

TO SING OF GILGAMESH: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MYTHIC STRUCTURE FOR
CREATIVE PRACTICE.

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Abstract

This practice-based research study investigates the structures underlying both a performance art practice, and the ancient epic of Gilgamesh, revealing the relationship between the form and content of this performance practice.

This study has asked:

- 1) What is mythic structure?
- 2) What is the form of this performance practice?
- 3) What is the content of this performance practice?
- 4) How can mythic structure be related to a creative practice?
- 5) What is the relationship between the form and the content of this performance practice?

Addressing these questions, this researcher produced and reflected upon a new body of performance artworks engaging with the ancient epic of Gilgamesh. Observations were then examined in the context of mythographic research, particularly the three-stage 'hero's journey' advanced by Joseph Campbell. Both strands of research were scrutinised in the light of key concepts including the individual and collective unconscious, Salomean identification, and alogicality.

This study discovered that the form and content of this performance practice are linked. Critical aspects of the three-stage structure underpinning some ancient myths (typically a separation, liminal period, and reintegration) were identified in the development and performance of the Gilgamesh Cycle works. The performance content reflects an alogical sphere that characterises Campbells' liminal period. This alogicality privileges connectivity between persons, materials, ideas, and states. Such connectivity exemplifies what this researcher (extending Kaja Silverman's analysis of poetry and installation art), has termed Salomean identification. Campbell's use of 'hero' as a figure representing the structure described above, is therefore misguided. This researcher has recast this figure as a 'medium': a conduit rather than a conqueror.

Finally this study has reflected on the success of the Gilgamesh Cycle as performance art practice, concluding that unanswered questions are necessary for the continued production of work. The increasing elucidation of this body of work has, for this researcher, rendered it finite.

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Audio 4	Appendix M	Pg 364	<i>A Love Song, For Gilgamesh</i> (a.2013). Audio recording of live performance on the SS Rotterdam.

Media Files

Chapter 1. Introduction

TO SING OF GILGAMESH: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MYTHIC STRUCTURE FOR CREATIVE PRACTICE.

Sit down now. Sit down and I will tell you a story. Sit down and I will tell you a story about Gilgamesh, surpassing all kings powerful and splendid a bull of a man. Sit down and I will tell you of Gilgamesh.¹

Once upon a time in the city of Uruk there was a great king called Gilgamesh, who was two thirds human and one third divine. Gilgamesh was arrogant and despotic until he met the wild man Enkidu, who was two thirds human and one third animal. Together the king and the wild man killed a monster, but then they angered the goddess Ishtar with an act of blasphemy. The gods punished Enkidu by ending his life, and so in grief Gilgamesh went on a quest to discover how to live forever. The king learned the secret of immortality from a man who had survived a great flood, but on his way home he lost this knowledge. Gilgamesh returned to the city of Uruk, to be remembered forever for his heroism and his splendour.²

And,

Around 4500 years ago in ancient Mesopotamia lived a king called Gilgamesh, who is credited with building the city walls of Uruk. This historical ruler is treated as a fictional

¹ Ruth Barker, *Of Gilgamesh and Others*, performance, 2013. For reference, an overview of the Gilgamesh narrative can be found in Appendix A.

² A narrative summary of the epic of Gilgamesh reflects Andrew George. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. London: Penguin. 1999. Print.

semi-divine figure in The Epic of Gilgamesh, which scholars consider to be the first known great work of literature.³

And,

A long time ago, storytellers around the Tigris and Euphrates rivers attached the names ‘Gilgamesh’ and ‘Enkidu’ to the tales they told to understand mortality, grief, and searching. Once they had been told, the stories travelled, and changed. In other places and at other times, other names became attached to these stories, and the stories changed. The names of ‘Noah’, ‘Odysseus’, and ‘Achilles’ appeared, and the names of Gilgamesh and Enkidu faded. The stories of an epic quest, a lost love, and a search for immortality continued to be told, in many forms and by many cultures, over millennia.⁴

And,

In the ancient city of Uruk, a king who was partly an arrogant god met a wild man who was partly a gentle beast, and they fell in love. Their love made them both human. Together the king and the wild man were ferocious and beautiful, but then the wild man died and the king had to bury him. The king was consumed by his grief. By confronting and internalising his sorrow, the king became a man.⁵

And,

³ A historical perspective on the epic reflects David Damrosch. *The Buried Book: the loss and rediscovery of the great epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 2006. Print

⁴ A mythographic perspective, with elements of literary theory, reflects Grace Dane Mazur. *Hinges: meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Natick: A. K. Peters. 2010. Print

⁵ A rite of passage reading, which explores the possibility for a homoerotic relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, reflects Susan Ackerman. *When Heroes Love; the ambiguity of Eros in the stories of Gilgamesh and David*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. Print

The myth of Gilgamesh emerged from the creative unconsciousness of peoples in ancient Sumer, who composed a great poetic epic, hybridised from multiple oral traditions. The epic was a spontaneous expression of archetypes that still resonate to us today.⁶

And,

Cuneiform tablets containing the Epic of Gilgamesh in the extinct Akkadian language were discovered in the ruins of the library of Ashurbanipal by the archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam in 1853. The Epic was first translated into English around 20 years later by George Smith, an amateur Assyriologist working in the British Museum. Although the text is largely complete, and the discovery of multiple versions has allowed several gaps in the story to be filled in, the Epic still contains some missing passages and incidents.⁷

And,

In the early decades of the twenty-first century a visual artist wrote something like poetry, and turned these writings into performance artworks that tried to tell the stories of Gilgamesh. She wondered why this was.

This wondering figure is myself. The performance artworks are my own, as is the ‘something like poetry’ that I write. As the researcher Maithree Wickramasinghe tells us:

“Reflexivity requires the researcher to talk and write in terms of the subjective ‘I, me and myself’ that are generally discouraged, rejected and ‘illegitimised’ or invalidated in positivist research. This need not imply, however, that the researcher is in absolute control of her / his consciousness and identity. [...] It means that the researcher needs to engage critically with the conceptual, cerebral and emotional aspects of

⁶ A Jungian psychoanalytic perspective reflects Rikvah Scharf Kluger. *The Archetypal Significance of Gilgamesh: a modern ancient hero*. Ed H. Yehezkel Kluger. Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag. 1991. Print

⁷ An archaeological perspective reflects R. Campbell Thompson. *The Epic of Gilgamesh, Complete Academic Translation*. 1928. Online Publisher: Forgotten Books. 2007. Print

the research process as far as it is consciously possible. Morley argues that this involves ‘emotional literacy on the part of the researcher, who can engage sensitively with the research study while / because s/he is aware of her / his own responses, values, beliefs’ (Morley 1999: 19).⁸

We are not anonymous when we research anything⁹ – still less when we are researching our own art practice. We need to present ourselves a little in order to show how our own preconceptions may alter what we think we see. In *Feminist Methodology: challenges and choices* the researchers and commentators Janet Holland and Caroline Ramazanoglu argue that it is the fact of researchers’ transcription of data that gives the transcribed information meaning, and so changes it forever. Data, they believe, are produced, rather than collected: “The term ‘data production’ implies that information gathered by the researcher is produced in a social process of giving meaning to the social world. This is distinct from ‘data collection’, which, at its simplest, can imply that ‘facts’ are lying about waiting for the researcher to spot them.” This is clearly even more pertinent when the researcher is both subject and agent of their own research, as I have been, and it is clear that in these terms, my thesis is a subjective exercise in production rather than an objective process of collection. In acknowledging and even embracing this subjectivity, I am also confirming the validity of the presenting a single perspective viewpoint on one’s own creative process. In Chapter 5.9 of this study I will offer a critique of one aspect of the work of canonical mythologist Joseph Campbell, on the basis that a universal template is not an appropriate tool through which to study a landscape as mutable and variable as myth. Likewise, this thesis presents a rigorous reflective account of a single creative practice – my own – and does not intend this to provide either a universal narrative of practice, or a set of instructions for those engaged in similar work. Rather it is a unique report, a single voice using an individual perspective to address particular questions. However, the ramifications of the data produced through this process are far broader – as discussed in the study’s Conclusion.

⁸ Maithree Wickramasinghe. *Feminist Research Methodology: making meanings of meaning-making*. New York: Routledge, 2010. pg 56-57. Print.

⁹ Janet Holland, Caroline Ramazanoglu. *Feminist Methodology: challenges and choices*. London: SAGE publications, 1992. Pg 154.

Walter Benjamin reflects on similar ideas in a slightly more poetic fashion. In his short essay *The Storyteller*, Benjamin reveals that:

“[t]races of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. Storytellers tend to begin their story with a presentation of the circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow, unless they simply pass it off as their own experience.”¹⁰

Prefacing the story of the research I have undertaken are the circumstances in which I have learned what is to follow. I am a bisexual woman who is married with a young daughter. I was born in the North of England in 1979, to a Scottish mother and an English father. I moved to Glasgow in 1998 and Scotland is now my home. I began making performances as artwork in 2008 and I think of myself as a contemporary visual artist (rather than an academic, a performer, or anything else). I have engaged with what has at times seemed like an epic journey of research and reflection, in order to understand the relationship between the form and the content of this performance art practice.

To do this I have written and performed a sequence of ‘Gilgamesh performances’ that retell the ancient myth in my own words. What is the significance of the form of these performance works? How is the delivery of these performances related to the act of mythopoeia (the creation of myths)? Through producing new performances that have culminated in *A Love Song For Gilgamesh*, and by meditating on the processes of production as well as the completed artwork, I have attempted to answer these questions. In doing so I have sought to learn something greater about the relationships between contemporary artistic production and the underlying structures of ancient myth.

Understanding this contemporary fine art performance practice has lead me to consider the work of other artists with whom I feel an affinity of practice, as my Gilgamesh performances do not exist in creative isolation but are instead held within a tradition. I have identified specific artists including Rachel Rosenthal, Meredith Monk, Joan Jonas,

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin. “The Storyteller”. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hanna Arendt. Trans Harry Zorn. 1968. London: Pimlico. 1999. pg 91. Print.

Linder, and Louise Bourgeois (as well as less internationally known artists such as Michelle Hannah, and Sue Tompkins) whose work has influenced the growth and development of my own practice. I have chosen to recount the personal circumstances in which I encountered these artists' practices, because their relevance to this study lies primarily in the degree to which they have influenced my own creative growth. Though not initially a conscious decision, I have realised that these artists are all women, a fact that I have only become aware of in the retrospective process of ordering my research into a thesis document.

Reflecting upon the work of Rachel Rosenthal, Meredith Monk, and Joan Jonas in particular has challenged me to think about the roles that female performance artists dealing with the form and subject of myth are often cast into – those of sibyl, shaman, or medium. Acknowledging the implications of these roles meant I had to look at the ritual structures they are associated with, practices that in ethnographic use function to connect the living to the worlds of the dead. This returned me almost full circle to consider the relationship between creative practice and katabasis (travelling down), and the importance of mortality as a theme within the epic myth of Gilgamesh. As one idea has become entwined with the next, so the importance of joining and of the connections between apparently disparate elements has become a central motif within this study. Prioritising the interconnectedness of states, people, times, and gestures; allowing the chains of coincidence and association to become visible, has become an important part of my methodology. As the literary theorist and mythographer¹¹ Laurence Coupe says of his own approach in *Myth*,

“By the logic just outlined, we will find that, rather than inviting a lengthy and detailed analysis [of a single creative work], this work will soon lead us to others.”¹²

¹¹ A mythographer is one who studies myths. Coupe says of the discipline that it “has usually been a matter of giving priority to one particular paradigm”, an approach that he critiques but goes on to follow (perhaps necessarily, as the subject of mythology is so broad that unless a study's focus is refined in some way, it risks becoming hopelessly broad). Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. London: Routledge, 1997. Pg 17. Print.

¹² Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. Ibid. Pg. 17.

Myths are often stories about just such joinings, and we can find many examples of loops and unexpected connections. Many myths contain figures that are impossible composites of human/animal, mortal/divine, or other unlikely unions (just as this study may be an unlikely hybrid of academic thesis and practice-based experience). In classical mythology the man/bull Minotaur springs to mind, but the epic of Gilgamesh also gives the god/king Gilgamesh himself, and his man/beast consort Enkidu. In Gilgamesh's great quest for immortality he comes across the Stone Ones (man/mineral), and finds a garden where precious stones and minerals grow from the branches of trees and plants as living, jewelled, blossoms (vegetable/mineral). In addition, time within mythological narratives frequently fails to follow conventional chronology, and instead joins back on itself in Möbius strip convolutions. Duration concertinas and expands until time becomes a strange, flexible, or unreliable phenomenon. The Gilgamesh epic is punctuated by prophecies that allow the future to bleed into the present through dreams, as well as the uncanny stretching of time into "double-hours"¹³ that occurs during the hero's passage through the mountain of the scorpion men. This document too, will not always follow a chronological 'start to finish' order. I will talk in most detail about the last performance work I made, although I will refer to earlier ones as and when it is appropriate. The works will appear and disappear within the text, returning (I hope) when the story makes it necessary.

At the same time as they are *about* these unexpected or impossible joinings, the morphology of myths also reflects a structure by which elements may coalesce to allow meaning to emerge in aggregate fashion, rather than developing in any logical or rational way. Claude Levi-Strauss, the anthropologist who perhaps more than any other can be credited with bringing the study of myth into the mainstream, suggests that myths themselves should be understood as a totality rather than through isolated narrative incidents:

¹³ "On reaching eleven double hours a journey remained of one double hour, / at twelve double hours Gilgamesh came out in advance of the Sun." Andrew George. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. London: Penguin Books, 1999. Pg 73. Print.

“[W]e have to apprehend it [a myth] as a totality and discover that the basic meaning of a myth is not conveyed by the sequence of events but – if I may say so – by bundles of events, although those events may appear at different moments”.¹⁴

Throughout his work¹⁵, Levi-Strauss proposes that rather than trying to extract meaning from a myth in a linear or narrative way (as one would “read a novel or a newspaper article”¹⁶) we should instead interpret a myth like a musical score, by

“understand[ing] that something which was written on the first stave at the top of the page acquires meaning only if one considers that it is part and parcel of what is written below”¹⁷.

We should, in fact, understand that the elements of a myth are vitally connected. This sense of the complex joinings between the ‘bundles of events’ described in a mythic text is of course at the heart of Levi-Strauss’ theories of structural anthropology. Here I mention his technique of myth apprehension only at its very simplest level. Crucial however, is Strauss’ basic notion that a myth does not operate like a conventional narrative with consecutive events that follow one another logically. Instead it functions by allowing patterns and motifs to emerge and connect to one another through the melody as we listen. The elements of a myth are joined in the same way that the elements of a song are – or as a performance artwork may be experienced. The first utterance must be understood in relation to the last, but each moment also creates counterpoints and echoes with other, related moments, in other myths (or songs, or performances). This sense of creative practice (of song, for example, or counterpoint) becoming a metaphor for myth,

¹⁴ Claude Levi Strauss. *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*. 1979. New York: Schocken books. 1995. Pg 44-45. Print.

¹⁵ In works including *Anthropologie structurale* (1955), and the four volumes of *Mythologiques* (1964 – 1971): *Le Cru et le cuit*; *Du miel aux cendres*; *L'Origine des manières de table*; and *L'Homme nu*. Translated by Doreen and John Weightman as *The Raw and the Cooked*, *From Honey to Ashes*, *The Origin of Table Manners*, and *The Naked Man*.

¹⁶ Claude Levi Strauss. *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*. Ibid.

¹⁷ Claude Levi Strauss. *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture*. Ibid.

is one that Strauss himself returns to. In *The Raw and The Cooked*, almost every chapter title poetically references musical practice, with headings including ‘Overture’, ‘The Good Manners Sonata’, ‘Fugue of the Five Senses’, and ‘Rustic Symphony in Three Movements,’¹⁸ among others.

What is a myth, after all? Coupe wrestles with the difficulty of defining this complex and contrary term. “Myth is paradigmatic,” he tells us “but there is no pure paradigm”¹⁹. Instead he follows Don Cupitt²⁰ in allowing that while there may be typical features that many myths share (such as commonly being anonymously authored, emerging from an oral tradition, involving divine or supernatural protagonists, being set outside historical time, etc etc), these features are neither necessary nor sufficient for us to confidently identify a particular story as a myth. “Exceptions to, and contradictions of, any particular paradigm are endless.”²¹

Coupe settles on a ‘family resemblance’ approach whereby he considers a story to be a myth if it shares features with other stories that can be considered to be myths. I would go one step further than Coupe, and suggest that myths may be understood more easily that they can be defined. By this I mean that in practical terms, if something *feels* like a myth to me (if I understand a story to be mythic), then I may treat it as a myth in my performance work²². As an artist the stories I am drawn to work with are those with deep resonance, which seem to speak to me about the scope and scale of human experience. This to me is what myths must do. They must allow us to transcend our individual position in order to connect with a collective perspective. They must be able to join us, in other words, to that which is outside of our self.

¹⁸ Strauss, Claude Levi. *The Raw and the Cooked*. New York: Harper and Row, 1990. Print.

¹⁹ Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. Ibid Pg 6.

²⁰ Coupe finds the ideas in *The World to Come* (London: SCM Press, 1982. Print.) by Don Cupitt influential throughout his own book.

²¹ Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. Ibid. Pg 6.

²² This ‘treatment’ is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Sometimes it is useful to know the etymology of a word, in order to understand it a little better. Myth, according to Coupe:

“originally meant ‘speech’ or ‘word’, but in time what the Greeks called *mythos* was separated out from, and deemed inferior to, *logos*. The former came to signify fantasy [myth]; the latter, rational argument [logic]. This process was a tortuous one”.²³

As Robert L. Fowler’s *Thoughts on Myth and Religion in Early Greek Historiography* (2009), puts it:

“‘myth’ has traveled on a long and complex semantic journey “from ‘authoritative speech’ to ‘imaginative tales’, which did not happen overnight.”²⁴

This journey, however ‘tortuous’, contains within it the central kernels of our contemporary Western perception of ‘myth’ – that it can be authoritative *and* imaginative; important *and* poetic. This of course is a positive contemporary Western interpretation of myth. A negative one is that the word ‘myth’ is a synonym for ‘untruth’. Type the phrase “the myth of” into the search engine Google and although the top result is ‘the myth of Sisyphus’, also appearing in the top five are ‘the myth of the latin [sic] woman’ (918,000 results), ‘the myth of mental illness’ (1,070,000 results), and ‘the myth of male power’ (5,890,000 results)²⁵. In each case the implication is of a fiction, delusion, or fabrication. Acknowledging this is to accept that myths are ungraspable, and that they have something to do with the caliginous area that exists between what is reality, what is

²³ Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. Ibid. Pg 9.

²⁴ In fact Fowler suggests that it occurs gradually in the centuries between Homer (8th century BC) and Protagoras (5th century BC). Robert L. Fowler. “Thoughts on Myth and Religion in Early Greek Historiography”. *Minerva*. Issue 22, Universidad de Valladolid, 2009. pp 21 – 39. Print.

²⁵ Search on Google.com at 09.53 on 08/01/15. ‘The myth of mental illness’ is the title of a 1961 book by Thomas Szasz, although not all search results refer to this title, and the phrase seems to be frequently used independent of the book title to suggest that mental illness may not be ‘real’. ‘The myth of male power’ is the title of a 1993 book by Dr. Warren Farrell, which is described on the back of the jacket as “debunking ‘the myth of male power’. Farrell dares to question the image of male-as-oppressor.” Dr. Warren Farrell. *The Myth of Male Power*, 1993. New York: Berkley Books, 1994. Print.

un-reality, what is believed, and what is spoken of.

My own ruminative journey has been to comprehend the relationship between myth as a territory, and the form and content of this performance practice. Along the way I have encountered Kaja Silverman, Danai Annesiandou, Carl Jung, and Rainer Maria Rilke, each of which have pointed out new directions. Sometimes I have followed their lead, but often I have followed the maps of my own artistic direction. In doing so I have found that it is possible for a contemporary performance art practice to embody the structure of a mythic paradigm – specifically for this creative practice to exhibit the narrative arc of a quest for creative insight. The form and the content of this performance art practice are proven to be inextricably linked, with the work containing many qualities and attributes of the mythic tale of Gilgamesh itself.

Laurence Coupe warns against the tendency of

“privileging one model [of mythic story] over another: for James Frazer fertility myth is the key to all mythologies; for Mircea Eliade, it is creation myth.”²⁶

However, even Coupe does not attempt to tackle the subject of ‘myth’ as an entirety in his book of the same name, but divides his attention towards particular arcs or paradigms: the fertility myth, the creation myth, the myth of deliverance, and the hero myth. This is still problematic in some ways because, as Jung has suggested through his psychoanalytic reading of myth, myth may be wedded to factors far more complex than a ‘simple’ narrative pattern even if that pattern is paradigmatic. Jung’s reading of myth foregrounds its deep roots within the human mind, and warns us against interpreting it as something external to ourselves.

“The very fact that this process [the process by which ‘unconscious psychic processes’ become, for example, a mythic understanding of nature that reveals itself through folktale or story] is unconscious gives us the reason why man has thought of everything except the

²⁶ Laurence Coupe, *Myth*, *ibid* p 5

psyche in his attempts to explain myths. He simply didn't know that the psyche contains all the images that have ever given rise to myths, and that our unconscious is an acting and suffering subject with an inner drama which primitive man rediscovers, by means of analogy, in the processes of nature both great and small."²⁷

We can never, in these terms, objectively 'know' the archetypal contents of a myth, because to know it is to render it conscious and so to transform those archetypal elements. For the purposes of this study however, it has been enough for me to concentrate on the myth of the heroic quest as exemplified in the Epic of Gilgamesh, which is a narrative arc of travelling elsewhere, and bringing something back. The tension between what is conscious and what may be unconscious – what is explicitly stated and what remains as allegory - will remain important to this study. As the writer Grace Dane Mazur describes:

"There is something thrillingly unadorned about Gilgamesh and his quest. Fear of death, or coming to terms with mortality, may underlie every hero's mission but usually it is disguised, camouflaged, or transfigured into something else. Gilgamesh is so brash and unveiled; there is no protective metaphoric covering for the brilliance of his purpose or the starkness of his fear."²⁸

The hero's quest then, is closely tied to the condition of human mortality. It is also however, equally closely linked to the condition of human creativity, as Joseph Campbell describes in the seminal work *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.

"[T]he adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit above described: a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life enhancing return. [...] Everywhere, no matter what the sphere of interest (whether religious, political, or personal), the really creative acts are represented as those deriving from some sort of dying to the world; [before returning] filled with creative power"²⁹.

²⁷ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Vol 9 pt 1) 2nd edition. 1959. Trans. R F C Hull. London: Routledge. 2009. Pg 6. Print.

²⁸ Grace Dane Mazur. *Hinges: meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Ibid. Pg 31.

²⁹ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. 3rd ed. California: New World Library. 1968. Pg 27-28. Print.

The American writer Joseph Campbell was a canonical figure in the study of comparative mythology, whose landmark work *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*³⁰ was published in 1949. As well as contributing to the academic understanding of myth, one of Campbell's great achievements was to popularise the subject of mythography, with work including his posthumously screened television series *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*³¹ cementing his reputation as a great communicator and storyteller, as well as an original and compelling researcher.

The hero's quest, Campbell tells us, is a monomyth – an overarching structure present in many myths of diverse origins – through which the protagonist absents themselves from a particular society, community, place, or group, in order to return with something 'regenerating' for the group as a whole. This paradigmatic arc, as I shall show, reappears in the structure of many rituals, from shamanic initiations to the medium's séance, to the choreography of contemporary performance art. This travelling to and coming back, the ability to leave the group in order to connect to it, is a migration that is central to understanding the relationships between the content and the structure of this performance practice. By reflecting on the development and performance of *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*, I will connect the structure outlined by Campbell to my own desire to make work in this way, suggesting that for me, *A Love Song* represents an artistic allegory of the same hero's quest that Gilgamesh undertakes. Though Campbell's work is important, I will suggest that its insistence on a universal template is problematic because it presupposes a masculine and heteronormative perspective. In Chapter 5 of this study I will investigate these shortcomings, and offer an alternative allegorical structure.

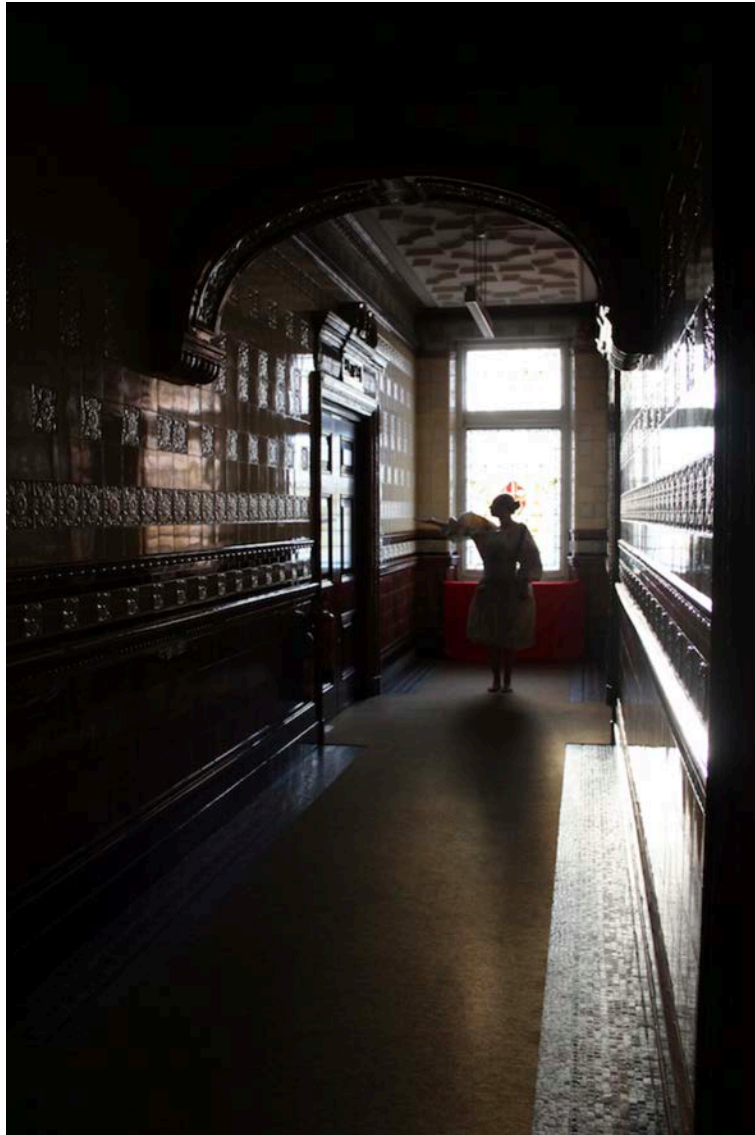
To begin this journey, I will present an overview of the Gilgamesh cycle of performances, together with a more comprehensive examination of the final work in the

³⁰ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Ibid.

³¹ *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth* Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers. PBS. 1988. Television Broadcast.

series *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*. More detailed documentation of works in the series can be found in this document's appendices.

Chapter 2. THE GILGAMESH CYCLE: an introduction to my performance practice



1. Rehearsal image for *To Sing of Gilgamesh* (a.2012)

I am a visual artist based in Glasgow. In 2001 I graduated from the Environmental Art (better described as 'context-specific practice') BA(Hons) course at Glasgow School of Art, and completed a Masters degree at GSA in 2004. Since my time as an undergraduate,

my practice has been concerned with storytelling and with the shapes and images of fairytales, myths, and cultural narratives. For my undergraduate degree show I hung coils of manila rope from the famous rafters of GSA's Macintosh building, as a suggestion of heavy plaited golden hair. In subsequent exhibitions I sewed the outline of a minotaur onto black felt, and sculpted grotesque and outsized antlers in white plaster, ready for an implied human head to wear them. Each time however, when I tried to embed my concerns with narrative, myth, and story into the sculptural forms of these inexpertly made objects, I would feel a sense of anticlimax when the work was finished and I stepped back to assess it. These sculptures failed to convey the eloquence I hoped they would possess (and they were never as good as they were when I talked about them).

Stepping away from making sculpture in order to perform for the first time was a thrilling, confusing, and terrifying experience for me. It came about because of a deep frustration that made me question the roots of my practice; a frustration that grew from a realisation that few people seemed to engage with the exhibitions I was making at the time - exhibitions such as *The Self As Knower Does Not Know The Self As Known* (solo exhibition, 2006, Glasgow Project Rooms). Here the graphite text on the back wall, difficult to make out in the image below, reads OUR SPEECH IS NO PRESENCE TO OUR SELVES, a statement that foreshadowed my growing interest in the possibilities offered by the spoken word.



2. *The Self As Knower Does Not Know The Self As Known* (2006).
Installation, Mixed media (plaster, pigment, graphite) Glasgow Project Room.

Feeling that I was unable to communicate with the articulacy that I desired through sculpture and written text, I was simultaneously frustrated by the growing number of requests to speak at conferences and symposia as an advocate for art practice, which were greatly outnumbering any exhibition opportunities I was receiving. Alongside object-making, writing had always been a regular feature of my practice, informing my ‘day jobs’ in arts advocacy, arts writing, and public art, as well as my visual work. But at this moment in my practice, I felt that people wanted to hear me speak rather than look at my work, and this troubled me.

My move towards a performance art practice that would integrate my writing habit came in 2008, when I made my first spoken word piece – *Octagon Upon Octagon* – for Tramway, Glasgow. On receiving an invitation to speak at a symposium titled Art-Site-Audience in Tramway, Glasgow, I decided to make my address to the audience an artwork in its own right, rather than a conventional conference paper. Instead of an academic paper, I rewrote the classical story of Galanthus as a 40 minute text, which I recited from memory while standing on the stage wearing a black suit and white T-shirt.



3. *Octagon Upon Octagon* (2008). Tramway, Glasgow.

This decision is even now surprising to me, coming as it did seemingly out of the blue. I'm not sure how I arrived at this course of action, nor how I summoned the courage to undertake it – unannounced as it was to both audience and organisers. The experience of performing totally revolutionised and reinvigorated my practice however, as I discovered that I could simply *speak* to my audience, rather than try to communicate by producing objects that stood only as proxies for ideas.

The feedback I received for *Octagon Upon Octagon* was far more positive than it ever had been for my conventional exhibitions, and in response I utterly and immediately transformed my work. I gave up my studio at Glasgow Sculpture Studios and concentrated on learning and honing performance skills, seeking to more fully understand the practice that I was shaping around myself. This practice-based PhD, started in 2011, is part of my ongoing process of practice-discovery and analysis. As I reflect upon the form and content of my work through the opportunity offered by this study, I have sought at every step to make my work more communicative, more effective, and more compelling through attaining greater understanding of its processes, delivery, and context.

Since *Octagon Upon Octagon* in 2008, the mainstay of my visual art practice has been live solo performance within a visual art context. As my work has progressed it has also become more resolved, gaining elaborate performance garments and discarding the microphone used in early pieces. I have experimented with gesture, and refined my vocal delivery and choreography. Considering these works collectively, it is possible to use Laurence Coupe's 'family resemblance' method to find the common ground between the major performance pieces I have made. The following elements are common across multiple works, and can be considered central characteristics of my performance work:

- Each new performance I make begins as I research, identify, and respond to the source myth. (Chapter 3)
- I then write an original poetic text, which brings together aspects of that myth with other elements including autobiography and contemporary references. (Chapter 4)
- I memorise this text by rote. (Chapter 4)
- I have a garment made, to be worn during the performance (Chapter 7)
- I choreograph the work for a particular location, and rehearse my vocal delivery. (See Chapters 5 and 6)
- Wearing this bespoke garment I recite the performance text from memory to a live audience (See Chapter 8).
- The effect is hypnotic and ritualistic. (See Chapter 8).



4. *Mouth Open In An Open O* (a.2012). Cornerhouse, Manchester.

How do these elements coalesce to make a work? The narrative outline goes something like this: I come across a myth, a story that I feel affected by, and I feel a powerful need to make new artwork in response to it. I begin to craft a piece of writing, and at the same time I speak to a designer about producing a garment that I can wear to perform in. I practice the vocal delivery of what I've written until my performance of the text is regular, automatic, and semi-hypnotic. I invite an audience to come to a specific place at a particular time, to see the performance. They arrive. I enter the room, wearing the performance garment. I recite the text from memory. The atmosphere is intense and ritualised. I leave. The audience leaves. It is over.

The subject of my work has remained largely unchanged since my early undergraduate experiments, although my capacity to address the complexity of this mythic content has become more able. I am still trying to understand the relationships between our selves and the mythic stories that we tell. The images of ancient myth still provide a territory for my work, though now I work through the structures of poetry and language, rather than casting plaster or climbing scaffolding to hang great swathes of sweet-smelling, endlessly coiling, rope from the roofbeams. Part of my excitement at the 'discovery' of this new medium of performance was undoubtedly the seeming appropriateness of using the spoken word to discuss the nature and language of mythology, which is itself an oral

practice. Myth, as Laurence Coupe has summarised (see this study's Introduction) is often characterised as a story that emerges from an oral tradition, even when later versions of the narrative become associated with written texts. Returning myths' images and questions to spoken form seemed particularly apt because of this.

This realisation that the medium of my work was now closely tied to the mythological content that I was exploring, gradually gave me the incentive to interrogate this relationship more fully. To this end, since 2011, I have created a sequence of new performances and associated works in order to fully understand the relationship between the form and the content of this ongoing performance art practice. Each of the 10 new pieces produced has been a response to the myth of Gilgamesh, the narrative of which is summarised in Appendix A. Throughout this document I have described these works collectively as 'the Gilgamesh cycle', and documentation of each piece can be found in appendices F - N.



5. *Mouth Open In An Open O*, Cornerhouse, Manchester, 2012.

Each time I have approached the Gilgamesh myth to make a new piece of work my responses have differed. This is as it should be. My relationship to the myth has evolved over the years since I first encountered it in 2011 (see Chapter 3). And I have changed, as

well. In tandem with the artistic context of this work has been an evolving personal context. During the early period of the Gilgamesh Cycle, I was trying to conceive a baby and experiencing fertility problems. In the middle period I became pregnant but miscarried at 12 weeks, after which I took a leave of absence to physically and mentally recover. In the later works I was pregnant again, this time resulting in a difficult pregnancy and the birth by emergency caesarean section of a healthy baby girl, my first child, in February 2014. There is no doubt in my mind that these experiences have influenced and informed the work I have made and the decisions I have taken. How they have done so is, for me at present, harder to clearly identify, although I shall return to a discussion of these questions in the conclusion to this study. At this point, I feel it is important to present the biographical facts as a parallel chronology to the production of work within this study, if nothing else.

This performance practice, like any art practice, exists in a state of fluidity and learning. The contents of past works cannot guarantee the appearance of future pieces. This study exists as a snapshot, attempting to capture and interrogate the nature of the work I have produced at a particular moment in my thinking and making. In undertaking such a project, the work itself has changed: perhaps because I am looking at it closely, perhaps for the biographical reasons outlined above, perhaps because processes of art making always change, and must change, over time regardless of other contexts. I have done my best to record and to understand this cycle of works, and to present an analysis that allows their discussion to inform a broader understanding of the relationship between mythic structure and creative practice.

Chapter 3. THE GILGAMESH CYCLE Working From The Source

Material: The Story of Gilgamesh.



6. Clay head of Humbaba, with a face representing coiled intestines. (Circa 1800-1600 BCE). From Sippar, southern Iraq. Collection of the British Museum.
See list of plates for full reference.

After making performance art the mainstay of my practice (see previous chapter), I began to more thoroughly explore the particular myths I was drawn to. As discussed, mythology and storytelling had long been part of my concerns as a visual artist, and so this content matter was not new to me. The shift into foregrounding my writing practice however (which had always previously existed separately to my visual practice) gave me a new set of methodological tools with which to analyse this content. Specifically, whereas previously mythic stories and other narratives moved quite fluidly through my work (my internal monologue suggesting to me that “Now I will make a work about Herne the Hunter,” or “now I will make a work about the minotaur”), I felt that I could begin

serious exploration of multiple versions of a myth, exploring the range of perspectives and associations that one story could contain.



7. *Odysseus and the Sirens* (2010). Centre for Interdisciplinary Artefact Studies, Newcastle.

In 2010 therefore I began to make work about the master storyteller Odysseus, a decision that resulted in four finished artworks³² and multiple written sketches, test pieces, and experiments. While I was researching Odysseus however, the name of another figure, another story, kept catching my eye. In sources such as the preface to *Homer: The Odyssey* by Jasper Griffin I found intriguing passages:

“The very ancient Epic of Gilgamesh has parallels even for such things as the profound and pessimistic meditation of the *Iliad* on the inevitable doom of man and the tragic nature of heroism, and for the techniques, so striking in the *Odyssey*, of starting the poem with two main characters in separate places who are brought together, and of including in the poem a character who narrates events from an earlier past (Utnapishtum [sic], the counterpart of Noah, who tells Gilgamesh the story of the flood).

³² Ruth Barker. *I Am Odysseus*. 2010. Performance; Ruth Barker. *Odysseus and the Sirens*. 2010. Performance; Ruth Barker. *I Am Odysseus*. 2010. single channel video; and Ruth Barker. *The Odysseus Fables: Numbers 1-7*. 2010. print and online audio work.

No-one, we know, ever said anything for the first time. The poet of the *Odyssey* would certainly not have claimed to be the first poet in the history of the world.”³³

My interest was piqued by these vague mentions of a ‘very ancient’ story far older than the Iliad, and a hero who cast his shadow of precedence over the charismatic storyteller Odysseus. Knowing that I wished to make new work about a new story, I decided to explore this Epic of Gilgamesh in more detail. I had a fixed idea at this point that Gilgamesh had something to do with the sea, and I associated the name with waves, fish, and nets. On reflection I believe that this may be from the connection to Odysseus and his own epic sea voyage, or from references as above to Uta-Napishti and the deluge. My misapprehension may also have stemmed from the appellation “He who saw the Deep”, which is attached to the standard version of the Gilgamesh myth³⁴. Without knowing the story, I thought ‘the Deep’ meant ‘the ocean’; it does not³⁵. The misunderstanding may not be a meaningless accident however. In Jungian terms an image of “the sea is the favourite image of the unconscious”³⁶. This is clear in Jung’s commentary on the drawing below, by “a middle aged woman who, without being neurotic, was struggling for spiritual development”³⁷:

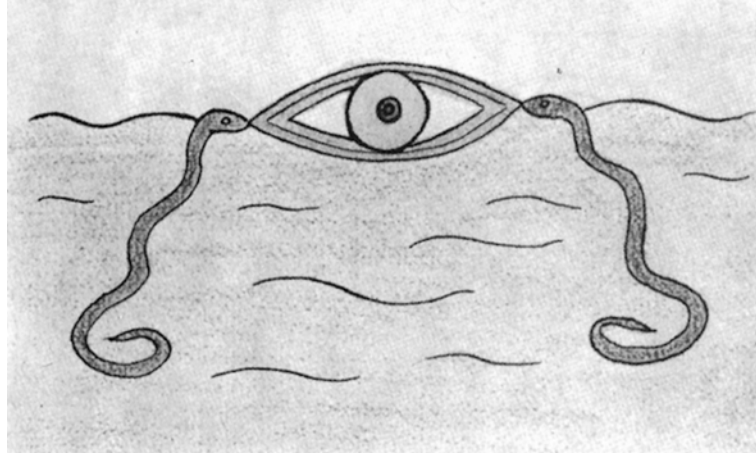
³³ Jasper Griffin. *Homer: The Odyssey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pg 4. Print.

³⁴ “The version of the epic in the Akkadian language that was standard in first millennium Babylonia and Assyria, with some of its gaps filled with older material. This, if you like, is the classical Epic of Gilgamesh. It was known to the Babylonians and Assyrians as ‘He who saw the Deep’. In this book it is referred to as the standard version.” Andrew George. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. London: Penguin, 1999. Introduction, Pg xv – xvi. Print.

³⁵ Instead it means something more like ‘he who looked into the abyss of the unknown’.

³⁶ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Vol 9 pt 1), trans. R F C Hull, 1959, London: Routledge. Second edition 1968. 2009. pg 177-178. Print.

³⁷ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid, pg 380. Image appears as Fig 43.



8. Drawing by an unnamed woman, unknown medium, size, or date.
See list of plates for full reference.

The image is, Jung explains: “a drawing of the birth of a new insight or conscious awareness (eye) from the depths of the unconscious (sea).”³⁸ In these terms, by connecting Gilgamesh with the sea, I was making an association between the myth and the image of the unconscious. It was only upon reading Andrew George’s translation of the Epic as early research for my PhD that I discovered that the landscape of the story is that of ancient Mesopotamia, rather than the heaving and depthless oceans of my imagination. The sea does play an important role within the Epic, but ‘Gilgamesh’ is certainly not the story of a sea voyage. Looking back on Jung’s patient’s drawing however, the connections to the Epic of Gilgamesh are irresistible: here are the waters through which Gilgamesh and Uta-Napishti dive to recover a plant that contains the secret of eternal youth. Here also is the skin-sloughing snake that devours the plant instead of Gilgamesh at the very end of the myth’s long journey. It is through this serpentine misfortune however, that Gilgamesh finally comes to emotional maturity, recognising with insight that immortality may not be literal but can reside in memory, and the passing of stories, such as his own, through millennia. From the waters of the unconscious, insight is attained by means of a snake.³⁹

³⁸ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid, pg 380.

³⁹ This is a wilfully serendipitous reading. Are these connections however, ‘merely’ coincidences? Jung has claimed, in his many writings on synchronicity, that there is no such thing. See for example C. G. Jung. *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*. Ed. Main, Roderick. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1997. Print.

Despite my early mistake, the Epic of Gilgamesh *is* replete with resonance for me. When I came across the myth I was at a point in my practice where I felt both frustrated and excited by my own work. I had by this point produced a significant number of performance works and I was becoming comfortable with the basics of performance as a medium. At the same time however, I knew that there were important questions about my own work that I had so far shied away from addressing: Why was I still so sure that I wanted to retell these ancient myths? How did these stories connect to my work? Why did I feel that performance was an appropriate medium through which to explore them? Retelling these ancient stories and entering into a relationship with a particular myth, felt important to me and yet I was unable to explain why. In conversations with curators, writers, and peers, two related questions arose again and again: Why are you so interested in myths? Why do you want to make performances from them?

I had no satisfying answer, and I could not progress my practice any further until I did. On reflection ‘why do I want to make performances about myths’ was not exactly the right question. Rather I needed to ask why making performances in response to these myths is an appropriate thing for me to do? Through a process of long consideration and development, this query eventually became the central question of this research study: *How can mythic structure be related to a creative practice?*

I began the development of *A Gilgamesh Cycle* by researching different versions of the Gilgamesh myth, trying to grasp it as a whole in so far as this is possible. In my attempt I read academic translations of the epic by Andrew George⁴⁰ and R Campbell Thompson⁴¹, as well as poetic retellings by Derrek Hines⁴², Herbert Mason⁴³, and Stephen Mitchell⁴⁴. I

⁴⁰ Andrew George. Andrew George. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. London: Penguin, 1999. Print.

⁴¹ R Campbell Thompson. *The Epic of Gilgamesh, The complete academic translation*. 1928. Online publisher: Forgotten Books, 2007. Print.

⁴² Derrek Hines. *Gilgamesh*. London: Chatto and Windus, 2002. Print.

⁴³ Herbert Mason. *Gilgamesh, a verse narrative*. New York: Mentor, 1972. Print.

⁴⁴ Steven Mitchell. *Gilgamesh, A new English version*. London: Profile Books, 2005. Print.

also read books about the epic, including *The Buried Book* by David Damrosch⁴⁵, *When Heroes Love* by Susan Ackerman⁴⁶, and *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World*, by Margaret Beissinger, Jane Tylus, and Susanne Wofford (eds)⁴⁷.

I looked at archaeological artefacts from ancient Mesopotamia to develop a sense of a material imagination of Gilgamesh. I found images of fired clay and cylinder seals; of cuneiform script; the head of a lion in silver, lapis lazuli and shell; and of a woman's headdress in gold and carnelian, garlanded with sculpted willow leaves⁴⁸.



9. Head of a lion, 11 cm x 12 cm, silver, lapis lazuli and shell. Dated circa 2550 BCE. One of a pair excavated from the death pit of Queen Puabi's tomb, in the Royal Cemetery of Ur, Mesopotamia. See list of plates for full reference.

⁴⁵ David Damrosch. *The Buried Book: the loss and rediscovery of the great epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 2006. Print.

⁴⁶ Susan Ackerman. *When Heroes Love; the ambiguity of Eros in the stories of Gilgamesh and David*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. Print.

⁴⁷ Margaret Beissinger, Jane Tylus, and Susanne Wofford (eds). *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999. Print.

⁴⁸ These last two objects, the lion's head and the necklace, are objects excavated in 1926-1932 from the Royal Cemetery of Ur (circa 2550 BCE). They are currently housed in the University of Pennsylvania's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and were exhibited in a 2009 exhibition titled 'Iraq's Ancient Past: rediscovering Ur's Royal Cemetery'.

At the same time I found myself extended my reading and thinking outward: Stephen Mitchell, whose writing I had enjoyed, had recently translated Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*⁴⁹. I read this, discovering by chance that Rilke had been deeply influenced by Gilgamesh⁵⁰. I looked at designs by Alexander McQueen (plates 10 and 11, below) because they made me think of armour, and gender, recalling Gilgamesh and Enkidu donning their polished war gear to fight Humbaba, their gender identities complicated, as I had learned from Susan Ackerman's analysis of homoerotic imagery in the ancient world.

I read *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller because it told a love story and in some ways the Gilgamesh story is a myth about love. I listened to *Push The Sky Away* by Nick Cave because I liked the tone, detail, texture, and scale. Myths appear and disappear in these songs. There are mermaids, but there are also streets and cars and bicycles. The abrupt abutments Cave makes between the mythic and the contemporary quotidian felt very relevant to the way that Gilgamesh was starting to permeate my world.

⁴⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke. *Duino Elegies & The Sonnets to Orpheus*. Ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage Books, 2009. Print.

⁵⁰ The poet Rainer Maria Rilke will return in Chapter 8 of this study.



10.

10. Alexander McQueen, untitled, corselet ensemble, materials unknown, fall-winter 2001, Givenchy Pret-a-Porter. See list of plates for full reference.



11.

11. Alexander McQueen, *The Search for the Golden Fleece*, dress, gold leather, spring-summer 1997, House of Givenchy Haute Couture. See list of plates for full reference.

⁵¹ Photograph by Bruno Pellerin, reproduced in Harold Koda. *Extreme Beauty, the body transformed*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. 2002. Pg 94. Print.

⁵² Photography by Sølve Sundsbø. Reproduced in Harold Koda. *Extreme Beauty, the body transformed*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. 2002. Pg 92. Print.



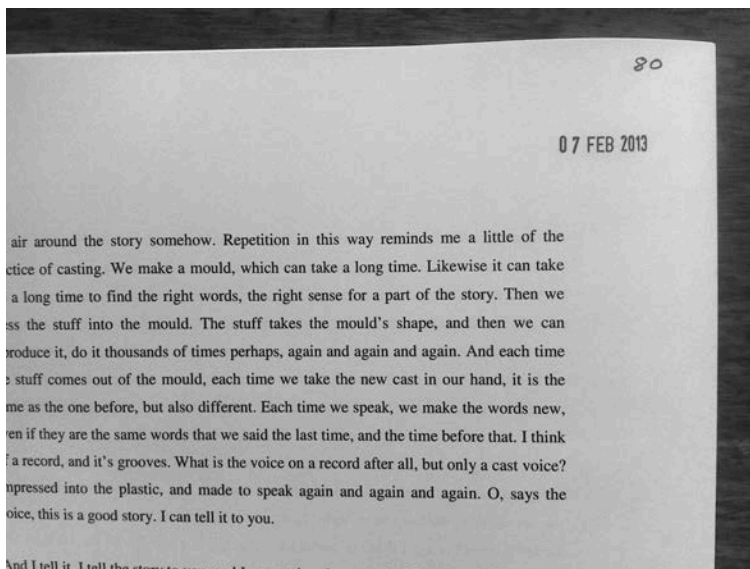
12. Babylonian frieze showing king Ashur-nadin-ahhe II in ceremonial costume (detail). Unknown date. Collection of Brooklyn Museum. See list of plates for full reference.

In this way, over time and through concerted effort, the Gilgamesh myth became familiar to me. I began to feel connected to the figures and images of the epic. From here I began to make the first work in the new sequence, titled *To Sing Of Gilgamesh*. In the chapters that follow I shall present an analysis of the different aspects of my performance work, examining the script, choreography, vocal delivery, and garments that I use when performing. In each case I will attempt to identify why I have made the creative decisions that I have, and examine what these choices reveal about the relationship between mythic structure and this performance practice.

As I hope will become apparent, this process has been a revealing one, as well as a challenging one for me personally. Isolating the performance elements has allowed me to identify a repeated pattern of practice-based decision making. In investigating my creative methodology, I have seen a repeated trend towards accentuating cues (garments, voice etc) that convey a ritual quality to the performances. At the same time however, it is clear that the personal nature of the performances' content (autobiographical elements in the script, for example, and the use of embodied voice technique in the vocal delivery) is also crucial. I will examine the content of the performances, re-examining the images voiced within the performance texts, and compare this with the structure of the work as a

performative gesture. Setting this analysis alongside a parallel reflection on the nature and structure of myth, will reveal that the hero's journey identified by Joseph Campbell is a narrative outline that outwardly resembles both the content and structure of this practice. Campbell's mono-mythic framework is not un-problematic however. By imposing a single and universal structure onto myths, Campbell excludes the possibility of perspectives other than his own masculine image of the 'hero'. In acknowledging this, I shall explore the other frameworks that my analysis may suggest as alternatives, developing ideas raised by the contemporary theorist Kaja Silverman in particular.

Chapter 4. THE GILGAMESH CYCLE: Written Composition



13. Performance copy of script from *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (b.2013)

4.1. Script.

In presenting the work produced as part of this research study, I have (after several false starts and much cognitive wrestling with how to make explicit the implicit forms and processes of one's own art practice) decided to initially break apart my performance practice in order to examine its constituent parts. I will start with what may be the most complex element of my work, which is my composition and use of a written script. I will begin by exploring how I write and edit a new text, going on to discuss the use and significance of reciting from memory. In further chapters I will continue to explore the choreography of my work (Chapter 5); my use of voice (Chapter 6); and my use of performance garments (Chapter 7).

In each case I will ask what significance each aspect of my practice has, and what an analysis of the various elements reveals about how mythic structure can be related to a creative practice. Here, I will show that the words I speak during my performances are

crucial to understanding the relationship between the form and content of this performance practice. The analysis I will present reveals twin passages of motion, which must be seen in concert. Firstly, to compose a performance text I deliberately journey into my own unconscious, and then return. This is my writing process. Secondly, the script once it is completed charts a similar trajectory, which accesses a strange and liminal space that blurs distinctions between mythic narrative and my own personal autobiography, and then comes back. This is the content of the work. This chapter will explore the significance of both of these peregrinations, interweaving the exegesis of my own performance practice with a contextual analysis.

4.2 Writing

In this section I will attempt to give a narrative account of my compositional process, focussing as a case study on the development of *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*, which was the last performance script that I wrote as part of the Gilgamesh Cycle. For documentation of this work, including a copy of the script and an audio recording of the live performance, please see Appendix M. In focusing on the development of this single work, I have sought to give insight into my writing process as a whole. Although every work develops individually and there is no such thing as an ‘ideal’ creative process, the following account of *A Love Song* does describe the culmination of the learning process that I have undertaken through the production of this body of new work. As the final work produced, it is also the freshest in my mind, and so feels the most appropriate for me to reflect upon in detail. Where I have tested particular ideas or methodologies in earlier works, I have made this explicit in sections headed ‘experiment’. In each case I have identified how the results of these creative inquiries have informed the works that succeeded them.

My creative process of script composition is something I’ve arrived at partly by chance and partly through trial and error.⁵³ Because my compositional process seems to ‘work’, i.e. because it seems to be able to generate material for my scripts, I have not previously

⁵³ One of those trials – an attempt to ‘short-cut’ the writing process – is described in 4.5 ‘Experiment: *To Sing Of Gilgamesh*’, pg. 63.

invested as much attention in understanding or interpreting this aspect of my practice as I perhaps should. Reflecting here at length upon my own processes however, has revealed much about the intersection between the subject matter of mythic narrative, and the creative methodology I have used to interrogate it: in particular, it has suggested that the relationship between these two territories is mutable and symbiotic, as it is clear that the subject matter of my work influences and at the same time is influenced by, the creative form that describes it.

