Are You Known To Us? Inscribing a Gendered Body Through Play in the Public Built Environment

Danielle Zahra Abulhawa

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ARE YOU KNOWN TO US? INSCRIBING A GENDERED BODY THROUGH PLAY IN
THE PUBLIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT

By

DANIELLE ZAHRA ABULHAWA

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

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Abstract

DANIELLE ZAHRA ABULHAWA

ARE YOU KNOWN TO US? INSCRIBING A GENDERED BODY THROUGH PLAY IN THE PUBLIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT

This thesis begins from a concern over the perceived lack of female involvement in performances of play in the public built environment. Its starting point is the male-dominated practice of skateboarding. Although a popular creation myth presents skateboarding as a subversive, socially resourceful activity born from the natural landscape (the riding of waves by surfers), it has since become consumed within a masculine commercial culture. It is used as an exemplar, because of my own history of involvement in the culture, which allows me to question the presence women occupy within its spaces and practices.

The practice at the centre of my practice-as-research methodology is a type of playing that has been created in response to skateboarding. It utilises costuming to present a gendered body. One of the first costumes references depictions of ‘Alice’ from Lewis Carroll’s 1865 Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, a presentation that has enabled the consideration of the mythical status of a generic ‘fictional girl’ within public consciousness. My approach to playing is analysed with reference to Lefebvre’s theory of rhythmanalysis, allowing me to consider how play operates within the public built environment.

Several practitioners (for example, Jill Magid, Fiona Templeton and Lottie Child) have made performance interventions into public space. They use techniques, particularly the avoidance of spectacle, contact between strangers, and autotelic activities, to disrupt a culture of ‘commerce masculinity’ – which is manifested through possessive spectatorship and authoritarian ownership. Foucault’s theory of panopticism is used to articulate this exercise of power. In reference to Magid and Templeton in particular, a concept of ‘romantic space’ is proposed in which intersubjectivity forms the basis of an antidote to this.

The final development of my practice is articulated as an act of inscribing an unknowable feminine archetype that resists the commodification and forms of spectatorship inherent in spaces of ‘commercial masculinity’, and attempts to engender ‘romantic space’.
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I am sure that many of my teachers at high school would fall off their chairs in astonishment if they knew that the girl who would not stop asking ridiculous questions (but, how do you know that's the way tectonic plates move?) and who was specifically earmarked not suitable for A-Level study, who insisted on playing basketball in the all-boys team, and who was encouraged to attend a residential trip (with only one other, equally disappointing, student) to an army barracks as a means for instilling discipline, had managed to achieve a doctoral degree.

When I embarked on my BA (Hons) degree, with barely enough qualifications to get me through the door, I felt part of an environment in which I had more autonomy and freedom, and in which questioning accepted ways of thinking was highly regarded, which made me feel like I wasn’t simply a nuisance or quite useless at learning. I hope other people, who, like me, perhaps don’t fit the school system, are able to slip down the rabbit hole into this wonderful world.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Roberta, Lee and Bob, who have supported my creativity, challenged my ideas, and encouraged me to develop my practice and writing throughout this project. Most importantly, you have given me the confidence and discipline to create and articulate Practice-as-Research. It is hard for me to express just how privileged I feel at having had such an excellent supervisory team behind me. Thank you for your expertise, your hard work and your rigorous insight, from the bottom of my heart.

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Thank you to S and D for their philosophy of love, and to R as well, for discussion, advice and encouragement.

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Finally, I would like to thank Dave, for his wisdom, kindness and love.
Author’s Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree either at Plymouth University or at another establishment

Publications:

Selected Performances:


Selected Presentations and Conferences Attended:


Word count of main body of thesis: 69,116

Signed...............................................................................

Date....................................................................................
Introduction: Reclaim the Streets

My research began when, having completed a degree in drama and a master’s degree in performance I found myself in a suitable critical space within which to re-examine the years I had devoted to being a ‘skateboarder’. My research draws then on experiences that began in 1998, of the social framework within which my own practice as female skateboarder was couched. I grew up in a small town in the Midlands with a fairly limited scope for exposure to alternative cultures, so my earliest forays into skateboarding were through a magazine, which was then titled Sidewalk Surfer and which I came across by accident in the high street newsagents, WHSmith.

The cover appealed to me first and foremost. It had a large photograph of an empty open urban vista at night. The whole front page consisted of a gigantic concrete wave and above it the body of a man and a skateboard connected, lit by a street light and –photographed mid-trick – several feet above the ground. This magazine became a portal into the skateboarding world. I studied it carefully before deciding which board, trucks, wheels and bearings I should buy for my first ‘set-up’. And when it arrived, the first thing I did was to position the skateboard on the carpet in the front room of our house – so that it was stable – and to try to learn to ‘ollie’.¹

I could have surmised that this was not a particularly realistic or sustainable hobby given that my earliest attraction to skateboarding was a mediated, fictional one, and my first experiences on a board, static and carpeted, but I had an image of myself gliding effortlessly through an empty, endless urban landscape, performing

¹ An ‘ollie’ is a basic jump trick and is commonly regarded as the most fundamental of tricks.
tricks here and there to allow myself a smooth transition from one place to another. The reality was obviously much different; this smoothness and gliding – though it appeared to me in pictures\(^2\) – was not something I realised could be part of the practice, until I conducted research for this thesis into the origins and history of skateboarding.

I was also very aware of my status as ‘girl’ skateboarder. My presence in skate parks and on the streets was marked by – often very positive and well-meaning – attention. But, attention can still be uncomfortable and a difficult context within which to learn a new skill, and to go through the process of failing and improving. The scrutiny I experienced as a female skateboarder was matched by the transition I was also experiencing as an adolescent. In 1998, when I got my first skateboard, I was 16-years-old and so I was also in the process of transitioning from girl to woman.

I became resigned to the fact that, as a girl, I had become attracted to something that was not really meant for me. All the people that were doing this, it seemed, were boys and men. I wanted to blend in, not stand out. Why were most other girls not interested? And why did I – as girl quickly turning into woman – want to do it? These are the questions that continued to circulate for me, even after I had (mostly) given up skateboarding, and it was these questions that led to my PhD.

This enquiry, which began with skateboarding, raised broader concerns: I identified skateboarding as a type of play with its origins in the playful use of urban space, and I recognised that skateboarding was akin to other practices like

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\(^2\) See appendix one for an explanation of this smoothness and gliding, which features in *Sidewalk Magazine*’s photography and links closely to the origins of skateboarding.
rollerblading and parkour in its attraction to – particularly – boys and men. My research considered, how and why might a woman play in the public built environment? The question implies a hypothesis and invites further questions: that there is something about this combination of play and the built environment that suggests only those who meet certain gendered standards have the freedom to express themselves in this way. What politics are implicit in the act when someone who does not meet the gendered norm chooses to play? What is the connection between gender and the built environment? What is the connection between gender and this type of play?

There were several ways to approach this. Considering the notion of play in the broadest sense, as a realm of human activity incorporating a wide range of non-functional, cultural activities (Schechner 2002), one method would be to examine the work of artists, and particularly female artists, making performance in the built environment. Another method would be to examine current literature on the topic. But, in order to explore this social issue in a rigorous and direct way, it was necessary to develop a practice of play as research method. This was particularly relevant because it was through the experiences of my body – as skateboarder, as girl, as woman – that this enquiry had come to light, and so it seemed highly appropriate that my bodily experience would be an important site for the research to be framed and for the production of knowledge to be understood.

Considering this enquiry, the aims of the project reflect that the work had a performative as well as a productive function: to create a social experiment within which responses to and experiences of playing as a woman could be examined, to
reclaim the act of playing for an adult feminine body, and to inscribe an alternative representation of ‘woman’ in public space.

**The Practice, History and Mythology of Skateboarding**

In order to develop a practice born out of my previous skateboarding activity, but that could be understood as a transformation from a type of masculine practice into a more feminine one, I sought to examine the history of skateboarding. As Iain Borden notes, this is not an easy task; besides brief overviews and potted histories there are few detailed historical accounts, particularly ones that explore the social landscape of skateboarding’s history (2001: 4-5). However in the same year that Borden published his thesis on skateboarding, a video documentary entitled *Dogtown and Z-Boys* was released, which presents a history of skateboarding through the pioneering 1960s Zephyr skate team, and which charts their contribution to the development of contemporary skateboarding practice.

The film was directed by former Zephyr team member Stacy Peralta, written by Peralta and Craig Stezyk – co-founder of the Zephyr team – and was financed by Vans, Inc. The video features interviews with many of the 12 original team members alongside the central narrative, as well as archival footage of the team surfing and skateboarding, and old images and footage of the three Californian beach communities at the centre of the narrative: South Santa Monica, Venice and Ocean Park.

The documentary makes no claims to be a definitive history of skateboarding, though Peralta has described *Dogtown and Z-Boys* as a ‘memorializing’ of the period (2008: np), which asserts the perceived authenticity of the film – at least
from the perspective of those 20 or so professional skateboarders involved in its production – or an adoption of the film as such, which is evidenced by its considerable popularity; Peralta has stated in an interview that *Dogtown and Z-Boys* has ‘sold over a million DVDs and more than 700,000 VHS’ (2008: n.p.). This origin myth of the development of skateboarding (or, more accurately its development from surfing) is a version of events that is highly regarded as accurate by skateboarders and is referred to as such in literature on the topic (Brooke 2001, Lorr 2005).

It is important to highlight the partiality of this document, and its hagiographic tone, which is particularly visible in the ‘holy trinity’ narrative structure set up around Tony Alva, Jay Adams and Stacey Peralta. *Dogtown and Z-Boys* certainly makes no attempt to discuss any of the Z-Boys in pejorative terms, which becomes apparent in my analysis. This document then must be understood for what it is – an uncritical history. Following the death of Jay Adams in August 2014 and in response to a white-washing of Adams’ history through the ‘legendary’ status afforded him in much of the reportage on his death, *VICE* journalist Jonathan Smith wrote an article questioning the idolisation of a man who served time in prison for his involvement in the beating to death of a homosexual man in Hollywood during the 1980s. In his article Smith is critical of several popular news outlets for ignoring or obscuring the details of this offence, and of Adams’ historical connection to homophobic hate crime (Smith 2014: n.p.).

The story of *Dogtown and Z-Boys* begins in the early 20th Century, when land developer Abbot Kinney altered part of the Pacific coast south of Santa Monica so that it resembled a Venice-inspired landscape, complete with canals, gondolas and
a replica colonnaded square such as you might encounter in Venice, Italy \textit{(Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001)}. Part of this development included the creation of Pacific Ocean Park (P.O.P.) and numerous other amusement arcades and theme parks up and down this stretch of the coast. Around this time, surfing had become a popular activity in California, though the history of surfing is not discussed at all within \textit{Dogtown and Z-Boys}, and during the late 1950s skateboarding developed as an after-surfing activity. During the 1960s both P.O.P. and skateboarding suffered massive declines \textit{(Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001)}.

Skateboarding disappeared almost overnight as a fad that had run its course, whilst P.O.P. had become ‘run down and seedy’ \textit{(Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001)} and in 1967 was closed; in the documentary, Skip Engblom describes that P.O.P. became a ‘dead wonderland’ \textit{(Engblom 2001: np)} of dilapidated structures, mainly occupied by drug users and artists and which suffered arson attacks. The pier itself was damaged and falling into the Ocean, which meant that this part of the beach, a hidden and secret surfing spot known as ‘the cove’, was ‘one of the most dangerous places to surf in California’ \textit{(Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001)}, both in terms of the social depravation of the area and aggression of local surfers, as well as the physical challenges of the submerged and damaged pier.

In 1972, Zephyr surfboard productions was formed by Jeff Ho, Skip Engblom and Craig Stezyk, who took an experimental approach to surf-board design, choosing not to align themselves with the mainstream of surfing culture \textit{(Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001)}. The group of local surfers who formed the Zephyr surf team are described as the best in the area and as having developed an aggressive localism \textit{(Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001)}. At that time, the group had colonised ‘the Cove’,
amidst the derelict pier of P.O.P., and would spray-paint the area with statements like ‘go home!’ directed at outsiders coming there to surf (*Dogtown and Z-Boys* 2001). During the film, members of the Zephyr team talk openly about throwing debris from the pier at unknown surfers in the water. Footage at this point in the documentary shows surfers negotiating routes around the remaining wooden supports with what appears to be little margin for error.

Surfing was only possible for a limited portion of the day, dictated by the strength of waves at different times, so the Zephyr team turned to skateboarding as an alternative activity (*Dogtown and Z-Boys* 2001). In the film, they describe how their approach to skateboarding was very much taken from surfing; they would use transitions in the streets as a simulation of waves, crouching very low down on their boards, performing flowing movements and cutbacks, and gliding their hands along the concrete as if they were running their hands through water (*Dogtown and Z-Boys* 2001). There is no explicit discussion within *Dogtown and Z-Boys* of the difference in style between the Zephyr team’s approach to skateboarding and contemporaneous skateboarding practice, however, this becomes apparent later on in the story when the Zephyr team attend the Del Mar national skateboarding contest. The Zephyr skateboarding style progressed after the team began using school playgrounds, where waves of black asphalt (constructed in an attempt to level out the school playgrounds, which were built at the bottom of canyons), became ideal skateboarding terrain (*Dogtown and Z-Boys* 2001).

Droughts in the Los Angeles area in the mid 1970s rendered many of the backyard pools belonging to households in the wealthy areas of LA County unusable. Continuing an image of the Zephyr surfer/skaters as an innovative group, able to
respond creatively to unfortunate circumstances, the film describes how the Zephyr skaters converted their activity from school yards to these backyard pools, which offered a greater transitional curve and paved the way for modern ramp practice from dropping in and vertical skateboarding to aerial tricks. The menacing or threatening image of skaters is also carried through; often pools needed to be drained of their remaining water and the skaters would turn up in vehicles with electric pumps and hoses for this purpose, stealing electricity from nearby houses (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001). These backyard pool-come-skate-parks were often raided by Police, which meant that lookouts were posted and fast exits devised.

Meanwhile, throughout this period mainstream skateboarding practice had developed an increased popularity and in 1975, the leading skateboard manufacturer, Bahne Skateboards, organised the first national contest since the 1960s, which was held in Del Mar, California (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001). According to the film, at this contest the competitive setup was based on a classic 1960s model: a large plywood ramp had been built for slalom racing and a small, flat wooden platform erected for freestyle tricks. ‘Slalom’ is a down-hill race with the inclusion of cones competitors ‘carve’ around at high speed, whilst ‘freestyle’ consists of a range of up-right tricks made popular during the 1960s, such as handstands, headstands, tic-tac, pirouettes, gliding (upright or on one knee), manual rolls (balancing on the back two wheels whilst rolling), nose-wheelies (balancing on the front two wheels whilst rolling) and hang ten (a surfing move in which the skateboarder stands on the very edge of the nose of their board with their toes poking over the edge).
The common feature all these freestyle tricks have is that they are orientated around balancing on different parts of the board, and using different parts of the body. The aesthetic is controlled, precise and graceful. The Zephyr team, having developed a style quite removed from these practices, appeared ‘like a hockey team going to a figure skating contest’ (Peralta 2001). The implication of gender in this description of skateboarding style comes through very clearly, and the association Peralta makes here to the physically aggressive sport of American hockey also suggests a desire for their style of skateboarding to be associated with typically aggressive forms of masculinity.

Zephyr came in and competed with their low, surf-style and, apparently, astonished the crowd (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001). The narrative describes how their ‘unusual style and disorderly presence marked them as outsiders from the start’ (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001). It is important to note that this position of outsider is one the Z-boys revelled in and they remark that their ‘aim was to go there and shut down’ (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001), suggesting that it was an intention to confound the expectations of the crowd and to take control over the proceedings.

Throughout the documentary, very little attention is paid to female participation in skateboarding, with the only female member of the Z-boys, Peggy Oke, describing her experience of attending the Del Mar nationals, thus:

[s]ome of the girls didn’t like the fact that I skated like a guy and so they protested me to the judges and one of the judges said that I skated better than some of the guys.

(Oke 2001: n.p.)
What is interesting is the way that Oke is perceived to occupy a masculine performance trope. This gendering of skateboarding activity, not merely in terms of male participation but as a physical style, is clearly embodied in current practice. The protest against her was not upheld and Oke took 1st place in the Women’s Freestyle contest.

The difference between what Zephyr were doing on skateboards compared with the other competitors was mainly down to their low and flowing style of movement, which was highly influenced by 1970s surfing. Footage of the Zephyr team at the Del Mar contest, and in their school-yard, back-yard pool and street environments, evidences they were much less concerned by a need to perform tricks. Instead, their skill was demonstrated in the flow and style of turning and their literal riding of the curvature of the ground, like waves.

The Z-boys perception of the popular skateboarding style in the 1970s was a display of tricks that were clearly defined and could be qualitatively judged against standard criteria (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001). In the documentary, Allen Sarlo, a member of the Zephyr team speaking about how the Zephyr style was received at the Del Mar contest states, ‘they didn't know how to judge it. They didn't know how to put it in their criteria and spit out a first place’ (Sarlo 2001: n.p.). Interestingly, the performance of tricks has continued to occupy a central place in current skateboarding practice. Whilst the attitude and style of several of the Zephyr team dramatically infected future skateboarding practice, the activity of flowing and carving, which was so clearly part of the Zephyr team’s challenge to

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3 The masculine performances of Marisa Dal Santo, Elissa Steamer and Alexis Sablone, discussed in chapter one, evidence this phenomena.
the mainstream, now occupies a reduced status, being largely regarded as outdated and uninspiring.

After the Del Mar contest and seeing a commodity in the ‘infectious presence and abundant talent’ (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001) of the Zephyr team, prominent skateboard manufacturers sought to sponsor individuals from Zephyr for their own teams. Unable to compete with skateboard companies who were prepared to pay substantially for riders to join their teams, Zephyr fell apart and shortly afterwards Ho and Engblom’s business closed down. Also following the Del Mar contest, more competitions were established and in the documentary a newspaper headline reads ‘More Skateboard Sites are Needed’ (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001), which is the first indication towards the creation of sanctioned spaces for skateboarding.

The sites built for skateboarding, both in the USA and UK, were heavily orientated towards transition, consisting of bowls, which were simulations of the back-yard pools the Zephyr team had appropriated, and also half pipes and quarter pipes, which are basically sections of pool, rising to vertical panels at the top and lined with coping, or as Zephyr team member Bob Biniak states in the documentary, ‘basically a half-pipe was what a swimming pool was, but we just hadn’t figured out how to build a half-pipe back then’ (Biniak 2001: n.p.). This suggests that the design of skate parks always references these features; they are simulations of the LA landscape and of the Zephyr team’s surf-inspired skateboarding style.

My approach to play is closer to the flowing and gliding styles of the earliest forms of skateboarding than to the practice of creating ‘lines’ that is currently common. A
'line' describes the trajectory of a skateboarder as they make their way through a site or skate-park from one stationary position to another. A line usually incorporates several obstacles; the more obstacles and more time spent in this flow of tricks, the better. Recognition is also given for skateboarders who create an interesting or alternative line in an otherwise predictable (well worn, well used) skateboarding site. Aside from lines, dominant skateboarding practice favours the portfolio approach of developing a trick repertoire. This necessitates the linear repetition of tricks, over and over again, until they are perfected, and in relation to obstacles, this approach requires the skateboarder repeatedly attempting a trick on an obstacle until a conquering of the obstacle has been achieved.4

Towards the end of the documentary, attention is drawn to three Z-boys in particular – Jay Adams, Tony Alva and Stacey Peralta, as the most influential of the team. Alva and Peralta are presented like godfathers of the resultant waves of skateboarding, through their business and professional exploits, whereas Adams is described as the having the most natural ability in skateboarding but reluctance to adhere to the increasing commercialisation of the activity (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001). In the documentary, Adams reflects on the shift from what he perceives as the fun times, expressing disappointment as the Z-Boys movement ‘got too serious’ (Adams 2001: n.p.), as well as regret that he failed to market himself and to take advantage of the business opportunities that his team mates, particularly Alva and Peralta, took advantage of – to great success.

4 An example of site conquering can be seen in the 1996 skate video made by Transworld Skateboarding titled Uno. During one section Tom Penny, a British skateboarder who is world-renowned within skateboarding culture, performs a series of tricks over a chain with a steep flat bank on the other side of it, one after another. At the end of this section another skateboarder, who has been watching in awe, announces in jest that ‘the bank is now closed’. Playing on the dual meaning of the word bank as a flat, sloping piece of land and a financial institution, he suggests that Penny has depleted its funds. Even in the case of less accomplished, beginner skateboarders the focus of their efforts becomes about how to perform tricks over empty coke bottles or cardboard boxes.
Alva articulates that Adams was ‘never interested in the material rewards that came from skateboarding. He had a total f-you approach to the whole commercialisation of skateboarding’ (Alva 2001: n.p.). This sets up a distinction between the three skaters as archetypes within the narrative – one of whom shuns the commercialisation of skateboarding, whilst the other two choose to engage and exploit such opportunities, in quite different ways.

During the latter part of the 1970s when both Alva and Peralta were enjoying their success being paid to ride skateboards and travelling around the world, they each saw opportunities to make their own businesses and progressed towards starting up their own teams. Peralta stopped skateboarding professionally in 1979 and collaborated with another professional skater of the time (George Powell) to set-up the Powell-Peralta Company. Their first team, known as the Bones Brigade, consisted of Steve Caballero, Lance Mountain, Tommy Guerrero, Tony Hawk, Mike McGill, Alan “Ollie” Gelfand and Rodney Mullen (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001), all of whom came to define the development of skateboarding and in particular the externally focused or mainstream strand of skateboarding and the X-games phenomenon.

This separation is made explicit as Peralta is seen to represent a more organised, professional and business-orientated attitude towards skateboarding. The documentary narrative states, ‘although Peralta would become the most financially successful skater to emerge from Dogtown, the two skaters who best personified the Dogtown spirit and who won the most acclaim were Tony Alva and Jay Adams’ (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001). Alva is described as having the biggest ego and being a fierce competitor, as having an aggressive style and being highly proficient in
timing, balance, speed and agility. In the documentary, he is credited as one of the first skaters (some people suggest he was the first, though he denies this) to successfully perform an aerial manoeuvre (a frontside air) out of the rim of a pool the Z-Boys nick-named the Dogbowl, in 1977.

His first advertisement for his company, Alva Skates, raised attention due to the lack of skateboarding presented. The advertisement shows Alva stood with his arms folded at the right-hand-side of the image, with a skateboard on the top left. Peralta describes reception of this image as a revolution in the industry, he states, 'people were up in arms, because here's this guy standing just like really tough and it was all of a sudden the advertisement was no longer about skateboarding. It had nothing to do with the product, it was about attitude' (Peralta 2001: n.p.). Powell-Peralta and Alva Skates represent the development of skateboarding from Zephyr; a subversive, resourceful activity born from the natural landscape becomes an organised, commodified and celebrity cultural form.

As an origin myth, then, *Dogtown and Z-Boys* reveals several interesting features that are central to an understanding of skateboarding culture and its development. Foremost is skateboarders’ relationship to water. Abbot Kinney's Venice-inspired landscape included canalised streets; later on in the story, some decades after these canalised streets were drained, the Z-Boys simulate the waves of the Pacific on the streets of Dogtown. Later, the droughts in LA County and the Z-Boys occupation of empty backyard pools for skateboarding posits the skateboarders themselves as representative of absent water (an interiorising of the theme of water). The simulation of emptied backyard pools throughout the USA and UK, designed for
skateboarding, extends this theme geographically (Borden 2001). Mythically speaking, skateboarders carry this theme of a connection with water within them.

Before the break-up of the Zephyr team, the main themes of the story relate to the importance of simulation to the activity of skateboarding, the rooting of attitude and behaviour in rebellion against a perceived mainstream, a disillusionment relating particularly to the physical environment and, importantly, the remaking or rewriting of landscape through physical activity that serves to over-turn this disillusionment. The point after the break-up of Zephyr suggests the beginning of a new wave of events led by the mediation of skateboarding in magazines, and the tension between the two emergent strands of skateboarding practice presented by the opposition between Alva Skates and Powell-Peralta.

**Reviewing Literature Across Disciplinary Fields**

This thesis explores gendered play and performances of gender in the public built environment, and it adopts an interdisciplinary approach across the fields of performance studies, anthropology, gender studies, architecture and the built environment, sociology, and psychology. This work represents a development of current literature and practice in several ways:

Jen Harvie's *Theatre and the City* (2009) considers representations of city experience in drama, particularly that which is undertaken in theatres, rather than within sited locations. The third section of her book explores performance work that takes place within the built environment, including references to the Situationists, Fiona Templeton's *You! The City* (1988) and Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (2007), all of which are referred to in my thesis. Harvie's book articulates
each of these practices through a consideration of the freedom they offer to
participants in the city, and for the ways that they, ‘challenge the spatial hegemony
of social isolation... and the social hegemony of work, capitalist alienation and
consumerism’ (2009: 66). These are points I echo in my own writing about these
performances, but my research develops on these by critiquing the apparent
subversiveness of these practices and others, through a consideration of the wider
cultural economy they represent. I also focus particularly on analysing the
gendered nature of these forms of play.

Nicholas Whybrow’s edited volume, *Performance and the Contemporary City*
(2010) has been a key reference for this research. Contributions within Whybrow’s
book adopt the same broad categorisation of performance I have utilised in my
own research. One section in particular, which looks at play, has been drawn upon
several times throughout my thesis, with an additional emphasis on exploring the
gendered implications of the relationship between performance and the city.

Sources such as Doreen Massey’s *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), Rosa Ainsley’s
edited volume, *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender* (1998) and Jane Rendell,
Barbara Penner and Iain Borden’s edited volume, *Gender, Space, Architecture: An
Interdisciplinary Introduction* (2000), provide an excellent foundation for the
consideration of how space is produced through, and how places are defined by,
practices that do not treat people as equal and active subjects. Rosemary Deem’s
book *All Work and No Play? The Sociology of Women and Leisure* (1986) asserts the
importance of leisure to women’s wellbeing, and examines how leisure is
understood and experienced by women. The scope of Deem’s book is on a broad
and commonly understood notion of leisure in relation to paid and unpaid forms of
work that are undertaken by women. My research stems from these sources through focusing on a particular type of play as a gendered form of situated practice.

There are also several other key texts that relate to this area of research. Iain Borden's *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (2001) offers an excellent theorising of skateboarding in relation to architectural theory and spatial production. He includes a chapter on skateboarding, as ‘subculture’, where he makes reference to female involvement and representations of women in skateboarding graphics, but his book does not – understandably, given its focus – go into great detail. My research begins with these concerns around female involvement in skateboarding as indicative of a wider cultural issue around female involvement in public forms of unorganised play.

Offering a clear reasoning for why women and girls have less of an involvement in play, several sources spanning at least the past 35 years, explore women’s involvement in sport, and argue, in a range of nuanced ways, that sports, games and organised forms of play typically preserve forms of patriarchal control and gender stereotypes (Bennett 1987, Birrell and Richter 1987, Bryson 1987, Vaughter 1994, Richman and Shaffer 2000, Strandbu and Hegna 2006, Knijnik 2012). Several of these sources cite restrictions that have historically been placed on women in their attempts to participate and compete in sporting activities (Knijnik 2012, Richman and Shaffer 2000).

Roberta Bennett, et al. argue that sport is modeled on masculine traits; these being, ‘competition, dominance, star systems, ‘destruction’ of one’s opponent,
maintenance of hierarchical power structures, a child-parent relation between athletes and coaches, and authoritarianism’ (1987: 370). Lois Bryson offers an important perspective on this by asserting that men’s attempts to protect their dominant position in sport suggests that dominance needs to be constantly performed (1987) and that it is quite a precarious thing.

Supporting Bennett’s view of sport as consisting of typically masculine traits in their article published within the same journal and edition, Susan Birrell and Diane M. Richter highlight how a group of female softball players construct their own alternatives to the male preserve of sport through their avoidance of ‘rigid, hierarchical, conservative, elitist and alienating’ practices (1987: 398). The literature suggests that even though sport (and the wider field of playful activity enjoyed by adults) does not always support women’s participation in various ways, and whilst narrow definitions of femininity discourage female involvement, there are still pockets of resistance that open up spaces for women and for gender to be redefined.

Literature on skateboarding tends to examine the practice as a shunning of the conventions of urban life (Borden 1998), a critique of urban architecture (Borden 2001), a disruption of the consumptive logic of city space (Irvine and Taysom 1998) and as exploiter of the ambiguity, ownership and function of public space (Woolley and Johns 2001). Other research examines skateboarding at risk of being swallowed up by monopoly capitalism (Lorr 2005) and, of particular importance to this PhD, research that identifies models of gendered involvement in Skateboarding (Beal 1996; Young 2004, Pomerantz et. al. 2004, Bäckstrom 2013).
Part of the subversive status of activities like skateboarding and rollerblading is derived from practitioners’ defiance of typically masculine traits. In Becky Beal’s research, which is often quoted on the topic, she articulates skateboarders as displaying an ‘alternative masculinity’ (1996), but she acknowledges that whilst skateboarding may be an arena in which these kinds of masculine tropes are challenged, it is still one in which gender stratification and, to a large extent, sexist and misogynist attitudes are prevalent. Shauna Pomerantz et al. highlight the difficulties girls face in gaining legitimate ‘skater’ status from their male skateboarder peers (2004).

Carolyne Ali Khan, who writes about the related practice of being roller skater in the city, discusses the gendering of Inline skate products and the way advertisers focus on displaying the female body as, primarily, sexualised and not presented in the act of skating (2009). Lia Karsten and Eva Pel acknowledge that skateboarding is not a very emancipated sport, but is one in which urban space is redefined and new forms of masculinity are experimented with (2000). These sources highlight that concerns about gender and women’s involvement in skateboarding are a microcosm for broader concerns exhibited in mainstream sports settings.

Whilst acknowledging the difficulties women continue to face in participating in sport and play for various reasons, some of these sources also see sport as an arena for female emancipation and the exploration of alternative femininities. This is particularly apparent in literature relating to the recent resurgence of roller derby as a sport that is specifically aimed at women (Pavlidis 2012, Pavlidis and Fullager 2012). Adele Pavlidis discusses how roller derby allows ‘the women involved to parody hetero-normative gender relations [which] is evidenced by the
often overtly sexualised costumes commonly worn – such as fishnet stockings and garter belts – and the outrageous names used, such as ‘Storm in a D Cup’ and ‘Annabella Apocalipstick’ (2012: 169).

This alternative view is paralleled in writing specifically focused on female involvement in skateboarding and rollerblading. Ali Khan articulates her practice of rollerblading as a ‘site of resistance against the perfection of fossilized flat female norms’ (2009: 1091), Åsa Bäckstrom considers how femininity is negotiated by the female skateboarders she observed and interviewed as part of her research (2013); whilst Pomerantz et al. discuss how the group of female skateboarders they refer to enact a feminist politics through their disassociation with what the group define as ‘bun girls’; girls who frequent skateboarding spots and display a more typical, ‘emphasised’ femininity, despite that this group of girl skaters also disassociate from the feminist label (2004). My research seeks to explore public attitudes to a woman playing, to consider how gender relates to play and the built environment, and to present my own body as a site of difference – not a difference that encompasses all women – but the expression of a (my) gendered body playing in a gendered space.

Aside from this theoretical basis, and due to the nature of this research as drawing across several fields, throughout the thesis reviews of relevant literature are weaved into the introductions of my chapters. Similarly, throughout the thesis I have attempted to place my practice in dialogue with the work of several different artists making performance interruptions in public places, these include Jill Magid, Fiona Templeton, Lottie Child, LIGNA, Gob Squad, Blast Theory and Allora & Calzadilla amongst others, and amongst artists working in the field of the visual
arts. Lottie Child, LIGNA, Gob Squad, Blast Theory and Allora & Calzadilla feature prominently in two parts of the thesis – firstly in chapter two, where I discuss them as exemplars of different types of play, and then in chapter four when I consider how different types of play subvert, adhere to, or undermine what I have coined ‘commercial masculine’ space. Magid and Templeton feature mainly in chapter five, as exemplary of resistant approaches to this commerce masculinity.

**Practice**

My research practice involves playful performances in the public built environment, often whilst wearing costume. Held, as it is, within a performance context, the activity of this research project occupies a fluid position with regards to its status as performance, and is subject to various attempts at framing. It is simultaneously a quotidian and everyday performance, street theatre or entertainment, exercise in the street, a form of social fieldwork, and an artistic practice. These different forms reflect both my own perspectives on the work, and the perspectives of witnesses who have commented on, or reacted to the work in ways that suggest the practice is understood in these ways.

The field of performance studies encourages this view of human activity and behaviour as subject to framing, but commonly it is more usual to find human activity categorised in discrete and fixed ways. Skateboarding, however, is one activity that has an ambiguity amongst its participants and commentators about its classification, particularly around whether it should be understood as a sport, as art, or as everyday street play. Of course, it can be any of these things, depending on who is articulating the activity in a particular moment. Much of the ambiguity about my own practice and that of skateboarders comes from its location outside
of a specific building, institution or organisation. The practice would be understood more readily as art, for example, if I were playing inside a theatre building or a gallery.

This written thesis frames my practice largely as fieldwork and research, whilst the artist pages I have included as documentation of the practice – delivered for my external examiners – frames the practice as art. The desire to include documentation in the form of artist pages is a way for me to imbue the aesthetic considerations I have made with value as a method of thinking that contributes to this PhD (the thinking of the artistic document is discussed in detail in the conclusion), and to align myself with the artists and their own practices, which have influenced and informed this research project (mentioned above).

Throughout the thesis I refer to my practice in public spaces as ‘interruptions’ rather than as interventions or incursions. Interruptions position the practice as an action that breaks the continuity of spatial practice, so as to represent another voice and approach to public space. Intervention is associated with making changes that improve a particular situation; my practice is not an attempt to fix a problem in public space, but to puncture the flow of dominant spatial practice with an alternative. Incursion on the other hand is a term associated with invasion, having associations with military tactics, force and aggression, which raises obvious masculine connotations I would choose to avoid.

My practice developed from a historical and contemporary understanding of skateboarding and in particular its association with masculinity. Sources like *Dogtown and Z-Boys* highlight how a conception of gender in skateboarding is not
inherent to a person, a practice or an object, but is inscribed through a culturally defined association of gender with certain objects and the reinforcing of gendered tropes by practitioners; their style of approach, attitude and physical appearance.

In the *Dogtown and Z-Boys* narrative, the surf-inspired, flowing, non-formalised practice and water-based imagery of the Zephyr team, which might under another set of circumstances be articulated as quite a feminine approach to movement, is presented through a clearly masculine frame, which is identified primarily by the attitude of the skaters. In terms of current skateboarding practice, which has shifted towards the presentation of formalised tricks, incorporating the adoption of a portfolio approach and repetitions of tricks on obstacles to perfect them, there is a stark contrast to that of the earlier Zephyr team, which serves to draw an interesting distinction between these two very different movement forms and the presentations of masculinity they represent.

The notion of a gendered practice is also not simply a reflection of the apparent biological sex of the participant. Protestations made by female skateboarders at the Del Mar national contest, towards Zephyr team rider, Peggy Oke, demonstrate how gender is commonly understood as something more constructed and complex than it is fixed, clear and certain. Performances of gender are discussed during chapter one, in relation to the practices of three well-known female skateboarders, whose presentations of self deliberately negate an association with femininity as a way to centralise themselves within skateboarding culture.

Taking a cue from these shifting presentations of gender, and following from the redefinitions of masculinity apparent in skateboarding, which are presented by both male and female participants, I sought to develop a practice that would
present a version of femininity. Presentations of gender are understood throughout this thesis as being made in dialogue with a multitude of existing cultural or collective representations as well as personal and embodied conceptions of gender identity. Gender is understood as a presentation of identity that comments upon, perhaps reinforces or perhaps subverts, dominant and essentialist understandings of the relationship between biological sex and behaviour.

There is much about the Zephyr team’s approach to skateboarding and the built environment to admire. In particular, their innovative use of sites and their site-responsive approach to physical activity, their lack of formalised movement and their subverting of a commercialised, dominating skateboarding mainstream. These are the things I chose to keep in my adoption of a transformed skateboarding practice. Instead of following the Zephyr team’s gender presentation for this, I adopted signifiers of femininity, particularly the wearing of a dress (specifics of the dress are discussed in chapter three) and an attitude of non-aggressive, non-confrontational action. To this end, I aimed to ensure that any physical activity could not be construed as disrespectful of the site I was using, and which accommodated other users of the space in an equal manner.

I avoided standing on benches or anything else used for seating and was considerate of people around me, allowing space for them to move in their own ways, but also making room for myself within specific locations in whatever way I could. For example, if I was walking along a handrail and someone else was lent against it, I would, in the moment of confrontation, devise a route around them –
sometimes moving very close to the bodies of strangers – or sometimes people would move out of the way for me.

In practice, these moments of negotiation reveal much about perceived social status and how people choose to exert this status and control public space. On one occasion whilst I was performing in Chester, a man stood with his arm outstretched and lent against a pillar outside the shopping centre. I had been adopting a movement where I was tracing my way around the pillars and so on encountering him I ducked underneath his arm and carried on moving around the pillar. In another moment, a man sat on a wall I was moving across in Manchester, who had noticed me approaching, made no attempt to move out of my way and deliberately held his ground. During an encounter in Leeds, I approached a bench, which was occupied by an elderly man who proceeded to move his feet between mine as I moved around him, joining in and playing with me.

Another way in which my practice differed was through the lack of skateboard. This decision was made because, as an object skateboards are deeply entrenched in skateboarding culture and an association with masculinity. The use of a skateboard would also have resulted in the creation of improvised performances suitable to the equipment and my use of it, which would bear a close resemblance to either current skateboarding activity or the more historical activity of carving and gliding, both of which I was trying to avoid emulating. The use of an object to play with creates mediation between the body and site and serves to legitimise the act of playing through an engagement with a commercial product designed for a specific purpose. It was important to me that my own act of playing allowed me a direct connection to the site, and was understood as a moment of unproductive,
autotelic play. Autotelic’ play describes that which is an end in itself – it is not undertaken for any other purpose than the experience of the activity in itself.

Another way to consider the lack of skateboard and my decision to focus upon the direct relationship between body and site is due to the connection of the body with the feminine. Whilst sporting activities are the domain of masculinity, in which the body is seen as powerful and tough (as is identified in the literature cited earlier in this introduction), dance practices and other forms of movement that emphasise creative bodily expression are, despite attracting many men, commonly understood as female-dominated and as feminine forms of physical activity (Copeland 1982). In his article in *The New York Times*, Roger Copeland concludes that ‘modern and postmodern dance are probably the only art forms in which various stages of feminist thinking are literally embodied’ (Copeland 1982: 3). I wanted to reference or associate myself with this feminist history through performing without an object and through an emphasis on the relationship between body and site.

My approach to play is ‘unforeseen’ and ‘skill-less’⁵. These terms articulate my practice of improvised play as being an uncontrollable element of public space that challenges authoritarian ownership, situates the practice outside of common notions of virtuosity, and thus challenges possessive spectorship. This is another way in which my practice both differs from, and adheres to the practice of skateboarding.

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⁵ I have included an activity sheet I created for a workshop undertaken with postgraduate students at Plymouth University, which explored the idea of ‘skill-less tricks’ (see appendix 6). The term is further explored in this introduction and in chapter two.
Whilst I am attempting to challenge authority in public space, as street skateboarding does, my practice doesn't follow a formal structure and is not concerned with the performing of tricks, though I recognise that my body returns to particular movements and actions in the process of improvisation; if these can be articulated as tricks, they are, at least, personal to me and result from my own unique somatic heritage. These notions of skilllessness and unforeseen play are discussed in detail throughout chapter two of this thesis.

The research undertaken for this project situates itself within the built environment, which derives from the connection of the project with skateboarding, and its roots in the adaptation of surfing waves to surfing pavement, as has already been discussed. Based on its historical roots in surfing, the activity of skateboarding symbolises the conversion of concrete (or some other hard, smooth surface) to water. Towns, cities and indeed the centres of villages, which generally contain large swathes of concrete, stone and asphalt, make ideal spaces for skateboarding.

The research has not been limited to the ‘urban’ as a spatial construct, but rather to places that are typically suitable for skateboarding activity, wherever they occur. Population density of cities differs across the globe, such that it is impossible to define the notion of ‘urban’ or ‘city’ in quantitative terms (Cadwallader 1996: 38). Similarly, Helen Liggett argues for the urban to be understood as a form of culture that permeates life, rather than a geographical location (2003: 3). Latham and McCormack echo this perspective in their discussion of ‘footprints of the city’ that describe how the urban can be considered a type of lifestyle rather than a spatial location (2009: 1).
Having grown up skateboarding in towns and villages in Warwickshire, the built environment of my childhood is quite different to that of Manchester. Nevertheless, each of these places offers a smooth environment in which to engage in flowing, gliding and carving play. The built environment also offers a relatively large social population who can experience the work by accident, thus the built environment functions as a forum within which the research practice is placed.

Throughout this research, I have created numerous interruptions in a range of cities and towns within England. For the written element of this thesis, I have drawn upon key moments from within these experiences, but the practice discussed does not represent the entirety of my practical experience and does not discuss every moment of practice. Between 2009 and 2015, a timeline of my practice looks as follows:

![Figure 1 – practice timeline](image)

The diagram above shows three main developments of the practice, which begins with me adopting ordinary clothing to play, followed by a decision to dress in a costume referencing popular depictions of ‘Alice’ from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) novels.
The final development of my practice incorporates a new costume, which I have called the grey dress. For each of these developments I performed in several different cities and towns. These places were chosen due to a personal or professional connection I have with them, or because an opportunity arose for me to perform in a particular place.

The main place I undertook my practice was in Manchester, which is the city in which I live, but I also visited Liverpool, Leeds and Bristol. On a few occasions I visited my hometown, Rugby in Warwickshire, and I undertook practice in Chester and Sheffield – both places in which I have worked throughout the period of my research. I have visited London on several occasions, particularly because it is the capital city of the UK, and I have created interruptions in Totnes in Devon, and in Plymouth, which is where my research institution is located. Specifics of the locations I have played in, and reflections on the relevance of costume in relation to specific moments, are discussed throughout the thesis, but particularly in chapter three. The five interruptions to this diagram – labeled as Curiouser, Upholstered, True Love Waits, Are You Known to Us? and Haunts, highlight five projects that are referred to in this written thesis and that sit as ‘extra-ordinary’ forms/contexts of the practice.

Curiouser was a performance I created for an event in Bristol (see fig. 2). This involved me adopting the Alice costume as I occupied Old Market Street for one day, creating playful responses to the environment through movement improvisations as well as the use of chalking on the pavement and writing notes that I attached to objects up and down the street. Upholstered was made for a performance platform in Liverpool (see fig. 3). For this performance I did not wear
the Alice Dress, but used three large sections of patterned carpet, recovered from a house in Knutsford, as material to play with; instead, I wore jogging pants and a t-shirt, which is still ‘ordinary clothing’, but it is not my ‘everyday’ clothing and thus it differs from the initial version of the practice.

Figure 2 – Curiouser (2010), Bristol
True Love Waits was created for a performance platform in Hackney Wick, London, and involved me wearing the same outfit I had used for Upholstered, but I did not incorporate the carpet. For this performance, I drew out a salt circle on an industrial site and invited people to play with me within and outside of this arena. Are You Known to Us? Was a performance I made for a platform in Bristol (see fig. 4). It incorporated the wearing of the grey dress and invited visitors to the performance event to consider my practice happening outside the venue.

Haunts is the title of the two performances I made specifically for my external examiners. Haunts #1 took place in London, and Haunts #2 in Plymouth and Totnes (see fig. 5 and fig. 6). For these I wore the grey dress and organised to have the schedules of my external examiners, so that I could locate myself in public places they would pass through or occupy. For this I wanted to set up a performance that
would allow my examiners to see the work in an accidental way, in order to maintain a resistance to traditional forms of performance spectatorship.

![Figure 4 - grey dress illustration (2014) not from Are You Known to Us? (2013)](image)

In reference to the points made earlier about the categorisation of my practice, these five interruptions in the flow of my research practice represent moments in which my practice has been framed as art. This is something that will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion. The continuous practice, being undertaken throughout the thesis represents the quotidian or everyday interruptions, and fieldwork of the practice. Within the written thesis, descriptions of some of these moments are peppered throughout, which reflects the continuous and often subtle way that I have generated knowledge from this background practice, throughout the research.
Figure 5 – *Haunts #1* (2014), London

Figure 6 – *Haunts #2* (2014), Totnes, Devon
**Following, Unknowing and Inscribing: A Practice-as-Research Methodology**

My approach to research adopts a situated perspective, which derives from Donna Haraway’s assertion that the partiality and position of the researcher enables not a better view of reality (Haraway contests the notion of a singular real world; the world of scientific ‘objectivity’), but rather a range of different views that foreground the contingency, power and perspective of the researcher. Her theory of situated knowledge is a re-articulation of objectivity, which regards:

objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions – of views from somewhere.