4.3 Development Process: scripting the work

In the first work I made as part of the Cycle, *To Sing of Gilgamesh* (February 2012), I found myself trying to grasp the heroes, shaping them in clay that needed to be kneaded.



14. *To Sing of Gilgamesh* (a.2012). Bruce Building, Newcastle.

“To sing of Gilgamesh is to lift
The mass of clay and work it.”⁵⁴

In *Mouth Open in An Open O* (September 2012), I discovered that I was seeing myself in the myth’s shadows and finding echoes of my own experiences of loss, love, and the circulation of time.

⁵⁴ Ruth Barker. *To Sing Of Gilgamesh*. 2012. Unpublished performance script (extract). See Appendix F.4 pg 285.



15. *Mouth Open In An Open O* (a.2012). Cornerhouse Manchester.

“And do I know what it means to lose somebody?
I am standing alone up here
Sometimes we are not in control”⁵⁵

By the time I came to work on the last performance in the Gilgamesh Cycle, I felt that I ‘knew’ the source material and had a strong relationship to it, which had changed over time because of the works I had produced. As I began to compose *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*, I tried to put these previous works out of my mind and begin again. I wanted the new work to grow again from the source material of the myth, rather than using my own existing performances as a starting point, and so becoming a sequel to them.

⁵⁵ Ruth Barker. *Mouth Open In An Open O*. 2012. Unpublished performance script (extract). Appendix J.4, pg 324.



16. Rehearsal image for *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (2013). SS Rotterdam, Rotterdam.

4.4 ‘Internalisation’

Each time I began to draft a new performance, I returned to look again at the Gilgamesh source material, outlined in Chapter 3. Then, when I felt ‘saturated’ in different versions of the Gilgamesh story, I shut my eyes to it. I tried not to think about the myth at all, and to avert my mind’s eye. After a week or so I had started to forget the details of what I had learned, and all that was left was the general shapes and images that emerged in my mind’s eye below or between the material I had studied. I think of this stage as a process of *internalising* the source material so that I can work with it on my own terms.

Once I felt that I had internalised the source material – in effect, that I had enough distance from the research that I would not simply regurgitate it untransformed – I could begin to write the performance script. In developing the text for *A Love Song*, I sat very quietly at first, thinking about nothing in particular. Then images began to form somewhere at the tips of my fingers and, following them, I began to write. I wrote very quickly and intensively over a concentrated two- or three-day period in which I isolated myself from as many outside influences or distractions as possible. Throughout this period, my writing activity was alternated with periods of stillness in which I would look

out of the window or stare into space, daydreaming. I did not talk about or discuss my draft during this time. I wrote instinctively, without editing or censoring myself. I wrote without worrying about structure, sense, or intention. When I was simply sitting, I was not consciously doing anything. Without willing it, and without trying to guide the process, I generated images, phrases, and tones, *feeling* them rather than *thinking* them. By doing this, I now realise that I was tapping into a ‘gut’ response to both the myth and the personal images that had become associated with it as I internalised the source material. The connections that had grown during this process and that started to emerge onto the paper were inexplicable, puzzling, and embarrassing. I wrote, for example:

“Bucket big bucket crab claws and those jelly shoes death.”

Revealing this now makes me cringe. While typing I didn’t exclude, explain, or question what I had written. The form the words took at this point is best described as ‘ugly’. I am intensely private about these early writings because I find them quite shameful in their crude form. At times, while writing, I found that I was speaking words aloud or, rather, that I was mouthing words to myself and then transcribing them after the fact. This is also embarrassing behaviour, that I would not like to be observed.

I worked on a laptop, re-typing each single line several times with minor variations. Lines were incomplete, half formed, fragmentary, and often in a mixture of poetic and prose structures. Meters varied, and there was inconsistency in style and voice. At times I could not tell whether the words I was speaking / writing were my own or those of the myth itself. This is something I have encountered before in my work, and it is not a fear of plagiarism. I know that these words have not been written before, and that I am their author in that sense. But still I am not always sure in another sense: did I write this, or did it write itself? It is hard to give a sense of the sincerity with which I wonder this sometimes. Generally though, I take it as a sign that the writing is going well. It does not always happen when I am working, but when it does I am happy.

4.5 Experiment: *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (a. 2012).

I tested the importance of this laborious process of internalisation in the development of *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (a. 2012), which I documented in the Wordpress blog ‘A Gilgamesh Journal’. Here, I tried to draft a script without going through a prior internalisation process, in consequence keeping the relationship to the research material too close. Reflecting on an audio recording of myself reading a draft of this script I state:

“[M]y reaction was instant and unequivocal: NO. I immediately threw out the script I had and tried to put it out of my mind. I changed location – I went to the B&B I had booked, checked in, and began there to write again from scratch with no reference to what I had done earlier. I wrote quickly and intuitively, drafting and redrafting without thinking about what I was writing. I worked on it solidly for about 6 hours, and finished at around midnight. When I read the new text in the morning, I had a strange sense that the words had just ‘arrived’. But I am very excited about the new text. It feels good – solid – and a lot better than all the many versions that have preceded it.”⁵⁶

This reference to the words having just ‘arrived’ is perhaps initially difficult to understand given that the previous sentence describes an intensive 6 hour writing process. However, it refers to the experience above, of the words *writing themselves*, without my conscious authorship. Following this experiment I realised the importance of this writing structure, and used it for all future works, recognising that it is an important part of my artistic process.

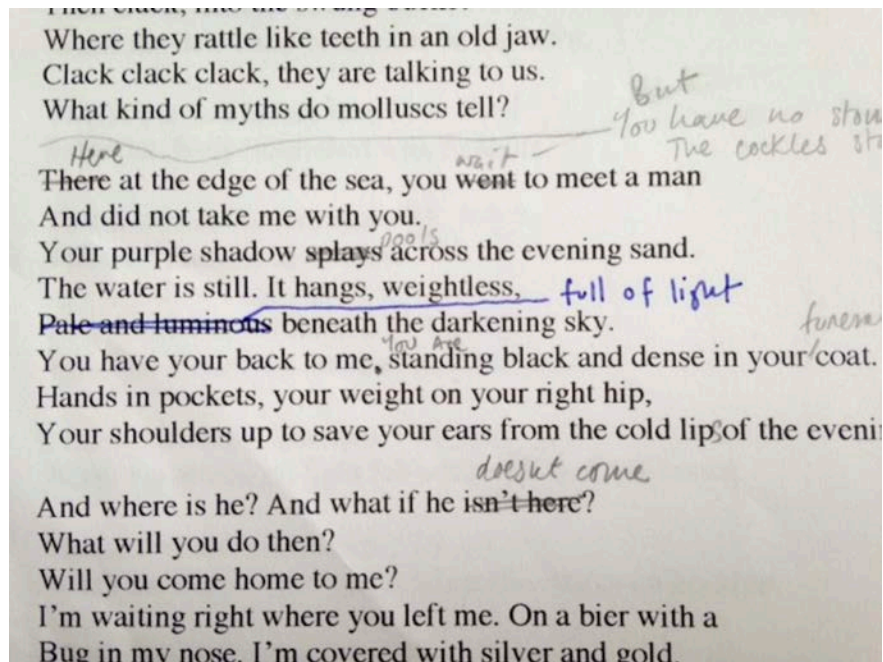
4.6 Editing

Once I have ‘written myself out’ through this intensive and highly intuitive process, my usual approach is to set the work aside for a while (for as long as deadlines allow) and deliberately not to reread it. After a few days away I print the entirety of what I have written and begin to annotate the hard copy with pen. There then follows a long process of editing that takes many weeks, when I work both on screen and on paper. My aim at

⁵⁶ Ruth Barker. ‘Changes’, *A Gilgamesh Journal*. 11/01/12. <https://gilgameshjournal.wordpress.com/2012/01/11/changes/> See also entries 02/11/11, and 12/01/12. Online blog.

this stage is to retain the raw power of my initial responses, but to refine and polish these uncontrolled notes into a coherent form that is able to communicate to an audience.

At the same time, as I edit, I also rehearse and begin to memorise the new text. These processes must occur in tandem because the act of learning the words always impacts on the final script. For example, I may alter the length of a line or the word order of some passages to fit my breathing, accent, and speech patterns. Or perhaps a particular phrase I have written simply will not embed itself into my memory and so I must change it in the text. I am also guided by some knowledge of poetic technique⁵⁷. In *A Love Song*, for example, I introduced an extended sequence of repetitions to develop structure in section III, while patterning sibilant and affricative sounds throughout (but particularly in sections I and V). I rehearsed again and again, sometimes recording myself and playing the results back in order to gauge the effect of the words on the ear, as well as the tongue. I continued to refine the script up until the moment of first performance.



17. Annotated script from a late stage in the editing process of *A Love Song*, prior to first performance (2013).

⁵⁷ I have no formal training in poetry although my own research has allowed me to study poetic form and structure to a small degree, and I consider myself an avid and regular reader of poetic work. I consider myself to have a working or amateur understanding of the field, rather than to be in any way an expert.

This editing / rehearsal process is the most labour intensive part of the process of developing any of my performance works, and is the aspect that I find most challenging both technically and creatively. My aim at this stage of *A Love Song* was to construct equivalences between personal located experiences that were unique to me, and more universal images with a broader resonance both within and beyond the myth of Gilgamesh.

For example, In Section I of *A Love Song*'s script, I describe a figure who may be Gilgamesh, waiting on a beach⁵⁸. The beach this figure stands upon, with its cockles and razor shells and pale pink pebbles, is a composite of several beaches in North Uist in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, where my husband is from: Hosta beach, Solas, Kyles, and Baleshare.



18. Winter evening on the beach at Hosta, North Uist, Western Isles of Scotland.

⁵⁸ For the full script of *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*, see Appendix M.5.

The purple shadows and the darkening sky, the air holes in the sand, the man standing away from me with his hands in his pockets, are all things that I have seen, which emerged unconsciously as I wrote. When I generated these images I did not know whether or why they might be connected to the Gilgamesh story, or if they would be important in the work. I generated other images such as the jelly shoes for example, which slipped away in the editing and have not made it into the final piece. But some images - the bier, the bug, the gold, the sense of the brink or the end of everything - these are things from outwith my autobiographical experience that come from the myth, or from the more general sense that the myth has awoken (a feeling of finitude perhaps, or longing). Piecing together these two separate spheres becomes the central momentum of the work. Contemporary reference points within my text anchor the source myth of Gilgamesh (which is never explicitly mentioned anywhere other than the title) to a vocabulary of the quotidian that is explicitly not mysterious, not other, elsewhere, or mystical: the cockles, the bucket, the pockets, and the chilly wind are all resolutely of our own world. This places the mythic structures, images, and archetypes into a daily universe that is my own.

This synthesis of mythic images and quotidian personal details is at the heart of all of the works I have made through the Gilgamesh Cycle. It is present in pre-PhD projects such as *And The Three Mothers Ask, Don't You Know Me?* in which the speaker uses the formulaic Roman phrase 'O, you were forewarned in a dream' but immediately follows this with the lines:

"O, the dream you had
In the Holiday Inn
The time you overslept."



19. *And The Three Mothers Ask, Don't You Know Me?* (a.2011). Macintosh Museum, Glasgow.

The overall effect is to make the moments at which the two sources – the personal and the mythic – join (or, as is often the case, the moments at which they overlap), to be almost invisible.

4.7 Memorising

I knew from the first invitation to perform on the SS Rotterdam that I wanted this work to be memorised and recited to a live audience. Of the four new texts I produced as the Gilgamesh Cycle, three (including *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*) were intended to be memorised. In contrast, only one piece (see below ‘Experiment: *Of Gilgamesh, And Others*’) was to be read from a manuscript. In each case the decision was made at the very beginning of the works’ development, and was integral to both conception and production.

I used a combination of simple mnemonics to remember the overall structure of the text, together with rote learning to recall each individual word and line. The compositional

structure of the script itself - such as almost-repeating Section I as Section V, and the repetitive structure of Section III⁵⁹ - also aided my recall.

When working from memory I am able to 'go into myself' with a concentrated focus that allows the delivery of the work to become trance-like. In effect I undergo a kind of self-semi-hypnosis, where I am all but unconscious of any deliberate effort of recall, but merely open my mouth and let the words 'fall out' in sequence. This lends a particular atmosphere to the performance, as the works' durations are substantial and my delivery is rhythmic and patterned, quite unlike normal speech (See Chapter 6). *A Love Song*, is about 1000 words long and takes 20 minutes to recite.

4.8 Experiment: *Of Gilgamesh, And Others*

I wrote *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* to be read from a script, purely to see what would happen, as I have never worked in this way before. In the first performance of the work at Cartel Gallery, London (March 2012), I sat at a table with the script on a laptop screen and read the text for the duration of the performance. For details see Appendix G, pg 292. For the full script of this work please see the additional bound document '*Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (a.2012) script.'

⁵⁹ See Appendix M.4, pg 364-370.



20. *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (a.2012). Cartel Gallery, London.

In the second performance, at The Old Hairdressers' Gallery, Glasgow a year later (February 2013), I presented the script on a music stand, and stood to read. For details see Appendix G, pg 292.



21. *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (b.2013). The Old Hairdressers' Gallery, Glasgow.

This second attempt was more successful. Shifting my position from sitting to standing, and taking the script from illuminated screen to printed paper pages formalised the act of my reading and speaking. It also more closely resembled the way that a ceremonial text might be read – for example the reading of a sermon to a congregation in a Christian church. By making the physical gesture of reading more ceremonial, it more closely fitted my ‘trancelike’ method of reciting. I had rehearsed how I would stand, and exactly how the pages could be turned smoothly and without interruption, so that the flow of the work was not affected. Other than my hands moving the paper I remained perfectly still moving only my jaw, which again made my actions seem automatic or inevitable.

The presence of a script of some kind was essential in this work as the duration of the piece made verbatim recital impossible. The length of the work however ([a.2012] is 5.5 hours, and [b.2013] is 6.5 hours), and the physical control needed to deliver it (particularly [b.2013] when I was standing and turning pages) meant that I had to concentrate on my breathing and speaking in much the same way as when I am working on an extended piece from memory. For this reason the experience of delivering the work was surprisingly (to me) similar.

The trance-like intensity of the work was in my view communicated in both versions of *Of Gilgamesh, And Others*, although it was markedly more successful in [b.2013]. The presence of a script initially seems to undermine the tradition of telling myths orally (see Chapter 2), *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* demonstrates however, that it is possible to successfully incorporate a written text so long as the object of the pages and the physical act of reading are integral parts of the performance from the outset, and are choreographed as such.

Nevertheless I was still keen to work from memory when developing *A Love Song*, and it is notable that I did not choose to read from a script for any other works within the Gilgamesh Cycle. Having the script as a visible element within the performance adds an extra and unnecessary component that has to be negotiated. If treated carelessly the paper may become a barrier, preventing a direct or energetic relationship between myself and

the audience. Or the script may become a provisional kind of object – a prop that says ‘imagine that I (the paper) am not here’. The scripts are for me tools. If possible, I prefer to leave them out of the finished works.

I also feel that memorising the words makes me indivisible from them, in a sense. If the text is written down and read before an audience then there is a sense that *anyone* could stand and read that text. This impression is not necessarily accurate however. In Chapter 6 for example I will discuss the work of Sue Tompkins, an artist who works from a performance-present script but whose unmistakable delivery ensures that she is utterly bound to her words. My own delivery, which is discussed alongside Tompkins’ in the same chapter, is likewise distinctive and ought to similarly unite me with the spoken words. The nagging feeling however, that keeping the words inside the artist’s own head renders them ‘special’ is nevertheless relevant. Henry M. Sayre discusses the difference between oral and written poetry in his essay *So Much to Tell: Narrative and the Poetics of the Vernacular*. Sayre rightly critiques the perpetuating of an easy dichotomy between written and spoken texts, (especially in relation to what he casts as a problematic assumed pastoral harmony in oral presentations of poetry). However, within this criticism, he does identify an important ontological distinction between the two forms:

“Oral performance, the claim goes, like performative utterance, does not just say something, it does it (a fact that explains, I think, the aggressiveness of so many oral and performance pieces, with their disconcerting insistence on intruding on the audience). But more important, a written text is always a thing made; a voiced utterance is an act of making. Poets are never in the manifold instances of their published texts, and the written text thus suffers from a lack of authenticity. Its very ‘being’ is gone. Just as in the late Paleolithic era authority rested with the shaman, in contemporary poetics that authority has shifted to the poet. And the *poet’s* authority has been wrested from the authority of the *text*.”⁶⁰

There are several pertinent ideas in this passage. Firstly, the question of the artist’s being *in* the text through the transformation of text into utterance relates directly back to my

⁶⁰ Henry M. Sayre. *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. Pg 183. Print.

sense of becoming indivisible from the spoken matter. Secondly, the act of ‘being’ the poem, of becoming the voiced utterance rather than reading pre-made object from the page, is to conjure an act of connectedness between performer and audience. Sayre finds this experience of connection “disconcerting” in its capacity for “aggressiveness” and “intruding on the audience”. Literally to intrude is to thrust one thing into another; it is a physical (and even a sculptural) act. The impression that Sayre gives by using this term is that to speak a poem is to render it physical, gestural, and volatile, capable of making these unexpected conjoinments between speaker and listener that he personally finds so unwelcome (though this may also reflect the type of oral performance work prevalent in the late 1980s when Sayre was writing). Later he suggests that:

“if the written word is demystified and de-sanctified, then the spoken word – by virtue of its very contingency and invisibility – is reconstituted with mystery and awe. In the ‘breath event’ [of oral recitation] we discover the new sublime – that is, the old sublime reconstituted in the lyrical self.”⁶¹

I shall return to this sensation of connection between performer and audience at greater length in Chapter 8, while the image of the shaman is one I shall return to in Chapter 9.

4.9 The Final Text

My early versions of the performance text for *A Love Song* were fairly impressionistic. As I edited I became aware of particular images and concerns, and worked to structure these. Now, considering the work in retrospect, I can attempt a more comprehensive analysis of the finished text. Throughout this process I shall refer to the voice of ‘I’ or ‘Me’ in the text as ‘the speaker’, to emphasise that I am not talking from an uncomplicated autobiographical position within this (or any) work.

The text opens with a declaration of sorts: “I stand here before you today / I am a young man” (lines 1 – 2 my script). I am clearly not ‘myself’ as I announce this. I am speaking the words of another. Interpreting the completed performance script I can identify the

⁶¹ Henry M. Sayre. *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970*. Ibid. Pg 183. Print.

“house of dust” (a repeated phrase in my script), where clay has been eaten and soil has been swallowed, as the land of the dead of which the dying Enkidu dreams in the epic of Gilgamesh. In Andrew George’s translation, Enkidu dreams of a house:

“whose residents are deprived of light,
where soil is their sustenance and clay their food,
where they are clad like birds in cloaks of feathers,”⁶²

The “dumb wings” (line 9 my script) likely come from this passage also, though I did not consciously recall this reference at the time of writing. Instead I had only a clear mental image of a man with heavy grey heron-like wings hanging by his side.

In the script, the speaker is doubly distant from myself: I am a live woman speaking with the voice of a dead man, perhaps Enkidu. The first and last lines of this passage of my script contain the word “you”, apparently referring directly to the audience. However, in the rest of the text, *you* is both the speaker’s “love” - the brogue-wearing person (sometimes Gilgamesh) who is waiting on the sand - *and* the audience. This contiguity (perhaps even continuity) of figures within the text is deliberate, and can be seen as a sequence of pairs:

I : You

Enkidu : Gilgamesh

Performer : Audience

Myself : My husband

All and none of these are ‘true’.

Section II is titled “A Love Song”, and begins with a series of questions in lines 2 – 4 of my script, *where, who, what?* which go unanswered. The speaker describes a scene that is happening elsewhere. The image in the second stanza (lines 5 – 9) is of a pebbled beach washed by an ocean, and this segues (lines 10 – 23) into a memory of the speaker collecting cockles with his beloved, learning how to dig the molluscs from the sand. My husband taught me how to cockle in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland in the early years of

⁶² Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. London: Penguin Books, 1999. Pg 61. Print.

our relationship. Out on the cold sands with a bucket as the tide turned, we stood bowed at our waists as we watched the tiny airholes appear in the sand, as the incoming water approached. Together, we stared down at the beach beneath our feet as each incoming wave rolled the sea towards us. This image speaks to me of separateness and yet also of connectedness. We are looking at the ground, not at each other. The wind chill divides us. And yet we are connected to the animals we are gathering, to the dampening sand, to the approaching water, and the wind that blows between us is touching us both.



22. Looking at the ground, not at each other.

In the text, (lines 21 – 22) the cockles are collected in a bucket where they clatter together and their clattering sounds like teeth in a jaw. What is the jaw saying? The question, again, is asked but goes unanswered. Stanza four returns the speaker's thoughts to the image at hand. His beloved (and / or the audience, depending on which pair relationship above is being imagined by the listener at that moment) is standing on a beach in the evening, waiting "to meet a man" (line 26). The speaker is alone, abandoned, and perhaps resentful: "you did not think to take me with you" (line 27). The image is one of pause

and liminality. The sea is weightless, hanging, and full of light. The sky is darkening, but not yet dark (lines 28 – 30). This moment too is drawn from the Gilgamesh epic – Gilgamesh is waiting to meet Uta-Napishti, the immortal man whom he hopes will tell him how to live forever. However, this moment is translated so as to be almost unrecognisable. This ‘Gilgamesh’ stands with his hands in his pockets and his back to the speaker. ‘Enkidu’ berates him from his own funeral bier as a maggot falls from his nose, and his body covered in grave gifts (37 – 43).

Section III contains a long repetitive sequence. The opening and closing stanzas of the section take the patterns of informal spoken speech, asking: “what did he say to you then?” (line 2) and “what did you think, my love?” (line 55). These however, bookend a lengthy and highly formalised set of images (lines 8 – 54), a litany of non-dying. These recount the days in which the immortal Uta-Napishti has not died: of drowning, of cancer, of burning, of suicide, or simply of living. The structure references the ancient Egyptian text ‘Dispute Between a Man and his Ba’:

“Death is before me today:
like the recovery of a sick man,
like going forth into a garden after sickness.

Death is before me today:
like the odour of myrrh,
like sitting under a sail in a good wind.

Death is before me today:
like the course of a stream;
like the return of a man from the war-galley to his house.”⁶³

However, the detail of section III’s images are highly contemporary: we are told of cigarettes, a sign reading ‘hungry and homeless, please help’, a Toyota dashboard, and a bed-sit room. When writing this section the images were at first very disparate and unconnected, and felt quite awkward and unworkable to me. I did not know how to

⁶³ ‘Dispute Between a Man and his Ba’ Unknown author, papyrus dating from the Middle Kingdom of Egypt. This translation is cited by Joseph Campbell in *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology*. London: Penguin Books. 1962. Pg 138. Print.

present them, but knew that the work needed these details: pollen on a shirt, butter-yellow afternoon light falling on a bed, a cigarette on a mattress, a tired man waiting to rest. On realising that I could work the images into a repetitive structure however, and that this could itself be underpinned by the text of the Dispute, I quickly found that a rhythm could be established for a far more cohesive section. Section III, “A Soft Song” has now become the poetic centre of the work, a passage in which mortality is explored and woven into the fabric of living. The section closes with gently pitying words from the deceased speaker to his living beloved. The speaker is waiting. Death is waiting. Death cannot be, and has not been, ‘put aside’. The gifts given (the grave goods, the objects given by the living to the dead) are tarnished (lines 55 – 59 my script).

Section IV of my script returns to the tone of Section II. It is the morning after the night before, and ‘You’ are walking home from the beach. ‘Come back to me’ is the call from the speaker to his beloved: “come quickly” (line 10). It is a call for an ending, for closure and burial. Reading the text back, I see it perhaps as a call for coming together in order to effect separation, with the two words “Bury me” given weight at the end of stanza 2. Stanza 3 repeats the closing lines of Section II in lines 16 – 22, but this time they have a different tone: moving from the questioning of Section II to a sense of finality or inevitability in Section IV. The imperatives in this section – “Build walls / Make laws” etc – refer to Gilgamesh’s legendary construction of Uruk’s city walls, but also to a general sense of progress, living, construction, and the ordering of the world. This is a challenge against entropy, and so is placed in opposition to the ‘tarnishing’ of the previous section.

Section V repeats the first section, to close. The only differences are changes in tense: from “I am” to “I was a young man”, and from “I will sing” to “I have sung for you.” The tone is slightly altered as well, changing from the earlier salutation, to become a sense of ending, and conclusion, culminating in the final word “Goodbye”.

4.10 Poetic Context

The script for *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* is directly influenced in particular by two works of poetry: *Nox*, by Anne Carson (2009)⁶⁴; and *War Music* by Christopher Logue⁶⁵ – a long term project that the poet worked on from 1959 until his death in 2011.

Anne Carson is a well-known Canadian poet who is also a professor of classics and a translator. In 2009 Carson wrote a version of the *Orestia* that placed translations of Aiskhylos' *Agamemnon*, Sophokles' *Elektra*, and Euripides' *Orestes* in triptych within one volume. It contains phrases that make my spine contract at the shoulders with little shivers. These lines for example, are spoken by Elektra as she holds the urn containing the ashes of her brother Orestes:

“You stopped.
And I would have waited
and washed you
and lifted you
up from the fire
like a whitened coal.
Strangers are so careless!
Look how you got smaller, coming back.”⁶⁶

Also in 2009, Carson published *Nox*. I have a copy on my bookshelf. *Nox* is a grey box 23cm x 15cm x 7cm, with a surface composed of the scanned textures of collaged paper. A strip of brown (paper? Tape?) is in the centre of the lid, and overlaying this is the image of a black and white photograph of a boy in swimming trunks and goggles, standing staring at the camera. Turn the box over in your hands, and on the back, along with the publisher, the price and the bar code, are a few words printed in small sans serif white capitals:

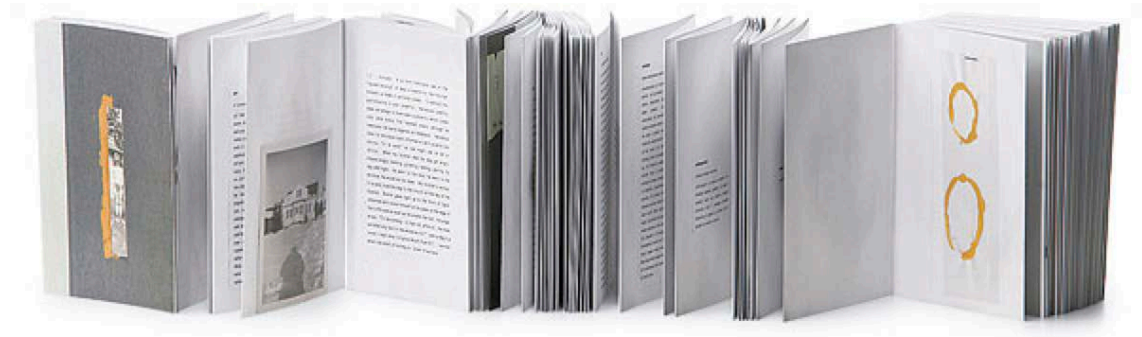
⁶⁴ Anne Carson. *Nox*. New York: New Directions, 2009. Print.

⁶⁵ *War Music* is the collective title given to the following poetic works by Christopher Logue: *Patrocleia* (1962); *Pax* (1967); *GBH* (1981); *Kings* (1991); *The Husbands* (1994); *All Day Permanent Red* (2003); *Cold Calls* (2005).

⁶⁶ Sophokles. 'Elektra'. *An Orestia*. Trans. Anne Carson. New York: Faber and Faber 2009. Pg 148. Print.

WHEN MY BROTHER DIED I MADE AN EPITAPH FOR HIM IN THE FORM OF A BOOK. THIS IS A REPLICA OF IT, AS CLOSE AS WE COULD GET.
- ANNE CARSON.

Inside the box is a concertina of paper (roughly A5 sized) containing scanned notes, fragments, scraps, and photographs. These curated ephemera combine Carson's process of translating Gaius Valerius Catallus' poem 101 with the intensely personal process of Carson's grieving over the death of her estranged brother. Poem 101 is an elegiac poem in which Catallus addresses, and bids farewell to, the ashes of his own brother.



23. *Nox*, Anne Carson (2009)

Nox is more personally explicit than my own writing, and Carson's complicated pain at the loss of her brother is worn on her (book jacket) sleeve. Her decision to draw together the personal and the classical is very affecting, as is the way she combines the lyrical and the prosaic, as in this extract:

“His voice was like his voice with something else crusted on it, black, dense – it lighted up for a moment when he said “pinhead” (**So pinhead d’you attain wisdom yet?**) then went dark again. All the years and time that passed over him came streaming into me, all that history. What is a voice?”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Anne Carson. *Nox*. *ibid.*

Nox is a meditation, a process, and a private thought process made startlingly public. Somehow I think of *Nox* as the documentation of a silent performance. Its only lack, I feel, is that it is not a performance itself. The work is intense and revelatory and yet, because it is a document and not an event, it has no control of the time that a reader spends with it and it therefore does not become ritualised in the way that my own work does. By taking the words I have written off their pages and turning them into live utterances I hope to render them transformative in a way that *Nox* cannot be, despite its beauty. Like *Nox*, *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* was made in part in response to a personal loss. Unlike *Nox*, however, *A Love Song* is not an epitaph but a map: I have not tried to record or announce my loss so much as to acknowledge it as a route that I have travelled⁶⁸.

In Christopher Logue's *War Music* project, which remained unfinished at the time of his death in 2011, I have found a kind of language that excites me. There are moments in Logue's poetry that remain in my mind as vivid and permanent milestones to phrase making. Searching to cite a line about how the flight of an arrow in battle could "Carry a tunnel the width of a lipstick" through a man's neck, I typed the quote into Google and came up with enough hits to suggest that I am not the only reader to find this image utterly indelible. *War Music* is comprised of five full-length books. I should have known which book the quote above was from, however: *All Day Permanent Red*, Logue's fourth instalment of *War Music*, takes its name from an old Revlon ad.⁶⁹

In another incidence of synchronicity, Logue too has seen the mighty foreshadow that *Gilgamesh* casts over classical texts. Rereading his work recently, I found that near the very end of his last book about the Trojan War, he describes the warriors Ajax and Nestor returning to Achilles to repeat their appeal for help on the battlefield. They go to look for him one evening on the sea-shore at the edge of the military camp, finding him under the stars:

⁶⁸ See Chapter 1. Introduction. Pg 46.

⁶⁹ I found it eventually: Christopher Logue. *All Day Permanent Red: war music continued*. London: Faber and Faber, 2003. Pg 6. Print.

“Starlight.
The starlight on the sea.

The sea.
Its whispering
Mixed with the prayers of Ajax and Nestor as they walk
Along the shore towards Achilles’ gate.

[...]

They find him, with guitar,
Singing of Gilgamesh.”⁷⁰

Logue’s writing is striking, moving, and important. In the terms I used to describe myth itself in the Introduction, it is ‘authoritative *and* imaginative; important *and* poetic’. I cannot imagine better writing, and certainly cannot hope to achieve it. Despite this however, I am glad that I have taken my own work into the act of speaking, rather than letting it rest as poems on a static page. There are things that my performance work can do – in the use of location, sound, and time – that even Logue’s luminous language does not because his audience encounters it through reading, rather than listening.

4.11 Accessing the Unconscious

A significant feature of my works’ development is that I internalise the source material in order to generate a response to it. That this is a central part of my creative technique is shown by my (failed) attempt to omit this stage in the early stages of *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (see pg 65). This reminds me of the drawing by Jung’s “middle aged woman” on pg 52 of an eye emerging from the sea: an image of the rising unconscious. This strategy that I have called ‘internalisation’ is how I catalyse my unconscious mind to generate images in order to produce a script. I now intend to look more closely at this notion of ‘the unconscious mind’, contextualising my internalisation process in order to understand it better.

⁷⁰ Christopher Logue. *War Music: Cold Calls*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005. Pg 39-40. Print. The appearance of a Gilgamesh reference that is tied to the liminal space of a tidal beach at dusk is particularly resonant.

What is this ‘unconscious mind’? What is it I am trying to articulate exactly, when I try to describe this process of ‘catalysing’, or extracting images from it? This is a study of art-making rather than of psychoanalysis, and so it is through this lens that I must approach these questions. I have already suggested that Jung’s image for the unconscious was the sea. And yet for a man who spent much of his life writing about and meditating upon the varying forms of the human unconscious, even Jung’s definitions sometimes seem unsatisfying. In ‘The Structure of the Psyche’ for example:

“I would like to emphasise that we must distinguish three psychic levels: (1) consciousness, (2) the personal unconscious, and (3) the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious consists firstly of all those contents that became unconscious either because they lost their intensity and were forgotten or because consciousness was withdrawn from them (repression) and secondly of contents, some of them sense impressions, which never had sufficient intensity to reach consciousness but have somehow entered the psyche. The collective unconscious, however, as the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation, is not individual but common to all men, and perhaps even to animals, and is the true basis of individual psyche.”⁷¹

That our “personal unconscious consists [of] contents that became unconscious” is clearly a partly circular definition. Reading Jung alongside Sigmund Freud however, the differences between their two approaches help to reveal a territory that is important for this investigation. The unconscious for Freud – or, what he calls the “unconscious *for the time being*”⁷² is:

“something unreal, a substitute for something else, unknown to the dreamer, similar to the tendency of errors, a substitute for something the dreamer knows but cannot approach.”⁷³

⁷¹ C G Jung. ‘The Structure of the Psyche’. C G Jung. *Jung: Selected Writings*. Ed, Anthony Storr. Bungay: Chaucer Press, 1983. Pg 67. Print. I cannot fail to point out (because Jung does not) that the collective unconscious may be common not only to men and animals, but also to women.

⁷² Sigmund Freud. *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Hall, G Stanley. 1920. New York: Horace Liveright Inc. Kindle file. 2014.

⁷³ Sigmund Freud. *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Ibid. Pg 90.

As with the definitions of myth in the introduction to this study, I would argue that this indicates that we need to *feel* our way into a discussion of the unconscious mind: that, like myth, the unconscious is a concept to understand rather than to exclusively define. Freud's categorisation of "something else" beyond and "for the time being" ungraspable to the dreamer in their awake state, is useful. However, Jung's parsing of the unconscious into two separate states – one personal and one collective – is also illuminating, and I shall return to this in more detail later. In order to see why the concept of an unconscious is important to a discussion of my script development, it is not necessary to take a firm line on whether Jung or Freud's definition ought to be prioritised. Instead, I have found it more useful to examine the space revealed by both psychoanalysts as they sought to find a vocabulary for the interior spaces of the human mind.

Jung described his attempts to access his own unconscious by writing down his "fantasies", the images – sometimes disturbing to him – that occurred to him while daydreaming. There are strong similarities to the descriptions of my own writing practice, both in the discomfort that Jung experiences and in the way he speaks the words out loud as he writes.

"I wrote down the fantasies as best I could [...] But I was only able to do this in clumsy language. [...] It is a style I find embarrassing: it grates on my nerves as when someone draws a knife against a plate. But since I did not know what was going on, I had no choice but to write everything down in the style selected by the unconscious itself. Sometimes it was as if I were hearing it with my ears, sometimes feeling it with my mouth, as if my tongue were formulating words; now and then I heard myself whispering aloud. Below the threshold of consciousness everything was seething with life. [...] I was writing down fantasies which often struck me as nonsense, and towards which I had strong resistances. For as long as we do not understand their meaning, such fantasies are a diabolical mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous."⁷⁴

⁷⁴ C G Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. 1963. London: Fontana Press. 1995. Print. Pg 202. Print.

Reflecting on this, I have come to think of my writing practice as being a process of private transcription, rather than of creative invention. Perhaps this is why my conscious analytical mind does not always feel itself to be the author of my own work. There is a parallel between my writing practice and the processes used in psychoanalysis to access an analysand's unconscious thoughts. In both cases the participant is encouraged to relax the conscious or analytical part of their mind and to recount unedited the images and sensations that appear to them. It is important to note that there are differences in the detail of this process between different psychoanalytic practitioners, and between the different schools of psychoanalysis: Jung advocated a more questing approach where, as above, the analysand herself undertakes a psychoanalytic 'quest' to discover the heart of their "fantasy" images; Sigmund Freud proposed a slightly more passive methodology for extracting meaning from the imagery of dreams, although again the process:

"demands a special delimitation of the attention, quite different from cogitation, in fact, exclusive of cogitation."⁷⁵

In general terms then, the techniques described are similar and rely on a relaxation of day-to-day focus in order to allow previously unacknowledged ideas and relationships to come to the fore. The main difference, which cannot be overstated, between psychoanalytic practice and my own creative process is that there is no secondary stage of decoding in my own work. Once the images are present on my page in their disjointed and fragmented fashion, I do not seek to interpret them. Instead I work with them formally (crafting their meter and rhythm) and aesthetically (refining and shaping their imagery and language). If I have at moments within this study sought to "approach" the images I have generated, it is because of the structure and demands of the study itself and not *a priori* because of the structure and demands of the artwork.

This difference indicates that whereas an analysand seeks to understand their *individual* situation, I conversely am trying to retain the *collective* resonance of the images I have generated. This is because although the work comes from me, I need it to be

⁷⁵ Sigmund Freud. *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*. Ibid. Pg 84. Kindle file.

recognisable to other people. I try to hone the communicative capacity of the shared resonances in my material. This is true even when (or especially when) the material has emerged from a very personal source. By paying a “special” kind of non-cognition attention therefore, I tap into images and “fantasies” from my unconscious mind that form the basis for my performance scripts. What is the benefit of doing this? Why should I bother? To answer, perhaps it is helpful to look at the practices of other artists who also work in this way.

I first became aware of the work of Joan Jonas in 1998, on a B-Tec Foundation course in Art and Design at Leeds College of Art. Fresh from my high school A-levels and researching ‘female artists’ for a set essay, I found video footage (or perhaps stills from a video? I can no longer accurately remember) showing a woman in a red dress dancing, with a black and white dog standing stoically in the foreground. At the time I was possibly as non-plussed as this dog, having no idea what to make of this work. Jonas’ name appeared again when I was an undergraduate at Glasgow School of Art; her work *Vertical Roll* (1972) being cited as a pioneering work of ‘video art’.



24. Joan Jonas, *Vertical Roll* (1972). Video still. See list of plates for full reference.

Though more informed by this point, I still was not overly interested in Jonas until I turned 30 in 2009, and my then-partner (now husband) took me to Venice. We visited the Biennale and, at the Arsenale, I came across Jonas' piece *Reading Dante II*.



25. Joan Jonas, *Reading Dante II* (2010). Image shows a recontextualisation of the 2009 iteration of the Venice Biennale work, for Yvon Lambert Gallery, New York. See list of plates for full reference.

I found the experience highly influential as well as strangely moving. The work was described by an apparently underwhelmed Art In America writer as:

“a mixed-medium piece centered on footage from performances with the artist’s friends reading aloud from *The Divine Comedy*.”⁷⁶

For me however, the work went far beyond this pragmatic description. It was transporting and almost magical in concentration and focus: the sound of voices; the familiar /

⁷⁶ Marcia E. Vetrocq. “Worlds Enough, and Time: Daniel Birnbaum's Biennale.” *Art In America*. 18/09/09. Accessed 19/02/15. <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/worlds-enough-and-time-daniel-birnbaums-biennale/> Website.

unfamiliar words; the setting and choreography of the room; the use of classical texts; even the audience seating that allowed me to sink into the work's world. I had only just started making performances, having abandoned my previous sculptural practice the year before, and *Reading Dante II* was inspirational, not least because I saw that performance artists' work could be positioned within a context like the Venice Biennale.

Jonas describes her approach to making *Reading Dante II* for Venice as *free associative*, though she uses the qualifying phrase 'kind of':

"I've chosen fragments from the Dante texts from all three books of 'The Divine Comedy', and it's a kind of free-associative method I use to collect images and put them together."⁷⁷

Free association is a technique developed by Freud in order to extract meaning from the dreams of his patients. By using this psychoanalytic language, Jonas immediately returns us to the idea that her unconscious leads her in the development of her work. As Freud describes it, in order for the analysand to successfully free associate 'his' (sic) thoughts:

"A twofold effort is made, to stimulate his attentiveness in respect of his psychic perceptions, and to eliminate the critical spirit in which he is ordinarily in the habit of viewing such thoughts as come to the surface. For the purposes of self observation with concentrated attention [...] he must be explicitly instructed to renounce all criticism of the thought formations which he may perceive [...] he must not allow himself to suppress one idea because it seems to him to be unimportant or irrelevant to the subject, or another because it seems nonsensical. He must perceive an absolute impartiality in respect to his ideas; for if he is unsuccessful in finding the desired solution of the dream, the obsessional idea, or the like, it will be because he permits himself to be critical of them."⁷⁸

For Jonas, and for myself, this method of free associating allows the unconscious to 'find the desired solution' to the initial research we have undertaken. Free association is a

⁷⁷ "Venice Biennale 2009: Joan Jonas." *Tateshots*. Youtube. Uploaded August 21st 2009. @ 0.34 seconds. Accessed 13/02/13. Website.

⁷⁸ Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey. 1953. Unknown: Dead Dodo Vintage, 2013. loc1485. Kindle file.

technique for moving between the states of conscious and unconscious awareness. However, if Freud's process can be summarised as follows:

(unconscious) dream > free association > (conscious) understanding

then the methodology within my own work must be summarised in the following inversion:

(conscious) research > free association > (unconscious) artwork.

With, of course, the qualifying final stage of editing or choreographing the unconscious images that the free associating technique has given voice to. This corresponds to a passage by writer Meg Williams discussing the working processes of the artist Louise Bourgeois (1911 – 2010). Bourgeois' striking works, which often touch on images or tropes from ancient myths, emerge – so Williams tells us – from:

“...the hard-to-access world of unconscious phantasy – the “volcanic unconscious” with its “flashes of intense feeling – this and this and this.” – that is the field which she [Bourgeois] considers the artist is “privileged” to have access to. It is a “privilege” to work there because, as in psychoanalysis (as Bion puts it), there is always a speedy unconscious being pursued by a slow and lumbering conscious.⁷⁹

This notion of the “speedy unconscious”, disgorging images as a volcano spews molten lava, is potent. The “instant and unequivocal: NO” in my 11/01/12 blogpost suggests the quickness that Bourgeois, via Williams, attributes to the unconscious mind. In these terms, the slow and conscious results of my previous too-research-heavy drafting process were impulsively and unambiguously jettisoned by a “speedy” intuitive response.

⁷⁹ Meg Harris Williams. “The Child, the Container, and the Claustrium: the Artistic Vocation of Louise Bourgeois”. *Louise Bourgeois: The Return Of The Repressed* (Vol 1). Philip Larratt-Smith, ed. London: Violette Editions, 2012. Pg 32. Print. The phrases in quotation marks refer to extracts, dated September 11 1980, from Louise Bourgeois diary. ‘Bion’ refers to W.R. Bion. *Two Papers: The Grid and the Caesura*. Rio de Janerio: Imago, 1977. Pg 25. Print.

Interestingly however, Bourgeois has also been criticised for not giving her unconscious free enough rein. In a review of a posthumous exhibition of works on paper at Tate Modern, the Guardian’s art critic Jonathon Jones complains that:

“Instead of opening her [ie Bourgeois] creativity to an unpredictable unconscious, she offers ready-made and preconceived icons of emotion.”⁸⁰

This work, he feels, is too wedded to the artist’s conscious mind. This is disappointing, Jones states elsewhere in his piece, because the work is therefore not “truly mad”, and does not compare with “the real nightmares of modern art” –nightmares, he suggests, that come from work that emerges from the ‘madness’ of the unconscious realm.



26. Louise Bourgeois, *The Family* (2008). Work on paper. See list of plates for full reference.

Here again we see a fascinating inversion: Freud used free association to tap into his patients’ unconscious in order to free them of nightmares and cure them of madness. For Jones, artists must access their unconscious to *become* mad and to *generate* nightmares –

⁸⁰ Jonathan Jones. “Louise Bourgeois at Tate Modern review – fatally complacent.” *The Guardian*. 16/06/14. Accessed 20/02/15.
<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/jun/16/louise-bourgeois-works-on-paper-review-tate-modern> website.

or at least to be able to generate nightmarish works from a point of temporary creative madness. Work that does emerge from an artist's unconscious, Jones suggests, is typified by "doubt or hesitation [...] the tension, anxiety and urgency of great art." Whether my work is "great art" or not, these traits are all familiar to me through the exegesis of my creative methodology contained within these pages – see in particular Chapter 8.

Considering the gulf between Williams' account of work emerging from Bourgeois' "volcanic unconscious", and Jones' criticism of the Tate exhibition, it is worth noting that Jones ameliorates his position by allowing that it refers to "the evidence of this display" only. Perhaps works on paper were simply not Bourgeois' medium. Or perhaps the artist's own experience of tapping into her unconscious is a necessary but not by itself a sufficient condition for the production of Jones' "great art."

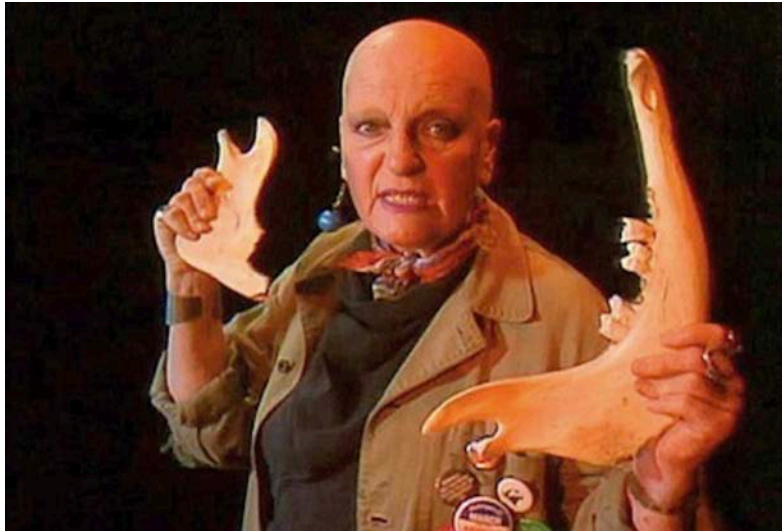
The risk is that by prioritising this language of unconsciousness, each of these artists emphasises the "speedy unconscious" element of their working practice without balancing that with an acknowledgement of the equally important editing process that must come afterwards. After all, performances by Joan Jonas, or sculptural works by Bourgeois, do not materialise fully formed from their creators' brows like artistic Athenas⁸¹, but are the products of highly skilled artistic practices.

The performance artist Rachel Rosenthal⁸², whose work I will return to in more detail later in this study, uses a similar methodology, which she describes as "semi unconscious". Rosenthal in particular emphasises the separation she establishes between her initial research process and a subsequent period of germination that must occur before the work can grow. She has described this process as "gardening," where the seed of her

⁸¹ Some mythic traditions of the classical goddess Athena's birth have her springing, fully grown and clad in armour, from the forehead of her father, Zeus. Pindar is among those who tell this version of the story.

⁸² I had just finished writing the majority of this study when Rachel Rosenthal passed away on 10th May 2015. I considered re-writing those passages that discuss her work, changing the tense of the discussion from present, to past. However, I felt that as I had written while Rosenthal was alive, and as I had responded to her work as that of a living artist, I would retain the present tense. I hope that this is appropriate.

research may flourish into a living thing, which does not outwardly resemble the initial kernel but nevertheless extends directly from it.



27. Rachel Rosenthal, *L.O.W. in Gaia* (1986).
Image shows performance at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) (1990).
See list of plates for full reference.

Rosenthal admits that she rehearses some works, but downplays the fact:

“I have been obliged to rehearse. [But] I still come pretty unformed to the performance and the performance kind of jells it”⁸³

The artistic value of this material from the unconscious is in its “madness”, to use Jones’ term. The unconscious speaks in the language of *mythos* rather than *logos*, and communicates through puns, inversions, and parallels in contrast to the reason, logic, and consequence of conscious thought. As Freud himself states in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

⁸³ Eelka Lampa. “Rachel Rosenthal Creating Her Selves.” *The Drama Review*. Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring, 1988). Accessed 15/02/13. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145878> Website. Pg 174

“It is not so much that it [i.e. the unconscious] is more negligent, more incorrect, more forgetful, more incomplete than waking thought; it is something altogether different, qualitatively, from waking thought and cannot therefore be compared with it. It does not think, calculate, or judge at all, but limits itself to the work of transformation.”⁸⁴

Our dreams, our fantasies, and our daydreams are moments when our unconscious comes to the fore. In these states we inhabit a state that is ‘altogether different’ from our daily cognition. The mental experience we are subsumed by can collapse and distort time, blur the boundaries between the dead and the living, or disrupt the causal nexus. When I sit at my desk, it is when I suddenly perceive the strangeness of my train of thought that I realise that I have been daydreaming. By using my unconscious as a source for new artwork I can create pieces that connect unexpected ideas or images that I could not reach by conscious deliberation. It is only through accessing the images from my unconscious that I can reach the language of *mythos* that my work requires.

Before closing this discussion of the unconscious, I wish to return to Jung’s distinction between the collective and the personal unconscious, to ask if it is possible to know *which* the artists here are accessing.

The personal unconscious, identified by Jung:

“rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious*. I have chosen the term ‘collective’ because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals.”⁸⁵

This collective unconscious can be recognised by its contents – namely the archetypes of which it is composed. These archetypes are forms, repeated images “that seem to be

⁸⁴ Sigmund Freud. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. A A Brill. 1913. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997. Pg 351. Print.

⁸⁵ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. 1968. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2009. Pg. 3 - 4. Print.

present always and everywhere”⁸⁶, and Jung goes on to state that one “well known expression of the archetypes is myth and fairytale.”⁸⁷ Describing these archetypes more fully is difficult because we are told that

“The term ‘archetype’ [...] designates only those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience.”⁸⁸

And, further:

“The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.”⁸⁹

We cannot *know* an archetype objectively because to do so would be to render it conscious, and so transform it. Conversely however, Jung is clear in identifying the broad shapes of some of these archetypes. These shapes are, he claims, the pre-existing concepts of which the images that appear in dreams and myths are derivatives. These archetypes include the mother, the anima or animus, the child, the self, the hero, the wise elder, and the trickster, amongst others.

From this we can say, in simplistic fashion, that if the images emerging from the artist’s unconscious are archetypal, in Jung’s terms, then the artist is accessing a collective unconscious rather than an exclusively personal one. This is borne out in the transcript of a conversation between Joan Jonas and musician Alvin Curren for *Frieze* magazine in 2009. Curren asks Jonas to respond to a previous critique from the writer Jonathon Dronsfield that asks “are the places [ie, the performances] Jonas creates impenetrable because, as she maintains, they are essentially private?” Jonas responds:

⁸⁶ C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid pg 42.

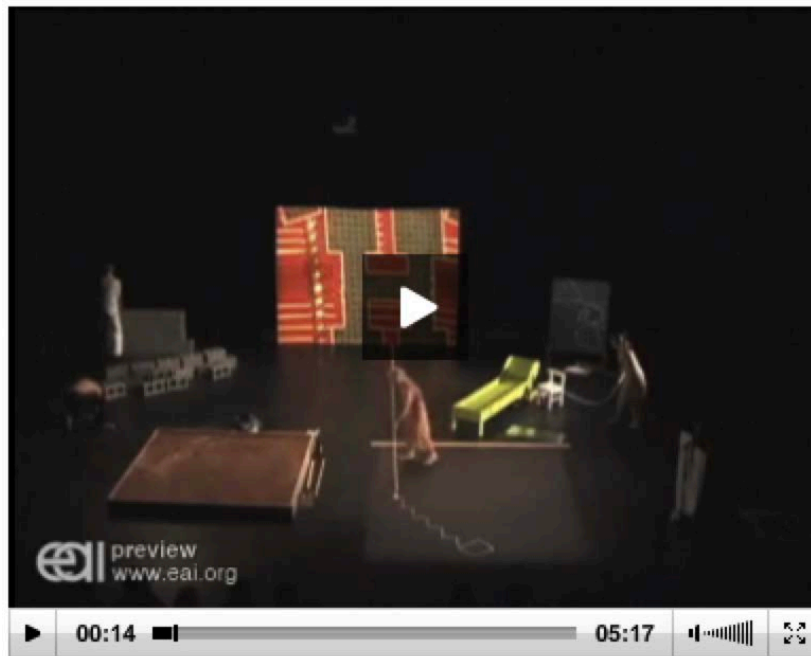
⁸⁷ C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid pg 6.

⁸⁸ C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid pg 5.

⁸⁹ C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid pg 5.

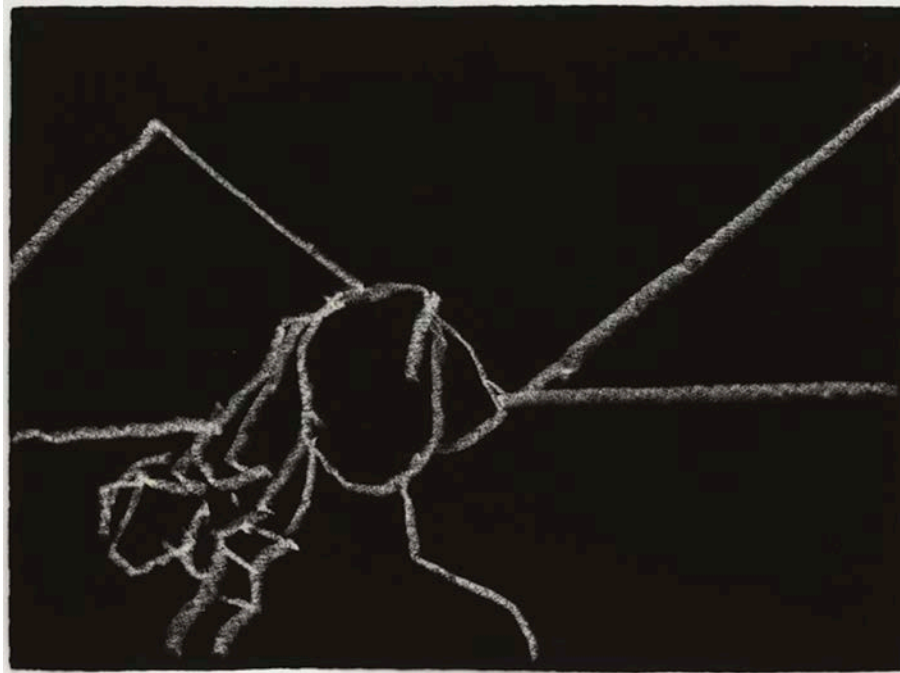
“it seemed I was exposing my inner thoughts to an audience, or finding ways of telling the audience my inner visions, not in words but in images. [...] As for my private world being impenetrable – I don’t think of it being so private.”⁹⁰

It is telling that Jonas refutes the ‘private’ part of Dronsfield’s critique, rather than the ‘impenetrable’ part. This feeling that Jonas has – that the inner visions of private realm are really not so private after all – is critical. In Jung’s terms, Jonas’ “inner visions”, if they touch on archetypal images, are not “private” at all but are composed of collectively recognisable motifs that are our shared human inheritance. Video footage of Jonas’ seminal work *Lines in The Sand* reveals archetypal images. The performance plays to a loud and hypnotic wash of noise, a melodic droning that cycles at a slow breathing pace: a sound in fact that recalls the sea – Jung’s image for the unconscious. Jonas herself draws a large pointed ziggurat in the centre of the stage, using a long extended rod.



28. Joan Jonas, *Lines in the Sand*, video (recontextualisation of performance), 2002-2005, 47:45 min. Image shows video extract (5:17 min) as it appears on Electronic Arts Intermix listing. See list of plates for full reference.

⁹⁰ Curran, Alvin. “Out of Space.” *Frieze*. Issue 124, June-August 2009. Accessed 14/02/13. http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/out_of_space/ Website.



29. Joan Jonas, *Lines In The Sand I* (2003). Oil stick on paper. Recontextualisation of performance. See list of plates for full reference.

In his text '*A Study in the Process of Individuation*', Jung interprets two drawings by a 'Miss X', both of which feature large pyramids.



30. 'Miss X' undated drawing. See list of plates for full reference.

“It should also be mentioned that the pointed pyramids of the first picture reappear in the second, where there points are actually gilded by the lightening and strongly emphasized. I would interpret them as unconscious contents ‘pushing up’ into the light of consciousness, as seems to be the case with many contents of the collective unconscious.”⁹¹



31. ‘Miss X’ undated drawing. See list of plates for full reference.

The wooden pole or rod that Jonas wields elsewhere in the performance (below) may transform her into a representation of an animus, the masculine part of the female artist’s inner personality.

⁹¹ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid. Pg 305.



32. Joan Jonas, *Lines In The Sand* (2002). Unknown Location.
See list of plates for full reference.

Caught in the projected image of a crystal ball, Jonas is framed within a round shape resembling a cave or dish, which are often expressions of the archetype of the mother. This is necessarily a surface reading of only an extract of Jonas' lengthy and multifaceted performance work. Acknowledging the archetypal nature of some of the images in Jonas' work does demonstrate however, that the artist's claim that her visions are collective *as well as* being private, may be justified.

It is this phrase 'as well as' in which I am particularly interested. Traditionally, Jung discusses the collective and the personal unconscious separately, visualizing a collective sphere that lies below the more surface contents of the personal unconscious. I believe that my own experience, described in this chapter, suggests that it is by connecting elements from both the personal and the collective unconscious that some artists develop new work. As they do so, they irresistibly knit their own private world to wider and more universal concerns.

The theorist Kaya Silverman does not explicitly discuss Jung's work in her 2009 book *Flesh of my Flesh*⁹², concentrating on the (published and unpublished) writings of Sigmund Freud. She does however make several references that irresistibly lean in the direction of Jung's theories of the collective unconscious. Specifically, Silverman uses the 1912 writings of writer and psychoanalyst Lou-Andréas Salomé to link the moment "when Freud discovered the unconscious" to "the words of Heraclitus about the infinite borders of the soul". Silverman states that for Salomé (and within her book Silverman proves that Salomé's claim is not as alien to Freud's own thinking as it may at first appear) it is only with the psychoanalytic articulation of the concept of:

"the unconscious, that Heraclitus' words found their referent, because it is through this most seemingly private part of ourselves that we communicate with what resides outside."⁹³

This idea is striking because it explicitly links the experience of feeling connected with others and the world, with the "discovery" of the unconscious. This is significant because it supports my contention that by internalising myths such as Gilgamesh in order to undertake the artistic process I have described, I am journeying into my unconscious in order to bring something back – something that may connect us to each other.

As Silverman explains, for Salomé,

"[...] the most frequently reiterated thesis in her letters and public writings is that everything in the world is connected to everything else. The 'extra quality' that makes us human is not our reason but our capacity to participate in this relationality *psychically* as well as *ontologically*. [...]"

To identify with someone or something in the Saloméan sense of the word is not to transform this other into an image of oneself, but to feel one's togetherness with it in an 'unfathomable totality'. This totality is unfathomable because it has no limits, either temporally or spatially, and because it defies explanation. It can be affectively registered, but it cannot be *thought*.⁹⁴

⁹² Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. Print.

⁹³ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Ibid. Pg 29.

⁹⁴ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Ibid pg 26.

Salomé's concept of a psychical link of 'unfathomable totality' does relate to Jung's work on archetypes and the collective unconscious, as well as reflecting the work of Freud and the thoughts of Heraclitus. Readily admitting that "probably none of my empirical concepts has met with so much misunderstanding"⁹⁵, Jung stresses that the accusation of "mysticism" often levelled at his approach is unnecessary: the idea of the collective unconscious, he claims, is "no more daring than to assume that there are [human] instincts"⁹⁶ and "there remain enough individual instances of autochthonous mythological motifs to put the matter beyond any reasonable doubt."⁹⁷ What is most significant for this study however, is that the collective unconscious provides one model whereby the most private impulses and images drawn from the unconscious mind may relate not only to that individual's personal experiences but can also be read as potentially "universal" material. The collective unconscious, through its shared nature, approaches Salomé / Silverman's temporal and spatial limitlessness.

I am reminded here of an exhibition I visited in 2012, where a selection of Louise Bourgeois' work was shown in the Freud Museum, amongst the artifacts and ephemera of Sigmund and Anna Freud's lives and in the context of their final home.⁹⁸ Again and again within the exhibition I found the same forms emerging from Bourgeois' work – faces and mouths, breasts and phalli, stomachs, labia and vaginas. The figures in her drawings and sculptures open, extrude, and slumber. The creative vision from which these works emerge is distinctly personal, and the relationship between Bourgeois' work and her own autobiography is well documented. However, I also felt an overwhelming sense of connection to the work. These drawings of bulging, pendulous breasts emerging from a field of looping handwriting⁹⁹ – this half-breast/half penile sack that hangs so heavily

⁹⁵ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid. Pg 42.

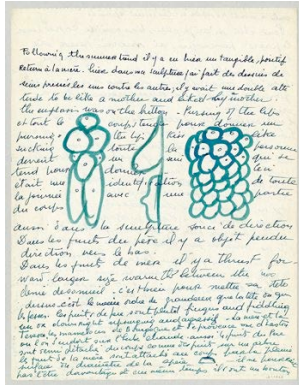
⁹⁶ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid. Pg 44.

⁹⁷ C. G. Jung. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid. Pg 44.

⁹⁸ Louise Bourgeois. *The Return of the Repressed*. Cur. Philip Larratt-Smith. London: Freud Museum. 8 March 2012 - 27 May 2012. Exhibition.

⁹⁹ Louise Bourgeois. Untitled. Loose sheet, 27.9 x 21.6 cm. Circa 1959.

above Freud’s famous couch¹⁰⁰ – these forms spoke to me as if I had seen them before or, more precisely, as if I could have imagined them. If they were words I could have said that they were on the tip of my tongue already.



33.



34.



35.

33. Louise Bourgeois, loose sheet 1959. See list of plates for full reference.

34. Louise Bourgeois, *Janus Fleuri*, Bronze, golden patina, 1968. See list of plates for full reference.

35. *Janus Fleuri* suspended over Freud's couch at The Freud Museum London. See list of plates for full reference.

Bourgeois’ works in this exhibition draw strongly from archetypal images that transcend her own personal mythology (her father’s affair with her tutor, her own relationship with her mother) to become universally resonant and articulate. In Lou-Andréas Salomé’s term, I identified with this material. In my own terms, Bourgeois’ journeys to her own unconscious have returned bearing fruit that I recognized from my own private world: fruit that has grown from a tree with its roots in a collective unconscious.

Several writers in addition to Silverman have argued that art practice has the capacity to make these vital connections between public communication and the private unconscious. In her essay *Creativity: Transgressing the Limits of Consciousness*, writer Meredith

¹⁰⁰ Louise Bourgeois. *Janus Fleuri*. Bronze, golden patina. 25.7 x 31.8 x 21.3 cm. 1968.

Skura states that

“creativity is not just a retreat into the inner world of unconscious material but, rather, a way of combining inner and outer worlds”¹⁰¹

She stresses later in the same text that

“What is important is not only that artists have access to unconscious material from the past and from current fantasizing, but that they can bring conscious and unconscious together, make fantasy and fact affect each other.”¹⁰²

Significantly, in discussing the relationship between art practice and the unconscious, Skura uses myth as a metaphor for this process of creative production that allows the conscious and the unconscious to meet:

“Creativity as transgressing limits: the myth is as old as the idea of creativity itself. Prometheus stole fire from heaven; Hephaestus, thrown out of heaven, cast his nets back; Orpheus stole his wife back from Hades; and gifted mortals like Arachne dared to compete with the gods. The rest of us are caught in familiar earthbound patterns, but the artist goes beyond what is known and allowed and pays the price.”¹⁰³

If creativity is the act of drawing together “inner and outer worlds” then, in Skura’s metaphor, the mythic space (the Heaven that Prometheus steals from, the Hades that Orpheus broaches, or the Olympian gods that Arachne challenges) corresponds with the artist’s unconscious. The artist here takes the role of the hero Prometheus or Hephaestus who transgresses the established division between our world and another world in order to bring something valuable back.

¹⁰¹ Meredith Skura. “Creativity: Transgressing the Limits of Consciousness”. *Daedalus*. Vol. 109, No. 2, ‘Intellect and Imagination: The Limits and Presuppositions of Intellectual Inquiry’ (Spring, 1980). Accessed: 15/02/2013. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024669> Pg 134. Website.

¹⁰² Meredith Skura. *Creativity: Transgressing the Limits of Consciousness*. Ibid. Pg 137.

¹⁰³ Meredith Skura. *Creativity: Transgressing the Limits of Consciousness*. Ibid. Pg 127.

For Skura that other world is the artist's unconscious, but by using myth as an analogy with which to discuss artists' journeys she suggests the complex connections between mythology and the human unconscious. Mythological narratives and images are deeply embedded in psychoanalysis, which is a language of the unconscious. Here myths are used to demonstrate central psychological conflicts (such as Freud's Oedipal complex, which uses the structure of the myth of Oedipus who was fated to murder his father and marry his mother), and express underlying metaphysical frameworks (such as Jung's collective unconscious, where "the archetypes occur on the ethnological level as myths"¹⁰⁴). In his preface to the third edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, anticipating future directions for his theory, Freud himself states that "Dream-interpretation must seek a closer union with the rich material of poetry, myth, and popular idiom"¹⁰⁵

The relationship between myth and the unconscious is so symbiotic that theories of the unconscious have been used to analyse particular myths¹⁰⁶. Towards the end of her life, Jung's former student Rivkah Schärf Kluger published an exhaustive Jungian interpretation of the epic of Gilgamesh titled *The Archetypal Significance of Gilgamesh*, in the introduction to which she claims:

"Since Jung's discovery of the collective unconscious and its contents, the archetypes (the basic typical forms of human thought, feelings, and reactions which underlie and determine the boundless variety of individual experiences), new light has fallen on the essence of myths. Finding mythological motifs turning up in the dreams of

¹⁰⁴ C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Ibid. Pg 67.

¹⁰⁵ Sigmund Freud. "Preface". *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey. 1953. Unknown: Dead Dodo Vintage. 2013. Pg XXVII. Print.

¹⁰⁶ Conversely, theories of myth have also been used to explore psychoanalysis. The writer Griselda Pollock states that "Antigone has been a signifier and a myth infused with diverse readings by varied interpreters [...] my own contribution is a small one, drawing into this exciting field a debate internal to French psychoanalytical theory, which has, I think, enormous ramifications". Griselda Pollock, "Beyond Oedipus". *Laughing With Medusa, Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Pg 91-92. Print.

modern man, Jung recognised that myths, like dreams, are manifestations of the unconscious.”¹⁰⁷

And later:

“Myths, so far as their origin is concerned, are, like dreams, spontaneous expressions of the unconscious”¹⁰⁸

However, because myths are not authored by any one individual, the unconscious mind they reflect belongs to, as Kluger’s says “the collective ego”. Myths then, are access points into the collective unconscious, expanding Skura’s use of myth as a metaphorical space to represent artists’ personal unconscious. Silverman too uses myth as an ongoing language through which to discuss her concerns of similitude and connectedness. For her, the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is particularly resonant, as “the ur-narrative of Western subjectivity.”

I agree with Silverman’s hypothesis – that mythic stories underlie the great narrative sweeps of our cultural consciousness, but would disagree with her choice of narrative. For me, Gilgamesh is the great story that underlies our contemporary search for self, and the one that my own creative odyssey reflects. Gilgamesh’s narrative journey grapples with the beating heart of what it means to be human: that our heart must one day cease to beat. In this, we see every more prosaic or quotidian quest that we are likely to encounter, writ large. In the contemporary West, Gilgamesh is undoubtedly less culturally familiar than Orpheus and Eurydice. However, even if we do not know a story well Silverman believes that “This does not mean, though, that we have ceased to live it”¹⁰⁹. This statement confirms the relationship between ancient myth – whichever one we favour – and the world of our own collective present through reaffirming the connection between the ancient archetypal stories of Eurydice and Gilgamesh, and the live and present space

¹⁰⁷ Rivkah Schärf Kluger. “Introduction”. *The Archetypal Significance of Gilgamesh, A Modern Ancient Hero*. Einseideln: Daimon Verlag, 1991. Pg 16. Print.

¹⁰⁸ Rivkah Schärf Kluger. *The Archetypal Significance of Gilgamesh, A Modern Ancient Hero*. Ibid. Pg 16.

¹⁰⁹ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Ibid. Pg 58.

of our internal landscapes: We may not consciously know the story, Silverman claims, but we “live it”.

In travelling deep into my own unconscious through the processes I employ to generate new work, I am able to return with images that connect me to others and the world. These images are at the centre of the performance artworks I develop. This motion of going elsewhere and returning will be explored further in the next chapter, which examines the use of choreography and site in my work, in relation to mythic structure.

**Chapter 5. THE GILGAMESH CYCLE: Choreography and Site.
Focussing on the performance *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*. (a. 2013).**



36. Archive photograph of unknown providence showing the SS Rotterdam's swimming pool in use. Sourced by staff at Sils Projects.

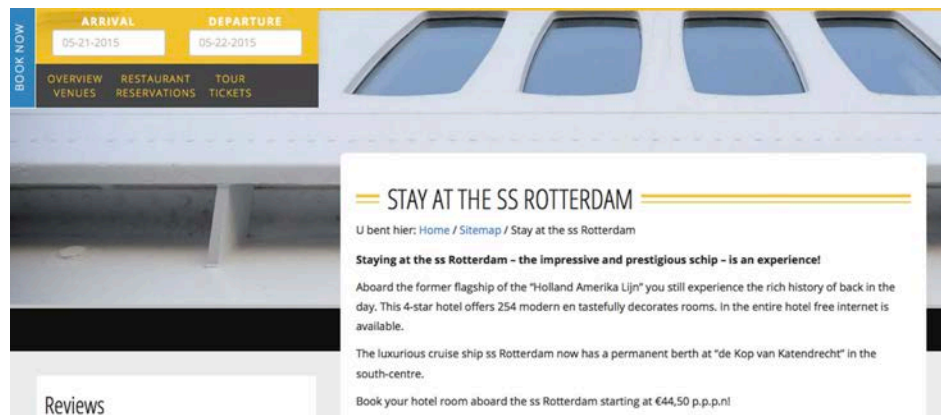
In the previous chapter, I showed that the techniques I employ to produce my performance scripts encompass a journey to and return from my unconscious. The arc of this journey is a 'there and back again' motion as, in a period of quiet akin to daydreaming, I access my unconscious mind. When I return from that strange place, I bring with me archetypal images from which I can compose a script. This subtle motion connects the methodology of my practice to its mythological subject matter, as mythological narratives – and Gilgamesh in particular – often feature the undertaking of such journeys. In discussing myth as a metaphorical space to represent artists' personal unconscious, the inverse may also be true: the personal unconscious may be a metaphorical place that we access in order to connect to myths.

In this chapter I will discuss the use of choreography and site in my work, building on the presence of this ‘there and back again’ pattern to examine the relationship between this creative practice and mythic structure. I will show that the choreography of the work follows a similar three stage outline, which I will connect both with ritual structure, and with Joseph Campbell’s ‘hero’s journey’ monomyth.

5.1 The site of SS Rotterdam

In early 2013 I was contacted by Sils Gallery, Rotterdam, NL, where I had previously exhibited in 2010. Curator David Stamp told me that following conversations arising from my previous exhibition, the gallery had secured permission and a budget for me to develop a new performance for the swimming pool on board the SS Rotterdam floating hotel in Rotterdam Harbour. The performance date was scheduled for June 2013.

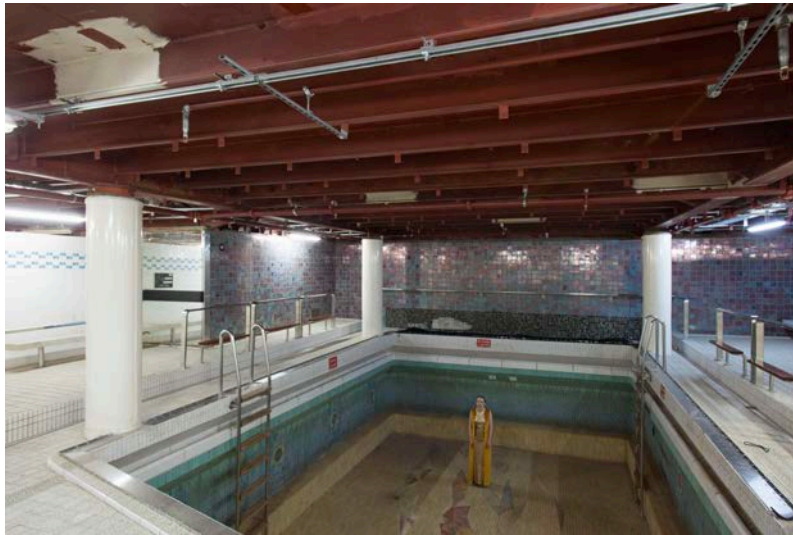
The SS Rotterdam is a former cruise liner, constructed in the late 1950s, which is now permanently moored in Rotterdam Harbour as a luxury hotel / museum owned by the WestCord Hotel chain.



37. Screenshot from the SS Rotterdam website <http://ssrotterdam.com/hotel/>

I saw photographs of the space during my production process, but did not see the site first hand until a few days before the performance when I arrived to rehearse. The performance took place in the cruise liner’s former swimming pool – an impressively tiled space in the very centre of the boat, on the lowest deck. The room had not at that time been fully restored and was in a state of semi-renovation. The pool itself was empty,

while the changing cubicles and other areas (a sauna, relaxation room etc) were in a bad state of repair, and being used to store building materials. The room had a strange atmosphere of former luxury and present dilapidation, emphasised by the booming, echoing sound quality and by a pervasive layer of plaster dust that clung to every surface despite cleaning.



38. *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*. (2013) SS Rotterdam.

Due to the small capacity of the room (strictly only 20 people including staff), the performance was given twice on the same day, at 6pm and 8pm on Friday 14th June 2013. I had never agreed to do this before, and found it exhausting.

After developing and performing *A Love Song* for Sils Gallery in Rotterdam, I was asked to re-contextualise the work for Camden Arts Centre in London. I spent three weeks working in the Performance Studio at CAC, and re-presented the work there in September 2013. For more details about this re-performance, see pg 123: 5.4 Experiment – *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (b2013). The majority of my analysis however, will focus on the first performance of the work, on board the SS Rotterdam, because working with the challenges of such an unusual performance site led me to consciously consider and address many of my choreographic choices. Although I have performed in many unconventional ‘non-art’ locations, SS Rotterdam was without doubt one of the most

logistically complex. The only other comparable experience I have had was my (pre-PhD) 2010 performance of *To Mithras*, which took place at the outdoor location of Carrawburgh Mithraeum, close to Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland. In that work I wore a rigid paper dress and climbed a hill before entering the mithraeum site itself and declaiming my text while hoping that the summer breeze did not entirely blow my (unamplified) words away.



39. *To Mithras* (2010), Carrawburgh Mithraeum.

Location is important to me. I am drawn to develop work for places that are out of the ordinary: where the audience has to step outside their day-to-day routine to access them. It would be very difficult for me to work with a site where people might stumble across the performance accidentally. Asking people to attend a particular place at a particular time is a significant part of how I intend an audience to approach my work: they need to set aside time for it; they need to commit their intention, and attention. The locations I feel have been the most successful sites for my work are often 'elsewheres', strange places that have an aspect of the uncategorisable. Carrawburgh Mithraeum for example is actually a replica antiquity, the 'real' stone artefacts are safely housed in the Great North Museum, Newcastle. Also pre-PhD, the Galini Hotel, Athens, where I performed

And The Three Mothers Ask, Don't You Know Me? in 2011 was derelict, the paint peeling from the walls and a strong scent of human urine and faeces wafting from the stairwell.



40. *And The Three Mothers Ask, Don't You Know Me?* (c.2011), Galini Hotel, Athens.

The SS Rotterdam was perhaps the strangest, most striking, and most successful of all: A dry swimming pool beneath the water-level on a boat that no longer sails. Working within performance sites that are ‘special’ or ‘other’ refers again to the ritualised nature of the work, an idea to which I shall return later in this chapter. Many of these spaces can also be described as liminal, and a parallel can be drawn between the described landscape of the sea-shore in the performance text (see Chapter 4) and the physical and associative location of the performance site, which I will explore here.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that I am pragmatic about the work I produce, and the extent to which it functions within the context of a professional contemporary art practice. To this end, I have developed or recontextualised performances for gallery contexts if the invitation to do so has seemed appropriate. At times this has involved exhibiting documentation, as in the audio recording (see Appendix M) of the SS Rotterdam performance that was exhibited in the group archive project foam¹¹⁰; but I have also re-choreographed live works in order to perform them again in a very different space (the Camden Arts Centre performance of *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* being a prime example).

The sites for which I have produced performances largely come through invitation, and are not locations that I have necessarily selected beforehand. My choice is usually primarily to accept or decline the offer. It is interesting to me that I often seem to be offered locations with some kind of historical atmosphere or association. I do not wish my work to be seen as an antiquated practice however, and so I am very careful about how closely I allow the performances to be contextualised in this way. The current, personal, and live aspects to the work are aspects that I hope to foreground: my performances may echo rituals, but they are contemporary artworks, and are being performed *today*.

5.2 Choreography

The choreography of my movements during a live performance is usually very simple. Typically:

¹¹⁰ FOAM was a peripatetic project by artist Mat Jenner, for which my contribution was commissioned by Anne Marie Watson. I produced a one-off dub plate 12" record for an archive that was presented as an exhibition and as an artwork in its own right. This record contains an audio recording of my performance *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*, recorded live on board the SS Rotterdam. The archive was exhibited at P/N Project Space, London; And/Or, London; and Wysing Arts Centre, Space/Time festival, all in 2014. See Appendix N.

- Prior to the performance, the audience is present in the performance-space, and I am absent.
- The beginning of the performance may or may not be announced by a gallery attendant or other third party.
- I enter the performance space slowly and walk to a pre-determined location.
- I arrive at my location, pause, and allow the audience to settle.
- I deliver the text when I feel that the room is ready.
- I reach the end of the text, and cease to speak.
- I leave the performance space by the same door through which I entered.
- The audience may clap.
- I do not re-emerge to join the audience until I have removed the performance garment, and put my own clothes back on.

This may be summarised as: *I am not there yet; I am there; I am not there anymore.*



41. Audience at The Cornerhouse, Manchester,
Waiting for my entrance prior to performance of *Mouth Open In An Open O* (a. 2012)

In *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (a.2013), I was very aware that for the audience the whole experience of entering and accessing the unusual performance space would feel

significant, and I decided to experiment by choreographing the audience's entrance and exit more holistically.



42. Exterior of the SS Rotterdam



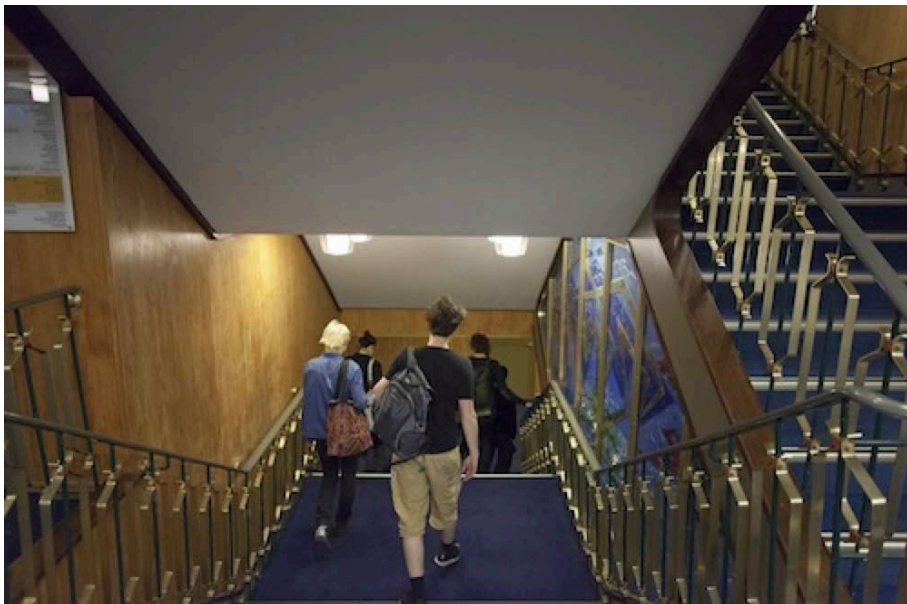
43. The audience gathers and are met by the project's curators.

I arranged to have the audience arrive at a specific time, and to be met on shore by curator David Stamp from Sils Gallery and a member of SS Rotterdam's staff: Marketing Manager Inez van Dijke, with whom Sils Gallery had been corresponding regarding

permissions and access. The audience were then escorted on board as a group, and taken down several flights of internal stairs onto the lowest deck.



44. Descending the internal stairs to the lowest deck of the ship.



45. Descending the internal stairs.

Inez van Dijke then said a few words to introduce the space, inform people about where they could stand, and asked that mobile phones etc be switched off. She then unlocked the doors and allowed the audience to enter the room. By prior arrangement, audience

members were not allowed to pass a set of steel permanent barriers that were already installed in the space, around three edges of the swimming pool. This was agreed because of health and safety concerns from the SS Rotterdam, but it also served to ‘frame’ the audience within the room, firmly connecting them to the performance space.

As people entered, I waited out of sight in an empty cubicle, where a green padded massage bench was placed incongruously alongside some sacks of rubble. Although I could not see the audience enter, I could hear them finding places to stand and moving about. I sensed the atmosphere begin to change and knew that they were now wondering when and where I would appear. When the moment seemed right I walked slowly into the room from my concealed entrance. I crossed the floor and reached the poolside ladder.



46. I descended this ladder backwards

I descended this ladder backwards before walking to a pre-determined point in the very centre of the pool.



47. The audience wait as I am about to speak. Note steel guardrails surrounding the pool (see pg 117)

I paused until I felt that the audience were ready, were waiting, and were willing me to speak. When I felt that the room was completely with me, the performance seemed to begin itself and the words emerged from my mouth without conscious effort¹¹¹. As I spoke I kept my body very still. My hands hung loose from my sides and I kept all bodily movements to an absolute minimum. When I reached the end of the text, I again paused, and used this time to ‘return to myself’ and collect my thoughts. I then retraced my steps to the ladder, climbed it, and exited the room. About halfway through my exit the audience began to clap. I did not acknowledge this as I left the space.

¹¹¹ This was only the case however, after several days of gruelling on-site rehearsals, together with several months of preparation prior to my arrival in Rotterdam.



48. Exit

When curator David Stamp felt that the piece was ‘finished’, he asked the audience to accompany him out of the performance space. David led the group up five flights of internal stairs from the very bottom to the very top deck of the ship, where there was a bar with refreshments. It was a beautiful clear evening, and people sat and watched the city of Rotterdam across the water. I got changed and came up to open deck to join them.



49. Reconvening on the top deck.

A Love Song, was performed twice on the same day, and this choreography was repeated for the second performance. The only significant difference was that for the later, 8pm performance, the sun was setting when the audience came upstairs. The water of the harbour was tinted gold as the sun set on the western side of the boat, and the effect was strangely moving.



50. Sunset.

Although more elaborately choreographed than in other works, the overall form of this performance was similar to previous pieces in that it kept me separate from the audience both before and immediately after the performance. Treating the audience together as a group also helped to collectivise their experience, and was very successful. Similarly, prefacing their entrance into the performance space with a formal ‘permission’ delivered by the SS Rotterdam staff member, also served to ceremonialise the performance as they were asked to pause for instruction on the threshold of the performance space.

5.3 Experiment – *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (b.2013).

After developing and performing *A Love Song* for Sils Gallery in Rotterdam, I was asked to re-contextualise the work for Camden Arts Centre in London. I spent three weeks based in the performance studio at Camden, rehearsing and thinking about how to allow the work to develop while still retaining the same script and performance garment. This provided an opportunity to test how the performance could be redesigned to take place in a very different context. There were three separate issues which I wished to address: a) the movement of the audience; b) my own movements within the performance space; c) the alteration in the associative / aesthetic context of the performance space.

a) I re-choreographed the movement of the audience by trying to recreate what had worked well on the SS Rotterdam. I asked the project's curator, Ben Roberts, to meet and greet the audience in Camden Arts Centre's foyer. Ben addressed the audience as a group, and gave them 'housekeeping' information about turning off mobile phones etc. He then lead them upstairs to the performance space using a rear door, which was accessed through another of the galleries. This was a route into the space that people would not have previously used, and it took them through unexpected service corridors. On entering the performance space, the audience took seats in two rows of chairs, arranged in a shallow hemisphere with a central aisle.



51. *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (b.2013). Camden Arts Centre, London.

b) I waited out of sight in a staff room, until I received a cue from Ben. This given, gallery attendants opened the large double doors at the front of the room (a different entrance to that used by the audience) and I entered the performance space. I then walked down the central aisle that had been left between the chairs to a space in front of the audience and turned so that my back was to the large gallery windows. Gallery attendants closed the doors behind me. After the performance I left through the same double doors, which were opened and then closed on cue by gallery attendants. Though at Camden Arts Centre I did not have to negotiate the SS Rotterdam's poolside ladder (making my entrance and exit from the performance space much easier), I was at this stage approximately 5 months pregnant with a growing bump that clearly showed beneath the performance garment, and which did restrict my movements somewhat.



52. Entering the performance studio, with visible bump.

c) The look and feel of Camden Arts Centre's performance studio was clearly different from the SS Rotterdam's swimming pool. As a high profile contemporary art gallery Camden Arts Centre is firmly embedded within a fine art context, and visually the performance space was clean, contemporary, and elegant. I arranged the audience seating in a shallow hemisphere with a central aisle, echoing a church presentation as well as a classical music recital. This was a deliberate strategy to suggest associations other than fine art, and so broaden the range of cues the audience could use to connect to the work. Acoustically the space was also very different, and I modified my vocal delivery accordingly (see Chapter 6 for details of vocal delivery). The aesthetic and associative changes in the performance location reframed the work but did not change it in essence.

My performances are therefore site-sensitive in their choreography, but not site specific in their content.



53. *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (b.2013). Camden Arts Centre, London.

One significant change for the Camden Arts Centre version of *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* was to have the audience seated rather than standing. In the SS Rotterdam performance pre-existing barriers within the space (plate 47) helped to guide the audience to an appropriate place to watch, and provided them with support on which to lean for the duration of the work. In CAC there were no such existing structures on which I could draw, but I decided that seating would indicate to the audience where to place themselves within the space, and would be more comfortable for them than standing. This decision – to provide audience seating unless an existing architectural feature is present to do the same job – is one that I have arrived at only over time through the development of my practice. *In Mouth Open In An Open O* (a.2013, b.2014) and *To Sing of Gilgamesh*

(a.2012, and b.2012), I did not provide seating but allowed the audience to find their own positions within the performance space.



54.



55.

54. *Mouth Open In An Open O* (a.2013), Cornerhouse, Manchester.

55. *Mouth Open In An Open O* (b.2014), The Agency Gallery, London.

In pre-PhD works I was inconsistent about providing seating. I have agreed to it in group presentations when other artists have requested it¹¹² but I have not insisted on it myself¹¹³.

¹¹² For example, Ruth Barker. *I Am Odysseus*. 2010 a, Performance. Part of the project Sym-po-zeum for Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Art.

¹¹³ See Ruth Barker. *And The Three Mothers Ask, Don't You Know Me?* 2011 c. Performance. Galini Hotel, Athens.

In works where the existing site provided a place to sit¹¹⁴, I note that audiences have always made use of this. When no seating was available, I feel that the physical discomfort of standing still for a long period distracted people from being able to concentrate fully on the work. It also meant that I could not predict exactly where people would stand. Providing seating for the Camden Arts Centre performance resolved these difficulties and although I recognise that it will not logistically be possible to do this in every future performance, it is now something that I hope to implement whenever I can.

5.4 Experiment: *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (a.2012)

Experiments in altering the basic structure of this three stage choreography (I am not there yet; I am there; I am not there anymore) have proved unsuccessful. In the Newcastle (Bruce Building) performance of *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (a.2012), I was present, wearing the performance garment as the audience arrived, and I attempted to speak normally to audience members and mingle with them, both before and after the performance. The results of this were recorded in two blog entries: of 19/02/12, titled ‘Some Reflections’;

“I was present in the foyer of the Bruce when people arrived, and I tried my best to talk to them and to be relaxed and easy, and clearly not in the performative persona. This was intensely difficult, both before and after the performance, and looking back I’m not sure how successful it was. I think it made people nervous to see me dressed in the performance garment, and coming over to talk to them. I think they worried that there was going to be some kind of participation inflicted upon them. They also treated me as a performer even though I was not performing: people formed a little semi circle around me, and didn’t get too close. I also became very aware that because people were perceiving me as performing, every gesture I made or word I spoke was in a sense, a performance.”¹¹⁵

And a more considered reflection from 12/0312 titled ‘Looking Back, Moving On’:

¹¹⁴ Whether a grassy bank in the sunshine during Ruth Barker. *To Mithras*. 2010, or a stone bench along the wall of Segedunum Museum’s bathhouse in Wallsend during Ruth Barker. *And The Three Mothers Ask, Don’t You Know Me?* 2011 b.

¹¹⁵ Ruth Barker. “Some Reflections”. *A Gilgamesh Journal*. 19/02/2012, <https://gilgameshjournal.wordpress.com/2012/02/19/some-reflections/> Website

“[M]y trying to mingle with the audience before and after the Bruce performance while still in the garment, did not work well. [...] This echoes a comment by one of the audience members – Hartlepool-based artist Graham Head – who said that seeing me beforehand had ‘spoiled the magic a bit’, for him.”¹¹⁶

This suggests that if this very simple and yet fairly fundamental structure is disrupted, the audience experience is unsatisfying or incomplete – the ‘magic’ of the work is ‘spoiled’ in the words of this audience member. This quote however, does come only from one spectator and so cannot be said to represent the views of all who attended and saw the work. It chimes completely with my own experience however, which is no doubt why this feedback made such an impression on me at the time: dissatisfied and unhappy with the results of the experimental decision I had made, the words of someone who seems to have felt the same way resonated strongly. The blog entry of 19/02/12 highlights the discomfort that I believed the audience were experiencing. I have no empirical way to prove or quantify this discomfort and in retrospect I wonder whether, by putting words into their mouths, I was projecting my own awkwardness and resistance onto those who were watching me. I certainly felt extremely nervous and worried as I tried to talk ‘normally’ to audience members who had gathered. I felt completely vulnerable and powerless in the moments before I walked to my final position and began to speak, and was distracted and less confident than usual while I was reciting the words. I will return to a discussion of the emotional experience of performing in Chapter 8: The Gilgamesh Cycle: Performer and Audience. In this case however, I felt entirely disrupted by omitting the usual separation prior to performing, and have no wish to repeat this experiment if I can possibly help it.

5.5 Experiment: *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (a.2012) and (b.2013)

In *Of Gilgamesh*, the performance structure was adapted due to the length of the work, in order to allow people to enter and leave the space as they wished, throughout the performance. I was dissatisfied with this arrangement during the first performance of this

¹¹⁶ Ruth Barker. “Looking Back, Moving On”. *A Gilgamesh Journal*. 12/03/12.
<https://gilgameshjournal.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/looking-back-moving-on/> Website

work, at Cartel Gallery, London (a.2012), as I felt that this change to the work's choreography did lead to a lessening of intensity in the work. For the second performance (b.2013) I took measures (including making sure that the space was warm!) to ensure that it was more comfortable for the audience to be in the space. I also changed the seating arrangements from a 'café style' series of small round tables (in performance a.2012), to tiered rows of pews on three sides of a spot-lit performance area Performance b.2013). This latter version proved far more successful, and audience members stayed for longer than they had previously. Many stayed over an hour, with one staying just over three hours. Several people also left and returned later in the performance. Choreographing the work in this way encouraged viewers to become 'lost' in the experience of watching the work (See Chapter 8).

5.6 Experiment: *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (a.2012)

Since beginning to make performances in 2008 I have kept my body very still when I perform, restricting the movements of my face, and making only very conscious and deliberate motions: my speech is articulated and pronounced, and my facial muscles are controlled. I have always kept my hands loose at my sides and as still as is possible. In *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (a.2012) I decided to test whether this was a necessary aspect of my presentation by introducing a sequence of slow hand gestures to accompany the text. The script of *To Sing* was split into three sections (see Appendix X for full script). For each section I developed a repeatable gesture that related to the text. The first gesture was a meeting of my two hands; the second was an upturned palm, first on one hand and then the other; and the third was a gradual lifting and lowering of both hands.



56. Images show the position of each section's hand gesture.

In considering the use of these gestures after two live performances of the work and a video recontextualisation (*Gilgamesh Song*, 2012) that also featured the gestures, I have not found them to be successful and have not used gesture in subsequent works. I feel that the inclusion of these mannered and ritualised gestures was a useful experiment to make, but my conclusion has been that they were an extraneous element that added nothing to the performance as a whole that was not there already.

5.7 Experiment: *Mouth Open In An Open O* (a.2012) and (b.2013)

I had never used props or additional objects or sounds in my work and, when in 2012 I was commissioned to develop a new performance for Cornerhouse Gallery in Manchester, I decided I would experiment by introducing some new elements. In particular I wished to learn whether I could extend the work beyond the boundaries of my own body through the use of recorded sound and a floorpiece on which I could stand.

This impulse was catalysed by several professional concerns, none of which have been fully resolved for me, and all of which continue to be aspects of my practice with which I wrestle¹¹⁷. Particularly, I wished to explore how my essentially ephemeral and time-based

¹¹⁷ I do not see this lack of resolution as a negative quality, but as a conversation that I am still in the process of having. Though this is a large subject area, and a continuing

performance practice might be able to exist within an exhibition context. This practical question is an ongoing question for me of how my work exists when I am not there: how can it be recorded or documented appropriately, and how can it exist in the future after my death?

In this instance I extended the work into a slightly more installation-based approach. I photocopied my own body in A4 sections, and lay these images on the floor as two outlines that had their feet almost touching. One figure lay face down, and the other face up.



57. Photocopied floorpiece installed at Cornerhouse, Manchester.

Around the door through which I entered and exited the space I created three more photocopied figures. Two on either side of the aperture were upright, while the third (an upperbody only) was placed above the doorway, and held an open notebook.

question for me, I will not devote much time to this exploration within this study as it does not directly illuminate my research questions. However, it is necessary to include it to give an accurate impression of the trajectory of my practice at this time.



58. Rehearsal image. All five photocopied figures are visible.

Before I entered the space, a sound began to play from concealed speakers. This was my own voice intoning a rhythmic Umm Ahh refrain that I use sometimes in preparatory breathwork, prior to performing. I overlaid several tracks of this refrain to create a very simple melody. During the performance, I allowed this audio piece to play in the space for several minutes before I entered. At a predetermined moment within the track, I entered the space and slowly walked a route through the gallery, using the face-down paper figure as a path. I stopped at a point between the two figures, with my feet between their feet. As I walked I had been repeating the Umm Ahh refrain from the audio, harmonising with the pre-recorded track. As I stood still the audio faded until it was inaudible, while I continued. When I felt the sense of ‘readiness’ that indicated that I should begin, I recited the script. Once I had finished, I began to recite the Umm Ahh again, and the pre-recorded audio faded back in. I exited the space using the face-up figure as a path. A studio-made audio recording of this work is available in Appendix J.

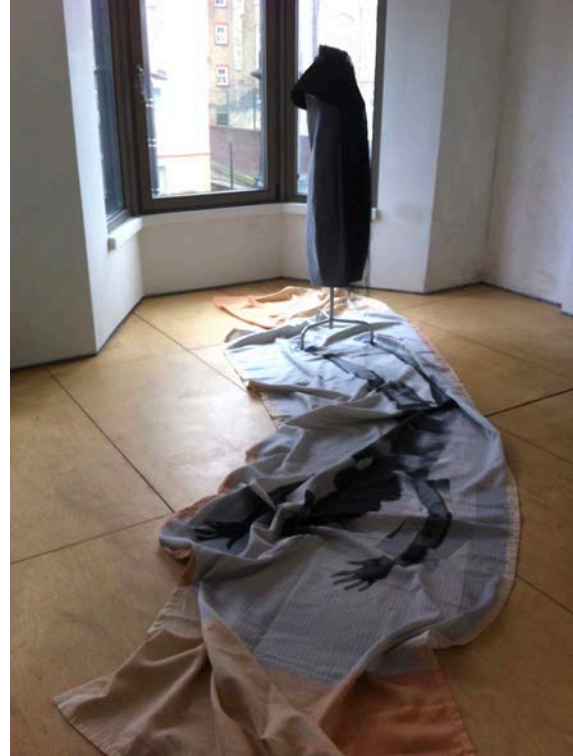
I felt that this slight difference in choreography was interesting but still unresolved. In early 2013 I performed this piece again, this time for the Agency Gallery, in London, and accompanied by a two-week exhibition. I turned the photocopied works into a large fabric floorpiece by having the original images printed onto heavy cotton. I also adapted

the pre-recorded sound work so that rather than fading out completely, the audio level dropped but remained playing while I recited the text, increasing in volume as I finished (a studio recording is available on the Media DVD). For the rest of the exhibition the audio played in the gallery and the performance garment was exhibited on a dummy positioned where I had stood during the live event. An annotated performance copy of the text was exhibited on one wall.



59.

59. Performance at the Agency Gallery, London



60.

60. Exhibition at the Agency Gallery.

As has been the case throughout these experiments, it has been essential for me to test these questions through the production of completed and publicly presented works. In this case, the questions raised remain largely unresolved. Working with a floorpiece was useful in that it helped to 'locate' the performance and did successfully function to leave something in the space when I was absent. Was it the right 'thing' to leave there however? I'm not convinced that it was enough, in retrospect, to give viewers who saw

the exhibition a real sense of the live element. I understand that this is not necessarily the purpose of this kind of performance recontextualisation, but feel that the separate iterations of the work ought to be equivalents, and this was not wholly achieved on this occasion. It is something, I believe, that I shall continue to address in future works.

5.8 Contextualising the Choreography

The choreography of *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* follows a simple structure, which in many ways is the simplest performance arrangement: *I am not there yet; I am there; I am not there anymore*. Refining the structure of *A Love Song* to incorporate the audience's arrival and departure, I have only emphasised these three stages. The only addendum is the addition / formalisation of my re-joining the audience on the boat's top deck, when I have 'become myself' again after the performance.

These performance stages irresistibly recall the progress of Joseph Campbell's notion of the 'hero's journey', the monomyth that Campbell believed was the foundation for all other mythic narratives. Despite the immediate connection of a three stage process, Campbell's formulation does not fit well with my own experience. However, it may offer a very general starting point from which to examine the shapes that lie within mythic narratives, and which are also present within this performance practice.

5.9 The Hero's Journey

Joseph Campbell has claimed that:

“The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: Separation – initiation – return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.”¹¹⁸

For example:

¹¹⁸ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, 3rd Edition. Novato, California: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2008. pg 23. Print.

“Aeneas went down into the underworld, crossed the dreadful river of the dead, threw a sop to the three headed watchdog Cerberus, and conversed, at last, with the shade of his dead father. All things were unfolded to him. [...] He returned through the ivory gate to his work in the world.”¹¹⁹

Myths, Campbell believes, “normally” conform to this structure though they may vary almost infinitely in their detail. “The effect” however:

“of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world. [...] for the hero as the incarnation of God is himself the navel of the world, the umbilical point through which the energies of eternity break into time. Thus the World Navel is the symbol of the continuous creation: the mystery of the maintenance of the world through that continuous miracle of vivification which wells within all things.”¹²⁰

The Hero himself is presupposed as a male, who leaves a domestic setting and ventures out into the world. While engaged on his journey the hero’s encounters are heavily gendered and heterosexualised. He undergoes “a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World”, for example, who is at once:

“mother, sister, mistress, bride. Whatever in the world has lured, whatever has seemed to promise joy, has been premonitory of her existence – in the deep of sleep, if not in the cities and forests of the world. For she is the incarnation of the promise of perfection.”¹²¹

Coupled with this is the dark mirror image of the Goddess as a ‘bad mother’ whom Campbell associates with castration complexes in heroic adventurers such as Oedipus. After the Goddess, Campbell’s hero must then come to terms with “Woman as the Temptress” followed by an “Atonement with the Father.” Women here provoke disgust and are “tainted with the odour of the flesh”:

¹¹⁹ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. 1949. Novato: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2008. Pg 24.

¹²⁰ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Ibid. Pg 32.

¹²¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Ibid. Pg 92.

“not uncommonly, there is experienced a moment of revulsion: life, the acts of life, the organs of life, women in particular as the great symbol of life, become intolerable to the pure, the pure, the pure soul.”¹²²

Eventually however, the hero is

“made capable of enduring the full possession of the mother-destroyer, his inevitable bride. With that he knows that he and the father are one: he is in the father’s place.”¹²³

It can be clearly seen that although Campbell intends this reading to be universal, it exclusively adopts the perspective of a heterosexual male (and, it must be stressed, not *every* heterosexual male). As a woman I am distinctly alienated by this paradigmatic arc and feel thrown into crisis by Campbell’s insistence that this journey represents

“a vast and amazingly constant statement of the basic truths by which man has lived throughout the millennia of his residence on the planet.”¹²⁴

Though acknowledging the importance of Campbell’s work, I have found his insistence on fitting a single template over *all myths*, a territory of stories that are so vibrant in their variety, to be deeply problematic. It is difficult for me to identify with his references to a solitary hero forging away on his quest, in part because the images this conjures are resolutely linear, individualistic and masculine. There is no room for ambiguity of purpose in this structure, no space for uncertainty, or for contradiction – all qualities that I have found and treasured in mythic narratives.

This critique does not seek either to jettison Campbell’s substantial body of work, or to rubbish the notion of the hero’s journey as a narrative journey. Campbell’s hero is however, by definition *an exceptional male figure*, who is beyond the norm. And yet

¹²² Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Ibid. Pg 102.

¹²³ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Ibid. Pg 101.

¹²⁴ Joseph Campbell. “Preface to the 1949 edition.” *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Novato: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2008. xiii.

Campbell's understanding of myths claims to be universal. This excludes from the myth's 'meaning' (in Campbell's sense) the figures whom the hero leaves behind to undertake *his* quest. After all, for every Gilgamesh setting out to end of the world, there may also be an Enkidu who is as equally significant within the narrative. For every Odysseus, Penelope. For every Achilles, Patroclus. For every Cronus there is Gaia, whose mythic arc is quite different in shape. Campbell is selective in where he places the 'meaning' of a myth. To critique him is not to discount the hero, but is instead to open the mythographic reading up to the possibility of multiple perspectives.

Although many myths do fit Campbell's three-stage pattern, this may also be explained by the long established narrative pattern of 'beginning, middle, end.' Stories form themselves compulsively into a three-stage structure. In his short book *Three Uses of the Knife*, the dramatist and poet David Mamet talks about his experience of how the urge towards story-making influences the way we perceive and describe even indifferent meteorological phenomena:

"The weather is impersonal, and we both understand it and exploit it as dramatic, i.e., having a plot, in order to understand its meaning *for the hero*, which is to say, for ourselves."¹²⁵

Mamet, himself a professional story-maker, is specific about what kind of plot we crave: "We wish, in effect, for a three act structure." These three acts are remarkably close to Campbell's monomyth, but Mamet makes no claims here that he is talking about mythology, still less that he is describing 'energies of eternity'. Indeed, his central premise is that we wish to perceive this structure everywhere, even "in the interplay of clouds."¹²⁶

The terms of Campbell's monomyth then, are simply too broad. His outline of a hero's journey may pertain to not just all myths but to all stories that we tell, even the most

¹²⁵ David Mamet, *Three Uses Of The Knife: on the nature and purpose of drama*. London: Methuen Drama, 1998. Pg 3. Print.

¹²⁶ David Mamet, *Three Uses Of The Knife: on the nature and purpose of drama*. Ibid. Pg 10.

prosaic. The three stage structure may not be a significant or defining attribute of myth itself, but rather of storytelling. Though myth and story are clearly related, they are also distinct. Myths, as I discussed in the introduction, are rather a special category of story. While myths may be stories, not all stories are myths.

5.10 Myth and Ritual

Campbell flounders in attempting to impress the ‘hero’s journey’ outline onto *all* myths. However, it is undoubtedly a useful tool for exploring the traits of *some* myths, so long as its limitations are remembered and its significance is not overstated. Campbell himself points us in the direction of another contextual lead, when he refers to ‘the formula represented in the rites of passage.’ This formula corresponds to the three-stage structure of initiation rituals described by the anthropologist Arnold van Gennaap¹²⁷.