(1988: 590)

A major aspect of my situated perspective within this research is my status as woman, and the main places in which my research practices has been undertaken are places known to me or which I am connected with.

On the front cover of Matthew Goulsh’s *39 Microlectures in Proximity of Performance* (2000), a statement is printed over the cover design about the process of making. It starts with a question: ‘How do we understand something?’ and ends with the statement, ‘we discover our approach and we follow it’. This personification of the creative approach places it, and the artist, into respective roles; the work itself knows where it’s going, or at least is moving in some direction. The artist doesn’t. Similarly, Tim Etchells in *Certain Fragments* writes:

when working on performance projects, having amassed some material by random collection and impro and accident and intention, and having worked with it a little, we have long asked ourselves the question: ‘what does it want?’ What does it need?’ Anthropomorphising the work as if it had desires of its own. As if the fragments of the work in this early stage are a note (for Alice) saying ‘follow me’.

(Etchells 1999: 62)
In these examples neither Goulish nor Etchells are discussing research, but it is interesting that the same anthropomorphism is often applied to the process of researching, particularly in practice-led research contexts.

John Freeman articulates performance practice as being unlike traditional research because it, ‘is always messy and its manners are often bad. It neither does what it is told nor does it go meekly in the direction one would expect. It sits uneasily with many ideas of academic objectivity and verification’ (Freeman 2010: 81). Freeman’s description of performance practice reads very much like the description of a difficult child, which appeals, perhaps, to performance processes because of the way they are always rooted in playing. It reminds me of Lyra Belaqua, the central character in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy, and, to reflect back to Etchells’ quotation, it reminds me of Alice. For my own research practice, Alice has been something of a recurrent theme. She cropped up when I was struggling to think of a suitable costuming for my practice, and then came to occupy a more intrinsic feature of the research in general.

Other researchers express this idea of the recurrent motif; Helka-Maria Kinnunen describes a particular book as a ‘companion’ during her research journey (2010: 32), whilst Robin Nelson, drawing on his experience of many Practice-as-Research (PaR) projects, articulates the ‘clew’ – a play on the word ‘clue’ embodying an archaic meaning of the word as a thread – to describe a thread that can be traced through a research project (2013: 10, 27). I particularly like Kinnunen’s idea of a ‘research companion’ as it appeals to the anthropomorphism of the PaR approach.
This anthropomorphism of the process of practice and/or research, and the
placing of the artist into the position of follower, is, I think a way to begin to
explain how practice embraces intuitive, embodied and tacit forms of knowing that
are central to practice, but that are difficult – but not usually impossible – to
articulate and understand as expressed through language. Baz Kershaw
acknowledges that many researchers encounter intuition or hunches as a method
for creating a starting point for their research projects (2011: 65).

But intuition is extremely difficult to unpack, and it necessitates an *a posteriori*,
rather than an *a priori* approach to the research process, which challenges
traditional research paradigms within the academy. Freeman explains:

> a priori reasoning is theoretical, based on the logic of traditional research,
whereas a posteriori reasoning is practical, based on experience,
experimentation and practice. And it is this that needs if not quite defending
then certainly explaining, for research questions as a starting point to
formal enquiry are generally deemed necessary if the findings are to have
any widely acceptable worth.

(2010: 65-66)

Freeman highlights a recognisable frustration for practice-based researchers, as
they are required to define research questions and methods before they have even
begun to embark on the creative process.

As much as the research process might function in this a posteriori way, involving
a mapping back over intuitive decisions made in practice, practice-as-researchers
do not tend to describe a linearity in the research process, experiencing the
relationship between explicit knowing and intuitive or embodied knowing through
the metaphor of loops, cycles or spirals. Kinnunen cites Gadamer’s dialogical
hermeneutics as a methodological background to her PaR PhD project, stating
the construction of knowledge happens in a dialogical process. My figure of reflection became like a loop or a bow, consisting of two different dimensions, practice and theory or theatre-making and writing, and the reflecting movement in between.

(Kinnunen 2010: 32)

Nelson’s refined ‘triangular model’, which articulates a multi-mode epistemological model for PaR has a distinctively dynamic quality as the practice based researcher works with their ‘know how’ – tacit and embodied forms of knowledge, ‘know-what’ – the tacit made explicit through critical reflection, and ‘know-that’ – conceptual frameworks and ‘outsider’ knowledge. The arts ‘praxis’ (theory imbricated with practice) sits at the centre of this model, fed by these multiple epistemological methods, which in turn feed each other in a fluid dialogue (Nelson 2013: 37).

In my own practice, the methods of my research enquiry have involved:

1. Improvised play;
2. Fragmented listening, seeing and reflecting;
3. Analysis of these fragments of writing and memories, and
4. Engaging with the work of other artists, and conceptual and critical discourse.

Each of these methods produces knowledge in different modes, and these modes sit in dialogue affecting each other. Nelson’s model permits this dialogue, allowing space for a multi-mode approach and avoiding the tendency for the traditional ‘know that’ mode of knowledge production to overshadow other forms. My intuitive decision to adopt Alice as a research companion is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

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This feature of following hunches or intuitive knowing requires the artist-researcher – just like in an non-research creative process – to not know clearly where they are going, and how the work is progressing. It requires an embracing of the unknown. Shaun McNiff, in his book on art-based research, states that the 'truly distinguishing feature of creative discovery is the embrace of the unknown' (1998: 16). And really, this is intrinsic to all research. If it is to present a contribution to knowledge, research must be pushing into unknown territory to some extent.

This, coupled with the mixed-modal dialogue of epistemological methods utilised in PaR leads Robin Nelson to recommend the defining of a research ‘inquiry’ rather than a research ‘question’, suggesting a more diffuse starting point. He writes:

> it may seem a small point, but I prefer to ask for the specification of a research ‘inquiry’, partly because questions typically imply answers and, in turn, evoke perhaps ‘the scientific method’ in which data leads to the resolution of a hypothesis.

(Nelson 2013: 30)

In support of the suggestion within Nelson’s quotation that PaR does not lead to neat resolutions, Freeman articulates PaR as not fitting well into conceptions of traditional knowledge because practice is ‘problem-creating rather than problem solving’ (Freeman 2010: 81). Jenny Hughes supports this suggestion in her research undertaken with Jenny Kidd and Catherine McNamara in which they articulate ‘decomposition’ as an important knowledge-producing element of PaR. They write,

> ‘Decomposition’ refers to moments when designed and improvised research processes deteriorate in confrontation with experiences that confound expectations of an orderly, rule-bound, habitable universe... the intention here is to recognise the importance of difficult moments of not knowing, and deterioration of meaning, in any research endeavour.

(2011: 188)
As Hughes et al. explain in their chapter, these moments of not knowing are often the moments containing the most interesting insights. Importantly, they cannot be prefigured in the research project through appropriate prior questions, because they arise through the process in unexpected ways.

Within the embodied mode of practical know how, there is also the question of whether practice is, in some cases and on some occasions, unknowable in any other mode. Freeman’s introduction to his book Blood, Sweat and Theory suggests a warning against imbuing the practical element of the PaR PhD with value purely on the basis of its ineffability (Freeman 2010); mystifying practice, he asserts, is unlikely to see PaR gain any security within the academy. Freeman certainly doesn’t claim that the ineffable does not exist, but he questions the reality of an experience that defies expression or description entirely. In my own practice it is not so much the ineffable that concerns me, but rather the ephemerality of practice and the problem of memory. After a performance, I found that if I didn’t jot down my experiences I would quickly forget them. Many of the experiences I have written about in this thesis are half-remembered. Plus, there are many ‘discoveries’ that likely never made it to the page or were not committed to memory.

I have wondered whether my body or my unconscious remembers some of these things? If they are expressed anywhere within the mixed modes of my PaR project, they will be in the know-how – the embodied mode of knowing. Supporting this, Leena Rouhiainen, writing about the troubled relationship between her writing and her practice explains,
I noticed that it was impossible to document much of anything of the free
flowing and lively conversations we had, or much of the actual dancing, I
was so engaged with them both... I was faced with the challenge of being an
artist-researcher doing two things simultaneously: exploring our artistic
practice in and through art-making itself as well as reflecting upon this
creative activity not for the ends of art-making itself but for telling about it
to others in writing.

(2010: 140)

This feature of unknowing – the things that are perhaps ineffable, or that remain
within the realm of embodied knowing – are important. The practice is not merely
experimental ‘data’ to be analysed. As Nelson’s triangular model articulates,
practice becomes praxis through its locating within the triangle, in which different
forms of knowledge necessarily infect each other type. Knowledge is located within
performance as well as within the written and spoken.

Freeman makes a distinction between practice-as-research and practice-as-thesis,
suggesting that whilst practice might contain knowledge for the practitioner, when
it comes to the submission of a PaR PhD, the modes in which the researcher
chooses to express their research may not include the practice at all. I can see why
in some cases – particularly in applied theatre practice or practice that is located
within a rehearsal or workshop context – it might not be necessary or appropriate
to bring an external audience to witness the practice.

However, in many cases presenting the practice as an element of the mixed mode
thesis is important to fully articulating the research enquiry. Baz Kershaw writes,

[a]s PaR is pursued through time-space events its transmission – the means
by which any knowledge/understanding/insight it produces are
communicated – is always multi-modal... this diversity of dissemination
reflects the hybridity of its specific methods of enquiry, as it involves unique
‘messages’ that constitute a singular chorus, the PaR bandwidth.

(2011: 66)
This notion of the PaR bandwidth elaborates a multivocality to the dissemination of PaR knowledges. This is reflected in Lee Miller and Joanne ‘Bob’ Whalley’s dissemination of their jointly produced practice-as-research PhD; the practical element of which, titled *Partly Cloudy, Chance of Rain* (2002) culminated in Whalley and Miller renewing their wedding vows in a motorway service station on the south-bound carriageway of the M6. Conceptually, this performance challenged Marc Augé’s notion of non-place, but as thesis, the practice also challenged the tradition of an esoteric articulation of knowledge within the academy. Their thesis adopts a multi-voiced approach; the written element is matched with the practical inscribing of space presented in Whalley and Miller’s performance event (Whalley and Miller 2010).

The multivocality of my own thesis is presented through the differing discourses of each format – the written and the practical. Presenting the practice has allowed me to inscribe myself as ‘playing woman’ into the public, built environment – a space in which women are rarely seen to play. In this format the work operates on a visual, proximal and rhythmic level, as an encounter between bodies and objects in space. This performative act, then, is understood as a form of situated and practical research, which has produced knowledge of public urban space, and speaks to and within the public urban context in which it is placed.

Whilst a reader can gain an understanding of how the practice functioned through my descriptions within this written element, witnessing the practice in specific locations offers a deeper, specific engagement that orientates the viewer within the space of a specific locale and in relation to the playful interruption and other people’s responses. An individual witnessing the practice – coming from their own
situated perspective – will have their own perspectives on the knowledge that this practice produces, which enables them to be in a position to judge and assess the outcomes I have identified myself.

The other form, this written element of the thesis, functions in a different discourse; it is a place for me to articulate in words my understanding of the knowledge-producing practice I have developed, in direct relation to the literature I have read. The writing within each chapter sets out a suitable theoretical landscape within which the practice operates, but my research findings come from placing the practice in relation to these theories and discussing how and in what ways the practice develops, enhances and advances this theoretical knowledge. Importantly, the literature read as part of this research and the practical interruptions undertaken in the public built environment are different forms of communication of my research; both literature and practice are present within the written and practical elements of my thesis.

**Focus of the Chapters**

Chapter one begins by setting out how skateboarding is commonly understood as an activity in which participants present themselves as, and embrace, an alternative masculinity. Drawing on current literature, I discuss how this is problematised by an inherent sexism and misogyny within skateboarding culture, and the suppression and exclusion of feminine forms of presentation. In this chapter I present research I have conducted into skateboarding companies, their distribution of sponsorships, a comparison of their presentation of male and female team riders on websites, and the presentation of women in advertising and skateboard graphics. Referring to Marion Shoard’s concept of a geographic
edgelands, my argument in this chapter is that skateboarders occupy an edgeland position within mainstream culture, but that within skateboarding, participants have coopted their own marginalising culture into which presentations of femininity are relegated.

The discussion develops to focus on three current and world-renowned female skateboarders – Marisa Dal Santo, Alexis Sablone and Elissa Steamer – whose approach to skateboarding and their physical appearance negates femininity as a viable choice of presentation of self. Their success in skateboarding is, I argue, largely achieved through their adoption of performances of masculinity, which secures their placement at the centre of skateboarding culture.

The final part of the chapter questions the association of masculinity with play of this kind and the positive things it represents: freedom of expression, freedom of bodily comportment, the freedom and power to take up space, to gather and to move in public places. The performativity of gender suggests that if ‘femininity’ is ruled out of an association with these things, that these kinds of gender presentations will lead to the reality of reduced freedom and power for women in public space. Therefore it is vital to stage interruptions in the flow of this social information. I also question the association of masculinity with the negative things inherent in skateboard culture: marginalising of women, normative heterosexuality, violent and aggressive representations of women, and violent and aggressive presentations of self.

Having established the context and need for research that has both a knowledge producing and socially performative function to interrupt the normative
association of masculinity with freedom of movement in space, chapter two begins by discussing how spaces are defined by rhythm, with particular reference to the philosophy of Henri Lefebvre, and his final work on space in *Rhythmanalysis*. During this chapter a connection is made between the work of Lefebvre and that of Foucault with regards to their similar criticisms of space as reflective of a commercially and commodity-driven power over bodies. Within this contextual framework, I argue that play – as a moment of interruption – can be seen as a potentially powerful disruption and resistance to public urban space as commercially productive.

Later in the chapter I discuss how Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow offers an understanding of play that helps to articulate its potential to operate with and from the rhythmic compositions of space and bodies. As part of this argument I discuss three moments of practice – one whilst I was playing in ordinary clothing and then as ‘Alice’ in Manchester, and one whilst I was playing as ‘Alice’ in Plymouth – to explain how my playing demonstrates the bodily capacity to sense and to connect with existing rhythms in public spaces.

Finally in this chapter I introduce the work of several artists who have informed this research project. Each artist has created performances located within the public built environment and each of the examples of their work I draw upon evidences a different approach to play. In this section, I set up a framework for understanding the type of play I am engaged in – ‘unforeseen’ and ‘skill-less’ – by discussing how each of the projects of these artists also relates to these terms. The final argument made in this chapter is that improvised play, in contrast to rule-bound play and games, develops a level of intimacy and interaction between
people or participants that has the greatest potential to undermine and interrupt commercial space. These themes of intimacy and interaction are developed further in subsequent chapters as constitutive of the main theoretical position of this thesis.

Chapter three begins by discussing my desire to integrate costume as a way to overtly gender my playing. In practice this began with the adoption of the ‘Alice’ dress, and a consideration of ‘Alice’ as representative of an archetypal girl character. Several sources are drawn upon to argue for the endurance of her iconicity as girl. On reflection of the practice, the ‘Alice’ costume led to questions over the desire to locate myself with an image of young femininity, as opposed to an adult or womanly feminine. This chapter explores what the categories of girl and woman mean through a consideration of representations in popular culture and art.

This topic is introduced through a discussion of the paradoxical problematic/powerful position that representations of ‘girl’ encompass, with particular examples drawn from the Riot Grrrl movement, and British ‘90s pop outfit the Spice Girls. These examples are explored in relation to Lyn Mikel Brown's discussion of the 'girl as fighter' stereotype in relation to the image of the 'girl in crisis', which is often related to representations of Shakespeare's Ophelia. Both of these stereotypes do little to empower girls and an image of girlhood, but as this section concludes, many of the negative connotations associated with girlhood can be reframed as powerful positions, particularly through an engagement with poststructuralist ideology.
In the next section two feminine and girl-related, ostensibly negative, themes are identified and explored in relation to Carroll’s ‘Alice’, several other fictional girl characters, and the work of several female artists. The first of these themes relates to the status of having an uncertain or a multiplicity of identity, and is discussed in relation to ‘Alice’s’ discussion with the Caterpillar, and the work of Nikki S. Lee, Lucy Gunning, and Anna Gaskell. The other theme is the association of femininity with hysteria or emotional insecurity. This is articulated as a powerful position through an understanding of the work of Liliana Porter, ‘Alice’s’ position in wonderland, and Luce Irigaray’s theory of ‘fluids’.

The next part of the chapter looks at the image of girl in relation to the image of woman, discussing how this relationship is often represented in popular stories, and, following the thread of the work throughout this chapter, in Carroll’s ‘Alice’ books. Drawing on the work of Carina Garland who has analysed the Alice books as allegories for Carroll’s repression and hatred of adult female sexuality, I make the point that this narrative – that adult women rather than patriarchy poses a threat to girls – is prevalent within popular culture and has endured as well as ‘Alice’ herself.

The final section of the chapter discusses the costume I adopted for the practice, how it problematised and enhanced my interruptions, and how it developed in response to my experiences in public space. The practical inscribing of play in feminine costume led to several verbal and physical responses from members of the public that helped me to understand how important it was to challenge the patronisation, possession and sexualisation of femininity in the public built environment, and to find ways of integrating something of the adult feminine into
my performed gender identity. Practice interruptions referred to in this chapter draw across the whole period of background practice detailed in the practice timeline on page 36.

While chapters one, two and three provide a rationale for and explanation of the practice as a form of play, as well as detailing my physical presentation of gender through costuming, chapter four focuses on the built environment as the generic site of my performance interruptions. In this chapter, the built environment is discussed as a gendered space, which my practice responds to and is located within. I begin by drawing on literature and practices that articulate or suggest a relationship between masculinity and urban space, looking particularly at fictional accounts and historic practices, such as the image of the flâneur and the Situationist International. I argue that the gendering of the built environment can be understood through these sources as associated with control of space, private ownership and objectification of the city and people within it.

The next part of the chapter looks at several current projects made by artists in response to, and which take place in the public built environment as site. In this section I analyse the themes of resistance these artists and their practices have in common, as a way to understand what is deemed – by the artists selected – as typical of the culture of the public built environment and the problems associated with it.

The artists I look at in this section include Hofbauer and Derschmidt, Kaleider, Blast Theory, Gob Squad, Fiona Templeton and Paulo Cirio. Each of these artists, in their own ways raise concerns over anonymity, commercial domination,
ownership of ‘public’ space, and surveillance culture. Drawing a connection between these themes and those associated with the masculinity of urban space from the earlier part of the chapter, I assert that the public built environment is defined by a culture of ‘commerce masculinity’.

The final section of this chapter critically examines the art practices discussed and their status as subversive, because of the ways in which these projects operate within an artistic economy. The status of art that comments upon and seeks to subvert the commerciality of public space is problematised and compromised by its reception as art and its financial support by institutions that see art practice as the ‘soft power’ of a cultural industry. The conclusion to this chapter begins to draw a connection between the commerce masculinity of the built environment and Foucault’s theories of the discipline society, which becomes part of the theoretical framework for a discussion of my performance interruptions in chapter five.

Chapter five focuses on gendered interruptions into the commercial masculine space of the public built environment outlined in the previous chapter. This chapter also brings Fiona Templeton’s work from chapter four into focus alongside my own playful interruptions and Jill Magid’s project *Evidence Locker* (2004), as particularly interesting subversions of the public built environment. The first part of the chapter discusses Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power, which is enacted primarily through the body. I discuss these ideas in relation to how my own gendered bodily presentation was received in three examples of ‘Alice’ costumed practice, to show how the feminine body becomes subject to forms of ownership through the practices of making souvenir, spectacle, and subject to authorisation.
The next section explores Foucault’s notion of panopticism and how power is exercised through surveillance. Magid’s subversion of the CCTV system of Liverpool offers a clear example of exercising power over such a system itself. My own practice is referred to in this section, particularly a moment of ordinary clothed practice in Manchester, and my experience of practice during *True Love Waits* in London. I argue that different sorts of surveillance enact possessive modes of power.

The gender blindness of Foucault’s work is discussed in this chapter and a connection made between his theory of panopticism and the gendered power inherent in being able to watch but not be seen. The anonymous power of the panoptican machine is discussed and related back to the practices mentioned in chapter four. Referring to moments of my own practice, the alternate position to anonymity – that of being known or ‘onymous’ – can also be used to claim ownership. There is no power in a distanced and objective knowing of the other, but there is power in a deeper intimacy between people. Verbal responses to my practice are discussed in this section to highlight how being ‘knowable’ can be a problematic position. Responses that try to name me or categorise me, responses of apparent caregiving and expressions of sexual interest are discussed within this section.

The final part of this chapter discusses the subversive potential associated with intimacy and the creation of ‘romantic space’, through a detailed discussion of Magid’s relationship with the controllers of Liverpool’s CCTV cameras, and in Templeton’s intimate, one-to-one performances. This section introduces Luce
Irigaray's philosophy of love in *The Way of Love* (2002) to the thesis, which provides a theoretical framework for the decisions made in the final presentations of practice and the subsequent concluding assertions of the thesis.

Having developed in response to my experiences and theoretical insights, chapter six explains the final development of the practice as the inscribing of an unknowable feminine archetype, as this was manifested in *Are You Known to Us?*, which was presented in Bristol. This chapter considers how the practice was received in relation to the theoretical concerns opened up throughout the research process, and how much the practice was able to develop ‘romantic space’ – spaces of intersubjective mutual power that undermine commercial masculine spaces of authoritarian ownership and possessive spectatorship.

As a set of possible strategies for performance, the term ‘romantic space’ does not refer to an idealised or naïve view of reality. This notion of romanticism can certainly be found in Abbot Kinney's Venice inspired LA, and it also relates to my own perception of the images of urban space in skateboarding photography (see appendix 1). ‘Romantic Space’ also does not refer to the artistic movement, ‘Romanticism’. Rather, the kind of ‘romantic space’ I am attempting to adopt within this research derives from a particular type of intersubjectivity and its subversive potential.

The artist's pages that follow chapter six document the final presentation of the practice for my examiners in each of their specific locations. In order to avoid an intentional audience, and the (gendered) power dynamic that is inevitable in this presentational format, it was necessary for me to locate myself in the vicinity of my
examiners for a period of one or a few days, so that they could witness the work. I obtained the schedules of each of my examiners for specified dates, and explained that I would bring the practice to them, to be experienced accidentally (see appendix 2).

The format of artist’s pages is borrowed from the regular feature in the journal *Performance Research*, in which a series of pages are set aside for artists to document a piece of work that relates to the themes of the issue. Documentation produced for this feature takes different forms, challenging the possibility of faithfulness in representing the live event. This critical position is in keeping with practice and debate in the field that the documentation of performance primarily functions as generative – developing a range of interpretations – rather than illustrative, and that the notion of an accurate or objective version of the live event is both unnecessary and impossible to achieve (see De Marinis 1985, Phelan 1993, Auslander 1999, Etchells 1999, Kaye 2000). My own artist pages in this thesis were the result of collaboration between graphic designer, Graham Jones, who is part of Loose Collective based in Manchester and myself. The featured text was written by me, David Penny took the images, and the design was collaboratively conceived, and then produced by Graham.
Chapter One  

**Skateboarding's Edgelands: Gendered Play**

In the opening paragraph of the article, ‘Space, Place and Gender’, Massey remembers, as a nine or ten year old living on the outskirts of Manchester, her experience of going into town with her family. She remembers witnessing, every Saturday, the vast grassy land between home and Manchester city centre, passed by on the bus journey, having been divided up into hundreds of football and rugby pitches, and being entirely occupied by boys. She says:

> I remember... it striking me very clearly – even then as a puzzled, slightly thoughtful little girl – that all this huge stretch of the Mersey flood plain had been entirely given over to boys... I did not go to those playing fields – they seemed barred, another world.

(Massey 1994: 185)

The other world Massey identifies represents those spaces or places of human environments that seem inaccessible to certain people. It also represents the difficulty women face when participating in male gendered activities; for Massey it is not only the playing fields that seem barred but also the activity being undertaken.

Traditional sports are often associated with hegemonic masculine attitudes, exemplified in the “Jock” stereotype and the Jock’s relationship to subordinated masculinities (such as the “Geek” – intelligent, non-aggressive and physically weak). Some non-traditional sports and activities choose not to be aligned with such stereotypes, developing what Beal describes as ‘alternative [forms of] masculinity’ (1996: 204-220). In her research, which is focused on skateboarding, she states:

> [t]he subculture of Skateboarders I investigated chose not to live completely by the traditional and hegemonic forms of masculinity. In doing so, they created an alternative masculinity, one which explicitly critiqued
the more traditional form. For example, the skateboarders emphasized participant control, self expression, and open participation which differ greatly from the hegemonic values of adult authority, conformity, and elite competition.

(2006: 204)

Beal articulates participant control, self-expression and open participation as features of an anti-hegemonic social organisation, which would suggest that skateboarding is a progressive and positive activity. However, as is highlighted by Beal in her article, skateboarding's liberalism and permissiveness is paradoxically compromised by an inherent sexism and heteromasculine focus within the subculture. The origins of skateboarding, as explored in my introduction, suggest other ways that skateboarding is paradoxical in its masculine identity. The aggression of the Zephyr team and their association with hockey players in Dogtown and Z-Boys exemplifies this.

The focus of this chapter is on the male dominated activity of skateboarding, and in particular the roles that women and girls adopt in relation to what is discussed as a heteromasculine standard. My suggestion is that female involvement in skateboarding occupies an ‘edgeland’ position within the subculture, but that female skateboarders have adopted methods to centralise their involvement through their performances of gender.

‘Edgeland’ is understood by Marion Shoard’s coining of the term to describe:

\[th\]e apparently unplanned, certainly uncelebrated and largely incomprehensible territory where town and country meet... as we flash past its seemingly meaningless contours in train, car or bus we somehow fail to register it on our retinas. When we deliberately visit it, this is often for...

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7 Defining skateboarding as a particular cultural form is difficult. Some skateboarders would not regard their practice as a sport; on the other hand, there has recently been a push to include skateboarding in the Olympic Games. The term "activity" seems to suggest light involvement rather than saturation within something, whilst the term "subculture" is rooted within cultural theory and may not necessarily be commonly understood or used by participants. In many cases it may be viewed as a lifestyle, influencing participant’s choices of clothing, music, art and also attitude.
mundane activities like taking the car to be serviced or household waste to the disposal plant, which we choose to discount as part of our lives.

(2002: 118)

Shoard is specific in her term, with edgelands referring to sites between town and country. But the term could also describe areas at the edges of the city or town, between city and suburb, such as the vast grey flatlands underneath ring-road carriageways or the dilapidated landscape of bygone industrial warehouses and service roads. In this chapter the term is adopted conceptually, to refer to a cultural edgelands, and is used to describe the marginal location of, particularly, female involvement in skateboarding.

Edgelands are particularly relevant to skateboarders, because the edgeland position is, in the broader context of culture in general, the kind of marginal space skateboarding has typically occupied. Skateboarders are frequently pushed to the edgelands of cities; they are prohibited from occupying city centres, whilst sanctioned places for skateboarding are built in actual geographic edgelands: commonly disused warehouses on out-of-town industrial sites. Shoard states that, ‘[t]he edgelands are raw and rough and rather than seeming people-friendly are often sombre and menacing, flaunting their participation in activities we do not wholly understand’ (2002: 121). Though individual skateboarders are mostly friendly and welcoming people, the prospect of entering a skateboard park or initiating a relationship with a group of skateboarders is a daunting one; the social system is not like that of other clubs or physical activities and there is usually no supervisory figure who organises the social group, and who can initiate a newbie or ‘outsider’ with others.

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8 Anti-skate devices are commonly applied to street furniture that is used by skateboarders, and byelaws are put in place that prevent skateboarding in specific areas.
This is a major issue for female skateboarders, who may lack the gender-specific nuances of social engagement needed to integrate themselves within a male-dominated group. From an outsider perspective, and though things are changing as skateboarding becomes increasingly commercialised, that sombre and menacing quality Shoard talks about seems to fit closely to skateboarding. Female skateboarders’ participation is also deemed unusual, due to the perception of skateboarding as being male-dominated, potentially injurious, and physically aggressive. Female skateboarders necessarily occupy an edgeland position from the perspective of both those outside and inside the activity. Though, as is discussed in this section, some female skateboarders are finding methods of transgression.

**Women’s Involvement in the Skateboarding Subculture**

Often women are only marginally involved in skateboarding. For example, when fulfilling supporting roles to a son, male friend or boyfriend by providing transport to locations around the country and through support, by attending skateboarding sessions and competitions. For males, at the heart of being a skateboarder is an emphasis on displaying a heteromasculinity, something exemplified by the inclusion of a female pole-dancing contest as the climactic evening’s entertainment during the annual, Vans Skateboard Company, Summer Sessions event, held in Newquay, Cornwall.

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This point is made to recognise that social rules and behaviours, learnt and repeatedly performed within familial and educational contexts throughout childhood, are typically gendered. The point is not to suggest that males and females have essentially or, indeed, vastly different social behaviours, but rather that gendered social structures may have a bearing on how well a person can initiate a social engagement.
Female skateboarders problematise this structure by occupying the realm of the male skateboarder and inevitably find themselves within social contexts that explicitly objectify women. This objectification is not limited to social events and everyday banter: graphics printed on to skateboard decks and images featured in advertising campaigns at times resemble soft-core pornography. A prime example of this can be seen in the marketing tactics of the Hubba Company. A typical example of one of their ads features an underwear-clad glamour model appearing to be sitting with a gigantic Hubba skateboarding wheel between her legs. In a campaign from 2009, Hubba produced two versions of an advertisement and invited the public to vote on which should appear in the next issue of the US skateboarding magazine, *Thrasher*.

The two versions, which both feature the same, topless glamour model, differ in the way the model is posed. In one, she is crouched next to the product with her legs extended across the image, in the other she is on all fours, with her back arched and her legs extending in front of the product. At the extreme of this, some companies have chosen to depict violence towards women in their graphics. As Borden states, ‘skateboard companies and magazines have increasingly used misogynist treatment of women as a way of selling skateboards’ (2001: 147).

The representation of women as sex objects ‘sells well’ because it reaffirms the heterosexuality of the participant, in what is a heavily male – and ostensibly heterosexual-dominated performance arena. In America, the skateboarding publication Big Brother is ‘sold in plastic wrapping due to its ‘adult’ content’ (Beal and Wilson 2004: 34), and the title of the magazine seems to enforce hegemonic masculinity, with its readers projected into the role of the younger brother, rookie
skater. ‘Harmless’ sexist commentary which features so prolifically within skateboarding print makes it clear to female and homosexual participants that they do not meet the heteromasculine standards that define skater subculture, and females are sexually objectified by the heterosexual male skateboarder’s gaze.

Even in the arena of fashion, the female skateboarder is marginalised, with very few skateboarding companies catering to the female body shape in clothing design. This has implications for the female skateboarder trying to fit into skateboard clothing, and a subculture, designed for men. The shoe company Gallaz, part of the Globe company, have produced skate shoes designed for “girls”, along with other well-established skate companies, such as DC, Vans and Etnies. However, through selling these products to large mainstream chains, in which the non-skateboarding public may purchase a pair purely for fashionable purposes, female-orientated brands cannot carry the same sub-cultural currency as brands that are only available at specialist skate-shops.

The skate wear company Fallen, for example, who make only one standard fit shoe, state in their advertising, ‘Fallen footwear is designed purely for skateboarding’. This, along with an emphasis on supporting local, independent skater owned shops (SOS), results in skateboard clothing designed specifically for women becoming devalued by its mainstream availability. By not being exclusive to the hallowed local skate-shop, it is not fully saturated in the subculture; in just the same way that female participation is all too often regarded as frivolous and uncommitted.

The skateboard industry’s representation of female and male professional skateboarders is particularly revealing. Out of 77 skateboarding companies
researched between December 2007 and April 2008, on the World Wide Web, 14 companies sponsored a total of 38 women. These companies were selected because they all deal, specifically, in equipment and clothing designed for skateboarding, such as grip-tape, trucks, wheels, bearings, decks, and skateboarding shoes. They also all currently sponsor a professional and/or amateur company team, or provide their product to skateboarders as endorsement.

It is important to note that the number of sponsorships does not reflect the number of individuals sponsored, since professional skateboarders often receive support from several companies. However, of those researched, 48 company sponsorships went to women, compared with 1173 sponsorships going to men. Interestingly, the (British) Rogue Skateboards and (North American) Villa Villa Cola skateboarding companies, which are the only specifically female brands included in this research, were both difficult to find information for. Rogue Skateboards’ main point of information at that time was their Myspace layout. Similarly, the only web information available for Villa Villa Cola was a link to a trailer for their skate video, featuring 12 female skaters from around the world. This strongly suggests that these companies also occupy an edgeland position within the skateboarding industry.

10 These companies were: Alien Workshop, Adio, Adidas Skateboarding, Almost, Arise, Avera, Bacon, Baker, Billabong, Blacklabel, Blind, Blueprint, 5 Boro, Bones Bearings, Circa, Chocolate, Darkstar, DC (USA), Death, Deka, Destructo, Duffs UK, DVS, Element, Elwood, Emerica, Enjoi, Enuff, Es, Etnies, Fallen, FDK Bearings, Flip, Foundation, Fourstar, Gallaz, Girl, Globe, Grindking, Habitat, Hawk Shoes, Heroin, Hijinx, Hubba, Hurley, Independent, Krooked, Lakai, Lib Tech, MADA, Matix, Mob Grip, Mystery, Nike Skateboarding (SB), Osiris, Pig Wheels, Plan B, Powell, Premium, Quicksilver, Real, Ricta, Rogue, Royal Trucks, Santa Cruz, Silver Truck Company, Slave, Supra, Third Choice, Thunder Trucks, Toy Machine, Vans (USA, UK, Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland), Villa Villa Cola, Volcom, Vox, Zero and Zoo York.
Most of the companies researched supported their female skateboarders on a separate, linked website under a “Girls” section. The contrast in the profile pictures and biographic information for female and male skateboarders is particularly notable, with many of the companies opting for posed ‘fashion’ shots of the females, compared with pictures of male skateboarders that, generally, present them in the act of skateboarding. In some cases, no images at all were supplied of the ‘girls’ actually skateboarding. Some companies, however, choose not to separate female and male skateboarders in this way. Vans USA sponsor Cara-Beth Burnside, Vans Austria sponsor Sabrina Goeggal, Vans France sponsor Lisa Jacob, and Element sponsor Vanessa Torres, Lacey Baker and Evelien Bouillart, all alongside their male skaters. Zero included the world-renowned skater Elissa Steamer as one of the main team, not differentiating her as sponsored woman. But, Steamer is a particularly interesting case.

On the Etnies website, she features in both the male and female teams, with her profile information displaying the following statement of her achievements in reference to her previous role as a team rider for the Toy Machine Company:

> [s]he regularly makes the cut skating with the boys, and is virtually unrivalled among her female peers... From the get-go, Toy Machine treated Elissa as just another rider, rather than as the head of a girl’s division or as a side project. However, it was not until her 1996 appearance in Toy Machine’s ‘Welcome to Hell’ video that many in skateboarding consider one of the most influential of all times that Elissa truly made an impact. Her exposure in the video single-handedly redefined the role of women in skateboarding and ushered in a new era of talented female skaters... Elissa continues to dominate nearly every all-female event she enters...The fact of the matter, however, is that Elissa is simply a great skater not just a great female skater.

(Etnies 2007: n.p.)

Here, Etnies sum up the industry perspective on female skateboarding by acknowledging that females and males are treated differently and that females are
not required to be up to the same standard as males. The quotation also suggests that Steamer broke the mould of previous female skaters by having proved her ability to skate ‘like a guy’.

Steamer is also included in the Etnies ‘Girls’ pages, as the girl who managed to transcend the female-only section. On the same website, and again while referring to Elissa Steamer, professional skateboarder and founder of the Toy Machine company, Ed Templeton, states:

Obviously, she’s the best girl skater, and the thing is that she doesn’t skate ‘like a girl’ It’s in quotes because, for some reason, everyone knows what you mean when you say that, even though it sounds like a lame thing to say. She has a good style, stands up straight and skates like a guy.

(Templeton in Etnies 2007: n.p.)

Templeton reveals an inherent sexism within the subculture by admitting his concern over using the term ‘like a girl’, but sanctioning his use of it by recognising it as commonly used and understood. In this context skating ‘like a girl’ implies skating ‘to a lesser extent’, and this is a view enforced in the way skateboarding companies construct teams. In comparison to Steamer, then, ‘girl skater’ becomes a category that actually refers to a lower standard of skateboarding rather than a biological difference between female and male skateboarders. In relation to Shoard’s edgelands, the male-centric skateboarding industry appears to have co-opted a female gendered edgelands through heterosexually orientated entertainment, the notion of skateboarding ‘like a girl’, and through the constructed supporting-role of women as spectator in the performance of skateboarding.
Dal Santo, Steamer and Sablone

In November 2007, a video clip was posted onto the Sidewalk Magazine online skateboarding forum with a caption below it reading, ‘Just in case you don’t know, Marisa is female’. The inclusion of this comment alongside the posting of the video suggested there might be some confusion. On viewing the footage, three things are apparent - first, the standard of skateboarding exceeds that of most female skateboarders, by the range of tricks demonstrated. Second, Marisa’s physical appearance is noticeably ‘masculine’; her androgynous natural features and hairstyle are rendered more ‘masculine’ by her choice of physical clothing, which is reminiscent of all-male 70s/80s rock band, The Ramones. Third, her skateboarding style is noticeably aggressive, in terms of the speed and force with which she performs tricks. Dal Santo’s consistency and success in competitions against both female and male contestants, has led to her becoming one of the latest up-and-coming skateboarding talents.

Talking about her experiences of attending female competitions, she says:

The guys’ contests go on for 3 days while the girls’ contests go on for 20 minutes. There’s usually 10 people at the most in the crowd... [a]t most of them, we all get paid something so it’s win/win even if you get last. For those same reasons they’re also kind of lame and embarrassing, cause it shows how low girls are viewed in skateboarding. I’m still backing them though.

(Dal Santo 2008: n.p.)

Dal Santo expresses an interesting tension between getting paid to do something you enjoy and concern over female involvement being regarded as inadequate. Her final sentence and use of the word ‘them’ suggests that she feels distanced from the ‘skater girl’ category, whilst at the same time expressing a desire to be supportive towards female skateboarders.
Having started skateboarding at the age of 10, Dal Santo’s practice has always been as the only female within a small group of males; she states that she has ‘never skated with girls outside of contests’ (Dal Santo 2008: n.p.). When asked whether she would feel comfortable being on an all-female skate team, she remarked, ‘No, I’ve always skated with guys and I feel as if it helped me in the long run. I try to stay closer to their level of skating’ (Dal Santo 2008: n.p.).

Many skateboarders believe, as Dal Santo’s statement suggests, that a person’s ability to skateboard is affected by the general level of the group of which that person is part. Dal Santo makes a conscious effort to transcend the arbitrary lower standard that has come to be expected of female skateboarders. Her presence within the subculture, alongside skaters with a similar approach (such as Steamer), is important in the way that they explode this mythology.

Dal Santo’s performance has allowed her to become well respected in skateboarding. When asked if she had ever experienced any negative attitudes towards her by male skateboarders, she replied: ‘No not really. The only people that have vibed me for skating were the girls in my class in like 6th grade. They’d say "girls don’t do that" and all that jazz. But I’d like to see what they’re up to these days’ (Dal Santo 2008: n.p.). Dal Santo’s young peers’ responses to her extra-curricular activities suggest that she may be having as much of an effect on mainstream culture as skateboarding culture.

Similarly, another American female skateboarder, Alexis Sablone, in a 2002 interview with Thrasher, states: ‘I think girls should just skate in regular contests. I don’t think girls should have to have their own category – they should just be in a
skateboard contest. Girls just skate with guys, it’s all the same’ (Sablone in Dyer and Burnett 2002: n.p.).

Sablone’s statement resonates with the more recent concerns of Dal Santo, whilst the article's authors, Erin Dyer and Michael Burnett, draw a clear comparison between Sablone and Steamer – and particularly to their physically aggressive approach to skating – as they state, ‘[o]ne similarity I’ve noticed between you and Elissa is that you can both take a beating. How hurt do you have to be to quit?’ (Dyer and Burnett 2002: n.p.). Sablone replies, ‘[j]ust never; never quit. You can’t stop ’til you land a trick, then after you land it is when you really feel it’ (Sablone 2002: n.p.). This attitude is also reflected in Sablone’s section from the Coliseum video P.J. Ladd’s Wonderful Horrible Life (2002) in which Sablone is seen to ‘slam’ down a set of nine steps, three times. On the third time, she momentarily writhes in agony on the ground before getting up. The person filming her asks if she is ok, to which she determinedly says ‘yeah’ before hastily grabbing her board and running back up the steps for another attempt, in an explicit demonstration of her physical endurance (Rougier Emilie 2006: YouTube).

What is most interesting about Sablone, Dal Santo, and Steamer, is the way in which their approaches to skateboarding are marked by an adoption of the masculine, as a tactic for being successful. In Gender Trouble Judith Butler states, ‘[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, that identity is formatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (Butler, 1990: 34). Importantly, Sablone, Dal Santo and Steamer’s expressions of masculinity do not suggest a desire to be male; they are not exemplary of any

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11 ‘Slam’ is a commonly used term to describe when a skateboarder falls whilst attempting a trick.
inherent ‘male-ness’. Sablone, Dal Santo and Steamer’s success within skateboarding is necessarily achieved through a performance, which is reliant upon the utilisation of costuming and expressive attitude.

Similar behaviour can be seen outside the skateboarding subculture. In an article published in the *Guardian*, titled ‘Why Does Hilary Clinton Wear Such Bad Clothes?’ writer Hadley Freeman states,

> It is obvious to the point of cliché that Clinton is in a trickier position in many ways than Obama: when he is emotional, he is persuasive; when she is emotional, she is betraying her feminist roots. So just as Obama can cut a dash in his slimline, clearly style-conscious suits, Clinton has to hide herself in garishly coloured squares going under the name of "jackets", or else risk being dismissed as so vain that she would be too busy putting on her lipstick to respond to an international terror threat…last year, when there was a bit of a hoo-ha in the US press about Clinton showing some cleavage, instead of dismissing it as the load of misogynistic nonsense it was, she seems to have taken this to heart and buried herself ever since in shapeless, defeminised, frequently yellow (yellow!) suits.
> (Freeman 2008: n.p.)

Freeman sees Clinton’s expressions as an attempt to “defeminise” herself – to hide or detract from physical features that explicitly reference her female-ness or femininity. She expresses a tension in the way emotion and a care over personal appearance is perceived when it is expressed by a woman and by a man who are both attempting to prove their professional ability. There are, of course, major differences between the practices of Sablone, Dal Santo, Steamer and Hilary Clinton. Nevertheless, their (perceived) negation of the feminine as a viable choice of presentation of the self seems to be intrinsically central to their position in their chosen professional arenas.

The skateboarding subculture and the heteromasculine standards that define it are produced and upheld by the objectification of women in advertising campaigns,
comments within skateboarding publications and in the graphic designs of skateboard decks. The involvement of women within the subculture, as skateboarders themselves, problematises this structure and positions female skateboarders, by their very presence, as performance interventions in what is a predominantly male performance text. Gender stratification has come to be accepted within the subculture with female only skate teams and competitions ensuring this separation and that the category of ‘female skating’ occupies an edgeland position within the subculture. Within male-orientated skateboarding circles, notions of skating ‘like a girl’ demonstrate the construction of an arbitrary lower-echelon applied to females, which skaters like Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo disprove through their achievements and their refusal to be restricted.

Importantly, Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo’s styles of skateboarding and styles of dress and behaviour explicitly reference masculinity, which has the effect of their incorporation into the ‘centre’ of the subculture, marked by their inclusion on team videos and their featuring in the popular skateboarding press. Therefore, their intervention is problematic in that whilst it helps to redefine notions of ‘girl skateboarder’ as well as highlighting the performed nature of gender, it also perpetuates masculinity as the centred normative. The ‘defeminised’ performances of Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo represent an intervention – albeit one which raises questions of inclusion, conformity, and the possibility of a ‘feminine’ intervention – into this heteromasculine subculture.

It is common to see groups of male skateboarders in a city like Manchester, occupying streets and areas to use particular objects or architectural features. The University of Manchester’s Stopford building on Oxford Road has a large flat-
banked wall running alongside it, which is dotted with retrofitted anti-skate bricks. Stories told by older local skateboarders and their photographs from decades ago show how the banks were once flat and ideal for skateboarding, without the addition of jutting bricks. One end of the building still has a flat bank, which is exploited by groups of skaters.

Oxford road is a major commuter route, and with several university buildings running alongside it as well as the Manchester Royal Infirmary, Whitworth Art Gallery and Whitworth Park, it is a busy road and one of high social visibility. The pavement outside the Stopford building is not very wide and with its high level of footfall at peak times there is relatively little room for pedestrians, let alone skateboarders as well. But, none the less, small groups of (usually) male skateboarders claim their rights to this ground, this building, those banks. They assert their rights to the space through their confident occupation and usage, free from anxiety and responsibility. This is their land, as much as it is anyone else’s.