In 1960 (11 years after the first publication of Campbell’s *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*) Arnold Van Gennaap described a structure found in ritual events. Firstly the participants undertake a *separation* from the rest of their group or community, followed by a time of *transition* or *liminality*, before a final stage of *reincorporation* into the community. When I waited unseen outside the performance space, I was separating myself. When I entered the performance space, gathered myself, and recited the text from memory, I was occupying a liminal period during which I was no longer strictly myself. Then, after the performance, when I joined the audience on the top deck of the SS Rotterdam to watch the sunset, I was reincorporated into the group (a community that had been established through the act of collectively witnessing the performance).

This structural reading of ritual in some senses falls into the same traps as those encountered by Campbell’s hero’s journey. All gestures that we make, inhabit, or perform contain structure because, in our day-to-day world of *logos*, time unfolds in a linear and consecutive fashion in which one thing must happen before another. As David

¹²⁷ Arnold Van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1960. Print. These ideas were further developed by Victor Turner. “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage.” *The Forest of Symbols*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1967. Print.

Mamet has evidenced, the structural notions that we believe we see drawing lines of connection between elements or actions may be nothing more than our human impulse to perceive pattern and meaning in our world. If the playwright above can see systems in the chance movements of water vapour, I do not doubt that the anthropologist can see universal structures in the forms of complex rituals. This is not to dismiss the work of Van Genaap and those who have followed him, but merely to suggest that while a discussion of these structural outlines serves a useful purpose, I am reluctant to call any application ‘universal’ – especially when the subject matter is so subtle and complicated as the field of human behaviour and belief. Structural connectivity does not automatically guarantee connectivity of meaning, after all. And causal logic, as we have seen, cannot be assumed in spaces that seek to operate in the liminal area of *mythos*, with which rituals are often associated.

For many who study myth, defining the relationship between myth and ritual becomes of paramount importance. There is not space here to fully explore this colossal domain, but it may be enough to summarise that for some mythologists, myth and ritual are indivisible. For some¹²⁸, ritual gives form and shape to a myth by embedding the mythic narrative within observable cultural behaviour. For others¹²⁹, myth verbally articulates the images or structure of a ritual and explains, defines, or emerges from an expression of it. In 1913 however, the classical scholar and early feminist Jane Harrison elegantly critiqued these simple hierarchies where either myth or ritual takes precedence over the other. Instead she suggested that myth is a spoken correlative of the gesture that is called ritual. Myth gives tongue to sacred actions and as such it may be equally as sacred as a ceremony, neither one nor the other being the ‘original’ expression, but both evolving in concert. Myth and ritual, for Harrison, are not merely adjacent territories but overlapping states that may be traversed together if we understand the continuity between them.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ For example, William Robertson Smith. *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*. Edinburgh: Black, 1889. Print.

¹²⁹ Sir James Frazer. *The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993. Print.

¹³⁰ Jane Ellen Harrison. *Ancient Art and Ritual*. Hamburg: Tredition, 2012. Print.

Harrison's work is useful for this study because it means that we can jettison the redundant question of whether either myth or ritual ought to be prioritised in understanding the relationship between the form and content of this performance practice and focus instead on understanding the nature of the performance space that this – admittedly provisional – three act, or three stage structure describes. The space in question is the middle stage, referred to as liminal by Van Genaap, initiatory by Campbell, and by Mamet as the 'problematic' second act: "the time in which the artist and the protagonist doubt themselves and wish the journey had never begun."¹³¹ It is the time between the moment when I pause, about to open my mouth for the first time; and when I leave the room, having spoken the words I needed to speak. It is the time of the performance itself, distinct from the time and space both before and after it.

5.11 Examining Script and Choreography in Concert

The choreography of *A Love Song* foregrounds a middle stage, described above, wherein the performance takes place. This defined structural location contextualises the words of the performance as they are spoken.

The script of *A Love Song*, delivered within this 'middle stage' of the work, describes a liminal space that is unstable. The audience initially hears a prologue in which I adopt the voice of a dead man in a house of dust. I am both him, Enkidu; and not him, myself. In the text's second section, the image is of a seashore at dusk. The sea is lighter than the sky, and a man stands with his back to me: I am alone and not alone, waiting. The audience is waiting, listening. We are all waiting, perhaps for transformation.

On a beach, the intertidal area that is sometimes underwater and sometimes not, is called the littoral. The littoral is an ambiguous and liminal place, neither wholly water nor entirely land, changeable and vulnerable and prone to wave-borne metamorphosis. The littoral is where *A Love Song* is located: at the edge of the beach at the edge of the world.

¹³¹ David Mamet. *Three Uses Of The Knife: on the nature and purpose of drama*. Ibid Pg 33.

This is where Gilgamesh stands to speak to Uta-Napishti, and where Enkidu watches him and calls him back to mortality. In this, the performance text recalls the work of writer and theorist Grace Dane Mazur, who believes that a sense of the margins (established in *A Love Song* both through the words of the text and through the liminal stage of the performance choreography) is an essential element creating “altered consciousness” through “literary entrancement”:

“Stories begin with instabilities – perhaps because beginnings themselves are such unstable conditions. In fact, the opening pages sometimes show the protagonist in a condition of liminality and entrancement, liminality being the state of being on the threshold. It is as though there is a sense of ‘look, reader, the same thing that is happening to you – now that you are coiled around this book and are about to slip into the imagined world – is happening to the fictional character, who is at the edge of his own altered consciousness, and at the edge of adventure.’”¹³²

Though my audience are not curled around me as I speak, Mazur’s depiction of connecting the listener’s experience to the performer’s – ‘listen, what is happening to you is happening to me’ is powerful, and reflects Silverman’s account of identification and joining in the Saloméan sense, which I introduced in the previous chapter on Script. I will return to Mazur’s work, and her central thesis that some stories (she concentrates on written fictions) catalyse in their audience (their reader) a change in consciousness, in Chapter 8.

¹³² Grace Dane Mazur. *Hinges: Meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Nantick: A K Peters ltd., 2010. Pg 9. Print.

Chapter 6. THE GILGAMESH CYCLE: Vocal Delivery



61. *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (b.2013). Camden Arts Centre.

My voice is a central aspect of my work, and controlling my vocal delivery is a skill that I have practiced for years, since my very earliest performance work. Understanding the choices I have made in this vocal development has been an important process in unravelling the relationship between the form and content of my work. By examining the techniques I have used, as well as contrasting my own work with that of other female artists, I have been able to isolate some central ideas regarding my creative intentions.

In Chapter 5, I discussed the relationship between my performances and the architectural locations in which they are performed and concluded that my work is not site specific in a strict sense. In this chapter however, I shall show that the work is specific to the site of my body and could not be performed by another person without drastically changing its context and meaning. I shall relate this specificity to the use of material from my unconscious, developing the notion that myth provides a language to access this personal architecture as well as to communicate it.

The vocal delivery of my work is highly practiced and rehearsed, and is crafted to sound melodic, rhythmic, and controlled. I work with a voice coach, Lorna Penney, who has helped me to develop the strength and sensitivity of my voice through an embodied voice technique. I began working with Lorna in 2011, and have returned to her regularly since then in order to rehearse new works. The embodied voice technique (in the form pioneered by Lisa Sokolov in New York in the 1980s) is described in the standard textbook *Voicework in Music Therapy: Research and Practice* as follows:

“[Embodied voice technique] involves listening, the kinaesthetic experience, breath and tone, and the imagistic language of our inner life [...] free expressive improvisational singing, practicing attentiveness, and developing an attitude of radical receptivity...”¹³³

Penney, however, is also influenced by the recent work of Nadine George of Voice Studio International, whose practice has extended her own embodied vocal techniques into stagework for international theatre companies. Nadine George, like Sokolov – and, after her, Penney – emphasises the physical and bodily capacity of the human voice, and the essential relationship between the voice and the breath. Much of the voice work I have undertaken with Penney (and independently, guided by my sessions with her) has centered around using meditative techniques to develop my sensitivity to the ingress and egress of breath. When developing and rehearsing a new work, I am not trying to ‘perfect’ the piece in the way that a singer might practice hitting the right note. Instead I am trying to inhabit the delivery of the work completely, feeling the relationship between my breathing and speaking, and working towards controlling the volume, pace, and intensity of the words. When I feel fully rehearsed and ready to perform, the sensation is akin to one of fullness. I can feel the performance text within me, located somewhere around my belly or diaphragm. When I open my mouth to speak I can feel the shape the words make in my stomach, lungs, and voice box. At these moments the text I recite

¹³³ Felicity Baker, Sylka Uhlig, Diane Austin, *Voicework in Music Therapy: Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2011. Pg 28. Print.

seems to emerge from within the internal spaces of my body, rather than consciously from my mind.¹³⁴

The way I use my voice while performing connects me bodily to the text as it is delivered. I am not ‘acting out’ or personifying the words so much as regurgitating them whole for the audience. Through performance I become a conduit for the delivery of the words I have written, and my speaking becomes a speech act. Because there is a meditative aspect to the practice of embodied voice technique, the delivery of the performance manifests a kind of ceremonial speaking, emphasized by the highly practiced and controlled manner of the recitation. As discussed in the previous chapter, the classicist Jane Harrison has stressed the interconnectedness of myth and ritual, presenting them as correlatives of one another. Using a highly formalised and ceremonial style of speaking is an appropriate way therefore, for me to give my words both a notional and a verbal aspect, defining a space that may itself be mythic, ritualistic or, in Harrison’s terms, both.

Using embodied voice technique allows me to refine the intuitive processes of my body and mind. Through my work I am learning to understand and strengthen capacities of my body that otherwise remain at the periphery of my consciousness. This includes my breath, as mentioned, but also my capacity for stillness, my awareness of posture, and my sense of presence within a space – an ability to feel my own body connect to both the bodies of others present, and to the capacities and spaces of the room in which I stand. The relationship between this experience and meditation practice is strong, and has a direct link back to the intuitive writing process I undertake, which similarly tries to connect and distil fleeting thoughts and sensations.

For *A Love Song*, I had to negotiate the voluminous echo in the performance space, and the way that the shape of the room caused any sound emitted to travel up into the complicated roof space. I spent several days practicing the pitch, tone, and speed of my

¹³⁴ For a discussion of how this performance delivery is perceived by the audience, and a more fulsome description of my own experience of performing, see Chapter 8.

delivery to ensure that my words were clear and audible. I had to use considerable vocal control to maintain the practiced delivery throughout the live performance of the work. The results of this can be heard in the audio recording of the live performance (See Media DVD)

6.1 Experiment: A Love Song, For Gilgamesh (b.2013)

After performing A Love Song, For Gilgamesh on the SS Rotterdam, I was asked to re-perform the work at Camden Arts Centre, London. I was able to spend three weeks in the performance studio there, practicing and rehearsing the work in order to recontextualise it for the new space. One of the major differences between the two performance spaces (of SS Rotterdam and Camden Arts Centre) was in their acoustic properties. This provided a good opportunity to investigate how to re-address the vocal performance of a work for a different context, and whether this would change the work in any way.

The swimming pool on board SS Rotterdam was very acoustically contained, and there was virtually no noise pollution from the rest of the ship other than a fan. This produced an unchanging tone that was easy to ignore during the live work, but which became more problematic when listening back to the audio recording. The room did however have a very complicated echo with a long reverberation, which threatened to make my words incomprehensible. Camden Arts Centre's performance studio on the other hand, has large single glazed windows along one wall, which open onto a main road with heavy daytime traffic. As a busy public gallery I was also aware of the voices of visitors and staff elsewhere in the building. With high ceilings and bare walls, the performance studio did echo, but the reverberation was simpler to manage than the boat's and as it was a much smaller room I knew that the bodies of audience members would considerably muffle the sound during the actual performance. The main difficulty at Camden Arts Centre then, was the loud ambient noise levels, which could have drowned my voice out. Traffic noises, and sounds from elsewhere in the gallery, were audible on the live stream broadcast of the work (available at <http://bambuser.com/v/3873740>).

While at SS Rotterdam I concentrated my rehearsals on slowing my pace of delivery to accommodate the long reverberation, so I did not begin delivering a new line until the echo of the previous one had died away. At Camden Arts Centre I focussed on increasing the volume and clarity of my delivery. I did not try to shout out or compete with the traffic noise, as this would be impossible, and any perceived vocal strain on my part would distract from the performance experience. The recitation ought to feel effortless, as the audience ought not to see the performance solely as an act of endurance or a trick of memory, in which the words themselves might become secondary to the feat of recall. Instead I used my understanding of embodied voice technique to allow my voice to resonate with my body to a degree that felt both natural and competent, but which was loud enough to be heard in that space. I then worked on fine-tuning the clarity of my articulation so that my words could clearly be picked out from the background sound, without having to compete with them. The rehearsals went well and by the end of the three weeks there was no difficulty with the acoustics and the words of the text were easily heard. The changes made to the performance of the work because of the different acoustics were technical rather than changes to content. Undoubtedly the sound of the work was altered between the two versions of the performance but the integrity of the piece and its content did not change because of this. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the relationship between my work and site specificity.

6.2 Analysis of Vocal Delivery

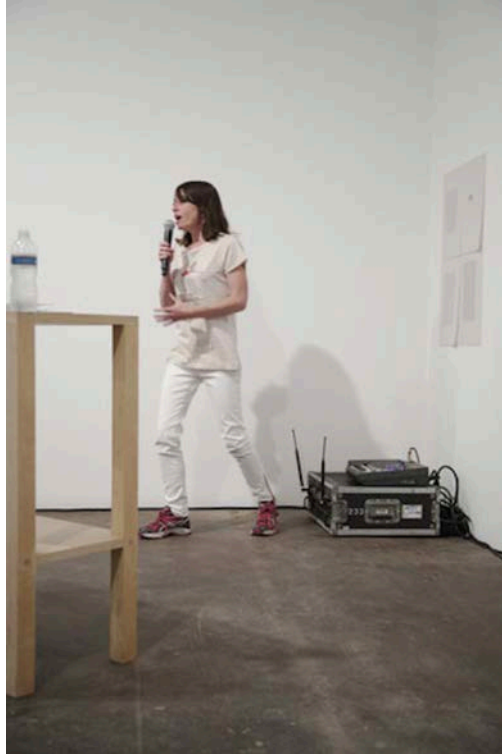
My approach to developing the vocal range of my work was undoubtedly influenced by working in fairly close context to Sue Tompkins. Tompkins (b. 1971) is a few years older than me, and by the time I moved to Glasgow in 1998, she was already developing a reputation for her work, and was associated with the fashionable ‘Transmission set’ (a group of emerging artists who exhibited at and served on the committee of Transmission Gallery, Glasgow).



62. Sue Tompkins performing during *Apple*, her first solo exhibition in London, presented by The Showroom (2007). See list of plates for full reference.

Tompkins is represented by The Modern Institute, a highly regarded commercial gallery, and her work has been shown in high profile solo contexts including Inverleith House, Edinburgh (*dug nature*, 2014), White Columns, New York (*Letherin Through The Grill*, 2014), DIA Art Foundation, New York (*My Kind Book* 2011) The Showroom, London (*Apple*, 2007), and the 2005 Scottish Pavilion of the Venice Biennale (*Elephants Galore*). It is unsurprising therefore that when I began to develop performance based work in 2008 I would look towards the practice of Tompkins – a very successful female Glasgow-based performance artist who uses her voice – as an immediate context.

Tompkins' vocal delivery is staccato and rhythmic, turning her fragments of language into bouncing, tumbling prose-poems.



63. Sue Tompkins *LL Bedrock* (2012). Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis.
See list of plates for full reference.

I admire the way that Tompkins composes her words, and have tried to emulate the deliberate way that she structures her texts for the ear rather than the eye. One significant shift between her work and mine however is in the tone of the work: my practice is far slower than Tompkins. Tompkins disrupts the language she uses, repeating single words or isolated lines in order to build complex non-narrative assemblages of language. This is quite different to my drive to tell stories and to immerse the audience within a ritualised experience. Tompkins' references within her work are solely contemporary, and give the appearance of direct autobiography. However, despite these differences, as I was building my performance practice (particularly in the years between 2008 – 2010) I felt that I could learn from the vocal skills that Tompkins demonstrates in order to progress my own work. Recognising that vocal delivery is a craft to be learned and refined just like any other artistic medium was an important realisation for me.

Moving on from Tompkins, in order to develop this craft, I have looked towards the work

of several other artists who use their voices. In studying the differences in their styles and techniques I have sought to build an approach that is distinctly my own. Particularly useful to me has been the work of Rachel Rosenthal, an American performance artist who comes from a theatrical tradition. In works such as *Gaia, Mon Amour* (1983), Rosenthal works solo on the stage and shifts between different personas through the course of the work, ‘becoming’ at various moments a bag lady, the goddess Gaia, and ‘herself’. Part of the way she accomplishes this movement through personas is through ritualized costume and props, but also through changes in vocal delivery.

At times Rosenthal booms, while at times she whispers.¹³⁵



64. Rachel Rosenthal *Gaia, Mon Amor* (1983). Still from YouTube video.
See list of plates for full reference.

Influenced by Rosenthal, I am aware of how changes in vocal delivery can be used to announce changes or distinguish areas and incidents within the body of the performance. In my own work, I do use this to vary the quality of my delivery through the performance of *A Love Song*. In section three of my script for example, the opening and closing lines appear in a more conversational, frank presentation, while the central section becomes more song-like, flowing, and intoned. This can be heard both on the audio recording included in Appendix M. This breaks the text up a little, making it less dense and shifting the register of the audience’s listening somewhat. However, I am careful to not distinguish the different areas of my script with different personae. Though the

¹³⁵ See Appendix C for a close reading of *Gaia, Mon Amour* (1983).

perspective of the text may shift between different viewpoints, my voice and vocal delivery unites the work as a continuous path for the audience's experience to follow. In contrast, Rosenthal's use of multiple voices within her work is significant because it fragments her presentation and splits her performing 'self' into figures that can be interpreted as 'roles', in a theatrical sense. Her performance scripts illustrate this. The script for Rosenthal's 1987 work *Rachel's Brain* opens with the direction:

"Enter ROSENTHAL as MARIE ANTOINETTE, wearing a silver-grey crinoline gown [...] She delivers the following speech in a half-operatic, half-sprechstimme style."¹³⁶

Later in the performance, Rosenthal's Marie Antoinette character 'dies' and the stage is plunged into darkness. A slide of a Rousseau painting then illuminates the stage, and Rosenthal is metamorphosed with the following script direction:

"The following sequence is played on or around the small stage right box and the downstage platform. ROSENTHAL alternates between playing KOKO the gorilla, and her TRAINER, the scientist who has been teaching her American sign language."¹³⁷

Rosenthal's script states that the artist enters *as* Marie Antoinette. Later she is *playing* Koko and the Trainer. This is theatrical language that demarcates the space between the artist and the figures that she is representing¹³⁸. I have chosen not to follow this theatrical tradition in my own work. I am not 'playing' a part when I perform, and my use of embodied voice technique, which roots my vocal delivery within the specific site of my own body, serves to knit my words into my own physical experience. Instead of fragmenting my performance self, as I move through the work I overlay and bring together potential perspectives so that they are multiple rather than sequential or

¹³⁶ Rachel Rosenthal. "Rachel's Brain". *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms: Rachel Rosenthal performance texts*. Ed Una Chaudhuri. London and New York: Continuum, 2001. Pg 115 – 116. Print.

¹³⁷ Rachel Rosenthal. "Rachel's Brain". *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms: Rachel Rosenthal performance texts*. Ed Una Chaudhuri. Ibid. Pg 128.

¹³⁸ It should be noted however, that the title 'Rachel's Brain' implicitly locates all Rosenthal's personae within the context of her own head.

alternating. Through studying Rosenthal's vocal practice I have felt that her theatrical connotations would be inappropriate for my own work, because of the references to acting and representation rather than embodiment.



65. Rachel Rosenthal, *Rachel's Brain* (1987). Unknown location.
See list of plates for full reference.

A third point of reference for my own work has been the Glasgow-based artist Michelle Hannah, whose work also employs complex vocal deliveries. Where Rosenthal's practice has references to theatre however, Hannah's leans more towards music. Influenced by the American vocalist, performer, composer and musician Diamanda Galas, as well as referencing musicians David Bowie and Laurie Anderson, Hannah recites disjointed fragments of song lyrics through highly processed vocal distortion software alongside minimal music tracks that she composes herself. Hannah's work is spectacular and intense, utilizing costume, make-up, and lighting to create mesmeric effects.



66. Michelle Hannah, *Statue*, (2014). Video, duration 11.01.
See list of plates for full reference.

She and I are roughly contemporaries, and have attended many of each other's performances. We have both learned from each other, as well as taking confidence from the fact that neither of us is working in isolation. In particular, our practices share a decision to create work that uses vocal performance to generate emotive or experiential responses in the audience. This can be contrasted with an artist such as Tompkins, whose performances are more conceptual or cerebral as viewing experiences.

Like Tompkins' practice however, I have refined my own work by analyzing the ways in which it differs from that of my peers, which it may superficially resemble. Hannah uses distorting technology, and employs a great deal of digital manipulation. Her performance texts are also composed of quotations – small sections of repurposed and collaged song lyrics written by others. These are both devices that distance the performer from the words that she speaks. Hannah's voice, as it is heard by the audience, does not emanate directly from her but is framed by audio technology. As described by *The Skinny* magazine "Her voice is powerful, technologic, metallic."¹³⁹ This is entirely appropriate for Hannah's practice, which seeks to create an otherworldly, futuristic digital aesthetic.

"It's like a cry of help to technology, I guess,' says Hannah. 'Or like

¹³⁹ Jac Mantle. "Michelle Hannah: New Romantic." *The Skinny*, 28/10/13. Accessed 27/5/15. <http://www.theskinny.co.uk/art/interviews/michelle-hannah-new-romantic> Website.

Nam June Paik said he wanted to find the humanity in technology, something like that.”¹⁴⁰

In my own work however, it has felt imperative that my words come directly from me, as well as being rooted in me. Hannah’s use of digital voice transformation and fragmented quotes work in concert to erect layers of distance that make it (deliberately) difficult to trace the personal position of the artist. My work moves in the opposite direction. The content of my performances emerges from a highly personal space and the delivery reflects this by vocalizing the words without amplification and completely unmediated.

Along with the other elements of this performance practice therefore, my use of vocal delivery functions on two levels. Firstly, the performance of the work is made to resemble ritual practices in that my speech patterns are formalized and ceremonialised. Simultaneously however, the delivery is rendered intensely bodily and highly personalized to the site of my own body – wed inextricably to my unique bodily capacities. As the content of my work reveals the internal spaces of my unconscious mind, so my vocal delivery is shaped by the internal spaces of my body. In a literal sense, the myth I give voice to is given shape by my body and my mind. In metaphorical terms, I imagine the myth emerging from my mouth like a cast plaster form, given shape by the interior spaces of its mold. Despite Joseph Campbell’s insistence on the universal qualities of myth, the evidence of this chapter suggests that it is myths’ highly personal aspects that resonate within the vocal delivery of my own performance work – or, more precisely, which allow the words of my performance practice to effectively resonate within me.

¹⁴⁰ Jac Mantle. *Michelle Hannah: New Romantic*. The Skinny, 28/10/13. Online. Ibid.

Chapter 7. THE GILGAMESH CYCLE: The Performance Garments



67. *Mouth Open In An Open O* (b.2013). The Agency Gallery, London.
Garment by Carmel O'Brien.

In this chapter I will explore how the garments I wear during the performances underline the ritual appearance of the work, as well as drawing attention to my physicality. As they literally contain me while I am performing, the garments are critical in reinforcing the ceremonial aspects of my work, while simultaneously underscoring that the performances are deeply rooted in a singular and identifiable human-scale experience (my own).

I refer to the clothes I wear during the performance as 'performance garments' rather than 'costumes'. This is an important distinction because costume is an aid either to disguise oneself, or to represent another. This distinction reflects the conclusions of the previous chapter, in which I distanced myself from the theatrical language used by Rachel Rosenthal (see pg 146). In my work, donning a performance garment indicates that I am

engaging in behaviours that are outside my day-to-day self. There is a connection here to the ritual apparel worn by shamans, which will be discussed further in Chapter 9. It is also significant that the first time I employed someone to produce a garment for a performance, I approached Lesley Hepburn, who had made my wedding dress for me. Partly this was because I knew I could trust her to do a good job. However, it also reflects the function of the garments I wear during performances. At my wedding I was not dressed up as a bride, because I was the bride. The wedding dress I wore was not a costume but, like shamanic garb, was a ceremonial garment that indicated that I was undertaking a ritual. Like my performance garments, I do not wear my wedding dress for other purposes but keep it safe, vacuum packed and mothballed as something between a document and a memento.



68. Wedding dress by Lesley Hepburn.

Wearing an item that has been created for me to perform in, I am clad for a ceremony that people have gathered to witness. The garment I wear binds me to the words I speak, to the moment and to the time that I am performing.



69. *To Sing of Gilgamesh* (b.2012). Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Art. Garment by Lesley Hepburn.

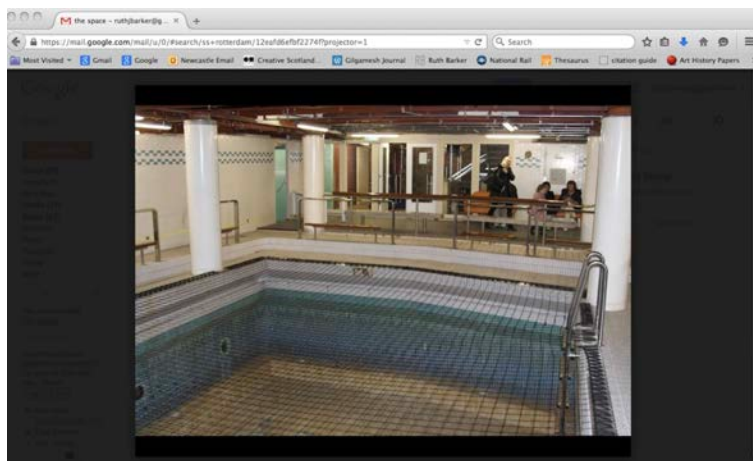
When I have finished, the garment remains as a solid document, testifying to the fact that the performance happened. I have discussed how myth and ritual may be bound together, with one indivisible from the other. My performance garments embed my performance work within the language of ritual, by suggesting a ceremonial framework that surrounds the delivery of my words. They also frame me however; I am not an anonymous storyteller who is separate from the words I am speaking. The garments present me as a sculptural vessel for the words, forcing me to recall Benjamin's words about leaving fingerprints on our pots¹⁴¹. My performance garments, which are (unlike, I hope, the wedding dress) gaudy, uncomfortable, and verging on the ridiculous, do not allow me to become invisible within the work but, like vocal delivery and the script-writing process, firmly stitch me into the fabric of the myth I am voicing.

¹⁴¹ See the Introduction to this study, pg 30.

7.1 A Garment for *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*

Since 2010 I have used a performance garment that is specifically produced for each work. The designer Carmel O'Brien, to whom I paid a £300 fee plus materials costs, designed and produced the gold and russet two-piece garment for *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*. O'Brien had also made the grey and black garment / neck-piece for *Mouth Open In An Open O* (2012). The white rubber garment for *To Sing of Gilgamesh* (2012) (£300 plus materials) was by Lesley Hepburn, whom I have continued to work with regularly (commissions include performances *I Am Odysseus* [2010] *To Mithras* [2010], and *And The Three Mothers Ask, Don't You Know Me* [2011]).

I consider the process of the garment's production as a commission rather than a collaboration as I pay for the work and control the brief. I contacted O'Brien at an early stage of the development of *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*, and met with her to discuss my intentions for the work. At first (because I was still working on the initial drafting of the script) the main sources of inspiration for O'Brien were the photographs of the performance space. She was drawn to the tile-work in the swimming pool and quite quickly decided that she wanted to use metallic or iridescent fabric. I met with O'Brien a total of 8 times (development meetings plus fittings), and showed her drafts of the script as soon as they were at a stage where I felt comfortable sharing them.



70. My first glimpse of the SS Rotterdam swimming pool, in an email from Sils Gallery.

To create this piece, I emphasised to O'Brien the slow and precious nature of this work and the 'jewel-like' sense that I wanted the script to have. Gold was a critical colour for the work, to draw out the repeated image of the dead speaker "covered with silver and gold, / And all the breath of my body / Gone out into the wind, and lost" (sections I and III – see Appendix M.4) which is contrasted with the disclosure in the central section that "the gifts you gave me are tarnished" (section II see Appendix M.4). The russet overgarment that O'Brien developed used fabric that she already had in her collection, which she suggested. The gold lurex fabric was bought and selected by myself.



71. Rehearsal image for *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (a.2012). SS Rotterdam.

As the garment developed I arranged fitting sessions with O'Brien, to ensure that the dress would fit the physical demands of the performance, including allowing me to climb down the pool ladder.



72. Descending the ladder.

I was also in the early stages of pregnancy at this time, and so some allowance was made for an expanding waistline. Though the garment does restrict my movement to some degree (though not as greatly as other, previous garments such as the paper dressed I wore for *I Am Odysseus* [2010] and *To Mithras* [2011]) practically it also had to allow me to deliver the performance.



73. *To Mithras*, (2011). Carrawburgh Mithraeum.
Garment by Lesley Hepburn.

Discussing the garment for *A Love Song* with O'Brien. I was clear that it was not intended to flatter or complement my appearance. Rather, it was intended to be memorable, visually striking, and elaborate in its own right.

I always keep my feet bare during performances. Having bare feet in a public context is unusual, and again signifies that my actions lie outside of my day-to-day life. Visually, I am also vulnerable and unprotected. However, having nothing between the soles of my feet and the ground also makes me feel stronger and more 'rooted' in my delivery. This may be connected to the fact that my body's physical alignment alters my capacity to make sound. The position of my head, my spine, and my hips, all take their balance to some degree from the way that my feet connect with the floor. Keeping my feet bare – although it may look fragile or vulnerable – actually allows me to feel stable, balanced, and sure of my footing.



74. Stepping from the bottom of the ladder onto the pool floor in bare feet.

The final design of the garment was intended to reflect the geometric form of the pool's tiling with horizontal bands across the back forming rectangular gold apertures onto the gold dress below. The structure was meant to emphasise my upright form in the centre of the recessed pool, and to make me look taller than I am. The material was intended to suggest a mixture of classical and contemporary / futuristic references.



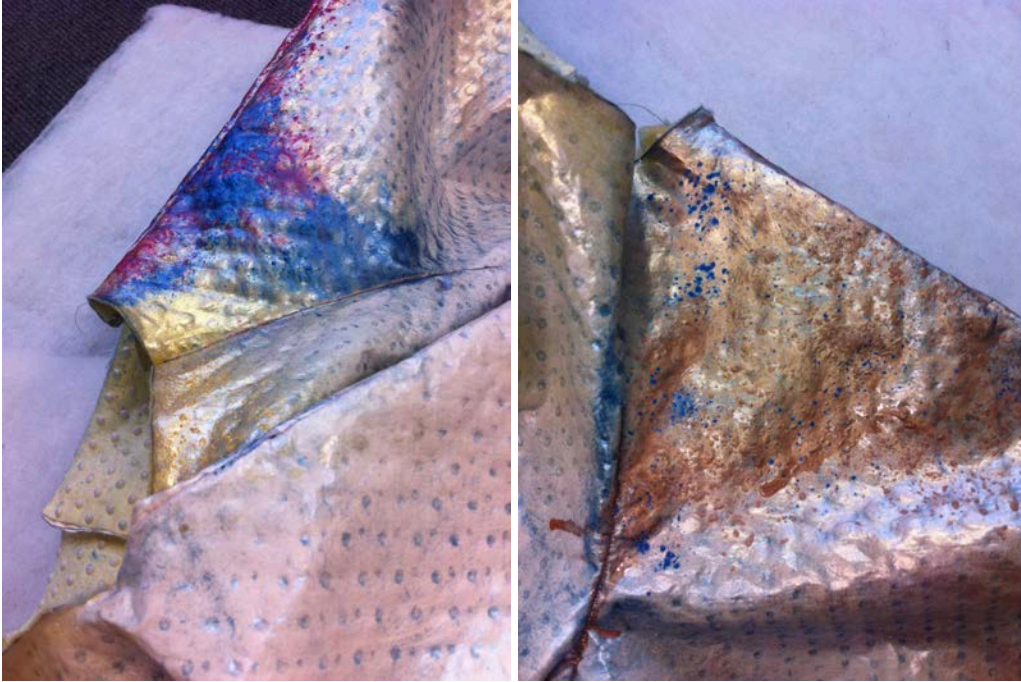
75. Back view of performance garment, showing relationship to floor tiles.

The garment increases the sense of my own physical presence within the work. It is sculptural, and I consider the piece's development and execution in sculptural terms. Because of the overt visual creativity of the dressmaking, and the visual pleasure found in some of the garment designs, the performance becomes a visual celebration. At the same time it also becomes a haptic experience as the audience reads the moments of fragility, tension, or discomfort I endure as I stand there before them and recite, contained within the form of the garment.

7.2 Experiment: *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (a.2012) and (b.2012).

Some garments have been more successful than others, and that of *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* in particular was adapted between an early studio performance (a.2012, in Bruce Building, Newcastle) and a later more formal presentation (b.2012 in Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art). In this case, the early version of the garment (a soft white rubberised fabric, pigmented with metallic cosmetic powders) did not feel resolved. The tied waist of the early piece was removed and the interior of the garment was padded

with wadding to make it appear more voluminous, heavy, and overblown. The pigmentation was also increased and made less subtle than it had previously been.



76. Studio images of the garment for *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* in production.

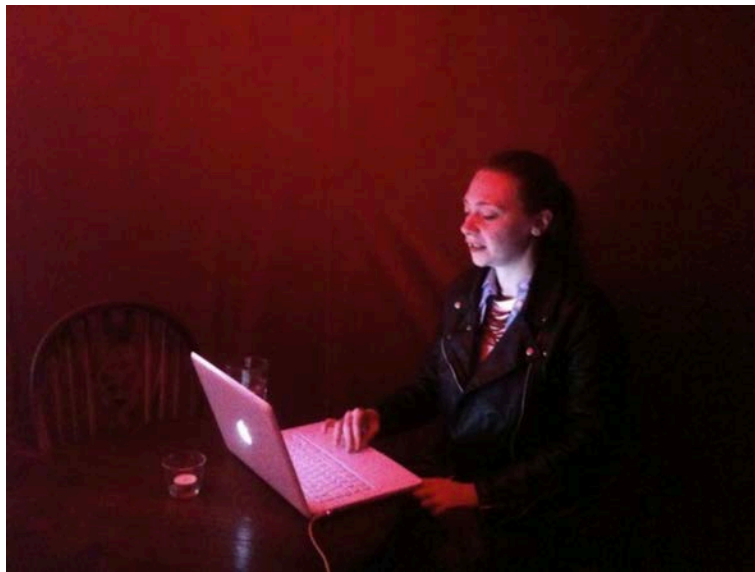


77. *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (b.2012) at Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary

Art

7.3 Experiment: *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (a. 2012).

For *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (a. 2012) I experimented by wearing my own clothes, rather than a bespoke performance garment. Because I was reading the text rather than reciting from memory, and because the audience would be free to come and go as they pleased, I expected that the performance would have less of a ‘ritualised’ feel. I felt that a performance garment might not be appropriate, and so instead I dressed practically for a very cold space, wearing a leather jacket, jumper, and jeans.



78. Wearing my own clothes during *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (a. 2012). Cartel Gallery, London.

I felt that this decision was disappointing, in retrospect. Looking at documentation of the performance, I missed the visual generosity and creativity present in other works. Without a performance garment I did not feel that I had as completely immersed myself within the performance sphere. I was aware that the line of choreography discussed in Chapter 5, which demarcates the liminal moment of performance, was less clearly drawn because I was not shedding my day-to-day clothes.

I felt that the garments of other performances transformed me as the performer out of my day-to-day self, and into a performance self, and this ‘metamorphosis’ did not occur when I was wearing my own clothes.

7.4 Experiment: *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (b. 2013).

For *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (b. 2013), I experimented by designing a digital print that was transferred to fabric. This bespoke printed fabric was used to produce a garment from a commercially available Vogue pattern. I was pleased with the digital print, which used collaged sections of photocopies of my own body, and through which I felt I had extended the performance into a new physical artefact.



79. Performing *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (b. 2013) wearing my own design of fabric print, and a commercially produced garment.

I was satisfied by the commercially produced garment that resulted, but not excited by it. It was an interesting option that I might make use of again if time or resources were tight

(this was a far quicker and cheaper option) but I missed the shared creative process of working with a designer to produce something new. I also missed the formalised creation process of the garments, which for the bespoke pieces takes place over several weeks and months, and involves multiple fittings and ‘tweaks’. The care taken in the garment’s making echoes the craft of the other performance elements such as the writing of the script and the practice of the voice. Together, the garment production and rehearsal process coalesce to provide a sense of anticipation, labour, and investment, which does recall the preparations for a wedding or public ceremony.

7.5 My clothes and others’: Understanding the presence of garments in my work through a narrative account of other artists’ practices.

When I began making performances in 2008¹⁴², I did not use bespoke performance garments, and in works such as *The Deer Woman* (2009), *Octagon Upon Octagon* (2008), and *In The Beginning* (2009), I simply dressed in black.



80. Ruth Barker, *The Deer Woman*, 2009.

I wore items from my existing wardrobe, selected because they were comfortable and, I believed at the time, fairly neutral. Examining photographic documentation of these

¹⁴² More a more detailed discussion of the development of my practice prior to starting the PhD, see Chapter 2.

performances however, I felt that I wanted to introduce a more visual element into the work: I wanted the performances to look elaborate and embellished. I also realised (admittedly belatedly) that the black outfit I had selected was in many ways an archetypal ‘performance art uniform’ (see below) that particularly referenced the work of artists in the 1960s and 70s, and I felt that this was inappropriate, and dated. I did not want to contextualise my work alongside the practices of figures such as Bruce Mclean or Yoko Ono, who had used similar aesthetics.



81. Bruce Mclean. *Pose Work for Plinths 3* (detail), 1971.



82. Yoko Ono performing *Voice Piece for Soprano*, 1961.

I was sure that there was an extra dimension I could add to my performances by pushing them in a more visual direction. In 2010 the performance artists whose work I regularly saw in Glasgow, such as Sarah Tripp, Jim Colquhoun, and Sue Tompkins all wore everyday clothes.



83.



84.

83. Sarah Tripp *Objects, People and Customs*, 2010. See list of plates for full reference.

84. Jim Colquhoun *Weasels*, 2008. See list of plates for full reference.



85. Sue Tompkins, *Hallo and Welcome to Keith Street*, 2011.
See list of plates for full reference.

In the performances above, Tompkins smiles and bobs in a printed t-shirt and dark jeans. She wears conventional clothes, looking styled and attractive though not out of the ordinary. Tripp wears a black lace dress, tights, and brogues, and controls her movements carefully, tracing shapes in the air that punctuate her carefully articulated phrases. Colquhoun reads, his hand in the pocket of his blue jeans, shifting his weight from one foot to another as his gaze makes eye contact with his audience and then returns to the words on his page. In each case, the clothes chosen by the artist point to a deliberately casual framing of their work, implying that a performance might appear out of nowhere. The work here is intended to be available, and firmly located within the daily sphere of experience. Tompkins' references are to pop/rock music – she was the lead singer of the post punk band Life Without Buildings – while Tripp and Colquhoun's presentations recall poetry recitals or author's book readings. After seeing several of Tompkins'

performances in particular¹⁴³ I felt confident that I could evolve my own work beyond this language of the quotidian.

A direct influence on my decision to commission Hepburn to make a garment for me back in 2010 was the discovery, during my development of *I Am Odysseus*, of a new point of reference for my practice, beyond these Glasgow-based performers. *I Am Odysseus* was written for Glasgow International Festival of Contemporary Art, and at a development meeting that discussed the upcoming festival programme, I learned that the performance artist Linder would be debuting a major new work at the festival. For *The Darktown Cakewalk: celebrated from the house of FAME*, Linder was working with the designer Richard Nicoll to develop a series of costumes for herself and a group of ensemble performers.



86. Rehearsal image (costume fitting) for Linder, *The Darktown Cakewalk: celebrated from the house of FAME* (2010). See list of plates for full reference.

This information was both inspiring and challenging. On hearing of Linder's intentions I realised that this was the direction in which I wanted my own work to move, and it gave me the confidence to implement a change in my work that I had been considering for several months, but had not yet undertaken. I had enjoyed the process of having a

¹⁴³ Particularly Sue Tompkins. *Hallo, Welcome to Keith Street*. Edinburgh: Inverleith House, 2011. Performance.

wedding dress made for me (who wouldn't?) but I also conceptually wanted my performance art practice to capture the sense of being prepared for a ceremony that I experienced previously in the context of my wedding. Having a garment made at first felt like a very bold departure, but immediately also felt appropriate. Wearing the garment for the first time during *I Am Odysseus* felt right. It was through attending Linder's *The Darktown Cakewalk* however, which took place after my own performance, that I was able to articulate more clearly how garments could function within a work, and why they might be important to me. Seeing Linder's performance allowed me to read the artist's decisions from an external perspective, at a point when my own experience was far too raw for me to be able to adequately reflect upon it.

The Darktown Cakewalk is a complex and multilayered semi-improvised performance work that takes place over 13 hours, and was premiered at The Arches venue in Glasgow. Linder employed an array of performers, musicians, and extras, and had costumes designed by Cerutti designer Richard Nicoll¹⁴⁴. The costumes within the work have multiple functions that operate simultaneously. Firstly they serve to transform the various participants into the archetypal figures of the performance: the star, the muse, the king etc.

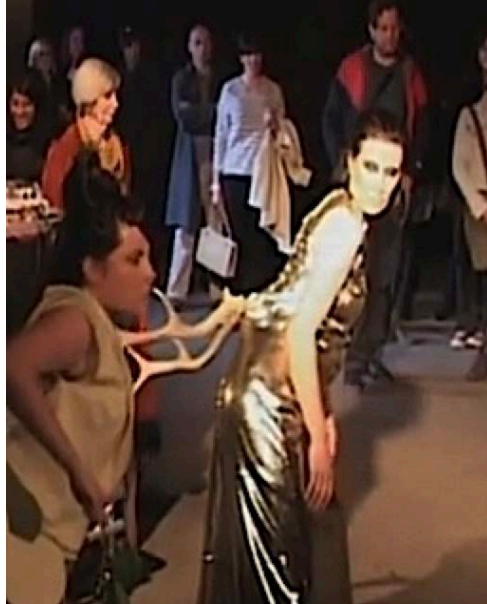
¹⁴⁴ Seeing an artist employ someone else to create costumes for her was very reassuring for me, legitimising my own decision to pay a professional, Hepburn, to develop my performance garments. I am simply not a skilled enough maker to be able to produce the clothes I had in mind for my work.



87. Rehearsal image for Linder, *The Darktown Cakewalk* (2010).
Image shows Judith Williams as Puella Aterna. Garment by Richard Nicoll.
See list of plates for full reference.

The costumes allow the performers to transcend themselves and to become someone else within the sphere of the performance. Their personas are identified and described by Nicoll's elaborate costumes and accessories: the gold cloak of The Star for example. In *The Darktown Cakewalk* this aspect of the costumes' use does approach a conventional understanding of theatrical costume, and indeed in my own work, this element (using garments to distinguish or indicate character) is not present. For me, wearing a garment does allow me to visibly demarcate an intention to perform, but it does not clad me as a character in a production.

Secondly, and more significantly for me, the clothes worn in *The Darktown Cakewalk* variously inhibit and accentuate the performers' movements and gestures. The (pregnant) dancer Sari Lievonen for example, performs the anima/animus/animal persona in a tight gold dress with stag's antlers extending from her lower back.



88. Video still showing Sari Lievonen as one aspect of the Anima, Animus, Animal character in *The Darktown Cakewalk*. See list of plates for full reference.

This is an idea I have worked with directly, using garments to physically frame by body by emphasising or restricting particular movements, or limbs. Prior to the PhD, the dress for *And The Three Mothers Ask, Don't You Know Me?* tightly bound my arms to my sides and rendered them immobile, while emphasising the strength in my legs. For the works in The Gilgamesh Cycle, the white rubber garment in *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (b.2012) was deliberately oversized to make me look physically small inside it. For *Mouth Open In An Open O* (2012) the dress was rigidly reinforced, creating a smooth seed-pod-like outline that reflected the botanical theme of the text, but which held me in a very upright position that was emphasised by the choker-like neck piece, the wires of which trembled as I spoke and breathed. The effect of this was to draw attention to the physical and sculptural act of my standing and speaking, drawing a direct connection between my use of garments that work with my body, and my use of embodied voice technique. Both strategies connect the act of my speaking with the physical site of my self.



89. Three performances and three garments. Left to right: *And The Three Mothers Ask*, (2011); *To Sing Of Gilgamesh* (b.2012); *Mouth Open* (2012). Garments by Lesley Hepburn, Lesley Hepburn, and Carmel O'Brien, respectively.

The third aspect of costume within *The Darktown Cakewalk* is the creation of the performance 'world'. On entering The Arches as an audience member, I was subsumed by the experience of Linder's epic and transformative journey. The costumes knit the performers into the performance's hypnotic and disorientating landscape. They give a visual quality to that landscape, colouring it and describing it through masks, clothes, capes, and hats in gold and black, nude and white. A visual and associative palette is created for the work through the use of fabric and paint, which extends the performance beyond gesture and sound into a space that is more physical, more speculative, and more immersive. This is also an aspect that I have tried to make use of in my own work, as the costumes allow the performance to similarly extend beyond the words that are spoken into a more holistic and immersive experience. Visual generosity and creativity is an important element in this, and one that again suggests the figure of a shaman, ritually clad in elaborate garb that places them within a theological network. In the video documentation of *The Darktown Cakewalk*, I can be seen standing at the sidelines in grey leather jacket and black jeans. I look out of place. In the sumptuous masque that is played out before me, the performers, like shamans, have an authority partly leant to them by the language of their garments.



90. Linder, *The Darktown Cakewalk* (2010). The Arches, Glasgow. I am in the audience, standing second from the right. See list of plates for full reference.

Linder, like Tompkins, comes from a music background, and her collage work has been associated with a number of bands from the punk and post punk era, notably the Buzzcocks, Ludus, Magazine, and Morrissey. In *The Darktown Cakewalk*, however, the performance does transition beyond being a musical spectacle (though music is an important element in the work) into a metamorphic, liminal space. For me however, as a viewer it did become strained due to the sheer number of different elements that were coexisting, and the time that these played out over. The work lost focus at times as the layering of multiple elements was at some moments so complex that it resulted in a subjective 'break' with the Cakewalk's experiential world, as I felt overwhelmed by it. I have responded to this experience in my own work by limiting the number of elements to one performer, one garment, one script, and little movement. By working within these self-imposed limits to produce *A Love Song For Gilgamesh* I was able to increase the performance's intensity and concentration and to keep the energy constant across the work's duration. Though *The Darktown Cakewalk* was very influential and I was lucky to be able to see it at such a critical moment in my work's development, I have also been careful not to emulate the sensory overload that at times Linder's performance reached.

7.6 Clothing and Ritual Performance.

Linder's work also lead me to think about the ceremonial role that performance garments may have. This consideration brought me back to the work of Rachel Rosenthal, now seeing her use of performance clothing in a ceremonial light (see Chapter 9 for more on Rosenthal and shamanism). Associatively connected to Rosenthal, for me, is the young Brussels-based Greek artist Danai Anesiadou. Like Rosenthal, Anesiadou's performative presence is a larger than life figure who blends autobiography with "slyly shamanistic"¹⁴⁵ visual art performances. Anesiadou previously worked as a costume designer¹⁴⁶ for plays and short films, and a concern with garment production has continued into her work as a visual artist using performance.



91. Danai Anesiadou, *One Measures a Circle, Beginning Anywhere* (2009-10). WIELS, Brussels. See list of plates for full reference.

In Anesiadou's work, the audience is presented with "a profoundly wild collage of motif" that is communicated in a "fragmentary, yet fluent dialect – the equally dis- and

¹⁴⁵ Quinn Latimer. "Focus: Danai Anesiadou". *Frieze Magazine*. Issue 146 April 2012. Accessed 07/05/2015. <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/focus-danai-anesiadou/> Website.

¹⁴⁶ No Author. "Danai Anesiadou: DAMNESIA VU. Zum Besten der Griechen. 25. Sep 2011 –13. Nov 2011" *Kunsthalle Basel*. No publication date. Accessed 07/05/15. <http://www.kunsthallebasel.ch/en/exhibition/damnesia-vu-zum-besten-der-griechen-2/> Website.

conjunctive syntax”.¹⁴⁷ In her performance *A Night of Psicomagia* (2008) “cheap gems glamoured her face, while gold- and silver-bodysuited assistants attended to her.”¹⁴⁸ Anesiadou adopts multiple personas within the work, and moves between these states fluidly, at times breaking character to regard the audience directly. The artist brings her mother (who is, Anesiadou claims, completely unprepared) on stage and reveals intimate details of their personal relationship, but layers this autobiographical glimpse with references to film, to healing rituals, and to an encounter with cult celebrity Alejandro Jodorowsky. Her face concealed / adorned with paste jewels, the artist stands before a screen and makes shadow images with her hands, allowing her dextrous fingers to conjure strange non-human forms and patterns. I cannot find any documentary images of *A Night of Psicomagia*. Anesiadou herself explains why:

“The idea was to do a photo shoot after the performance because I didn’t want a photographer to ruin the moment with weird sounds. The photo shoot never happened. I was in state of trance, receiving congratulations while cleaning up because that’s what happens after a performance, one has to clean up the mess unless one is Maria Callas. So, no photos.”¹⁴⁹

Anesiadou’s intense, layered, performances are determinedly ritualistic, and her use of outlandish garments – from the costume jewels of *A Night of Psicomagia* (2008) to the “luxurious white fur, against which her dark hair falls like a shroud” of *X, Y & M* (2008) (a film work collaboration with the artist Sophie Nys) – accentuates the sense of peculiar ceremonial activity. Performance theorist Richard Schechner has written that:

“ritual behaviour is ordinary behaviour transformed by means of condensation, exaggeration, repetition, and rhythm.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Jan Verwoert, “Magic She Does” *Aprior*. 2001, issue 21, Accessed 30/05/12. http://aprior.org/article/magic_she_does Website.

¹⁴⁸ Quinn Latimer. “Focus: Danai Anesiadou”. *Frieze Magazine*. Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Danai Anesiadou. “A Night of Psicomagia.” *Metropolis M*. Issue 4 2008. Accessed 04/06/2015. <http://metropolism.com/magazine/2008-no4/a-night-of-psicomagia/english> Website.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Schechner. *The Future of Ritual: writings on culture and performance*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Pg 228. Print.

Garment production, for Anesiadou, is clearly an important part of this process of transformation and exaggeration, and I see parallels here to my own approach to the construction of performances that appear as ritual events.



92. Danai Anesiadou and Sophie Nys, *X, Y & M* (2008). Video still. See list of plates for full reference.

In Anesiadou's work, as in my own, I am aware of an apparent contradiction that is of central importance to this study. The use of garments here prioritises the particular position and singular identity of the artist herself as an individual. In my work, as I have established, I have stepped outside my day-to-day life to temporarily adopt the role of 'performer' signified by, amongst other cues, the outlandish apparel I have donned. However, the garments also draw attention to my individuality: I am here, I am standing, I am uncomfortable, I am telling a story, I am talking to you. Like Anesiadou, there is a strong autobiographical element to my work, which the wearing of a garment to indicate my separation from my daily self, might seem to undermine.

This has been a central issue in the analysis of my practice and it is only through careful reflection on the work of comparable artists such as Anesiadou, Rosenthal, and Jonas, that I have been able to approach an answer. The garments of religious ceremonies such as the vestments and liturgical garments worn by a Catholic priest conducting a wedding, remove the individuality from that person, and identify them instead in their theological role as officiant. The bride and groom however, retain their individual identities despite wearing ceremonial clothes, becoming instead the celebrants of the ritual. This has been an important distinction for me, as I have discovered that my work places me in a role of celebrant in the ritual re-composition of a myth. However, it important to reiterate that the work functions within an art context, rather than at the level of a social ceremony

such as a marriage. As such, the performances posit a ritual structure through which to investigate this intersection between myth and creative practice. The adoption of ritual techniques (such as garment production) articulate a framework through which this creative exploration can be carried out, and are not themselves the uncritical products of it.

Chapter 8: THE GILGAMESH CYCLE: Performer and Audience



93. Self portrait taken on camera phone, moments before performing *A Love Song*.

8.1 Audience Experience

The words of my performances are intended to be spoken and heard, rather than being read, by the audience. This makes the experience of the text durational (fleeting, the ear hearing one word after the other in sequence), instead of spatial (fixed, the eye reading the words in multiple sequences, and going back to read them again). Prioritising the fleeting act of listening reflects the organic and shifting state of myth, which shies away from single authoritative texts and leans towards practices of remembering, reciting, and speaking. In attempting to articulate the subjective experiences of both performer and audience I will build upon the work of previous chapters to discuss the alogical qualities of the performance event – the features that transcend logical frameworks of reasoning or interpretation. I will connect these qualities firstly with the sphere of *mythos* and, from there, will connect to other philosophical frameworks that privilege the moments of connection between individuals, worlds, or experiences. In creating this network of

analogical connectivity I will be drawing lines of structure and subject between this performance practice and the landscape of mythology.

When an audience attends a performance, my intention is for them to be affected: the work is constructed as a hypnotic, mesmeric, and subsuming or enveloping encounter. The listener is intended to feel part of a collective group experience that is shared by the whole audience. At the same time however, as they listen, I hope that the words will trigger individuals' personal memories and associations. Their attention may drift, with reflections triggered by the stream of images, only to return again to the rhythm of the words, their sound, my voice. I do not expect my audience to deconstruct or interpret each element of the work, but rather intend for the words to communicate an experiential whole. In the Gilgamesh Cycle works I typically recite for around 20 minutes, and the length of the work coupled with the stillness of my own body during the performance, are structured to enhance this effect of a whole. I use pauses and slow movements to construct an atmosphere of stillness, calm, and meditation.

The performances are consciously constructed to produce a particular sensation in the audience that is at once bodily (physically still) and psychological (attentive, reflective, etc). This is so that the audience can both hear and listen to the words. The specific words spoken during each performance are important to the work. I make every effort that the audience receives the words of the performance under conditions that are conducive to their reception. In addition to this however, and in some ways contradicting it, is my sense that the "listener's attention may drift" and that "I do not expect my audience to deconstruct or understand each element". It is the synthesis of all the performance elements (location, garment, script, vocal delivery etc) that is crucial to the work's intention.

The writer Lauren Amazeen was commissioned by Cornerhouse Gallery to write a text to accompany *Mouth Open In An Open O* (a.2012). After experiencing a dress rehearsal of the performance at the CCA, Glasgow, she wrote:

“The tone is dignified, elegiac, and sincere. At points within the recitation, the artist uses repetition almost as an incantation, building on the psychological thresholds between the artist and the public. And there are pauses. These serve as formal interludes, holding the tension between the past and present, dreaming and being awake, the body and the spirit, the performer and audience.”¹⁵¹

This sensitive written response foregrounds Amazeen’s experience of the liminal quality of the work as it occupies the space between different states: past and present, dreaming and waking, body and spirit, performer and audience. A critical point of the work is, she suggests, this ‘psychological threshold’ that, through the course of the work, becomes permeable. Amazeen’s sense, while watching the work, is that the work:

“is able to conjure both the personal and the collective memories so necessary for human wholeness.”

This sense of connectivity is also stressed in an exhibition text by writer Rachel Carey, which accompanied *A Love Song For Gilgamesh* (a.2013) (again, written in response to the experience of dress rehearsals). In this case however, Carey finds fluid connectivity between the performance and the site itself “[i]n a piece in which artwork and site reverberate with the presence of one another”¹⁵². I find Carey’s sense of ‘reverberation’ to be evocative because it implies a physical vibration that trembles between the work and its surrounding, blurring the edges of them both. Amazeen’s experience of the liminal is reflected by Carey, who develops her theme by noting that:

“Just as an ocean can liberate cruise ships and cargo boats from the laws of gravity, so one can find inside the SS Rotterdam another embedded layer of release.”

¹⁵¹ Lauren Amazeen. *Mouth Open In An Open O*. Manchester: Cornerhouse Gallery, 2012. Unpublished exhibition text. The full text is presented in Appendix J.5

¹⁵² Rachel Carey. *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*. Rotterdam: Sils Projects, 2013. Unpublished exhibition text.

This “release” from logical physical “laws of gravity” that Carey cites is significant as it locates the audience’s experience of the performance within the sphere of *mythos*, rather than *logos*. After all,

“Hereclitus uses the idea of *logos* to probe the foundation not only of speaking but also of natural law, the universal *logos* that gives rise to the cosmos itself.”¹⁵³

Mythos is the space that operates outwith these natural laws, which “lacks the explicit distinction between true and false.”¹⁵⁴ It is the propositional space allowed by *mythos* that enables the experience of liminal boundary-less-ness that both Carey and Amazeen perceive. I will now attempt to communicate my own subjective experience of the moment of performance, and then return to a contextual discussion of the ideas raised.

8.2 My Experience of Performing

Transcribing what it is like to perform is very difficult. The most important parts of the experience are essentially non-verbal and interior, and this presents problems of literal description. The following is intended to be read as an imperfect translation from one mode of experience (being) to another (describing, reflecting). As such it is partial but necessary and, like all good translations, the process of adaptation may reveal previously unrecognised moments, connections, or ideas. Because the level of difficulty is increased when I try to write in general terms about such a specific experience I have focussed my narrative account of the experience of performing *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (a.2013).

8.3 Performing *A Love Song*

I was intensely nervous in the hours before performing, which is typical of my experience of presenting a work – whether it is new or not. I physically trembled, was unable to eat, unable to socialise normally, and felt acutely nauseous. These sensations increased as the scheduled performance drew nearer. I became distinctly aware of the madness of my own

¹⁵³ Albert A. Anderson. *Mythos, and Logos*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 2004. Pg 70. Print.

¹⁵⁴ Albert A. Anderson. *Mythos, and Logos*. Ibid pg 61.

work: that I intended to stand in the middle of an empty swimming pool, wearing ridiculous clothes, and spouting some nonsense phrases that I had made up! What on earth was I thinking? None of it makes sense, my rational mind was screaming. This is crazy! I began to try and think of any way in which I could avoid performing – any way in which I could get out of it, and yet at the same time the coming moment seemed inevitable. At first the day – and then the hour – of the performance seemed to approach slowly, inexorably, and painfully. Time dragged. Then, as it became closer, time started to speed up with whole minutes rushing by until I felt that I was going to be late, I would miss my cue and everyone would be waiting, frustrated on the quay-side.

This nervousness began to subside as soon as I put on the performance garment and took off my shoes. Waiting in the small anteroom and hearing the audience enter the space, I felt my body physically growing and becoming stronger and my posture becoming more erect. I felt the words that I was about to say. They were waiting, all in place, in my body.

I entered the room and descended the ladder, to stand in the centre of the empty pool. I was aware of the audience though I did not look at them, or recognise them individually¹⁵⁵. Simultaneously however, I felt my body in relation to the audience's bodies in the room, and in relation to the room itself. My feet felt rooted to the tiled floor, and I felt the top of my head connected by space to the ceiling above it. I felt hyper aware of my body. Then slowly this focus shifted, and I went 'inside myself'.

¹⁵⁵ At the performance of *Mouth Open In An Open O* at The Agency Gallery, London, one audience member's phone rang. She answered the call, and then left the room, crossing directly through my line of sight. When another audience member, afterwards, commented on how distracting this must have been I was surprised. I had no idea that this event had happened. At this same performance, another audience member began to film me using her mobile phone. Standing directly in front of me, she held the phone up to get a better picture. I was not aware at the time of her presence.



94. Mid performance.

As I allowed the words to come out of my mouth (the right words at the right time and in the right order), I became ‘blind’. I did not see what was going on in the space, or the audience’s reaction. As I spoke, I was not consciously recalling the words. The words emerged automatically, and one seemed to follow the next within my thinking about it. I felt utterly sure of what I was doing. The earlier sense of craziness had gone completely, and I felt that what I was doing made total sense – more than this, I felt that it was the only thing that I could do. I felt borne along by the experience of performing.

Time became very strange. At one and the same moment, I felt that I had been standing in that same spot forever, and also that the performance had gone in a flash. As I drew to a close, my sense of self came into focus again during the final few words. I felt as though I had been hypnotised, or as though I had been under anaesthetic and I was just coming round. I stepped away to climb the ladder, and this movement felt almost like a tearing, or wrenching. My muscles had stiffened and it was an effort to make them supple again. The audience began to clap as I walked out of the room feeling very self-conscious, and uncomfortable.

After the performance, I felt ashamed and embarrassed. I did not enjoy rejoining the audience on the top deck, but felt as though I ought to. Recalling the performance while speaking to those who had seen it, I felt as though people had been watching me when I

was sleeping, and had caught me doing something peculiar. I found it very difficult to talk about the work immediately, and was slightly horrified that one person or another was present and that I didn't know, or hadn't recognised them. In Rotterdam there were a few artists present whom I had met before, but this can happen with very close friends or even my husband. I am genuinely not aware of who is or is not present while I am performing. By the next day, my sense of mortification had faded and I returned to normal.

8.4 My Experience of Watching Another's Performance

In 2013 I saw Meredith Monk and Vocal Ensemble perform *On Behalf of Nature* at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh, as part of the Edinburgh International Festival. Monk is a performer whose practice in some ways mine appears to exist in contradistinction to. She dances, while I remain still. She uses no words, and I use many. She performs with others, but I stand alone. She appears in theatres, while I do not use a stage. She is world famous, and I am not. And yet despite this when I watched her work I felt that at some moments I could draw a line on a map that joins our work together.



95. Meredith Monk, *On Behalf of Nature* (2013). Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh. Image from The Guardian's online coverage of the performance. See list of plates for full reference.

These points of proximity are in the experience of the work. At times, watching *On Behalf of Nature*, I experienced exactly the sensation of meditative 'here and away'-ness that I am trying to communicate through works like *A Love Song*. I did not *understand* Monk's work, and yet I *felt* its strangeness speak to me.

Monk's own website describes the work as follows:

“For her newest evening-length work, Meredith Monk offers a poetic meditation on the environment. Using her 2012, highly acclaimed composition *Realm Variations* for vocalists and instrumentalists as a point of departure, she employs contrasts in range from high to low to create an expansive sound world of different musical realms. Within this world, Monk evokes the Buddhist notion of the existence of different realm categories—the idea of joining heaven and earth by way of human beings.

Drawing additional inspiration from writers and researchers who have sounded the alarm on the precarious state of our global ecology, Monk and her acclaimed Vocal Ensemble create a liminal space where human, natural and spiritual elements are woven into a delicate whole, in order to illuminate the interconnection and interdependency of us all.”

Monk is a highly regarded performer whose work spans several different traditions, from non-narrative theatre, to music, choreography, and dance. Before the performance began there was a palpable sense of anticipation and an almost reverent sense of expectation and hush. We, the audience, were willing to be moved and waiting to be transported. As the performance began I was immersed in a world that at times seemed minimal, and at times felt expansive. There was no set, and the performers moved between moments of colour on an otherwise bare stage. They called, ululated, and danced a language that felt rigorous and measured and yet intuitive and lyrical. At some points I did feel overwhelmingly as though the work was transcending the world of theatrical spectacle to become something more akin to physical meditation or ceremonial communion. This was not the case throughout the performance however; some elements (a video projection of very literal images of natural and human environments) I felt were less successful.

I would also take issue with Monk's statement, which I quoted earlier, that the work seeks to “illuminate the interconnection and interdependency of us all.” I have no problem with the experience of connectivity during the event, and will return to this idea in some detail. But the strength of the work did not lie in its ability to *illuminate* this connectivity. The work was not didactic. To intimate that the purpose of the work was to demonstrate this

intellectual or political concern in effect diminishes it. The value of *On Behalf of Nature* lies in its ability to *be* interconnected and interdependent and to engender this sense in the audience who are watching it – not to illustrate a conceptual notion or reference political ideal from elsewhere.

The tension between these claims (the claim to illuminate something, and the claim to be something) can be found in some of the reviews of *On Behalf of Nature*. Responses were polarised. A two star review in The Guardian newspaper said that:

“as a drama (let alone an environmental call to arms) I found it so vague as to be practically formless.”¹⁵⁶

The review was opened to comments from readers however, and all of the comments left appear to be¹⁵⁷ from people who had also attended the performance. One respondent with the username ‘achriskitten’ referred to the work’s “powerful emotional depth”¹⁵⁸, while ‘gerhard’ stated that they found the work “accessible, intelligent, beautiful, haunting, harmonious, difficult...great”¹⁵⁹. The final commenter however, under the name ‘edinburghresident’ lamented Monk’s “Tuneless, formless, wafting” asking

“I wonder, were there an interval, how many of the audience would have returned for the second half. I'm glad there are some who enjoyed it, but it represents all I dislike about pretentious ‘art’.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Andrew Dickson. “On Behalf of Nature – Edinburgh festival 2013 review.” *The Guardian*. 18/08/13. Accessed 10/03/15.

<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/aug/18/on-behalf-of-nature-review> Website.

¹⁵⁷ Bearing in mind that on the internet nothing is as it seems.

¹⁵⁸ ‘achriskitten’, comment left below “On Behalf of Nature – Edinburgh festival 2013 review.” 18/08/13 at 19:10. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/aug/18/on-behalf-of-nature-review> Accessed 10/03/15. Website.

¹⁵⁹ ‘gerhard’ comment left below “On Behalf of Nature – Edinburgh festival 2013 review.” 18/08/13 at 1:22. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/aug/18/on-behalf-of-nature-review> Accessed 10/03/15. Website.

¹⁶⁰ ‘edinburghresident’ comment left below “On Behalf of Nature – Edinburgh festival 2013 review.” 18/08/13 at 17:42. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/aug/18/on-behalf-of-nature-review> Accessed 10/03/15. Website.

The frustration that some seem to feel in response to the work reflects a fundamental division. The reviewer Andrew Dickson criticises the work because it is ‘formless’, and unsuccessful as drama or as the political ‘call to arms’ that it professes to be. In contrast, I did not seek narrative unity but instead allowed the work to *be* rather than to dramatize, and I found the performance deeply communicative in these terms.

8.5 Contextualising the Discussion of Performer/Audience Experience

My own experience of performing, as recounted in this chapter, foregrounds the discomfort that threatens to overwhelm me prior to entering the performance space. This is followed by my distorted awareness of the performance period itself. My initial discomfort stems from a sense that if viewed from an outside perspective the moment of performance seems ‘crazy’, and nonsensical. From the inside however it feels simply as though different ‘natural laws’, to refer back to Heraclitus and the writer Rachel Carey, are in operation from those I am used to. As I have tried to narrate, my perception of time is different while I am performing. My sense of space is also altered, and my awareness of the edges of my own body changes too. At one point my impression of finitude expands, connecting me to the audience and the space in which I am performing. At another moment this same awareness contracts until part of me is subsumed within my own self, becoming automatic, hypnotic, and ‘blind’. Which part of me is swallowed by which other part at this time? Obviously I cannot clearly *see* this subsumation in any exterior way, and so my ability to parse it is compromised. As I wrote almost ten years ago on a woodcut block (after the psychologist William James): THE SELF AS KNOWER DOES NOT KNOW THE SELF AS KNOWN.



96. Ruth Barker, *The Self As Knower* (2006) ink on plywood, 26cm x 23cm.

Perhaps however I might speculate that it is a rational, logical, and reflexive aspect of me that is temporarily ingurgitated by some part of myself that operates within a different set of embodied experiences. Though there are problems presented by the attempt to examine this 'blindness' discretely, the shift in manifest empathies that it represents suggests that, for the performer, the performance begins to occupy a physical and experiential space that is distinct from the day to day.

This experiential 'space' is the place where the performance happens. It is the notional location that contains the performance and allows it to play out through its own patterns, which may not be the templates of the daily sphere. In this metaphorical space (which is the literal space in the room where I stand to perform) I, who have a memory like a sieve, achieve word-perfect recall of lengthy poetic texts. I can become myself and others simultaneously, and can speak with the voice of a dead man to his living lover. I can connect the small moments of my own self with the echoes and reverberations of much greater archetypes that have resonance and meaning to others. I can dip into my own unconscious mind and extract what will become the work.

This is true also of the experience of watching performances such as Monk's *On Behalf of Nature* (2013), or Jonas' *Lines In The Sand* (2002), which I discussed in Chapter 4. In the former, to watch the work was at times to lose oneself in the movements on stage: to become connected to the bodies that danced and patterned themselves in complex and fluid choreographies. This was not in an imaginative or cognitive sense, and I as an audience member was not consciously pretending to be a performer. It is better described through Saloméan identification: an experience of involuntary haptic connection to another body or bodies. While watching *On Behalf of Nature*, the finite sense of my own body was expanded to include the performers'. After the performance, this sense retracted. On leaving the theatre my legs felt heavy and unwieldy, my torso unmuscle and flabby, because I had lost the tone and control I had experienced a connection to for the duration of Monk's work. Part of me, I felt, had been cut off.



97. Meredith Monk and Ensemble, *On Behalf of Nature* (2013). See list of plates for full reference.

Watching video documentation of *Lines In The Sand* foregrounds a related though distinct experience of the connectivity of the images, sounds, texts, objects, and gestures within the work. Jonas uses her technique of “free association”¹⁶¹ to produce a collage of performative and audio-visual elements that “dissembl[e] fixed boundaries of time, space,

¹⁶¹ “Venice Biennale 2009: Joan Jonas” *Tateshots*, Youtube, uploaded August 21st 2009. @ 0.34 seconds. Accessed 13/02/13. Website.

sound, and sight”¹⁶². At one point in the performance for example, Jonas steps into the beam of a video projector, becoming holistically incorporated into its projected image. There are multiple simultaneous elements that occur in sympathy with each other, but which have no clear narrative or causal relationship to one another. The artist’s voice is at times pre-recorded, and at times uttered live. It is never clear to whom (if anyone) her words are addressed. Her actions, as she draws a large ziggurat on the floor, or raises and lowers slim wooden poles are dreamlike, inexplicable, but controlled and deliberate in execution.



98. Joan Jonas, *Lines in the Sand*, video, 2002-2005, 47:45 min.
See list of plates for full reference.

In the terms of this study, Jonas the performer identifies with the willowy rods she manipulates. As they dextrously dance and play in her hands, she is extending the boundary of her own self to incorporate their waving lengths. Through the rods’ movements, she and the rods identify with the ziggurat that emerges on the floor of the performance space. In the experience of the viewer, the artist’s body is again extended to contain the video projection that overlays her, as well as the audio that accompanies it. The elements of *Lines* are overlaid and simultaneous. Within Jonas’ performance space, the edges between states, things and gestures are blurred and the distinctions between them are negligible. The effect is cumulative, layered, and recalls Levi Straus, cited in the introduction of this study, that myth can only be understood by the apprehension of bundles of events read in conjunction, not from discrete analysis of individual events. The layered presentation of *Lines In The Sand* reflects Jonas’ free associative compositional

¹⁶² Jane Philbrick. “Paper Trail: (Re)viewing "Lines in the Sand" and Other Key Works of Joan Jonas.” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep., 2004). Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3246472> Accessed 19/05/12. Pg 23.

trajectory, which foregrounds the journey of subjective connections between elements (*this* makes me think of *that*) rather than a sequence drawn from logic or reason.

The performance artist Rachel Rosenthal, whose work was introduced in Chapter 6, embodies a “multilayered struggle to discover an emergency exit from the dead-end road of a patriarchal, rationalist, materialist world”¹⁶³. In her work *Gaia, Mon Amor*, Rosenthal’s intense monologue oscillates discordantly between modes of performative delivery, encompassing poetic fugue, political rabble rousing, trancelike incantation, personal recollection and the powerful eruption of a woman ‘possessed’ by a goddess. The first person of Rosenthal’s text likewise shifts with great elasticity between personae, with the performer’s physical persona (indicated by her body language and garment) not always corresponding with her vocal or spoken persona (indicated by her word’s delivery as well as their content). Within the performance, Rosenthal’s Saloméan identification extends and overlaps between and within personae. There are, as I have discussed and to some degree critiqued, theatrical aspects to Rosenthal’s approach. However, if the segues between the elements of her work are examined, it becomes clear that her methodology is not purely theatrical and, conversely, incorporates some aspects that point to significantly divergent structural influences, which resonate with the work of Jonas, above.



¹⁶³ Eelka Lampa. “Rachel Rosenthal Creating Her Selves.” *The Drama Review*. Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring, 1988). Accessed 15/02/13. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145878> Website. pg 172.

99. Rachel Rosenthal *Gaia, Mon Amor* (1983). See list of plates for full reference.

Rosenthal employs:

“a variety of materials (slides, music, dance, recitation), while compartmentalized scenes switch unpredictably – alogically - as in *Traps* [Rosenthal 1982], from contemplation to ritual to private-life slide show to agitative lecture”.¹⁶⁴

This word ‘alogical’, introduced here by the writer Eelka Lampe in her discussion of Rosenthal’s practice, merits a closer examination within the context of articulating the performance experience (both as performer, and as viewer). The Oxford English Dictionary (online) defines alogicality as:

“(Philos. and Psychol.) not determined or guarded by logic or rationality.”¹⁶⁵

Although to watch Rosenthal’s performances is to experience “a theme that is rationally understandable or readable, [their] composition is neither logical nor illogical”¹⁶⁶. The work does contain meaning; however this emerges incrementally from the audience’s experience of cross-references and repeated images within the work. Lampe gives the example of Rosenthal’s *Traps* (1982):

“When Rosenthal, in the guise of a warrior, tells of her mothphobia, the opening ritual of the burning (paper) moths acquires another dimension of meaning - the link between her individual phobia and the existential fear of humankind.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Eelka Lampa. Ibid. Pg 178.

¹⁶⁵ ‘alogical, adj. and n.’ *OED Online*, March 2013, Oxford University Press. Accessed 05/06/13, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/5638> Website. Coincidentally, this entry gives as an example of use, the following: “1907 E. B. Bax *Roots of Reality* 173 The aim of art... is to express the unity and harmony of experience... in the world of immediate feeling—in a word, alogically.”

¹⁶⁶ Eelka Lampa. Ibid. Pg 178.

¹⁶⁷ Eelka Lampa. Ibid. Pg 178.

As with Jonas, there is a link here to Levi-Straus' 'bundles' of mythic events, rather than the logical / illogical structure of conventional narrative. Lampe's discussion foregrounds this quality of alogic, which she believes is critical in understanding and placing Rosenthal's work within a tradition that includes the performance art 'happenings' of the 1960s. The significance of this is that it moves Rosenthal's performances away from a theatrical tradition of acting, and towards a fine art tradition of being or happening. As Lampe states:

Orthodox Western theatre is a form of literary theatre. The spectator can 'read' the performance from its information structure (see Kirby 1965:28), implying that the work must be either logical (as in a 'well-made play') or illogical (as in a dreamlike, surreal, or absurd play). Although *Traps* follows a theme that is rationally understandable or readable, its composition is neither logical nor illogical. For instance, the monk's reflection on the Doctrine of the Dharma does not necessarily lead to burning paper moths or to the monk's transformation into a warrior who recites a poetic text. Formally, *Traps* is an example of 'alogical structure' - outside the relationship between logic and illogic - also used in happenings (Kirby 1965:28)."

I would build on Lampe's work to suggest that the condition of alogicity she identifies firmly locates the performance space within the associative sphere of *mythos* rather than *logos*. The Routledge *Dictionary of Philosophy* finds two routes of meaning for the term *logos*, as used philosophically:

"(i) the result of speaking, i.e. speech, discourse, theory (as against practice), sentence, story. (ii) the result of picking out or counting, i.e. account, formula, rationale, definition, proportion, reason."

It is tempting to describe a binary opposition here, with *mythos*, in contradistinction to *logos*, becoming the space of practice rather than theory, and of being or happening rather than describing (returning my thoughts to critical reviews of Meredith Monk's *On Behalf of Nature*, above). The easy division however, is not quite appropriate. The writer Albert A. Anderson explains:

“although distinctions might be made, we should avoid creating a false dichotomy [...] In the works of Homer and other poets from his era the word ‘*mythos*’ generally means word, speech, or conversation as well as tale, story, or narrative. This sense of *mythos* is shared by *logos*, giving priority to what is delivered in the form of words.”¹⁶⁸

The essence of the difference, Anderson believes, is that rational logic is central to the core of *logos*, which is fundamentally:

“a form of speaking and writing that seeks to articulate the reason or ground in an attempt to justify or explain.”¹⁶⁹

It is not enough therefore to draw a hard and fast line on a map and so divide *mythos* and *logos* into separate countries. The territory between them is somewhat shared. What can be firmly identified however is this difference of essence, with *mythos* as essentially a space in which alogic governs. *Mythos* is an alogical landscape not defined by rational logic. Again, the criticism of Monk’s work that ‘as drama’ it is ‘vague’ seems apposite to recall: *On Behalf Of Nature* does not ‘justify or explain’. *Mythos*, most obviously, is the language of myth, which as we have seen absorbs all such strangeness and contradictions into its own nebulous and powerful nature. Even this must be examined carefully however, because a central argument for the origins of myth (put forward by, amongst others, the writer Karen Armstrong in *A Short History of Myth*) is that mythology grew from humanity’s drive to explain (*logos*) the world around them.

“Mythology was therefore designed to help us to cope with the problematic human predicament. It helped people to find their place in the world and their true orientation. We all want to know where we came from, but because our earliest beginnings are lost in the mists of prehistory, we have created myths about our forefathers that are not historical but help to explain current attitudes about our environment, neighbours, and customs. We also want to know where we are going [...] And we want to explain those sublime moments,

¹⁶⁸ Albert A. Anderson. *Mythos, and Logos*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 2004. Pg 61. Print.

¹⁶⁹ Albert A. Anderson. *Mythos, and Logos*. Ibid Pg 61.

when we seem to be transported beyond our ordinary concerns. The gods help to explain the experience of transcendence.”¹⁷⁰

I find Armstrong’s statement here to be problematic on several levels. I have already discussed the doubt that I customarily attach to any universalising tendencies within the subject area of myth, and I attach those same doubts here, and Armstrong’s use of ‘we’ in particular unsettles me. I am also however, dubious regarding the sense of certainty about a subject - the mindset of people of the distant past - that is necessarily riven with uncertainty. I do not see how any of us, regardless of the level of scholarship, can know for sure how myths emerged ‘in the mists of prehistory’ because we were not there. However, it is difficult to deny that there is a relationship between mythopoeia as a practice and an attempt to articulate or explain (whether that pertains to the world, the psyche, or the human condition) at some level. I believe that to reconcile this apparent contradiction we simply require more subtlety than Anderson himself allows. Rather than characterising the act of explanation as being *a priori* rational or logical, space must be made for alogical articulation or reasoning. The difference between *mythos* and *logos* then lies not solely in the attempt to explain, but in the manner of explanation, with *mythos*, crucially, providing a language for alogical connections.

There is an additional joining that I would like to make here, connecting the alogical space of *mythos* to Kaja Silverman’s conception of the Oceanic. Silverman borrows the word ‘Oceanic’ from the Nobel prize winning French writer Romain Rolland. In *Flesh of My Flesh*, she brings Rolland’s work together with that of Russian-born psychoanalyst and writer Lou Andreas-Salomé (whose ‘identification’ I have already found useful), and Sigmund Freud¹⁷¹. Silverman, after Rolland, describes a “sense of limitlessness” and an

¹⁷⁰ Karen Armstrong. *A Short History of Myth*. Edinburgh. Canongate: 2006. Pg 6. Print.

¹⁷¹ Silverman’s discussion, in *Flesh of My Flesh*, of the relationship and correspondence between Rolland and Freud particularly, with their vastly differing outlooks and specialisms, is fascinating. In particular her unpicking of the word ‘Oceanic’ in their letters to one another reveals much about the way that ideas evolve and influence. Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. Print.

experience of being connected to others and the world¹⁷². She expands this sense, beyond the temporally and geographically limited experience that I have already outlined (where a performer may identify with the props of a performance, or an audience may identify with the dancers on a stage) to encompass an expansive sense of identification across time and space. She finds examples of this in literature and, tellingly, foregrounds the work and letters of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who was greatly influenced by an early translation of Gilgamesh.¹⁷³

“Rilke’s sense that his life was part of a great ‘whole’ was no more delusional than his belief that his past was an ‘already written page’. Analogies that are not of our making really do connect our lives to many others – to lives that are over, and to lives that have not yet begun, as well as to those proximate to us in time and space. [...] Because art privileges similarity over all other relationships, it is able to reveal these connections to us. Not every work of art exercises this capacity; [...] However there are songs, poems, paintings and buildings that help us to see that we have ‘appointments to keep in the past, in what has gone before and is for the most part extinguished’ and that we must go there in search of places and people who have some connection with us on the far side of time.”¹⁷⁴

This sense is of wholeness, of dissolving of the boundaries between self and others, is stressed in Rilke’s poetry, and is particularly evident in his *The Sonnets to Orpheus*. Orpheus, as I discussed in Chapter 4, is significant because the story is an important reference point for discussing the motion of the creative journey that Meredith Skura has typified as travelling between “inner and outer worlds”¹⁷⁵. In tracing the path of Orpheus’

¹⁷² Central to Silverman’s thinking is the process of analogy, by which we find relationships between disparate but distinct things. I shall return to this idea in a later chapter.

¹⁷³ Theodore Ziolkowski states that in a letter to his friend Helene von Nostitz, dated 31st December 1916, Rilke writes that he has been “living for weeks under the influence of the poem.” Theodore Ziolkowski. *Gilgamesh Among Us: Modern Encounters With the Ancient Epic*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2012. Pg 33. Print.

¹⁷⁴ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Ibid. Pg 65. Print. To Silverman’s “songs, poems, paintings and buildings”, I would add on the basis of this study that there are also performance artworks that can do likewise.

¹⁷⁵ Meredith Skura. “Creativity: Transgressing the Limits of Consciousness”. *Daedalus*. Vol. 109, No. 2, ‘Intellect and Imagination: The Limits and Presuppositions of

journey to Hades and back again the creative artist, according to Skura, immerses themselves in another world and “goes beyond what is known”. In *The Sonnets*, Rilke writes:

“Silent friend of many distances, feel
how your breath enlarges all of space.
Let your presence ring out like a bell
into the night. [...]

“And if the earthly no longer knows your name,
whisper to the silent earth: I’m flowing.
To the flashing water say: I am.”¹⁷⁶

The writer Stephen Mitchell, who translated a 2009 Vintage edition of Rilke’s *The Sonnets* (and who also, perhaps not coincidentally, wrote *Gilgamesh, A New English Version*) says of these lines in the book’s foreword:

“By the end of *The Sonnets*, Rilke is no longer addressing Orpheus, the primal poet. He has *become* Orpheus and can speak to his personal self from the centre of the universe. The cycle is completed. Life resolves in a single breath, and the tree of song that sprang up in the first line of the first Sonnet is transformed into the serene, rooted *I am* that is the *Sonnets*’ last word, the word uttered at every moment by each particular form, and also the name of God.”¹⁷⁷

Mitchell’s words may seem hyperbolic, but it is notable that he stresses Rilke’s emphasis on Saloméan identification at this critical moment of the poem’s resolution. For Mitchell, Rilke has by this stage in the poem expanded to encompass Orpheus, and the poet’s words are the same as those uttered “at every moment by each particular form”. Rilke’s ‘wholeness’ is encapsulated by his use of the poem’s final phrase “I am”.

Intellectual Inquiry’ (Spring, 1980). Accessed: 15/02/2013. Pg 134. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024669> Website.

¹⁷⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke. *Duino Elegies & The Sonnets to Orpheus*. Ed. and Trans Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage Books, 2009. pg 191. Print.

¹⁷⁷ Stephen Mitchell. “Foreword.” Rainer Maria Rilke. *Duino Elegies & The Sonnets to Orpheus*. Ibid. Pg xix. Print.

In *Civilisations and its Discontents*, cited by Silverman, Freud discusses the ocean experience in lines that echo the (alogical) non-cognitive, non-verbal, ‘happening’ sphere of *mythos*.

“the oceanic feeling is ‘imposed’ upon us as a ‘fact’, and it is a ‘sensation’ instead of a thought – the sensation of the ‘contact’ between ourselves and other beings.”¹⁷⁸

In Silverman’s text, the importance of this capacity to ‘contact’ is frequently stressed. As she suggests in her own Introduction to *Flesh Of My Flesh*, this ability to privilege connection rather than autonomy has not always been philosophically popular:

“[I]t has been discredited by Russian formalism, Saussurean semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, and most of the Frankfurt school of writers.”¹⁷⁹

It has also however,

“been embraced by an impressive group of later writers and artists. Rainer Maria Rilke, Lou Andreas Salomé, Aby Warburg, Marcel Proust, Paul Valéry, Wilhelm Jensen, Walter Benjamin, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, James Agee, Roland Bathes, W.G. Sebald, Jean Luc Godard, Gerhard Richter, James Coleman, and Terrance Mallick all privilege similarity above all other relationships.”¹⁸⁰

A significant number of the artists and writers Silverman refers to have worked with the narratives of mythology: Jean Luc Godard’s retelling of Orpheus and Eurydice in the 1965 film *Alphaville*¹⁸¹; and Aby Warburg’s work on Pueblo religion such as his 1921

¹⁷⁸ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Ibid. Pg 29. Print.

¹⁷⁹ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Ibid pg 4. Print.

¹⁸⁰ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of my Flesh*. Ibid pg 4.

¹⁸¹ *Alphaville: une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution (Alphaville: A Strange Adventure of Lemmy Caution)*. Dir. Jean Luc Godard. Perf. Eddie Constantine, Anna Karina, Howard Vernon and Akim Tamiroff. Athos films, 1965. Film.

*Lecture On Serpent Ritual*¹⁸². As Paul Valéry states in his essay *On Myths and Mythology*:

“there are so many myths in us, and such commonplace ones, that it is almost impossible to segregate completely in our minds that is not a myth. [...] Myths are the very soul of our actions and our loves.”¹⁸³

In Silverman’s terms, myth is able to articulate the Oceanic feeling that is present in the work and philosophies of a great many artists, writers, and thinkers. Through myth’s alogical vocabulary of joining (*mythos*), artists articulate the Saloméan identification that may be experienced between ourselves and others, and between ourselves and the wider world.

Silverman does not discuss performance artwork in *Flesh of my Flesh*. In confining her analysis to literature and letters, film, painting, and installation, she omits a discussion of the live experience that occurs when an artist stands before a live audience and utters. The experience of performing, as discussed in this chapter, connects Silverman’s Oceanic feeling to the sphere of *mythos*, shedding light upon the latter. *Mythos* is the alogical space that contains me while I perform. It is the context from which I speak, and the place in which I stand, experiencing a sense of Saloméan identification as I perceive “my body in relation to the audience’s bodies in the room, and in relation to the room itself”, while I become ‘blind’, ‘hypnotised’, or ‘anesthetised’ during the performance experience itself.

Entering into this space of *mythos*, whether as a performer or an audience member, is an experience of being elsewhere. We cannot rely on logic or rationality to navigate and, as I have suggested, this may render some aspects of our consciousness ‘blind’.

¹⁸² Aby Warburg. *Lecture On Serpent Ritual*. London: Warburg Institute, 1939. Print.

¹⁸³ Paul Valéry, “On Myths and Mythology” *Selected Writings of Paul Valéry*. New York: New Directions, 1950. Pg 200 – 201. Print.

The central thesis in writer and theorist Grace Dane Mazur's 2008 book *Hinges: meditations on the portals of the imagination* is that some stories (she concentrates on written fictions) catalyse in their reader a change in consciousness.

“[W]hen we achieve this altered consciousness, we are echoing the descent of the classical hero to the underworld, also called the world below, the nether world, the world beyond. This is generally the Land of the Dead. [...] But the geography of the Land of the Dead does not lend itself to rational mapping, and the journey can be one of infinite horizontal, rather than infinite vertical, distance. It is as though having gone so far – to the edge of the world – we get to where space has buckled and ‘far’ has been folded onto ‘under’. Thus the Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh [...] approaches the world beyond by travelling through the mountains where day and night live, outracing the sun, and finally crossing the river of death.”¹⁸⁴

Significantly, Mazur also lists some of the ways in which this landscape can be identified:

“The most important marker for these other worlds is a blurring of the boundaries between things that are usually kept distinct, such as kingdoms, species, or genders. Thus a man can be part beast, part god, or part woman. The invisible becomes visible. Time gets distorted or turns out to be measured by odd clocks.”¹⁸⁵

These “markers” are strikingly similar to the traits I have identified as indicating a space of *mythos*, just as the hero who undertakes a journey to the land of the dead and back surely recalls Orpheus as well as Gilgamesh. Here there are unexpected hybrids, strange joinings, and time does not behave as it does elsewhere. The entrance into Mazur's lands of the dead by both literary authors and mythological heroes is analogous to the journey I have described above, as moving towards the territory of myth. It is the ‘initiation’ that leads to the state of *transition* in the terms of Arnold Van Genaap, and, in Campbell's

¹⁸⁴ Grace Dane Mazur, *Hinges, meditations on the portals of the imagination*, Natick, AK Peters, 2010. Pg 13 – 14.

¹⁸⁵ Grace Dane Mazur, *Hinges, meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Ibid, pg 16.

hero's journey, may correspond to "the belly of the whale" wherein the hero "is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died."¹⁸⁶

This journey (which Mazur illustrates through Gilgamesh's quest to the far side of "the Waters of Death"¹⁸⁷ and the immortal Uta-Napishti, and which I connect to my experience of stepping into the voice of Gilgamesh's dead lover Enkidu), Mazur terms as an act of *katabasis*. This is the process of travelling temporarily to the land of the dead and specifically "conversing with the inhabitants"¹⁸⁸.

"Katabasis is reminiscent of pearl diving: one explores the depths of a perilous medium to the limit of one's breath and life in order to bring back a rare and valuable treasure that could be found nowhere else."¹⁸⁹

This 'treasure', Mazur believes, is creative practice itself. Her description inevitably again recalls Skura's analysis of Orpheus as a model for creative practice, and reasserts the sense (which I shall return to in Chapter 9) of a journey in which the artist travels and returns.

Mazur goes on to identify properties and practices that are both "connected to artistic creation as well as entry into other worlds", most pertinently the ritual of *incubation*, "a meditative practice" of prolonged stillness and silence intended to inspire dreams or visions. "Incubation can be thought of as a magical-religious analogue of a hero's voyage to the other world" in order to attain "knowledge, wisdom, or revelation."¹⁹⁰ It directly

¹⁸⁶ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Novato: Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2008. Pg 74. Print.

¹⁸⁷ Andrew George. *The Epic Of Gilgamesh*. London: Penguin Classics, 1999. Pg 82. Print.

¹⁸⁸ Grace Dane Mazur, *Hinges, meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Ibid. Pg 14. Print.

¹⁸⁹ Grace Dane Mazur, *Hinges, meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Ibid Pg 16. Print.

¹⁹⁰ Grace Dane Mazur, *Hinges, meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Ibid pg 19. Print.

corresponds with Campbell's hero's journey, describing a departure elsewhere, to a strange and illogical place, and a return bearing something precious.

Returning full circle to a connection that appeared at the beginning of my analysis of *A Love Song*, Mazur then states that:

“Incubation is closely related to that beloved and necessary activity of the writer: day-dreaming [...which enables the practitioner to] put the world away for a while in order to come up with dreams and visions, poems, laws, solutions. [...] Musing, we might call it, for that is when we let down our rational guard, turn off our censors for what is reasonable, and open ourselves to the Muses.”¹⁹¹

Mazur's account correlates with Jung's description of his 'fantasies', which I have already cited as an example of reaching into the unconscious. Jung's account of the onset of these 'visions' sounds remarkably like the powerful daydreams that lurk at the edges of a writing desk:

“I was sitting at my desk once more, thinking over my fears. Then I let myself drop. Suddenly it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plunged down into dark depths.”¹⁹²

When Jung returns from the underworld that he has penetrated, and as Mazur would predict, he begins to write. This is irresistibly familiar as a description of my own scriptwriting process, where after I have 'internalised' the source material I set aside time and space to daydream, allowing the text of the new work to emerge from this process. Significantly, Mazur's work allows my experience of writing the script (entering into another world by daydreaming) to parallel both my experience of performing (entering into another world while reciting the words before an audience), and the content of my work itself (a textual account of another world, which is akin to Mazur's fictions).

¹⁹¹ Grace Dane Mazur, *Hinges, meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Ibid pg 19. Print.

¹⁹² C G Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. 1963. London: Fontana Press, 1995. Pg 203. Print.

To return then, to the experience of *A Love Song*, it is significant that the middle section of the work, following the initial liminal phase on the beach's littoral, is an encounter with mortality. 'Enkidu' asks 'Gilgamesh' what he found when he spoke to Uta-Napishti, the man who would live forever. Enkidu asks about all the days that Uta-Napishti was refused by death, the days when he feared it, and the days when he asked for it. He tells Gilgamesh that death is waiting for him; that he, Enkidu is waiting. This is Mazur's Land of the Dead, from which Enkidu speaks, and which I have entered both through the dual experiences of both accessing my unconscious in order to compose the text and then through experiences an alteration of consciousness as I perform it. Through Silverman's Saloméan identification, the audience are also able to enter this other world through the moment of performance.

Section IV of my script (Appendix M.4 pg 364) mirrors the Gilgamesh figure within the text, who turns and begins to walk home. The text here is also starting the return journey, and Section V (Appendix M.4 pg 364) is the work's epilogue. The audience and I are back at the threshold, ready to step back into the world. Once through the door of the house of dust, I can leave the performance space, and return to myself.

The structure I have described here is twofold: Firstly, the choreography of *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* itself echoes the structure of a myth / ritual (in Harrison's sense that the two are intertwined) as it draws the broad outline of Campbell's hero's journey. Secondly however, the content of the performance follows Mazur's depiction of a literary descent to the Land of the Dead, an otherworld that also corresponds with the alogical world of *mythos*. Mazur describes the myth of Gilgamesh, around which this performance is based, as providing an archetypal trajectory for katabasis. Such katabasis, she argues, finds an analogue in a ritual that she likens to daydreaming.

Mazur seems to argue that these various processes – katabasis, daydreaming, incubation, are analogous. They are each, she suggests, experiences through which the creative imagination travels elsewhere and returns with inspiration. Mazur's ideas are significant because she emphasises the connections between the creative author and her readers. The

writer may daydream and return to her desk with the germ of a story, but the reader also travels as she is ‘coiled around this book and [...] about to slip into the imagined world’. This connection provides a language through which to consider the relationships between these parallel journeys: my own creative journey in the development of the work; my experience of performing the work; the audience’s experience of watching the work; and the textual and performative content of the work.

As a writer, Mazur limits her discussion to writing and to reading – a limitation that I find unnecessary. By expanding the discussion of creative activity and audience experience to include contemporary performance art, the vivid nature of the creative experience – and so the capacity for such journeying – is emphasised. When we are ‘lost’ in a book, we imagine we can hear the author’s voice, and we can picture the characters walking and talking before us. When we watch a transportative piece of performance art however, the invitation to travel is made by the flesh and blood before us. The author occupies our space, her voice is in our ear, her body dances right before our eyes. In this way perhaps to watch some artworks is closer in experience to Mazur’s ritual of incubation with its sense of literal as well as imaginative immersion in an ‘other’ space in order to come across a vision.

If katabasis, daydreaming, and incubation are analogous as processes, then Mazur’s *Land of the Dead*, the unconscious, *mythos*, and Silverman’s Oceanic feeling may be analogous as experiential ‘places’ which this process allows us access to. This is not to say that they are the same, as equally I would say that daydreaming is *the same* as the ritual of incubation. Merely that they may follow similar rules, and be identified using similar languages, as a place where time is disjointed and rejointed, where identities may overlap, and where strange hybrids may be met. The re-ordering of time is an important quality in *Hinges*, and is an indicator that Mazur returns to frequently. I now believe that non-consecutive time is central to understanding the essence of alogical space, because conventional time as an element is necessary for the operation of logic. For rationality to have a toehold, there must be an ordered progression of *before* proceeding logically to *after*. Without this, there cannot be either cause and effect, or syllogistic function.

In content as well as structure, the performance artwork *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* operates as some myths operate. It is describing a motion. *A Love Song* takes me as the performer, and my audience, to the Land of the Dead (the unconscious, the Oceanic, the place of *mythos*) and then it brings us home with the knowledge of what we have seen there. This reading however, casts me as the artist into the role of Campbell's hero and while on one level this seems a functional fit, in many ways the cut is uncomfortable for me to wear due to the shortcomings of Campbell's definition of this role.

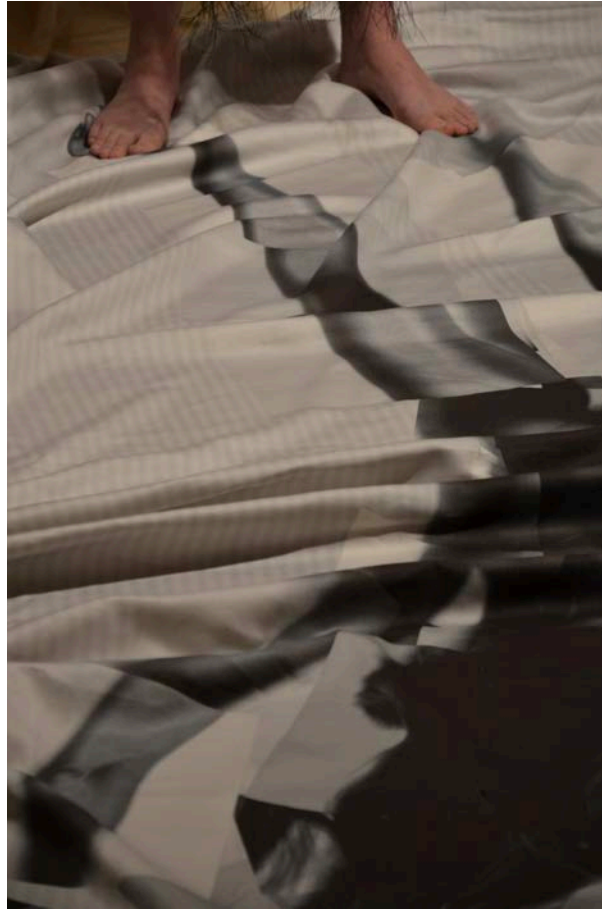
In the next chapter I will temporarily continue my proposed analogical connection of the alogical space of *mythos*, with the Land of the Dead. In doing so, I will explore whether they may be another way to understand the metaphorical katabasis I undertake as a performer. I will present the figures of mediums, sibyls, and shamans, as alternatives to Campbell's hero, shifting the metaphor from an account of travelling between states, to one of brokering or bridging them.

This idea that concepts may co-exist simultaneously in a relationship of similitude and analogy returns me to Kaja Silverman's *Flesh of my Flesh*, in which she writes of the importance of privileging "similarity above all other relationships".¹⁹³ Silverman's concern with what she calls "ontological kinship"¹⁹⁴ or like-ness, is an aspect of the sensation that she describes as Oceanic, which I believe exists in kin with *mythos*, and the Land of the Dead. These are alogical places, where unexpected joinings are to be expected. By its nature this territory must be mapless, because to fully delineate it would be to render it conscious, exposed, and so transformed. However, by continuing to explore the nature of these shifting and mutable landscapes – by charting, to extend this metaphor, their underlying geologies rather than their present topographies – we can approach an understanding of them.

¹⁹³ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of My Flesh*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pg 4. Print.

¹⁹⁴ Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of My Flesh*. Ibid Pg 4.

Chapter 9: Mediums, Sibyls, Shamans.



100. Feet on the image of feet. Detail of my feet on the edge of the floor-mat during *Mouth Open In An Open O* (b.2013). Making and performing this work has often felt like standing at the edge of something that I do not quite understand.

In the previous chapter I reflected on the subjective experiences of watching and performing, and found analogous processes and places, and found ideas – katabasis, daydreaming, incubation; the Land of the Dead, the unconscious, *mythos*, and the Oceanic – that exist in correspondence.

As Silverman has demonstrated, by examining the processes of likeness and similarity between states and experiences, we can find new ways to locate ideas and navigate questions of meaning or suggestion. In myth, recognising processes of connection and analogy are crucial to being able to approach the meaning or content of a myth (or group of myths). In the narrative of Gilgamesh for example, we understand the figure of Enkidu through his parallels to the figure of Gilgamesh: Enkidu is not wholly human, just as the King is also a human/non-human composite. Comprehension of the ‘wholeness’ of each character rests on an understanding that to be partly an animal (Enkidu) is analogous to – and so is connected to – being partly a god (Gilgamesh).

Cultural theorist Lewis Hyde writes convincingly of a related issue, the importance of joins and joints, in his book *Trickster Makes This World*, a treatment of one of the core cross-cultural mythological narrative archetypes. Beginning from a discussion of several myths in which bodily joints (like the Norse god Baldr’s vulnerable knee, or we could also cite the Greek hero Achilles’ ankle joint) may be connected to liminal periods within the calendar year (such as the solstice), Hyde states:

“we could find ourselves using the same talking about a ‘knee joint’ and a ‘summer solstice’ using the same terms, for a single Latin word, *articulus*, can mean both a joint in the body and a turning point in the solar year. [...] *Articulus* belongs to a large group of related terms preserving an ancient root, **-ar*, that originally meant ‘to join’, ‘to fit’ and ‘to make’. Many words in Latin, Greek, and modern languages come from this root, all of them having to do with joining in one sense or another. [...]

The two related nouns in Latin are *ars* and *artus*. Though the first of these derives from the **-ar* root, it doesn’t refer so much to ‘joins’ as to all that we mean today by ‘arts’: *ars* is skill, artifice, craft, and crafty action; it is a liberal art, a trade, a performance, and a work of art.”¹⁹⁵

This is significant not only because it reasserts the importance of moments of joinings and connections, but because it explicitly associates these with the work of the artist. To create ‘a performance, and a work of art’ we are articulating a moment of connection. To do this through the language of mythology deeply weds these critical points of joining.

¹⁹⁵ Lewis Hyde. *Trickster Makes This World*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008. Pg 254. Print.

Hyde goes on to specify that spoken and written words may be particularly pertinent in this sense. He quotes Aristotle, who explains that although many animals can make sounds, they cannot turn these sounds into language because they have “no articulation of the voice.” Hyde continues:

“In human speech, the tongue and the lips are the organs of articulation. They do the joint-work in a stream of sound. In written language there is joint work to be done as well. To break an uninterrupted flow of letters into words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters (or the older ‘articles’), to divide it with spaces, commas, periods, and indentations, is to articulate it, to make evident the places where thought itself has joins or points of demarcation.”

Speaking the words of a performance is a kind of joining. To articulate is to connect, and therefore to occupy a position *between* one place and another, which is neither and both of them. This is the liminal space of the performance, the experience of which was described in the previous chapter. Mazur writes of “hinges in the mind”¹⁹⁶, which utter “the groan of the liminal.”¹⁹⁷

As I have discussed, myths are landscapes of joinings and hybrids, where unexpected or impossible elements are connected; often, as in the animal-man Enkidu, or the god-man Gilgamesh, within the same imagined body. The body as a place of joining, and the artist as a medium of connection, is an image that I will now discuss in more detail. In this chapter I will ask what analogies have been used to describe the female artists whose work I have already introduced. In part such an exploration will deepen the understanding of the metaphorical katabasis that these artists undertake through their work. In addition however, I will also be searching for an appellation other than ‘hero’ that might more fittingly describe myself, as a protagonist of similar creative journeys.

¹⁹⁶ Grace Dane Mazur. *Hinges, meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Ibid. Pg 125.

¹⁹⁷ Grace Dane Mazur. *Hinges, meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Ibid. Pg 128.

The sense I will be articulating is of a body who joins different states, existing temporarily between them, rather than a hero who travels from one to the other. The sense of an allegorical ‘elsewhere’ and ‘here’, and how an artist might move between or connect these metaphorical spaces, is reflected in how the work of Joan Jonas, Meredith Monk, and Rachel Rosenthal, is described by writers and critics, as well as by the artists themselves. Very different writers have used similar analogies to describe the work and practices of these practitioners, and these designations repeatedly stress the role of ‘conduit’ or ‘connector’ rather than of ‘adventurer’.

The terms Medium, Sibyl, Shaman, Seer, have been variously used as analogies for these artists, and each refers to figures who are believed to connect this world (our day to day familiar universe), with another world that we may for convenience call the land of the dead, though it also encompasses such nebulous territories as the ‘spirit world’, or the domain of gods and mysteries. The precise type of connection ranges from bridge, to interventionist, to vessel for that other world. At no time however do these commentators seem confused as to the cultural placing of the work they describe. This is not ethnography, and they are not discussing the practices of ‘real’ shamans or oracles. Rather they are, wittingly or unwittingly, making use of a language of analogy that promotes recognition by extending the boundaries of the artist and their work to encompass what they may resemble, however apparently alogical that may seem. In fact, as we have seen, the strangeness of these connections may be a marker for their appropriateness in this case.