As a woman, and as a female skateboarder, seeing a group of (often) male skateboarders use this place with such freedom, as they skate closely to walkers and land suddenly in people’s paths, as they use speed, they lift their arms, they make noise and sit, stand, lean and move as they choose, I think how uncomfortable I would feel in this position. I would worry and be anxious. As a skateboarder, I am used to finding secluded and quiet places, and avoiding watchers. If I were skating here on Oxford Road, I would be sitting with my anxiety until I moved on somewhere else. I have never felt the freedom I can see in their practice.
Skateboarding is a prime example of a form of play that occurs in the public built environment. Though it is just one example of a playful practice, it raises concerns over the intrinsic relationship between masculinity and freedom – of bodily comportment and of movement and behaviour in public spaces of the built environment. Skateboarding perpetuates this connection, through its development of a culture in which expressions of femininity cannot thrive as a viable presentation of self.

The practice undertaken for this PhD is chiefly concerned with adopting explicit representations of femininity and starting to make connections, through practice, between feminine gender representations and freedom of bodily comportment and freedom of movement and behaviour in the public built environment. This practice, explained as it is in my introduction, is a way to interrupt the flow of social information coming from skateboarding and from many public urban playful practices – that playing in the city is for privileged gendered bodies. Instead, my practice presents a feminine body staking a claim to the city, and is a research activity that allows me to see what happens when someone marked clearly as ‘woman’ decides to play in the public built environment.
Chapter Two  
A Blink of an Eye: Play as powerful Instant

In his text on seeing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre, Michel de Certeau describes the relationship of walkers to the city as being like 'lovers in each other's arms' (1984: 93). He writes,

> the ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below', below the thresholds at which visibility begins... they are walkers... whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it.

(1984: 93)

Although de Certeau's perspective is from a literal position above the street, his referring to down below suggests a more conceptual depth - below the level of consciousness - to describe how walkers accustom themselves to the flow of the city and negotiate their routes through corporeal rather than cognitive means: we move and are moved in ways we don't consciously know.

The flows we follow in urban spaces, often unthinkingly, derive from the 'perceived', 'conceived' and 'lived' elements of space that Henri Lefebvre articulates as constituting the production of space (1991). In contemporary urban spaces, these flows often serve the smooth transacting of capital in relation to productive human behaviour – from one shop to another, or from home to place of work and back again.

Dominant practices of space – the ways in which we occupy sites – have been theorised by Pierre Bourdieu in his notion of habitus, in which he explains how social rules and relations are established over time and then performed unconsciously. His notion of habitus explains how dominant practices become
embedded in space and bodies, leading to what he describes as ‘the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations’ (1977: 78). Our seemingly free movement in public spaces is better understood as freedom within the confines of an already established, embodied and ubiquitous (and invisible) set of regulations.

In relation to this, Lefebvre’s final work on space, titled *Rhythmanalysis* (2004), looks at how we can understand lived space as consisting of rhythms – the interaction of expenditures of energy in time and space. Within this framework, Bourdieu’s habitus might be understood as an expression of dominant rhythms. But, there is far more to public urban spaces, such as practices that sit in dialogue with habitus and dominant rhythms – those that critique, subvert and interrupt the flow of dominant spatial practice. This chapter considers this idea of rhythmic interruption, through a focus on my own version of playful performance interruptions, outlined in the introduction.

The form that my play takes is improvisatory, both in relation to the more permanent elements of space and the temporal presence of people. In the moment of playing, an offer that comes from an external source is either accepted and incorporated or blocked. These terms, of accepting or blocking an offer of playful improvisation, are closely related to those used in the actor training theories of Keith Johnstone (1987), where an openness to offers is encouraged as part of the development of skillful improvising with one or more other actors.

Openness is a state of not being attached to a fixed notion of self, space and place. It requires an ability to see the world and the body as containing possibilities for a
range of actions and experiences, rather than a system of already established habitual patterns and rules that are adhered to. To play in this improvisational way involves drawing a balance between the contradictions of, on the one hand, movement that is critical of the regulated improvisation Bourdieu identifies in habitus, against an intuitive physical engagement with sites which necessitates a level of unconscious action to achieve this particular type of playing: activity without a pre-determined plan of action, and without a specified goal.

Henri Lefebvre's theories on spatial production have offered a way for me to understand how my playing functions within the everyday, at the micro level of movement and the slightest physical gestures, as an important contribution to ‘spatial practice’. The interaction of Lefebvre's theories with my practical experiences has raised an awareness of the importance and power of the instant of play in the public built environment.

**The Power of the Instant**

Lefebvre's theories on the production of space are conceptually located in his triad consisting of ‘spatial practice’, ‘representations of space’ and ‘representational space’. This tripartite structure of space is conditioned by the history of a particular site, what Lefebvre describes as ‘the etymology’ of locations in the sense of what happened at a particular spot or place... all of this becomes inscribed in space’ (1991: 37). In a basic sense, ‘spatial practice’ refers to the ‘perceived’ elements of space – the tangible, permanent elements of space; what we understand as the ‘built’ environment. ‘Representations of space’ refers to the ‘conceived’ elements of space – our symbolic understanding of spaces, mental images, as well as the physical enactment of these images of space in the form of
maps. And ‘representational space’ is the ‘lived’ elements of space – the ephemeral, physical activities and movements (Lefebvre 1991: 38-39).

Importantly the three parts of his schema are not to be thought of as separate from one another – each part contributes to another, whilst examples of activity occurring in spaces are likely to fit into each of these categories in different ways. Lefebvre’s theory does not suggest that there is a fixed, unchangeable, built environment, rather his model acknowledges the interrelationship of ostensibly more permanent elements, alongside the ephemeral and the psychological, bearing in mind that space is experienced always from an individual’s embodied perspective.

Explaining the way in which these three points might fold into one another, Marco Cenzatti writes,

> the physical space of, say, a square does not change when it is occupied by a market, a political rally, or a carnival. Yet the social relations taking place in the different instances produce different ‘lived moments’ – different spaces of representation...[these] may leave traces in the built environment and change the physical space... They are a modification of the physical space and, therefore, a spatial practice. They can also change our perception of space... thus fitting into Lefebvre’s second ‘moment’ [his representation of space].

(Cenzatti 2008: 80-81)

Skateboarders, for example, in their occupation of a city square create a ‘representational space’ in which they perform their skateboarding activity. This impacts on the environment in two major ways: firstly, the act of skateboarding causes markings on the physical parts of the space, which adds to the ‘perceived’ elements of space. Secondly, for the people occupying a site at the moment of performance and witnessing skateboarders’ markings after the event, this experience is likely to affect how spaces of the built environment are ‘conceived’
(Borden 1999, Borden 2001). Therefore, as Lefebvre theorises, the ephemeral moment in space is actually very powerful indeed.

Stuart Elden, writing in the introduction to *Rhythmanalysis*, explains how early in Lefebvre’s work he had been influenced by a particular concept of Nietzsche’s – his ‘augenblick’, the blink of an eye – which enabled him to challenge the dominant philosophy of Bergsonian duration. Elden writes,

> [f]or Lefebvre, moments are significant times when existing orthodoxies are open to challenge, when things have the potential to be over-turned or radically altered, moments of crisis in the original sense of the term. Rather than the Bergsonian notion of *durée*, duration, Lefebvre was privileging the importance of the instant.

(Elden, 2004: x)

As an extension of his theory in *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre’s swansong – his theory of Rhythmanalysis – delves deeper into his triad and his interest in the present moment, through considering it as composed of rhythms.

The rhythm-analytic project is a fundamentally embodied one. The ephemerality of the lived moment places the body at the centre of the enquiry amongst the ‘polyrhythmia’ of the everyday. Lefebvre writes,

> we know that a rhythm is slow or lively only in relation to other rhythms (often our own: those of our walking, our breathing, our heart)… spontaneously each of us has our own preferences, references, frequencies; each must appreciate rhythms by referring them to oneself, one’s heart, or breathing, but also to one’s hours of work, of rest, of waking and of sleep.

(Lefebvre 2004: 10)

This foregrounding of an embodied, phenomenological perspective of space, alongside the interrelationship of Lefebvre’s triad of ‘spatial practice’, ‘representations of space’ and ‘representational space’ forms the foundation of a theoretical perspective, which has since been developed by several people working
in the field of cultural geography (including Edensor 2010, Massey 2005, Mels 2004 and Ingold 2000) and that challenges common notions of space as a backdrop for human interaction.

In their own ways these perspectives contribute towards an understanding of space and place as, in the words of Tim Edensor, ‘always in a process of becoming’ (2010: 3). Tim Ingold’s notion of the ‘dwelling perspective’ relates clearly with Lefebvre’s concept of Rhythmanalysis. He writes,

> the world continually comes into being around the inhabitant, and its manifold constituents take on significance through their incorporation into a regular pattern of life activity. It has been rather more usual, in social and cultural anthropology, to suppose that people inhabit a world – of culture or society – to which form and meaning have already been attached.

(2000: 153)

Ingold privileges an ongoing practice of place and objects as the project of weaving existence – places, buildings, artefacts and natural objects are always in a state of being made by their occupation and usage, rather than being conceived of as finished, completed things that form the setting or backdrop for life.

The presence of features like desire lines\(^\text{12}\) in landscapes, the curved wearing away of hard stone steps in mill factories over hundreds of years, or the markings made by skateboarders from grinding and sliding planters curbs and benches demonstrate some of the ways that objects and buildings are transformed over time through different types of use. Similarly, environments and practices transform the bodies of people – for example, the popular complaint of veteran

\(^{12}\) A path created through the gradual deterioration of the land due to persistent use by pedestrians or cyclists.
skateboarders having 'shit knees' refers to the wear and tear of joints through high-impact jumps down sets of steps\(^\text{13}\).

*Rhythmanalysis* (2004) includes a chapter in which Lefebvre discusses 'dressage' to explain how human beings are broken in to the ways of moving and holding themselves that are common within a society or nation through repetition of acts, gestures and movement. Dressage is also a term adopted by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), in which the body is seen as a site in which power is enacted through the training and disciplining of the human body. Lefebvre was, in a similar thread to Foucault, critical of our 'urban-state-market society' (Lefebvre 2004: 6), remarking '[t]he commodity prevails over everything' (2004: 6). Because rhythms are the means by which 'dressage' is activated, and power is performed, this chapter examines the ways in which play might be understood as operating within everyday rhythms as a powerful instant that disrupts productive, commercial space.

The notion of 'play' encompasses a wide range of different activities, but this chapter is focused on free improvised play, as opposed to playful practices of a more rule-bound or structured nature. In my practice, this playing is primarily movement based, involving my interaction with street objects, sometimes people, paving patterns, or simply my moving through or occupying of sites in an unusual way. The practice is very much not dance, involving un-skilled and vernacular, or easy physical expression. In actuality, the practice does have clear skill to it, particularly around improvisation and the ability to respond creatively and

\(^{13}\) Jumping sets of steps is a popular skateboarding trick and most skateboarding videos feature stair jumps. The depth of steps and quantity is proportionate to the level of difficulty. The terrain on which the steps are approached and landed also adds to the difficulty.
spontaneously, but the movement itself does not bear any markers of virtuosic or formal movement practices.

The sites in which the practice takes place are of key importance. The built environment is increasingly a place in which people’s rhythms (their expenditures of energy in space and time) serve a dominantly commercial aim, to get them from one place of consumption or production to another. In his book, *Performance and the Contemporary City* (2010), Nicolas Whybrow asserts that an increasing interest in urban space as a site for performance and art derives from ‘the perception that increasingly the behaviour of individuals in urban space is becoming restricted in fact to little more than the ‘right to shop’ (2010: 195).

This chapter refers to my practice as an example of a type of play that is best characterised as representative of an unusual and critical form of spatial practice in the context of the public built environment. It allows the player to consider the built environment as grounds for open physical improvised expression, and in doing so critiques dominant spatial rhythms. Rather than seeing this approach to play as a frivolous and unimportant interruption, Lefebvre’s theory of rhythmanalysis opens up a theoretical case for the ephemeral playful moment to be seen as a powerful instant. Reflections on my own practice articulate how an instant of play might work as a critique of space in practice.

**Rhythmanalysis**

Lefebvre embraces the knowing body in his theories of space, but particularly in *Rhythmanalysis*, in which he explicitly critiques philosophical enquiry that understands thinking only as something located in the mind. He writes,
the Cartesian tradition has long reigned in philosophy. It is exhausted, but remains present... what we have thought over the course of the preceding pages implies another concept of thinking. It is to think that which is not thought: the game and the risk, love, art, violence, in a word, the world, or more precisely the diverse relations between human beings and the universe.

(2004: 17)

For Lefebvre, then, omitting bodily knowing from the project of philosophy denies the opportunity to fully explore the world of knowledge.

This knowing is inherent in the ‘screaming monumentality’ of the steps of Gare Saint Charles in Marseille, as described by Catherine Regulier and Lefebvre in their ‘Attempt at the Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities’ (2004). The steps are navigated through a muscular negotiation of the weight of the body, they initiate the body into the city, they offer a particular vantage, and they set a pace that must be reconsidered at the point of the next rhythmic engagement with the built environment. They explain,

[t]hey are for the traveller the obligatory – one could say initiatory – passage for the descent towards the city, towards the sea. More than that of a gate or an avenue, their screaming monumentality imposes on the body and on consciousness the requirement of passing from one rhythm to another, as yet unknown – to be discovered.

(2004: 97)

The notion of passage is also important; the steps mark an exiting from an enclosure and the rhythms contained within it. The descent places the city at a tonal depth from the station and point of arrival. All of these things can be described perfectly well, but the experience of them – in situ – is integral to a full understanding because of the complex and embodied way that space is produced.
Lefebvre sets up a basic framework for the analysis of rhythms, which involves a consideration of the following from the perspective of the individual:

a) repetition (of movements, gestures, action, situations, differences);

b) interferences of linear processes and cyclical processes;

c) birth, growth, peak, then decline and end.

(Lefebvre 2004: 15)

Repetition is an important, identifying feature of rhythm. Also, he makes a distinction between linear and cyclical rhythms, arguing that cyclical rhythms derive from nature, whereas linear rhythms are a product of social practice. He writes,

[t]he cyclical originates in the cosmic, in nature: days, nights, seasons, the waves and tides of the sea, monthly cycles, etc. The linear would come rather from social practice, therefore from human activity: the monotony of actions and of movements, imposed structures.

(Lefebvre 2004: 8)

This distinction does not attempt to articulate human beings and their actions as unnatural, but rather emphasises how human activity sets out to rationalise and measure. For example, time as a linear construct is a fiction that allows human beings to measure their existence, but it compartmentalises experience and places a marker on the end point of a process sometimes to the detriment and disregard of an experience of the process itself, or to any notion of a continuity of experience.

For Lefebvre these two rhythmic dynamics – the linear and the cyclical – exist together as an ‘antagonistic unity’ (2004: 8). He writes, ‘[t]ime and space, the cyclical and the linear, exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made a measuring-measure; everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetitions’ (2004: 8). Lefebvre’s final point in his framework for analysing rhythm – its building and eventual dying out – is a
way to understand rhythm from the embodied perspective as a sequence that is determined by the individual in a moment of interaction of ‘a place, a time and an expenditure of energy’ (2004: 15). Lefebvre’s theory does not work when considered from an abstracted position – the fly-on-the-wall perspective of watching space from ‘nowhere’. There is no such space in which to determine when rhythm begins, peaks, declines and ends, unless within the moment.

For someone who crosses the road and begins walking across Albert Square in Manchester, their rhythm will begin from their first step on the cobbled stones and end when they step down onto the road at the other side. Their ‘peak’ might be nothing more than reaching the centre of the square, or the walker might reach a peak of their heart rate. Or this person’s peak might occur as their movement intersects suddenly with three other walkers, who are also crossing the square. On the other hand, for the person who sits on the outskirts of Albert Square during their lunch break their experience of beginning, middle and end of rhythm is in the witnessing of other expenditures of energy, in time and in this square. The rhythmic peak might come as three or four walkers exchange paths like two waves colliding in the centre of the square, or when the watcher witnesses a sudden downpour that speeds up the pedestrians and scatters them quickly out of the square.

**Play as Intra-Ordinary Rhythm – Cyclical and Linear Repetitions**

The body is the means by which rhythms are experienced and responded to tacitly in ways that are not pre-conceived by the individual. This capacity of the body to organise itself rhythmically, in a way that is quite unknowable to the individual can be seen in the way that the menstrual cycles of women who live or work together
sometimes synchronise over time. In terms of space and place, Edensor articulates that ‘corporeal capacities to sense rhythm... organise the subjective and cultural experience of place’ (2010: 5), acknowledging how the body is drawn into patterns and speeds of movement within specific locales.

Whilst the play activity of my research does not constitute ordinary, everyday movement performed in public spaces, its rhythms are still born from within the spatial practice of specific places. Play connects with the bodies of users of place in oblique ways, absorbing rhythm from people, objects and architecture and expressing them in heightened or more elaborate ways.

There are several moments during my practice when a rhythmic engagement with a specific site was revealed to me. On one occasion, I was playing on a set of railings that line the edge of the Shena Simon building on Whitworth Street in Manchester. Standing with the right side of my body closest to the railings, I grabbed a spike with my right hand and hauled my right foot onto the bottom rung of the railing. Tipping my body forward slightly, I allowed my left side to fall in towards the railings, grabbing a new spike with my left hand further along and setting my left foot down on the bottom rung of the railing. Then I would switch my left hand for my right, and my left foot for my right foot and repeat this movement again until I had reached the end of the railings.

Moving gradually in this way, I made a linear progression across the railings, similar to the movement of pedestrians around me, but in a way that was inefficient and slower, incorporating a cyclical action of swinging and dipping (as I switched hands and feet). The action of swinging reminded me of the swing of a
person’s arm as they propel themselves forward to walk. The repetition of a
dipping motion also felt as though it resembled the slight dipping and rising of hips
during an ordinary walking action, which can be noticed more clearly when slowed
down. Therefore, the play action was not absurdly ‘out of the ordinary’, but can be
more accurately described as entirely ‘within the ordinary’ – a pattern of
behaviour and actions born out of the ordinary rhythms exhibited (and performed
by myself) within this type of space.

This instant of play utilised an aspect of the space – the railings – that are designed
to keep people out, but also to dissolve out of public consciousness. My playing on
the railings both underlines the fact that they are there, and undermines their
status as a symbol of authoritarian control. In this way, my playing can be
understood as a subversion of the dominant movement performed within this
space, and a critique of authoritarian control.

As a subversion of dominant rhythms, the playful action I developed on these
railings also demonstrates the ‘antagonistic unity’ of linear and cyclical rhythms.
The act of walking is dominantly understood through the propelling of a person
forwards in space and time. The action of walking, however, integrates many
cyclical repetitions activated throughout the mechanics of the body, which are
commonly not paid attention to and seen as ancillary to the linear rhythmical
process of walking. The swinging and dipping of my playful action on the railings
heightened the cyclical aspects of this movement and relied upon the transfer of
weight as my body became hinged against each railing.
This heightening of cyclical repetition through play can also be seen in another intervention in Manchester's Exchange Square. I was experimenting with video recording my practice, which provided me with a unique view that captured an interesting moment. I was located at the side of the Harvey Nichols building at the top of a gradual sloped walkway that links Exchange Square with Deansgate. At this time, the square housed a ‘big wheel’ tourist attraction, allowing public to view the city from 60 metres above ground.\textsuperscript{14} I had positioned the camera on a tripod at the bottom of the slope, closest to Deansgate, and angled the camera upwards, so that it would capture me performing at the top of the slope and making my way down. This vantage also captured several of the buildings in the background as well as the top of the big wheel.

The slope has a stone columned railing on one side. Facing this rail and slotting my feet into the gaps between these pillars, I took hold of the handrail and began a movement that involved placing my right toes into a gap, followed by my left toes, and then turning 180° (so that my back was against the rail) and placing my right heel, followed by my left into gaps further along. This (rather awkward) action was repeated as I moved slowly down the slope towards the camera.

When I reviewed the footage my movement was very slow. The wheel in the background – also moving very slowly – appeared static, much like the buildings surrounding it. I became bored of watching my slow progression and decided to fast-forward the footage. As I watched the rate of my circling increase rapidly on the screen, I was surprised and fascinated to see the big wheel in the background of the image speed up at a very similar rate. Not only was my movement

\textsuperscript{14} The 'Big Wheel' was removed in April 2012 and has since been relocated to Piccadilly Gardens.
reciprocating the turning of the wheel, but I was also moving at a very similar speed. With the image sped up, I was able to notice the synchronicity between myself and the wheel, in comparison with the speed and movements of other objects and people within the frame.

In this example, my bodily absorption of rhythm came from a connection made to the imposing mechanical wheel that occupied so much of Exchange Square, rather than from pedestrians walking, as could be inferred in the previous example. It is interesting that in this example of play, as with the previous one, there is a heightening of and connection with cyclical repetition. Whilst there is this rhythmical similarity between my act of play and the Big Wheel, there is also a stark ideological contrast between the two, since The Big Wheel represents an activity of commercially oriented play in the built environment through its association with tourism and leisure time.

**Play as Intra-Ordinary Rhythm – Connecting With Other Bodies**

Many play theorists have explored the unification that play engenders (particularly, Csikzentmihalyi & Bennett 1971, Schechner & Schuman 1976, Turner 1982, and Sutton-Smith 2001). It is mainly discussed in relation to organised play, such as games, sporting events and festivals in respect of how individuals become part of a collective playful culture that involves a temporary removal from everyday life, and a range of social engagements within that play world. Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman state:

> a play community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over... the feeling of being “apart together” in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutual withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game.
This suggests that play bonds individuals through the shared experience of an extraordinary event or encounter and that the connection felt during play is retained.

These sources highlight how the unifying power of play tends to be discussed in terms of its function to develop community. Following a description of a Catalan Festival (citing Noyes 1995) in which a participant explains his feeling of becoming part of the mass of bodies, Brian Sutton-Smith remarks that ‘festivals bring a renewal of community identity’ (2001: 110), acknowledging the communal bond that a play space brings and the expression of an identity played out by that community. This perspective echoes that of Carl Seashore – writing as far back as the beginning of the 20th century. He articulates play as a social tool, stating ‘we become like those with whom we play’ (1910: 514), suggesting that play homogenises through shared identity. These perspectives posit play as a tool in the production of a dominant community identity or ideology, which does not quite explain the type of connection made in my own performances of playing.

In contrast to these notions of play, Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of attention and flow relates more to the rhythmic ontology of play as distinct from ideological connections between participants of a community. He describes attention as a form of ‘psychic energy’ (1990: 33), which is invested and spent in the process of engaging in tasks. Flow is the state of being held within this kind of deep attention as part of a given task. Being in a state of flow is understood as not exclusive to
play, but many of the examples used by Csikszentmihalyi are drawn from a wide range of play activities and events.

As Csikszentmihalyi explains, during the experience of flow, participants experience a weakened sense of self and gain a feeling of union with fellow participants and/or environments. He states that

when a person invests all her psychic energy into an interaction – whether it is with another person, a boat, a mountain, or a piece of music – she in effect becomes part of a system of action greater than what the individual self had been before.

(1990: 65)

In Csikszentmihalyi’s theory, the focusing of attention allows for ‘self-transcendence’ (1990: 64) where the body is operating in a state of being in total cooperation with another person or object. The notion of selfhood, then, is to be understood as contingent upon ‘presence’: the self is constructed over and again in each instant of space and time and in relationship to other people and rhythms within that instant.

An instant of play in Plymouth demonstrates how such a connection can be experienced in practice. I was located in one of the main, pedestrian shopping streets in the city centre, stepping from one paving stone to another to avoid the cracks and sometimes using the linear gaps between stones as a pretend tightrope, trying to balance my feet whilst moving forwards and backwards. Whilst playing, a boy around 16-years-old walked up and stood next to me. I paused as I registered his presence and then began to continue with my activity. As I shifted my foot to the right, he copied me. I moved to the left, and he followed. I began to
try and catch him out, shifting my weight quickly, but an intense concentration
developed between us such that we began to move in almost perfect synchronicity.

Although I was directing our movement, I kept pausing, hoping that he might take
the lead. After what was only a minute of play, but that seemed like a much longer
period, he dropped his attention and ran away. Neither of us made an attempt to
converse in any way, and we didn’t ever look at each other, as we moved entirely
on the basis of a peripheral vantage of the other person’s actions. Despite this lack
of visual contact, I felt close to the body of this stranger and our interaction was
based on miniscule details apparent from close proximity.

As an instant of play, it was mildly competitive, but through the development of
our synchronicity it appeared like an impromptu choreography between two very
different people. When he walked up and stood next to me, my engagement with
the site was split between the paving stones and him. When he broke from the
connection we had created – it felt like the space was suddenly shattered – I
remember feeling that I had to adjust myself, to make a connection internally, in
order to go back to playing on my own. My attention, which had been focused on
him, was refocused back on my feet, those stones, and those cracks (fig. 7).
In this example of play in direct connection with another person, my consciousness was extended to incorporate the person standing next to me out of a desire to respond to him as much as the rhythms of the pattern of paving stones or the actions of walkers. If a notion of the ‘self’ is understood as fluid, then we (myself and this boy) developed a connection in the present that was ‘me’, ‘him’ and ‘us’ simultaneously. This was our peak of rhythmic connection – a brief instant of synchronised movement – and the boy’s breaking of attention and running away signaled the end of our interaction.

Though people in public places interact in lots of ways, holding doors open for each other, saying good morning and in through the interaction between customers and business owners, play in many forms is able to generate spaces of rhythmic synchronicity between people in the public built environment that is not
primarily concerned with the flow of capital, the generation of profit, the productivity and efficiency of individuals, or the creation of an ideological community identity. It also operates at a deeper corporeal and rhythmic level than the superficial communication and interactions required to ensure the smooth flow of capital in commercial spaces.

Free improvised play is a particular type of playing that avoids formalisation and rules. It involves the absorption of rhythms in space and suggests the possibility of alternative movement. It highlights dominant pedestrian movement through its contrast, and it draws attention to exclusionary objects (like railings) that delineate space but that are designed to sit quietly in the background. In terms of linear and cyclical rhythms, free improvised play adopts a non-regulated mode of attention and behaviour in the built environment that interrupts the smooth flow of productive and efficient linear rhythms. My experience of free improvised playful practice highlights how play heightens the cyclical rhythms of space.

**Play and Game Frameworks**

Play is a broad category of cultural activity that ranges from spontaneous improvised movement to organised sporting events, and theatrical presentations. If these practices were compared along a continuum, they could be organised in terms of the frames in which they operate. Practices operating at the improvised end of the continuum tend to work within an already existing framework, rather than operating within a more or less complex frame of play – with rules, special clothing and equipment and particular spaces in which the activity takes place.
Along this continuum of play frames, the closer we move towards games the closer we get to goal-orientated competitive practices, whereas activities at the spontaneous and improvised end of the spectrum tend to be more autotelic, in which the act of playing is its own purpose. Skateboarding – the practice, from which this research developed – is an activity (discussed in the introduction to this thesis) that has shifted further along the continuum from autotelic to goal-orientated. Rhythmically too, the dominant practice of linear repetition towards the goal of perfecting tricks imposes a machine-like rhythm on the built environment, compared with the flow and rhythmic absorption of landscape inherent in the pre-tricks phase of earlier skateboarding practice.

Within the field of performance, several artists making playful interventions in public spaces have been explored as part of this research, but of particular interest to this chapter are Lottie Child, Allora & Calzadilla, LIGNA, Fiona Templeton and Blast Theory. The work of Child and Allora & Calzadilla operate within the existing framework of the cities in which their works are located, whereas Templeton and Blast Theory adopt external frameworks and gaming formats that limit freedom for participants. LIGNA’s work, in relation to these, occupies a more ambiguous play frame than the other practices. These examples are included as a way to consider how certain types of play – particularly improvised play – opens up a space in the moment for creative expression and connection between people in the public built environment.

Lotti Child’s ‘Street Training’ events are undertaken with a range of different groups, from adults to adolescents, within inner city neighbourhoods and involve Child leading groups out into the built environment to interact with the city in
playful and subversive ways. An article on the Street Training website describes these outings as ‘walk[ing] the line between creative and antisocial behaviour [...] we’ll use the streets more joyfully and more... creatively’ (Street Training 2007: n.p.). In terms of the actions performed, one video taken from a Street Training outing in Manchester showed the group jumping down sets of steps, climbing on walls, smiling and waving at passers by, looking at the faces of gargoyles on old buildings, and making patterns with their feet from puddle water in a car park.

As part of an exhibition of a Street Training event undertaken in Manchester and presented at Cube Gallery, Child produced a street training guide with suggested activities that could be performed in different places around Manchester city centre, meaning that play is not entirely improvised; rather participants are given suggestions and cues to encourage their playful engagement with the city. On the Street Training website, an explanation is given for the ongoing project that raises concerns about the narrowing of public activity and the self-policing of the public built environment. Their statement reads,

we are conditioned in big cities to always walk down the street with our walking down the street face on and police ourselves and others for deviating from this narrow use of public space... Sharing your thoughts, feelings or opinions with other users of public space is one way to invest and so co-create the public spaces we all use... Creative expression in public space doesn’t have to be the sole preserve of public artists and buskers... isolation and alienation, characteristic of big city living are challenged every time you smile at another person on the street. The city can be seen as an assault course and a free gym, travelling through the city can become terrain for developing physical skill and flexibility.

(Street Training 2007: n.p.)

The Street Training ethos aims to broaden the possibilities of public space, to re-establish the person-to-person contact so integral to a notion of ‘public’ space, and it opens up the possibility of the city functioning as a place to develop creative and
physical skill and flexibility, rather than being a series of pathways that direct people from one place to another. This quotation highlights Street Training as a process of connecting people both to their urban landscapes and to other people within urban landscapes. Though there are, no doubt, moments of competition between participants, Street Training is primarily concerned with creative expression in public space without attaching an aesthetic judgement or goal.

Artist duo, Allora and Calzadilla’s series of Chalk sculptures (1998-2006) also engage with the notion of public freedom in urban space, through the playful and temporary inscribing of words and pictures. Their chalk interventions involve Allora and Calzadilla depositing large cylinders of chalk (made to look like giant versions of ordinary sticks of chalk) in public squares and inviting the public to write and draw whatever they like on the street. Talking about the project, Allora and Calzadilla remark on the appeal of chalk because of its ideological association with education, as well as its ephemerality as a substance (2007: n.p.).

Chalk is simultaneously a powerful but easily destroyed object. Calzadilla remarks on big chalks allowing for the writing of ‘big words’, both physically and symbolically (2007: n.p.), identifying a political dimension to the project. Talking about their locating of a Chalk project in Peru, Allora and Calzadilla state,

our idea was to place the chalk where the governmental buildings of Peru are located. Everyday they would allow for protestors to go and make a kind of lap around the plaza and that’s your opportunity to publicly voice whatever demands you might have. The protesters, they realised that this was like another way to vocalise and to make visible their demands... and it really became a complex sort of forum that was all being registered on this floor... you have all this multiplicity of positions... A police squad, they arrested the sculpture. They took all the chalks, they put them in a military truck, and they took them away.

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15 Allora and Calzadilla refer to the piece as a ‘sculpture’ (in Art21 2007: video online), though the work encourages public performances that make the work relevant to this discussion.
Despite being a site in which vocal forms of protest were explicitly sanctioned, chalked statements on the ground were not tolerated.

In the video it is visible that people choose to write all sorts of things from statements of political allegiance to ‘I love you’s. Allora and Calzadilla do not explain whether the police gave a reason as to why the chalks needed to be removed, but it is interesting that in a site in which verbal forms of protest and political speech are sanctioned, a playful interruption was not tolerated. The intervention of chalks opens up a more intimate space than the public voicing of demands as Calzadilla describes people crossing out each other’s words and engaging in playful writing-over of other people’s notes. This playful action also engages in a form of co-creation.

LIGNA are a group consisting of one media and two performance artists, who explore subversive and playful collective actions with members of the public who access their artwork. At the centre of their practice is a bi-weekly radio programme produced by the not-for-profit Hamburg radio station, Freies Sender Kombinat (FSK). This programme, running since the 1990s is titled Lignas Radio Box and invites public to call up the radio station and transmit their favourite songs through their telephone receivers (Ligna n.d.(a): n.p.). Beginning in 2002, they have also developed a practice that extends the company’s interest in using radio broadcasting for collective public action. LIGNA’s Radio Ballet events involve participants listening to a radio ‘play’ within a particular public place. The radio ‘play’ includes instructions for ‘permitted and forbidden gestures (to beg, to sit or
lie down on the floor etc.)’ (Ligna n.d.(b): n.p.), which participants may choose to
perform or not.

The company is clear in articulating the work as not being a demonstration or
‘mass ornament’ (Ligna n.d.(b): n.p.), eschewing any association with the
commercially popular ‘flash mob’. Public are not required to be located together to
perform these gestures or actions – the work is aimed at the individual and at the
individual’s personal response to the instructions. Instead, they describe the work
as ‘a ”Zerstreuung” (a German term with different meanings: dispersion,
distraction, distribution and, as well: entertainment)’ (Ligna n.d.(b): n.p.). Much
like Child’s *Street Training*, the work functions as a ‘zerstreuung’ from
conventional and dominant ways of behaving and moving in public places. Its
status as ‘entertainment’ for the participant - as something playful and without
goal – is important too, especially in the context of public spaces and their
dominant commercial context.

The ‘flash mob’, as a similar format of public intervention, is avoided probably
because of its use for commercial purposes. The T-Mobile company have used this
format for a number of publicity stunts, in advertisements online and on TV. Unlike
*Street Training* and *Chalks, Radio Ballet* doesn’t generate the same kind of
connectivity between participants and the ‘general public’, mainly because of
participants’ use of headphones and their occupying of a virtual space that reduces
their sensory connection to the shared public space they are physically inhabiting.
There is also a limited level of improvisation due to the directing of the action of
the participant, which is implied in the notion of a radio ‘play’ in which there is an
already established part that the actor fulfills. This example is interesting in the way that it sits somewhere between goal-orientated and improvised forms of play.

The mixing of the virtual and the ‘real’ inherent in the individual occupying public space whilst wearing headphones diminishes person-to-person contact on the ground, but it creates an interesting representational space for the individual whose virtual and real environments come together in the moment as part of their embodied spatial experience. This mixture of the virtual and the real is a space that has been extensively explored by Blast Theory throughout their career spanning more than two decades. Much of the work of Blast Theory is focused around interactive gaming, and the company have partnered with companies such as Sony, Nokia, British Telecom and Microsoft Research as part of three major research projects looking at pervasive gaming and mass participation (Blast Theory n.d.(a): n.p.).

The company’s early work adopted predominantly live aesthetics, but their creation of Desert Rain in 1999 marked a shift in the companies interests towards the exploration of digital performance and the relationship between virtual and ‘real’ spaces (Blast Theory n.d.(a): n.p.). Referencing the desert setting of the first Gulf war and Jean Baudrillard’s theorisation of the first Gulf War as ‘virtual’ from the mediated perspective of global spectators, and also incorporating information about the estimated numbers of Iraqi casualties, Desert Rain was a complex installation involving visitors entering a virtual desert in which they have a target to find and a mission to complete (Blast Theory n.d.(b): n.p.).
Several of their projects have taken place simultaneously in ‘real’ urban environments and virtual online spaces, involving a combination of different participants – some on the streets with hand-held devices that connect them to a virtual platform, and some who access the virtual environment and a mediated version of the ‘real’ streets from their computers – which is exemplified in projects such as Can You See Me Now? (Blast Theory 2001), Uncle Roy All Around You (Blast Theory 2003), I Like Frank (Blast Theory 2004), and I'd Hide You (Blast Theory 2012). In all of these projects, Blast Theory create a separate community in a mixed space, one that is not cut-off, but rather permeable, that constantly experiences a blending of ‘real’ and virtual spaces – whether through the interactions of people on the streets of a city, or interactions with people in the home, in the case of online participants.

Despite this connectivity, the dominance of the goal-oriented gaming format prevents a sustained or deep engagement with other people; the relationships are, ultimately, provisional and instrumental. I took part in Blast Theory’s I'd Hide You (2012) when it was performed in Manchester city centre, as an online participant. The piece was organised like a game of hide and seek played by three runners who were located on the streets of Manchester’s Northern Quarter with live feed cameras, (each individual runner transmitting a video that could be watched in real-time online), and tracking devices (so their movements could be seen on an online map of the area).

Online participants could see the exact whereabouts of each runner and could type messages to the runners and other online players in real-time. Once a runner was ‘found’, online players had to click on the image of the ‘found’ runner on their
screens, aiming to take as many ‘snaps’ as possible. The snaps translated into points for each on-street player. Online players also had a limited number of six lives. I enjoyed the feeling of connection with my runner, the opportunity to communicate with strangers, and the ‘other worldly’ space I was occupying as I spectated upon Saturday night revellers in the city, so I became frustrated with the competitive element, constantly losing my lives and having to re-enter the game, and not feeling able to regain the contact I had previously enjoyed.

Similarly, Fiona Templeton’s interactive theatre piece, *You! The City* (1988) also adopts elements of game-play. The first version of this piece took place in various sites (and in transit) around the midtown Manhattan area. The performance was experienced by one person at a time and involved the participant moving from one location to another, accompanied by a host of different performers. During each scene the response of the participant has an impact on the way the scene is played out, and so each scene has variations of the script that have been committed to memory by the performers. As the participant makes choices throughout the show, the performers are able to tailor their responses accordingly.

The participant has some power in her or his authorship of the material, but this is limited and has been carefully orchestrated so that any choice the participant makes will fit into the framework that has been established. Much like in the work of Blast Theory, the framework is permeable, always subject to the spontaneous interaction or imposition of everyday life. Also, the one-to-one interaction and poetic quality of Templeton’s text creates a particularly interesting intimacy between performers and participants, which is discussed in chapter four. But, the
type of play happening within *You! The City*, is certainly located at the gaming end of the continuum in which a framework of rules are imposed upon the player.

Considering these different types of play alongside each other, those projects operating towards the improvised end of the spectrum impose fewer rules on participants and allow greater freedom of expression. With this comes the uncertainty of not-knowing how the playful activity will work or what will happen. Play activities operating at the game end of the continuum are rule-bound and predictable, they apply limits and time frames that control how the play will progress. They set limited parameters, which means that the results of play are limited and, to a large extent, predetermined. The imposition of rules and goal-orientated play diminishes the opportunities for a depth of interaction and an intimacy between participants of play.

**Unforeseen, ‘Skill-less’ Play**

My own practice functions at the improvised end of this play spectrum. It is not highly rule-bound and is open to possibility. The word improvisation derives from the Latin ‘improvisus’, which translates as ‘unforeseen’. To play in this improvisational way is to engage in the site without a pre-determined plan of action, without a goal. Thus, in terms of categorising play, improvisation is the natural opposite to game, where games are a kind of ‘foreseen’ play.

My presentation of a deliberately vernacular form of improvised movement developed as a way to avoid the display of skill that is so inherent in skateboarders’ presentations of tricks. The practice I have been undertaking for this research has its own skills, particularly in terms of improvisation – being able
to accept offers and to develop spontaneous creative movement – but the term ‘skill-less’ became important, as a way to position my activity outside of already existing cultural forms, particularly the skillful and codified forms of skateboarding and dance in which the body must meet certain standards, and have certain qualities.

Elizabeth Dempster’s work on ‘pedestrian movement’ addresses these concerns within a dance context. She explains that ‘the choreography of the pedestrian [...] makes an issue of the audience; the work is not, or not only, in the body of the performer; the work and its effects [...] are activated and produced between spectator and actor’ (Dempster 2008: 27). Instead of presenting a body that draws attention because of its visually striking qualities, the choreography of the pedestrian draws a parallel between the spectator and the performer and opens up a space of dialogue.

Marsha Meskimmon, similarly, conceives of an ‘aesthetic of pedestrianism’ (1997: 21), which is located conceptually in opposition to the flâneur and with the feminine, she writes, ‘the pedestrian differs from the flâneur in her locatedness and physicality... she is not a disembodied eye like the theoretical flâneur... but a sentient participant in the city’ (1997: 21). Meskimmon’s sentient participant correlates with Lefebvre’s rhythmanalyst, who occupies an embodied position in relation to others, rather than a privileged distance and objective viewpoint. Thus, in keeping with these perspectives, there has been a necessity for me to adopt a position of skill-lessness in my practice as a strategy for avoiding possessive spectatorship and to present an unskilled and undisciplined (female) body in the built environment.
**Exaggerated Bodily Comportment**

The physical qualities of the movement I adopted can be understood as a display of extension, exaggeration and unbalance. I noticed similarities in my approach to movement on different types of obstacles, which indicates a particular approach to my physicality that aims to try and fill space, to take up as much room as possible, and to make my body look odd, strange or grotesque. The following description of some of these types of street obstacle and my analysis of them reveals these qualities:

**Through railings**
I duck underneath with both hands on the top of the railings. I lift my head and arch my spine as much as I can. I pause halfway through. My feet are pointed slightly as I push through and emerge the other side.

**Walking along railings**
My hands on the railing, my feet on the bottom rung, I stick my elbows outwards making my body look odd. I walk along the railings with turned out feet and crossed arms.

**Swinging on railings**
I place one foot on the bottom of the railing, and my hand on the top. I use my body weight to swing forward in towards the railings. The ball of my foot creates a pivot point.

**Balancing on walls**
Deliberately finding points where I'm unbalanced, either by walking on my tip-toes or on the edges or backs of my feet. Almost falling over, my arms flail wildly in circles.

**Walking in a straight line**
Holding out my arms as if balancing – overtly. Pointing my toes, dipping and swinging my legs as I walk forwards. I also try to walk backwards, I always look down at my legs and lift my skirt up so I can see my feet.

**Climbing downstairs**
On all fours, my hips raised up as I clamber right hand, left foot, left hand, right foot. Trying to make my shoulder blades stick up like spikes on my back.

**Around pillars**
Depending on their diameter I either swing around the pillar, using my weight, or try to stretch my arms and legs completely around it.

**Tiny ledges**
I find the smallest ledges to try and stand on. The very edge of my foot connects with a miniscule ledge and I see how long I can stay balanced on it. I often fall after just a few seconds, but sometimes I am surprised by how long I can manage it.

Balancing
Hands in the air. An exaggerated expression – arms outstretched, taking up as much room as possible.

Paving stones
Jumping from one to another, following the cracks. Keeping one foot on one stone and then seeing how far I can stretch my other leg to a paving stone further away. I am practically doing the splits.

Upside down
Lying down on a wall, a bench or on the floor and I look at the people and cars going past from a different perspective. Sometimes I just sit and watch and occupy space.

I tend to use the weight of my body to determine the speed that a movement happens. I often exaggerate what I am doing with my body, lifting and stretching my arms and legs as widely as possible. I deliberately avoid trying to make my movement ‘pretty’ – the movements I perform when I play tend to involve sticking out my hips and stomach, sticking out my elbows, curving my spine and squatting on the floor. When I am running and moving around I am often moving on the balls of my feet or my tiptoes, but this is usually to unbalance me – providing an unstable basis for the movement and a likelihood that I will tip and fall. An apparent failure in being able to balance and perform much of these movements is part of the unskilled quality of my playing.

These features of my practice enact an approach to movement that challenges a historical restriction of bodily comportment, which is associated with girls and women. In her article originally published in 1980, and re-published in 2005 suggesting its continued and contemporary relevance, Iris Marion Young explains how girls and women are encouraged to be fearful of harm to their bodies,
distrust their physical capabilities, and that women tend to occupy spaces in a far more restricted way than men do. She writes, ‘women tend to restrict their space and range of movement in a variety of tasks’ (2005: 32-33). My playing is in opposition to this, as an approach that attempts to present a woman exaggerating her range of movement.

Young also articulates the performativity of acts of restriction, which perpetuate an association of femininity with fragility and physical inhibition. These performances of restriction ‘produce in many women a greater or lesser feeling of incapacity, frustration and self-consciousness. We have more of a tendency than men do to greatly underestimate our bodily capacity’ (2005: 34). Therefore it is necessary in my own fashioning of a feminine interruption to perpetuate an alternative view of female bodily comportment through my acts of playing.