In her analysis of Joan Jonas’ performance *Lines In The Sand*, the writer Jane Philbrick connects Jonas’ work to Kaja Silverman’s re-presentation of Julia Kristeva’s work on the *chora*, which the Dictionary of Feminist Theory defines as: “the pre-verbal psychic/biological ‘pulsations’ that generate an infinite number of signifiers”¹⁹⁸. Before they are six months old babies’ lives are dominated by blurred and boundless sensations,

¹⁹⁸ Maggie Humm. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989. Pg 111. Print.

wants, and perceptions, within which they do not discriminate between themselves and others (most especially between themselves and their mother). According to Philbrick,

“Silverman characterizes Kristeva's *choric* fantasy as a ‘three-generational relay’ or ‘community of women’ that expands the maternal unity of mother and child to encompass the mother's mother, a configuration eliding roles of parent and child.”¹⁹⁹

Philbrick stresses the connectivity and subjectivity of this state of embrace and enclosure formed by female voice and touch. She continues by stating:

“The performative blur of Jonas's work, dissembling fixed boundaries of time, space, sound, and sight, re-enacts this ‘provisional’ embrace within the sound of her voice and the reach or imprint of her presence, residually marked by drawing and a rigorous vocabulary of props.

Lines in the Sand presents a multi-generational community of women, real and fictional, actual and virtual, addressing loss, illusion, and desire.”²⁰⁰

At the centre of this work is Jonas herself, speaking, reaching, and imprinting as her single self becomes ‘blurred’ and ‘dissembled’ between others’. The word Philbrick chooses as an analogy for Jonas’ practice is that the artist, when performing, is a ‘medium’:

“There is Jonas, artist, who is not Jonas, performer, ‘The performer sees herself as medium,’ she explains. ‘The information passes through.’”

This sense of blurring corresponds to my own experience. In *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*, I describe Gilgamesh waiting on the shores at the end of the world, but

¹⁹⁹ Jane Philbrick, “Paper Trail: (Re)viewing “Lines in the Sand” and Other Key Works of Joan Jonas.” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*. Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep., 2004). Stable URL:

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3246472> Accessed 19/05/12.Pg 23.

²⁰⁰ Jane Philbrick. *Paper Trail: (Re)viewing “Lines in the Sand” and Other Key Works of Joan Jonas*. Ibid. Pg 23.

overlay this image with my own memories of my husband teaching me how to harvest cockles on a beach in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. These two images blur into one another, and are indistinguishable. Equally, within the text of the poem I am myself as an individual, myself as a figure of an artist, and also the voice of Gilgamesh's dead lover Enkidu. These various identities are intentionally indivisible within the conversation of the work.

“Where are you now, at the edge of the world?
Who will you see there?
What will he say?

Behind my eyes lies an image of you, waiting.
Behind my eyes lies the wash of a great ocean,
[...]
Snatch up the pale razors and the fists of cockles.
You taught me how to scoop them up with spoons,
Hearing the shell clamp shut through the sand grit,
Sighing out as the silver pries them loose.
Then CLACK, into the swung bucket
Where they rattle, like teeth in an old jaw.”²⁰¹

This blurring is vessel-like or channel-like, as I allow multiple streams of information to ‘pass through’²⁰². Amongst the plethora of possible definitions²⁰³ of ‘medium’ offered by the Oxford English Dictionary (“Forms: 15 *mediam*, 15– *medium*, 19– *media*. Plural 16 18– *media*, 16– *mediums*.²⁰⁴”), there are two that seem relevant to Philbrick’s description. The first:

medium, n. and adj.
A person or thing which acts as an intermediary.

²⁰¹ Ruth Barker. *A Love Song, To Gilgamesh*. 2013. Unpublished performance script. Appendix M, pg 164

²⁰² It does not pass through unmediated, however. The words, like Jonas’ performances, are constructed artworks rather than spontaneous outpourings.

²⁰³ Others refer, appropriately, to: “any raw material or mode of expression used in an artistic or creative activity”; and “An intervening substance [...] through which impressions are conveyed to the senses”, both of which I feel I may be.

²⁰⁴ “medium, n. and adj.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, 2013. Accessed 09/08/13 website. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115772?redirectedFrom=medium>

[...]

An intermediate agency, instrument, or channel; a means; esp. a means or channel of communication or expression.

The second:

Spiritualism. A person believed to be in contact with the spirits of the dead and to communicate between the living and the dead. Hence: a clairvoyant, a person under hypnotic control.²⁰⁵

Though the context suggests that Philbrick connects Jonas with the latter definition, the former (with its connotations of joining and linking) also seems to support her choice of metaphor. The image of the medium that Philbrick conjures is culturally familiar. It reminds me of the veiled ladies and proper gentlemen in Victorian drawing rooms who so impressed the writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle that he wrote:

“I consider that in these days of doubt and sorrow, a genuine professional medium is the most useful member of the whole community. [...] I see dimly the time when two congregations, the living and those who have passed on, shall move forward together with the medium angel as the bridge between them.”²⁰⁶

But it also brings to my mind the more recent incarnations of this same figure – the mediums who entertain large audiences on television, in theatres, and in community halls, with messages from deceased relatives (and who risk being denounced as frauds for doing so²⁰⁷).

²⁰⁵ "medium, n. and adj." *OED Online*. Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921. Pg 15. Print.

²⁰⁷ See for example Damien Gayle. “Two professional mediums fail test to demonstrate their psychic powers under laboratory conditions.” *Mail online*. 1/11/2012. Accessed 15/08/13. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2226129/Two-professional-mediums-fail-test-demonstrate-psychic-powers-laboratory-conditions.html#ixzz2c2nAGgFG> Website.

Also Matt Roper. “The spooky truth: Most Haunted exposed as a fake by star that claims Derek Acorah show features ‘showmanship and dramatics.’” *The Mirror*. 15/05/12. Accessed 15/08/13. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/most-haunted-exposed-fake-star-833433#ixzz2c2qwqXRF> website.

In both of these examples, the format of the medium's 'performance' is similar. An audience (some of whom may be mourning loved ones whom they hope to contact) will have gathered. The medium will appear to enter some form of trance. They may alter their voice, tone, or body language to indicate that a transformation has taken place. They will then "communicate" with "the dead", passing on messages from the audience, and reciprocating with words, sounds, or "physical signs" in reply from the deceased²⁰⁸. Conan Doyle, a great advocate of Spiritualism, describes a meeting with the medium Evan Powell, before the Sherlock Holmes author set out on a lecture tour:

"Good Evan Powell had come down to give me a last séance, and I had the joy of a few last words with my arisen son, who blessed me on my mission and assured me that I would indeed bring solace to bruised hearts. The words he uttered were a quotation from my London speech at which Powell had not been present, nor had the verbatim account of it appeared anywhere at that time. It was one more sign of how closely our words and actions are noted from the other side. Powell was tired, having given a sitting the night before, so the proceedings were short, a few floating lights, my son and my sister's son to me, one or two greetings to other sitters, and it was over."²⁰⁹

A medium is a living bridge between two worlds – the realm of the living, and the land of the dead. S/he is a broker who allows messages to pass back and forth between these otherwise separate worlds. This is achieved in a trance-like state, before an audience. Whether sincere or not, the medium is a performer undertaking a role with their audience as witness. That role is to bridge, to join, and to connect.

²⁰⁸ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*. Ibid. Pg 22.

²⁰⁹ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist*. Ibid. Pg 19. Conan Doyle's eldest son Arthur Alleyne Kingsley died of Spanish influenza during the first world war aged 26.



101. A Victorian medium named Helen Duncan apparently producing ectoplasm (actually cheesecloth) (1931). See list of plates for full reference.

The analogy between this and the acts of creative katabasis I have presented are clear. By suggesting that Jonas is like a medium, Philbrick is describing how the artist, during Lines, metaphorically bridges the quotidian, personal world of the audience and the alogical world of *mythos*, becoming a conduit between the two. The ‘messages’ of the day-to-day world – Jonas’ ‘trade war’ for instance – are conveyed, via the medium of the artist’s presence, into the ‘other’ world that Jonas enters during her performance; the world that we have described variously as Oceanic, mythic, or unconscious, or which Mazur refers to as the Land of the Dead. The narratives, textures, or strange hybrids of that world make the return journey via the artist’s mouth and body into the experience of her audience as words, sounds, or “physical signs”. Jonas alters her body language and way of speaking to convey that this is taking place, sometimes even appearing to enter a trancelike state. As we watch Jonas perform, Philbrick suggests through her analogy, the artist is our guide who travels to the land of the dead and back to bring us messages. She is our “Good Evan Powell”, a “bridge” between two “congregations” who cannot otherwise connect.

The veracity of the medium – whether or not he or she is a ‘fake’ – is an important part of this persona. Conan Doyle touches on this when, in the midst of the rather poignant passage above, he mentions some information that he believes proves Evan Powell’s veracity. The slender nature of this evidence (quotes from a publicly given speech that

could easily have been reported to Powell) is rather sad, but perhaps hints at the level of emotional investment present when a medium claims to be bearing communication from the land of the dead.

Is Jonas ‘real’ or ‘fake’ in her work? Am I? This is clearly a difficult area but I would suggest that if the artist is genuinely invested in this interchange – between the fragments of the everyday that are carried to the land of the dead, and the images they return with – then they are not ‘faking’. Because the endeavour of Jonas relies on artistic sincerity rather than on claims of supernatural activity, accusations of truth or falsity are somewhat more nebulous, unable to be decided through the kind of straightforward test designed by the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit at Goldsmiths²¹⁰. But if these performances incorporate an element of psychoanalytical insight or process as I have suggested that they might, then the artist’s ability to undertake their role with genuine integrity *is* important to the success of the work²¹¹. For the work to be meaningful as art, it is possible to argue that the performer must approach it as ‘real’, rather than a sham, or act. For my own part, I am sincere in my creative process. Though I am clear that the final performance is a rehearsed and crafted artwork, my intention is to act with complete integrity for my own creative process.

Philbrick’s analogy between Joan Jonas entering the land of *mythos* to create a performance, and Evan Powell travelling to the land of the dead to carry messages between “the living and those who have passed on”, is not perfect. It draws attention however, to the prototypical mediums that exist within the world of myth, and that function as archetypes for exchanges between the worlds of the living and the dead.

As we have seen, Kaja Silverman uses the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice as a point of reference for her study of analogy and correspondence. In the myth, Orpheus is the grieving husband of Eurydice, a young bride who dies from snakebite shortly after her

²¹⁰ Damien Gayle, *Two professional mediums fail test to demonstrate their psychic powers under laboratory conditions*. Ibid.

²¹¹ See for example Jonathon Jones’ review of Louise Bourgeois’ works on paper in Chapter 4. Pg 88

marriage. Orpheus descends to the underworld to plead for Eurydice's life, and sings a song so sweet that Hades and Persephone allow him to lead Eurydice back to the world of the living. The one condition however, that Orpheus must walk ahead and not look back at Eurydice until the journey home is complete, is not fulfilled. Orpheus turns his head when he is almost at the final door of the underworld. Eurydice is still behind him in Hades' kingdom. Eurydice is therefore reclaimed by the world of the dead and Orpheus must return alone. Orpheus then shuns human (most especially female) company, and retreats to the wilderness where he lives as a poet and musician, composing work of preternatural beauty and accomplishment. After his death (which in some versions of the myth comes at the hands of a murderous crowd of women), Orpheus and Eurydice are reunited in the underworld.

Silverman states that "many later writers saw Orpheus as the prototypical artist"²¹², an appellation deriving both from his journey to and return from the land of the dead, and from his ability to create music and song. It is Orpheus' journey to Hades and back that catalyses his greatest work, the song to Hades and Persephone that is eloquent enough to soften the hearts of the monarchs of the dead. Orpheus the artist creates his magnum opus but forfeits his pleasure in life and his bride because he cannot help but let his gaze stray back into the land of the dead, the location of his inspiration.

The late poet Seamus Heaney imagined himself as an Orpheus in contemporary London in the 1984 poem *The Underground*, which Heaney read publicly in 2009 on the occasion of his winning the David Cohen prize for a lifetime's literary achievement. Commenting on Heaney's choice of reading for the presentation event, the editor of Poetry Review magazine Fiona Sampson noted that *The Underground* is significant because it is in part about the land of the dead that is "the well of inspiration, of the muse"²¹³ which is underlined by the poem's final Orphic image.

²¹² Kaja Silverman. *Flesh of My Flesh*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009. Pg 9. Print.

²¹³ Alison Flood. "Seamus Heaney chooses two poems to sum up his lifetime achievement." *The Guardian*. 19/03/2009. Accessed 30/08/13. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/mar/19/david-cohen-seamus-heaney> website.

“To end up in a draughty lamplit station
After the trains have gone, the wet track
Bared and tensed as I am, all attention
For your step following and damned if I look back.”²¹⁴

Similarities can be traced between the creative journey of Orpheus and the myth of Odysseus, the master storyteller of classical antiquity whose story provided me with my initial connection to Gilgamesh. In the course of his epic journey home from the Trojan War, Odysseus summons the dead before a nervous audience of his ship’s crew in a manner very like a medium, in order to question the late seer Tiresias. The poet Simon Armitage describes Odysseus’ ‘performance’ in his 2006 verse retelling of *The Odyssey*, complete with stage directions.

The blood of the black ewe gushes into the pit. The harrowing wails
and moans of the dead start up in the distance, coming nearer.

“Look – now they flock to me, the dead.
Up out of Hades they come,
the souls of the departed.
Unhappy crowd, sorrowful mob.
[...]
Pitiful, pitiful the massed ranks
of the lost, restless in death.
A million troubled, weightless ghosts.
[...]
One question, Tiresias – will I ever reach home?”²¹⁵

Tiresias answers Odysseus’ question (after a fashion), but he is then succeeded by a queue of other departed spirits including Odysseus’ mother Anticleia as well as his fallen comrades, each of whom offers Odysseus stories that he then retells to us, the *Odyssey*’s living audience.

²¹⁴ Seamus Heaney. “The Underground” *Opened Ground: Poems 1966 – 1996*. London: Faber and Faber, 1998. Pg 213. Print.

²¹⁵ Simon Armitage. *Homer’s Odyssey*. London: Faber and Faber, 2006. Pg 139-140. Print.

For Odysseus, the land of the dead is where the stories come from. For Gilgamesh too, there is a relationship between the land of the dead and storytelling. In the Gilgamesh myth, the King loses his companion Enkidu to death, and enters a state of deep mourning that catalyses his quest to find the secret of immortality. Gilgamesh travels to the end of the earth, and crosses the waters of death to reach a place beyond mortality where he may converse with Uta-Napishti. The immortal man instructs the King that death is necessary and brings him into proximity with it, connecting the experience of sleep with the experience of death and allowing Gilgamesh to enter a death-like sleep lasting seven days and nights. When Gilgamesh returns from his journeying, he bring with him two things: an acceptance of death, and the story of the deluge, told to him by Uta-Napishti. Further, Gilgamesh realises that true immortality comes not through avoiding death, but in casting a story that will outlive him, which he then proceeds to do.

The stories of Odysseus and Orpheus, like that of Gilgamesh, are often cited as examples of the Hero's Journey, as in this passage from Campbell, explaining "The Call to Adventure":

"The hero can go forth of his own volition to accomplish the adventure [...] or he may be carried or sent abroad by some benign or malignant agent, as was Odysseus, driven about the Mediterranean by the winds of the angered god Poseidon."

Contextualising their narratives through a discussion of mediums however, suggests a more subtle interpretation of the mythic trajectory. The narrative arc towards separation, liminality within an alogical space, and subsequent return, is still present. However, when Odysseus or Orpheus is presented in the role of medium rather than as hero, the emphasis is on connectivity rather than conquering. In this new analogy the weight is on the exponent's connecting and conversing with others during the moment of their katabasis, rather than on their own personal journey towards attaining what Campbell calls "power"²¹⁶.

²¹⁶ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. 3rd ed. California: New World Library, 1968, Pg 28. Print.

There is also acknowledgement here of the role of the audience for the artist's public katabasis. The medium's audience are witnesses, but crucially they are involved witnesses, who evaluate, are affected by, and may judge as either 'false' or 'useful' what the medium says. As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle suggests, mediums have a place and function within their community that should not be underestimated, and this social connectivity as opposed to heroic autonomy, is also significant.

Other writers have used other, similar, figures as analogies for other artists' practices, with varying success and raising various problems when the metaphor is looked at closely. In her introduction to Rachel Rosenthal's collected performance scripts, Una Chaudhuri describes Rachel Rosenthal's practice as embodying "the artist as shaman"²¹⁷:

"Rosenthal's role is [...] that of the officiant, the shaman who conducts the ritual"²¹⁸.

Key to understanding the significance that this ritual shamanic activity has for Chaudhuri is that the Shaman, unlike the medium, is an *active* agent in the land to which they travel, associated with journeying through undertaking elaborate ritual enactments. The "Altaic shaman" for example:

"ritually climbs a birch tree into which steps have been cut; the birch symbolises the World Tree, the steps representing the various heavens through which the shaman must pass on his journey to the highest heaven."²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Una Chaudhuri. "Introduction" Rachel Rosenthal, *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms: Rachel Rosenthal performance texts*. Una Chaudhuri ed. London: Continuum, 2001. Pg 5. Print.

²¹⁸ Una Chaudhuri. Ibid. Pg 5.

²¹⁹ Mircea Eliade. "Foreword." Mircea Eliade. . *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972. pg xiv. Print.



102. Shaman of Altaic / Siberian descent, about to perform a 'kasa-taori' ritual (undated image). A ritual tree, in which three steps have been inserted, is visible on the left of the image. See list of plates for full reference.

The shaman accesses a space that is theological and, through performative behaviour, is tied to the structures and hierarchies of a particular pantheon. In this sense, the shaman is a religious figure, rather than a broadly secular one like the medium. The connection to myth (and *mythos*) is also far more explicit here as, during their enactments, a shaman may encounter the heroes, gods, monsters, and personalities of the community's own mythic cycle. In the example above, the shaman climbs the metaphorical and literal steps to ascend to his performance space at the top of the tree. This is then designated as 'the highest heaven', a space of *mythos* that the shaman temporarily occupies for the duration of the ritual.

Chaudhuri reflects the shaman's operative presence in the land of the dead by using shamanistic practice as an analogy for Rosenthal's creative practice. A medium simply carries messages from one side of 'the veil' to the other. A shaman on the other hand can effect change; they can intercede on behalf of a living community in order to achieve healing, bring rain, avert catastrophe etc. As the Oxford English Dictionary defines:

shaman, n. and adj.

A priest or priest-doctor among various northern peoples of Asia. Hence applied by extension to similar personages in other parts, esp. a medicine-man of some of the north-western American Indians. Occas. in wider sense: an adherent of shamanism. Also more recently, with recognition of the widespread similarity of primitive

beliefs, the term denotes esp. a man or woman who is regarded as having direct access to, and influence in, the spirit world which is usu. manifested during a trance and empowers them to guide souls, cure illnesses, etc.²²⁰

Mircea Eliade, in *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, which provided the account of the Altaic shaman, stresses that as well as being “a magician and medicine man”, the shaman is, crucially:

“a psychopomp, and may also be priest, mystic, and poet. [...] the shaman specialises in a trance during which his [sic] soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld.”²²¹

A *psychopomp* is a guide of souls who conducts initiates from this world to the land of the dead. It is also, incidentally, the term Jung uses to describe the anima / animus; an archetype that blends male and female aspects, and which he believed was the link between the conscious ego and the unconscious. In both of these senses (and whether he would have been conscious of the Jungian connotation or not), Eliade’s use of the term to describe the role of a shaman is significant, connecting the shamanic role to both the psychological and mythical spheres. This figure, the anima/animus, titled ‘Anima, Animus, Animal’ was a central character in Linder’s performance of *The Darktown Cakewalk* and, as a psychopomp, was the only role played by the artist herself. The programme notes read as follows:

“ANIMUS/ANIMA/ANIMAL Linder / Sari Lievonen
‘Anima, Animus, Animal’ is the title from a chapter from *The Wise Wound* by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove (1978). The animus and anima are terms from Jungian psychology, referring to the feminine and masculine aspects of the psyche. Anima, Animus, Animal is the most liminal of all the characters within *The Darktown*

²²⁰ "shaman, n. and adj.". *OED Online*, 2013. Oxford University Press. Accessed 20/08/13. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/177388?redirectedFrom=shaman> website

²²¹ Mircea Eliade. *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Ibid, pp 4-5. Print. Eliade consistently refers to shamans as ‘he’, although he does cite several examples of female shamanic figures. ‘He’ in this case therefore, appears simply to be a stylistic limitation of 1970s academic writing.

Cakewalk and will only take shape - and shapeshift - over the thirteen hours. The role is shared between Sari Lievonen and Linder to introduce doppelganger motifs and pun on mythological twinning. Sari Lievonen is presently pregnant and carrying twins. Richard Nicoll will create costumes for Anima, Animus, Animal within the performance. Linder will appear throughout the performance.”²²²



103. The artist Linder as anima/animus/animal in rehearsals for *The Darktown Cakewalk*, 2010. Photograph from The Workroom, Glasgow. See list of plates for full reference.

The shaman’s appearance is significant. Unlike a medium, shamans employ elaborate ritual costumes, often along with sacred items and props such as mirrors, masks, or drums, the use of which is closely tied to their spiritual activities.

“The shaman’s costume itself constitutes a religious hierophany and cosmography; it discloses not only a sacred presence but also cosmic symbols and metaphysic itineraries. Properly studied, it reveals the system of shamanism as clearly as do shamanic myths and techniques.”²²³

For many performance artists, myself included, the garments and props that become part of a performance are crucial elements that are part of the ‘system’ of the work. In the account above, the costumes for Linder’s ‘Anima, Animus, Animal’ character were

²²² No author. *Linder At Chisenhale: the darktown cakewalk: celebrated from the house of fame with stuart mccallum and richard nicoll Saturday 10 July 2010 10am – 11pm*. London: Chisenhale Gallery, 2010. Unpublished performance notes. See Appendix D

²²³ Mircea Eliade. *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Ibid, pg 145.

designed by Richard Nicoll, with additional accessories and masks (see image above) that came and went at different times during the expansive performance.

Overall, if a medium may be typified as an everyday member of her community with a ‘gift’ for katabasis, the shaman is an individual set aside from the community for the purpose of managing the relationship between different worlds. This ‘management’ is carefully demarcated by ritual structures, clothing, and behaviours.

“The shaman begins his new, his true life by a ‘separation’ – that is [...] by a spiritual crisis that is not lacking in tragic greatness and in beauty.”²²⁴

Rosenthal’s practice, when seen through the metaphor of the shaman, is a practice rooted in an attempt to intercede. The “separation” and “crisis” that Eliade claims are necessary for shamanic rebirth are described in Eelka Lampe’s 1988 essay *Rachel Rosenthal Creating Her Selves*. There are two critical moments of separation that Lampe’s biography of Rosenthal highlights. The first is Rosenthal’s escape with her family, first to Brazil and then to New York, from Nazi occupied Paris in 1940. The second is the artist’s midlife awakening after her discovery of feminist art practice in 1971 at the age of 45. Lampe claims “Rosenthal’s life was radically altered”²²⁵ by this “extraordinary” encounter with feminist discourse and creative work, prior to which she had been living as a housewife in suburban Los Angeles. In an interview with Lampe, Rosenthal says that “for the first time in my life, I began to shift my identification”²²⁶ and to change her perception of both who she was and who she could be (a process that involved the breakup of her marriage), in a parallel with a shaman’s spiritual and social rebirth. In the ten years that followed Rosenthal began to create performance works through which she “exorcised” herself, shedding her “personal obsessions and disturbances”²²⁷ in a series of

²²⁴ Mircea Eliade. *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Ibid, pg 13.

²²⁵ Eelka Lampe. “Rachel Rosenthal Creating Her Selves.” *The Drama Review*. Vol. 32, No. 1 (Spring, 1988). Accessed 15/02/13. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145878> Website. pg 172.

²²⁶ Eelka Lampe. “Rachel Rosenthal Creating Her Selves.” Ibid, pg 172.

²²⁷ Eelka Lampe. “Rachel Rosenthal Creating Her Selves.” Ibid pg 172.

performance works that included a self-healing ceremony in *Replays* (1975), which the artist claims successfully cured a chronic knee condition.

“The theme of each work was Rosenthal's own death and rebirth. This approach reached its apex in *The Death Show* (1978) and *Leave Her in Naxos* (1981). In *The Death Show*, she sought to overcome her fear of letting past phases of her life ‘die’. *Leave Her in Naxos* revealed intimate details of Rosenthal's love life in interview form and, close to the end of the piece, a performer shaved off all of Rosenthal's hair. This action was an offering of ‘her femininity, her beautiful red hair, in a ritual of dying to allow for rebirth’.



104. Rachel Rosenthal, *Leave Her in Naxos* (1981). See list of plates for full reference.

Once symbolically reborn and personally ‘healed’, Rosenthal shifted the focus of her work significantly, beginning to position herself as the active agency of the shaman proper in works such as *Gaia, Mon Amor* (1983). *Gaia* is, like *Replays* before it, a healing ceremony - though one that the artist performs not for herself, but “for the fate of the earth and a new consciousness.”²²⁸ If this account of Rosenthal as shaman has prioritised the personal biography of the artist, that is because the figure of the shaman is a cultural role that is defined through initiation and social attribution, rather than by a single distinguishing act.

²²⁸ Jackie Apple. *Performance: The State of Art*, Cal Arts 9, no. 2 (November). Pg 13. Cited in Eelka Lampe, “Rachel Rosenthal Creating Her Selves.” Ibid pg 173.



105. Rachel Rosenthal, *KabbaLAMobile* (1984). See list of plates for full reference.

In order for Rosenthal's performances to 'work' (ie, in order for them to shamanically function to effect the social and environmental changes that Rosenthal intends), the artist uses elaborate costumes, masks, and make-up (see performance costume for *KabbaLAMobile*, 1984, above), and engages in preparatory rituals:

"Rosenthal is ritualistic in her handling of the warm-up, the phase immediately before the performance. Usually Rosenthal paces while enacting her own rituals: lighting incense, rattling a gourd, 'sending energy through the gourd or sometimes even with my drum into my performance space, the space used by my musicians, if any, and also the audience's space. I usually have a candle lit in the center of the stage. And then I do some breathing and vocalizing'."²²⁹

²²⁹ Eelka Lampe. "Rachel Rosenthal Creating Her Selves." Ibid pg 174. "Sending energy..." is from Rachel Rosenthal. Interview with Eelka Lampe. New York: 8 June 1988.

This ritualised demarcation of the space and time of Rosenthal's performances is critical. The alogical sphere of *mythos* within which the performance takes place is the space in which Rosenthal makes the myth of Gaia manifest before her audience. It is the space within which Chaudhuri claims that Rosenthal metaphorically becomes the goddess Gaia. It is the place where the artist acts to ritually and metaphorically intercede on behalf of the world – equivalent to the space at the top of the tree to which the Altaic shaman ascends to ritually act. By adopting the figure of a shaman as analogy for Rosenthal's practice, Chaudhuri and Lampe legitimise it, and confirm that it is not simply a private metaphor that is of use to the artist herself, but is also a resemblance that can be perceived and discussed more publicly.

In contrast to the medium's fear of being exposed as a 'fake', the shaman suffers no such judgement. A shaman may be successful or unsuccessful in their aims (they may or may not be able to make it rain, for example) and so they might be regarded as more or less powerful. But so long as the individual has undergone the appropriate initiation ceremonies and so been accepted into the social position of a shaman, they cannot be 'a fake'. Perhaps an analogy with our own Western culture may be that if a doctor has passed her exams at medical school and is being employed in a hospital, then she is still a doctor even if her patient succumbs to his illness. The doctor in question may not be a skilful one, or indeed the patient's illness may have simply been untreatable in this case. Either way, in ordinary circumstances the ontological state of the doctor is not made vulnerable.

It is no longer important to the 'truth' of Rosenthal's shamanic identity whether or not her ceremonies are literally successful in achieving healing or change at an environmental or social level. No commentary on her work that I have read critiques her practice on the grounds that she has not achieved environmental change. In adopting the persona of the shaman, by performing her rituals and attempting to heal the world, Rosenthal is behaving analogically even if she claims to be acting literally. The artist is performing a

metaphor that extends the whole width of her practice, but which should nevertheless not be taken at face value.²³⁰

Rosenthal's decision to adopt this analogy of shamanism so wholeheartedly can be read through the work of Silverman to suggest that similitude may be powerful enough to evoke a sense of connectivity between a performative action and the causes or effects of ecological destruction. This perceived similitude is illustrated in the banner image that hangs over the 'Mission' page on Rosenthal's own website. Above text informing the reader of Rosenthal's intention to "communicat[e] relevant social, environmental, cultural, gender, and spiritual issues to a broad public" is a treated photograph of the artist's distinctive gaze, her eyes staring unblinking at the viewer from the centre of the page. The iris of each eye is overlaid by a blue circle, obscuring Rosenthal's pupils, and resembling nothing so much as the blue globe of the earth as seen from space.



106. Banner image from Rosenthal's website showing Earth/eye overlay. Original photograph by David Michael Kennedy.²³¹ See list of plates for full reference.

By retelling myths such as Gaia as a methodology through which to articulate her ritualised performances, Rosenthal is drawing on long-established traditions²³² that link

²³⁰ Considering Rosenthal's practice at this level, I might suggest that if she *really* wished to impact on environmental change, there might be more direct and demonstrably effective activities that she could undertake. However, perhaps to make change imaginatively *is* a critical act. This reflects Henry M Sayre's writing on the intersection between ritual and entertainment, which (unlike Richard Schechner's efficacy <-> entertainment polarity) he views as a porous boundary. See Henry M Sayre. *The Object of Performance: the American avant-garde since 1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. Pg 184. Print.

²³¹ <http://www.rachelrosenthal.org/rr/mission.html> accessed 12/09/13.

mythic structures and images to issues of fertility and environmental concern. Rosenthal's attempt to present such a profound embodiment of wholeness and connection with the world around her is a direct link to Rainer Maria Rilke's poetic iteration of "I am".

For Chaudhuri, seeing Rosenthal's work through the analogy of a shaman is a way for her to present the artist as metaphorically enacting ecological change at a poetic level. The Altaic shaman ritually climbs a birch tree, which symbolises another, mythic tree. This symbolic substitution is acknowledged and recognised. The climbing represents an ascension that is more than purely physical and the act is at the same time ritual and representation. Chaudhuri sees Rosenthal's work, which does not have the framing context of an established theology or shared mythic realm, as a system of symbols and representations that she has invented herself, but which pertain towards a similar function.

Though shamanic practice may be a useful analogy for Rosenthal, who is quoted by both Chaudhuri and Lampe as supporting this identification, it is less so for my own work, which lacks the crucial interventionist aspect, and my intention is less didactic than Rosenthal's. Though I am influenced by the place of mythos that I access through my development process I do not use it to effect change.

In searching for a vocabulary to describe this sense of being 'influenced', I wondered about the figure of the classical sibyl, oracle, or seer, not least because writer Lauren Amazeen described me as being "[l]ike an oracle" in her text to accompany the performance *Mouth Open In An Open O*²³³. This too is a problematic metaphor however. While a shaman or medium enters a trance in a self-directed effort to contact another

²³² In the second edition of *Myth* for example, Laurence Coupe updates his book with a whole new chapter 'Earth' that examines the relationships between mythology and environmental concerns. See Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge: 2009 (1997). Print.

²³³ Lauren Amazeen. *Mouth Open In An Open O*. Manchester: Cornerhouse Gallery, 2012. Unpublished exhibition text. See Appendix J.1

world, the sibyl or oracle is put into a trance under divine guidance or control as a mouthpiece of a god.

In the classical Greek world, it was believed that a god might use a sibyl to communicate with their mortal followers. Classicist Walter Burkert, in *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, describes oracular pronouncements as emanating from “Frenzied women from whose lips the god speaks”²³⁴ and cites tales of sibyls “with raving mouth[s]” in the work of Heraclitus and the dramatist Aeschylus, amongst others.²³⁵ Burkert gives an example from the sanctuary of Apollo on Mount Ptoion near Akraiphnion in Boiotia of “a male seer [who] is seized by the god.”²³⁶ Sibyls were usually women however, whose divinely authored utterances, ideally in hexameter verse, were believed prophetic. They were often formally consulted by civic representatives in times of social conflict or uncertainty (an Erythraean Sybil was said by Apollodorus of Erythrae to have predicted the Trojan War, for example), as well as being asked to pronounce on personal matters by individual citizens. The site of Delphi in Greece became an important centre for pilgrimage as people travelled substantial distances to consult the oracle on matters that were important to them, becoming, in one of my favourite classical phrases, the *omphalos*, or world’s navel.

²³⁴ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*. Trans. John Raffan, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1985. Pg 116. Print.

²³⁵ Walter Burkert. *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*. Ibid. Pg. 117.

²³⁶ Walter Burkert. *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*. Ibid. Pg. 117.



107. Heinrich Leutemann *Delphic Oracle* (1888). Lithograph. See list of plates for full reference.

The adjectives “frenzied” and “raving”, used by Burkert together with the verb “seized”, suggest that the sibyl or oracle was a potentially unwilling vehicle for the gods’ communications. The sibyl may typically be imagined as a relatively passive figure²³⁷, contrasted with the active ‘brokering’ of the otherworld undertaken by mediums. In William Golding’s novel *The Double Tongue*, the god Apollo enters a new sibyl, or ‘Pythia’ at Delphi. These lines give the perspective of the imagined Pythia:

“Suddenly my whole body began to shiver, not the skin with its surface movements but the deep flesh and bone, a repeated convulsion that turned me sideways, then round. [...]

‘Evoeee!’

It was the god. He had come. What was this? A yell, my chest pumping out air, the muscles convulsed again.

‘Evoeee-ee, Bacche!’

²³⁷ The image of the sibyl is problematised by the fact that in referring to classical accounts of the Pythia recounted by historians such as Burkert (or novelists such as William Golding, whose work I am about to introduce), we are relying on (almost always) male authors’ accounts of (almost always) female sibyls’ behaviour. These male correspondents’ interpretations may therefore be biased by any assumptions about the role or capacities of women.

[...] Suddenly the whole tomb place was full of rolling, rollicking laughter that went on and on, louder and louder and I knew as my body worked like some automaton that it came from my own mouth. Then, as suddenly and horribly – no, not horribly that brazen clamour – but as suddenly as it had come there was silence.”²³⁸

Later, the young Pythia is again possessed by the god “whether I would or no, oh yes, it was a rape, this was Apollo”²³⁹. This image of the sibyl’s relationship with the divine as a penetrative assault is present in Burkert’s text as he states:

“How the sibyl suffers violence from the god is alluded to by Vergil also. There are also hints of a similar relationship between the Pythia and Apollo, even if it was only Christians who first elaborated this with sexual details.”²⁴⁰

Regardless of the origin of this perceived relationship, the image – powerfully depicting Golding’s fictionalised account – has clearly stuck, and so it remains an aspect of the analogy that must be considered if the description is to be used. The implication here is that the artist’s work comes at least partly from an outside agency of which the artist herself is not in control. If I were to say that ‘one analogy for my creative process is that of a sibyl’ (or if I were to declaim ‘I am like a seer when I make work’) it would be to suggest that I was under the influence of a higher power who was communicating to the audience through the movement of my lips.

And yet this is almost precisely what the writer Carole Koenig quotes Meredith Monk – an artist whom I otherwise respect – as saying about her own work. Meredith Monk has claimed that in her work she feels herself to be “like this seer”²⁴¹. The analogy is reiterated by the writer Marianne Goldberg, who states:

²³⁸ William Golding. *The Double Tongue*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. Pg 87-88. Print.

²³⁹ William Golding. *The Double Tongue*. Ibid pg 88.

²⁴⁰ Burkert. *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*. Ibid. Pg. 117.

²⁴¹ Meredith Monk cited in Carole Koenig, “Meredith Monk: Performer-Creator.” *The Drama Review*. Vol. 20, No. 3 (Sep., 1976). Accessed: 18/02/2013 Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145090>

“Monk’s metaphor for the artist is the sibyl or oracle – one who is able to receive images and able to create from them. She conceives artists as ‘the antennae of society ... connected to things that are underlying what is going on at the emotional, psychic level of the culture’.”²⁴²

Both Goldberg and Koenig are sympathetic to Monk’s analogy, and do not view being ‘like a seer’ as a derogatory statement. This surprises me, and so I have expended some effort in questioning why this may be, asking if there is perhaps a more positive aspect to the image of the oracle, which I have overlooked.

Monk adopts the sibyl as a simile, not a metaphor. This is important because it suggests that although she posits equivalence between a sibyl and her spoken oracle (shaped by a god) on the one hand, and the artist and her dance (shaped by what exactly?) on the other, she is also cognisant of the distance between these two behaviours. Neither Monk nor her commentators supply the corresponding ‘deity’ that would complete the metaphor of Monk as sibyl, because there is no external god authoring this artist’s work “whether [she] would or no”.

By omitting the figure of a god as an external author, Monk is free to suggest other sources for her compulsion to create her work. A possibility is that the inspirational deity may be the voice of Monk’s (and her co-performers’) own unconscious. Elsewhere, Goldberg describes Monk’s artistic role as “that of the visionary (the artist perhaps) who perceives the world through a different lens”, compelled “to tell over and over again”²⁴³ the same core narrative or story within her work. Goldberg explains that this core story is shaped by folktale and myth. Is *mythos* itself what Monk is setting in the place of her god? Monk and House members Blondell Cummings and Lee Nagrin, have stated that some elements of their work emerge intuitively and non-intellectually from what

²⁴² Marianne Goldberg. “Personal Mythologies: Meredith Monk’s Education of the Girlchild.” Deborah Jowitt ed. *Meredith Monk*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997. Pg 53. Print.

²⁴³ Marianne Goldberg. “Personal Mythologies: Meredith Monk’s Education of the Girlchild.” *Ibid* Pg 53. Print.

Cummings describes as “a deep, personal, subconscious”²⁴⁴. This ‘subconscious’ corresponds with *mythos* as a notional location.

This possibility recasts the sibylline simile above. The artist retains authorship of her creative utterances because the ‘voice’ that possesses and directs her is her own – though one which may be inaccessible to her in daily life. Viewed in this way, Monk’s phrase “like a seer” becomes more palatable. The pushy Apollonian entity that renders Monk’s body “some automaton” under its agency is her own unconscious mind, speaking through her body as she composes and dances a response to “the world through a different lens.” Monk’s account therefore, of feeling “connected to things that are underlying what is going on at the emotional, psychic level of the culture”²⁴⁵, is a direct link back to Silverman’s Oceanic feeling.

Powerful as an analogy because it translates the image of the sibyl’s hexameter verse into Monk’s largely mute dance performances, the ‘artist as sibyl’ is perhaps the most complex of the three roles I have explored here. This is not least because the sibyl’s pronouncements are supposed to be prophetic: the god is meant to reveal the future – however elliptically – in her words. What is Monk revealing about how to live, in this case, and why? How are the shadows cast by her moving body to be interpreted? Light may be shed by the words of theorist Robert Pogue Harrison (already cited by Laurence Coupe, above). Though speaking about poetry, Harrison’s words may equally apply to other creative practices.

“Poetry does not only monitor spiritual states of being, or what one used to call the ‘spirit’ of an age; it also registers the spiritual effects of a changing climate and habitat. As the external environment undergoes transformations, poets often announce them in advance with the clairvoyance of seers, for poets have an altogether sixth sense that enables them to forecast trends in the weather, so to speak. Like oracles, they may couch their message in the language

²⁴⁴ Marianne Goldberg. “Personal Mythologies: Meredith Monk’s Education of the Girlchild.” *Ibid.* Pg 50. Print.

²⁴⁵ Marianne Goldberg. “Personal Mythologies: Meredith Monk’s Education of the Girlchild.” *Ibid.* pp 50-51. Print.

of enigma. Like oracles, the meaning of their message becomes fully manifest only after the events it foretells have unfolded."²⁴⁶

Harrison implies that we should not try overly to 'read' Monk's performances, but instead treat them as oracles "in the language of enigma", the sense of which will emerge in time. This is poetic, but may skirt the issue of whether, if she believes herself to be "like this seer", Monk also believes her work to be a prophecy. Sadly, so far in published accounts of her work, commentators have been silent on this question.

9.1 The Artist As Psychopomp

Sibyls, mediums, oracles, and shamans: individuals who connect here to elsewhere and draw something back from the other world they have visited – the land of the dead, mythos, the unconscious. None of them, taken as discrete figures, have proved themselves to be unproblematic analogies for the journey taken by performance artists. As a group however, an analysis of their methodologies has helped to re-imagine a narrative arc that moves away from the heroic, combative individualist, towards a paradigm of connectivity. If Orpheus is cast as a psychopomp rather than an adventurer, his agency becomes centred around his capacity as a conduit to link what that may otherwise remain separate: the land of the dead, and the world of the living. His creativity springs from this unexpected joining. In its entry for 'psychopomp', the OED refers directly to the artist Orpheus through the circuitous connection of a quotation from Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae*, which again connects the land of the dead with the human unconscious.

"1990 C. Paglia *Sexual Personae* xi. 309 She is a marriage broker or Psychopompos guiding him through the Orphic underworld of emotion toward his 'true self'."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Robert Pogue Harrison. *Forests, The Shadow Of Civilisation*. Unknown publisher: 1993, pg 148-9. As cited in Laurence Coupe, *Myth*. London: Routledge, 1997. 187-188. Print.

²⁴⁷ "psychopomp, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, March 2015. Web. Accessed 2/04/15.



108. The living Orpheus and the dead Eurydice, with the god Hades and his consort Persephone. Peter Paul Rubens, *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1636-1638). Oil on canvas. In this image, of the beginning of the couple's ascension, it is Eurydice who is looking back (with longing?) towards the Underworld.²⁴⁸ See list of plates for full reference.

In considering these various figures and their practices I have come to the conclusion that it is more appropriate to focus on the action of joining rather than the travelling. The motion undertaken in each of the roles above is a katabasis, a 'going down'. The arc followed by my performances is that of pearl diving, day-dreaming, and the return road to Hades. It is the story of Orpheus and most importantly perhaps it is the story of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh travelled a long road in grief and when he reached the beach at the end of the world he spoke and he listened to an old man called Uta-Napishti who had escaped death, and had been made immortal. The state of Uta-Napishti however, who waits forever on a lonely beach, far away from community and civilisation, surely recalls nothing so much as the fates of the weightless, rotten, unmoored dead of the underworld who come forth to speak to Odysseus in the bloody pit at Aea.

²⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of this image, see Judith E. Bernstock. *Under the Spell of Orpheus: The Persistence of a Myth in Twentieth-century Art*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 1991. Pg 102.

Gilgamesh's whole journey is a quest away from simple, linear heroism through an "anomalous and ambiguous – that is liminal"²⁴⁹ period of "betwixt and between"²⁵⁰ before he is

"urged to reaggregate or reintegrate himself into society by reversing the liminal rituals of mourning and returning to the normal and normative behaviours of Mesopotamian society."²⁵¹

This is katabasis as mourning, as ritual, and as learning. Of the analogies I have examined perhaps I am drawn to the figure of the medium or psychopomp, temporarily connecting the audience with a place of "ambiguous and paradoxical imagery"²⁵², as the writer Susan Ackerman has referred to the landscape of the myth of Gilgamesh.



109. Gilgamesh and Enkidu dispatch the sacred Bull of Heaven.
Assyrian cylinder seal, circa 600 BCE; Schøyen Collection.
See list of plates for full reference.

Analogy is never *the same as*; it is only ever *like*. In some lights the resemblance is closer than in others. In a certain angle therefore, my work resembles the narrative arc of a medium performing an act of katabasis; a psychopomp guiding her audience to the land of the dead, and back. This itself is a mythic paradigm, the archetypal story of Orpheus and of Gilgamesh in which artists find their own practices folded back on themselves. I

²⁴⁹ Susan Ackerman. *When Heroes Love: The ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. Pg 122. Print.

²⁵⁰ Susan Ackerman. *When Heroes Love: The ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David*. Ibid. Pg 148.

²⁵¹ Susan Ackerman. *When Heroes Love: The ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David*. Ibid. Pg 130-131.

²⁵² Susan Ackerman. *When Heroes Love: The ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David*. Ibid. Pg 122.

have described my art practice as myth, and the myth itself becomes a metaphor for creative practice. I am reminded, suddenly of Jung's Ouroboros, the snake with its tail in its mouth representing endless cycles of beginning and end, which appears in myths from Greece to Scandinavia. In Egypt, *The Enigmatic Book of the Netherworld* depicts a snake that bites its own tail, which is coiled around a god. The god is a hybrid of the solar deity of life, Ra; and Osiris, the lord of the dead.



110. Ouroboros encircling a mythic figure linking the worlds of the living and the dead.²⁵³
See list of plates for full reference.

This image describes the alogical worlds of myth, and of this performance practice: in joining the worlds of the living and the dead, each discovers stories and brings them back. Composing, delivering, and reflecting upon my practice has been a process of katabasis, travelling down (somewhere, perhaps to the interior spaces of myself) in order to return with something. As the author Margaret Atwood has written:

“I was holding forth [...] awhile ago at a dinner for a bunch of writers.
“Gilgamesh was the first writer,” I said. “He wants the secret of life

²⁵³ Erik Hornung. *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*. Transl. David Lorton. New York: Cornell University Press, 1999. Pg 81. Print.

and death, he goes through hell, he comes back, but he hasn't got immortality, all he's got is two stories – the one about the trip, and the other, extra about the flood. So the only thing he really brings back with him is a couple of stories. Then he's really tired, and then he writes the whole thing down on stone."

"Yeah, that's what it is," said the writers. "You go, you get the story, you're whacked out, you come back and write it all down on stone. Or feels like a stone by the sixth draft," they added.

"Go where?" I said.

"To where the story is," they said.

Where is the story? The story is in the dark. That is why inspiration is thought of as coming in flashes. Going into a narrative – into a narrative process – is a dark road. You can't see your way ahead. Poets know this too; they too travel dark roads. The well of inspiration is a hole that leads downwards.²⁵⁴

Atwood comes close here to articulating the essence of this study, if only she had not retained Campbell's hero's journey as her metaphor. In following chapter I will bring this study to a conclusion, returning to reflect upon *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*, and what my Gilgamesh Cycle of performances have revealed about their relationship to mythic structure. Gilgamesh does 'go through hell' and 'come back' but Atwood misses the important part of his experience: the degree to which he connects the worlds of the living and the dead for us, his living audience. This is where his inspiration, and the story he tells, comes from.

²⁵⁴ Margaret Atwood. *Negotiating with the Dead. A writer on writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pg 176. Print.

Chapter 10. Conclusion

People forgot where the story had come from, or perhaps they never knew. And the story changed a bit. But it was still the same story. Sometimes it was more like a song, and sometimes it was more like a warning. Sometimes it was an anthem, and sometimes it was a joke. But it was still the same story. It is only ever the same story. There is only ever one story, and it is the story that we all tell each other all the time, over raw meat and firelight, and over telephones, and tiny screens, and the pages of the pulp paperback books that we read in the bath. We need to tell each other stories, after all. And this is a good one. I can tell it to you. Sit down now. Sit down and I will tell you a story.²⁵⁵

And so, after his long journey to the end of the world and back, the great king Gilgamesh who was one third human and two thirds divine, returned to the city of Uruk. Standing at the gates the king saw at last the monument that would be his immortality: the immense city walls of clay-fired brick that he himself had commissioned. He shows them to the ferryman who has accompanied him.

“O Ur-shanabi, climb Uruk’s wall and walk back and forth!
Survey its foundations, examine the brickwork!”²⁵⁶

With this salutation the words of the epic become circular, as Gilgamesh repeats the formulaic invocation that opens the story.

Climb Uruk’s wall and walk back and forth!
Survey its foundations, examine the brickwork!”²⁵⁷

Gilgamesh has been elsewhere, and he has returned. Now his story can be told again. In bringing this study’s thesis to conclusion, I find that I am also returning, full circle, to

²⁵⁵ Ruth Barker. *Of Gilgamesh and Others*. 2013. Performance. Extract taken from the closing words of the performance script. See Appendix M.4

²⁵⁶ Andrew George. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. London: Penguin. 1999. Pg 99. Print.

²⁵⁷ Andrew George. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Ibid. Pg 2.

consider the words of its Introduction. The wondering (wandering) figure is myself. The performance artworks I have described are my own, as is the ‘something like poetry’ that I have written. I have been elsewhere, and now I have returned. I have experienced grief and sadness at the loss of a pregnancy. I have felt indescribable joy and love at the presence of my daughter, who is now 18 months old. I have made work that I could not have imagined at the beginning of this study. Now return I must where I started (seated in front of an ominously empty word.doc) in order to answer the questions I have raised, and to ask where this research may lead me next.

In opening this study I stated that I wished to understand the relationships between the form and the content of my own performance practice. Specifically, I asked how mythic structure can be related to a creative practice. To answer this question I developed, composed, and presented the Gilgamesh Cycle of new artworks that are represented in the appendices to this study. The written thesis became a way for me to reflect upon these works after their completion, in order to better understand what their production demonstrated.

In performing this retrospective analysis I often chose to concentrate on the final work in the series, *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*. Partly I chose to do so because this work, being the most recent, was also the most fresh in my mind. However, it also represented the culmination of this sequence of new works, and so exemplified what I had learnt through the trials and errors of the work that had come before. Now, with the benefit of a little more time having passed, I can see *A Love Song* with necessary critical distance. I have creatively moved on from the work, and this has aided and informed the reflective illations that I can now offer.

I will now use the results of the thesis so far to examine the constituent parts of the original research questions. In the terms of this research study therefore the following subsections will ask:

- 10.1) What is mythic structure?
- 10.2) What is the form of this performance practice?
- 10.3) What is the content of this performance practice?
- 10.4) How can mythic structure be related to a creative practice?
- 10.5) What is the relationship between the form and the content of this performance practice?

10.1 Mythic Structure

Recognising that ‘myth’ cannot be explored as a singular paradigm, and that it is beyond the scope of this research study to attempt to represent it as a whole, I have focussed on the ancient Epic of Gilgamesh as representing several salient features of mythic structure more generally. I have followed the broad example of Claude Levi Straus, who stated that myths cannot be understood as conventional narratives but rather as bundles of related events whose meaning is contextual rather than discrete.

The motifs that are central to the core ‘melody’ of the Gilgamesh myth (to also use Levi-Straus’ musical metaphor) are those of separation and joining. Gilgamesh’s central quest to seek immortality is a separation from his home and community as he travels to the end of the world and back. This journey however, through a notional territory that Grace Dane Mazur has typified as the ‘land of the dead’, is characterised by unexpected joinings and connections that identify this landscape as alogical (outside the familiar daily experience of logical cause and effect). I have shown that alogicality is related to the classical frame of mythos, part of the etymological root of our English word ‘myth’, which connotes the absence of “natural law”, order, and logic and “lacks the explicit distinction between true and false.”²⁵⁸ Part of the very fabric of myth therefore, is an account of an alogical territory, such as is found in the Epic of Gilgamesh.

²⁵⁸ Albert A. Anderson. *Mythos, and Logos*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 2004. Pg 61. Print.

In the Gilgamesh myth, this alogical space of mythos is positioned within the context of a journey undertaken by the king across the waters of death to the end of the world in order that he may understand and overcome death (which, of course, he finds is impossible). Although arguing against the universalising tendencies of mythographers such as Joseph Campbell, I have found that the three stage structure that Campbell terms a ‘hero’s journey’ is common within mythic narratives. Typifying the narrative arc as Campbell does however, as a masculinised and warlike quest that uses a language of conquest, is deeply problematic. I have recast the metaphor for this narrative theme, finding interest and import in the allegorical figure of the medium, rather than the warrior. Whereas Campbell’s crusading hero penetrates and conquers the territory of the unknown, my alternative metaphor of the medium describes a temporary connection with such territories, carrying messages and acting as a collective conduit. In this way it is joining, rather than overcoming, which is the significant motif within mythic structure.

10.2 The Form of this Performance Art Practice

My performance art practice has provided the primary methodology for this study, becoming both the raw material – the data – and the investigative language of its inquiry. At times (and perhaps necessarily) this has posed real epistemological difficulties, which I nevertheless hope that I have overcome in the writing of this thesis. However it has also offered a unique insight into the first hand processes of creative production that would not otherwise have been accessible.