All forms of play are permeable, impacting on ordinary life in various ways. Play operates within existing frameworks of ordinary life, but forms of play that adopt specific rules also impose their own frameworks that limit freedom for participants. Forms of play that operate at the improvised end of the continuum are not ‘foreseeable’ and raise a difficulty for the imposing of social control, as can be seen in the example of Chalks where the sculpture was removed from public space. The public built environment can be understood as a space that does not tolerate the unknowable – that which cannot be rationalised, understood and sanctioned. In the built environment, improvised forms of play also develop intimacy and deep interactions between people that challenge commercial culture.
Leebvre’s theory of rhythm analysis provides a perspective on how to understand an embodied experience of space and the interrelationship of elements, as well as raising the status of the moment as having great powerful potential. My own practice reveals how through play the body absorbs rhythms within space, how people match rhythm with each other and how improvised play makes visible and draws attention to the rhythms by which public spaces are defined. It also highlights how play as a form of social action not separated from the everyday, might contribute to the development of ‘spatial practice’, and form powerful moments of resistance in increasingly commercialised spaces.
Chapter Three      Refusing to Play: Popular ‘Girl’ and ‘Woman’ Narratives

Representations of femininity in popular culture are discussed in this chapter, with a particular concern over the value of states and behaviours that are associated with femininity. This chapter also considers the relationship between adult femininity and young girls. The issues raised in this chapter reflect several of my experiences whilst undertaking my practical interruptions; I found myself subject to restrictions, sexualisation, and concern for my mental health, particularly when costumed in the Alice dress and grey dress. In response to this, this chapter also considers how my costume functions as a signifier of femininity, and how my image of femininity whilst wearing it, is responded to by people in the public built environment.

My costuming is understood in relation to Aoife Monks’ theories, as a theatrical element that ‘mediates [a] relationship between the actor and the audience in performance’ (2010: 9). Monks use of the terms ‘actor’ and ‘audience’ reflect the focus of her study, which is located within the broad realms of theatrical performance. The relationship between the people who witness my interruptions and myself are not the same as those within a typical theatrical setting, but nevertheless I am utilising an element of the theatre – my costuming – as part of my playful interruptions.

The costuming of my practice adds a level of complexity to the categorisation of my interruptions (as performance, as fieldwork, as research), because it adopts a theatricality in its presentation, but does not seek to associate any further with the theatre other than through costume. Thinking about Michael Kirby’s acting
continuum, which establishes a broad conception of the representations of actors from ‘not-acting’ to ‘complex acting’, I am not an ‘actor’; my performance is not clearly locatable within his framework at all. Kirby’s acting continuum is predicated on an understanding of theatre as a matrix within which an actor performs to a more or less complex degree. His category of ‘not acting’ is described as ‘non-matrixed performing’, and is defined by the presence of someone on stage who is understood as being outside of the matrix being presented (Kirby 1972).

In my interruptions, the matrix I am operating in is that of everyday life, not theatre. I am still performing, but on a continuum of everyday performances. The equivalent to a ‘non-matrixed’ performance in the everyday context must (in reversal of Kirby’s continuum) be a theatrical action – something that refers to a theatrical, other worldly matrix. This is understood in contrast to the way the non-matrixed performer in the theatre is someone who is ‘not acting’, who represents a ‘real’ person not held within the world of the play.

The wearing of something that is not ordinary dress is a way to be seen as playing even if I was to do nothing more that stand in the street or to occupy space in an ordinary manner. My costuming may be understood as referencing the theatrical realm, but the context in which I am wearing it is very much of the everyday. The lack of any other theatrical elements – my un-spectacular ‘skill-less’ and ‘unforeseen’ playing described in chapter two – situates my playful interruptions as a type of theatrical-matrix performance in everyday space.

The use of costume also presents a heightened representation of femininity – a representation clearly referencing common and popular feminine images and
icons. Monks explains how costume has been explored in relation to how gender is formed and represented, and that it has been explored in relation to uncovering the symbolic meaning of a dramatic text spoken by an actor, but that relatively little attention has been paid to how the costume itself functions as a site of discourse and the ways in which the experience of costume by a spectator creates further levels of meaning. She writes, ‘costume, in one way or another, is frequently looked through, around, or over in theatre scholarship’ (2010: 9). With this in mind, I have attempted towards the end of this chapter to analyse responses I have received that seem to relate to people’s experience of my costumed body, rather than to solely consider what the costume represents.

The first costume I used referenced Carroll’s ‘Alice’ character, consisting of a puff-sleeve blue dress with white pinafore, white tights, and black shoes or pumps (see fig. 8). The use of a costume elicited more responses from people than I had received when not in costume and made the practice more complex because it was recognisable. Whilst playing in this costume people tended to verbally state who they thought I was ‘playing’. For example, by shouting ‘there’s Alice’, or ‘Where’s the Had Hatter?’ Often people were not able to identify me precisely, but would name me as some other fictional girl character, such as ‘Cinderella’ or ‘Dorothy’, or, as one man stated, “where’s the three bears, Heidi?” – which typifies my status as standing for a multiplicity of fictional female girls.
An important point to make about the costumes that I have worn throughout this research is that my mother made them for me. As a child, I often performed in amateur dramatic and dance productions and my mother would make the costumes I needed for these. When I decided I would use a costume for this research it felt appropriate to ask her to make it. She is not a trained costumier or tailor, and mostly taught herself how to sew. My great grandmother was a court dressmaker in London, and my mother thinks that she may have inherited an interest in sewing or basic skills from her. In this way my costumes are also closely associated with my own female family history and the relationship between my mother and me as an adult, and as my former girl-child self.
Dressing up, playing dress-up and playing in costume can also be seen as a gendered activity that has a particular association with the feminine. Monks considers the lack of scholarly study of costume as an issue of gender politics. She writes, ‘[b]y extension, it may be that fashion’s associations with femininity (a relatively recent association) may make costumes seem like “girl’s stuff”: not worthy of serious masculine analysis’ (2010:10). In this research, my costuming functions as an integral part of my knowledge-producing activity, and this chapter has opened up a space for me to give consideration to my costuming and its role within my research.

My intuitive decision to adopt a representation of ‘Alice’ in the first costume I used became central to my project because she represents an iconic image of girlhood, at least within a European cultural context. Remarking on the endurance of Carroll’s character, Anne Bernays describes ‘Alice’ as ‘indestructible’ (2000: 138), and Christoph Benjamin Schultz, writing in the catalogue from the Tate Liverpool gallery’s 2011 exhibition on the influence of Alice in Wonderland to the visual arts, explains that Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland has been ‘consistently reissued and republished [such] that it has never been out of print’ (2011: 18-19).

Robert Philips asserts ‘Alice’s’ mass appeal in his statement that ‘[b]y 1965, Alice’s Adventures had been translated into forty-seven languages, including Latin, making it one of the world’s most-translated books... After Shakespeare, it has been said, Carroll is perhaps the world’s most quoted author’ (1971: 15). Therefore, Carroll’s ‘Alice’ occupies a central position in the collective cultural consciousness. Importantly, as a girl ‘Alice’ is also seen as a strong feminine archetype; she is rational, unperturbed in the strange environment of
'Wonderland' and inquisitive, and she makes and trusts her own assessment of situations. It is important to note here the multiplicity of Carroll’s ‘Alice’. Carroll had a close relationship with a young girl whose name was Alice Liddell, who is said to have inspired his ‘Alice’ stories. Carroll’s character ‘Alice’ is fictional, but is also ambiguously connected to a real Alice. The connection of my research to this real/fictional ‘Alice’ opened up a space for me to question and consider the mythical status the gendered categories of ‘girl’ and ‘woman’ occupy in order to establish how I might choose to articulate my own gender position and utilise this as method for acquiring knowledge as part of this PhD.

At the time when I was beginning this research, my adoption of ‘Alice’s’ child status offered me the freedom to play, as a woman. My representation of her served as a necessary frame for play that I would eventually need to develop. This chapter offers a theoretical exploration of my concerns around presentations of ‘girl’, ‘woman’ and the relationship between these two positions within popular culture.

**Girl as Problem/Powerful**

As a social construct, the concept of ‘girl’ is multifarious. Populist uses of the term are problematic when they are used to apply limits about what females are capable of, or rules of behaviour that are markedly different to those set out for males. Gwen Stefani – lead singer of North American band, No Doubt – sings, ‘Oh I’m just a girl, living in captivity, your rule of thumb makes me worrisome... Oh! I’ve had it up to here’ (Stefani and Dumont, 1995: song lyrics). This line features in their 1995 hit single ‘Just a Girl’, in which Stefani and Dumont’s lyrics pronounce the limitations put upon ‘girls’, particularly the expectations of a narrowly defined ‘pretty and petite’ feminine, and the feeling of being constantly under scrutiny: ‘I’m just a girl,
guess I’m some kind of freak, ‘cause they all sit and stare with their eyes’ (Stefani and Dumont, 1995: song lyrics).

Similarly, ‘girl’ is popularly associated with the non-serious and unimportant, which is a particular problem when you consider that the category of girl has been applied, historically, to a broad age range of female persons and isn’t always limited to children. Cyndi Lauper’s 1983 hit ‘Girls Just Want To Have Fun’ displays a clear feminist reflection on traditional female roles, and a perception of female subjectivity as being typically defined around male ideals when Lauper sings, ‘some boys take a beautiful girl and hide her away from the rest of the world. I wanna be the one to walk in the sun’ (Lauper and Hazard 1983: song lyrics).

Lauper’s song and video has been described as a ‘feminist anthem’ (Moeschen 2013: online) and Lauper herself identifies proudly as feminist. In an interview with Emma Green, Lauper explains that during the 1980s when she was asked about her political motivations in interviews with the popular press, she would say, ‘yeah, I’m a feminist, I burnt my training bra at the first demonstration. You got a problem with that?’ (Lauper in Green 2014: online). However, despite the importance of Lauper’s presence as an enduring feminist voice within the music industry and in popular culture in general, her overall statement of this song risks

16 Aapola, et al. explain that girl has been used historically as a derogatory term reflecting, ‘women’s lack of status as adults’ and that it was ‘quite common to refer to any female as a ‘girl’, whether she was a child, an adult or even a senior citizen!’ (2005: 6).

17 Robert Hazard is generally regarded as the official writer of the song, but according to the songfacts website, quoting Lauper from an uncited interview with Rolling Stone, Lauper changed the lyrics from Hazard’s original which featured a male protagonist enjoying the attention he received from girls who wanted to have ‘fun’ (read as sex) with him. Therefore, Lauper’s version is a feminist re-write of the original, and as such I have wanted to credit both Lauper and Hazard as writers of the song (songfacts n.d.: webpage). See also, Green, 2014, writing on Lauper’s version of ‘Girls Just Want to Have Fun’ as a feminist reworking of Hazard’s original. In this article, Green quotes Lauper stating that wanting to ‘have fun’, ‘doesn’t mean that girls want to f*ck... it just means that girls want to have the same damn experience than any man could have’ (Lauper in Green 2014: online).
trivializing ‘girls’” activities as something that can be cast to the margins, and that doesn’t make an impact in the serious world of men and work.

This separation from the ‘serious’ world of adult patriarchy and (predominantly) masculine status was a strategic distancing for some feminist women. Sinikka Aapola et al., discuss the Riot Grrrl movement, in which the term ‘girl’ was reclaimed and given a decidedly aggressive edge with the three Rs representing the sound of an animal growling. Importantly, Aapola et al. challenge the origins of this reclaiming of ‘girl’ by the Riot Grrrls who were formed of ‘young, mainly white and middle-class women’ (2005: 20), arguing that young African American women adopted the phrase, ‘you go girl!’ in the late 1980s as a form of encouragement to other women. They write, ‘it is not the white punk music scene but rather Black hip hop music that spawned and supports the changing modes of femininity understood as girl power’ (2005: 33). Despite this reclaiming and the power it engenders, second-wave feminists insisted on avoiding the term ‘girl’ precisely because of the problems with its derogatory use. Aapola et al. explain that the term ‘woman’ and ‘young woman’ were adopted instead, ‘as signifiers of seriousness, equal standing, and adult or mature status’ (2005: 6).

According to Aapola et al., the media response to the Riot Grrrl movement was mostly critical of what was perceived as an aggressive feminist politics, but grrrl power was quickly coopted by marketers as a way to sell products. One standout result of this was the construction of the British pop group, the Spice Girls, consisting of five women identified by their ‘type’ and who performed with corresponding outfits and attitudes, ‘Sporty’, ‘Scary’, ‘Posh’, ‘Baby’ and ‘Ginger’. Many women identifying with the Riot Grrrl movement reacted angrily to the
commercialisation of their politics. Aapola et al. cite the author of an Australian zine as stating, ‘their version of lame ‘girl power’ is so far away from our original version of ‘grrrl power’; coopted, watered down, marketable, profitable – all style and not a fuck lot of content’ (Kylie in Aapola 2005: 25).

Whilst the Spice Girls were a marketing construct, and their identification with feminist politics tenuous and problematic, their overall message did have some limited efficacy. They presented themselves as women who took centre stage, who presented a multi-racial sisterhood, and were uninhibited by traditional notions of women’s sexuality. However these positive features were undercut by contradictions. The Spice Girls’ presentation of five female types fed directly into narrow and offensive cultural stereotypes. Scary spice – the only black member of the group – was frequently clothed in animal print and posed baring her teeth like an animal, suggesting a connection between her racial identity and the notion of the uncivilized ‘savage’. Baby spice – often wearing fluffy pink hair accessories and baby-doll dresses – worked directly along the lines of the common masculine fantasy of the sexualised young girl. Geri Halliwell’s role in the group – as Ginger spice – played up to common notions of red-haired women as fiery and aggressive.

Also, the Spice Girls’ central position in British culture was not on the grounds of their musical talent, but much more as cultural objects – they represented living dolls and people chose their favourite one. The Spice Girls presented a safe and sellable version of feminism that ultimately didn’t challenge the patriarchal framework within which they were located.

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18 A song by ‘indie’ band, James from ‘1998’ – a tongue in cheek joke about the band selling out to commercial success – includes the line, ‘she likes the black one, he likes the posh one, cute ones are usually gay’ (James, 1998: song lyrics), directly referencing the Spice Girls’ status as product.
The conversion of feminist qualities into commercial culture has also produced what Lyn Mikel Brown articulates as the ‘girl as fighter’ stereotype. She writes,

In response to girl as victim, which fed off stereotypes of femininity as passive and vulnerable, girl as fighter is assertive, usually smart, psychologically tough, physically strong... But there’s something suspicious about this shift from victim to fighter... TV offers us a range of smart fighters from Alias and CSI to Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Charmed and Birds of Prey, while movies are filled with the likes of Lara Croft and Charlie’s Angels. Like girl as victim, the girlfighter maps too easily onto familiar assumptions about femininity... her fighting is mediated by qualities that make her pleasing – and sexually appealing – to men.

(2005: 15)

Presentations of women in popular culture all too often fall back against a patriarchal framework in which femininity is defined through its bolstering of and adherence to, a typically hetero, masculine standard.

Alongside this contested ‘girl power’, Aapola et al. identify another dominant feminine discourse, which they perceive as emerging at the same time as the rise of ‘girl power’ in the 1990s. This discourse, which is influenced by Mary Pipher’s 1994 book Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls, presents an image of girlhood in crisis, adopting the icon of Shakespeare’s character Ophelia, who, following the death of her brother, unable to meet the demands of her father, and unable to cope with what she perceives as the deterioration of her lover, Hamlet’s, mental state, commits suicide.

Aapola et al. chart the representation of Ophelia, explaining that amongst other definitions,

in the nineteenth century Ophelia was used to represent hysteria, which was at the time believed to be a real organic disease... Hysteria became a major focus of scientific study with girls and women as its major target... Ophelia also seems to symbolize the adolescent girl that the very influential
educationalist and psychologist G. Stanley Hall established as the normative form of girlhood... adolescence was a turbulent and chaotic phase of life, and an archetypally feminine phenomenon.

(2005: 41)

This association of female adolescence with hysteria extended well into the lives of adult women; girls were not expected to pass through the adolescent phase and were deemed to be dependent on men into their adult years (Aapola et al. 2005: 41).

Lesley Johnson rearticulates this turbulence and chaos in girlhood as representing the body in a state of radical openness. She refers to Mikhail Bakhtin’s reading of Rabelais, and his discussion of the ‘grotesque body’, writing, ‘the grotesque body... is constantly growing, transgressing itself and its own limits... the image of the teenage girl as ‘all arms and legs’ intimated a bodily existence which was unfinished and open’ (Johnson 1993: 133). Here Johnson rearticulates the adolescent female body as a powerful state of becoming – an unclosed and unfixed entity that poses a threat to the organising principles of patriarchal society in which femininity must meet narrowly defined standards.

Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation of the grotesque body in his reading of Rabelais frequently locates the grotesque with the female body. For example, in one passage the mouth and womb are related to Lucifer’s gaping jaws in which death is to be swallowed up and the body returned to the earth, which conflates the image of hell with the womb (Bakhtin, 1968: 337). Bakhtin also states that

the grotesque body has no impenetrable features, neither has it any expressive features. It represents either the fertile depths of the convexities of procreation and conception. It swallows and generates, gives and takes.

(1968: 339)
Which likens the grotesque body with the vagina. Johnson’s discussion also serves to reclaim Rabelais’s ambivalent association of the feminine with the grotesque, again, as a powerful state.¹⁹

The changes in body size Alice goes through in Wonderland place her in this state of the unfinished, grotesque body. The adoption of the powerful position of openness as deriving from conceptions of adolescent girlhood is reflected in the uncertain space of the fairytale. Carol Maver describes the time and place of the fairytale as ‘a no-place (u-topia) in no-time (u-chronia)’ (2012: 60), and she articulates the rabbit hole that begins Alice’s adventure as ‘the unmemory hole’ (2012: 54), because Alice forgets everything, including her name, when she arrives in Wonderland. As much as fairytale lands represent childhood spaces and, to a large extent, feminine ones, these spaces themselves have the quality of fertile ground for the development of the unknowable, the surprising and the mysterious.

Evidence that this space is seen as an opportunity for feminists is inherent in what Carolyn Burke articulates as Luce Irigaray’s adoption of the unmemory status of Wonderland as a space ‘from which she may (re)learn to speak… a conceptual realm beyond the law of the Logos’ (Burke 1981: 296). Burke provides a reading of Irigaray’s *Ce Sexe Qui n’en est Pas Un* highlighting her use of *Alice’s Adventures* as a way to postulate a feminine language – her notion of écriture féminine.²⁰

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¹⁹ Incidentally, artist Matthew Barney’s five-film series *The Cremaster Cycle* (1994 – 2002) exploits the possibilities of the grotesque body by challenging it as a solely feminine concept and presenting various grotesque bodies, across a broad spectrum of female/male identities. Barney’s biology-inspired project seems to explore the unfinished open body in a range of ways.

²⁰ Écriture féminine is discussed in more detail in chapter six.
Who Are You? The Philosophy of the Caterpillar

The radical acceptance of not knowing who you are is part of the openness that is so powerful in the adolescent body. Not knowing – or not having – a true, essential notion of self is central to postmodern theories of the performativity of behaviour that forms identity. In her discussion of media sources during the 1950s and 60s, Johnson explains how popular and prolific step-by-step guides were, instructing women on how to achieve particular feminine styles and behaviour.

In these guides Johnson recognises a kind of cultural loophole. As much as the media was narrowing the possibilities for feminine identity construction by producing such guides, as well as frequently aligning femininity to the aim of procuring a husband or male attention, it was also presenting the feminine as a series of facades that could be removed, remade, and replaced. She writes,

magazines... set out to teach... how to be ‘essentially feminine’; yet the very proliferation of this information and the variousness of the images of femininity they invoked spoke of its belonging to a world of surfaces. If it was now possible for young women to transform themselves from the ‘girl-next-door’ into the ‘sultry siren’ (or vice versa) simply by changing their hair colour, then it became possible also to understand femininity as nothing more than a question of the image itself.

(1993: 131)

Whilst such recurrent messages about the essence of femininity still had a major impact on the way that women defined themselves, if these messages were also instilled with a kind of in-built failure and obsolescence, they could also be challenged.

The multiple self of the feminine is, according to Burke, also a position adopted by Irigaray in chapter three of Ce Sexe Qui n’en est Pas Un. In Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Alice cannot remember her name, and in trying to remember, thinks
it begins with an ‘L’. According to Burke, Irigaray’s reading of this asserts the multiplicity of the feminine in language. Burke writes,

‘L’ is, of course, multiple in Irigaray’s reading: Alice, ‘Alice’, Luce, and for a French speaker, elle/elles – the third person feminine, both singular and plural. To begin with elle(s) means to learn that the female self is multiple, that we are all written in to the text.

(1981: 299)

Here the metamorphosed and multiple body is aligned with a conception and image of femininity.

Discussing the work of artists Liliana Porter and Regina Vater, and their independent use of imagery from Carroll’s novels, Janis Bergman-Carton articulates Vater’s employing of the discussion between ‘Alice’ and ‘the Caterpillar’ in her installation, Advice from the Caterpillar (1982), as the passing on of vital knowledge about metamorphosis and its adoption as a powerful (un)state. She writes,

Vater’s selection of the dialogue between the caterpillar and Alice is suggestive. Alice complains that she is constantly changing shape and size and that she no longer knows who she is. The savvy caterpillar, who is experienced in matters of metamorphosis and adaptability suggests a model of power that is possible in shifting identities. The exotic, hookah-smoking caterpillar, who possesses the secret of shrinking and growing, teaches Alice that change is natural and even desirable. The key for Alice, and by extension Vater as a Latin American artist mediating the New York art world, is to subvert the conventional perception of multiple identities as a disadvantage.

(Bergman-Carton 1989: 17)

Several artists have chosen to adopt and explore a multiplicity of (feminine) identity, notably, Nikki S. Lee, Lucy Gunning and Anna Gaskell.

Nikki S. Lee, in her Projects series of works spanning from 1997 to 2001, integrates herself within a particular cultural group, adopting costume and make-up that allows her to play with different types of identity (The Creators Project: Nikki S. Lee
A photograph is taken, featuring Lee alongside some of the people from the group she has integrated with, as a document of each project. For example in an image representing *the Seniors Project* (1999), Lee is pictured next to two elderly women, underneath umbrellas in the street. Lee has a thick wig of grey hair, large-rimmed glasses and makeup has been used to give her skin the appearance of wrinkles and jowls. The breadth of these projects, and Lee’s ability to visibly look the part is impressive. Other groups she has worked with include punks, tourists, lesbians, skateboarders, schoolgirls and Hispanics.

Lucy Gunning’s work, whilst not as obviously engaged in the type of identity shifting adopted by Lee, offers a conception of gender that avoids the either/or position of traditional notions of feminine/masculine. Gunning’s video, *Climbing Around My Room* (1993) involves a woman balancing on high shelves, navigating across a narrow window ledge and skirting, and folding and squeezing into small crevices, as she moves around a bare white room. Femininity is presented through the use of a girlish-styled red dress, worn by what appears to be an adult woman. This is further complicated by the physical movement, which does not reinforce a girlish persona or ethereality, but rather presents a stripped-back, plain and functional quality of movement in which the woman’s physical exertion is apparent through audible low, short and inarticulate sounds made as she pushes and stretches her body from crevice to hook to ledge and so on.

The work has been read as metaphorically sexual, particularly autoerotic, in which the room itself is figured as the body, and the moving body of the woman, the sexual act (Bush 1995: np). However the lateral trajectory both of the movement and that is stated in the title of the work by use of the adverb ‘around’, suggests
that the broader concerns of the work are in exploring and asserting a varied landscape of gender drawing across a range of possibilities rather than upwards towards an essential and idealised gender progression.

Reflecting on Gunning’s work in general, but with particular reference to another piece titled *The Footballers* (1994 documented in Gunning 2007: 44-45) in which two women dressed in what look like white nurse’s uniforms play with a football, Michael Archer states,

> [w]hat would it mean to answer the question, Are you male or female? ... Can we be sure that those are the only two options? Gunning’s art conveys the conviction both that to talk in terms of either/or rather than to recognise a field of possibilities depending on the circumstances is too reductive.

(2007: 58)

Archer acknowledges Gunning’s work in which these two women ‘kick a ball around’ as an attempt at opening up a space of indeterminacy and an escape from reductive binaries.

A different approach to multiplicity and indeterminacy is present in Anna Gaskell’s series of 20 photographs that make a direct reference to moments from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, titled *wonder* (1996). These images depict scenes that are reminiscent of the events within Carroll’s novels, but that also comment upon and write a new narrative that centres around the presentation of an ambiguous sexuality and multiplicity of identity. They all feature girl(s) dressed in a blue pinafore dress, white tights and black Mary-Jane style shoes.

In *Untitled #1 (wonder)* the model dressed as ‘Alice’ floats up to her neck in water, which seems to reference Carroll’s pool of tears. Some of the images are not
faithful to, or are a departure from the literary story, for example *Untitled #13 (wonder)* depicts ‘Alice’ holding false teeth in her hands, on her lap, which does not directly relate to the events of the story\(^{21}\). Five of the images in the series, depict a doubled ‘Alice’, played by twin sisters, which is perhaps a reference to Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* world, which is defined by doubling due to the story being based on the game of chess, and which includes the doubled characters of Tweedledum and TweedleDee, the White and Red Queens and The White and Red Kings.

In one of Gaskell’s images, *Untitled #2 (wonder)*, in which one Alice holds the nose of another as if she is about to administer mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, there is a particular ambiguity over the gender of the unconscious ‘Alice’. The length of her hair is not apparent and it is slicked back away from her face (as if, perhaps, she has been pulled from the pool of tears), her dress is also not clearly apparent, which makes her appear boyish, or as if she is in fact a boy wearing a dress.

Further to this, Catherine Grant’s analysis of this image focuses on the way it presents an uncertain sexuality, she states, ‘this shot incorporates an anticipated kiss that is coded to be more than a simple resuscitation. Here the kiss of life is layered with the sexuality of the photograph’s lighting and framing; the focus on the girls’ perfect skin with its glistening wetness, is too redolent of pornographic images to be written off as accidental’ (2008: 165).

These layers of ambiguity create a range of possible relationships between the two Alices from, as Grant articulates, ‘reading the two models as lovers to friends’.

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\(^{21}\) This image may have been influenced by Barbara Creed’s theory in *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993), in which she discusses the Vagina Denata – the vagina with teeth. A reading of Carroll’s *Looking Glass* novel in relation to the Vagina Denata is made by Carina Garland (2008) and is discussed later in this chapter.
playing to fantasized doubles of each other’ (2008: 165). Grant provides a framework within which Gaskell’s ambiguous narratives can be read in terms of allowing, ‘for different identifications and desires to take place simultaneously’ (2008: 169). Each of these examples demonstrates how artists have drawn upon a multiplicity of feminine identity and the imagery of Alice and Wonderland, as a way to challenge the narrow, fixed and binary distinction of identity.

**Crying Girl: The Pool of Tears**

Hysteria mythology, which is focused on the psychological makeup of women and girls, implies within it a relationship between emotional instability and femininity. However, this association is also subverted by feminists and rearticulated as a powerful position. Writing about Porter's references to Alice, Bergman-Carton highlights her use of Carroll's *Wonderland* book, its pages open to the chapter titled ‘The Pool of Tears’ and Tenniel's illustration of Alice neck deep and almost drowning in her tears, in her collage *The Unending Story* (1981). Bergman-Carton also draws attention to Porter's rendition of Roy Lichtenstein's *Crying Girl* (1964) in her collage titled *The Postcard* (1984) as an image that, ‘functions as a sign for the missing crying Alice whose sea of tears symbolizes for Porter a kind of amniotic fluid that nurtures new narratives and new meanings’ (Bergman-Carton, 1989: 15-16).

This notion of tears as amniotic fluid subverts the act of crying from an association with weakness, toward tears as a generative process. In *Alice's Adventures* it is Alice’s crying that results in her birth-like passage through the keyhole of the locked door and into the garden of Wonderland. Porter’s use of Lichtenstein’s 1964 *Crying Girl* is also relevant to this. Lichtenstein created an earlier work titled *Crying
Girl in 1963. The two pictures are quite different, though they both display a close up of a woman’s face and the presence of tears. In Crying Girl (1963) the woman pictured looks fearful and distressed. Her hair waves behind her, and she glances sideways as if she is being pursued. Her fingers are pressed against her lips denoting worry and her eyebrows are furrowed slightly and raised in distress or shock. Crying Girl (1964), on the other hand, looks calm and unaffected. Her hair sits neatly down the side of her face suggesting she is static. Her hand is wiping a tear away. The look of the woman in this version of the picture is vacant and devoid of intense emotion. Porter’s use of this second crying girl suggests that the act of crying is not perceived to be a moment of panic and distress, but a cathartic and knowing meditation on the transformation that will come from crying.

Relating to this, and according to Burke, Irigaray posits fluids as a distinctively feminine and powerful feature in Ce Sexe Qui n’en est Pas Un. Burke writes,

> The second essay, “La mécanique des fluides”... discusses the physics of fluids... Here, of course, “fluids” is partly an analogy with female expression, and “solids” with the dry self-consistency of male logic... In an artfully flowing style, she unravels the “long-standing complicity” between rationality and “solids”, which has resulted in a privileging of that which is firm, quantifiable, and measurable... Because female language flows beyond the boundaries of logical discourse, it is seen as unstable, in excess of solidifiable sense, and therefore outside the discourse of the master.

(1981: 298)

Irigaray’s locating of the feminine with fluidity is part of her formulation of écriture féminine – feminine writing, but it also resonates with Porter’s representation of fluids, where crying is revisioned as a powerful process that sits outside a dominant masculine understanding of strength and resilience.
Queening/Queaning

As much as ‘girl’ can be seen to represent a powerful feminine archetype, popular narratives around ‘woman’ are quite different. As has already been discussed, the girl-as-concept is not entirely associated with age, so the definition of woman is not as simple as referring to a particular age group. If girlhood is to some degree related to frivolity and freedom from responsibility, and is seen as set apart from the serious world of men and work, then womanhood must be located somewhere within this framework. Johnson (1993) highlights that the aim of instructing girls in performing femininity was focused around the securing of a husband and becoming the ‘loved individual’. This suggests that the passage from girlhood to womanhood is often framed around a shift in marital status. Womanhood is also closely associated with motherhood, as a symbol of maturation of the body and through the common perception of no longer having the freedom to do as you please, and having to engage in the serious activity of looking after someone else’s needs.

The representation of women in narratives that are aimed at, or are suitable for, children and young people are particularly interesting. The examples I refer to in the following few paragraphs are not a comprehensive range; rather they represent narratives that have been most apparent to me, as someone marked female within my own specific cultural and geographic context. They are a subjective selection of narratives that I am aware of and that I perceive to be frequently and currently available to me. Within this selection, women are frequently cast in roles that portray them as deceitful, evil and bad tempered.
In Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995 – 2000), ‘Marisa Coulter’ – Lyra’s birth mother – though not without some redeeming moments, is largely portrayed as manipulative and ruthless. She is the central child-catcher of the story, and a prominent member of the Oblation board, who authorise experiments on children. In L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), which was popularised in the 1939 film adaptation directed by Victor Fleming and starring Judy Garland, Dorothy’s main adversary is the Wicked Witch of the West. Whilst In C. S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956) the woman character ‘White Witch/Jadis’ is the central antagonist and the person responsible for having frozen Narnia in a perpetual winter. In each of these examples, the relationship between a strong ‘girl’ or, in the case of Narnia, a ‘child’ character, is contrasted with the presentation of an evil ‘woman’ character.

Mikel Brown explains how this narrative pattern is presented in several popular fairytales. She writes,

> [i]n Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty a girl escapes the cruel world of bitter women to the safety of romance. Chosen by a prince, she's saved from women's wrath, deceit and jealousy. This is a common story that has at its heart the separation of girls from women. Girls are promised happy endings if they sacrifice female relationships.

*(2005: 21)*

Though Brown’s examples are taken from a Western cultural perspective, and though my own examples are drawn from a subjectively bounded selection of texts, it is clear that a thread of problematic relationships between girls and women are apparent within and perpetuated through the adoption of well-worn narrative strategies.
In a more recent example, Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (2008) presents a strong 'girl' character in 'Katniss Everdeen'. Her opponents are many and there is not a singular or central female antagonist, but Katniss’s relationship with her mother is one of reversed responsibility. Katniss has become unsympathetic of her mother’s ongoing mourning at the loss of her husband (Katniss’s father) and her mother is presented as rather weak and incapable. Katniss is the one who replaces the paternal role in the household providing food for her younger sister and mother. Whilst presenting a positive female role model in Everdeen, the story does not promote solidarity between female characters, and in fact associates Katniss’s power with traditional masculine traits, such as stoicism and rational control over emotion.

There are, of course, exceptions to these presentations of motherhood and womanhood. One notable example is the two-volume *Kill Bill* films (2003 and 2004) written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. The protagonist of these films, 'The Bride/Black Mamba' has a very clear status as 'woman', being both married and a mother in the story. In fact several, of what is a large female cast, are characters that are mothers and wives, which might have traditionally seen them occupying very different on-screen presences. The narrative diverts from popular stereotypes, particularly in the representation of women who are part of a gang of assassins, who fight with each other throughout and not in the sexualised way that women are often portrayed as fighters.

Within Carroll’s books, ‘Alice’ is certainly received as a resilient and intelligent girl character. Anne Bernay’s writes, ‘[s]he... seems to have a psyche with the consistency of a rock and the chief property of rubber; she bounces right back from
insult and threat, with more self-confidence than Emma Woodhouse, more grit than Mattie Rose’ (2000: 138), which aligns ‘Alice’ with two other well-known literary female characters who could be defined as positive girl role-models. Correspondingly, Hélène Cixous describes ‘Alice’ as ‘unshakeable, powerful and full of authority’ (1982: 237).

The fact that she has been such a popular feminist symbol is apparent in Cixous’s and Irigaray’s, and others’, references to her. Whilst Alice may be a symbol of feminist power conceptually (on the page) and within Irigaray’s theoretical writing, my experience of embodying Alice through the adoption of costume, which is discussed towards the end of this chapter, reveals how in practice this powerful position is challenged and reduced.\textsuperscript{22}

The narrative within which Carroll’s Alice moves is also problematic in the way that it perpetuates a difficult relationship between girl and woman. Carroll presents a range of women characters including ‘The Red Queen’, ‘The Duchess’, ‘The Queen of Hearts’ and ‘The White Queen’ across the two books, who are hotheaded, frightening and unreasonable, and whom, for the most part, Alice chooses not to associate with. Wordplay is a key feature of Carroll’s books, and interestingly, the origin of the word Queen is an archaic English word, ‘quean’, meaning an impudent or badly behaved girl or woman (OED n.d.: online), which relates to the behaviour of Carroll’s queen characters very well.

Carina Garland argues that popular studies of the Carroll books have been keen to articulate Alice as an empowered feminine character, but that this has masked a

\footnote{This issue about the disjunction between the power of Alice conceptually and her lack of power in embodied and practical forms is something I hope to develop in the future.}
‘fundamental repression/hatred of adult female sexuality within the texts and Carroll’s often perverse attempts to quell this repulsive sexuality in his child heroine, Alice’ (2008: 23). Garland looks particularly at how appetite and food are symbolised within the stories, in relation to Alice and the women characters.

Referring to documents from Carroll’s personal writings, she reads *Through the Looking Glass* in particular as an allegory for ‘[Carroll’s] anxieties surrounding [the real Alice – Alice Liddell’s] move from girl hood into adolescence’ (2008:23). Garland draws on Barbara Creed’s articulation of the ‘vagina denata’ in *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) to make her point that Carroll’s text articulates his fear of an aggressive female (adult) sexuality. She writes,

> male characters within the Alice texts are mocked, emasculated and weak, this treatment does not valorize feminine power, nor is it exclusive to *Through the Looking Glass*. Instead, male characters are weakened in both texts because they cannot compete with a vicious and frightening female sexuality that threatens them and Carroll’s dream child as Alice moves to join their ranks when she grows into a (female) adult.  

(Garland 2008: 30)

Garland argues that the text displays an overall anti-women statement; a womanhood into which Alice is eventually inaugurated as she moves into the eighth square of the chess board and is made into a queen. Her assertion is supported by Laura Mooneyham White’s reading of Carroll’s women characters (particularly his dealing with queens), who states, ‘[t]he events of *Through the Looking Glass* show that Carroll believed the perfection of girls would be marred by a yearning after political power or even adulthood’ (2007: 113).

**Costuming in Practice**

Whilst performing in the Alice costume I received many verbal responses. Many, like those discussed earlier in this chapter, were attempts at naming or identifying
me. After having performed in the Alice dress on several occasions, I made a
decision to develop it into a different representation of femininity, one that would
be less knowable. I wanted to develop a presentation that was not already part of a
circulation of cultural imagery – a form of cultural currency.

Other responses I received whilst costumed included questions over what I was
doing, expressions of caregiving or concern for my physical welfare, attempts to
sexualise my activity, concern for my mental state, competitive challenges, and
expressions of delight or support. Each of these responses are quite complex in
that the specific context in which they were spoken is unique, but I have attempted
to analyse them in terms of how they can be understood as responses to my
particular gendered activity.

The question, ‘what are you doing?’ can be spoken and meant in very different
ways; largely depending on the location in which it is said. For example, whilst
performing inside Plymouth’s Drake’s Circus shopping centre – which is not a
public space, but it was raining heavily outside, so I thought I’d risk it – two
security guards asked me what I was doing as a way to exert their authority over
me and my activity. My refusal to explain that it was anything more than ‘just
playing’, resulted in them asking me to leave the building and contacting the police.

On a different occasion in Manchester, whilst I was playing in costume around
Marks and Spencer’s at the bottom of Market Street, a woman who was about my
age stopped me and said, ‘can I just ask? What are you doing?’ I told her I was ‘just
playing’ and she said something along the lines of ‘great – good on you’ and then
walked away. Obviously there are nuances to these two conversations – the
woman in Manchester offered me a polite tone and a level of respect, whereas the security guards – who were entirely civil and not at all aggressive – engaged me with a very different performance of their own authority and ownership of the space.

In both these cases, and in all cases where a member of the public asks me what I am doing, they are – in the context of an increasingly separate and anonymous sphere of public space – raising their head above the parapet to even talk to a stranger. Which is why, in the public built environment, for someone to ask what another person is doing suggests a level of perceived authority and public confidence. Obviously in the example from Drake’s Circus above, the two security guards were not merely members of the public and were employed in a role that required them to engage with the public and ask questions of their behaviour, but it is interesting how much their actual authority is replicated – often by men – who are not employed in such a capacity, in public places.

Most of the people who have made verbal responses to me throughout the entirety of this project were men. Given the status of masculinity within the built environment, it is not surprising that more men would perceive they had a level of confidence and/or authority to question a stranger. The women who spoke to me perhaps also felt this same confidence. My own status as woman may also have been integral to both men and women in the public realm feeling confident to stop me and question me.

Whilst usually suggesting a more positive form of response, expressions of delight or support for what I am doing also require this same level of confidence and
authority to speak in public. When people say ‘very nice’, ‘enjoy yourself’, or when they give me a knowing smile, it shows me they support what I am doing, and appreciate the activity or presentation on some level. The amount of responses I have received where people have passed judgement – positive or negative – on what I am doing, are interesting because these are moments of explicit authoring and editing of space. Public spaces as a social forum operate on both the micro level – of habitus, below the level of consciousness – and on the macro level of verbal responses and physical actions.

Linked to these experiences are expressions of caregiving; when people tell me to be careful or to watch myself. This response has come from a range of different sorts of people in different places, and was typical regardless of the type of costume I was wearing. One particular verbal response of this kind highlighted how much gender politics are related to the issue of public play. Whilst performing in Rugby in the Alice dress, an elderly woman stopped me to say, “Get up from there. You’ll get your pretty dress dirty.” Implicit in her words is the idea that it is not ‘lady-like’ to be crawling around on the floor; that girls clothes are made to look nice and are not clothes for getting dirty in. In this moment, the costume became much more than a representation of ‘Alice’ or of a generic, multiple fictional girl. It was also representative of a set of behaviours typically associated with girlhood and femininity.

Another response that was typical regardless of the costume I was wearing was when men – it was always men in this case – have asked me to go for a drink with them, told me I looked attractive, or made other sorts of sexual remarks about my behaviour. This reflects the tendency, seen in the literature explored within this
chapter, for popular representations of girls and women to be presented as sexually appealing, even when their character portrays otherwise non-stereotypical gendered and feminist traits, such as the 'girl as fighter' stereotype. Whilst this kind of response may be indicative of women in public being understood as objects of heteromasculine desire, the expression of sexual interest made directly to me by men is also an expression of that same confidence and authority seen in people asking questions about what I am doing. Having a right to the city is extended to include the speculative soliciting of sexual desire.

As the research within this chapter has evidenced, 'girl' is a term that is rooted in the patronisation of adult women, but has been reclaimed by feminists as a positive slogan that locates women outside the confines of a limiting patriarchal social structure. The power of girl has in turn been commercialised, through the selling of a content-less 'girl power' culture, or through the objectification of women's and girl's bodies as they take a central position in cultural consciousness. Theorists and artists have drawn upon popular representations of girls and women, to rearticulate feminine power in the image of the grotesque body, a shifting multiplicity of identity, and an acceptance of emotional states.

Representations of womanhood do not generally adopt the same power as 'girl'. The relationship of girls to women and how this is presented in the most enduring of narratives reveals how the power of girls is made at the detriment of women's power. Carroll's 'Alice' stories offers a metaphor in the process of 'queening' to articulate the passing of girl into womanhood, and the (ironic) diminishing of power inherent in this move.
These findings highlight the importance of the representation I have adopted for this research. As it has progressed, the development of my costume moved away from the more singular or obvious adoption of ‘girl’ status, towards a more ambiguous femininity that might suggest an openness and multiplicity of representation, and the adoption of the position of girl-woman hood, as a refusal to participate in the structuring of femininity in relation to masculine power.

Concern over my mental state was a response I tended to get when I was in the grey dress, rather than in the Alice dress, which suggests that the Alice dress functioned as a frame for play both in that it referenced a girl character, and because it referenced a *known* girl character. The framing of the Alice costume was one that sanctioned my activity, which became another reason to alter the costuming and to make it less knowable. It was important to try and establish a costume that would enable me to present a heightened femininity, but also to avoid the practice of either being disregarded or owned as ‘street entertainment’ (through the adoption of more layers of theatrical-matrix performance), and to avoid the processes of naming, authoring and permission I had experienced whilst performing in the Alice dress.

The grey dress was cut from the same pattern as the Alice dress, with puffed-shoulders and the addition of longer sleeves. The pinafore element of the Alice costume was removed, so that the dress became a stripped back, simple version of a dress that was reminiscent of ‘fairytale’ imagery. In this way, the grey dress was a ghost of the Alice dress (see fig. 9). This idea of the costume developing from, but still containing the Alice dress within it – of not being completely removed – was important. It represented the ‘growing up’ of my representation, the need to
embrace an adult femininity, and to remove the permission that my status as playing girl and its association with childhood had previously granted. Expressions of concern over my mental state whilst wearing the grey dress suggest that the costume achieves these aims in not being recognisable and not offering me a kind of permissive framing.

Figure 9 – grey dress illustration (2014)

The choice of fabric colour came from a desire for the grey dress not to draw any relationship to an existing feminine character. Grey is not the sort of colour typically associated with fairytale characters – it is dull and plain, typical of the everyday. It also has associations with the generic grey suit uniform of workers in city-based professions. As part of a developed understanding of how costuming functions in my practice the association of the colour grey with city-based work also allows the costume to encompass something of the tension inherent within my practice – its status as a type of play, but also as a type of work.
Competitive challenges were also a response I tended to receive more when I was wearing the grey dress. Whilst I was performing in Bristol, a man asked me if ‘I could do any other tricks’, and then whilst performing in Totnes, a man said, ‘at your age you should be able to jump over that’. Also, whilst in Bristol, two men who noticed I was climbing up a wall came over and started to join in, trying to climb higher than me and each other. Some of these kinds of response suggested I was not being impressive enough, which implies that I was perceived as trying to impress, or that my presence was perceived as being for the benefit of the onlooker. Some were simply people getting involved and interacting with me, but it is interesting how easily competitive approaches to engagement are a default response. It suggests that play without a purpose is something that people found difficult to appreciate or understand.

I also think that my gendered status had much to do with these competitive responses. Responding competitively gave these men an opportunity, in some cases, to play and to show off, or to show me up as not very good at a particular activity. As a woman playing in an unskilled way, my ego is not regarded as delicate or in need of preserving. On several occasions people felt quite comfortable with telling me what I was doing wrong, or how I should approach an activity or an object.

In relation to the literary research conducted in this chapter, the Alice dress represented an adoption of an iconic girl character, which in the early stages of my research enabled me to play by providing a suitable frame and permission. My experience of responses to this costuming in practice show how the ‘Alice’ dress also functioned for witnesses as representative of multiple fictional girl characters.
My decision to develop the costume came from a desire to avoid the permissive framing of the costume and the naming/authorising I received.

The grey dress holds on to the multiplicity of feminine representations, becoming like a vessel for popular cultural notions of girlhood, femininity and womanhood, as well as the personal mother-daughter, maternal lineage connections inherent in the production of the dress. In this way it also represents an attempt to counter the ‘queening’ relationship of girls becoming women and the negative relationships of girls to women, by avoiding a sole association with childhood and representing a mature femininity.

The literary research conducted in this chapter alongside my practice has formed the basis for my own understanding of gendered space, revealed through my adoption of costuming and my physical interruptions of play. Chapter four reflects on this by looking at how the public built environment is understood by theorists and other artists as a gendered space.
Chapter Four  ‘Sous les Pavés, la Plage’
(Under the Pavement, the Beach)

The gendering of the built environment has historically and mythically been associated with control, private ownership and objectification. This chapter looks in detail at current practices of artists, created in urban settings to delve deeper into this conception of a gendered built environment and to consider further what the nature of that gender is. The site-responsive performances I draw upon resist spectatorship and ownership in the built environment, and in this way they reveal a type of oppressive gender identity that is primarily enacted within urban spaces – that of commerce masculinity – and demonstrate ways in which these practices subvert the dominant gendered modes of engagement in the public built environment.

There are many ways to understand the city as a gendered space. Theorists of urban space and social interaction, such as Helen Jarvis et al. (2009), Liz Bondi (2005), Doreen Massey (1994), Cynthia Bowman (1993) and Daphne Spain (1992) – to name just a few – articulate various current and historic features of city living and working that privilege the rights and freedom of men over those of women, from involvement in different city-based professions to the issue of street harassment inflicted by men upon women. These approaches to analysis and the discussions around them are a critical foundation for my research.

This chapter is concerned with exploring how the built environment consists of gendered spaces that are not closely tied to one sex or another, recognising that femininities and masculinities are both constructed and upheld (as well as subverted) by both women and men (Spain 1992). My research considers how,
through the history of men’s privilege and the status of cities as built for and by men, practices of the city have become gendered, making all people and social interactions within them subject to a particular type of masculinity.

Aside from the ways in which the city can be considered to privilege one sex over another, the mythical concept of the city is also one that is firmly rooted in a gendered dichotomy. Akkerman (2006) discusses the emergence of a Myth of the Garden and its relation to the Myth of the Citadel, stating:

A Myth of the Garden evolves from the feminine archetype of the Earthmother, possibly at the turn of the late Stone Age, c. 5,000 BCE. Symbolizing fertility, the female gatherers of fruits and vegetables became the Garden’s emissaries. Another myth, that of the Citadel, then arises along with the first appearances of citadels and forts. Evolving from the Myth of the Garden, the Myth of the Citadel subsequently becomes a masculine paradigm.

(2006: 230)

The locating of the feminine with nature through the concept of the primeval garden, and the masculine with a marker of culture is an observation that has been made throughout history, such as in Sherry Ortner’s article from 1974.

In this, Ortner questions what might be the ‘generalized structure and conditions of existence, common to every culture, that would lead every culture to place a lower value upon women?’ (1974: 71). Her conclusion is that women’s bodies (their ability to give birth), social roles (their responsibility for the early socialisation of children, which is then passed on to men), and their psychic structure (foregrounding a close, personal identification) – none of which are considered innate – locate women as ‘belonging to culture, yet appearing to have stronger and more direct connections with nature’ (1974: 80).
In Ortner's discussion men's societal roles and responsibilities are granted as being of 'the higher level'. She states, 'women perform lower-level conversions from nature to culture, but when the culture distinguishes a higher level of the same functions, the higher level is restricted to men' (1974: 80). Ortner’s argument states that culture is designated by patriarchal society as a fundamentally masculine realm, which links closely with the feminine Garden myth and masculine Citadel myth proposed by Akkerman.

 Developing on this idea of a gendered urban space, Elizabeth Wilson’s research articulates the city as a place ‘constructed by means of multiple contrasts: natural, unnatural; monolithic, fragmented; secret, public; pitiless, enveloping; rich, poor; sublime, beautiful.’ (1992: 8) and, for Wilson, ‘[b]ehind all these lies the ultimate and major contrast: male, female; culture, nature; city, country’ (1992: 8). Wilson’s argument is that the city is not solely a masculine place, but rather a combination of masculine and feminine elements. She states, ‘urban life is actually based on this perpetual struggle between rigid, routinized order and pleasurable anarchy, the male-female dichotomy’ (1992: 8).

 Wilson acknowledges that the representation of women's presence in cities has historically been problematic, remarking that ‘prostitutes and prostitution recur continually in the discussion of urban life, until it almost seems as though to be a woman... in the city, is to become a prostitute – a public woman’ (1992: 8). Her central argument explores how women represent an intervention in the public, built environment. She explains,

> As the right-wing theorist of the crowd, le Bon, put it, 'Crowds are like the Sphinx of ancient fable; it is necessary to arrive at a solution of the problems offered by their psychology or to resign ourselves to being devoured by
them.’ At the heart of the urban labyrinth lurked not the Minotaur, a bull-like male monster, but the female Sphinx, the ‘strangling one’, who was so called because she strangled all those who could not answer her riddle: female sexuality, womanhood out of control, lost nature, loss of identity.

(1992: 7)

Wilson’s analysis highlights how much possibility the city holds for women to ‘escape from patriarchal relations’ (1992: 18)\(^2\), which was seen as a problem in need of strict paternal control.

Interestingly, Wilson also reports on two twentieth century city theorists, Lewis Mumford and William Morris, both of whom opposed the metropolis under what Wilson considers to be largely patriarchal concerns about women and the family. Linking back to the association of the feminine with the Myth of the Garden, Wilson states, ‘Mumford’s support for the ‘garden city’ was based in part on his belief that it would restore women to their primary maternal role’ (1992: 18). The suggestion here is that a vision of the Garden under control of the city represents an expression of masculine power and control over the feminine.

The city has also often been associated with the objectification of the (female) body. Richard Sennett explains how in the 12\(^{th}\) century, philosopher, John of Salisbury, articulated the state as a body. He writes, ‘John of Salisbury in turn connected the shape of the human body and the form of a city: the city’s palace or cathedral he thought of as its head, the central market as its stomach, the city’s hands and feet as its houses’ (1996: 23). Whilst not referencing the city as female, the process of objectifying both the city and the body in combination suggests an

\(^2\) A perspective echoed in numerous sources, as Liz Bondi articulates in *Gender and the Reality of Cities: Embodied Identities, Social Relations and Performativities* (2005)
authoritative, divine control that is historically associated with the projections of men.

The city as female body is most clearly evidenced in the theories of the Situationist International, particularly their practice of wandering through the city, known as the dérive, which was directly influenced by the gendered urban practice of the flâneur, a distinctively male and heterosexual construction. Doreen Massey states, ‘the flâneur’s gaze was frequently erotic. And woman was, and was only, the object of this gaze’ (1994: 234). The leisurely act of wandering suggests a level of privilege, freedom and ownership of space that was not extended to the rights of women.

In some ways the Situationist International’s theories and practices were progressive and commendable – their interest in the city as a playful rather than a rational space (Wark 2011: 20), their denouncement of a society controlled and dictated by business interests, and their alliance against participating in the production and distribution of capital (Sadler 1998: 46), for example. However, their practices and approach to these aims seem compromised; they were generally about serving themselves, as a male-dominated group, which maintained gender stratification and was achieved through various forms of female objectification.

‘Sous les Pavés, la Plage’ (Under the Pavement the Beach), which Malcolm Miles attributes to Henri Lefebvre was a slogan adopted by the Situationists (Miles 2007: 170) as well as protesters during the May-June Paris riots of 1968, which can be interpreted as a call to action that implies force – the literal lifting and moving of
paving stones as representative of uprooting capitalist society and its suppression of social life. Nicolas Whybrow remarks that the slogan was 'adopted by the first generation of skateboarders in California' (2010: 200) who – as is discussed in the introduction – had the beach (and, more accurately, their riding of waves as surfers) attuned to their practice when they took to the streets and empty backyard swimming pools of California.

The word, dérive, has its roots in the Latin, ‘derivere’, which means to ‘draw a fluid through’. Wark explains, ‘its English descendants include the word “derive” and also “river”. Its whole field of meaning is aquatic, conjuring up flows, channels, eddies, currents and also drifting, sailing or tacking against the wind. It suggests a space and time of liquid movement, sometimes predictable but sometimes turbulent’ (2011: 21). This imagery has connections with the oceanic origin myth of skateboarders.

Early skateboarders, Situationists and the Paris protesters had in common their dissatisfaction with the status quo and their desire to reclaim and rearticulate their environments, but in the case of the Situationists, this project was also tied to a sexualising and objectification of the city and of women. Simon Sadler explains that

> The over-whelmingly male-dominated group's penchant for girlie illustrations gave its architectural commentary an especially odd cast. A page of Debord and Jorn's Mémoires drew upon the old metaphor of the landscape as female body... Another of Debord's metaphors, in distinctly poor taste, suggested that the drifter could rape the night streets of London's East End... the linkage of sexual prowess to the city and to revolution was completed by a famous piece of Situationist-inspired May '68 graffiti: 'I came in the cobblestones'.24

1998: 80

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24 Sadler’s reference for this quotation is as follows: Quoted in Sadie Plant (1992) The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age. P.103 Citing Walter Lamino (1968) L'imagination au Pouvoir
The page from Debord and Jorn’s Memoir highlighted in this quotation by Sadler is printed in his book on page 80. It shows a cut up collage of female nudes, which is supposed to represent the landscape.

One of their Situationist maps was also called *The Naked City* (1957), which reinforces the Situationists’ view of the city as a body that is both exposed and available. Whilst the naked city does not necessarily imply a sex, it is difficult to read apart from the female body when it is considered alongside the Situationists’ other material, of an overtly female-objectifying nature. If the Situationists’ view of the city is understood as sexed, then their desire for ‘la plage’ – to uncover a city ‘seemingly bypassed by religion, capitalism and modernization’ (Sadler 1998: 100) – also perpetuates this problematic connection between women and nature.

Elizabeth Sussman’s 1989 exhibition catalog documents a retrospective of the Situationist International’s work, which was held at the Pompidou Centre; a somewhat contentious location and choice of exhibit, since the Situationists were opposed to the gentrification of the Beaubourg area of Paris, as well as to their work being capitalised upon or defined within the art world. Sussman refers to these concerns in her introduction to the catalogue. The first image in the catalogue, on page two is a reproduced print of a Situationist poster advertising the sixth congress of the Situationist International in 1962. Alongside this text, the poster includes an image of Marilyn Monroe – a sex symbol of the time – who died in August that same year. There is no indication of the relevance of the picture to the group but, as Sussman explains, the Situationists often used provocative pictures of women in publicity and creative material (1989: 8).
Throughout the introduction, Sussman has included images and referred to the work of several artists, including Jenny Holzer, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince, and Cindy Sherman, amongst others, who were contemporary at the time of the exhibition and who Sussman articulates as being connected with the aims of the Situationist International. The selection of artists whose work is depicted in the introduction are weighted towards female artists dealing explicitly with issues of female objectification, suggesting that Sussman’s text functions as a subtle subversion of the Situationist’s objectification of women from a feminist perspective.

One of her statements is particularly relevant to this. She writes:

All of these gestures [referring to the artists mentioned] rely upon a reading of the world of representations in mass culture that recognizes the form of control that resides in the world of images and upon an aesthetic strategy that operates by wresting an image or a form of language from its original context and subverting it by methods of re-presentation in a different context.

(1989: 13)

Sussman’s point here is carefully articulated. Her statement articulates a major theme of the Situationists, whilst at the same time highlighting how contemporary artists have responded, in a similar way as the Situationists, to the world of gender representations, the irony being that the Situationists were responsible for creating and perpetuating negative gender representations in much of their group’s material.

Following these concerns, this chapter aims to examine the gestures of performance makers in the built environment as a way of mapping back through the concerns that have led to those practices. Without diminishing the power these performances have for some participants and in some contexts, and in keeping
with some of the more positive aspects of the Situationist International's aims, the examples are also critiqued due to the way they interact with and operate as part of a capital culture, which problematises their status as subversive.

**Ownership and Spectatorship in the Public Built Environment**

In his book, *Performance and the Contemporary City* (2010), Nicolas Whybrow asserts that an increasing interest in urban space as a site for performance and art derives from 'the perception that increasingly the behaviour of individuals in urban space is becoming restricted in fact to little more than the 'right to shop' (2010: 195). This perspective is echoed by Ursula Hofbauer and Friedmann Derschmidt when they explain that the built environment assumes a culture of 'permits', 'that is, the assumption that only that which is explicitly permitted is not forbidden' (2010: 217) which 'usually draws the laws of one's own possibilities far more narrowly than necessary' (2010: 217). The culture of permits that pervades urban settings suggests that many people perceive what are ostensibly public spaces as not belonging to them, and as spaces in which they do not have the right to do as they please (within the confines of the law).

Hofbauer and Derschmidt address this concern directly in their project *Permanent Breakfast*, which began in Vienna on 1st May 1996 and is still ongoing. Their website describes the 'rules of the game' (*Permanent Breakfast*, 2013): a group of people sits around a table that has been placed in public, to eat breakfast together. The breakfasting persons invite passers by to join them. Invited participants are required to set up their own public breakfast at the next available opportunity, with the hope that this might create an exponentially increasing chain of breakfasters across the world.
The act of breakfasting is an integral subversive feature of the work, because of its common associations with free leisure time, the wasting of time and the ‘private’ space of the home. Reflecting on her experience in creating a public breakfast event, Karin Schneider explains:

The glance and pointed finger at the wrist is a widespread gesture... No actual wristwatch needs to be there. The clock face has been internalised as if it were engrained into the human wrist. Giles Deleuze calls it the "electronic collar" as a metaphor for the replacement in society of discipline by control... A leisurely breakfast is usually had on Sundays, which marks it as a special day. Therefore, whoever eats breakfast in the middle of the day is somehow seen as stealing part of the day... Permanent breakfast also means bringing this private ritual into the public and to share a part of the interior life with strangers. It is seen as a provocation by many that we use the time before the sun goes down to breakfast, and that we see this as a meaningful use of time, and, even more so, that we do it in public.

(Schneider n.d.: n.p.)

Schneider articulates that the provocative nature of public breakfasting derives, in part, from its rhythmical divergence from the dominant speed and bustle of public places.

Its leisurely quality can be (deliberately) misconstrued as the flaunting of a lazy and worthless social attitude, which is quite at odds with the aims of the project. The sharing of an interior life with strangers is achieved through the intimate act of eating together, and this act necessarily leads to an opening up of the individual and the discussion of topics that might not be readily conferred in any other public circumstances.

This kind of personal engagement with strangers and use of time threatens the status quo in a society that functions through the internalising of controls, such as that of time described by Schneider above in respect of the theories of Giles
Deleuze. Much like the wristwatch engraved into the body, in the public space of the built environment anonymity is often used as a metaphorical hermetic seal around the bodies of people in public spaces. The effect of this is revealed through people’s resistance to engage with, talk to, and touch or to come into close physical proximity with strangers. This feature of public society has many useful functions for social and political control, particularly in ensuring a lack of dialogue between people, and few opportunities for the sharing of experiences, opinions and feelings. The act of breakfasting makes strangers known to one another.

The act of leisurely breakfasting is also closely related to the concept of taking a long lunch, an activity that is commonly associated with women who do not work, but rather spend the incomes of their (male) spouses, which is encapsulated in the often derogatory phrase, ‘ladies who lunch’. Having the means and time to eat a meal leisurely is a sign of expense – a wasting of time and of resources, which may be leveled at a particular class of woman, but the association of gender and privilege is very much inscribed within this provocative act of being leisurely and unproductive in the city, whilst others are working.

Another phrase related to breakfasting that carries negative gendered connotations is to ‘eat someone for breakfast’, which is used in reference to a woman who is sexually confident and who could take control (over a man) during sex. The phrase is also used in a business setting to refer to a woman who portrays typically masculine traits, such as emotional stoicism, dominance, assertiveness, and a cutthroat approach to business and human resources, which is seen as un-‘lady-like’ and non-befitting a woman.
Another project that brings strangers into proximity with one another is *You With Me* (2014) by Kaleider. In this one-to-one performance, participants are given a mobile telephone with headphones at a central location in the city. The phone contains one contact, which the participant is instructed to call at a specific time. Once the phone call begins, the participant engages in a conversation with the person on the other end, moving around the city streets and responding to the contact’s questions and suggestions.

The one-to-one nature of this piece makes it impossible to know how the work plays out for different participants or whether details change – such as the gender of the person on the phone, the contact name, the conversation topics or the route and ‘activities’, but in my own experience of the piece I was struck by the contact name in the phone, which I was instructed to call. The name was ‘Alice’, which has connotations with Carroll’s protagonist and is of major relevance to this research, as has been discussed in chapter three. For me, this work felt like a kind of stealing of space and time from the city, as I occupied the streets to play, to behave strangely, and to not be drinking in the bars (my time slot was at 8pm on a Saturday night).

One theme of our conversation was the way that ‘Alice’ – the person on the other end of the phone – talked about the city buildings as temporary – rather than permanent. In this way, the performance resonated with the Situationists’ theories of the dérive, as I was encouraged and guided to wander in a non-functional way, and their technique of ‘détournement’ – what Sadler explains as “‘diversion,” though at the loss of the nuances encoded in the original French - ”re-routing,” “hijacking,” “embezzlement,” “misappropriation,” “corruption” (1998: 17). In my
experience of the work, at least, the company chose to present these ideas through what appears to be an intentional and knowing female character, that of ‘Alice’, who occupies and ultimately takes control of a world based on a nonsensical logic and run under the brutal regime of a Queen and court who are ‘nothing but a pack of cards’. The suggestion here is that our own urban world is based on a similar frail logic and our government granted a level of power our culture installs.

The use of live calls as a connective device between people in the public built environment has also been used by Blast Theory, whose work also explores alternative spatial contexts for playful performance in the built environment. In 1999, the group created Route 12:36, which was commissioned by the South London Gallery for presentation on London Central Routemaster buses. Four posters were created for the number 36 bus, which consisted of an image and a question, such as, ‘what do you fantasise about on the bus?’ Or, ‘describe a stranger you once saw and have never forgotten’, followed by ‘Call 0800 917 9158 to give your answer and listen to others’ (Blast Theory n.d(c):n.p).

For the duration of the work, members of Blast Theory connected live calls to recordings, operating a telecommunications system that enabled people to delve into the private thoughts and feelings of other bus users in their local area, and to reveal their own. On one hand, the ‘0800’ number, which is commonly connected to large companies and organisations as a public service line, is claimed as a local communal public space for the divulging and sharing of personal desires, thoughts and feelings. The idea of the work is to encourage contemplation of the environment of the bus, and of relationships between strangers/passengers. On the other hand, this project encourages a kind of micro surveillance culture in
which users of the bus are asked to watch each other, and to report their findings. The issue of the built environment as a site of surveillance is discussed in more detail later on in this chapter, but in relation to the work of Blast Theory, Route 12:36 encapsulates an ambiguity inherent in the group’s work within the social realm.

As a result of their experiences creating Permanent Breakfast events, Hofbauer and Derschmidt suggest that the built environment has developed in ways that empty the significance of public spaces as nodes of social and political expression. They explain that ‘disguising private, commercial spaces as public ones and the transformation of public locations into privately managed ones is making it increasingly difficult to tell what kind of space one is located in’ (2010: 219). Examples of this can be seen in most cities and towns throughout the UK; The Liverpool One complex combines retail, restaurants and leisure businesses in a sprawling indoor and outdoor privately owned development. In most urban centres such a complex exists, but Liverpool One is an interesting example because its borders are not clear – being partly indoor as well as outdoor.

It merges so closely with the existing city centre infrastructure that it is difficult to tell when you are within Liverpool One or within the ordinary public space of the city. The area that is Liverpool One is largely delineated by its paving, which differs slightly in colour from the grey flagstones used as paving in the council owned areas of the city. The creating of spaces that look very like open, public squares and streets is an invitation to dwell in so far as this brings people in proximity to the shops, bars and restaurants where footfall can be converted into the consumption of goods and services.
These spaces, which Hofbauer and Derschmidt would refer to as ‘pseudo-public spaces’ (2010: 218), have security services who regulate the space more strictly than would be so within actual public spaces. The creation of pseudo-public spaces serves to bring all types of public spaces – whether pseudo- or actual-public – into line as a resemblance of an antiquated urban concept of ‘public space’. Public space is no longer identified as somewhere belonging to ‘the people’, but rather is an aesthetic configuration of concrete plinths, paving, benches, buildings, planters and finely styled greenery that allows people a place to dwell for a short time and for a largely commercial purpose.

Though not representing their entire oeuvre, since 2001 Blast Theory’s work has also reflected this physical mixing of public and private space, as their projects have moved to being simultaneously located within public urban spaces and the virtual space of the Internet. Can You See Me Now? (2001), Uncle Roy All Around You (2003), I Like Frank (2004), Rider Spoke (2007) and I’d Hide You (2012) all involve the setting up of a game that is played through the interactions of on-street and online participants, as has been discussed in chapter two.

Blast Theory’s use of the city as a hybrid social space wrests the built environment from a commercially driven articulation of space, towards a personal re-articulation in which individual people make public their own lives or stories and build relationships between other participants, though, as has been discussed in chapter two, they do this through a type of goal-orientated and often surveillance-culture playing that conflicts with their use of the built environment a site for relationships between people.
This notion of space being redefined as social space can be expanded through a subversion of the anonymity of the urban, which can be seen in Gob Squad’s *Super Night Shot*. The company describes the project as a ‘war on anonymity’ (Gob Squad n.d.: n.p.). It involves four company members taking to the streets of a city for one hour during the evening. Each member carries a video camera and documents their journey and interactions with public on the streets of the city. After the hour is up, the company members return to a theatre venue where they edit the four separately collected recordings into a one hour ‘blockbuster’ that sees everyday people and the city itself feature in the film where ‘the group set out to capture a great moment of emotion, passion and liberation on camera’ (Gob Squad n.d.: n.p.).

In this example, Gob Squad’s war on anonymity is waged at the cost of exploiting those individuals on the street who engage with the performers. The company does not make it clear whether their on-street participants agree to, or are aware of, the subsequent editing and presentation of the material they feature in. But, what was apparent to me in the 2008 presentation of the piece at Greenroom, Manchester, was the level of personal investment shown by the on-street volunteers, and the level of intimacy between volunteers and the members of Gob Squad who were with them.

Sat in the Greenroom theatre, watching these surprisingly intimate but entirely public performances, felt uncomfortable and as if the presentation of the work misaligned with the overall intentions of the piece. Or, more accurately, that the company’s desire to have an arts audience and to present their work at an arts venue necessitated an exploitation of the city streets and the public involved.
Indeed, the volunteers taking part on the streets of Manchester were not any better connected or less anonymous to the audience witnessing the edited version of events in the Greenroom auditorium.

These formats for performance set up a privacy between participants and performers, which is one way in which they can be seen to divert from a dominant gendered position. This is discussed by Fiona Templeton in her articulation of her 1988 performance, *You! The City*:

> Since YOU deals with relationship, it also evokes privacy. But not the privacy of reaction at the individual in one of a thousand theatre seats, protected in anonymity and in numbers, in a distance which reduces the human spectacle to a television-sized illusion switched off by trips to the ‘real’ bar, in the one-sided darkness of the voyeuristic position and the superiority of its demand... There, if the performer enviable loses him or herself, it is in display to the gaze that, as Barbara Kruger puts it, 'hits the side of my face'.

(Templeton 1990: 139)

Templeton makes a distinction between the conventional theatrical format and her own one-to-one, site-specific performance, by acknowledging that the notion of privacy in each of these formats differs greatly.

In the audience-performer separation of conventional theatre formats, privacy is granted to the voyeur, whereas in *YOU – The City*, Templeton suggests, the privacy shifts to the coequal, close knit relationship between performer and participant. Both of these formats are seen within Gob Squad’s *Super Night Shot*; the one-to-one interaction of volunteer and performer is later presented to the, ironically, anonymous gaze of the theatre audience.

Templeton references a specific piece of Kruger’s work in her quotation, which suggests a parallel between different formats of performance presentation and
gender politics. Kruger's text and image collage titled *Untitled (Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face)* (1981) shows the profile of a classical female statue, which includes text down the left hand side of the image reading 'your gaze hits the side of my face'. The work addresses female subjectivity by suggesting that the statue – a symbol of feminine beauty repeatedly objectified in classical art – is given voice to acknowledge and respond to the gaze. By referring to Kruger's work, Templeton suggests that different performance and theatrical formats create relationships between audience and performers that embody power frameworks mirroring those between femininity and masculinity throughout the history of art and civilisation.

During *YOU! The City*, different performers' texts are delivered 'of identifiably poetic density' (Templeton 1990: 140), which necessitates an engagement that does not seek for clear, direct or logical information. Templeton expands on this and the nature of relationship being fostered in her work, by stating: 'The relationship was located in the same place where the meaning of the text was made' (1990: 140). Templeton suggests that the meanings of the work are as unique as the particular relationship between each participant and each performer, rather than suggesting that her texts have a clear, prior meaning that should be discovered by her audience-participants.

Many artists making performance in the built environment choose to avoid conventional formats; their work is often deemed to be subversive for this very reason. In the context of Templeton's lucid critique, the work of such artists is necessarily tied to a concern over spectacle and in bringing the experiencer of the
work into a direct and intrinsic relationship. This issue of spectacle is implicitly linked to gender.

Taking up an issue of surveillance in the city, artist Paulo Cirio, explores the way public spaces – particularly the people within those spaces – are articulated as part of private property, in his ongoing project, Street Ghosts, Cirio uses Google Street View to find locations in which people have been captured by Google’s Street View cameras. These portraits of people – their faces blurred, but their bodies, clothing and personal items visible – are then printed out into life-sized images and pasted onto public buildings at the actual location they appear on Google Maps.

Google’s impressive Street View images involve taking multiple photographs using mobile cameras that systematically roam the streets. In order to protect the privacy of people captured in this way, people’s faces are blurred out, though as Cirio articulates, there is still a large amount of data that can be gleaned from these photographs of people – clothing, body shape, gender, ethnicity, class, personal items and relationships, all of which offer a social perspective on that area and its people. As a mapping exercise, Google Street View does more than merely detail infrastructure. Cirio explains,

> The collections of data that Google and similar corporations have become the material of everyday life, yet their source is the personal information of private individuals. By remixing and reusing this material, I artistically explore the boundaries of ownership and exposure of this publicly displayed, privately held information about our personal lives.  

(2012: n.p.)

The development from historical maps that detail the layout and connections of streets, to maps that capture the more personal markings and presence of people in a particular area marks a shift that is not merely one of developing technology,
but an ideological shift of power from the streets being mapped to allow for freedom of movement, to the capturing of personal images (faces, bodies, front doors, gardens, cars, and so on), which are then owned by companies who collect this data without permission, and which can be viewed by any person accessing Google Street View.

Helen Jarvis et al., in their book *Cities and Gender*, put forward an argument that articulates the relationship between mapping practices and gender. They explain that

the first London A-Z street atlas was compiled by a Bohemian woman artist and travel writer who would have felt thoroughly excluded by Bacon’s 1929 guide. In 1935 Phyllis Pearsall (1906 – 1996) conceived the idea of mapping London following a conversation she had at a party, having got lost while making her way there on foot, following the best (clearly inadequate) ordinance survey map of the time. Pearsall’s mapping project involved her walking the 3,000 miles of 23,000 streets of London, all the while noting the names and drawing up the streets and landmarks which made up her road atlas.

(2009: 20)

Jarvis et al.’s assertion that Pearsall would have felt excluded by Bacon’s 1929 *Up to Date Atlas and Guide to London* is based on its preoccupation with a public view of the city of London that sought only to document the activities and achievements of men. They state,

[t]he 60 or so ‘principle public buildings and sights’ identified in alphabetical order focus on church and government buildings, Royal Palaces, War Memorials, citadels of commerce and tunnels (designed by and portraying men). The list also includes clubs (all of them restricted to men) – a list of some 68 all-male literary, sporting, political and drinking societies – including the Garrick, Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) and the Reform.

(2009: 20)
The context surrounding Pearsall's production of the A-Z early in the 20th Century posits her work as a kind of reclaiming of the streets, which is born out of a desire to have knowledge and freedom of the city (as a woman).

As Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose articulate, maps are rooted in an expression of masculine colonial power, and for this reason they express a concern over practices that further, rather than challenge, forms of structural inequality (1994: 9), which could be an argument levelled against Pearsall’s A-Z project. However, both Pearsall’s London A-Z project and Cirio’s Street Ghosts can be articulated as performances that enact a political and powerful position in their own particular historical contexts.

Google’s gendering of the city is not made through exclusively documenting male-centric organisations, features and exploits of the city, as was the case with Bacon’s guide, rather a type of masculinity prevalent in contemporary culture is revealed and perpetuated in Google’s Street View through two key processes: firstly through taking ownership of the ‘public’ elements of the city, its people, their actions, their livelihoods, and their dwelling places. And secondly, through making these private lives and places open to spectatorship, and open to the gaze (that hits the side of my face).

**Subversion**

Subversive practices are a form of political action that, much like protest, are easily co-opted by an authoritarian culture, if not as an aggressive and anti-social act, then as a commodity. As Judith Butler explains, ‘subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition and, most
importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where “subversion” carries market value’ (2007; 1990: xxiii). This kind of cooption can be seen in practices like those of skateboarding and graffiti writing, where they come to represent an image of gritty urban art and performance, and are sanctioned or commissioned either for advertisement25 or in the case of graffiti writing, to adorn the walls of gentrified urban city quarters or the community centres of inner-city neighbourhoods. Therefore subversive acts have a limited efficacy.

Aside from the limitations of subversive acts, as somewhat disposable forms of political action, there are other problems relating to how much subversive acts appeal to a fundamentally bourgeois audience, and risk excluding, ignoring or exploiting those at the margins of, or at a distance from, the central consumers of the work. The privileged position of artists making subversive work can, if looked at within a wider global issue of the ‘right to the city’ (Harvey 2012), undermine their political value, or bring into scrutiny the ‘first-world’ status of the rights being fought for.

The examples already cited within this chapter are problematic for several reasons, many of which have already been noted. In Hofbauer and Derschmidt’s Permanent Breakfast events, the act of breakfasting may serve a purpose as a way to bring strangers together, as I have argued, but it presents a privileged form of social engagement, one associated with refinement, luxury and leisure time, as well as coming from a European cultural practice that does not necessarily translate to

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25 See Nestlé’s Aero Bubbles advertisement (2009), which features a skateboarder riding a concrete bowl filled with brown coloured balloons, made to look like the bubbles in Aero chocolate. Or Daewoo’s ‘Aerial Fantasy’ advert (2000), which was made to promote their Lanos car. The ad featured the car being stunt driven on a car-sized mega-ramp, alongside several professional skateboarders.
other cultures or geographical regions. In this way, *Permanent Breakfast* can be read negatively as a form of colonial action, though it is clear that this is not an intention or desire of the organisers, who seek to critique the time-economy of public places.

Similarly, the inclusion of Blast Theory is problematic due to their status as a company funded regularly by Arts Council England. Talking about the Arts Council’s 10-year strategy for arts and culture, and the role and importance of culture within British society, Peter Bazalgette – Chair of Arts Council England – highlights the economic and educational incentives for cultural industries. He states,

> [t]here’s the whole question of culture and education; it lies at the heart of education, it drives education. And then the economy; the way in which culture brings tourists, the way culture exported from Britain is what they call ‘soft power’ – is our reputation abroad; the way in which a new museum and gallery can regenerate an area... We want the organisations that create all this brilliant art to be as resilient and sustainable as possible... So we need them to be healthy, well-run and commercially clever.

(Bazalgette n.d.: n.p.)

Any work funded by Arts Council England has been assessed for economic impact. Bazalgette’s use of commercial language – particularly, in the way he sees art as cultural goods that can be exported abroad – makes clear the commercial ownership taken by the Arts Council over the work it funds.

The social impact of work is also closely linked to the proximity of visitors that arts and cultural organisations ‘pull’ towards other businesses; restaurants, cafés, shops, etc. (BOP Consulting, 2013: 7). The issue of public spaces as a way to generate capital has, in many ways, contributed to people’s reduced rights to the
city (Harvey 2012). Blast Theory's practice is highly relevant to this research, as it raises a tension between on the one hand the need for artistic organisations to thrive within capital culture, and on the other, the hypocrisy inherent in any practices that are funded by a body that places economic value at the top of its agenda.

This is not to say that artists cannot be funded as well as producing work critical of the framework it operates within. But, this practice is paradoxical in that 'biting the hand that feeds you' can also be seen as selling out or simply as the exploitation of a socio-political issue for capital gain. An example of this can be seen in the work of Barbara Kruger, identified by Templeton as an artist whose work explicitly critiques gender inequality and capitalist culture. Kruger's collaboration with department store, Selfridges, and advertising agency Mother in 2003 to produce an advertising campaign that borrowed the style and slogans of Kruger's body of work during the 1980s, for example *Untitled (I shop therefore I am)* (1987), brings to light the ambiguity of such a collaboration as an anti-consumerist statement.

The placement of Kruger's work in Selfridges – an icon of capitalist culture – is an ideal location for the work, since it brings her slogans on the emptiness of consumer-culture into direct contact with shoppers. However, Selfridges’ employment of this advertising strategy works as an ironic statement, demonstrating the company's tongue-in-cheek humour, and their awareness, understanding and identification with high-culture. It is also a gesture that nods to the cultural status of its customers who, it is assumed, would get the joke. In this example, as with that of Blast Theory, the socio-political purpose of the work is not
entirely lost, but it sits on precarious ground as superficial or fickle. The relationship between consumerism and art, then, is a complex one. Reaching a wider audience necessitates some co-option of the work by consumer culture that risks devaluing the political efficacy of the work entirely.

Even projects that take place on a smaller scale, and that are concerned with a particular community group often enter into a relationship with arts organisations that raises concerns over their exploitation of those communities. An example of this can be seen in the work of artist and facilitator Lottie Child, who founded the ongoing *Street Training* projects discussed in chapter two.

Community groups work together with Child in ways that seem very valuable. However Child is commissioned to undertake these projects by arts organisations that require documentation of the projects and the presentation of this documentation in galleries where people of a largely non-community-based audience will review it. This presence of an arts audience, who spectate – albeit at a distance from the work – raise a concern over ‘making use’ of a community group to demonstrate an organisation’s widening participation, diversity or community engagement agenda, which is ultimately used to gain future funding.

In Child’s work, as in that of Hamburg-based group LIGNA, there is also a concern over the artists’ position as gatekeeper to a ‘right to the city’. LIGNA’s *Radio Ballet* (LIGNA, n.d.(b): n.p.) and Child’s *Street Training* work on the level that they give people a licence to act, which might be seen to adhere with the culture of permits inherent within commercialised public space. These concerns highlight the important relationship between political action and the context in which it is
produced and created. In all of these cases, the intentions of the artists are rooted in a desire to create socially engaged or political works, but their location, funders or audiences necessarily re-articulate the work in ways that undermine or over-write their political or social efficacy. These examples suggest that subversive practice can only be achieved outside of a cultural or artistic economy, which necessarily compromises its visibility.

Artists’ site-responsive performances in the built environment may reveal a scenario in which public spaces are not perceived as space in which to express a right to the city. This is largely achieved due to the internalised controls of permits, and wristwatches, which control what can be done where and when, whilst the individual adheres to a seal of anonymity that distances people from each other.

The examples of Permanent Breakfast, Super Night Shot and much of the work of Blast Theory demonstrate how artists have responded to these perceptions of the built environment attempting to make strangers known to one another, to create social connections and dialogue and to bring people into proximity with one another through active forms of participation. However, these features of the work are problematised by the economic incentives that come with such forms of engagement, which risk the exploitation of participants and/or artists.

A right to the city is also diminished through the ambiguity of what is and is not genuinely part of the public domain, and what private companies own, such as through the creation of pseudo-public spaces. The increasing surveillance culture of public spaces and methods for navigating public space have developed in ways that seem to elaborate power relations. The most widely used maps today are
those provided by online companies, such as Google, which enable people to navigate public space, but that necessitates a level of surveillance and ownership of space, through allowing the private elements of people’s lives and homes to be seen and watched, and through the capturing of data that is held by a private agent.

Through looking at the work of different artists who are making responses to the built environment, it is possible to map some of the concerns that the built environment raises for personal freedom, the notion of public space and, importantly, the concept of a right to the city. Writing on their most recent project, *The Cry of the Mall* – a sound installation located inside the Netherlands’ largest shopping mall – artist company LIGNA state:

> The voice of the mall has been described by Paco Underhill as a call, the “call of the mall”. The mall is not just one place among others in present day capitalist societies. It is, as many socio-lo-gists have stated, a prototype for spaces in the “control-society” and thus a laboratory for producing a certain subjectivity ... the regular space of the mall has always already interpellated you with its signs, its labels and ads. They are telling in a clear language not only where to go, where to look at or what to buy, but also how to behave, how to identify and how to exist.

(LIGNA n.d.(c): n.p.)

LIGNA’s discussion of the mall as a proto-type space in the control-society evokes the theories of Foucault (1977) and Deleuze’s development of these ideas in his ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’ (1992). However, as Kruger’s collaboration with Selfridges shows, Mall owners have also found ways to exploit their negative features, through the use of irony. The mall achieves control by directing the user through space, directing the point of gaze, and through the productive activity of commercial exchange.

Writing on the shift from a discipline society (proposed by Foucault), which emphasises spaces of enclosure each with their own rules (the family, the school,
the factory, the hospital, etc.), to a control society in which these spaces of
enclosure are replaced by the ‘corporation’, Deleuze states,

\[\text{enclosures are } \textit{molds}, \text{ distinct castings, but controls are a } \textit{modulation}, \text{ like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other... This is obvious in the matter of salaries: the factory was a body that contained its internal forces at a level of equilibrium, the highest possible in terms of production, the lowest possible in terms of wages; but in a society of control, the corporation has replaced the factory, and the corporation is a spirit, a gas.} \]

(1992: 4)

The corporation puts to use the language and practices of business that can be reinforecd within every social framework. In light of the considerations of this chapter, gender can be seen as one such social framework, which is achieved through an oscillation between spectatorship (in replacement for relationship) and private ownership, in what are ostensibly public spaces.

Authoritarian control, connections between commerce and gender, and concerns around spectatorship and the objectification of women, all of which are fundamental features of the built environment, suggest that the city can be articulated as a space in which dominant expressions of masculinity are played out. This chapter has drawn parallels between each of these features through an understanding that they function primarily through taking ownership and directing visual attention.

Fiona Templeton’s work on \textit{You! The City} suggests that coequal participation is a way to resist objectification that has long been associated with the oppression of female subjectivity. Thus, a resistance to spectatorship is central to subverting gendered norms and hierarchies. But crucially, a resistance to the anonymity and ‘strangeness’ of other people must be coupled with a resistance to consumer
culture to ensure its efficacy; freedom in the built environment cannot be achieved at the expense of other people’s own authorship of space.

This chapter raises questions about whether freedom from these forms of ownership can be achieved from within an artistic economy that adopts the same kind of business models as any commercial enterprise. This chapter has focused on articulating the built environment as a gendered space, and has looked at some practices presented in this setting and the possibilities and problems related to them. The next chapter follows on from this and from earlier chapters by considering how interruptions of gendered bodies, and how being unknowable, and employing intimacy and intersubjectivity might offer a different approach to the subversion of ‘commerce masculinity’.
Deleuze's development of the work of Foucault offers an important recognition that power has become less bounded to the institution (the enclosure) and more pervasive within public space in general. Importantly, Foucault conceived of his theory of disciplinary power as lacking an origin. The disciplinary machine, he said in an interview, is one in which ‘everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised’ (Foucault in Gordon 1980: 156).

Historically and commonly, power is thought to be exercised by someone or a group who wish to fulfill their needs and desires. The gendered power of the built environment has developed organically rather than by design, by its people, in response to local, micro concerns. Foucault states,

> does this new technology of power take its historical origin from an identifiable individual or group... who decide to implement it so as to further their interests or facilitate their utilization of the social body? Then I would say ‘no’. These tactics... took shape in piecemeal fashion, prior to any class strategy designed to weld them into vast, coherent ensembles.

(in Gordon 1980: 159)

Whilst a lack of origin may be the case, the discipline society becomes a perfect framework for consciously designed exercises of power, developed through political-economic states, whilst it continues to evolve.

In previous chapters, particularly the preceding one, I have explored the responses of artists (and my own responses) to the built environment as a way to understand and locate the exercises of power, relationships of power and concerns over restricted space in this setting. The result of this exploration is an identification of the character of the built environment as displaying ‘commerce masculinity’, which
takes into account concerns over the built environment’s surveillance culture, its strong ties to the exchange of capital and the procurement of goods, and the divisive, separation of individuals through people’s adherence to a culture of anonymity.

The relationship between gender and structures of power is not something that is always highlighted, particularly in the work of Foucault\(^{26}\), as I will discuss. The discussion of power in relation to gender aims to redress this absence. Whilst the previous chapter outlined the conditions of a gendered built environment, this chapter focuses on gendered interruptions into this commercial masculine space through mapping back to the work of Fiona Templeton in chapter four and bringing this into contact with the work of artist Jill Magid, particularly her *Evidence Locker* project (Magid 2004), as well as several of my own projects created as part of this research.

Jill Magid’s *Evidence Locker* took place in Liverpool city centre during the city’s 2004 biennial. The performance took place over a period of 31 days and involved Magid’s collaboration with the City Watch organisation who control the 242 public realm CCTV cameras in the city of Liverpool. The 31-day duration represents one memory cycle of the system, as general footage from the cameras (not containing ‘incidents’) is kept contained for 31 days, before it is removed.

Documentation of Magid’s performances were shown at two venues in the city; Liverpool FACT housed Magid’s *Retrieval Room*, whilst *Evidence Locker* was located

\(^{26}\) Foucault’s failure to address issues of gender within his theories is discussed in numerous sources, including McNay (1992), Mills (2003), Bartley (1988) and Braidotti (1991). This issue is taken up more thoroughly later in this chapter.
at Tate Liverpool throughout the biennial, which took place between 18th September and 28th November 2004. In the Liverpool Biennial catalogue text, Ceri Hand describes Magid’s practice as characterised by her desire to gain access to systems from which she is excluded (Hand 2004: n.p.). Liverpool’s City watch system exists – in collaboration with the police – to witness and record actual (and potential) incidents of criminal and anti-social behaviour, but the people behind those cameras and the specific incidents they capture are hidden. Recognising a potential in the City Watch system to capture not only crime, but other activity as well, Magid became fascinated by the CCTV system as a ‘movie set’. She states, some activists based in Liverpool remark that the cameras are symbols of hygienic space, in which ‘unwanteds’ are targeted and removed; or as marketing signs to businesses and consumers that the city is now watched and thus safer. While I may agree with these ideas, the debates run parallel to my own questions and desires. I was more concerned with the size of the system and how the presence of so many cameras turned the city into a movie set with 242 cameramen.

(Magid in Lovink 2004: n.p.)

Rather than highlight the political concerns around this type of surveillance, which she acknowledges, Magid’s performance reframes the system for her own interests and desires, thus subverting the system’s central use.

Magid’s Retrieval Room and Evidence Locker were enabled by the UK Data Protection Act of 1998, which pertains to individuals having the right to access personal material about themselves, which is kept by public agencies, including images and footage captured on CCTV. In order to get this material, a Subject Access Request Form must be completed, and an administrative fee provided to the relevant agency. Magid submitted 31 ‘forms’, to City Watch, but addressing them to ‘the observer’, she wrote these missives as if they were letters to a lover. Hand states,
In addition to detailing the facts of where she was and what she was doing necessary to retrieve her footage, she expressed how she was feeling and what she was thinking. These 'letters' form an intimate portrait of the relationship between herself, the observer and the city.

(Hand 2004: n.p.)

Magid not only subverted the function of the City Watch system, but also the bureaucratic process of retrieval.

Whilst engaging with the project, Magid developed a close personal relationship with members of the City Watch team. She writes, '[t]he (love) story grew from out from (sic) the relationship that the controllers and I formed through the camera, especially with one of them' (Magid in Lovink 2004: n.p.). Magid spoke regularly with controllers on the telephone, and visited them in their control tower, thus she not only gained access to her images, but also to the physical space occupied by the City Watch team.

This relationship grew to such an extent that the controllers became implicit in the work, which is epitomised in the moments when Magid is being guided through public space with her eyes closed, by controllers who give her instructions on where to move via telephone, as they track her movements visibly through their cameras. Magid's intervention into the system goes beyond the level of access enabled by the Data Protection Act. The controllers with whom she created her performances were not merely following orders or duties; they went beyond their required actions and therefore the level of Magid's infiltration and subversion of the system is extensive.

The presentation of the work during the biennial included the 31 letters Magid sent to City Watch to retrieve footage, the presentation of the footage itself, and
audio recordings of controllers in the City Watch tower. Documentation from Evidence Locker is also available to be viewed from www.evidencelocker.net; this website provides information about the project and allows public to sign up to receive the letters Magid wrote to City Watch in order to gain retrieval of her footage, as well as links to an online ‘locker’ in which selections of the footage from Magid’s project can be viewed.