In the preceding chapters I have outlined the form of this practice, describing its methods, validity and scope through a process-based account of my activities. I have explained how my work has emerged from a background in sculpture and context-specific practice and how, since 2010, I have been making performance works that seek to re-voice ancient myths. This practice has culminated in the production of *The Gilgamesh Cycle*, a sequence of new performance artworks engaging with the ancient Epic of Gilgamesh.

I begin a new work by immersing myself in research material giving multiple variants of a particular myth. I then spend a period of time away from the source material in order to

‘internalise’ the stories and images. Following this I embark on an intensive and intuitive writing phase in which I unselfconsciously transcribe ‘stream of consciousness’ type texts, which are then edited and composed into scripts, using poetic form and meter. I commission a bespoke performance garment for each new work, and often perform in non-gallery settings, which require careful choreography of elements including my own entrance and exit, and the audience’s placement and movement. I learn the completed scripts by rote, and recite them from memory in a hypnotic, measured, and trancelike presentation.

In this thesis I have placed my work in relation to that of other artists, where I feel that a discursive relationship may be ascertained between our approaches. By doing so, I have revealed the significant structures and mechanisms that underpin the developmental and presentational forms I have used, and placed them within the context of other creative practices. By using a similar approach to that of Levi-Straus’ ‘bundles’ of events I have found that my practice hinges around two parallel journeyings that I, as the practitioner, undertake within the sphere of each work. The first is in the development of the new work, during which I deliberately access my unconscious in order to generate material for the performance script. The second is in the delivery of the work, when I enter a mentally divorced state of self-hypnosis for the duration of the performance. These processes of highly intuitive working are framed by highly conscious decision-making regarding editing, composition, and costume.

10.3 The Content of this Performance Art Practice

My performances take as their dual content both the subject matter of the ancient myths with which they engage, and also the autobiographical material that emerges from my unconscious. They make few distinctions between these very different fields of reference, which are often overlaid within the performance scripts.

At the heart of both of these fields of origin are core concerns regarding the immense subject that might be termed ‘the human condition’: questions of loss, love, the connections between ourselves and others, and mortality. Running through the production

of the Gilgamesh Cycle of works has been an evolving set of personal circumstances (fertility problems; pregnancy; miscarriage; grief; pregnancy; birth) that have doubtless impacted on the performances.

The autobiographical aspect of my work places the content of the performances in the resolute present. Though partly referencing ancient mythology – stories that have been told and retold for millennia – the world of the performance is consciously not archaic. The performance scripts are studded with language and cultural landmarks that are rooted within everyday contemporary experience. There are smouldering cigarettes, brogues, and burgers. There is the dashboard of a Toyota car, and a kitchen table at which a woman sits with clay beneath her fingernails.

The Gilgamesh Cycle returns to the myth of Gilgamesh for the origin of each new work. Each piece however, differs from the others in both tone and focus, as my practice has moved through the myth to find a variety of voices or access points within it. Exactly what has felt most pertinent to me – which aspects of this immense and multilayered myth I have been drawn to – has previously been a mystery to me. I have not known, consciously, why at one moment I have wanted to write about Gilgamesh’s walking home, while at another moment I have needed to say something about his sleeping on the beach. Now however, after I have had some time to see the work in retrospect, I feel closer than at any time previously to being able to articulate these impulses.

When Laurence Coupe writes about myths, he talks about the paradigms – such as Campbell’s hero’s journey – that we can use to find meaning within them. These paradigms are the “overarching framework[s] of fertility, cosmology, deliverance and superhuman heroism”²⁵⁹, and Coupe is clear that the practices of interpreting myths “depend on how one reads myth in the first place: that is, on which paradigms are of interest, and on how to interpret them.”²⁶⁰ A myth such as Gilgamesh then, contains many different paradigms within it, and it can be interpreted in different ways at different times.

²⁵⁹ Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. London: Routledge, 1997. Pg 5. Print.

²⁶⁰ Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. Ibid. Pg 17. Print.

I can now see that my own interpretation of Gilgamesh (as seen through the Gilgamesh Cycle) has been shaped by the events of my personal life. At a time when I was experiencing fertility problems for example, and undergoing various processes to chart and measure my reproductive cycle, I found myself writing *Mouth Open In An Open O* (2012). This work takes a calendar year as its structure and describes the changing of the seasons. In my script, Ishtar's Bull of Heaven dies and children eat its meat. Plants grow throughout the text, and there is an egg that "rolls. Has rolled. Will roll."²⁶¹ With hindsight, these seem clearly to suggest that at this point I was drawn to the aspects of the myth that offer a cyclical pattern of death and rebirth, and that point towards a paradigm of fertility (Ishtar herself being a fertility goddess). Re-viewed in this context the work is replete with references to sex, fertility, growth, and cyclical repetitions of death and rebirth, exemplified perhaps in the final section of the script, which describes two trees growing "limb to limb" and states enigmatically:

"Cut them down and they will flourish, or else make way for something new.
A snake with its tail in its mouth still sloughs its skin."²⁶²

It may seem obvious to make these connections, and for me to state that the aspects of the Gilgamesh myth that refer to fertility, for example, resonated with me at a time when fertility was on my mind. It was not obvious to me at the time I made the work however, and it is only through the process of reflecting on my working practices in this focused way, that these underlying structures have become explicit.

This indicates an important development in my ability to understand my own work, as I have previously had reservations about discussing it in overtly personal terms, partly because these aspects felt so mysterious. I now feel far more in control of how the autobiographical elements of my practice might function, and so feel correspondingly more confident in choosing how and when to make those elements visible to others

²⁶¹ Ruth Barker. *Mouth Open In An Open O*. 2012. Performance script. See Appendix J.4

²⁶² Ruth Barker. *Mouth Open In An Open O*. 2012. Ibid. See Appendix J.4

(either in conversation, or through the work itself). Previously, as I did not myself understand how my experiences were shaping the work I made, my capacity for making these choices was limited.

10.4 How can mythic structure be related to a creative practice?

The thrust of this study has been to interrogate the intersection between mythic structure and this performance art practice. I have concentrated on revealing the points at which ideas or practices encompass both the experience of the creative practice, and of the ancient myth.

Focussing on the structures of myth outlined above, and taking a similar approach to a close reading of my performance practice, I have identified significant areas at which this overlap, or simultaneity, occurs. In pursuit of this, I have made use of a discussion of ritual behaviour as a language through which to understand the relationships between narrative (myth) and behaviour (performance). I have also incorporated ideas from literary theory and philosophy, in order to approach the territory from the opposite perspective and reveal connections between creative practice and mythic interpretation.

The key areas of coalescence are as follows:

10.4.1 Alogicality

Through my research, I have recognised that the middle stage within the three-stage structure of myth outlined above, typically incorporates elements that can be described as alogical (i.e. narrative situations, accounts, or experiences that omit the conventional frameworks of logic, reason, or cause and effect). In the epic of Gilgamesh, when the king leaves Uruk to travel to the ends of the earth, the journey is characterised by a blurring or inconsistency between states that should conventionally remain distinct, with human/animal; plant/mineral; and mortal/immortal hybrids. Time is likewise distorted or problematised throughout Gilgamesh's quest, either becoming stretched, 'hypersensitive'

in Grace Dane Mazur's term²⁶³, or else measured in such peculiar ways as through the baking and rotting of bread. These are all indicators that this section of the Gilgamesh myth (which Campbell would typify as a hero's journey, and which I would describe as a medium's intercommunion) exists in a particular frame of reference that is outwith the sphere of day-to-day experience, and which features unexpected joining or connection as a regular motif.

This alogical state corresponds, in the terms of ritual structure outlined in Chapter 5 of this study, to Arnold Van Genaap's transitional or liminal phase, where the ritual participant is no longer their 'old' pre-ritual-event self, but has not yet become their 'new' post-ritual-event self. Liminality is a state of and, rather than or when conditions such as true/false, alive/dead can coexist (can be joined together) without contradiction despite otherwise being mutually exclusive.

Through the production and analysis of new performance works, I have identified a parallel between mythographic / ritual accounts of this particular structural trait of myth, and experiential aspects of the production of new work. Firstly, the material gathered during my unedited initial writing stage, which I have described as a process of accessing my unconscious in order to extract an internalised version of my research material, can clearly be described as alogical in nature, as I have shown in Chapter 4. Secondly, as I have described in Chapter 8, my experience of performing – also shares alogical characteristics. I feel a lack of distinction between myself and others, my awareness of time is highly distorted, and my sensory impressions are strange and contradictory - seeming 'blind' despite my visual awareness, for example.

The information I have gathered through the empirical process of creative production and reflection expands upon theoretical ideas outlined by philosopher Kaja Silverman regarding particular properties of creative practice. Specifically, Silverman has described a type of connection that poetry, and other forms of art, may awaken between people.

²⁶³ Grace Dane Mazur. *Hinges: meditations on the portals of the imagination*. Nantick: AK Peters, 2010. Pg 30.

This connection, which distorts time, place, and blurs the boundaries between autonomous selves, should itself be described as alogical. Because Silverman traces this notion back to the writings of Lou Andreas-Salomé, I have departed from these writers' use of the phrase 'Oceanic', preferring instead to call this experience of joining 'Saloméan identification.'

My own work develops Silverman's writing by relating this phenomenon directly to the property of alogicality, then to liminality/transition in ritual behaviour, and from there to the middle stage of a three-stage mythic structure. In this way, I have found that mythic structure can be related directly to creative practice through parallel processes of necessary temporary immersion in an alogical sphere.

10.4.2 Journeying

The narrative arc of myths such as the epic of Gilgamesh, often features a central 'there and back again' journey, which may involve a return bearing some kind of treasure, benefit, or knowledge. As I have shown, these journeys often (see the myths of Orpheus, Gilgamesh, Odysseus, etc) involve a penetration and return from the land of the dead, and it is this type of journey that is typified as being alogical in nature. Campbell has described it as a hero's journey into another territory, while I have recast it as a medium's intercommunion with another territory.

The creative process I have outlined involves two such 'there and back again' motions, as described above. Firstly, the artist travels into her unconscious and returns with material for her work. Secondly, the artist travels to and from the literal and metaphorical 'performance space'; a journey that may be only a few feet or meters from the door to the centre of a room in one literal sense, but which is simultaneously a passage of much greater span from her day-to-day world into an alogical performance sphere. What the artist brings back in this second example is, from the perspective of the audience, the delivery of the performance itself. The artist undertakes the journey of the performance, in this latter stage, in order to deliver an artwork to the people who have come to see it.

Again, this analysis has shown that mythic structure and creative practice are closely related at a constructional and at a metaphorical level. The interrelation between these two levels (the functional and the allegorical) is complex and can not wholly be answered in a study of this size. It does however, provide a tantalising opportunity for further study.

10.4.3 Joining

Characterising the nature of alogicality and at the core of the ‘there and back again’ motion referred to above is the motif of joining and connectivity, which has become so central to this study. Each time I have begun to write about one idea, experience, or quality, the mutable nature of both this creative practice and mythology as a landscape has tied that line of thinking to another, until I am left with a net of strange and shifting proportions. This does not seem inappropriate however as, as I discussed in the Introduction to this study, ‘joining’ has become an aspect of my methodology as well as my subject matter.



111. The Norse god Loki, with a net of strange proportions that he both designed and became trapped within. Unknown artist, 18th century Icelandic manuscript SÁM 66. Árni Magnússon Institute, Iceland. See list of plates for full reference.

Joining together things which are not usually connected (human and animal, mortal and immortal) is a frequent occurrence in mythic narratives, when framed within the containing structure I have outlined above. At a greater scale than this however, joining then to now is one aspect of the broader operative functions of myth. As Laurence Coupe, whose work on myth has been a point of reference throughout this study, has shown:

“Myth, for Ricoeur, is all about this dialectic of past and future; it is a narrative whose beginning and ending continually inform the middle. [...]

Thus Burke, Ricoeur, and Cupitt agree that to recognise the primacy of language is to recognise that we are always involved in history. Moreover, it is through language and it is in history that we make our myths. In doing so, we suppress neither the past nor the future, but remain open to the potential of both.”²⁶⁴

Coupe’s words clearly demonstrate the Gordian entanglement of temporal joinings that myth provokes. The centre of a narrative is informed by what is to come, as well as what has already passed, and Coupe refers here both to a potential suppression of the future, and to the open potential of the past – both of which would seem to be contradictions in terms were it not for the “endless self generating power”²⁶⁵ of the alogical nature of mythos.

This layering and joining of matter is seen replicated in the work of artists such as Rachel Rosenthal, Joan Jonas, and Danai Anesiadou (see Chapter 8). In my own work, the performance scripts blur accounts of time, location, and personae to create alogical connections across temporal and narrative references. The text moves between positions and voices fluidly, joining anecdotal or autobiographical material to mythic images. The capacity of contemporary performance to prioritise connectivity is also demonstrated in the process of Saloméan identification that can be experienced as an audience member who feels temporarily connected to the performer whom they are watching, and to the

²⁶⁴ Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. London: Routledge, 1997. Pg 97-98.

²⁶⁵ Laurence Coupe. *Myth*. Ibid. Pg 96.

performer who discovers mid-work that they may be indivisible from the audience, or from the room in which they are standing (see also Chapter 8).

Through an analysis of creative process, I have linked this multitude of connections to the process of free association, by which individuals can access their unconscious. Significantly, I have shown (via the work of Joan Jonas) that there is also a relationship between this process of free association (the ‘fantasies’ of Carl Jung) and the collective unconscious. Joining our conscious thoughts, as audience members watching a performance, to material generated by the artist through her accessing a personal as well as a collective unconscious, may be a mechanism by which the experience of Saloméan identification is manifested. Again, this study has only touched on this possibility, but it would be a fascinating area for further study.

I have therefore demonstrated that mythic structure is related to creative practice through an underlying morphology that is shared by both. Both the creative practice and the structures of myth that have been under examination have been shown to prioritise joining and connectivity as vital methodologies. They occupy a three-stage structure that frames a motion of ‘there-and-back-again’ conduit. This ability to make connections between realms, states, and times that are otherwise distinct is a primary property of the sphere of mythos itself, by which I might suggest that art-making and myth-making are themselves perhaps aspects of an expanded practice of connecting both to a collective unconscious, and to an audience; thereby joining the deeply personal to images and patterns of shared unconscious resonance.

10.5 The relationship between the form and the content of this performance practice.

Through the analyses undertaken above, I have shown that the form and content of this performance practice are intimately connected, and cannot easily be parsed. The content of this work is found in the liminal territory in which the mythic and the personal overlay one another. The structures that give the work form, similarly, operate to facilitate the production of this liminal space. In the development of a new work, the script originates

from within the alogical space of my own unconscious. In the presentation of that work, the performance space itself becomes a platform for an alogical experience, witnessed by an audience who may connect with the performer through Saloméan identification (itself alogical in structure).

Both the form and the content of this practice are strewn with moments of connectivity, as has been shown. These processes of binding and joining extend to join a given performance's conformation to its content. By expanding the terms of this territory of connectivity through exploring it as a maker and performer rather than a theoretician, I have shown that performance art is able to reveal the complexities of the landscape in a way not previously possible. As writers such as Mazur and Silverman have interpreted existing texts or non-performance-based artworks by artists and writers other than themselves, their exploration has necessarily omitted the experience of both creating a work and performing it.

10.6 Documentation

In understanding how successful *The Gilgamesh Cycle* has been, both as a series of works and as a methodology for research, I have had to revisit the works in retrospect, keeping in mind the questions of this research study. Doing so has foregrounded the matter of documentation, which has been an ongoing practical issue for this practice-based study.

I have not discovered an entirely satisfactory way to document my performance work, a fact that the examiner of this study may have already discovered. Video gives an outline of the performance's events but does not communicate the experience of the work. Photography gives a visual record of a moment, but cannot convey duration or sound. Audio recording can give a sense of what was spoken and how, but does not give a holistic account of the event. The performance ephemera – scripts, garments, written accounts – can testify to occurrence, but cannot describe the context in which they were used. I have not succeeded in recontextualising my work as a gallery installation that could exist without my performative presence, but feel that this may, in the future, be

possible. If I were to do this however, the installation would likely then itself require translation into the communicative language of (printable, emailable, website-friendly) JPGs. The question then, is not solved but merely transferred.

At an early stage of my research I considered turning my concern with the limitations of performance documentation into a secondary research question for analysis and – hopefully – development or resolution. However, I quickly became aware that this is an immense subject matter that would swiftly overwhelm my focus. I decided to omit it as a subject for study, and accept that I would have to settle for recording methods that I found necessarily unsatisfactory. Somewhat grudgingly, I have done so, as may be seen in Appendices F – O.

10.7 Success of the Gilgamesh Cycle

Re-viewing these partial, essentially incomplete documents with the benefit of hindsight, I have sought to keep an objective perspective on what must be a subjective process. To evaluate the ‘success’ of an artwork (especially one’s own) I have tried to maintain two simultaneous approaches.

The first has been to ask whether the works were successful in the context of this study: did they provide the data I needed; and did they complement the results of my thesis regarding the relationships between mythic structure and creative practice?

The second has been to ask whether the works are successful in broader terms: have they developed or progressed my own artistic practice; and how do I feel they operate within a professional context?

In the first case, I feel that the production of the new works of the Gilgamesh Cycle has provided the information and experiences needed to pursue the research questions of this study, and certainly have been successful in this sense. I did encounter methodological problems stemming from conflicts between the intuitive nature of much of my decision-making, when brought up against the interrogative necessities of a study of this kind.

However these were mostly resolved in the writing stage of my work, through which I was able to carefully examine the moments at which my intuitive mind resisted the process of ‘making explicit’ (for example, during my initial unconscious-led drafting process), and to ask why this might be. The very fact of this resistance provided to be a useful clue as to the nature and significance of the process that was taking place.

The new performances have been worthwhile in this sense, I believe. Understanding the structures that underlie the creative processes we undertake, and the ancient myths that still lie beneath the surface of our contemporary world as strata shapes a landscape, is crucial. Following the paths that I have found through these territories has lead me to re-cast the nature of the connections that can be experienced between ourselves and others. In an age where atomisation and autonomy seems increasingly to be assumed as a cultural and social status quo, shifting perspectives to catch a glimpse of our congruence is a richly valuable process that would not have occurred without the production of this new work.

The Gilgamesh Cycle has successfully complemented the results of my thesis and, having had the opportunity to reflect in some depth about the material that the study has revealed, I am now in a position where I can see the work anew in the light of my own discoveries. The surprise for me is that this process has changed the nature of the work I want to make now that this research study is nearing completion. The interconnectedness of the form and the content of the performances of the Gilgamesh Cycle was a structure that had evolved very naturally and organically over a great many years in which I was trying, as an artist to articulate something that felt fundamental about our shared human condition. Through undertaking this study however, I have recently come to realise that the work I produce next may not have the narratives of mythology as an overt content. Instead, it may prioritise the more implicit cycles of connectedness and correspondence that this study has proved to be so foundational. The figure of the medium as an archetypal figure – an image that I have found to be far more compelling than that of the hero – is certainly one that I shall return to in future works. Re-imagining the canon of mythic heroes such as Odysseus, Gilgamesh, or Orpheus (each of whom may be cast as

an analogy for the creative process), as mediums, has provided an enigmatic image of artist-as-medium, which I wish to explore further. In Appendix X I have included the details of a new work *The White Ink Lecture*, which develops these ideas for the first time.

Finally I must ask how successful the *Gilgamesh Cycle* of works has been as performances. This is, I confess, perhaps the most challenging question of the whole study. At the time of the *Gilgamesh Cycle*'s composition I was utterly convinced of the performances' value, credibility, and legitimacy as artworks. They have been accepted into a professional context, and presented by public institutions (Camden Arts Centre, London; Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester), by respected artist-run projects (Sils Rotterdam, who commissioned *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh*; *The Old Hairdressers*, Glasgow), and within a commercial context (The Agency Gallery, London). Audiences have responded well, and feedback has generally been positive. At the same time however, I feel that the work's success has been limited. The audiences that the performances have attracted have not continued to grow. In retrospect, now that I am completing this research study and feel able to understand the mechanisms of my own work, I feel that the form and content of the work may be too closely intertwined. This proximity, where the 'story' told by the script of the work is knit indivisibly to the formal and developmental structures that underpin it, now seems to close the performances down somewhat. Perhaps there is not enough space left in the work for friction, for problematics and open ended questions, which are essential ingredients of any truly successful practice.

My thoughtful (retrospective) dissatisfaction with the work I have produced however, can also be read in a very different light. For me as an artist, new work must come from a sense of the limitations of what I have already produced. If I was ever to feel that I had made a 'perfect' work (whatever that may be), then that would be the point at which I would stop. My drive to make work comes from a need to ask questions, and to understand. Now, after several years of intensive making, reflecting, and writing, I feel that I understand this body of work and, further, that I have used it to answer a set of

questions that have been of fundamental importance to me. By doing so, however, I have come to the end of something and this, inevitably, carries with it a sense of regret. I understand this work I have made in a way that suggests that I do not have to make it any more. The questions that this work was asking have now been answered, and I do not have to ask the same questions again. This should not be a moment of melancholy though, however much I feel as though I am leaving something behind. The coming years of my practice are also full of possibility: new works and new opportunities are on the horizon, and I am developing new strategies of production, from which new questions are arising.

This new work is, of course, informed by the experiences and discoveries that I have encountered during my time as a practice based PhD student. It is more complex, more unformed, and is a step forward in my practice that I could not have taken otherwise²⁶⁶. Shedding the manifest content of ancient myth I am working to push the form of my work to encompass objects as well as moving image, stretching my capacities as a performer to engage more directly with the questions of Salomean identification, and the figure of the medium as a conduit between worlds.

²⁶⁶ See Appendix O

Appendices A - O

Appendix A

The following is a narrative summary of the epic of Gilgamesh, synthesised from the sources below, which all use as their basis the standard Akkadian version of the Epic, written circa 1200 BC. The standard Akkadian version of Gilgamesh comprises 12 clay tablets of cuneiform script, recovered in fragments from the ruins of the Library of Ashurbanipal in ancient Nineveh (adjacent to modern Mosul, Iraq), by Hormu. The ‘chapter’ divisions (in **bold**) are my own, included for ease of reference.

A.1 Sources

The Epic of Gilgamesh, Andrew George. London: Penguin. 1999.

Gilgamesh, Derrek Hines. London: Chatto and Windus. 2002.

Gilgamesh, A Verse Narrative by Herbert Mason. New York: Mentor. 1972.

Gilgamesh, A New English Version, Stephen Mitchell. London: Profile. 2005.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, Complete Academic Translation, R. Campbell Thompson. 1928.

Online: Forgotten Books. 2007.

A.2 Dramatis Personae

Gilgamesh; a demigod king of Uruk.

Ninsun; the cow-goddess, mother to Gilgamesh.

Enkidu; a wildman created by the goddess Ishtar, and companion to Gilgamesh.

Shamhat; a temple prostitute of Uruk.

Shamash; the sun god.

Humbaba; the monstrous guardian of the cedar forest.

Ishtar; the goddess of fertility, war, love, and sex. Principle goddess of Uruk.

Siduri; the goddess of wisdom and the fermentation of alcohol.

Ur-shanabi; a ferryman.

Uta-Napishti; an immortal man, survivor of the deluge.

A.3 Narrative

Prologue

Gilgamesh is a great and heroic king who has seen and accomplished many wonders, and constructed the city walls of Uruk. The reader is encouraged to read the story of Gilgamesh's great deeds, which is written on a tablet of lapis lazuli, hidden in a cedar box, set within the walls of the city.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu Meet

King Gilgamesh rules the city of Uruk in tyrannical, bull-like fashion. His women subjects appeal to the Goddess Ishtar for help.

Ishtar creates a semi bestial wild man, Enkidu, whom she sends to live outside the city walls. Enkidu lives in peace with the animals, destroying the traps hunters set to catch game.

Enkidu is seen by a hunter, whose father tells him to seek help from Gilgamesh. He says that Shamhat, a temple prostitute will seduce Enkidu, after which the wild man will be spurned by the animal kingdom.

The hunter travels to Uruk and tells Gilgamesh that he has seen a frightening wildman. Gilgamesh tells the hunter to take Shamhat to the wildman so that she can seduce him.

Shamhat seduces Enkidu, and couples with him for six days and seven nights. The animals then flee from Enkidu, who is weakened by human sexual contact.

Shamhat offers to take Enkidu to Uruk to meet Gilgamesh. Enkidu feels that Gilgamesh will be a friend, but also wishes to challenge him to combat.

Shamhat tells Enkidu that Gilgamesh has dreamt of the wildman's arrival in Uruk through two prophetic visions in which firstly a meteor falls from the sky, and then of an axe appears. Both are too heavy for Gilgamesh to move, but are loved, kissed, caressed and embraced by the king, who treats each object like a wife. Ninsun then makes the object Gilgamesh's equal.

Shamhat tells Enkidu that Gilgamesh's dream has been interpreted by his mother, Ninsun. Ninsun foretells that both objects represent a man who will come to Uruk to become Gilgamesh's companion, and that she will make this man Gilgamesh's equal. Gilgamesh will become like a wife to his friend.

Shamhat civilises Enkidu by bathing, dressing, and educating him. Enkidu learns that Gilgamesh practices *droit de seigneur* in Uruk, and is angry about this. Enkidu arrives Uruk and interrupts Gilgamesh at a wedding ceremony.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight. They are evenly matched but Enkidu accepts Gilgamesh's superiority. The heroes kiss and become friends.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill Humbaba

Gilgamesh wishes to travel to the Cedar Forest and kill the forest's guardian, Humbaba. Enkidu resists but is persuaded by

Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh and Enkidu arm themselves with weapons from Uruk's forge.

An assembly of Uruk's elders tries and fails to dissuade Gilgamesh and Enkidu from their dangerous quest. Ninsun adopts Enkidu as her own son and Gilgamesh's equal, and enlists the help of Shamash to protect both heroes. Gilgamesh and Enkidu leave Uruk for the cedar forest.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel to the cedar forest. Every three days they cover a distance that would take an ordinary man a month and a half. During the journey Gilgamesh and Enkidu conduct five dream-based rituals. Each time Gilgamesh's nightmares appear to show Humbaba winning the coming battle. Enkidu reassures Gilgamesh and offers alternative positive interpretations of each dream.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu reach the dense and mountainous cedar forest. Both are afraid and reassure each other. Shamash advises a quick attack on Humbaba.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu confront Humbaba. Humbaba accuses Enkidu of treachery, and Enkidu urges Gilgamesh into combat. Humbaba is protected by seven auras, but Shamash unleashes thirteen winds that blow them away.

Humbaba pleads for mercy. Enkidu tells Gilgamesh to kill the forest guardian quickly, before the gods notice. Humbaba curses the heroes, saying that they will not grow old together, and that Gilgamesh will bury Enkidu. Gilgamesh decapitates Humbaba, and they fell trees from the cedar forest.

Enkidu dies

Gilgamesh and Enkidu are back in Uruk. Attracted by the king's beauty and strength, Ishtar wishes to marry Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh rudely rejects the goddess, citing her treatment of former lovers.

In rage, Ishtar unleashes the Bull of Heaven (the constellation of Taurus) to destroy Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh and Enkidu fight the bull and kill it. Enkidu further insults Ishtar. Gilgamesh and Enkidu celebrate their victory.

Enkidu dreams that an assembly of gods have condemned him to death. On waking, he curses everything that has led to his current plight, including Shamhat who has civilised him. Shamash convinces Enkidu to repent and he turns his curses to praise and blessings for Shamhat.

Enkidu has a second dream in which he is dragged to the underworld. On waking he tells Gilgamesh of his dream, and then sickens and dies.

[Note: Much of the description of Enkidu's illness and death is missing from the original cuneiform text]

Gilgamesh laments and mourns Enkidu in great distress. He commissions a statue of him, and offers up his treasures as grave goods and goodwill gifts to the gods of death. A wake and banquet are held.

Gilgamesh seeks Uta-napishti

Gilgamesh's grief awakens in him a crippling fear of his own death. He leaves Uruk to search for Uta-Napishti, a man who has become immortal.

Gilgamesh kills lions in the wilderness and clothes himself in their skins. He digs wells and becomes weatherbeaten, thin, and dirty.

Gilgamesh races the sunrise, running beneath a mountain protected by scorpion men for twelve 'double hours'. He emerges in a garden where precious stones grow as flora.

Beyond the garden Gilgamesh finds a tavern on the sea shore. Inside is the goddess and tavern keeper Shiduri, who counsels the king that his quest is futile. Her advice is ignored.

Shiduri tells Gilgamesh how to find the boatman Ur-Shanabi, who can take the king across the Waters of Death with his crew of Stone Ones.

Gilgamesh follows Shiduri's instructions but fights and smashes the Stone Ones. Ur-Shanabi tells Gilgamesh that the only way for him now to cross the Waters of Death is for the king to punt the ferry himself, using giant punting poles to avoid touching the fatal waters.

Gilgamesh fells 300 pine trees and makes the poles. He uses them to cross the Waters of Death, and when they are not enough he makes a sail from Ur-Shanabi's clothes.

Gilgamesh speaks with Uta-napishti

On the far side of the Waters, Gilgamesh meets Uta-Napishti, a man who will live forever.

Uta-Napishti tells Gilgamesh that his quest is useless. As a king Gilgamesh has great responsibilities, which he has been shirking during his journey. Uta-Napishti tells Gilgamesh that death is an essential part of human life.

Gilgamesh asks Uta-Napishti how he came to live forever.

Uta-Napishti tells Gilgamesh the story of the deluge. The gods once punished mankind by sending a great flood to drown the human race. Uta-Napishti and his wife were the only survivors, having been helped by the god Ea. As a result they were made immortal.

Uta-Napishti tells Gilgamesh that death is as essential as sleep. Uta-Napishti challenges Gilgamesh to go without sleep for a week.

Gilgamesh is tired and sleeps for six days and seven nights. Uta-Napishti's wife marks the time by baking a loaf of bread each day, and leaving it beside Gilgamesh, so that on waking he can see their gradual decay.

Gilgamesh wakes and is in despair at failing Uta-Napishti's test.

Uta-Napishti's wife tells her husband to give Gilgamesh the customary gift for his departure. Uta-Napishti tells Gilgamesh

how to reach a rare plant that grows under the sea. This plant has the life-giving property of rejuvenation.

Gilgamesh dives to the bottom of the sea and finds the plant.

Gilgamesh returns to Uruk

Gilgamesh and the boatman Ur-Shanabi begin the return journey to Uruk. Gilgamesh carries the youth-giving plant.

On the way, Gilgamesh bathes in a pool. A snake steals the plant and rejuvenates itself by shedding its skin. The plant is lost and cannot be replaced or recovered.

Gilgamesh despairs, feeling that all hope is lost with the plant. He feels that his journey has been worthless.

Gilgamesh returns to Uruk empty handed.

Epilogue

Gilgamesh shows Ur-Shanabi the great city walls of Uruk, which will be his lasting legacy.

Appendix B

Close Reading: Joan Jonas, *Lines in the Sand* (2002).

B.1 Background

During the 1980s, Joan Jonas began to build on her existing practice by:

“developing her emblematic, personal grammar of gesture, ritual and sound into intricate, multi-textual works that exhibit a sophisticated layering of nonlinear narrative forms with performance, theatricality, and electronic manipulations of space, time and image. Her elliptical, fragmented video narratives often merged such storytelling forms as fairy tales (*Upsidedown and Backwards*, 1980), science fiction (*Double Lunar Dogs*, 1984), legends (*Volcano Saga*, 1989), myths and dreams with topical and autobiographical references.”²⁶⁷

Joan Jonas’ *Lines in the Sand* (2002) is a multimedia performance installation. The work was originally commissioned for Documenta XI, and was then recontextualised for the galleries at Queens Museum of Art, New York in *Joan Jonas: Five Works* (2003). In this major solo survey exhibition, the gallery presentation was accompanied by a live performance featuring Jonas at The Kitchen, New York. *Lines* is typical of Jonas’ work in that it layers multiple references and media into an elaborate structure that brings together mythological and personal elements. The work is a retelling of the myths of Helen of Troy and Achilles, via the text of *Helen in Egypt* (1952-55) by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle). Jonas appears in the performance herself, along with other ‘assistant’ performers (at The Kitchen performance, these were Sung Hwan Kim, Ragani Haas, and Henk Visch, with audio visual assistance from Astrid S. Klein and Stephen Vitiello). The script is composed of edited quotations collaged by the artist from a range of sources.

B.2 Close Reading

Lines in the Sand is documented in a 47 minute single channel video “which features the artist and performers interacting with large-scale video projections, ritualized objects and

²⁶⁷ *Joan Jonas: Biography*, Electronic Artists Intermix, New York. No author, no date. <http://www.eai.org/artistBio.htm?id=408> accessed 14/02/13. Website.

a rich sound collage.”²⁶⁸ An extract from the video reveals several significant elements and can be seen as representative of the whole work, meriting a close examination, here.

The extract opens to show a blackbox theatre-style presentation, with a large digital projection on the rear wall, and various props and performers engaged in a series of repetitive actions. The projection shows an illuminated letter H, part of a Vegas-style neon sign in red and yellow, which pulses as its different bulbs blink on and off. A loud and hypnotic wash of sound plays over the stage – a melodic droning that cycles at a slow breathing pace.

Jonas is towards the centre of the stage, and is drawing on the floor using chalk attached to a slim pole of around 10’ in length. The pole flexes as Jonas applies pressure, and the wood seems dynamic and animate as it is manipulated by the artist, who walks around the drawing channelling her whole body into the tool in order to produce the marks. Jonas’ actions are rhythmic, sure, and flexible, resembling dance as well as drawing and her pacing has a repetitive intensity. The act of drawing, using this long and unwieldy implement, recalls automatic writing on a slate, or the uncanny motion of a Ouija board. She wears a pinkish dress or coat over darker grey-green trousers, with pale shoes. The drawing resolves itself into a ziggurat with its base near the centre of the stage and its tip facing out towards the camera. As Jonas draws we are aware of a second female figure stage left, dressed identically to Jonas, who moves more rapidly while holding a similar flexible wooden pole. This female performer moves her pole swiftly over the ground, sliding the (unchalked) tip over the floor to produce a swiping, swishing noise. Her motion is more urgent and active than Jonas’, though never rushed, and again her movements reminded me of dance. Her gestures appear to be sweeping, cleaning, or marking the space around her in some invisible way. The camera moves upstage, stage right, (1:32 min) to reveal a male performer who is building a wall from grey breezeblocks. Again his movements are regular, paced, and controlled. He is dressed in white, and is white haired, and stands behind the wall he is building. In front of the wall,

²⁶⁸ *Lines in the Sand, Performance*, Joan Jonas, Electronic Arts Intermix, New York. No author, no date. <http://www.eai.org/titleVideoLowRezExcerpt.htm?id=14717> Website.

facing it, is a bare chested man in black trousers. He squats, and is holding something resembling a small LCD screen in his hands.

As the camera pans back to centre stage (1:55 min) Jonas is finishing her drawing. She then (2:30 min) places her drawing pole on the ground and picks up two other, unchalked poles. She moves these sinuously, dextrously together to produce a sine-wave like horizontal undulation, clattering the poles together, allowing them to bounce both off each other, and off the floor. As she does so (2:39 min), Jonas walks backwards, upstage, until she is directly in front of the projection and facing the camera. The projection now shows a female figure holding a crystal ball in one hand, in front of a green table or chaise longue (the same object in fact, which is standing in front of Jonas, to stage left). Of the projected female figure, only her hand holding the ball, and the front of her pinkish-orange dress are visible, while the footage appears to be handheld, moving gently and organically in front of the figure. By standing in front of the projection Jonas is completely covered in its image, which she partially obscures just as she becomes part of it. The image's focus has now pulled in, and the screen is filled with an image of the crystal ball (and its inverted refraction of the green chaise longue), which Jonas-on-the-stage seems to stand inside. The on-stage chaise longue can just be seen stage left. Jonas continues to oscillate the poles until the motion seems to flow between her arms and the wood, and the poles become fluid extensions of the artists' body. Then (3:00 min) Jonas begins to speak, bringing the poles down hard on the floor with a percussive smacking sound to punctuate her words.

Jonas begins by speaking single words, and goes on to utter fragmentary, isolated statements. Her tone is forthright, formal, annunciative, and declamatory. She does not make eye contact with the camera, and does not seem to be addressing anyone in particular, either on stage or off. Her movements, together with her vocalisations, are ritualised in character. The words she uses, each phrase punctuated by the visceral slap of the poles on the ground, reinforce this reading,

“The feel of things. [slap]
The actuality of the present. [slap]
Their bearing on the past. [slap]

Their bearing on the future. [slap]
The past. [slap]
The present. [slap]
The future.” [slap]

Finally (3:35 min) Jonas raises her poles in the air and allows them to tremble rhythmically upright, above her head, as she walks slowly forward, downstage, and out of the frame of the projected image. At the same time the projected image pulls back to its previous framing. An electronic muttering resolves itself to become a stream of undistinguishable vocal babble, identifiable as a female voice (3:57 min) and electronic tones that gradually increase in volume until all that can be heard is a static like sound, and the melodic notes of a wooden windchime or glockenspiel. Behind Jonas, the video image changes again, this time showing a long shot of a figure holding billowing fabric streamers or flags in an industrial landscape, under a blue sky. We hear Jonas’ voice again (4:36 min), although this time as a recorded voiceover on the video. Here, she uses first person pronouns (I, me) as well as third person (he), although there is still no indication as to whom she may be addressing.

“Let me go out
Let me forget
Let me be lost
Does he dare remember the unreality of war in this enchanted place?”

At a pause in Jonas’ speech, the audio fades and the extract fades to black (5.17 min).

Appendix C

Close Reading: Rachel Rosenthal *Gaia, Mon Amour* (1983).

B.1 Background

Rachel Rosenthal:

*“is an interdisciplinary performer who developed a revolutionary performance technique that integrates text, movement, voice, choreography, improvisation, inventive costuming, dramatic lighting and wildly imaginative sets [...] Rosenthal's work centers around the issue of humanity's place on the planet.”*²⁶⁹

Rachel Rosenthal's *Gaia, Mon Amour* was premiered at The House, Santa Monica in 1983. The work takes place on a stage, with props and costumes, and is scripted and performed by the artist. Rosenthal takes on multiple personae within the performance, becoming alternately Gaia, a bag lady, 'herself' the artist, and the Moon Bull. Each figure segues into the next, with Rosenthal often using one persona to address another. The work retells the myth of Gaia, the Earth Goddess, and presents this figure's contemporary sickness, anger, and vulnerability. Rosenthal uses the work to give Gaia a first person voice, and the performance becomes a vehicle for the artist to frame her ecological concerns. Many of the motifs identified in Joan Jonas' work are also present here.

B.2 Close Reading

Near the opening of the performance, Rosenthal 'wakes' in the persona of the BAG LADY, and tries to rouse the prone 'body' of the goddess Gaia, who lies slumped downstage. The 'body' is a bundle resembling a figure, wrapped in a black shroud.

The BAG LADY strikes the body powerfully with dead branches, which she refers to as “flowers”, becoming suddenly angry:

“Nothing. That pisses me off! DON'T DIE, MOTHER! Here she seems to lose it and become herself, not the character.) I was so angry. I was

²⁶⁹ *Rachel Rosenthal/Biography*, rachelrosenthal.org, no author, no date, accessed 15/02/13. Website.

breaking my bones. (*Breaks the twig with a snap with each 'rage'.*)
RAGE! Now the little finger! RRAGE! Now the big toe! RRRAGE! And
now the rib!"²⁷⁰

Rosenthal then breaks character completely, addressing the audience and then the technical crew.

(Takes off the clown nose) Shit. I got off the track...
(She tries to go back a few lines but fails.)
(As herself) I think I better start over again. Stick to the topic. Please
bear with me... *(Ad libs like 'Damn deconstruction...!' to the crew)*
Sorry guys, let's take it from the blackout!
*(ROSENTHAL goes to lie down next to the garbage, places a paper
over her face.*
*Blackout.*²⁷¹

Rosenthal / ROSENTHAL removes BAG LADY's false nose, though otherwise remains in the same garments as before. She demands that the performance be started again. The performance begins again, though this time the scene plays out quite differently. Returning to a pile of garbage centre stage, Rosenthal turns to face the audience. Her voice becomes booming and desolate. Her eyes stare glassily ahead. Her posture becomes taught and upright, she seems larger somehow, raised up by her own breath. In video documentation of this section of the performance, Rosenthal addresses the camera directly. Wearing red and with long dangling earrings, her hair is shorn close to her head. Her eyes are wild, rolling and staring and she digs at her face, contorting her lips and baring her teeth in a skull-like grimace as she speaks.

²⁷⁰ Rachel Rosenthal, *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms: Rachel Rosenthal performance texts*, Critical Performances, Continuum, London, New York, 2001, pg 144. Print.

²⁷¹ Rachel Rosenthal. *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms: Rachel Rosenthal performance texts*. Ibid pg 144.



112. Rosenthal bares her teeth. Rachel Rosenthal, *Gaia, Mon Amor* (1983). Youtube video footage of performance <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTVerDGHLKg>

Rosenthal's arms grapple one another, pulling and wrestling her own wrists, as she – seemingly unconsciously – evokes the shapes of birds, horns, fish, or rays with her fluid hands.



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113. Rachel Rosenthal, *Gaia, Mon Amor* (1983), Youtube video footage of performance <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTVerDGHLKg>

²⁷² Rachel Rosenthal, *Gaia, Mon Amor* (1983), Video still from performance. *ibid.*

Rosenthal's voice is deep, resonant, and booming. Her delivery is intense, her piercing, unblinking stare becoming hypnotic.

"You know me. I'm the One you haven't named. I'm the one you've never bothered to name.

You've names all the others, and you capitalise them. Yes: a capital V, a capital M, a capital J... but Me, it's a small e and I'm synonymous with dirt.

When you say 'soiled' you mean filthy. You mean besmirched.

Do you hear that? Do you hear the enormity of that?

earth. With a small e.

I, the first, the most powerful of the Gods."²⁷³

Watching this clip, I felt transfixed, mesmerised by Rosenthal's powerful incantation. At this point, she has 'become' Gaia herself within the frame of the performance, though the movement from BAG LADY, to ROSENTHAL, to Goddess, is completely fluid. The three states are never clearly demarcated and are continually overlapped within Rosenthal's presentation.

²⁷³ Rachel Rosenthal, *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms: Rachel Rosenthal performance texts*, ibid pg 145.

Appendix D

The Darktown Cakewalk Programme Notes

The following is a reproduction of the programme notes that were distributed at the 2010 Chisenhale Gallery performance of *The Darktown Cakewalk: Celebrated from the House of Fame* by Linder.

LINDER

AT

CHISENHALE

the darktown cakewalk:
celebrated from the house of fame
with stuart mccallum and richard nicoll
SATURDAY 10 JULY 2010

10AM – 11PM

THE DARKTOWN CAKEWALK: CELEBRATED FROM THE HOUSE OF FAME

Chisenhale Gallery presents *The Darktown Cakewalk: Celebrated from the House of FAME*, a thirteen-hour performance event by artist and musician Linder in collaboration with musician Stuart McCallum (also The Cinematic Orchestra), fashion designer Richard Nicoll (also Creative Director, Cerruti) and dancers and musicians from varied traditions and disciplines.

The Darktown Cakewalk is an epic invocation of glamour and fantastical pageantry. Witch trials and beauty queens, ragtime and Euro Pop merge to enfold the viewer in a secret history of prejudice and dissent. The thirteen-hour performance begins at 10am and is divided into two six-hour sessions ('masque' and 'anti-masque') with a thirteenth hour. The audience are invited to mingle with the performers and to come and go over the thirteen hours as they wish.

Over the last three decades Linder has consistently questioned roles of gender identity and commodification in society. Part of the late 1970s and early 1980s Manchester punk and post punk scenes, she has been described as a 'post punk feminist crusader', and as a 'corrective' to punk which - even in its anti-establishment, popularist posturing - still spoke primarily to (and from the perspective of) young men. Best known for her photomontages, such as her artwork on the cover of the 1977 Buzzcocks single 'Orgasm Addict' (now in the collection of Tate Modern), the narrative, structure and casting of this performance are based on a range of collaged material and ideas. *The Darktown Cakewalk* is a development of recent performances at Tate St. Ives and The Arches / Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art 2010.

Linder was born in 1954 in Liverpool. She has recently presented solo shows at Linn Luhn, Cologne (2008), Baltic, Gateshead (2007) and PS1/Museum of Modern Art, New York (2007). Recent group shows include *The Dark Monarch* (Tate St. Ives, Cornwall, 2009), *After Twilight* (Kolnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 2009), *Crossroads* (Salamanca Insitute of Culture, Salamanca, 2008), *Cohabitation* (Galeria Francesca Kaufmann, Milan, 2008) and *Punk. No One is Innocent* (Kunsthalle Vienna, 2008). Linder's work is included in the Tate collection.

ACT 1

Troubling a dead body

ACT 2

Fruits of a soft Peace

ACT 3

Quickly come, we all are met

ACT 4

Most Royal, and most happy *King*
Of whom, *Fame*'s house, in every part, doth ring

ACT 5

(The Cakewalk)

In the heat of their Dance, on the sudden,
was heard a sound of loud Musick

ACT 6

All our *Charms* do nothing win

ACT 7

Age of gold

ACT 8 Their lives I stick with needles quick

ACT 9 Never a star yet shot?

ACT 10

...lose the whole henge of Things;
And cause the ends run back, into the Springs

ACT 11

A kind of hollow and infernal music

ACT 12

(The Darktown Cakewalk)
Black go in, and blacker go out

Titles adapted from Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens: Celebrated from the House of FAME*

CAKEWALKERS

The Star : Tom Pritchard

The Muse : Rosalind Masson

The Witch : Florencia García Chafuén

The Cakewalk King : Rachel Aisling Smith

The Cakewalk Queen : Laura Cameron Lewis

Puella Aterna : Judith Williams

Animus/Anima/Animal : Linder and Sari Lievonen

Notes adapted from artist correspondence with Cakewalkers

THE STAR Tom Pritchard

The young Star is a mixture of sports star, film star and pop star — but predominantly pop star. He finds himself at the Cakewalk in a state of innocence. We see him in his bedroom practising his posturing; he's relaxed, ambitious, and still in a state of grace. The Star's career sharply ascends and descends. Very early, the Muse offers him a gold lamé jacket and for a while he is a Pop Midas: his chart position and his ego correspondingly increase. The Star is imperial in his popularity for the first six hours. We also see him trapped in a limbo state, perpetually waiting in hotel rooms, dressing rooms and bedrooms. He becomes more and more obnoxious as his ego inflates. The Muse abandons him, the Witch watches him: she knows that he will lose his glamour and come to her eventually. The Cakewalk King mimics him cruelly. The Star has an affair with Puella when he is at his lowest. He appears on awful celebrity tv programmes and becomes more and more desperate to regain popularity; he is unsuccessful.

THE MUSE Rosalind Masson

The Muse is at all times paradoxical. She is in a continuous state of elevation and is also extremely earthed. She is playful, inspirational and generous to all around her. She is close to the Witch in many ways but is connected with the air (as in inspire — to breathe in), whereas the Witch is far more connected with the earth. The Muse gives the Star his gold mantle in the form of a jacket; she tries to inspire Puella, but Puella sometimes misinterprets the Muse and gets it all wrong. The Cakewalk King and Queen know her from old. In the second half, the Muse becomes more and more abstract and elevated — not quite of this world. She begins to remove herself, vacate herself, until she becomes a cosmic void. The Muse and the Star are perhaps the two most physical dancers in that they both move easily from vertical to horizontal and upside

down.

THE WITCH Florencia García Chafuén

The Witch watches. She is older than time but looks ageless. She is very connected to the earth and collects a lot of her materials there — herbs, minerals, animals, etc. She knows the grammar of glamour — she invented it! And she may have been hung or burnt for it. The Witch often echoes persecution within the performance (for example, a glamorous pair of shoes that she holds out to Puella then become a brank). The antlers on the corset she borrows snag at her and almost impale her. The guitar that she offers to the Star almost crucifies her. The Witch appears to die, but she is only shapeshifting, flexing ancient muscles. In the second half, the Witch — after having mainly observed the other characters, becomes more involved with them. She and the Muse hold all the power.

THE CAKEWALK KING AND QUEEN

Rachel Aisling Smith and Laura Cameron Lewis

The Cakewalk King and Queen are played by two women. This reverses the early twentieth century trope of using two men in the Cakewalk instruction series of postcards. The dancers are always shown holding sticks in their hands, often with a small ribbon attached. The performers also use sticks as: inadequate crutches; a magic wand that brakes into two and reassembles; a fake phallus; a stick for beating; an evening dress cane. The Cakewalk King herself veers between slave and master. She then interacts with the other characters from those two positions and incremental psychological stages in between; she tries to goad Puella to defend herself from attack using the stick; she mocks the Pop Star's increasing impotence by using the stick as comical phallus; discarded clothes are tossed to one side with the King's wand. The cane enhances and exaggerates the posturing of the Cakewalk King and Queen throughout. There is a sense with both these characters that they are reconstituting themselves before our eyes from centuries past. They both spend quite some time remembering who they were and investigating how their bodies now work — can they still dance? Are they slaves or masters? The King and Queen eventually become extremely flamboyant, regal and controlling. Their archetypal pendulum continuously swings between slave and master, and they try to make others around them their 'slaves' in an attempt to keep control. At the end of the performance, they lead all other characters in an antimasque parade, The Dark Cakewalk.

PUELLA AETERNA Judith Williams

Puella Aeterna is a psychological term (the male version is Puer Aeternus);=. Like all archetypes the puer is bi-polar, exhibiting both a 'positive' and a 'negative' aspect. The 'positive' side of the puer appears as the Divine Child who symbolizes newness, potential for growth, hope for the future. He also foreshadows the hero that he sometimes becomes. The 'negative' side is the child-man who refuses to grow up and meet the challenges of life face on, waiting instead for his ship to come in and solve all his problems. In *The Darktown Cakewalk*, Puella appears initially as a girl — full of wonder at this new world that she finds herself in. She is dangerously open to influence from the glamour she sees around her, and too trusting. She is intrigued by The Star, for example, but he takes no notice of her until he is in his decline and she has had her breast implants — she's suddenly oversexualised in appearance. Towards the end of the thirteen hours, Puella and the Star, goaded on by The Cakewalk King in his negative aspect, have a clumsy sexual encounter. In the second half, Puella has her breast implants, a fake tan, provocative clothes and too much make up, and she suddenly receives a lot of attention. She becomes a small town beauty queen, meets her prince (i.e. The Star — he is puer aeterna anyway), messily consummates this union and becomes exhausted by her new life. The Witch and The Muse are very protective of her throughout.

ANIMUS/ANIMA/ANIMAL Linder / Sari Lievonen

'Anima, Animus, Animal' is the title from a chapter from *The Wise Wound* by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove (1978). The animus and anima are terms from Jungian psychology, referring to the feminine and masculine aspects of the psyche. Anima, Animus, Animal is the most liminal of all the characters within *The Darktown Cakewalk* and will only take shape - and shapeshift - over the thirteen hours. The role is shared between Sari Lievonen and Linder to introduce doppelganger motifs and pun on mythological twinning. Sari Lievonen is presently pregnant and carrying twins. Richard Nicoll will create costumes for Anima, Animus, Animal within the performance.

Linder will appear throughout the performance.