This chapter discusses Magid’s performance in Evidence Locker, Fiona Templeton’s intimate performance in You! The City and my own performance interruptions alongside Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power and Luce Irigaray’s philosophy of love, highlighting how these two performance methodologies function as subversive practices of the built environment through their engendering of what I refer to as ‘romantic space’. Central to this concept of ‘romantic space’ is a discussion over how seeing/not seeing, and knowing/unknowing are utilised by these artists.

**Power**

On her webpage for a project titled System Azure, in which Magid convinced the Amsterdam police to allow her to attach rhinestones to the security cameras on their police headquarters, Magid refers to an old Chinese saying, highlighting the focus of her art practice on pointing to and questioning the root of power in social spaces. She writes:

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27 As part of her ongoing interest in surveillance culture, Magid initially approached the Amsterdam police, but her project was rejected on the grounds that the police did not wish to collaborate with an artist. So, she remarkedeted herself as a company (System Azure) and approached the police again with the same idea, but framing the work as a business proposal (as well as charging a fee). After negotiations she succeeded in undertaking the jewelling on four of the headquarters’ cameras. She also managed to engage the police in discussions over what colour (with associated meanings attached) that the jewels on each camera should be (Magid in Lovink 2004: n.p).
While an old Chinese saying claims “When the wise man points to the moon the idiot looks at the figure”, System Azure upholds the reverse: The wise consider the finger. Why? Looking at the finger is more interesting. The finger is reality. In considering the finger you consider how moon is being represented. Who is pointing this finger? Toward what is my attention being directed and why should I look there? What does this finger want me to see?

(Magid n.d.: n.p.)

This redirecting of attention from the moon to the finger is also framed as a redirecting of awareness that the context of the wise (the person in power), who is directing our gaze is as – if not more – important than what we are being shown.

Though she doesn’t make an explicit reference to Foucault, Magid’s sentiment here – as she asks us to consider the frameworks of power that condition our social engagements – relates to Foucault’s theories of power. He explains that power should be understood as a system that cooperates within the social body, which does not take an explicit binary form – of dominator on one side and dominated on the other – but rather exists in multiple and relational forms. Foucault states that these relations of power serve a primarily economic interest, and that resistance is built into the dynamics of power (Foucault 1980: 142). This, in some part, explains how subversion is able to both resist and be subsumed within a commercially driven society.

The body is central to Foucault’s theory of power. In Discipline and Punish (1977, 1991), he highlights how power, once manifested symbolically in the form of the sovereign, and typified in architecture like palaces and churches has changed over time to be inflicted upon individuated bodies, who become the target, rather than the expression of power. He writes,

[t]he classical age discovered the body as object... it is easy enough to find signs of the attention then paid to the body – to the body that is
manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful, increases its forces. The great book of Man-the-Machine was written simultaneously on two registers: the anatomico-metaphysical register, of which Descartes wrote the first pages and which the physicians and philosophers continued, and the technico-political register, which was constituted by a whole set of regulations and by empirical and calculated methods relating to the army, the school, and the hospital, for controlling or correcting the operations of the body.

(Foucault 1991: 136)

The envisaging of human beings as machines is, for Foucault, a vital part in the setting up of the discipline society. The materialist work, *L'Homme Machine* (1748), written by Julien Offray de la Mettrie, was a rejection of the notion that human beings have a spiritual core – the soul – and set out the methods for ‘a general theory of dressage, at the centre of which reigns the notion of docility’ (Foucault 1991: 136).

Dressage, as is mentioned in chapter two in relation to the theory of Lefebvre, relates to rhythmical repeated practices that shape a person's posture, gesture and physical attitude. Foucault charted these repetitive and rhythmical practices by considering the timetables that were applied to school children and soldiers and defined them as having three great methods: ‘establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition’ (Foucault 1991: 149). Discussing the strict marching of troops, Foucault coined the phrase ‘anatomo-chronological schema of behaviour’ (1991: 152), which acknowledges the importance that time plays in regulating and disciplining bodies.

Disciplinary practices, which are produced through this anatomo-chronological schema of behaviour, produce ‘docile bodies’, which Foucault defines as ‘subjected and practiced bodies’ (1991). Despite, as I have already mentioned, that Foucault acknowledged resistance as part of the discipline society, he does not address
corporeal resistances to the concept of docility. The ‘docile body’ has been critiqued by Lois McNay as too general a term that risks effacing other aspects of the individual or personhood, which may on closer inspection challenge the passivity of specific bodies (McNay 1992: 40-41). This thesis as a whole considers how a body might become a site of resistance to gendered, commercial disciplinary structures.

Foucault uses a distinctively commercial language to explain the disciplinary process. He identifies three main techniques of bodily discipline; scale, object and modality, describing them as follows:

[scale:]… not of treating the body, en masse, ‘wholesale’, as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it ‘retail’, individually… [object:]… no longer the signifying elements of behaviour or the language of the body, but the economy, the efficiency of movements… [and modality:]].... Uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result.

(1991: 137)

This connecting of disciplinary practice with terminology used as part of commercial production posits the body as a component in this machinery, which raises a question over what kind of economic-political production this represents.

Referring to the work of Paul Patten, Sarah Mills questions the intrinsic link between capitalism and disciplinary production, highlighting how disciplinary structures are also clearly visible within non-capitalist societies, and she highlights the disciplined use of the body that was developed within the Soviet system under communism as a key example of this. Mills also recognises that whilst these practices were operated under a different economic-political system, that they still functioned as part of industrial production (Mills 2003: 44), therefore the disciplined body operates within the specific political-economic climate of which it
is located. In a simplistic sense, the difference between communist and capitalist forms of production is in where the ownership of profit is located: with the many (the community, the state), or with the few (business owners, the top of the hierarchy). In the current capitalist climate, the body works within a machinery that results in the creation of profit that is privately owned.

When discussing the disciplined body in school, in the army, or in the factory, it is relatively clear what the profit to be gained by these methods of production is, but if the dressage of everyday life in the built environment is considered within these commercial techniques of discipline there is no enclosure in which to define profit, and so profit must be locally specified. The modulation of docile bodies in the built environment is dictated by public space, which is not a fixed entity. In many urban centres, the mall and the ‘right to shop’ is dominant, as has been highlighted by many of the artists in chapter four, and so in this instance bodies are modulated towards the most efficient means of connecting consumers with goods. One of the major ways this is achieved is through limited physical and verbal contact between individuals; the anonymity of public space ensures the smooth transacting of bodies from one place to another.

In relation to these issues around power and profit in the built environment, I would like to draw upon three examples of my practice that took place in three different cities. In all three of these examples, I was costumed as ‘Alice’, which provided me with insights that encouraged a development of the research, as these experiences led to alterations of my costume to be less identifiable (this is explained in more detail in the next chapter). The three sites discussed here are: The South Bank, within the city of London, and in particular its status as a space of
'profit' through the objectifying act of claiming 'souvenirs'; an area of Bristol known as 'Old Market', in which I performed as part of an art event and experienced the problems associated with being both out of place and an explicit spectacle; and an encounter in Plymouth’s Drake Circus shopping centre between myself and two security guards that highlighted how ‘authorisation’ is used as a way to claim ownership over physical actions in ostensibly public spaces.

The site in London – the Southbank – is located on the River Thames and has numerous galleries, concert venues and museums in close proximity, as well as the London Eye and various restaurants and cafes, with outdoor seating on the riverside pathway. The Southbank is also a site in which temporary market stalls and street performers are located at certain times. The Southbank also houses an area known as the Undercroft that was adopted by skateboarders in the 1970s (LLSB n.d.(a): n.p.), before the Southbank became the tourist hotspot it now is. In recent months, The Southbank Centre (who own the Undercroft) have threatened to remove skateboarders to make way for further development of retail and leisure buildings. This has been petitioned by a wide range of locals, including non-skateboarders, who see the Southbank skate area as a piece of urban history that should be allowed to remain (LLSB n.d.(b): n.p.).

Because of the South Bank's emphasis on tourism, anything presented as performance-like in this site becomes part of tourist ‘goods’. Possibly part of the reason that skateboarders have remained on the South Bank for so long is because whilst they do not directly generate income, they have come to function as a tourist site to see, which contributes to the overall revenue of the South Bank area.
Dressed in my ‘Alice’ costume, I experienced a clear sanctioning of my activity by a security guard who moved on a group of young boys who were climbing over a railing, but left me alone when I was performing a very similar action. In this instant the costume was read as a frame for performance in this site, and not as something ‘out of the ordinary’. Possibly the security guard assumed that I had been employed by one of the local businesses as ‘entertainment’ or I was performing as part of some guerilla marketing strategy. Or, perhaps, this is an example of how a body marked ‘female’ registers as spectacle more readily than those of young boys. As I played around the site, people began filming me on their mobile phones and taking photographs, getting very close to me and in some cases invading common notions of personal space. I felt I was being subsumed into the culture of tourism and became a souvenir image or experience that people could take away with them.

In Bristol’s Old Market, my status was very clearly an ‘act’, since I performed as part of an event titled The Stranger at the Party, which was curated by artist, Cara Lockley. In this example there were at least two types of audience, since not everyone was accidental. An intentional audience turned up at various moments to witness my actions, but there was also the presence of business owners and the street’s residents and regular inhabitants, who were a different (more sustained) kind of accidental audience than the people who witnessed me in fleeting glances out of car and bus windows, or as they walked or cycled down Old Market Street.

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28 The concept of ‘guerilla’ action is the creation of an action spontaneously and, usually, without authority. However, this concept has entered common parlance and practice with companies adopting ‘guerilla’ tactics to sell products and services. Guerilla marketing examples – characterised as innovative and low-cost – can be seen as being used in a wide range of different products and services.
For those fleeting audience, my performance functioned in much the same way it
does in any city; I was unable to witness any responses, though people did honk
car horns and occasionally shout unclear words and phrases. I was located on Old
Market Street for several hours since I was part of the event and needed to be
within a clearly delineated boundary to maximise potential for an intentional
audience to encounter me. This felt like being on display and because of my
occupation of Old Market Street for this length of time, my engagement with the
sustained audience of residents and regular visitors became more a process of
placating mild territorial concerns about my 'loitering'.

This was probably also indicative of the specific site of Old Market Street, which is
not within the city proper, so its businesses tend to attract people for specific
purposes and it is not a space that is set up to allow for meandering and dwelling
in the same way that city squares allow for this (to some extent). Neither is it a
busy enough site for someone to be invisible for any length of time. This was one of
the only times I felt the need to explain myself as being a performer and part of an
event, and I felt that I needed to heighten my performance when intentional
audience were present.

By not adhering to the dominant use of the space I was not being 'productive', and
was seen as an element that did not adhere to the smooth running and transacting
of the space. This experience highlighted for me how effectively space functions to
challenge or reject unclear components, and that being part of an event had
necessitated the converting of my practice into a spectacle that to some extent
removed the work from its purpose and effectiveness, because an intentional
audience and their expectations determined it. As a result of this, I began to
consider how it might be possible to present the work within the context of an ‘art event’ but to avoid becoming spectacle; and to avoid becoming an artistic commodity. I also realised the need to deal with the discomfort of being challenged and rejected.

This dilemma of spectacle and rejection played out in a different way when I performed in the Drake Circus shopping centre in Plymouth. I ventured into Drake Circus, driven by the heavy rain, knowing that I would probably end up being removed by security, since the central shopping mall is largely a private site that consists of some privately owned public space. Part of the ground floor is a thoroughfare from one outdoor street to another, so I thought that this might give me grounds for being there.

Whilst performing on the first floor of the building, with a camera operator nearby and clearly visible, two members of security staff approached me, wanting to know what I was doing. I had already made the decision that if I was asked, I would respond by saying I was ‘just playing’, as a way to foreground the autotelic nature of the play activity, and I wanted to avoid the situation I later encountered in Old Market where the work became consumed as an entertaining piece of performance. In keeping with this decision, I responded by saying I was ‘just playing’, which was taken as flippant because they repeated the question a number of times and appealed to the person filming me for a more detailed response. Aware of the small crowd that was gathering to watch what I was doing, one of the security guards said they’d let me stay if I would simply tell them what I was doing. Again, I repeated my response, reluctant to offer any greater depth. The security
guard explained that in that case, he would have to ask me to leave as I was a health and safety risk and that Drake Circus was a private building.

The security guards’ reluctance to accept that I might be ‘just playing’ suggests they perceived some ulterior motive behind my activity, however their bargaining to allow me to stay if I explained myself, suggests that by obtaining a reasonable rationale they might gain some ownership through the granting of permission, which is fitting within the commercial space of the mall environment. ‘Authorisation’ is a form of transaction in which one person takes ownership (authorship) for another person’s actions; it grants freedom, but at the cost of the actor’s ownership. My non-compliance with this authority under their jurisdiction within the private space of Drake Circus was reframed as an unqualified public threat.

Each of these examples reveals differing modulations of spaces within the built environment. On the Southbank and in Plymouth’s Drake Circus, attempts were made to integrate what I perceived as a resistant physical strategy into the flow of profit. On the Southbank this is exemplified in making the unusual body a ‘souvenir’; in Drake Circus, the unusual body can be used as pure spectacle.

On Bristol’s Old Market Street, there were several channels of activity I did not qualify for; I was not merely passing through, I was not engaging with the businesses on the street, I was not a local who lived in the area, but I was performing as part of an event. This meant that within Old Market Street I was both rejected as being not profitable - not economical – as well as being consumed as spectacle by an arts audience.
As a result of these experiences, my research practice developed to address these concerns with how performance can be presented in the public built environment as well as within a cultural arts context without adhering to conventions of possessive spectatorship. However, in spaces that are deeply entrenched in tourist culture, such as that of the South Bank, it seems near impossible to resist objectification as a woman, since these areas operate as open-source on whatever material qualifies as ‘souvenir’.

These examples highlight how profit can be articulated within different urban settings. They also bring to the fore an issue of surveillance and spectacle, which intertwines with the notion of the ‘docile body’. Within Foucault’s theory of power in *Discipline and Punish* (1991), panopticism, which deals explicitly with how disciplinary power is elaborated through surveillance culture, explains the internalising of control that is inherent in spaces of the built environment.

**Panopticism**

Foucault’s theory of panopticism derives from research he conducted into the origins of clinical medicine, and later his research into the penal system, particularly into how control over patients and prisoners was inscribed within the social environment. He writes, ‘I noticed how the whole problem of the visibility of bodies, individuals and things, under a system of centralized observation, was one of their most constant and directing principles’ (Foucault in Gordon 1980: 146). His observation of medical settings was mirrored in the organisation of penal settings and several of the examples he explored made reference to the
architectural designs of English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham (Foucault in Gordon 1980: 147).

Bentham’s Panoptican design was, in principle, a central tower surrounded by a perimeter building in the form of a ring. Within the perimeter, cells could be divided up with windows facing the central tower, thus allowing a centrally located authority figure to view each of the cells. Importantly, the partitioning of cells within the outer ring meant that prisoners (or patients) within each cell would not have any contact with each other.

It was also important that inmates could not return the gaze and see the authoritarian within the central tower, so that they would know they were being watched, but could not tell whether they were being watched at any precise moment. This was necessary to developing an automatic function and ‘perfection of power’ (Foucault 1991: 201) by engendering a feeling of ‘constant and permanent visibility’ (Foucault 1991: 201). The panoptican is a clever design, and a concept in which the individual is singled out and placed under the anonymous gaze of an authority figure who has the privilege to not be seen or have the gaze returned. In this design power is not inflicted, but represented.

Foucault emphasised the importance that within the panoptic design no one would be free from the gaze. The authority figure who watches prisoners, school children or patients can also be watched themselves by adding another layer of surveillance, or, whilst they are undertaking their duties with inmates, they must necessarily place themselves in the situation of the gaze they have inflicted, thus the panoptican develops what Foucault describes as a ‘malveillance’; ‘an apparatus
of total and circulating mistrust’ (Foucault in Gordon 1980: 158). Further more, because the inmate can not tell whether they are being watched the surveillance becomes internalised; so that it does not matter who is watching, or whether there is someone watching at all. Through these means, and as part of a development of his theory of disciplined, docile bodies, the surveillance system of the panoptican becomes a ‘machinery that no one owns’ (1980: 156).

Foucault’s reflections on the panoptican feed back to his general theories about disciplinary power. In Discipline and Punish he sets up four central principles of discipline that correspond well with the panoptican (Foucault 1991: 142-144). One principal is that ‘discipline sometimes requires enclosure’ (1991: 141), though he acknowledges that this is not constant, indispensible or sufficient, but rather that the more fundamental principle in relation to this is that of ‘partitioning’, involving the individualising of the body. In the built environment, this is apparent in the culture of anonymity adopted in public places.

Foucault also sets out the rule of ‘functional sites’, which is key to productivity, stating that places must be useful (or profitable). And the final point he makes is about the importance of ‘rank’ – such that disciplined bodies do not occupy a fixed position, but a relational one by which they are classified. This point is perhaps intended to represent ideological power; a form of partitioning through discourse (a reflection of the physical partitioning already mentioned), in which individuals come to understand themselves as located within several different inter-relating socio-political, racial, gendered groupings.
This conception of power, in which all persons are caught up, in which resistance is inbuilt and which exists in the form of complex relations of disciplinary structures, avoids a straightforward linear dichotomy of disciplined person on one side and authoritarian on the other. Mills explains that, ‘individuals should not be seen as the recipients of power, but as the ‘place’ where power is enacted and the place where it is resisted... Power needs to be seen as something which has to be constantly performed rather than being achieved’ (Mills 2003: 35). Power can be enacted in various and multiple micro and macro ways and individuals perform acts of power and resistance, rather than possessing power. Magid highlights and exploits this understanding of power in her work, as she positions herself within the frame of ostensible powerful people and organisations, such as the police, and finds ways to perform her own resistances and versions of power.

Whilst creating Evidence Locker, there is a moment when Magid becomes attracted to a window that she would like to be filmed in the frame of. She goes into the unknown building and is told by the secretary on duty that the building is the housing association, that the window she is asking about belongs to the office of the Executive in Chief, and that he does not allow anyone access to his office. Magid negotiated with the secretaries to let her see the window. Once she had gained access to the office, Magid telephoned ‘the observer’ at City Watch to direct their cameras towards the window and then she proceeded to open it and perform for camera. In her letter for this day, Magid writes:

I opened the glass and the secretary hid in the blinds. I was in the Chief’s office, behind his desk. He was not there and the boardroom was empty. The window was closed so I opened it. I filled the frame... the wind blew across my face and through my hair. It was a good window.

(2004(a): n.p.)
This scenario illustrates Magid’s performing of power and illustrates a tactic she uses in her work, as she remarks in relation to the System Azure project, ‘the deeper we got into the patterns and colors of the fake jewels, the farther we moved from the camera’s so-called intended function. It was this slippage that intrigued me; I questioned the representation of power versus the activity of power’ (Magid in Lovink: n.p.). Thus, in the context of Evidence Locker, Magid enacts several layers of power, which are exquisitely realised in the moment with the window: Magid instructs the controllers operating the police surveillance system for the City of Liverpool to film her as she illicitly occupies the Chief Executive’s office of the Housing Association, for the ‘non-productive’ activity of framing herself within a window.

The enacting of power through surveillance can be seen differently in my own performances. In the two encounters presented below, the power of surveillance – or keeping watch – is explored as an ambiguous form of claiming or protecting property. These encounters are a moment in Manchester when I was watched by a policeman and eventually felt the need to relocate myself and the experience of performing as part of an event (‘Tempting Failure’, at Performance Space in London) in which the site I was located in contained several residential homes guarded by their owners.

Whilst I was located in the Piccadilly Gardens area of Manchester city centre, I was exploring the rhythmical composition of the site and the flux of pedestrians from Market Street through the Gardens and towards Piccadilly Approach. As a way to move against the flow, I began weaving in and out of several bollards positioned in the middle of this area. As I weaved slowly and repeatedly in a figure of eight, I
began to pick up on other bodies moving slowly or that were stationary, and I eventually realised I was being watched by a police officer, some 30 yards away from me. He was stood entirely still and was staring in my direction. I immediately felt uncomfortable, as I was torn between worry that he was assessing what to do about me, but aware that I was doing nothing wrong. I felt a strong desire to hold my ground. The presence of his gaze was like that of a CCTV camera, it suggested I was being monitored and measured as a potential risk. This was an extremely powerful action that encouraged me to move on to another part of the city, so as to release myself from his gaze. If I had held my ground I thought he might choose to escalate his action (at least to questioning me), to visibly show his control of the situation, in the context of a busy public street.

**True Love Waits**

A different example of keeping watch happened whilst I was performing *True Love Waits* (2012); a project I created for the first ‘Tempting Failure’ event, which took place at Performance Space, a venue for live art on the Hamlet Industrial Estate, Hackney Wick, East London. The venue is located on a small single-road site containing around 12 warehouse spaces. Only one warehouse was open during the evening that I was there – a company that were packaging raw meat. Other businesses on the site were not marked with company logos. A fleet of large white unmarked transit vans were parked on one side of the road, just after a row of industrial sized bins. At the end of the road was a wall with a locked iron gate on the left hand side. Through the bars of the gate and beyond the wall was the Hertford Union Canal and towpath, and a skyline consisting of high-rise flats, the Olympic stadium and further in the distance, tall office blocks. There were parking spaces lining the road on either side.
I set up a play space for the work in the form of a salt circle, made with ordinary domestic salt such that you might use in cooking, which referenced the sacred space of a magical ritual in which energy is concentrated or contained. I also made instructions for participants (see appendix three), which detailed a series of rules for engagement and explained that the work was intended to be an improvised, playful encounter with no intention towards a particular outcome. The instructions detailed that any communication between the participants and myself should not be verbal. This instruction was intended to prevent discussions between participants about what a correct or incorrect physical response or participation might entail; I wanted participants to generate their own free form of engagement not bound by a given standard of success or failure, through an attentive engagement with me and other participants.

I began the piece at 7.15pm – it was already dark – and the first thing that surprised me was that the industrial site I assumed I was located in was in fact a semi-residential street. Aside from a few businesses, a number of the warehouses had been converted into apartments; I had accidentally located myself in between a row of people’s homes. The first I realised of this was when a man pulled up outside one of the warehouses and looked on at me with suspicion. Initially, I assumed he was a business owner or worker, who’d arrived to begin a night shift, but he spent some time outside the building, having a cigarette as a veiled activity for examining what I was doing. Without engaging in a conversation with him, I began to play by myself within the circle, using the perimeter as a tight-rope, jumping from inside to outside and back again; this communication that I was playing, and in close proximity to Performance Space must have satisfied him that I
wasn’t any kind of threat or danger, and he retired into the building. As a light came on in the upstairs part of the building I realised he was sat inside his lounge, with a tortoiseshell cat padding around the window in the glow of television light.

Some time after this a number of cars pulled up outside another warehouse entrance – smartly dressed visitors to a gathering in someone else’s warehouse apartment. Suddenly, I was no longer in the edgeland industrial space I’d envisaged, but rather a kind of hybrid industrial-residential space, and my performance encroached on the territories of local residents. The party guests drove their cars down the site road, stopping before the salt circle to work out whether they should be driving over it. After getting out of their cars, they lingered, seemingly unsure of whether I was some kind of public nuisance or a harmless stranger. Here, the surveillance of my activity was a performance of protection. The gaze is also a way of conveying protection over property, and a way of keeping strangers at a distance.

In *True Love Waits*, the salt circle functioned rather like an arena to help start off interactions, but it was made clear in the information card provided to participants that they did not need to stick within the boundary of the salt. In practice, visitors to the event tended to congregate around the salt circle and to spectate upon what was happening within it. Participants also tended to stay within the salt circle. The presence of an audience incorporated a different sort of gaze to that imposed by the homeowners, that of possessive spectatorship.

Many of the participants interpreted the salt circle as a competitive space, in which they were performing for each other as well as with/for me. It was difficult to
resist the spectatorial presence and the type of performance display it demanded. When there was no-one watching; no participants, audience or residents, I was left wondering what the purpose of my performance was, with no one there to witness it. But, it was only within my lonely occupation of the site that I could achieve an autotelic engagement with this place, removing the practice from an economy of property.

Positing panopticism as a key feature of Foucault’s work on power, Martin Jay situates Foucault’s work within an ‘anti-ocular discourse’ (1986: 176). Jay recognises the privileged role that sight has played in Western epistemology since the time of the Greeks, but particularly within early French discourse and suggests that an interrogation of metaphorical sight has links with the attack against the traditional, rationalist subject of enlightenment (1986: 178). He states:

Thinkers as different as Bataille and Sartre, Metz and Irigaray, Althusser and Levinas have all called into question the time-honoured nobility of sight. Even Merleau-Ponty, whose phenomenological exploration can be seen in part as a celebration of embodied vision, was deeply suspicious of what he called pensée au survol, the high-altitude thinking which maintained the Cartesian split between a distinct, spectatorial subject and the object of his sight… it is legitimate to talk of a discursive or paradigm shift in twentieth-century French thought in which the denigration of vision supplanted its previous celebration.

(1986: 178)

Jay also puts forward a convincing argument that Foucault applied the same problems that he connected to vision – its singular, imposing and unidirectional perspective – to that of certain uses of language. Jay explains how in Madness and Civilisation, Foucault ‘recognised the linguistic strategy of Freud as another form of observation, of surveillance, through the monologue that is applied to the patient’ (1986: 181).
In the context of the therapist-patient relationship, it is clear to see how language can be another set of places in which power is enacted. Jay suggests that the crux of Foucault’s conception of power is in monologic forms of enactment (visual or otherwise), and that dialogue inherently resists disciplinary power through its interactivity between subjects, and, importantly, that this kind of dialogue is also present within some kinds of visual communication. He writes, ‘unlike many non-French commenters on the implications of vision, he resisted exploring its reciprocal, intersubjective, communicative function, that of the mutual glance’ (Jay 1986: 195). This idea offers alternative possibilities for the enactment of power and of considering ways in which resistance might occur, through close interaction between subjects. This idea is taken up in greater detail later in this chapter, in the section on Romantic Space. The power of the gaze in gendered terms and the relationship between the gaze and language is also discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

**Gender Blindness**

Lois McNay’s investigation (1992) into Foucault’s theories and their implications for feminist social theory highlights how important his poststructuralist approach has been, particularly in the way his theories argue against essentialist notions of the body and of sexuality, and by virtue of the fact that many feminists have drawn on his work. She writes:

> Feminists have drawn extensively on the poststructuralist argument that rather than having a fixed core or essence, subjectivity is constructed through language and is, therefore, an open-ended, contradictory and culturally specific amalgam of different subject positions... perhaps to a greater extent that any other poststructuralist thinker, feminists have drawn on Foucault’s work.

(1992: 2)
Similarly, Rosi Braidotti remarks on the discoveries Foucault has made as being ‘extremely significant for women’ (1991: 88). However, both Braidotti and McNay agree, amongst numerous others, that Foucault’s work lacks reference to feminist scholarship (Braidotti 1991: 88), that his theory of disciplinary power does not take into account the different experiences of men and women in society (Bartkey 1988: 63) and that he fails to consider the ‘gendered character’ of his disciplinary techniques (McNay 1992: 11). Mills regards Foucault as an ‘androcentric... thinker’ (2003: 7), remarking that this unfortunate problem limits and obscures the insights he has to offer (2003:7).

This is particularly relevant in his theory of panopticism. The basis of this theory, as has already been discussed, is on attaching a power relation to the seeing/being seen dyad. Those who are seen cannot see who watches them or return the gaze, those in the powerful seeing position can see everything, without being seen. This position very clearly corresponds with the gendered position of the spectacle that Templeton describes and I have referred to in the previous chapter.

In her theory, and drawing on the work of Barbara Kruger, Templeton suggests that women are and have been consistently held, throughout western civilisation, within an objectifying male gaze. Foucault also considers the relationship between spectacle and surveillance in *Discipline and Punish*, but writing from a privileged androcentric position, he sees the two as quite separate from each other. He writes:

> [a]ntiquity had been a civilization of spectacle. ‘To render accessible to a multitude of men the inspection of a small number of objects’: this was the problem to which the architecture of temples, theatres and circuses responded. With spectacle, there was a predominance of public life, the intensity of festivals, sensual proximity. In these rituals in which blood
flowed, society found new vigour and formed for a moment a single great body. The modern age poses the opposite problem: ‘to procure for a small number, or even for a single individual, the instantaneous view of a great multitude.’ In a society in which the principle elements are no longer the community and public life, but, on the other hand, private individuals and, on the other, the state, relations can be regulated only in a form that is the exact reverse of the spectacle.

(Foucault 1991: 216)

Foucault writes from the position of the powerful – the spectator – and he fails to see the view from the position of the ‘small number of objects’. He writes nostalgically about how spectacle promoted community and the interrelation of the public, but he fails to see those who are under the gaze of these public spectators. The examples he gives of architectural forms that responded to the desire to spectate – temples, theatres and circuses – are also telling of the power dynamic in the spectatorial gaze. All bodies become objects under the spectatorial gaze, but in the example of circus and, to a large extent, theatre, the bodies on display are very likely to have been ‘othered’ within the context of the wider social body.

What Foucault is really describing in his shift from spectacle to surveillance, is not a dramatic reversal of power from the many to the few, but merely the development of a powerful, objectifying gaze that in surveillance society incorporates the bodies of the powerful and the ‘normal’, in a similar way to how ‘other’ bodies and the bodies of women have been perpetually gazed upon. Nothing changes in the shift from spectacle to surveillance except that powerful bodies (those who have previously enjoyed their position as spectators in society) are inevitably caught up in the same gaze that has previously been directed towards women and ‘others’. The statement, ‘our society is one not of spectacle,
but of surveillance’ (Foucault, 1991: 217) merely marks a shift in position for the powerful – who previously watched – to that of being watched themselves.

Foucault does seem to recognise the similarities of the two positions of spectacle and surveillance, when he writes: ‘As a monarch who is at one and the same time a usurper of the ancient throne and the organizer of the new state, he combined into a single symbolic, ultimate figure... the pomp of sovereignty, the necessarily spectacular manifestations of power... in the daily exercise of surveillance’ (1991: 217), but his lack of explicit reference to the obvious gendering and othering of power is a disappointing omission. Whilst Foucault’s notion of a ‘single great body’ demonstrates a lack of consideration of those members of the public who do not meet normative standards, his harkening to the communitas of festival does raise an important point about ‘sensual proximity’ and connections between people in public space, which are key to the engendering of ‘romantic space’, discussed later.

Anonymous/Onymous

The anonymous nature of the panoptican machine – its ability to watch, but not be seen, its lack of origin, and the way in which discipline works through the partitioning of bodies – suggests that the individualization of society, in which each person is a stranger to another, is a particularly important concern for artists wishing to subvert the surveillance culture of public space. This is apparent in the examples of performance looked at in the previous chapter, most of which, in some way, have sought to bring strangers into proximity with one another.

The unmaking of strangers, seen in various practices within this research can be seen as a making ‘onymous’. This term I have adopted, which is in opposition to
‘anonymous’ refers to practices in which the aim is to make known or named. This position is a locus of power for artists who seek to resist the anonymity of public space, but it is also a locus of power for authoritarians, who seek to attach a label and to categorise unknown quantities. Both of these activities of power can be seen in my practice, but the following examples explain the role that ‘onymity’ plays in creating (gendered) disciplining practice.

My performance interruptions can be seen to generate a community who recognise the work as playful, which is identified through their use of subtle or more explicit communication of their feelings. For example, some people choose to stop me and express their delight at what I am doing, or in a subtler manner, to express their advocacy through brief smiles of support and recognition, or in the case of one man in Leeds, to play along with me for a moment. In these examples, the communication of advocacy and support is aimed directly at me in a more or less subtle form.

Instances where people show annoyance or contempt for what I am doing are not usually leveled directly at me. In fact, I only know of these responses through reports that other people have recounted to me from conversations they have overheard, or through my reviewing of video footage in which people’s facial expressions and looks to each other have been captured incidentally. What is clear is that people register their contempt often through facial expression, which is clear and readable to other observers, but not to me as I am absorbed in what I am doing. These are perhaps what Martin Jay highlights as the ‘mutual glance’ (1986: 195), discussed earlier in this chapter. The fact that contempt has never been expressed directly to me suggests that the work does not do anything to produce
strong negative reactions; it has always been important that the work is non-confrontational, mainly to avoid any opportunity for it to be outlawed or suppressed by authorities. This is part of its success as a subversive act.

All these types of response, which express personal opinions, undermine the culture of anonymity of public spaces, and bring people into proximity with each other as non-strangers in much the same way that people spontaneously break their anonymity and ‘strangeness’ by communicating with each other when public transport is cancelled or delayed. Verbal responses discussed within this section are organised into three main categories: responses that seek to categorise or name me and what I am doing; ‘caregiving’, from people who make comments concerned with my welfare, health, and safety; and finally, expressions of physical or sexual interest.

Categorising and naming, which is often achieved through people (who in all the cases I encountered were men) shouting ‘Alice’ or more quietly (but still audibly) stating, ‘there’s Alice’, is part of the conversion of a cultural entity into a form of property. If something can be named and identified, it can be connected with an economy of cultural associations – in this case from the representation of princesses in Disney films, to the adoption of ‘sexy’ girl character costumes in a fancy dress or ‘hen’ ritual context. As I developed the practice, I moved away from the ‘Alice’ costume precisely because it was too easily recognised. Even when the dress was misinterpreted as ‘Dorothy’ or ‘Heidi’, the association with a specific girl (often fairytale) character was always conveyed. This association with fiction and fairytale framed the work too much as a known performance, which too easily invited spectatorship and naming, and public attempts at ‘owning’ the practice.
Whilst being quite endearing, responses of caregiving are underwritten by an ultimately patronising agenda. When costumed as ‘Alice’, the expression of care could be seen as a form of ‘playing along’ for the public, due to the responder’s performing of a role they felt in keeping with the performance of ‘Alice’ – a child figure. However when not in costume, I still received similar comments that I should ‘take care’, or ‘be careful’, which establishes those commentators in a paternalistic role, by which I am cast as dependent or subordinate. Having been a skateboarder for many years, I have never witnessed public expressions of care towards skateboarders performing tricks, many of which are far more potentially injurious than the actions I undertake as part of my practice. This kind of response expresses restrictions towards a woman playing in an attempt to suppress or stop play, under the ostensible danger of personal harm. I am not suggesting that these people do not want me to play, per se, but more so that they repeat a paternal tendency towards women and girls that is socially learnt behaviour.

The expression of physical and sexual interest has, in all of my experiments, come from men, which suggests that I am read (or put into role) as a heterosexual woman/girl, or that men are more likely to express their opinion verbally in public. In many of these cases the experience was unsettling; I had to remove myself from the situations due to a man’s persistent occupying of my personal space and prolonged conversation, which physically prevented me from performing. The unsettling feeling was associated, for me, with feeling out of control in each scenario, and as if each person was attempting to ‘acquire’ me. It felt like the sort of attention a person might expect – though not necessarily solicit – in the social context of a bar or a club. Part of my anxiety about these responses
was due to their incongruence with open public space, and particularly given my activity and costuming.

These experiences of naming, patronising and acquiring can be seen as processes of accumulation, which characterise the culture of public urban space and which cannot be read apart from a concern with how different articulations of gender are perceived and treated within the public built environment. They also highlight that 'onymity', rather than 'anonymity', has a part to play in elaborating gendered discipline and resistance.

On the other side of this is a practice like that of Jill Magid's in Evidence Locker, in which the intersubjectivity she adopts with members of City Watch allows her to subvert the surveillance system of the city. Or in Fiona Templeton’s You! The City, in which the poetic density of her texts necessitate a personal encounter between the participant and actor. The final part of this chapter looks at these relational forms and their potential to subvert dominant gender positions through the development of ‘romantic space’.

**Romantic Space**

In her catalogue text, written about Magid’s project Evidence Locker and Retrieval Room projects in Liverpool, Hand refers to the ‘intimate, romantic space’ (Hand 2004: n.p) between Magid and ‘the Observer’. Her subversion is not unilateral, it is predicated on an exchange. In the prologue to her ‘love letters’ sent to ‘the Observer’, she writes, ‘since you can’t follow me inside, I will record the inside for you’ (2004(b): n.p.). Magid’s texts, provide personal information about her internal world; how she is sleeping, what she is thinking about, what she thinks about ‘the
Observer’, but she also provides information about the private sphere of the house in which she is staying, in return, perhaps, for ‘the Observer’s’ own private view of Magid and the City.

In her letter from day two, Magid writes:

At 8.25pm I am listening to the Pixies and eating green curry soup in my bedroom. There had not been a can opener in my kitchen, so I had peaked [sic] around the house to find theirs... The cabinets are blue and fill the wall. In the middle is a long table with no less than twelve chairs. They have gold studs that keep the green leather upholstery taught against their frames.

(Magid 2004(c): n.p.)

There is a considerable level of detail and intimacy to the letters Magid sent. Having received them all, one-by-one, as part of the research for this chapter, I felt I was being drawn into a very private world, but Magid’s text manages to avoid a simple voyeurism taken by the secondary witness, who reviews the documentation of her performance. She does this by making the details unclear and obscure, such that I was constantly kept wondering what she means by this or that phrase, who she is referring to, where she is going and what she is doing. The reading process becomes an investigation, requiring an active engagement that forces the witness into the work, instead of the witness being able to adopt an outsider perspective – a rational, spectatorial distance. The romantic space Magid creates in the production of the work is reflected in the relationship between viewers of her documentation.

Suggesting a similar relationship in her discussion of You! The City, Templeton articulates the combination of writing and performance/directing as ‘the meeting of logos and eros’ (1990: 140). These two terms may point to the psychoanalytic theories of Jung, in which logos and eros are contrasted with one another and
related to the Animus (identified as ‘male’) and the Anima (identified as ‘female’) respectively. But, in Greek Mythology Eros is also the god of love, whereas Logos represents the principle of reason and judgment. In the context of Templeton’s notion of privacy, which is explained in the previous chapter as the coequal spectatorship of her largely one-to-one performance, this comment corresponds well with the notion of romantic space. In these examples, a romantic space is used to bring subjects ‘into communication’ (Foucault 1991: 200), a connection that Foucault regards as the opposite of the objectification of panopticism.

In The Way of Love (2002), Luce Irigaray draws upon Plato’s Symposium to put forward a conception of philosophy in which this kind of communication between subjects becomes central to knowledge. She explains:

> The book outlines another philosophy, in a way a philosophy in the feminine, where the values of intersubjectivity, of dialogue in difference, of attention to present life, in its concrete and sensible aspects, will be recognised and raised to the level of a wisdom.

(Irigaray 2002: vii)

Irigaray aligns this philosophy with a feminine position and discusses the etymology of the word ‘philosophy’, highlighting how in the logic of language philosophy has lost an important interpretation as ‘wisdom of love’, rather than simply ‘love of wisdom’. She writes:

> The wisdom of love is perhaps the first meaning of the word “philosophy”. In fact, if theology is understood as the discourse on or about god and metrology as the science of measures, why has the reverse order been imposed in the interpretation of the work “philosophy”? And, above all, why has only one meaning been retained: the love of wisdom?”

(Irigaray 2002: 1)

Her approach to a wisdom of love is one that foregrounds dialogue between subjects as the locus of knowledge, rather than the development of a singular subject who sets itself apart from, or appropriates, the ‘other’. Thus it is a
philosophy that requires a notion of contingent being. Working together, Irigaray envisages the 'constitution of two worlds open and in relation with one another, and which give birth to a third world as work in common' (2002: 10). Therefore knowledge is produced in what alludes to a giving birth between two subjects.

It is clear to see the influence of Plato's *Symposium* in Irigaray's philosophy of love. In this text, the nature of love is discussed through an account of an Athenian social event organised by the poet 'Agathon', in which the group of intellectuals take it in turns to discuss their views on Eros or desire. The party consists entirely of men, with the exception of an intervention by the ancient female philosopher, 'Diotima', whose perspective is recounted by 'Socrates' from a dialogue between her and himself at an earlier time.

Whilst 'Diotima's' presence in the room is only made possible through a verbal account of her discourse, her presence within the discussion is of the highest regard. It is her knowledge of the ways of love that are posited as the most crucial perspectives put forward within the discussion. This feature of Plato's *Symposium* in which a female philosopher is so highly regarded (albeit without being physically present) has been discussed, according to Andrea Nye, with puzzlement by most scholars, particularly because 'Diotima's' teachings differ starkly from Plato and the dominant Pythagorean theory of the time. Nye states,

> Most scholars have found this puzzling and embarrassing. How can the great Socrates, founder of philosophy, be saying that he learned everything he knows from a woman?... almost universally, it is asserted without argument that Diotima is fictional. In translation and commentaries, her teachings are interpreted so as to be compatible with platonic philosophy.

(1994: 198)
Thus, what doesn’t fit neatly in to a dominant understanding of Plato’s discourse, and because the presence of ‘Diotima’ conflicts with the sexist view that a woman couldn’t possibly demonstrate a higher level of knowledge than Socrates, Plato’s text becomes interpreted to ensure that ‘Diotima’s’ status and knowledge is undermined.

In her article, Nye challenges the perception of classical Greece as a historically misogynist landscape, arguing that the Minoan culture overtaken by Greek-speaking invaders was one in which women occupied positions of prominence and power. She writes,

> [b]y classical time, although subjected to increasing segregation and domestic isolation, as well as to complete political disenfranchisement, women still retained some of their own power in religion. In historical context, then, it is neither surprising nor anomalous that Diotima would appear in an authoritative role as the teacher of Socrates. (1994: 206-207)

‘Diotima’s’ status, but lack of presence, may be a reflection of the cultural status of women philosophers at the time; revered, but facing an erasure of their role and status at the hands of an increasingly misogynist culture.

‘Diotima’s’ initial point progresses from her discussion of desire. She states that love represents an in-between state of not being in possession of something and within this she articulates Love as an intermediate spirit that, like all intermediate spirits, function to interpret and carry messages between humans and the gods. She states, ‘being intermediate between the other two, they fill the gap between them, and enable the universe to form an interconnected whole’ (Plato 1999: 40).
‘Diotima’s’ theory of love and wisdom develops from her argument that ‘all human beings are pregnant in body and mind’ (Plato 1999: 43). Here, Diotima asserts that procreation, more commonly associated with childbirth as a result of love between two people, also refers to the way in which wisdom is produced – a giving birth through the mind. Later in the text, ‘Diotima’s’ argument sets up a hierarchy in which giving birth to children is given a lower status to birth through the mind. And, both of these are ultimately seen as methods for obtaining immortality.

Irigaray’s reading of Plato’s *Symposium*, highlights the contradictions of ‘Diotima’s’ argument, and in each case she suggests that this is ‘Socrates’ misunderstanding of ‘Diotima’s’ theory. She writes:

[what seemed to me most original in Diotima’s method has disappeared once again... Amorous becoming no longer constitutes a becoming of the lover himself... instead it is now a teleological quest for what is deemed the highest reality... beauty of body and beauty of soul become hierarchized, and the love of women becomes the lot of those who, incapable of being creators in soul are fecund in body and seek the immortality of their name perpetuated by their offspring... that, surprisingly, is the view of Diotima. At least as translated through the words uttered by Socrates.](Irigaray 1994: 190-192)

These problems with ‘Diotima’s’ argument are dealt with, to a large extent, in Nye’s argument that the translation Irigaray is using obscures the original language and meaning of the text, and that this accounts for the contradictions and twists in the argument (Nye, 1994: 200). Ultimately, Nye’s argument takes up the fictionalising of ‘Diotima’, as an ancient philosopher, and puts forward an argument that there is a historical possibility of her actual existence. Nye argues for how important it is to reinstate her (1994: 212), as this would provide an ancient historical route in philosophical discourse for a theory of knowledge that derives from the experience and thought of women.
Romantic space, then, understood through the practices of Magid, Templeton and alongside Irigaray’s philosophy of love, and 'Diotima’s’ theories of love, can be characterised as a feminine concept. One that challenges the gendered disciplinary power inherent to practices of the public built environment. Romantic space achieves this through intimacy, exchange, communication and dialogue, intersubjectivity, and attention to the present moment. Foucault's panopticism is fundamentally about a controlling, unidirectional, or monologic approach that does not allow the other to return the gaze or to respond.

Commercial masculine space upholds the social machinery of surveillance and spectatorship described by Foucault through his theory of panopticism. Anonymity is central to the discipline society, because it functions to partition people from each other, which generates mistrust and individuation. But ‘onmyity’ is not necessarily an antidote to this, as it is also a place in which power is enacted over the other.

Within commerce masculinity, disciplinary power is achieved through rhythmical control of the body ensuring that spaces are profitable. These disciplining practices are less bounded to the enclosures that Foucault envisaged. In the built environment, the modulation of profitable space has to be understood on a local level. In my own practice I have experienced spaces of souvenir, spectacle and authorisation, and I have experienced resistance and rejection at times when I did not contribute to the smooth running of space.
An important feature of Foucault’s theory of the discipline society is that power is not an essential element. Disciplining practices attempt to fix it, but power is performed, sometimes in subtle ways, which means that spaces consist of multiple enactments of power, and that power can be exercised in the most unlikely of contexts.

In the next chapter I discuss the final development of my practice in relation to the ideas of ‘romantic space’ introduced in this chapter. This final development of my practice involves my inscribing of an ‘unknowable’ feminine archetype through my practical interruptions in the public built environment.
Chapter Six  Are You Known To Us? Inscribing an Unknowable Feminine Archetype

Historically, public space has presented a problem for women through explicit exclusions – men’s-only clubs and societies – or more subtly, through social customs that are perpetuated over time until their origins become unknown or taken for granted. Shirley Ardener’s article on ‘ground rules and social maps for women’ is a key example of historical research in which spaces are defined by more of less explicit membership rules. The separation of spheres that this engenders is regarded, historically, as a concept that has permeated into all human realms, such that the stratification of gender has been seen as the most prevalent and prevailing authority over space. Blunt and Rose articulate this as ‘gender difference...inscribing spatial difference’ (1994: 1). This problem, however, can be seen to have shifted to one in which a homogenising commerce masculinity orders and takes ownership of space, particularly seen within the public built environment.

Surveillance and spectatorship have been recurrent features of commercial masculine domination throughout this research, which demands the question: who is being watched and who has the power to observe? Traditionally, the position of the observer, and the power that position assumes, is associated with the masculine. Invisibility or the ability to not be seen is a powerful position to have in public space. It is the position adopted in the mythos of the flâneur. As Meskimmon explains, ‘the flâneur embodied the characteristic of fictive invisibility so empowering in the city. The stroller never made a spectacle of himself, witness to

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29 Ardener’s theory is that spaces have rules and gatekeepers that in private space are explicit and clear. In public places, space is regulated in more subtle and uncertain ways, but the rules, the gatekeepers and the notion of membership remains perceptible (Ardener 1981).
all forms of display, his was the disembodied eye which saw without being seen’ (1997: 17).

Mythic representations of women support this narrative of the power to look but not to be seen\(^30\), and Monks explores this theme in her work on costume and nudity in theatre, remarking, ‘the act of looking is not a neutral act, but is inherently constructed through power relations, and has a material effect on how gender is represented’ (2010: 107). Perhaps this is what makes Medusa – the mortal Gorgon with snakes for hair who has the power to turn anyone who looks at her to stone – such a strong feminist symbol\(^31\), since she represents a woman who cannot be looked at.

Lizbeth Goodman suggests a warning against the perpetuation of mythic images as a practice that has historically come from men’s authorship of women and a narrowing of the representations of real women. She states,

> the ‘female’ is inscribed as ‘mythic’ in both the context and content of much of what is considered to be ‘great literature’... none of these is a ‘real’ woman they are fictional creations... These are characters and as such function at the level of the symbolic... The question for readers and writers today is: symbolic of what?

(2000: xvii)

It is impossible to delete these myths, but it is also impossible to write real stories.

It is possible, however, to analyse, to critique and to rewrite the symbolism of

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\(^{30}\) Lizbeth Goodman puts forward a convincing argument in *Mythic Women/Real Women*. She states, ‘Cassandra [is] the visionary who sees but cannot make herself heard or believed; and connected to Cassandra is Philomèle, whose tongue is cut out to prevent her speaking the truth... Joan of Arc sees and speaks and is burned for her trouble... what these figures have in common is a sense of vision: like Medusa, they are all women who are looked at and who seem to look, though we must question the power of the gaze in each case.’ (2000: xvi). Goodman also connects many of these mythic women with characters from literature throughout the centuries to demonstrate how enduring these myths are.

\(^{31}\) Hélène Cixous’s article ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (1980) and Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard’s book *Laughing With Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought* (2006) suggest an adoption of ‘Medusa’ as a symbol of feminist power. Lizbeth Goodman articulates some of the feminist and, in comparison, the more stereotypical articulations of ‘Medusa’, ultimately highlighting her appeal as an empowering feminine symbol (2000: xvi), which is further discussed within this chapter.
those myths that already circulate within culture and popular consciousness, and to establish new symbols that better serve a broad and multiple notion of gender, but particularly femininity. As Goodman states, ‘[t]he point is not to bring myth to life, nor to kill the stories, but to highlight the uneasy distinction between the [mythic and the real]’ (2000: xvii).

Zajko and Leonard identify the importance of ‘revivifying’ ancient narratives as a way of disrupting the basis of patriarchal power. They write, ‘myths are after all not only the products of an androcentric society, they can also be seen to justify its most basic patriarchal assumptions’ (2006: 2). The idea of rebirth, inherent within the term revivify, is a particularly pertinent use of terms. It suggests the production of a narrative from the uterus, rather than through a man-made system of language, which nods to – particularly – cultural feminists’ concerns with writing and language as a locus of masculine domination, which has traditionally excluded women and limited their contribution to culture.

Throughout the history of feminisms, language has been addressed, particularly in the workplace and in the use of politically correct terms in the media, as well as in relation to more recent postmodern discourse, in which language is viewed as the means by which categories and identities are established and performed (Gibbon, 1999). But within this history, écriture féminine, or feminine writing, and the different ways in which it has been postulated by, particularly, French cultural

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32 The focus on language as a central concern for feminists is attributed particularly to French cultural feminists of the Psychanalyse et Politique group whose critique focused on Freud’s and Lacan’s conceptions of psychoanalysis, in which women are cast as the ‘absent reflection of men’, which derives from their lack of the phallus (Gibbon, 1999). The concern with language as a structure that reinforces this bias towards male subjectivity has become an ongoing concern for feminists, as is particularly evident in linguist, Julia Penelope’s book Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers in which Penelope discusses the CUD (Cosmetic Universe of Discourse) and the PUD (Patriarchal Universe of Discourse) in which CUD is ‘a dialect some women use, and only in specific contexts, to signal recognition and acceptance of their subordinate status’ (1990: xxi).
feminists such as Cixous, Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Monique Wittig, is seen as a seminal concept which aims to counter the phallocentric form of language, by considering ways in which women may write from a position outside language structures.

Margaret Gibbon explains that writing by women within this movement typically featured, ‘loose syntax, unfinished sentences, words spelled and respelled to suggest alternate, plural readings and other devices to suggest openness or lack of fixity and closure’ (1999: 8), which suggests an attempt to subvert and ignore the rules of language, and the prising open of words to consider their value-laden connections with other words and ideas. Drawing a more expansive definition, Ann Rosalind Jones explains that écriture féminine represents ‘the critique of phallocentrism in all the material and ideological forms it has taken, and the call for new representations of women’s consciousness’ (1986: 374).

Hélène Cixous’s essay, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ – which references that mythic feminine of the woman who can not be looked at – provides a general sense of what is meant by écriture féminine, as a writing that must speak for and from (woman’s) self, in the context of a history in which women have not been given the right to speak, or have been spoken for by men. Cixous writes,

writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy… this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated… where woman has never her turn to speak… writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures… she must write herself.

(1980: 249-250)
Women’s writing, therefore, functions as an inscription in traditional patriarchal culture; ‘she draws her story into history’ (Cixous 1980: 251).

In her paper, Cixous explains that it is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, so as not to pin it down. She writes, ‘for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded’ (1980: 253), maintaining, perhaps, the importance of a personal and situated notion of the feminine, rather than a shared femininity that risks excluding some women; a problem which has led to much criticism of a historically white, middle-class and Eurocentric dominant feminist discourse.33

Feminine writing cannot become a stylistic form otherwise it would have to make essentialist claims about the nature of female consciousness, which could not encompass the broad and diverse range of different women’s experiences. The concept of feminine writing is critiqued by many feminists for this reason; as Jones asks, ‘is women’s sexuality so monolithic that a notion of a shared, typical femininity does justice to it? How can one libidinal voice – or the two vulval lips so startlingly presented by Irigaray – speak for all women?’ (1986: 369).

Elaine Showalter highlights another critique, explaining that the concept of a women’s language has been used since antiquity to place women within the realms of ‘myth’ and an objectifying mystique. She writes,

33 In her overview of feminist movements, Gibbon suggests that liberal feminism is generally perceived as ‘a white, upper- or upper-middle-class movement, which serves the aspirations of a minority of privileged women’ (1999: 5). Reflecting this, Goodman articulates that during the 1980s and 90s, black, lesbian and working-class feminists argued against the ‘totalising ‘female’ experience which was often defined implicitly as white, heterosexual and middle class’ (2000: xii). Heidi Satia Mirza’s edited volume, Black British Feminism: A Reader (1997) acknowledges the sites of struggle for Black British feminism as ‘migration, work, white feminist theory and now identity and difference’ (1997: 21), highlighting that postmodernity has, ‘opened up the possibility of a new ‘feminism of difference’ (1997: 19), but that this remains problematic because of the ways that postmodernism valorises, but also capitalises on the space of the ‘other’.
the concept of women’s language is not original with feminist criticism; it is very ancient and appears frequently in folklore and myth. In such myths, the essence of women’s language is its secrecy; what is really being described is the male fantasy of the enigmatic nature of the feminine.

(1986: 254)

For Showalter, the secrecy of women’s language also becomes a way for it to be marginalised and ignored, as something that cannot be known by dominant discourse. If the problem, or more importantly, the solution, does not depend on a drastic reiteration of language it must depend on allowing women the opportunity to write themselves into culture.

Feminine writing is a way to acknowledge the problems of language and writing that exists in forms that disguises real bodies and real experiences, and that can – too easily – exclude and order certain bodies and experiences in its ostensible objectivity. For these reasons, Showalter regards écriture féminine as ‘a utopian possibility rather than a literary practice’ (1986: 249). The written word, unlike the spoken word, cannot reveal the body – it exists in one (gendered) form. But, if the concept of writing is applied to an expanded notion of text then ‘bodied’ forms of writing are available. In this chapter, I suggest that physical movement can offer a way out of the singular sexed written form, through the presentation of the idiomatic body, in which a body, its gender and ethnicity as well as its knowledge and skill, become intrinsic to the text being read.

The relationship between gender and public space is a close one, such that public spaces can be considered as being written with gendered rules that are more or less explicitly regulated. One of the most enduring narratives of gender in public space is the association of men with freedom of movement and the power to
observe, whereas women are placed in role as they who are looked at, and controlled within public space. Commerce masculinity, which is dominant in the public built environment, over-writes this dichotomy. It is a space in which all people are under the gaze of civic authority.

Narratives of gender are made through the circulation of symbols in popular cultural products, and it is impossible to address concerns about gender in the public built environment without looking to the stories and oral tales that perpetuate symbolic representations of the sexes. Feminist critiques of gender symbolism and of language forms in general have been orientated around how women’s subjectivity might be expressed appropriately within patriarchal systems. These are the reasons I have drawn necessary parallels between the public built environment and popular culture as sites for the generation and perpetuation of gendered narratives.

This chapter considers how my practice has developed to address these concerns by functioning as a practice of inscription, through my presence as a performer in costume playing in the public built environment with a particular feminine archetype. The physical practice has developed into the performance of what I have termed ‘skill-less’ tricks, which are an expression of my own idiomatic body, and a critical position I have taken for the practice in keeping with the avoidance of spectacle, which is central to my research. The first part of this chapter develops further the concept of ‘romantic space’ introduced in the previous chapter, by outlining a theory of the ‘unknowable’ in reference to Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse* (2002). The second part explains the development of the practice and its final manifestation, whilst the third part reflects on my findings from the presentation.
of this practice at the ‘Tempting Failure’ performance platform, which was held in Bristol in 2013.

**Unknowable – A Theory of Love**

Drawing on literature, traditional philosophy, conversations and personal experiences, Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse* (2002) provides a basis for a multifarious ‘philosophy of love’ that also corresponds with Irigaray’s *Way of Love* and Plato’s *Symposium*. The book contains many very short sections of text, which relate to an aspect of the experience of love. Barthes calls each of these ‘figures’ and explains that they are not supposed to be read in succession, in a linear narrative form. He writes, ‘the figures are non-syntagmatic, non-narrative; they are Erinyes; they stir, collide, subside, return, vanish with no more order than the flight of mosquitos’ (2002: 6). The linking of these fragments of text about love with the mythical Greek Erinyes – minor female avenger deities, who inflict punishment – suggests they problematise and inflict rather than fix or solve, which represents Barthes’ view of love as inconvenient, irrational and chaotic, and which attaches a representation of gender to his discourse of love.

Barthes’ figures have been placed into an ‘entirely insignificant’ (2002:8) alphabetical order. Barthes remarks on the order of the book that a chance organisation may have generated logical sequences and established a ‘philosophy of love’ (2002: 8) suggesting that instead the intention was to ensure there are many orders for the material and therefore many philosophies of love. Barthes also suggests that a philosophy of love operates outside of traditional discourse. Writing about the way he integrates references he states,
I am not invoking guarantees, merely recalling... what has seduced, convinced, or what has momentarily given the delight of understanding (of being understood?)... these reminders of reading, of listening, have been left in the frequently uncertain, incompletely state suitable to a discourse whose occasion is indeed the memory of the sites (books, encounters) where such and such a thing has been read, spoken, heard. For if the author here lends his “culture” to the amorous subject, in exchange the amorous subject affords him the innocence of his image-repertoire, indifferent to the proprieties of knowledge.

(Barthes 2002: 9)

Barthes’ lover’s discourse does not adhere to the rules of traditional discourse with regards to the lineage and authority of sources, and the ownership of ideas.

It embraces uncertainty, the incomplete, and the fragmented. And, it is a discourse that is firmly rooted in practice and therefore its written account is a document – a memory – of the knowledges associated with love. One of the fragments within *A Lover’s Discourse* that has a particular resonance with this chapter is the one titled ‘the Unknowable’, because it opens up a new position in relation to anonymous/‘onymous’ and the concept of romantic space.

The first feature of the Unknowable refers to efforts of the lover to understand the being they love, a riddle in which the lover both knows, but does not know. Barthes writes,

I am caught in this contradiction: on the one hand, I believe I know the other better than anyone... and on the other hand, I am often struck by the obvious fact that the other is impenetrable, intractable, not to be found; I cannot open up the other, trace back the other’s origins... Where does the other come from? Who is the other? I wear myself out, I shall never know.

(2002: 134)

This section also includes the concept that to know someone is to know what they desire, and that not knowing what someone desires perpetuates love. Or, considering these in reversal, the first point also includes the notion that “I can’t
get to know you” means “I shall never know what you really think of me”’ (2002: 134).

The second point of the Unknowable is the feature of ‘pure religion’: ‘to make the other into an insoluble riddle on which my life depends is to consecrate the other as a god’ (2002: 135). The Third and final point of the unknowable is: instead of trying to define the other, the subject comes to define the loved being ‘solely by the suffering or the pleasure he affords me’ (2002: 135). In this final point, the other is defined ‘as a force and not as a person’ (2002: 135). These points might be clarified as follows:

- I know you, but I can never fully know you
- If I don’t know you, I can’t know what you think of me (who am I?)
- You are an enigma that I will never understand (I can never be in control of you, and this situation takes control of me)
- You make me feel...

The trajectory of this frustration of not being able to contain the ‘other’ places knowledge of the self into question, the awareness of not being in control places the subject into a power relation in which the other is worshipped, and finally the subject situates themselves more equally as confronted forces. The Unknowable marks a shift from the cognitive to the sensitive, suggesting that a depth of understanding between people is developed through non-cognitive means.

The position of the unknowable lies between anonymity and onymity, but it is also a position that is far more involved, having more wisdom than merely knowing. In my practice I have recognised some of the features of ‘romantic space’ in my interactions and I have developed the practice to adopt a position of being
'unknowable', and of generating intersubjectivity through physical actions, glances and peripheral vision of other people's bodies, rather than through language.

**The Story of the Grey Dress and Skill-less Tricks**

The first interventions I made involved improvised play whilst I was wearing my ordinary clothes. This brought into question just what kind of femininity I was embodying in my ordinary state. I was not in costume, but I was still performing a particular type of femininity. I often had a handbag with me during these outings, which I would place down on the floor to play. I soon realised the necessity to incorporate the handbag if I could, within the play activity, so as not to be read as casting aside a commonly perceived marker of femininity or a ‘woman’s prop’ in order to allow myself to play.

Also, during these first outings, I experienced my exiting and reabsorption into the dominant rhythms of public space (discussed in chapter two); my ordinary clothing meant that when I stopped playing on something, I became another body within the dominant flow of space, and that I had to make my play activity distinctively different to the ordinary action of walking. Deciding to bring costume into the practice deepened the intervention. It meant that I could choose to be static or to move in an ordinary fashion whilst still behaving playfully; it allowed me to be constantly exited from the rhythms of the public built environment. I knew that I wanted the costume I chose to be read as feminine, and that it needed to stand out, so it could not be created from a skirt or dress in a contemporary fashion.
The decision to dress in a way that was reminiscent of popular depictions of Lewis Carroll's 'Alice' seemed right at the time because she represents a mythic image of girlhood, as is discussed in chapter three. Mythic figures of womanhood tend to focus on women as caring, self-sacrificing and mothering figures, with variant or antithetical examples presented as negative divergences from the ideal. In her book *Mythic Women/Real Women*, Lizbeth Goodman brings together different women's interpretations in poetry and drama of mythic representations of women.

Goodman explains how three mythic figures in particular dominate the examples in her book. These are, 'Mary (the religious icon of the virgin and her counterpart, Mary Magdalena, merged), Medea and Medusa' (2000: xiv-xv), and how the stories associated with these types have been ‘reincarnated’ by female writers:

Mary ... as the suffering housewife and the misunderstood sexual being. Medea, the ultimate caricature of the sexual woman and 'bad mommy', has been reclaimed by some as a feminist identity-politician given a bad press for daring to react to abandonment by her unfaithful husband, sacrificing the children she loves in the process... Medusa is a more cryptic figure: from Greek myth to twentieth century writing, she has been seen as the ultimate dangerous woman... feminists, and some lesbian artists in particular, found in her a symbol for masked identity: she who looks but cannot be looked at or seen.

(2000: xv-xvi)

These mythic notions of women, all of whose stories are tied up with familial and marital concerns, did not seem the types to play in the city; it did not seem appropriate to reincarnate these mythic women as 'child-like'.

On reflection, I can see how this decision I made not to adopt a symbolic woman character reflects, at least in some part, my own inability to see a woman as someone who would play. ‘Alice’s’ child status offered me the freedom to play, as a
woman, because she is a girl. The costume did not mask my physicality, but it served – at the time – as a necessary frame for play.

In practice, however, the ‘Alice’ costume came with other problems. My representation as ‘Alice’ became subject to processes of accumulation through naming, patronising and acquiring, and in some particularly tourist areas as I was made into a kind of ‘souvenir’ (as is discussed in chapter five). As a result of these experiences and that in which I was expelled from Drake Circus in Plymouth by security guards, and in response to concerns about a woman’s ability to play, the importance of being ‘unknowable’ became central to the work. I began to consider ways that I could project an archetypal image that might embody the duality of woman and child.

Jung’s archetypes are concepts that do not exist in the collective unconscious as a concrete manifestation; their status is as unknowable or indefinite, until they are manifested. He writes, ‘an archetype in its quiescent, unprojected state has no exactly determinable form but is in itself an indefinite structure which can assume definite forms only in projection’ (1990; 1954: 70). The projection of any kind of woman figure would connote to one of an already existing set of feminine archetypes, which is why it became necessary to consider manifesting a quiet or dormant archetype – not necessarily from the collective unconscious, since I do not wish to argue for the existence of or against such an idea – but certainly one that has been drawn from my own practice and my own intuitive approach to research.

I was attracted to the notion of an archetype in a quiescent state, since it acknowledges that archetypes are without an author and that they are collectively
made through subtle, rhizomatic cultural processes that are activated or woken up. This approach also allowed me to address the problem posed by Elaine Showalter about the endurance of a (feminist) critique. She states, ‘as a critical practice feminist... critique can only compete with alternative readings, all of which have the built-in obsolescence of Buicks, cast away as newer readings take their place (1986: 245-246). As a form of inscribing, I wanted to avoid a direct critique, instead opting for the awakening of an alternative feminine, so as to ‘[express] the critical concept of difference in practice’ (Goodman 2000: xii).

I kept the same ‘skill-less’ movement discussed in chapter two, and decided to keep the costume in the form of a dress, choosing the same dress pattern that had been used to make the ‘Alice’ costume – with puff sleeves, plain neck collar and knee-length skirt, but I added longer sleeves and had the dress made in a plain grey cotton. This dress had a somewhat familiar look in that the style was recognisable, but not to a particular culture or era, and it did not utilise any colour or embellishments that might be associated with a particular character or stereotype.

I wanted to appear as ghost-like in order to draw a connection between the ‘Alice’ costume I had previously adopted and my new manifestation. Using white cotton was too close to the comical white sheet ghost that might be worn as a Halloween costume, or connections might be made between a white dress and purity or as a symbol of spiritual divinity, which is already a myth exemplified in representations of ‘Mary’.
Grey, on the other hand, can be associated with liminality, because of the way it is used to denote the middle ground between two oppositional views, ‘shades of grey’, and it appeals to the representation of a ghost (between the living and the dead). It draws a connection between my representation as being between girl and womanhood, and it relates to the notion of romantic space through ‘Diotima’s’ and Barthes’ respective theories of love as a state of being between. From a spatial perspective, it also delineates where the practice operates – between the ordinary rhythms of public space, and the extra-ordinary activity of play as is discussed in chapter two; not absorbed by the dominant rhythms, not exited from them, but between.

**Are You Known To Us? A PaR Project in Bristol**

*Are You Known To Us?* was presented at 'Tempting Failure' (2013) in Bristol. It encompassed each of the different strands of knowledge I have developed throughout the duration of the research. It involved implementing improvised, skill-less play with a grey dress and, in order to address my concerns with the expectations of spectatorship inherent within the format of the live art platform, I produced a poster, which was placed inside the venue in lieu of my physical presence there (see appendix four). The poster explained that the work was made for an accidental audience, and it also gave an explanation for the title of the work, which references a comment I received from a police officer in Plymouth city centre.

Alongside the poster I had also left an audio message that people could listen to on headphones (see transcript in appendix five). This audio provided more detail about the project. It explained about my encounter with two police officers in
Plymouth in which I was stopped whilst dressed as Alice, playing in the street. The police who stopped me suggested I was mentally ill and a previous ‘offender’ (of some sort of public nuisance) by repeatedly asking me, ‘are you known to us?’ as well as asking me what I was doing and where I lived. The question, ‘are you known to us?’ is, on one level, a simple question about whether I am someone who has had previous dealings with the Devon and Cornwall police, but ‘us’ also goes deeper than that, representing a collective social power with rules I was not displaying or adhering to.

These police officers were registering my unusual activity as an indication of a potentially dangerous or problematic illness, but this assessment is signified by my presence as a woman who was not intoxicated, who was playing in public, in costume, in an unskilled and, importantly, a non-organised way. Therefore, their comment is about the strangeness of not being in an organised group, not being a child and not being a young man, as these are the types of bodies who typically play in urban space. The audio finally invited visitors to come outside and to watch, join in with me or create their own interventions, whilst making it clear that I wanted to transform the participant into a conspirator to the action, rather than a spectator.

A few people who visited the ‘Tempting Failure’ event ventured outside to participate in the project and some of these people also began playing themselves, but the majority of responses and interventions were from members of the public who were oblivious to the ‘Tempting Failure’ event. The absence of a recognisable or nameable character led to several responses; some that echo the responses from the earlier work, and some that present new insights, particularly around the
issue of inscribing. From the responses and interventions I received during the process of this performance, this section looks at the sexualisation of my activity, competitive challenges, tests and assessment of my ability, and an attempt to fictionalise/re-write me into a fairytale narrative.

The expression of sexual interest is something I have encountered during several outings, as is discussed earlier in the thesis. However, a man in his fifties explicitly addressed the connoting of my play activity with sexual intercourse in Bristol when he asked whether I was making love to the police station. The activity I was performing at the time was to climb up the walls of the building, which was a disused police station (and the venue for 'Tempting Failure'). He then went on to ask whether I had ever made love in one of the cells – a somewhat unsettling and creepy suggestion – and asked whether I had ever visited the cells.

He was using this rather odd and indirect line of enquiry to explain that he had been held in one of the cells of this police station at some time in the past, and that it was not an enjoyable place. He also suggested that he had been roughly or badly treated by the police during the time he spent there. His closing remarks to me, that I should ‘enjoy [myself], all around the building’, were ominous. I detected a slight sarcasm and aggression in the way he was speaking to me. It felt as if he was drawing a stark contrast between his experiences of this place compared with what he perceived to be my flippancy.

In his remarks, the presence of a woman having close bodily contact with a building, and the action of opening my legs and arms as I climbed, is written as a sexual action. His interpretation was not an act of reading my practice as a
sublimation of sexual desire, since his story was already inscribed, for him, in this place. My performance encroached upon his story, and so he attempted to degrade me in the most expedient way, writing me as a casual and public sexual object, as a woman not paying due respect to a building that he does not have a pleasurable memory or experience of.

Some of the more frequent responses I received were those challenging me to a competition, testing my ability, or assessing my ability. At one point during the evening when I was climbing up a different wall, two men came up to me and asked how high I could climb, before they tried the climb themselves. Later on, as I was clambering across a small ledge against another wall, a woman ran up to me, asked me what I was doing and then starting joining in with me.

I received several comments like ‘nice balance’ and ‘very nice’, and one man asked, ‘what other tricks can you do?’ Some of these kinds of response can be seen as imposing a competitive slant on the kind of play I am performing, and some extend their ‘permissions’ for my activity (though it has not been asked for), but at the same time, they also display support and encouragement for what I am doing, and at times they reveal a genuine interest and desire to use the city in a playful way.

I also received one expression of sexual interest from a man who broke away from his group on a stag do to ask me questions and participate in the playful movement. He stayed with me for about 20 minutes, challenging me to perform different types of tricks (the competitive element coming through in this encounter), as well as asking me general questions about where I was from and what I was doing. Attempting to interpret my costume, he told me I looked ‘like a
kind of Cinderella character’, that I looked like I was ‘wearing a sack’, but underneath I was probably quite ‘fit’. The narrative this man attached to me was that of Cinderella, the exploited and over-looked servant girl who gets the attention of Prince Charming at a ball, enabling her social mobility and freedom from the oppression she has endured at the hands of her step mother and step sisters.

Even when a woman does not adhere to practices and presentations of self that might be perceived to emphasise her attractiveness – and to show her active contribution to a sexualised, commercial culture – she is already within a cultural system in which women’s bodies are available material for the writing of (masculine) desire. What is most interesting about this project is in how much it reveals that the desires and opinions of men are expressed and impressed upon my activity as a woman.

Throughout my research it is almost always men (and people in a position of patriarchal power, such as the police and security services) who feel they have the power, and the imperative, to make comments and to intervene with my activity. In each of the examples above, the emphasis is placed less on reading the intentions of my activity as an author of my own activity (as a woman), and more on what these respondents, as agents of the public built environment, determine its function or incentive to be, from their perspective. This interpretation leads to a perception within the scope of this research that the public built environment is a space for the writing of masculine desires.
The tension between the mythic and the real in terms of representations of women is extremely important. The stories told by and perpetuated by a society have major implications for the freedom and power of real bodies in public spaces. The adoption of the position of the writer has been seen by feminists as a way to redress the absence of women's voices in patriarchal culture and to rewrite or reconsider some of the most persistent myths in circulation, whilst within this endeavour, the concept of écriture féminine is, at the broadest level, concerned with finding alternative forms of communication that divert from the singular, phallocentric form of language.

Because of its opportunity to present the idiomatic body, movement offers such a possibility for communication, though dance and movement forms have also developed in ways that control the body as well as attaching essentialist narratives of gender. Still, the direct presence of the body has the potential to display a more situated form of narrative if, as I suggest within this thesis, the performer avoids typical skilled forms and adopts a position of skilllessness. The presentation of this type of movement alongside the costuming of myself in a grey dress has enabled me to write an unknowable feminine archetype into the space of the public built environment.

The issue of authorship and writing is apparent in the responses and interventions received during the presentation of this work. The sexualising of my activity was associated with my perceived frivolity and lack of seriousness in respect of the police station and one man's experience of it. His response may have been intended as a way to shock or frighten me, making this one of the more sinister forms of reprimand I have experienced. On the other side of this, several people
granted me permission, either in the form of ‘like’ comments or through challenges in which the action was rewritten as a competitive form of play. Importantly, challenging me to climb a wall or jump across something also allows the challenger the opportunity to demonstrate their physical ability, and to gain advantage or control over the action.

The association of my presentation with the fictional character ‘Cinderella’, by one man, shows an attempt to attach a fairytale narrative – and, importantly, this narrative was one that cast me in a traditional, dependent, and ultimately a girl role. In each of these cases in which respondents reprimand me, give permission, challenge or attach a narrative to what I am doing, they attempt to author or write their own values and desires. Thus, this research points to the importance of inscribing difference in public space, as a way of presenting different bodies actively proclaiming their different values and desires.

Attempting to develop ‘romantic space’ in this interruption, I worked closely with the idea of being ‘unknowable’ and between. The next chapter, in the form of artist’s pages, documents the two final performance interventions produced as part of this research, which were presented in the vicinity of my examiners’ homes and workplaces. In these interruptions, being ‘unknowable’ and between were combined with the aspects of intimacy and exchange identified in chapter five as part of the notion of a philosophy of love.
Haunts
#1.
-
27/06/14
London
Haunts

#1.

27/06/14
London

— 06:38
Stockport suburbs flash past with bridges and cables. I slept well – no dreams. I imagine you’re still sleeping.

There’s a repeated announcement on the train asking people to keep a look out for suspicious behaviour and to report it to the staff. I wonder what kind of thing gets reported.

— 08:08
By now you’re probably waiting for a train into London. We’re nearly at Euston. My phone tells me that the word of the day is ‘environ’, which feels nicely apt. I just remembered that I did dream, about the sleeves of my dress. I wanted to add something to the sleeves that would make them snugger. I dreamt about adding rubber piping to the forearm section.

— 10:15
I located myself in the walkway between the entrance to your building and the tube, but I was worried I’d missed you arriving. I had memorized the floor plan of your building and so I peeked a look up at where you said you would be working. I think I saw you looking out at me. I tried to make it look like I was just idly glancing in that direction.

— 11.30ish
It was good to see you with your friend when you came out for coffee. You spoke to me and asked if I was all right. I noticed that the theatre opposite your building has a show on at the moment called Wonderland; it’s not an Alice show.

— 13:11
On my way to Bradley’s I walked through the garden behind the theatre. Wonderland is about mining, which makes sense, with miners being underground, like Alice is when she falls down the rabbit hole. The garden is lined on one side by rose bushes of different colours.

— 19:14
In Uxbridge I found some pillars just like the ones outside the Grosvenor Hotel in Chester. They felt like an old friend. You spoke to me again. You wanted to make sure you could leave me here.

(Overheard by D)
Two kids in a double buggy, being pushed by a mother or a nanny – a woman. A young woman about 30. I heard the older one say, "What’s that lady doing?" The woman said, "I’m not sure what she’s doing. Maybe she’s doing her exercises."
Haunts
#2.
-
12/08/14 +
13/08/14
Totnes +
Plymouth
12/08/14 + 13/08/14
Totnes + Plymouth

— 12/08/14
— 10:02
I’ve decided to go out and scope things out before I start. There’s an Elizabethan market on. I think about how the women on the market are playing.

— 12ish
I posted a drawing of me playing in your door.

— 13:16
You followed me. I enjoyed playing hide and seek. My favourite activity was hanging upside down and watching the world go by. I found some things. I have left them in a hole in a wall on the High Street opposite Barclays.

— 15:22
I decided I’d post you some drawings, as a way to get into the places I won’t go. To bring the public space of outside, inside.

— 13/08/14
— 10:29
I’m on the train. I took the 10:11, so I can get there ahead of you. I imagine you’re close behind on the next train. It’s raining and I didn’t bring an umbrella. I have inside information on where your meeting is. Room 006 – no windows. I am told the steps up to the Babbage Building will be good to play on.

— 11:40
I’m outside the market now. Glad you saw me before your meeting. The steps up to Babbage are fantastic, as L said they would be. 006 is very dark. There was a man in there getting the PowerPoint presentation ready and preparing neat piles of paper.

— 12:56
I waited for you to come out, but I didn’t see you.
Conclusion: To Answer Back is Always Necessary

As the theoretical research cited within my introduction shows, participants of mainstream sport are typically defined by qualities that are associated with hegemonic masculinity. As is mentioned in my introduction, Roberta Bennett, et al. identify these qualities explicitly in their 1987 feminist analysis of sport. Though this source is nearly 30-years-old, it is apparent from more recent research (2000 onwards) that Bennett, et al.’s findings are still a concern, with less mainstream sporting activities like roller derby, roller skating and skateboarding being seen as domains which offer a possibility of resistance to the dominant, hegemonic gender presentations and relations of sport and culture more generally (see pages 22-25 of my introduction).

The dominant masculinity expressed in mainstream sport subordinates alternative expressions of masculinity and relies upon the maintenance of an oppositional feminine. This system constantly performs and perpetuates heteromasculine power. Even in cultural forms that resist dominant masculine expressions, such as those displayed by participants of skateboarding (as discussed in my introduction and chapter one), femininity is understood as the opposite of a desirable presentation of gender. When women and girls enter into physical activities, such as this, their presence is unlikely to shift dominant presentations of gender, which means they must find ways of being accepted, usually through the adoption of what are typically masculine traits, or through developing their own female-oriented factions of a particular sport or activity, which tend to be located at the margins of that subculture, and of mainstream culture.
The history of skateboarding is particularly interesting in this regard. The Zephyr team, whose flowing and gliding could easily be defined as quite a feminine style of movement, chose to articulate themselves as typically masculine; their common name – ‘Z-Boys’ – explicitly references this masculinity, and this is read alongside their aggression towards outsiders, their tough image and the separation of their team from mainstream skateboarding practice, which they equated with ‘figure skating’ (Dogtown and Z-Boys 2001), as is discussed in my introduction. The defining of movement or style as gendered is, of course, not intrinsic, but it is interesting that sports – and many forms of physical play – have continually developed as an arena for the performance of masculine domination.

Chapter three of this thesis looked at the notion of ‘girl’ as a problematic cultural position. It can be seen equally as the reclaiming of a term associated with the infantilising of women, or as an adherence to that patriarchal oppression. Whilst the terms ‘woman’ or ‘young woman’ may be a way of avoiding this, cultural narratives relating to women divest whatever power it might ostensibly hold. Much like in sports, within what is a dominant masculine culture in general both girlhood and womanhood are constructed in ways that uphold heteromasculinity. Strong, intelligent female characters that feature in popular culture are often made the object of masculine desire through sexualisation, or are presented as dependent upon a typically masculine character.

When they are not subject to these forms of patriarchal control, they are usually presented as ‘girls’; strong female characters whom, because of their age, do not threaten the dominance of adult men. A prevalent cultural narrative in circulation is that in which dominant and powerful women are associated with malice, which
is particularly aimed towards young girls. Adult women, not patriarchal frameworks, are cast in the popular cultural consciousness, as the major threat to girls.

Finding ways to avoid the subsuming of womanhood and girlhood into this masculine hegemonic structure has been of central concern to this research. Having altered my costume to de-emphasise my ‘girl’ status towards a stronger presentation of ‘womanhood’, the responses I received in Bristol reveal a tendency for men in the public realm still to categorise me as girl and to sexualise my practice, as is discussed in chapter six.

This is not always the case though, and it is important to consider how much the context of a particular setting has an impact on how my interruptions are framed and responded to. In Bristol, I was playing on a Saturday evening, so people were mostly out in the city drinking and socialising. Given that it was nighttime, it was possible that people who witnessed me were reading my interruptions alongside the hen parties and stag dos that typically present as costumed play in city centres at nighttime.

**Haunts**

I decided to title the artist pages documenting the ‘showings’ of my practice for my examiners as *Haunts #1* and #2. These performances adopted a unique format, which was necessary to ensure my examiners could witness the practice ‘accidentally’ in the public built environment, rather than to turn up at a specified time for a conventional show. The performances I created for *Haunts #1* and #2
developed from *Are You Known to Us?* and further explored the possibility of producing an inter-subjective ‘romantic space’ between myself and my examiners.

The concept of ‘romantic space’ has been discussed in chapters five and six and is typified by the qualities of intimacy, exchange, communication and dialogue, intersubjectivity, presence, being unknowable, and chaos, multiplicity, uncertainty and fragmentation. These qualities echo throughout my thesis, particularly in my conception of play in chapter two, which adopts an intense presence and attention to my surroundings, and a focus on intersubjectivity. In chapter three the notion of girlhood explored throughout various sources also reveals a connection between ‘girl’ and uncertainty, multiplicity, chaos and ‘betweenness’. Chapters five, six and seven address the notion of romantic space more explicitly, and my final presentation of practice for my examiners attempts to bring together several aspects of ‘romantic space’, as this is seen as a way to subvert and resist the commerce masculinity of the public built environment.

The word ‘haunts’ is commonly used to refer to a place someone frequents or typically spends time in, and for this version of the practice I was going to be occupying my examiners’ ‘haunts’ – the places that are known to them and that they visit regularly, their territory. In this context haunts might also be used to describe both places of shelter and security, and the hunting territory of people or animals. Haunts can also be used to describe something disturbing, present, and on a person’s mind, and this seemed to relate both to my occupation of the streets – as an interruption – and the idea that I would be on my examiners’ minds, and that they would be on mine.
To haunt is also associated with the presence of a ghost (between present and absent), which related to my use of costume, as is described in chapter three, and the accumulation of feminine representations I tried to distill into the grey dress.

‘Haunts’ is also a regular feature in Sidewalk Magazine, which explores the local skate spots of a different skateboarder each month and includes images of them performing tricks in their hometown. For my version of Haunts, the images depict me performing my own version of tricks in my examiners’ home and work places.

Instead of having an anonymous audience, the practice for Haunts was created for my two PhD examiners. Even though the practice was being framed as performance, and was being deliberately spectated, by setting up the work on a kind of one-to-one basis, I was able to develop a unique and close relationship with my spectators, and to engender romantic space between us. Haunts involved several emails between my examiners leading up to the days that I was planning on stalking them. The level of detail I needed (see appendix 2) meant that I built up much more knowledge of each of my examiners than an actor or performer typically knows of their audience.

In theatre and performance, such as in Fiona Templeton’s You! The City (1988) which is discussed in chapters four and five of this thesis, one-to-one and participatory performance brings the performer and audience member into close physical proximity, but the one-to-one intimacy in Haunts was achieved through knowledge of my examiners’ schedules – an indication of their regular routines, knowledge of the routes they travel, an idea of what time they will get up, eat lunch, drink coffee, and go home, glimpses of the inside of their work places and homes, and glimpses of their partners and colleagues.
For *Haunts #1* in London, I was located mostly outside my examiner’s workplace. In preparation for this, I managed to find a detailed map of the building she was in located online, so I could see which office she was in, and its size and shape. For *Haunts #2*, I was located mostly outside my examiner’s home. So, the two locations contrasted very nicely. Because I had access to my examiner’s front door in *Haunts #2*, I extended the concept of play from physical action to also include making simple sketches of myself playing, which I would post through my examiner’s front door.

These two locations also had a range of other contrasts and similarities, particularly relating to the accidental audiences at each. In London I was located in Swiss Cottage, an economically affluent area, and between a conservatoire and a theatre. Totnes is a similarly affluent setting, but is a small town with a high level of tourists and visitors particularly during the summer holidays. In Plymouth I was primarily located on the site of the University, which was quiet, due to the time of year, but the University is also a place with a higher proportion of culturally privileged inhabitants than the broader inhabitants of the city of Plymouth. For this reason, I was located in places where an accidental audience may have been more sympathetic to my interruptions. It has been important throughout this thesis to recognise how the socio-economic and cultural landscape of different locations conditions my interpretation of people’s responses. In respect of this, the specific locales of my *Haunts* practice are explored in reference to the responses I received later on in this conclusion.
Throughout both of the *Haunts* performances, I kept a diary in which I wrote down how I felt and reflected on things that were happening throughout the days. This was influenced by Jill Magid’s diary entries for *Evidence Locker* (2004), functioning as exposure of my own private thoughts, feelings and observances. Part of the documentation for *Haunts* captured in the artist pages includes some of these diary entries, as a way of making the document feel like an experience of personal material for the reader, reflecting the romantic space the practice attempted to generate.

The artist pages also document responses I received from members of the public who witnessed my practice. In this way the artist pages bring together the three sites of knowledge production available within the project of this thesis as a whole: the photographs represent the view of an accidental audience, witnessing my play in the public built environment (what I cannot see). The glances and verbal responses capture what I personally hear, what I am told, what I overhear, and what I see (what you can not see/hear). The diary entries document my perception of a relationship between me and each examiner, and something of the stalking process, such as how I arrived to the location, when I took breaks, what I ate for lunch, and extra information I received from other people (what you did not know). This final element of the artist pages is key in bringing the reader into the romantic space of the practice through intimate material.

The production of artist pages represents another site of thinking related to the overall research project, through the unique perspective it allows for the reader and through the specific things I have focused upon and highlighted in the artist pages. Whilst I was performing *Haunts #1*, several aspects of the site I was in were
extremely apparent to me, and these are things I ended up focusing upon in my reflections within the artist pages. For example, the Hampstead Theatre was showing a play called ‘Wonderland’ and the garden behind the theatre was full of roses of different colours. These elements have connotations with Carroll’s ‘Alice’ books, and they stuck out to me because of my use of the ‘Alice’ costume and my adoption of ‘Alice’ as a research companion.

Though this is not all clearly explained in the artist pages, the highlighting of ‘Wonderland’ and the rose garden would appeal to many readers as an ‘Alice’ reference, drawing a connection that is very much part of the research project. This highlights how my position as researcher – embedded as I am within this research project – conditions the way I view and think about things. And this seeing and thinking necessarily comes through in my thesis – in a clear and explicit way in this document, and in a more poetic or implicit way in my artist pages.

There is also a moment in Haunts #1 where I make reference to an earlier interruption in Chester, when I am talking about the pillars outside the Uxbridge tube station. The pillars were very similar to ones I played on outside the Grosvenor Hotel in Chester’s Eastgate Street. There is implicit knowing in this moment too; that there is something of Chester to Uxbridge; I am making a connection between the apparent and visible wealth of both places. Aspects of urban places – pillars, railings, planters, etc., become part of a symbolic language that is readable up and down the country in different cities and towns.

My movement on these street objects and particularly on these pillars is also similar from one place to another, to try to wrap my arms and legs entirely around
them. To press my cheek against the coldness of the stone, like an embrace. My physical closeness, and willingness to touch, sit, lie down on and embrace objects found in the street is part of the practice of treating hard surfaces of the built environment with a degree of attention and warmth usually associated with soft fabric and the furnishings of the home. And this is another aspect that relates to the concept of romantic space.

These actions are an attempt to reclaim the built environment as a place of comfort, closeness and familiarity, which is important for me as a woman playing, and it links to the Zephyr team’s reclaiming of the physical environment of California. As is explained in the introduction, when the Zephyr team turned from surfing to skateboarding, they would often treat the concrete as if it were made of water, running their hands along the ground to illustrate their adoption of the streets as concrete waves.

In *Haunts #2* I happened to be in Totnes on a day when the civic square is given over to an Elizabethan market, where stall owners sell a variety of things – often vintage items and antiques, but also clothes and food – whilst dressed in Elizabethan outfits. Totnes has an Elizabethan Society, whose aim is to celebrate the Elizabethan roots of the town. In my documentation for *Haunts #2*, I made a reference to this market and the dressing up of women (and men), since dressing up in this way represents a playful act alongside the commercial activity of selling goods. I was conscious that my interruption would be read alongside these other playing women, and I hoped that I would also be seen as a different kind of playing woman.
In terms of verbal responses and people's reactions to my interruptions, my findings from *Haunts #1* and #2 follow many of those in other versions of my playing conducted throughout the research. Generally I received very supportive and permissive responses, which is partly due to the type of places I was occupying.

For *Haunts #1* I was in Swiss Cottage in London, and outside the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, which is directly opposite the Hampstead Theatre, so it is an area which is sympathetic to performance, and a place where local people are probably quite used to seeing people perform, or are more open to the presence of unusual behaviour, which is framed between two buildings that are typically associated with theatre and performance.

The locating of my practice for *Haunts #1* between these two buildings also raises an interesting dialogue between the types of performance they represent. The conservatoire building and theatre venue between which I located my practice, typically represent the creation of mainstream theatrical products, whereas my own practice occupies a performance mode literally and metaphorically outside of these institutions, one that is more akin to the everyday realm. In this way there was a poetic significance to this location for the work.

*Haunts #2* took place in Totnes, Devon and on the site of Plymouth University. Totnes is a town in Devon that consists largely of independent shops and businesses. It is a culturally rich town that has a strong connection with the arts. In 1925 Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst bought Dartington Hall, situated close to the centre of Totnes, which was in a derelict state. They transformed the estate into an
experimental community-driven educational establishment, a ‘centre for progressivism’ (Bourne 1982: 11). Dorothy Elmhirst (born Dorothy Whitney) was from a wealthy and prominent family in the US and Leonard Elmhirst was the son of a Yorkshire vicar. The couple met at Cornell University in the US, and both had a desire to foster a liberal and artistic educational landscape that would see subjects as different as the arts, psychological therapy, rural agriculture and industry within the same establishment (Bourne 1982: 11; The Guardian 1968: 4). A descendent of this history, from 1961 until 2010, the Dartington College of Arts was located on the Dartington Estate, and it had a particular focus on performance and theatre.

An indication that local people are keen to draw associations to the town’s creative and playful qualities, and also perhaps indicative of the nature of the place, can be seen in the ‘welcome to Totnes’ sign, which has been overwritten several times, firstly to read that the town is twinned with ‘Narnia’ – the fictional land of C.S. Lewis’ The Lion the Witch and The Wardrobe novels – instead of its actual twin town, Vire in France (Herald Express 2012: online). More recently, the sign has been altered to read that Totnes is twinned with ‘Area 51’ – the restricted air force base located in the USA’s Nevada Desert, typically associated with conspiracy theories around the existence of aliens and the testing of experimental military equipment. An article featured on the Metro website discusses this recent prank, and explains that the linking of Totnes with magical or alien places is a longstanding joke (Waugh 2014: online).

The city of Plymouth has a similar history of playful naming by its inhabitants. An article in The Herald on Plymouth’s rebranding as ‘Britain’s Ocean City’ discusses
ancient and modern mottoes that have been used in branding exercises. A line at the end of the article explains how the slogan, 'Plymouth – Spirit of Discovery', employed from 1996 on signage throughout the city was 'frequently reduced by vandals to Plymouth – Spirit of Disco' (*The Herald* 2013: n.p.). This kind of action is a subtle undermining of the authority of town and council leaders, which is particularly apparent in Plymouth; language used by *The Herald* in their reporting of these incidents articulates them as regrettable and inappropriate ('unfortunately') and their use of the term 'vandals' to describe the perpetrators suggests an unwarranted association of the act with aggression and a destruction of the ideology of the city.

Within the city, Plymouth University is a site in which unusual behaviour is more easily framed. An example of this can be seen when one woman asked me, 'is it for your course?' to which I replied, 'no'. The university campus setting framed this woman's interpretation of my playing. Her response suggests she could envisage my behaviour as being related to the activities on a course run by the University. In both settings, I did not receive the kind of naming and categorisation I had previously experienced with the 'Alice' costume. I also did not experience any attempts to sexualise my act of playing.

In London, a larger proportion of women commented on my interruptions during *Haunts #1*, and many of the comments I received or overheard suggested that witnesses were trying to valorise what I was doing by associating it with exercise. I was pleased with this response, as it suggested that my interruptions were not being read as dance or as some other skilled form of practice. Labeling the practice as exercise gives my playing a rationale and a goal. It suggests that the people
witnessing my interruptions outside Swiss Cottage tube station could not conceive of what I was doing as autotelic.

Questions from people in Totnes were more understanding of the desire to play. When one man asked, ‘you’re not going to jump on me are you?’ He was comfortable with what I was doing and didn’t need to ask me why. Another man who when he asked what I was doing and I replied ‘just playing’, responded with ‘good’, which was spoken in a certain and positive way, as if it was an abbreviation for, ‘that’s very good and don’t let me stop you’.

There was much more anxiety for my safety at Plymouth University, with several people expressing worry that I was going to jump off a high ledge, or concern over whether I was ‘alright’. I was not occupying the site in a normal way, but rather than being disregard as ridiculous or playful, my behaviour was taken very seriously and with concern by some. These expressions of responsibility for me are, perhaps, associated with the institutional university site, which is not the same kind of anonymous public space that the town centre is. Universities tend to foster a community identity in which people are encouraged to perceive themselves as part of a fellowship or team and to look out for each other. This is achieved through common societies and groups that bring together students and staff across disciplines, and through the University’s ‘team colours’ – its adoption of branded sweatshirts, hats and bags that identify a person as belonging to the institution.

Concern for my welfare and psychological state is a response I have experienced at other times and in other places. It articulates an identification that I am not conforming to ‘normal’ behaviour, both in terms of the site – its rhythms and
‘habitus’ (see chapter two) – and that my physical appearance as an adult playing woman is incongruent with this behaviour. It is apparent that for some people the logical interpretation of my behaviour is that I am unwell.

**Answering Back**

Whereas historically public spaces could be considered as gendered through their configuration of male-dominated enclosures that excluded women, the current situation is one in which public space, seen as a kind of social body, is saturated by a commercial culture that is itself an expression of masculine power. The findings throughout this thesis serve to demonstrate how much forms of play have a bearing on and are reflections of, everyday life.

Rule-bound forms of play, such as sports and games offer limited freedom for participants, often emphasising competition, which enacts social partitioning, and which is a major part of Foucault’s conception of disciplinary power (1977; 1991). On the other hand, forms of play that emphasise improvisation – an unforeseen outcome – tend to operate through the inter-subjectivity of agents, engendering connection and evoking ‘romantic space’, which I have defined in relation to the practices of Magid and Templeton, and the theories of Irigaray, Diotima and Barthes discussed in chapters five and six. As these sources illustrate, Romantic space is oblique, rather than direct. It is poetic and not easily understandable – requiring tentative steps and uncertainty, much like love.

This uncertainty and unknowing is reflected in the status of being ‘unforeseen’, which is central to the improvised quality of play I have employed throughout this research (discussed in chapter two). The powerful position of being unseeable is
related to the mythical character of ‘Medusa’, as is discussed in chapter six.

Therefore autotelic, improvised play can be understood as a feminine concept, one that does not support, but rather undermines, masculine hegemony.

Another aspect of ‘romantic space’, taken particularly from Irigaray’s concept of a philosophy of love discussed in chapter five, is the importance of conversation and dialogue. My discussion of Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power in relation to gender in chapter five asserts the importance of understanding how gendered power is enacted in the moment. My responses to the men that questioned me and gave their opinions could have been better formulated. This is where the power lies, in strategies for dealing with the writing and elaboration of masculine desire through dialogue. Foucault’s theory explains how monologue and unilateral communication is central to disciplinary power (1977: 1991). Therefore, to answer back is always necessary. Through conducting my practice I have identified three types of communication that require response and dialogue. I have termed these, vigilance, engagement and possession.

Vigilance is apparent when security staff, police or ordinary members of the public feel the need to check that I do not pose a risk to others or myself. This concern is tied to the exertion of authority and the authorisation of behaviour in public places. Engagement – seen as a pledging of the self and an opposing response to that of vigilance – refers to moments that people take a risk with me, choosing to be implicit in the act of play. Often these are corporeally led, non-verbal encounters, involving moments of meta- and para-communication. Finally, there are possessive responses, during which I become aware of behaviour I perceive as risky to myself. The skilllessness of my playing is designed to avoid possessive
spectatorship, but several responses, often of a sexually objectifying nature, jeopardise my occupation of public spaces.

Responding to people’s questions about what I was doing and their verbal and physical interruptions whilst still managing to avoid giving a direct, rational explanation was a key part of the practice. This was important primarily because I wanted my playing to be autotelic – not having any other purpose beyond the activity of play. It was important that I did not articulate my interruptions as instrumental to some other purpose. I wanted to engender a practice that operated through and generated ‘romantic space’: an intimate, intersubjective, unknowable experience, as a challenge to the possessive spectatorship of the traditional spectator-performer dynamic and of the surveillance culture of public urban spaces.

Responses where people attempted to infantilise and sexualise my playing were the most tricky to deal with. In hindsight, I could have responded better to these moments by insisting that I was comfortable with potentially hurting myself, that I didn’t mind getting dirty, and also by being more direct about not wanting to be spoken to or pursued in a sexual way: 'I’d like to interrupt and stop you there. Thank you, but I’m not interested'. It has been necessary, as part of this research, to manage personal risk so as to offer chances for people to take a risk with me.

My intuitive responses to these kinds of comment, in which I would often try to appease the situation and give allowances by not being direct in asking men to leave me alone, is indicative of my own ingrained cultural expectation that as a woman it is a normal part of being in public that my behaviour will be questioned
and commented upon in this way. Much of this research has involved unpicking my own deeply rooted gender behaviour and expectations and questioning the origins, validity and implications of these learnt behaviours.

My practice of developing a transformation of skateboarding led me to consider the historical roots of skateboarding practice in depth, which has highlighted just how significant narratives, in the form of myths and archetypal characters, are to identity, because they establish a ‘base-layer’. This term, base-layer, is not to be taken as suggestive of the notion of an essential centre of the self, but rather the base-layer is a recognition of the complex layering process that is identity formation and suggests that archetypes function as a deeply embedded layer of this kind, which conditions the subsequent development of the practice and weds the practice – in itself not a gendered thing – to a particular gender expression.

The practice I developed from skateboarding was particularly drawn to its features as a site-responsive form of play, its lack of formalised movement in the early stages of skateboarding’s development, and the subversion of a commercialised, dominating mainstream. Like skateboarding, my practice represents an interruption of the public built environment, the breaking of a continuity of social and spatial practice and a form of answering back to this through play. My reflections here demonstrate that there is more I could have done to answer back to some of the gendered forms of social-spatial practice.

In contrast to skateboarding, I sought to do these things from an avowedly feminine position, primarily through costumed play. My costume developed towards the presentation of an accumulated feminine, which encompassed
representations of ‘girl’ and ‘woman’, as well as my own familial matriarchal lineage, as has been discussed in chapter three. Whilst adopting a non-formalised movement, my practice developed into a series of ‘tricks’ that were drawn from my own improvised play, representing a somatic heritage of play and tricks in contrast to the standardised tricks of mainstream skateboarding practice.

My approach to play was one of negotiating space for myself, but being respectful of other people’s rights to space too. My physicality adopted an exaggerated bodily comportment, challenging the perpetuation of femininity as a restriction and inhibition of physical possibility. I rejected the use of a skateboard, as a way to make a direct connection between body and site, one not mediated by and legitimised by the employment of a commercial (and masculine) product.

The type of play I created and its use in practice considered alongside the theories of Lefebvre, have allowed me to formulate a theoretical perspective on play – as an intra-ordinary rhythm – that questions the articulation of play as separate from ordinary life. Instead, it is important for play to be seen as a powerful moment of rupture that feeds back into the production of space.

Operating on an everyday level, my playing is ‘unforeseen’ and ‘skill-less’ as a way to challenge the authoritarian ownership and possessive spectatorship – the ‘commerce masculinity’ (as discussed in chapter four) – of the public built environment, and the possessive spectatorial gaze of traditional theatrical presentation. When my practice was presented as ‘art’ for an intended audience, it was necessary for me to create a romantic space between that audience, through a
level of intimacy achieved by building up a prior relationship with that audience and myself.

My adoption of costuming and presentation of gendered play in public spaces reveals how, particularly men and authority figures, respond to ‘unforeseen’, unauthorised performances in ways that attempt to regulate space in line with the commercial masculine framework of the built environment. It is quite understandable then that women would not associate the built environment or play with freedom and power.

It is clear, from many of the responses I have received, that what I am doing physically is incongruent with my presentation of femininity. It is not ‘lady-like’, it is not expected behaviour and strangers who witness me in the street frequently question me about it. There is an unspoken authority of public space and behaviour, which is policed by ordinary people on an everyday level. To create an interruption is like swimming against the flow; it is a struggle and a negotiation, but it is important to establish ruptures and to create spaces for new and alternative expressions of gender identity and behaviour that may ripple out to other parts of everyday life.

Undertaking this research has enabled me to contribute knowledge within the interdisciplinary fields of performance, anthropology and social and cultural geography, of the relationship between play, gender and the public built environment. This is particularly relevant to anyone identifying as ‘girl’ or ‘woman’, who may find the pursuit of playing in public a difficult and restricted prospect because of their gender.
My research has resulted in strategies which interrupt and undermine masculine dominance, strategies that can be used by a woman wishing to play in the public built environment – either informally or through the creation of her own performance interruptions. The first strategy lies in recognising the power of the instant and the ephemeral, and that small and fleeting interruptions of public space have far-reaching potential. The second strategy is to find performance methods that make an issue of the spectator, bringing them towards an intimate engagement with the activity. This can be done through types of one-to-one or small group performance, durational processes, or simply through the use of a verbal or physical language that might be resistant to normative social discourse and thus seem bewildering. The third strategy involves the adoption of a performance style that reconsiders notions of skill and virtuosity through new forms of performance, rather than the consumption of an existing form. This might involve the performer drawing upon their somatic and personal history, as a way of presenting a local and situated practice, rather than a well known cultural form.

The fourth strategy for a woman making playful interruptions is to recognise and emphasise her status as an adult woman, through behaviour and costuming. This is a strategy for avoiding infantilisation, and helps to normalise the connection between playing and being an adult. Relating to this, the fifth strategy involves being prepared for dealing with responses of vigilance, engagement and possession through fluidity and unknowing. Being fluid and unknowing relates to each of the three types of common response as it enables the playing woman to envisage herself as not trying to meet standards and demands, but rather of
returning a question with a question, or with uncertainty, or with an unexpected response – of problematising the situation rather than seeking to resolve it.

My findings from this research also suggest possible approaches that might be taken by town planners, educators, and adults generally, to make play and the public built environment more accessible to women. Connected to this are questions for the performance industries, and what role they might play in encouraging alternative forms of performance spectatorship. In school environments, particularly for the adolescent age group from 13 upwards, institutions could integrate free play and somatic movement sessions, alongside the more rule-bound and gender divisive forms of play undertaken as part of physical education. This would not only encourage a wider and more alternative range of bodily comportment in young women and men, but would also develop creative responsive thinking and moving that could be beneficial in other aspects of education.

Town planners and councils could do more to provide dwelling places in the public built environment, so that a balance can be drawn between the commercial/productive and the leisurely/unproductive. Along with this, architects and planners could encourage alternative uses of space by offering more playful routes around the built environment. For example, stairways might incorporate side ledges and hand holds for scaling up and down, alongside standard steps. Or, text could be incorporated on the sides of buildings and on paving stones that invites walkers to navigate a particular area in a playful way. Whilst these suggestions are not ideal – suggesting institutionally bound forms of play – small
interventions of this kind might help to change the status of the public built environment, as well as people’s attitudes to playing.

The performance industry could also help to foster the creation of alternative relationships between spectators and performers, and the development of performance forms by doing more to support presentational formats that differ from the standard audience-performer configuration and the creation of creative products. As performative research, I hope that my presence in urban spaces as playing woman has contributed some small powerful moments of difference, and that this might create a space and a reason for other women to play.
Appendices

Appendix 1

Street skateboarding images are often - though not always - used for cover shots in *Sidewalk* magazine. Pictures of monumental buildings and well-known (or lesser-known) locations documented as skate spots offer immediate impact, perhaps because they suggest adventure and travel, but also because of the scale of tricks being performed (fig. 10).

The skateboarders depicted are often shrunken by the scale of the architecture, but the tricks they perform are reflected in, and even emphasised by, the size of the architectural features. These images may also carry impact because the act of skateboarding in an apparently monumental site suggests a moment of mastering or playing with it, and represents a subversive act. An example of this can be seen on the cover of *Sidewalk* Issue 190 from July 2012 (fig. 11), which features Kelley Dawson performing a backside 180 nosegrind on what appears to
be a temple housed within an ornate public square, one that could perhaps be located in East Asia. In fact the image is taken from a spot in Milton Keynes.

Often specific information about the location of cover shots is not made explicit in the magazine. This is sometimes due to a desire to maintain an ambiguity about the site (as it may have been accessed illegally), but it is also perhaps seen as being unnecessary or unimportant information. In this way, skateboarding photographs of this sort begin to erase the link between the image and its actual geographic site.

In other kinds of cover shots, the image presents a lone skateboarder performing a trick in close up, such that very little beyond the object being used and the closely surrounding area is visible (see fig. 12, fig. 13 and fig. 14). In these images, the materiality of the urban is presented up close and consisting of grainy concrete and pitted tarmac, grey, white and brown brick, metal, intersecting lines and angles, repetitive patterns and undulating asphalt. The use of this kind of close-up suggests that the objects used as part of the skateboarding trick and their closely surrounding area might go on infinitely, extending beyond the frame in all
directions. They also avoid any identification with a real place from which the photograph was taken.

In much urban skateboarding photography, but particularly cover shots, the skateboarder is often presented alone, suspended in the moment that a trick is being performed. Generally, other people – other skateboarders and public who happen to bear witness to the trick – are not present or not visible within the frame of the image, suggesting that the site being occupied is abandoned, deserted or forgotten (see fig. 10, fig. 11, fig. 12, fig. 13, fig. 14 and fig. 15). It is this combination of features that has established my own romanticised notion of an urban environment. It is an imaginary place, lacking the presence of others, in which urban materiality stretches far and wide in an endless sea of repetitive lines, curves and abstract objects.
Appendix 2 Email sent to examiners to organise final showing of work

I am sending you this email to organise the showing of my practice.

Unlike a more conventional showing of practice, in which you would be invited to attend an event at a given time in a particular place, it is necessary for me to tailor the event to your own locales. One of the central concerns for the practice has been its avoidance of an intended audience, and its status as performance that is witnessed accidentally. Therefore, in order to try and present the work in the most appropriate way possible, I plan to locate myself in areas that you are likely to encounter me around your work and home sites.

What I need is a two-day period in which you are happy for me to know your planned (rough) schedule for these two days, so that I can locate my practice somewhere that you will encounter the performance. For example, your schedule might be as follows:

Mon 16th June - working in office from 10am. At 1pm, I have a meeting in the University canteen. At 3pm, I have a meeting in Room 1145. Back home for dinner approx. 6pm and meeting friends to go to the cinema in the evening.

Tue 17th June - Working at home from 10am - 5pm. Going for lunch at Pizza Express on high street around 1pm. Walking dog at approx. 5pm in central park.

In this example, I would need to know specifics about where your office is located, which park you are walking in, which cinema you are planning on going to, where your home is, etc., and importantly what type of transport you are using to get around. If you would rather that this encounter is kept restricted to your work place only, or your home site only, then please only give me that information. i.e. I will assume that any details you include of your whereabouts, would be suitable for me to turn up to.

The performance work does not require any participation from you and is designed for public spaces, so I will not go into your work place (or home!), but I will locate myself outside, or near by. It is more likely that I will turn up as you transport yourself from one place to another, rather than when you arrive somewhere. I will not make any attempt to interact with you during my performance (unless you initiate it as part of the work).

Because of the fleeting nature of your witnessing, I need a couple of days to ensure that you can see enough of the practice to examine it. Please see below a list of recommended dates; though I am extremely flexible, so if other dates are more appropriate, please say.

I hope that this makes sense. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask. I look forward to seeing you (and you hopefully seeing me) soon.

Warmest regards,
Dani
Appendix 3 Instructions to Participants for my performance, titled *True Love Waits*:

Instructions and rules for engagement.

- I'm outside the building.

  For ease of identification, I'm located within a

  ----- salt circle. -----

  This performance is expected to be nothing more than a playful encounter between two or more people.

  The action is not for anyone in particular.

  Our performance begins when you enter the action and ends when you exit.
You and I are responsible for the space.

Once the rules are learnt they can be broken.

5 — Take control
4 — Relinquish control
3 — Keep inside the circle
2 — Be respectful of the site and its users
1 — Avoid verbal communication

The rules are:

We're going to get bored. We're going to play.
Appendix 4

Image of the poster for my performance *Are You Known to Us?*

This notice is a stand-in for my **performance** which is happening outside the building, as you stand here reading.

The performance isn’t here because it’s made for an accidental audience. It’s designed to be happened upon, or accidentally encountered. You may even have seen it already as you made your way to the venue this evening.

*Are You Known To Us? Is* a response I received during a similar playful intervention I made in 2009. It came from two police officers as I was performing in a costume referencing popular depictions of ‘Ahi’ in Plymouth town centre.

On our level they were asking if I was someone who has had dealings with the Devon and Cornwall Police, but the pronoun ‘us’ also represents a collective social power in which there are accepted modes of conduct that are not deciphering.

I want to transform you into a conspirator to the action, rather than a spectator. Or, at least, to generate a consciousness of my actions that are absent from this building.

**Please** take a seat, put the headphones on and operate the MP3 player for further information and instructions...

[Website link](http://www.dawnflemmings.wordpress.com)
Appendix 5

Transcript of audio, which was presented as part of Are You Known to Us?

When the police stopped me in Plymouth, they wanted to know what I was doing. They assumed I was mentally ill and asked me repeatedly ‘are you known to us?’ This question was intriguing to me. The initial thought is to assume that it is my activity that is considered ‘unknown’ or strange, but this is not quite accurate. The kind of playing actions I perform are quite like the spontaneous climbing on or clambering underneath things commonly performed by children as they navigate the urban environment with their parents. There are also lots of established playful activities - albeit those commonly performed by young men – in the forms of skateboarding, rollerblading and parkour that do not attract quite the same kind of attention.

The costume was certainly unusual, but there is a sense that it is a combination of things; costume, activity and status as a woman that make my performances unknown. In fact, ‘are you known to us?’ is a question that underlines the strangeness of not being a child and not being a young man, as these are the types of bodies who typically play in urban space. Being a stranger in this context is being a playing woman, and it is a powerful position that has the potential to re-organise the gender of urban space.

There are some maps here on the table – inside the brown envelope, which detail the rough area I’m in outside. Please take one if you’d like to venture outside to watch, join in with me, or create your own intervention.

I’m wearing a grey dress.
Appendix. 6

Skill-less Tricks Dani Abulhawa
For this task, you will (at some point) need to work with someone else

First Using the space – the architecture, street furniture, pedestrian rhythms and behaviours of a site – develop a physical action (a trick); something as subtle or as blatant as you like, which responds playfully to, and which you enjoy performing, in a chosen public, urban location. Choose something that deceives (is unfaithful to) the rules of your chosen site, something unexpected, something sped up, or slowed down,

Don’t feel the need to commit to one thing – there are plenty more tricks in the sea

Please don’t attempt anything that:
w. May be construed as aggressive or competitive within the space (avoid standing on something designed for seating, or damaging anything)
x. Might damage you personally.

Please do attempt anything that:
r. Springs to mind
s. Seems extremely lacking in skill
t. Is playful

Second Teach someone else your trick and learn theirs – how does it feel to try on someone else’s trick?

Thirdly Develop your trick, based on the experience of learning your friends.

Fourth Inconspicuously, dwell within the space as you watch someone else perform your trick – how does the space become transformed whilst they are doing this? What happens when they have finished performing it? How do you feel about your trick? Do you notice any responses from members of the public, within the space?

Fifth Take one photograph of your action as your friend performs it.

Sixthly Write a sentence or caption to accompany your photograph.
List of References


_The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe_. (2005). Directed by Andrew Adamson and Michael Apted [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.


Publications

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Female Skateboarding: Re-writing Gender

In the opening paragraph of the article “Space, Place and Gender”, Doreen Massey remembers, as a nine or ten year old living on the outskirts of Manchester, her experience of “going into town” with her family. She remembers witnessing, every Saturday, the vast grassy land between home and Manchester city centre, passed by on the bus journey, having been divided up into hundreds of football and rugby pitches, and being entirely occupied by boys. She says:

I remember... it striking me very clearly – even then as a puzzled, slightly thoughtful little girl – that all this huge stretch of the Mersey flood plain had been entirely given over to boys... I did not go to those playing fields – they seemed barred, another world.  
(Massey 185)

The other world Massey identifies represents those spaces or places of human environments inaccessible to certain social and cultural groups. More specifically, it represents the difficulty which women face when participating in male gendered activities; for Massey it is not only the playing fields that seem barred but also the activity being undertaken.

Aside from their gendered nature – or perhaps because of this – traditional, competitive sports (such as football and rugby) are deemed to be of the greatest cultural importance, commanding consistent attention in the media. Therefore, such activities dominate in more ways than purely spatially or geographically. Traditional sports are often associated with hegemonic masculine attitudes, exemplified in the “Jock” stereotype and the Jock’s relationship to subordinated
masculinities (such as the “Geek” – intelligent, non-aggressive and physically weak). Some non-traditional sports and activities attempt to move away from this hierarchy, developing what Becky Beal describes as an “alternative masculinity” (204-220). In her research, which is focused on skateboarding, she states:

> [t]he subculture of Skateboarders I investigated chose not to live completely by the traditional and hegemonic forms of masculinity. In doing so, they created an alternative masculinity, one which explicitly critiqued the more traditional form. For example, the skateboarders emphasized participant control, self expression, and open participation which differ greatly from the hegemonic values of adult authority, conformity, and elite competition. (Beal 204)

Here, Beal articulates participant control, self expression and open participation as features of an anti-hegemonic social organisation, which would seem to suggest that skateboarding is a progressive and positive activity. However, as is highlighted by Beal in her article, skateboarding’s liberalism and permissiveness is paradoxically compromised by an inherent sexism and heteromasculine focus within the subculture.

The focus of this paper is on the male dominated lifestyle/activity/sport/subculture34 of skateboarding. The central argument is concerned with the notion of female skateboarders occupying an “edgeland” position within the subculture and how, from these edgelands, female participants might re-write their involvement through the performance of gender.

“Edgeland” is understood by Marion Shoard’s coining of the term to describe:

> [t]he apparently unplanned, certainly uncelebrated and largely incomprehensible territory where town and country meet... as we flash past its seemingly meaningless contours in train, car or bus we somehow

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34 The contestation of what skateboarding is relates to the different modes in which skateboarding is perceived. Some skateboarders would not regard their practice as a sport; on the other hand, there has recently been a push to include skateboarding in the Olympic Games. The term “activity” seems to suggest light involvement rather than saturation within something, whilst the term “subculture” is rooted within cultural theory and may not necessarily be commonly understood or used by participants. In many cases it may be viewed as a lifestyle, influencing participant’s choices of clothing, music, art and also attitude.
fail to register it on our retinas. When we deliberately visit it, this is often for mundane activities like taking the car to be serviced or household waste to the disposal plant, which we choose to discount as part of our lives. (118)

Shoard is specific in her term, with edgelands referring to sites between town and country. But the term could also describe areas at the edges of the city or town, between city and suburb, such as the vast grey flatlands underneath ring-road carriageways or the dilapidated landscape of bygone industrial warehouses and service roads. The term could also refer to a cultural edgelands. Shoard states that, “[t]he edgelands are raw and rough and rather than seeming people-friendly are often sombre and menacing, flaunting their participation in activities we do not wholly understand” (121). Applying this quotation to the skateboarding subculture in general is straightforward, since attitudes towards skateboarders are often negative.

Skateboarding-related internet forums are rife with stories from skateboarders who report having been verbally and physically attacked whilst attempting to skateboard in public and private sites, whilst skateboard filmmakers regularly include documentation of confrontations between skateboarders and local authorities, business owners, or the public, in skate videos. Most examples present skateboarders as responsible and reasonable in these situations, such as in professional skateboarder, Anthony Pappalardo’s, section from the Transworld Skateboarding video IE (2001). In this video, Pappalardo, appealing to a police officer who has reprimanded him, says, “I’m giving you respect, I’m not talking back... now I just feel like I’m not getting respect back”. The police officer responds, “How do you figure that? I’m talking to you,” to which Pappalardo replies “You’re talking to me like an animal, not like a human being”. This dialogue posits skateboarders as victims of overzealous authorities, rather than as aggressive
occupiers of sites; as James Davis points out, in his aptly titled book *Skateboarding is Not a Crime*,

[s]kateboarders have long been thought of as rebels, for various reasons... skaters... use the urban environment in a way which is not designed, and this often provokes a negative response from members of the public. It’s a natural response – what they don’t understand must inherently be bad. (82)

Davis’s quotation suggests that confrontations are essentially an individual’s articulation of their knowledge of the habitus of a specific site as a place that is not designed for skateboarding. Public opinion towards skateboarders, then, is strikingly similar to that of the public opinion towards Shoard’s edgelands. Furthermore, from a socio-cultural perspective, a female skateboarder’s participation in the activity is deemed unusual, due to the perception of skateboarding as being male-dominated, potentially injurious, and physically aggressive. Therefore, female skateboarders necessarily occupy a subcultural edgeland position, though, as is discussed later in this paper, some female skateboarders are finding methods of transgression.

Street skateboarding, or the application of tricks on objects not designed for skateboarding, demonstrates a physical and creative re-writing of the urban environment and the creation of an emotive performance text. The documentation of this exists in the marks caused by the interaction between the physical material of the skateboard and of the object used. This performance text, created predominantly by male skateboarders, is therefore interrupted by the mere participation of female skateboarders, who write themselves into this text, becoming performance interventions.
Representations of women in the skateboarding subculture

Often women are only marginally involved in skateboarding when fulfilling supporting roles to a son, male friend or boyfriend - providing transport to locations around the country and support, attending skateboarding sessions and competitions, and so on. For males, at the heart of being a skateboarder is an emphasis on displaying a heteromasculinity, something exemplified by the inclusion of a female pole-dancing contest as the climactic evening’s entertainment during the annual, Vans Skateboard Company, Summer Sessions event, held in Newquay, Cornwall, UK. Female skateboarders problematise this structure by occupying the realm of the male skateboarder and inevitably find themselves within social contexts that explicitly objectify women. This objectification is not limited to social events and everyday banter: graphics printed on to skateboard decks and images featured in advertising campaigns at times resemble soft-core pornography. A prime example of this can be seen in the marketing tactics of the Hubba Company. A typical example of one of their ads features an underwear-clad glamour model appearing to be sitting with a gigantic Hubba skateboarding wheel between her legs. In their most recent campaign, Hubba have produced two versions of an advertisement and are inviting the public to vote on which should appear in the next issue of the US skateboarding magazine, Thrasher. The two versions, which both feature the same, topless glamour model, differ in the way the model is posed. In one, she is crouched next to the product with her legs extended across the image, in the other she is on all fours; with her back arched and her legs extending in front of the product. At the extreme of this, some companies have chosen to depict violence towards women in their graphics, as Borden states, “skateboard companies and magazines have increasingly used misogynist treatment of women as a way of selling skateboards” (147).
The representation of women as sex objects or in situations where they are ill-treated, “sells well” as an attitude because it reaffirms the heterosexuality of the participant, in what is a heavily male – and ostensibly heterosexual – dominated performance arena. In America, the skateboarding publication Big Brother is “sold in plastic wrapping due to its ‘adult’ content” (Beal and Wilson 34) and interestingly, the title of the magazine seems to enforce hegemonic masculinity, with its readers projected into the role of the younger brother, rookie skater. “Harmless” sexist commentary which features so prolifically within skateboarding print makes it clear to female and homosexual participants that they do not meet the heteromasculine standards that define skater subculture, and females are sexually objectified by the heterosexual male skateboarder’s gaze.

Even in the arena of fashion, the female skateboarder is marginalised, with very few skateboarding companies catering to the female body shape in clothing design. This has implications for the female skateboarder, trying to fit into skateboard clothing, and a subculture, designed for men. The shoe company Gallaz, part of the Globe company, have produced skate shoes designed for “girls”, along with other well established skate companies, such as DC, Vans and Etnies. However, through selling these products to large mainstream chains, in which the non-skateboarding public may purchase a pair purely for fashionable purposes, female-orientated brands cannot carry the same sub-cultural currency as brands that are only available at specialist skate-shops. The skatewear company Fallen, for example, state in their advertising, “Fallen footwear is designed purely for skateboarding”. This, along with an emphasis on supporting local, independent skater owned shops (SOS), results in skateboard clothing designed specifically for women becoming devalued by its mainstream availability. By not being exclusive to the hallowed local skate-shop, it is not fully saturated in the subculture; in just
the same way that female participation is all too often regarded as frivolous and uncommitted.

One of the best ways of examining the skateboard industry’s representations of women is to consider the contrasting ways in which female and male professional skateboarders are represented and marketed. Out of 77 skateboarding companies researched between December 2007 and April 2008, on the World Wide Web, 14 companies sponsored a total of 38 women. These companies were selected because they all deal, specifically, in equipment and clothing designed for skateboarding, such as grip-tape, trucks, wheels, bearings, decks, and skateboarding shoes. They also all currently sponsor a professional and/or amateur company team, or provide their product to skateboarders as endorsement. It is important to note that the number of sponsorships does not reflect the number of individuals sponsored, since professional skateboarders often receive support from several companies. However, of those researched, 48 company sponsorships went to women, compared with 1173 sponsorships going to men. Interestingly, the (British) Rogue Skateboards and (North American) Villa Villa Cola skateboarding companies, which are the only specifically female brands included in this research, were both difficult to find information for. Rogue Skateboards’ main point of information is their Myspace layout. Similarly, the only web information available for Villa Villa Cola was a link to a trailer for their skate video, featuring 12 female skaters from around the world. This strongly suggests

35 These companies were: Alien Workshop, Adio, Adidas Skateboarding, Almost, Arise, Avera, Bacon, Baker, Billabong, Blacklabel, Blind, Blueprint, 5 Burro, Bones Bearings, Circa, Chocolate, Darkstar, DC (USA), Death, Dekline, Destructo, Dufus UK, DVS, Element, Elwood, Emerica, Enjoi, Enuff, Es, Etnies, Fallen, FDK Bearings, Flip, Foundation, Fourstar, Gallaz, Girl, Globe, Grindking, Habitat, Hawk Shoes, Heroin, Hijinx, Hubba, Hurley, Independent, Krooked, Lakai, Lib Tech, MADA, Matix, Mob Grip, Mystery, Nike Skateboarding (SB), Osiris, Pig Wheels, Plan B, Powell, Premium, Quicksilver, Real, Ricta, Rogue, Royal Trucks, Santa Cruz, Silver Truck Company, Slave, Supra, Third Choice, Thunder Trucks, Toy Machine, Vans (USA, UK, Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland), Villa Villa Cola, Volcom, VoX, Zero and Zoo York.
that these companies also occupy an edgeland position, this time within the skateboarding industry.

Most of the companies researched supported their female skateboarders on a separate, linked website under a “Girls” section. The contrast in the profile pictures and biographic information for female and male skateboarders is particularly notable, with many of the companies opting for posed “fashion” shots of the females, compared with pictures of male skateboarders that, generally, present them in the act of skateboarding. In some cases, no images at all were supplied of the “girls” actually skateboarding. Some companies, however, choose not to separate female and male skateboarders in this way. Vans USA sponsor Cara-Beth Burnside, Vans Austria sponsor Sabrina Goeggal, Vans France sponsor Lisa Jacob, and Element sponsor Vanessa Torres, Lacey Baker and Evelien Bouillart, all alongside their male skaters. Zero included the world-renowned skater, Elissa Steamer as one of the main team, not differentiating her as sponsored woman.

However, Steamer is a particularly interesting case. On the Etnies website, she features in both the male and female teams, with her profile information displaying the following statement of her achievements and her previous role as a team rider for the Toy Machine Company:

[s]he regularly makes the cut skating with the boys, and is virtually unrivaled among her female peers... From the get-go, Toy Machine treated Elissa as just another rider, rather than as the head of a girl's division or as a side project. However, it was not until her 1996 appearance in Toy Machine's ‘Welcome to Hell’ video that many in skateboarding consider one of the most influential of all times that Elissa truly made an impact. Her exposure in the video single-handedly redefined the role of women in skateboarding and ushered in a new era of talented female skaters... Elissa continues to dominate nearly every all-female event she enters...The fact of the matter, however, is that Elissa is simply a great skater not just a great female skater. (“Elissa Steamer”)
Here, Etnies sum up the industry perspective on female skateboarding by acknowledging that females and males are treated differently; that females are not required to be up to the same standard as males. The quotation also suggests that Steamer broke the mould of previous female skaters by having proved her ability to skate “like a guy”. Steamer is also included in the Etnies “Girls” pages, as the girl who managed to transcend the female-only section. On the same website, and again while referring to Elissa Steamer, professional skateboarder and founder of the Toy Machine company, Ed Templeton, states:

> Obviously, she’s the best girl skater, and the thing is that she doesn’t skate ‘like a girl’ It’s in quotes because, for some reason, everyone knows what you mean when you say that, even though it sounds like a lame thing to say. She has a good style, stands up straight and skates like a guy. (“Elissa Steamer”)

Templeton reveals an inherent sexism within the subculture by admitting his concern over using the term “like a girl”, but sanctioning his use of it by recognising it as commonly used and understood. In the above context, skating “like a girl” implies skating “to a lesser extent,” and this is a view enforced in the way skateboarding companies construct teams. In comparison to Steamer, then, “girl skater” becomes a category that actually refers to a lower standard of skateboarding rather than a biological difference between female and male skateboarders. In relation to Shoard’s edgelands, the male-centric skateboarding industry appears to have co-opted a female gendered edgelands through heterosexually orientated entertainment, the notion of skateboarding “like a girl”, and through the constructed supporting-role of women as spectator in the performance of skateboarding.
Marisa Dal Santo

In November 2007, a video clip was posted onto the Sidewalk Magazine online skateboarding forum with a caption below it reading, “Just in case you don’t know, Marisa is female”. The inclusion of this comment alongside the posting of the video suggested there might be some confusion. On viewing the footage, three things are apparent - first, the standard of skateboarding exceeds that of most female skateboarders, by the range of tricks demonstrated. Second, Marisa’s physical appearance is noticeably “masculine”, to the extent that she would be easily mistaken for a young male; her androgynous natural features and hairstyle are rendered more “masculine” by her choice of physical clothing, which is reminiscent of all-male 70s/80s rock band, The Ramones. Third, her skateboarding style is more aggressive than is generally demonstrated by female skateboarders, in terms of the speed and force with which she performs tricks. In her consistency and success in competitions against both female and male contestants, Dal Santo has become one of the latest up-and-coming skateboarding talents. Talking about her experiences of attending female competitions, she says:

The guys’ contests go on for 3 days while the girls’ contests go on for 20 minutes. There’s usually 10 people at the most in the crowd... [a]t most of them, we all get paid something so it’s win/win even if you get last. For those same reasons they’re also kind of lame and embarrassing, cause it shows how low girls are viewed in skateboarding. I’m still backing them though. (Dal Santo)

Dal Santo expresses an interesting tension between getting paid to do something you enjoy and concern over female involvement being regarded as inadequate. Her final sentence and use of the word “them” suggests that she feels distanced from the “skater girl” category, whilst at the same time expressing a desire to be supportive towards female skateboarders.
Having started skateboarding at the age of 10, Dal Santo’s practice has always been as the only female within a small group of males; she states that she has “never skated with girls outside of contests” (Dal Santo.). When asked whether she would feel comfortable being on an all-female skate team, she remarked, “No, I’ve always skated with guys and I feel as if it helped me in the long run. I try to stay closer to their level of skating.” (Dal Santo.) Many skateboarders believe, as Dal Santo’s statement suggests, that a person’s ability to skateboard is affected by the general level of the group of which that person is part. Dal Santo makes a conscious effort to transcend the arbitrary lower standard that has come to be expected of female skateboarders. Her presence within the subculture, alongside skaters with a similar approach (such as Steamer), is important in the way that they explode this mythology.

Dal Santo’s performance has allowed her to become well respected in the skateboarding subculture. When asked if she had ever experienced any negative attitudes towards her by male skateboarders, she replied: “No not really. The only people that have vibed me for skating were the girls in my class in like 6th grade. They’d say "girls don’t do that" and all that jazz. But I’d like to see what they’re up to these days” (Dal Santo). Dal Santo’s young peers’ responses to her extracurricular activities suggest that as performance, she may be having as much of an effect on mainstream culture as skateboarding culture.

Similarly, another American female skateboarder, Alexis Sablone, in a 2002 interview with Thrasher, states: “I think girls should just skate in regular contests. I don’t think girls should have to have their own category--they should just be in a skateboard contest. Girls just skate with guys, it’s all the same” (Dyer and Burnett). Sablone’s statement resonates with the more recent concerns of Dal Santo, whilst the article’s authors, Erin Dyer and Michael Burnett, draw a clear comparison
between Sablone and Steamer – and particularly to their physically aggressive approach to skating – as they state, “[o]ne similarity I’ve noticed between you and Elissa is that you can both take a beating. How hurt do you have to be to quit?” (Dyer and Burnett). Sablone replies, “[j]ust never; never quit. You can’t stop ’til you land a trick, then after you land it is when you really feel it.” (Dyer and Burnett).

This attitude is also reflected in Sablone’s section from the Coliseum video P.J. Ladd’s Wonderful Horrible Life (2002) in which Sablone is seen to “slam”36 down a set of nine steps, three times. On the third time, she momentarily writhes in agony on the ground before getting up. The person filming her asks if she is ok, to which she determinedly says “yeah” before hastily grabbing her board and running back up the steps for another attempt, in an explicit demonstration of her physical endurance. What is most pertinent about Sablone, Dal Santo, and Steamer, is the way in which their approaches to skateboarding are marked by an adoption of the masculine, as a tactic for being successful. Judith Butler, in Gender Trouble states with reference to Nietzsche that “[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, that identity is formatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (Butler 34). Importantly, Sablone, Dal Santo and Steamer’s expressions of masculinity do not suggest a desire to be male; they are not exemplary of any inherent “male-ness”. Sablone, Dal Santo and Steamer’s success within skateboarding is necessarily achieved through a performance, which is reliant upon the utilisation of costuming and expressive attitude.

In relation to this performance, similar behaviour can be seen outside the skateboarding subculture; in a recent article published in the Guardian, titled “Why Does Hilary Clinton Wear Such Bad Clothes?” writer Hadley Freeman states, 

36 A commonly used term to describe when a skateboarder falls whilst attempting a trick
It is obvious to the point of cliché that Clinton is in a trickier position in many ways than Obama: when he is emotional, he is persuasive; when she is emotional, she is betraying her feminist roots. So just as Obama can cut a dash in his slimline, clearly style-conscious suits, Clinton has to hide herself in garishly coloured squares going under the name of "jackets", or else risk being dismissed as so vain that she would be too busy putting on her lipstick to respond to an international terror threat...last year, when there was a bit of a hoo-ha in the US press about Clinton showing some cleavage, instead of dismissing it as the load of misogynistic nonsense it was, she seems to have taken this to heart and buried herself ever since in shapeless, defeminised, frequently yellow (yellow!) suits.

Freeman sees Clinton’s expressions as an attempt to “defeminise” herself – to hide or detract from physical features that explicitly reference her female-ness or femininity. She expresses a tension in the way emotion and a care over personal appearance is perceived when it is expressed by a woman and by a man who are both attempting to prove their ability to be president. There are, of course, major differences between the practices of Sablone, Dal Santo, Steamer and Hilary Clinton. Nevertheless, their (perceived) negation of the “feminine” as a viable choice of presentation of the self seems to be intrinsically central to their position in their chosen professional arenas.

**Conclusion**

The skateboarding subculture and the heteromasculine standards that define it are produced and upheld by the objectification of women in advertising campaigns, comments within skateboarding publications and in the graphic designs of skateboard decks. Skateboarding, as an activity, functions as a subversive performance text of the city, written physically by skaters – a majority of whom are male – into spaces. The involvement of women within the subculture, as skateboarders themselves, problematises this structure and positions female skateboarders, by their very presence, as performance interventions in what is a predominantly male performance text. Gender stratification has come to be
accepted within the subculture with female only skate teams and competitions ensuring this separation and that the category of “female skating” occupies an edgeland position within the subculture.

Within male-orientated skateboarding circles, notions of skating “like a girl” demonstrate the construction of an arbitrary lower-echelon applied to females that skaters like Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo disprove through their achievements and their refusal to be restricted. Importantly, Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo’s styles of skateboarding and styles of dress and behaviour explicitly reference masculinity, which has the effect of their incorporation into the “centre” of the subculture, marked by their inclusion on team videos and their featuring in the popular skateboarding press. Therefore, their intervention is problematic in that whilst it helps to redefine notions of “girl skateboarder” as well as highlight the performed nature of gender, it also perpetuates masculinity as the centred normative. Their presentation of masculinity and the success this achieves, relates to Luce Irigaray’s claim, as it is defined by Butler, that “[t]here is only one sex, the masculine, that elaborates itself in and through the production of the “other” (Butler 25). This production of the “other”, or of a subcultural edgelands, ensures that the heteromasculine aspects of the subculture remain intact, suggesting that within skateboarding, it is presentations of femininity and possibly, homosexuality, that are “othered”.

The “defeminised” performances of Sablone, Steamer and Dal Santo therefore represent an intervention – albeit one which raised questions of inclusion, conformity, and the possibility of a “feminine” intervention – from the “edgelands” into this heteromasculine subculture.
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