Principal musicians

Stuart McCallum: guitar and laptop

Dave Walsh and Jon Howard: drums

Kim Macari: trumpet and flugelhorn

Tom Chant: saxophone

Maxwell Sterling: double bass

Peter Lee: piano

Production crew

Producer: Polly Staple

Associate Producer: Andrew Bonacina

Front of House Manager: Isabelle Hancock

Production Assistant: Cicely Farrer

Sound design and production: Myles Hayden

Lighting design and production: Brendan Clarke, Insight Lighting

Costume creative director: Anthony Campbell at Richard Nicoll

Tailor: Kevin Geddes

Branks by Catriona Gourlay

Hair and make-up: Debbie Dannell and Hannah Wynne

Sound recording: Antti Sakari Saario and Philip Reeder

Still photography: Jannica Honey

Documentary filming: Jackson Holmes and Joe Williams (students from BA Moving Image at the University of Brighton)

Noon–5pm: Cakes and refreshments provided by the East London Women’s Institute

5–11pm: Bar

The Darktown Cakewalk is produced in collaboration with Sorcha Dallas, Glasgow and supported by Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art 2010, Outset Contemporary Art Fund, Stuart Shave / Modern Art and Shane Akeroyd. Follow The Darktown Cakewalk blog at <http://cteditions.posterous.com>

Appendix E

The Gilgamesh Cycle: Chronology

Appendix	Date	Title
	October 2011	
	November 2011	
	December 2011	
	January 2012	
F	February 2012:	<i>To Sing Of Gilgamesh</i> (a. 2012). Bruce Bldg, Newcastle.
G	March 2012:	<i>Of Gilgamesh, And Others</i> (a. 2012). Cartel Gallery, London.
H	April 2012:	<i>To Sing of Gilgamesh</i> (b. 2012). Gi Festival, Glasgow.
I		<i>Gilgamesh Song</i> (2012). Gi Festival, Glasgow.
	May 2012	
	June 2012	
	July 2012	
	August 2012	
J	September 2012:	<i>Mouth Open In An Open O</i> (a. 2012). Cornerhouse Manchester.
	October 2012	
	November 2012	
	December 2012	
	January 2013	
K	February 2013:	<i>Mouth Open In An Open O</i> (b. 2013). The Agency Gallery, London.
L		<i>Of Gilgamesh, And Others</i> (b. 2013). The Old Hairdressers, Glasgow.

Appendix I) March 2013: *Gilgamesh Song* (2012). DOCVA, Milan. (See
April 2013
May 2013
M June 2013: *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (a. 2013). SS
Rotterdam, NL.
July 2013
N August 2013: *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (b. 2013). Camden
Arts Centre, London.
September 2013
October 2013
November 2013
December 2013
January 2014

Feb 2014 – December 2014: Maternity leave

June – Aug 2014: *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (c. 2014).
FOAM (See Appendix M)
January 2015 – onwards: writing up.

Appendix F



114. *To Sing of Gilgamesh* (a. 2012).

To Sing of Gilgamesh (a. 2012). Performance, duration, 20 minutes approximately.

F.1 Details

Garment: by Lesley Hepburn, adapted and finished by Ruth Barker. White textured polyurethane fabric, pigmented with commercial cosmetics powder.

Date: February 2012. The Bruce Building, Newcastle (studio presentation to invited staff, students, and guests).

Synopsis: The performance introduces my relationship to the Gilgamesh myth, and to the mythic figures of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Gilgamesh seems at once close, and unknowable. The core themes of the Gilgamesh performances are grief (loss), mortality, and love.

Subsequent work: I re-performed this work, with some changes, for Gi festival (2012) – see Appendix H. I also developed a video recontextualisation of

this work, which was screened at Gi (see Appendix I), and at DOCVA, Milan (see appendix M).

F.2 Narrative Account

The audience were invited via email, and a small number of printed posters present in the fine art department of Newcastle University and Northumbria University.

Already wearing the performance garment, I waited in the entrance foyer of The Bruce Building for the audience to arrive. As they did so I greeted them, and engaged in informal conversation. When I judged that no-one else would arrive I stood at the bottom of the Bruce's staircase, and prepared to begin the performance (plates 115 and 116).

When I felt ready, I climbed the stairs slowly and silently (plate 117), arriving on the top landing, where I waited. The audience followed, and found positions along the stairs. I began to recite the text (see attached script) from memory, allowing the words to echo within the central tiled stairwell. Each chapter of the text was accompanied by a slowly and repetitively performed hand gesture.

During the first chapter I held my hands in front of me with palms facing in and knuckles out. My elbows were bent, and my hands were in a horizontal position. I slowly moved my hands together until my fingertips met in front of my chest (plate 118). I then moved my hands slowly away from each other along the same axis, to the limit of my elbows' extent (my shoulders and elbows did not change position) (plate 119). This action was repeated through the duration of the text.

During the middle chapter I kept my feet and lower body in the same position, but turned my upper body to the right. I extended my right arm to its full reach, with my hand held palm up, at a level slightly above my shoulder. I faced my outstretched hand, and delivered the first half of the chapter's text (plate 120). I then lowered my right arm and repeated the position to the other side, with a half-turn to the left, and an extension of my

left arm, the palm held up as before (plate 121). I then recited the second half of the chapter's text.

During the third and final chapter I lowered my elbows to my sides and extended both arms from elbow to wrist, with palms up (plate 122). Keeping my upper arms rigid and close to my torso, I very slowly lifted both my hands until they were level with my breasts (plate 123). I then turned my wrists so that my hands were palms down. I then very slowly lowered my hands until my arms were straight again. This action was repeated through the duration of the text.

When I had finished reciting the text, I stepped back a little, and 'came out' of the performance moment. My body language relaxed, and I moved amongst the audience, chatting and greeting them in an informal fashion. After 20 minutes or so I left the room to get changed.

F.3 Photography by Lindsay Mann



115. Approaching the stairs to the performance space.



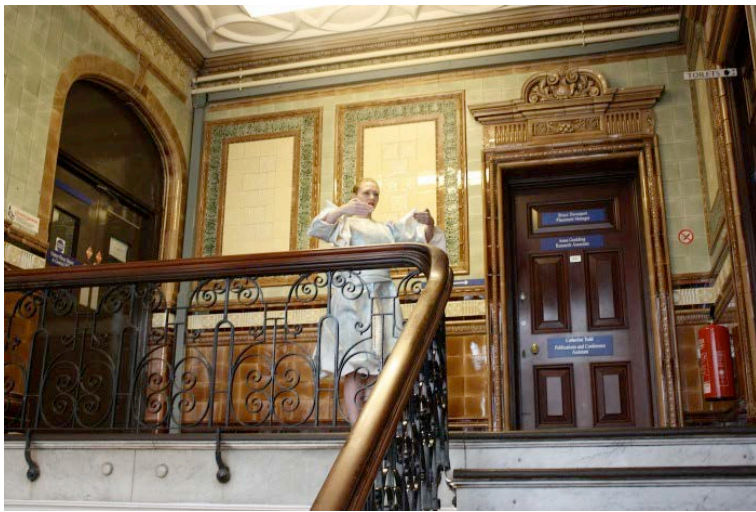
116. Approaching the stairs to the performance space.



117. Climbing the stairs to the performance space.



118. First position.



119. First position.



120. Second Position (a).



121. Second position (b).



122. Third position.



123. Third Position.

F.4 Script (page 1 of 3):

One.

To sing of Gilgamesh
To sing at the beginning
Of a man, a king, a god

Who crawls out of the clay
And into the night of our tongues,
And we speak him into shape
And outline.

To sing of Gilgamesh
To sing at the beginning of a story
That we do not remember
That we do not speak
That we do not have in our hands
Or our fingers
Or our mouths

And I will sing of Gilgamesh
Though I do not remember.
Though he has not crawled out of the clay
And into my tongue
But I will speak him into shape
As a she bear licks her cub
To clean off the caul on his new face.

To sing of Gilgamesh,
Gilgamesh
Gilgamesh
And I sing his name low, like a lover may say.
And I will make him my own,
I will step inside the loose sheets of his shape and beat him out, from the
inside, with a beat beat beat beat
beat beat beat
beat beat beat, like a heart, or a drum, or a poem.

To sing of Gilgamesh
Again
For the first time.

Script (page 2 of 3):

Two.

Here come the things I do not know:

I do not know who he is
I do not know what he says
I do not know who you are
I do not know who she is
I do not know why he loves
I do not know where he goes
I do not know what he sees
I do not know how he decides
I do not know what road he takes
I do not know where he comes from
I do not know what his dreams mean
I do not know where he ends up
I do not know how he gets there

Here come the things that I do know:

I know his name
I know his heart
I know his shape
I know his strength
I know his grief
I know his path
I know his fear
I know his love
I know his killing
I know his mistake
I know his outline
I know his weakness

And that is all.

Script (page 3 of 3).

Three

To sing of Gilgamesh is to lift
The mass of clay and work it.

The storyteller beats beats beats beats
beats beats beats
beats beats with her hands,
Forcing the clay to the grain of the table she sits at.
With elbows out, she kneeds the thick dirt,
Folds it / tears it / joins it.
Clay cleaves beneath her fingernails,
And in the join between her fingers,
And creases, red brown, on the knuckles of her fists.

She pats and pushes clay.
She pinches and lifts it.
She thumbs it rudely into the likeness of: legs, navels, bellies.
Into the likeness of: chests, shoulders, arms.
Into the likeness of: two blunt and bearded heads.

On the flat of a kitchen table,
The storyteller makes two man-shapes stand, locked,
Braced
One along the other.
His collarbone rests upon his wrist.
His shin is brushed against *his* calf.
Thigh touches thigh.
Face against face.
They are built from the same terracotta.

These are not men, but solid shapes in clay.
One will lose.
One will be lost.
And in the solid mud of their heads
We will find, written:
All the words we've ever used for grief
And love;
And all the ways we've ever learned to look at death
Through distant lens, or the glass of our own front door.

To sing of Gilgamesh
May be to lift
The mass of clay

And work it.
Clay stains our hands.
The men we make with it
Are dumpy, crude, unyielding.
But the words in their heads
May still sing.

F.5 Audio

Audio recording made at my home studio. Filename: Audio 1.

Appendix G



124. *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (a. 2012).

Of Gilgamesh, And Others (a. 2012). Exhibition and performance (5.5 hours) approximately.

G.1 Details

Garment: Artist's own.

Date: February 2012. Cartel Gallery, London. in 'Word of Mouth' exhibition programme, curated by Rose Lejeune.

Synopsis: The performance retells the Gilgamesh myth through glimpses of my own personal history, suggesting that the story cannot be told without telling the story of the teller at the same time. The story becomes impossible to tell, full of tangents and unresolved images. The line between the myth and my own story becomes blurred.

Subsequent work: I re-performed this work, with some changes, for The Old Hairdressers Gallery, Glasgow (2013). See Appendix L.

G.2 Narrative Account:

For the 'Word of Mouth' exhibition programme at Cartel, the walls and ceiling of the gallery space had been lined with fabric and illuminated by a red light. A number of round 'pub style' tables with wooden chairs were positioned around the room, for the audience to sit at (plate 125). Light levels were low. This environment was installed by the curator Rose Lejeune, and remained constant through the exhibition programme, during which five artists gave solo presentations of new work utilising the human voice. Outside the gallery tea, coffee, water, and soup were available for visitors to take into the space. Although attempts had been made to keep the gallery space warm, the ambient temperature in the room was very low. Printouts of information about the exhibition programme were available for visitors.

I wrote a 30 000 word text, and produced an audio recording of myself reading it in its entirety. For the first seven days of the exhibition run, *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* was presented as an audio work, with the recording playing in the space from concealed speakers. On the final day of the exhibition, I gave a live reading of the same text.

The reading was advertised to start at 12 noon. I entered the space (dressed in my own clothes), and sat at a table furthest from the door, at which my laptop and a glass of water had already been set up. I began to read from the laptop screen, keeping very still and moving only my right hand, which scrolled the pages of the text. When I began reading there were no visitors present in the room, but this did not influence the manner of my performance (plate 126). I read in a slow, regularly paced style, which quickly lulled me into a rhythm of speaking and breathing that became a kind of self-hypnosis. Visitors came and went throughout the day, but I was unaware of who was present (plate 127), or how long they stayed. I took three unscheduled comfort breaks throughout the day. These were determined by the curator who informed me that as no-one else was present it would be an appropriate time for me to use the bathroom or eat something.

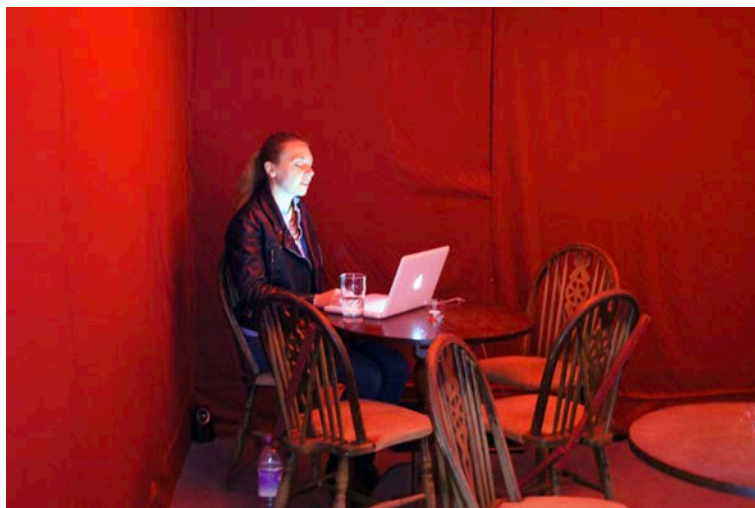
I had no real sense of time passing over the course of the day, and the experience of speaking became dreamlike and disconnected. I was able to speak fluently, with only

very occasional stumbles or breaks in the work's spoken meter. The gallery was busiest at the very end of the performance, when I was reaching the conclusion of the reading. As I came to the end of the text I paused, lowered the laptop lid, and walked out of the gallery. This was physically difficult as I was stiff from the rigid position I had kept in the cold room, but I did my best to conceal this. The audience clapped as I left the room.

F.3 Photography by Rose Lejeune.



125. Members of the audience sit at pub-style round tables.



126. When I began reading there were no visitors present in the room.



127. Visitors came and went throughout the day.
Information about the work was available to take away.

F.4 Script (extract):

Chapter 20

Pare the earth. There is blood beneath the soil,
From which things grow, and
Into which things stick their roots and coil

Up out, blood-fed, and still self-loyal;
Pursing, parsing sod to
Pare the earth. There is blood beneath the soil

Which feeds the cheap stems and the royal
Oaks of ages up; so
Pare the earth. There is blood beneath the soil,

It is a kind of blood placenta boil,
Mud-slick, red-black, and protein-full
Into which things stick their roots, and coil

Their tendrils, plump and oiled
With greasy mud
Into which things stick their roots and coil

And coil, drawing puddled, meaty soil
Up to our nostrils. Drink that scent. And
Pare the earth. There is blood beneath the soil,
Into which things stick their roots, and coil.

When the clay tablets on which the epic of Gilgamesh had been written were first translated in a basement room in the British Museum in London, it was this passage - when Uta-napishti tells Gilgamesh the story of a great deluge sent by the gods to punish all mankind - that made the epic famous.

In Uta-napishti's version, he is the only man saved from destruction. Pre-warned by the god Ea of the approaching catastrophe, Uta-napishti builds an enormous boat, and loads onto it his wife, all of his possessions, and all the animals he can find, of all different kinds. Then the rains come, the world floods, and Uta-napishti's boat bobs on the surface of the catastrophe until it becomes wedged against the top of a mountain. When the rains stop, Uta-napishti sends out a dove, which comes back, because there is no-where for it to land.

Then Uta-napishti sends out a swallow, which comes back, because there is no-where for it to land.

Then Uta-napishti sends out a crow, and the crow flies for a long time, but then it sees a branch. It lands, clumsily, on the branch and then looks around to discover that the whole world is full of water-bloated carrion. And so, overjoyed, the crow begins to eat. The crow does not go back to the boat, so Uta-napishti knows that the waters must be receding.

When there is enough land on the mountain for him to stand on, Uta-napishti and his wife alight from the boat and they offer sacrifices to the gods who have spared them. When they receive this sacrifice, the gods are surprised, as they thought that all humans had been destroyed. They turn on Ea, who they rightly guess to have saved Uta-napishti, and they are angry with him. But Ea argues that the deluge was too harsh a punishment for mankind's bad behaviour. That it was too draconian to destroy the whole human race in one great genocide. The other gods grudgingly agree that Ea might be right. They apologise.

In recompense for their hasty actions they agree to make Uta-napishti and his wife immortal. Because they have survived the flood that has drowned the whole rest of the world, then these two humans will live forever and repopulate the earth with their

descendants. So Uta-napishti and his wife live long and happy lives, and then retire to a beach at the far side of the waters of death, where they will live forever.

And when the nineteenth century Englishman George Smith – a working class amateur Assyriologist with little formal education, who spent his lunch hours looking at the cuneiform tablets in the British Museum – when George Smith at last deciphered this incredible text, he was so excited that he took off his clothes and ran naked around the Museum's storage rooms. And the reason that he, and the rest of the Western world, when they found out, were so excited by this deluge story, is that it seemed to them to prove the truth of the old testament biblical story of Noah and the flood; although there were some who insisted that it proved the opposite, that it proved that the flood was a pre-existing story that was simply included in the bible because it was convenient. George Smith became a household name as a result of his translation work, and he was able to quit his day job as an engraver, and work full time at the British Museum, thinking and lecturing and discovering, until he died at an archeological dig in Nineveh at the age of only 36. And, in the meantime, Great Britain thrilled to stories from this ancient world.

The story of Gilgamesh captured the imagination. It began to be told again and again and again. And Gilgamesh began to live again, on the tongue, and in the shape of the mouth, and in the dreams of men and women who heard his story, and told it again. And the story changed a bit. But it was still the same story. Sometimes it was more like a song, and sometimes it was more like a warning. Sometimes it was an anthem, and sometimes it was a joke. But it was still the same story. It is only ever the same story. There is only ever one story, and it is the story that we all tell each other all the time, over raw meat and firelight, and over telephones and tiny screens, and the pages of the pulp paperback books that we read in the bath. We need to tell each other stories, after all. And this is a good one. I can tell it to you.

I can recast Uta-napishti as a dark continent of exploration. So I can make the breeze run over his topography. So, his forests dig their roots into his soil. His springs well up and

spill fresh water. His volcanoes erupt. His earthquakes roar. His avalanche. His mudslide. His tornado. The oceans lap at his circumference. The sky arcs over him. He is strata. He is mighty geography. He is geography.

He is geography and he is geophagy. He is the mapping of territories and the eating of soil. He is a contested borderland. He is the soil that roots beneath walls, between picket lines, and barbed wire fences. He is the stone that runs under mountains and the mud that hold rivers to their beds. He is the cornfield and the desert and the machair and the moorland heathers. He is the deciduous woodland and the rainforest and the plantation and the scorched earth and the dump.

So Uta-napishti is a dark continent. He is limestone and mud, magma and tectonics. He is acres beneath our feet, and his mountains tower vast over our horizon. He is the story within the story, and he dwarfs us.

In his belly he holds the past. Dig down into him. Scrape away his topsoil with brushes. Be gentle. Take it grain by grain.

What do you see? Amphora. Coins. Something made of dark metal. Something made of bone.

What do you see? I see a shape in the mud where wood has rotted away. I see the soil a different colour. I see that something has been burnt here.

Dig deeper. Dig deeper. I see things from the past. I see who we were, but might not have been, and could have been again. I see hundreds of years of things lost and thrown away and broken and soiled. I see the detritus of centuries.

Yes. That's it. Dig softly. What do you have in your mouth? I have mud and blood.

Dig anywhere. Dig anywhere in me. Cut my turf. Stick your spade into my clay. I am bigger than you. I am him, and I am the landscape of his story within the story.

F.5 Audio

MP3 copy of audio from the exhibition. Recorded at CultureLab, Newcastle.

Filename: Audio 2.

Appendix H



128. *To Sing of Gilgamesh* (b. 2012)

To Sing of Gilgamesh (b. 2012). Performance, duration, 20 minutes approximately.

H.1 Details

Garment: by Lesley Hepburn, adapted and finished by Ruth Barker. White textured polyurethane fabric, pigmented with commercial cosmetics powder.

Date: April 2012. In group exhibition PETROSPHERE, part of Glasgow international Festival of Contemporary Art.

Synopsis: The performance introduces my relationship to the Gilgamesh myth, and to the mythic figures of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Gilgamesh seems at once close, and unknowable. The core themes of the Gilgamesh performances are grief (loss), mortality, and love.

Related work: This work was previously performed at The Bruce Building, Newcastle in February 2012 (See Appendix F). I also developed a

video recontextualisation of this work, which was screened at Gi (see Appendix I), and at DOCVA, Milan (see appendix M).

H.2 Narrative Account:

PETROSPHERE was a group exhibition self-organised between artists Ruth Barker, Antonakis Christodoulou, Helen de Main, Vassilis H, Niall Macdonald, James McLardy, Margarita Myrogianni, Aliko Panagiotopoulou, Ciara Phillips and Kostas Sahpazis. We had previously exhibited together in the Greek visual arts festival ReMap (Athens 2011). We made curatorial decisions collaboratively, but worked independently on our own work for the exhibition. This exhibition also included the video work *Gilgamesh Song* (2012). See Appendix I for details.

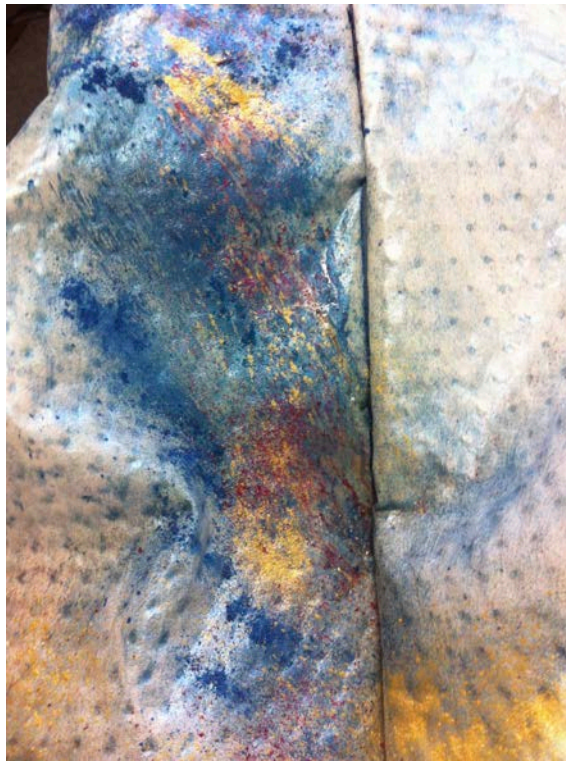
I agreed to present this live performance of *To Sing of Gilgamesh* (b. 2012) at the opening of the PETROSPHERE exhibition, knowing that there would be a large crowd. The performance was scheduled to begin midway through the opening. Clad in the performance garment, I waited out of sight in a fire escape, in order to prepare myself. I took this decision because I was uncomfortable with the experience of this work's prior performance (a.2012), where I chose not to separate myself from the audience before and after the work.

I had also reworked the performance garment slightly following the previous iteration of this work. Firstly I removed the waist-sash and re-padded the interior of the garment with wadding, to bulk out the silhouette and make myself look much larger. Then I applied an additional layer of pigment (plate 129) over the surface of the garment so that the majority was now coloured in a bluish sheen, with other cosmetic colours visible in the creases and pockets. I had felt that the garment had previously been too 'polite', and wished to make it more outlandish.

I received a cue via text message when my artist colleagues felt that I should enter the space. They had announced to the audience that the performance was about to begin, and when I came into the gallery (plate 129) I discovered that people had arranged themselves

into a rough semicircle around the centre of the room (plate 130). This was unplanned but not problematic, as the arrangement of the works in the show did leave a natural performance space in that area. I walked slowly to the centre of the audience's arc, and paused to collect myself. No chairs or seating had been provided, and so everyone was standing.

To perform, I fixed my gaze on a neutral spot above the heads of the people watching me. Slowly I began to recite the text from memory, moving my arms in the choreographed arrangement described in Appendix F (plates 131 – 135). I became unaware of the audience completely, as I felt myself 'fade' into the recital of the words. When the text was complete, I brought my hands back to my sides, refocused my gaze, and turned around to leave the room (plate 136). As I did so the audience began to clap, which I did not acknowledge. I exited the gallery through the same fire door, and removed my makeup and costume before returning to the opening a little later, when I felt like myself again.



129. Garment detail.

H.3 Photography by Alan Dimmock.



130. Entering the gallery.



131. The audience had arranged themselves into a rough semicircle around the centre of the room.



132. Delivering the performance.



133. Delivering the performance.



134. Delivering the performance.



135. Delivering the performance.



136. Delivering the performance.



137. Leaving the room.

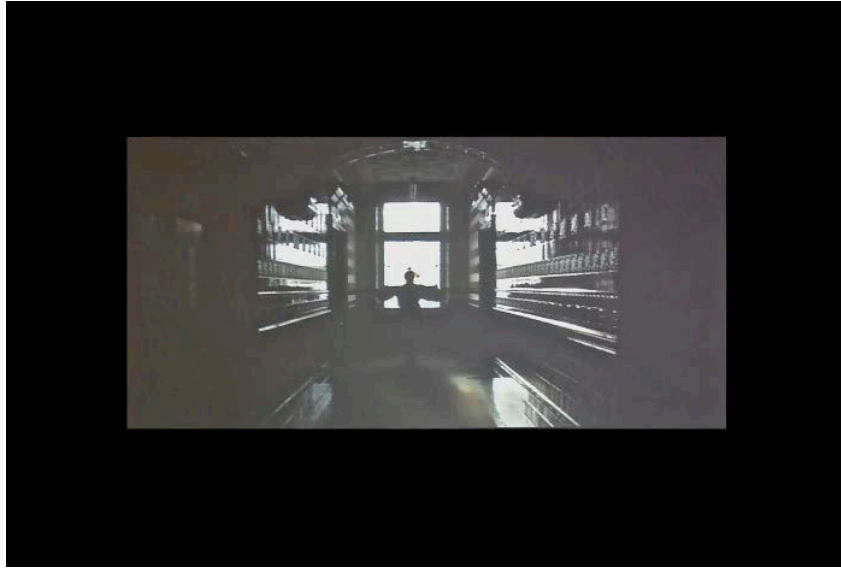
H.5 Script

Please see Appendix F.

H.4 Audio

Please see Appendix F.

Appendix I



138. *Gilgamesh Song* (2012).

Gilgamesh Song (2012). Single channel video, duration, 22.46 min.

I.1 Details

Garment: by Lesley Hepburn, adapted and finished by Ruth Barker. White textured polyurethane fabric, pigmented with commercial cosmetics powder.

Date: April 2012: group exhibition PETROSPHERE, part of Glasgow international Festival of Contemporary Art.
March 2013: DOCVA, Milan (through The Agent RIA)

Synopsis: The video is hypnotic and rhythmic. It is largely inscrutable, and conveys the murkiness of the Gilgamesh narrative. It is not documentation, but an attempt to re-present a site-based performance as a moving image work.

Related work: This video recontextualises a live performance at The Bruce Building, Newcastle in February 2012 (See Appendix F).

I.2 Narrative Account:

While developing the performance work *To Sing of Gilgamesh*, I knew that I would be presenting it in the context of an exhibition (PETROSPHERE, see Appendix H) at Glasgow international Festival of Contemporary Art. I also knew that my work would have a greater reach if I could present it in media other than live performance, for example so that it could be included in an exhibition environments. I decided to try and recontextualise the live work, which was developed within the site of the Bruce Building, Newcastle (see Appendix F), into a new moving image piece. My intention was not to document or re-present the existing live work, but to try and make a new piece that used the same starting point but took the text in a different direction.

Having no expertise in making moving image work, I employed Lyndsay Mann, an artist with a great deal of experience in video, to support me. Lyndsay filmed the work, recorded the sound, and helped me to edit the piece. She had a great deal of influence over the finished work, for which I was grateful as this was a new medium for me.

I wanted the video work to be impressionistic and visually rich. I felt strongly that I didn't want my face to appear in the work, and that I wanted much of the screen to be in darkness, with glimpses and fragments of detail. I wanted repetition within the image to echo, reflect, or distort the structures of repetition within the written text. I felt that surfaces and textures were also important within the work, and felt that the video should give a sense of moving over or across the fabric of the work. The sound was recorded on site, and includes a lot of incidental auditory texture as well as the booms and echoes of my voice's reverberation within the architectural space.

In editing the work I tried to bring together a host of impressions and visual layers. I began to think of myself in the video as 'the figure', a separation that interested me. Lyndsay helped me to structure the visual development of the work, and to try and find a

visual language and style that I felt was appropriate. The finished work was screened at Glasgow festival of visual art in April 2012 (plates 139 and 140), and at DOCVA, Milan in March 2013.

In retrospect I am not satisfied with Gilgamesh Song as a work, and I have not returned to making video. I feel that I was not clear enough in my decision-making, and the resulting video is technically unsuccessful: the sound is poorly recorded, and the images (though at times striking) are inconsistent in quality. The problems stem from my own divided interests – if it was not important to me to create a legitimate performance document, then I should have recorded the sound elsewhere where I had more control over the acoustic. I should have planned better and allowed for enough time to re-shoot or re-compose where necessary.

I.3 Photography by Alan Dimmock.



139. Video presented in PETROSPHERE exhibition, Gi Festival 2012.



140. Video presented in PETROSPHERE exhibition, Gi Festival 2012.

I.4 Script (page 1 of 3):

One.

To sing of Gilgamesh
To sing at the beginning
Of a man, a king, a god

Who crawls out of the clay
And into the night of our tongues,
And we speak him into shape
And outline.

To sing of Gilgamesh
To sing at the beginning of a story
That we do not remember
That we do not speak
That we do not have in our hands
Or our fingers
Or our mouths

And I will sing of Gilgamesh
Though I do not remember.
Though he has not crawled out of the clay
And into my tongue
But I will speak him into shape
As a she bear licks her cub
To clean off the caul on his new face.

To sing of Gilgamesh,
Gilgamesh
Gilgamesh
And I sing his name low, like a lover may say.
And I will make him my own,
I will step inside the loose sheets of his shape and beat him out, from the
inside, with a beat beat beat beat
beat beat beat
beat beat beat, like a heart, or a drum, or a poem.

To sing of Gilgamesh
Again
For the first time.

Script (page 2 of 3):

Two.

Here come the things I do not know:

I do not know who he is
I do not know what he says
I do not know who you are
I do not know who she is
I do not know why he loves
I do not know where he goes
I do not know what he sees
I do not know how he decides
I do not know what road he takes
I do not know where he comes from
I do not know what his dreams mean
I do not know where he ends up
I do not know how he gets there

Here come the things that I do know:

I know his name
I know his heart
I know his shape
I know his strength
I know his grief
I know his path
I know his fear
I know his love
I know his killing
I know his mistake
I know his outline
I know his weakness

And that is all.

Script (page 3 of 3)

Three.

To sing of Gilgamesh is to lift
The mass of clay and work it.

The storyteller beats beats beats beats
beats beats beats
beats beats with her hands,
Forcing the clay to the grain of the table she sits at.
With elbows out, she kneeds the thick dirt,
Folds it / tears it / joins it.
Clay cleaves beneath her fingernails,
And in the join between her fingers,
And creases, red brown, on the knuckles of her fists.

She pats and pushes clay.
She pinches and lifts it.
She thumbs it rudely into the likeness of: legs, navels, bellies.
Into the likeness of: chests, shoulders, arms.
Into the likeness of: two blunt and bearded heads.

On the flat of a kitchen table,
The storyteller makes two man-shapes stand, locked,
Braced
One along the other.
His collarbone rests upon his wrist.
His shin is brushed against *his* calf.
Thigh touches thigh.
Face against face.
They are built from the same terracotta.

These are not men, but solid shapes in clay.
One will lose.
One will be lost.
And in the solid mud of their heads
We will find, written:
All the words we've ever used for grief
And love;
And all the ways we've ever learned to look at death
Through distant lens, or the glass of our own front door.

To sing of Gilgamesh
May be to lift
The mass of clay

And work it.
Clay stains our hands.
The men we make with it
Are dumpy, crude, unyielding.
But the words in their heads
May still sing.

Appendix J



141. *Mouth Open in an Open O* (a. 2012).

Mouth Open in an Open O (a. 2012). Performance, duration, 20 min.

J.1 Details

Garment: by Carmel O'Brien. Grey curtain fabric with black folded paper ruff and black plastic detailing.

Date: September 2012, The Cornerhouse, Manchester.

Synopsis: The performance follows a cyclical pattern following a calendar year, from September to September. There are themes of rebirth, fertility, and language of flowering plants, alongside the overarching themes of loss, grief, and love that continue throughout the cycle. Key images from the Gilgamesh myth include the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the sequence of prophetic dreams within the epic, the death of Enkidu, and Gilgamesh's encounter with Uta-Napishti.

Related work: This work was re-performed at The Agency Gallery in February 2013 (see Appendix K).

J.2 Narrative Account

Mouth Open In An Open O was commissioned by The Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester, as part of their 'Between' series of performance commissions, programmed by Louise Adkins and The International 3 Gallery. The audience were invited via Cornerhouse's own publicity networks.

I produced a series of four collaged figures based on 1:1 scale photocopies of my own body. These were installed within the gallery: two on the floor in the area in which I would perform, and one on either side of the door through which I would enter the space. I also produced an audio track comprised of tonal breathwork exercises that I usually use while rehearsing. These had been edited together into a repetitive sequence.

As the audience entered the room and seated themselves (on the floor, or on a low platform within the space), the audio track was already playing from concealed speakers (plate 142). At a prearranged time, I entered from a door at the rear of the gallery (plate 143) wearing the performance garment. I walked slowly across the room, stepping along a 'path' made by the prone body of the first photocopy figure (plate 144). As I reached the space in between the two figures, I stopped (plate 145). I began to accompany the pre-recorded sound of my own voice performing the breathwork (plate 146). Slowly the audio track came to an end, and I continued for a short time unaccompanied. I then paused, before beginning to recite the performance text (plates 147 – 150). As I reached the end of the text I again paused, and then began to repeat the breathwork exercises. After a few moments the audio track began again, starting slowly and building up to accompany me. I then stopped and slowly exited the room, by walking over the body of the second photocopy figure. As I exited the room by the same rear door, the audience

clapped. The pre-recorded audio continued playing in the gallery as the audience left the space.

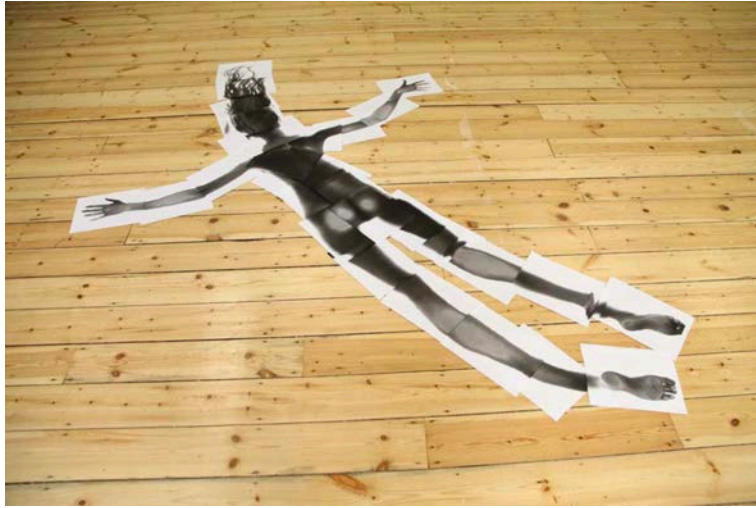
J.3 Photographs by Jonathon Purcell



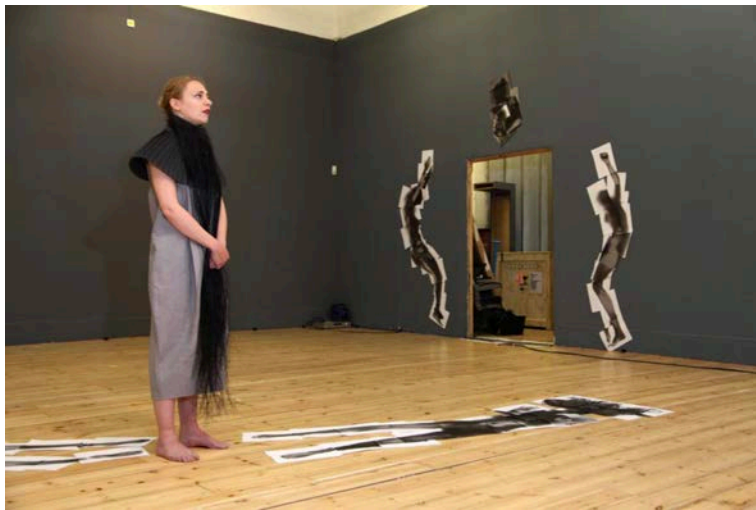
142. The audience enters the room as the audio track plays from concealed speakers.



143. I enter the gallery from a rear door.



144. The path made by the prone body of the first photocopy figure.



145. As I reached the space in between the two figures, I stopped.



146. Accompanying the audio track.



147. Reciting the performance text.



148. Reciting the performance text.



149. Reciting the performance text.



150. Reciting the performance text.

J.4 Script (pg 1 of 7)

Early Autumn

We are here in the late September,
Watching the weight of the year
Blow the lilac blooms to the low gutters, and dampen
Them with rain.
There is fat black earth under the paving
And the worms draw pink through black in the dark.

We are here in the late September,
Watching the elongation of the night
Light the compact fluorescents in high-rise kitchens, and dampen
The dreams in a thousand absent minds, with thoughts of Autumn.
And the TV news is on. And it whispers to us,
Low words of other's worlds, condensed.

We are here in the late September,
Feeling that nothing has happened to us, yet, turning
Our Selves away from each other.
And the TV news is on. And today we are the multitude,
In Syria, Egypt, Uruk, Oman.
We are asking the Sand King Why?
And the Sand King says Why Not?

We turn our heads away from each other,
Mouth open in an open O.
Mouth Open.
And elsewhere: GILGAMESH.
On a beach at the edge of the world
The sand we stand upon is hollow. Shifting under our feet
Like quicksand, like something alive in the birth of a story.
(On the beach, you said, don't step there. Or did you?
And did I remember? And have I never seen the sinking
Sand again there? And how did you know?)

A black dog running on the white sand, with sand in her nails,
She runs in one breath out, out along the sand. Come, back.)
Manchester. The pale purple petals peel back into the black September sod
And the crown in the hand of a man with his hand outstretched and
Full of sinking sand, and the loved black barguest, running.
The axis of the year, turning, in a sacred sound shaped like September.

Script (pg 2 of 7)

October, (and looking towards the Spring).
When I first kissed you
We tested our strength against one another.
I felt your teeth behind your lips.
We were tired and the sun had come up.
Your face was dry.
Your mouth was wet.

Lip met lip met lip met lip.

What do you say when the king takes a lover?
A mirror?
A brother?
A part of him self put out, put in?
What do you say when the Sand King?
What do you say to the Sand King?
What?
What do you say?
What?
What did you say?
'In Greece we are in danger from the dawn.'

Hallowe'en, and we imagine springtime. Impossible.
We cannot remember a time both behind us, and still to come.
But we are both wearing masks. And in our forward recollection
A painted egg rests at the top of the hill, neither falling
Backward nor forward.
Backward nor forward.
Backward nor forward.
Begin again:
I I .Pause. I I
A hand outstretched, forefinger out,
Yours or mine,
Caught in time,
Not touching the egg, neither falling backward,
Nor forward.
Lip met lip met lip met lip.

The egg rolls. Has rolled. Will roll. Inexorable. Down.
We were both wearing masks. And it was Hallowe'en
When we first kissed, will kiss, the King.

Script (pg 3 of 7)

Midwinter / January

In the darkness that is black as the soil underground,
We dream, together. I dream alone in the dreamhouse you made,
And you dream alone, outside.

Winter: sawn lilacs, and the king my father's neck.
Feet like stumps. A black dog on the white frosted sand.
The lizard in the reptile glitter, blue and soft like the breast
It was, soft and blue under glass.

Dreaming and knowing / not knowing.
The dream of teeth, splinters, broken bone.
The dream of gold, and the shadows of cedar trees.
You sang me a song once, coming up as the sun goes down,
And I could not sing it with you and I'm sorry.

Winter. In the night-time bedroom
You hold up a match,
You say see, it's all right.
You switch on the torch and trace boggarts in the darkness.
I turn on the light, see your coat on the chair.
Outside there are cats cutting sirens on the dark grass
Full of passion they pin out their throats
On the chlorophyll ice, where the daisies will grow.

Through our uncurtained window comes the scent of wet cedar,
Yesterday's sleet, and the perfume of lilacs.

I never remember my dreams.

Script (pg 4 of 7)

Springtime. April.
In the whiteness that is loud as noise
We dream of separation. A cedar tree falls in the forest,
Let me live,
And do I know what it means to lose somebody? When
I am standing alone up here
Sometimes we are not in control
But there is no-one on the other side of me,
No-one walking there on the long road.
I carry my own drum
And I beat it,
Plant it under the sod and it will grow,
Pollarded and blooming like the lilac tree that grew
Outside my mother's window.
In the summer the scent was fat and coloured,
Bee-filled and honey tinted.
We sat below the syringa: Syrinx, dreaming of panpipes.

Green grow the lilacs, sparkling with dew.
I'm lonely now, my darling, since I parted from you.

I never remember my dreams,
But I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
I am standing alone out here
And some times we are not in control.

Script (pg 5 of 7)

June.
Midsummer,
And we are children again,
And today, at the Great Yorkshire Show
She saw her first penis.
A great white bull, his balls hanging down
Like bagged planets,
Stood square, blotting out the light and air
In his sweet-smelling rosetted stall.

She stood and pointed, joyous,
Look at that! And I wanted to pull her away,
Out of the sight of the king's cabled white backside,
Out into the open, away from the tent.

But the bulls of the mind are huge.
Heavenly slabs of muscle, hair, and horn,
Standing in mud, holding the world
Still, clamping the sod to their hooves,
Teaching gravity its edges, and their definition.

>

In Uruk, the bull of heaven wears his wings
Not lightly, looking as unlikely
As a winged penis, or a butterfly hammer.
Garlanded with asphodel,
His holy bovine head is raised,
His holy bovine throat exposed,
And the bull is slain. Later, his hide dries flat
On a bloody wall. Flies creep in, under the iron white sun.
The dusty blood is washed away by working women.
The goddess shouts, her voice is hoarse and
Broken in the desert.
She shreds her eggs-and-bacon plant in rage.

>

And at the Great Yorkshire Show,
We squeeze tomato sauce
Onto our burgers,
And wash the sweet meat down with fizzy pop, and childish, titillated, laughter.

Script (pg 6 of 7)

August

When Enkidu died they packed his body with lilac
At your instruction. You could not stand to see him rot.
Sand King, you filled his arms with silver,
And his mouth was filled with gold.
He could not speak, and you wept oceans across his salty skin.

Green grow the lilacs, sparkling with dew.
I'm lonely now, my darling, since I parted from you.

Tear off your head with your hands.
Tear off your arms with your fists.
Tear out your heart with your fingers.
How can you bury someone you love?
Sand King,
I'll love you and leave you.
I'll love you and leave you.
I'll love you and leave you.
I'll love you and leave you.
Love me. Lost you. Live.

Script (pg 7 of 7)

September. The end-of it (and also the beginning)
The world has turned, and we are here
Together in a rush of congregation.
Rushes
Acanthus
Agrimony
Almond.
Mayflower
Oats
And Olive, always olive,
And the lilac and the cedar growing limb to limb
Cut them down and they will flourish, or else make way for something new.
A snake with its tail in its mouth still sloughs its skin.

You slept on the beach for seven days and six nights,
And on the seventh day you woke,
And saw the pastries I had left there.
You were the Sand King once, and tomorrow, and today
Broken and lonely,
Alone on the sand,
You are ready to go home.

We are here in the late September, feeling
That something has happened to us now, turning
Our faces towards one another other. And today we are the mutlitude
And we have asked the Sand King why? And the Sand King has said why not?

We turn our heads towards each other.
Mouths open in an open O.
And Right Here: Gilgamesh,
On a beach at the edge of the world.
The sand we stand upon is hollow. Shifting under our feet
Like quicksand, and something alive in the blood of a story.
On the beach, you said, don't step there.
And I have seen the sinking
Sand again there. How did you know?

A black dog running on the sand, with sand in her nails,
She runs in one breath out. Come, back.
The pale purple petals peel back into the black September sod
And the crown in the hand of a man with his hand outstretched and
Full of sinking sand, and the loved black barguest, running.
The axis of the year, turning, in a sacred sound shaped like September.

J.5 Supporting Text

The following was written by writer Lauren Amazeen, commissioned by Cornerhouse to accompany the performance of Mouth Open In An Open O.

'Mouth Open In An Open O'

"The sand we stand upon is hollow. Shifting under our feet, like quick sand,
like something alive in the birth of a story." –

Mouth Open In An Open O

Ruth Barker stands elegantly, barefoot, reciting a poetic narrative that weaves the elusive 4,000 year-old Sumerian tale of Gilgamesh together with recollections of her own life. Mouth Open in A Open O is the most recent chapter in a three-year experimentation with text, voice and movement. Like an oracle, she solemnly enters the gallery space alone. At first accompanied only by the recording of her voice reciting a few words. As she reaches a point in the space where she begins to speak, the recording slowly fades. She is attired in couture designed for the artist as a biomorphic form– organic, a sleek pod-like shape, soft grey, with long, black shiny threads, faint and wispy flowing out from the round neckline and down the length of the dress, like elongated ostrich feathers delicately responding to the slightest movement or breath. There is very little movement made by the artist once she has entered the space and taken her stance. At times she may gesture with an arm or change the position of her head. Her voice is the medium with which she slowly sculpts this performance.

The only objects created for the performance besides the couture, are two large paper collages laid flat on the floor. Having used a copier machine to construct the paper works, the artist copied parts of her body on regular sized paper and pieced together two life size portraits. Throughout the performance she stands firmly between these two simple paper constructions. They could be a pair of shadows, one extending before her and one behind, simultaneously. They represent temporality. It brings to mind an excerpt from the

Situationist Guy Debord writings in *Internationale Situationist* (no. 1, Paris, June 1958), "It [Making art] is a question of producing ourselves, not things that enslave us."

The spoken words of the piece address love, loss, longing and impermanence. Throughout, Nature becomes a constant metaphor for human emotions. The tone is dignified, elegiac, and sincere. At points within the recitation, the artist uses repetition almost as an incantation, building on the psychological thresholds between the artist and the public. And there are pauses. These serve as formal interludes, holding the tension between the past and present, dreaming and being awake, the body and the spirit, the performer and audience. The latter suspense is indeed an integral part of the piece, as the audience is not given a designated place to sit or stand – there is no clear delineation between the "stage" and the "public" – and the audience can only anticipate where the artist might enter to begin the piece. Yet, the rigour of her voice and her firm physical presence give the work a structure that holds the space for the audience. At the same time, the structure opens the experience up to the concept of chance. Lucy Lippard writes in her classic book, *Overlay – Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, "For all the formal beauties that are accessible today, the essence of life is elusive. Contemporary artists are looking to ancient forms both to restore that breath and also to take it for themselves. The animating element is often ritual . . ." She also states that, "The dominant alienation of maker from what is made, and the alienation of art and work from life, has led some contemporary artists to a conscious restoration of severed connections." Ruth Barker's work definitely can be placed in this lineage. By using her own voice to deliver the narrative, by performing a role somewhere between an ancient muse and a contemporary poetess, she is able to conjure both the personal and the collective memories so necessary for human wholeness.

- Lauren Amazeen.

J.6 Audio

Audio recording made in my home studio. Filename Audio 3.

Appendix K



151. *Mouth Open in an Open O* (b. 2013).

Mouth Open in an Open O (b. 2013). Exhibition with live performance (duration, 20 min).

K.1 Details

Garment: by Carmel O'Brien. Grey curtain fabric with black folded paper ruff and black plastic detailing.

Date: February 2013, The Agency Gallery, London.

Synopsis: The performance follows a cyclical pattern following a calendar year, from September to September. There are themes of rebirth, fertility, and language of flowering plants, alongside the overarching themes of loss, grief, and love that continue throughout the cycle. Key images from the Gilgamesh myth include the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the sequence of prophetic dreams within the epic, the death of Enkidu, and Gilgamesh's encounter with Uta-Napishti. The exhibition was a recontextualisation of the performance elements.

Related work: This work was originally developed for (and performed at) Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester in September 2012 (see Appendix J).

K.2 Narrative Account

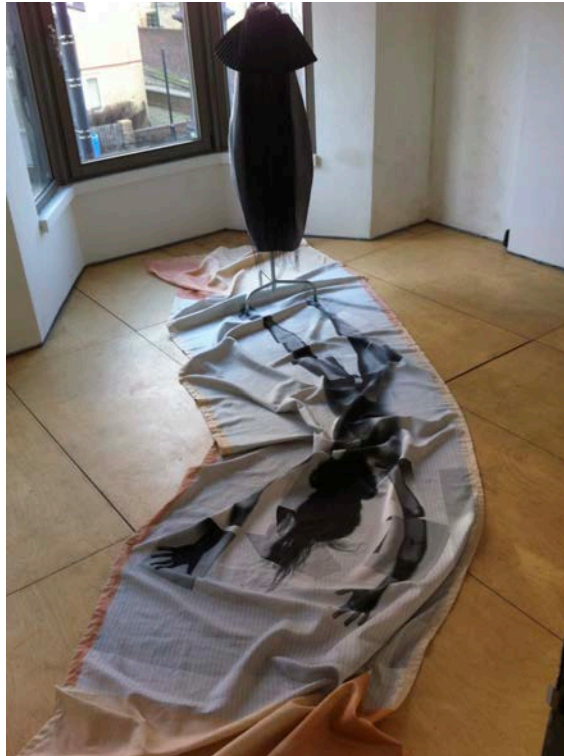
I was invited to re-present the work I had produced for Cornerhouse, Manchester, at The Agency, a commercial gallery in London. This was a useful opportunity for my research, as the gallery gave the condition that the performance must be recontextualised so that it could be presented as an exhibition that would run for 3 weeks. This forced me to develop the works' elements, and to consider how they could function without my own live presence to accompany them.

To do this, I evolved the photocopied figures used in the Cornerhouse presentation into a floor-based digital print fabric work on brushed cotton (printed for me by the Centre For Advanced Textiles in Glasgow). This became a rug-like floorpiece that occupied the centre of the gallery floor and defined a performance space even when I was not physically performing (plate 152). I also re-edited the audio file of the pre-recorded breathwork so that it could play on a loop throughout the day. As in the Cornerhouse, the audio played from concealed speakers that were not visible in the gallery space. A 'working' copy of the exhibition script – ie, seven typed A4 pages with my own handwritten notes - was presented unframed on the wall to the left hand side of the space (plate 153). The dress and neckpiece were presented on a tailor's dummy, which was positioned to stand on the fabric floorpiece in the same position that I would occupy during the live performance (plate 154).

For the live performance the tailor's dummy was removed, and I entered the room wearing the performance garment and using the floorpiece as a path along which to walk to the performance space. In another change to the Cornerhouse presentation, the audio continued to play behind me while I was speaking. After reciting the text I left the room

using the route over the floorpiece. Once I had changed out of the performance garment, invigilators replaced the tailor's dummy back into the exhibition.

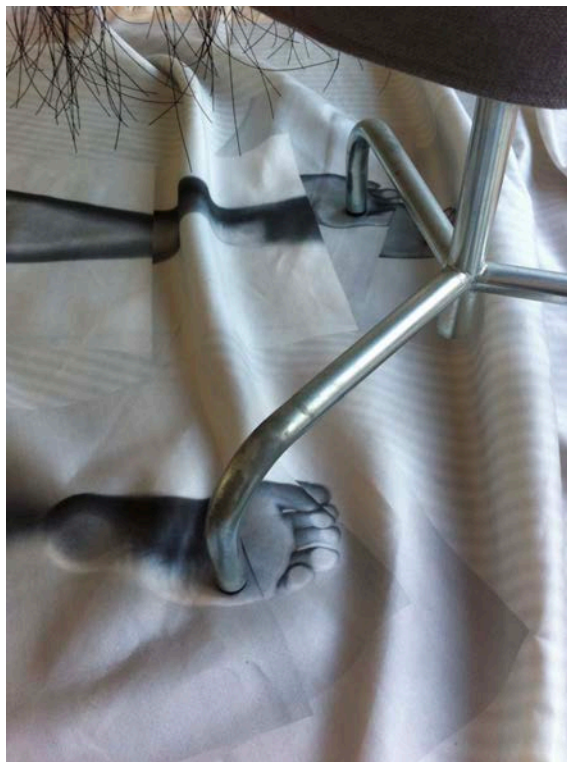
K.3 Photography by Bea de Sousa



152. Exhibition at The Agency Gallery. A brushed cotton fabric floorpiece with a digitally printed reproduction of the photocopied figure from the Cornerhouse, fills the centre of the room. The performance garment is presented on a tailor's dummy.



153. A 'working' copy of the exhibition script was presented unframed on the wall.



154. The dress and neckpiece were presented on a tailor's dummy, which was positioned to stand on the fabric floorpiece in the same position that I would occupy during the live performance.

K.4 Performance documentation by Anna Wilson



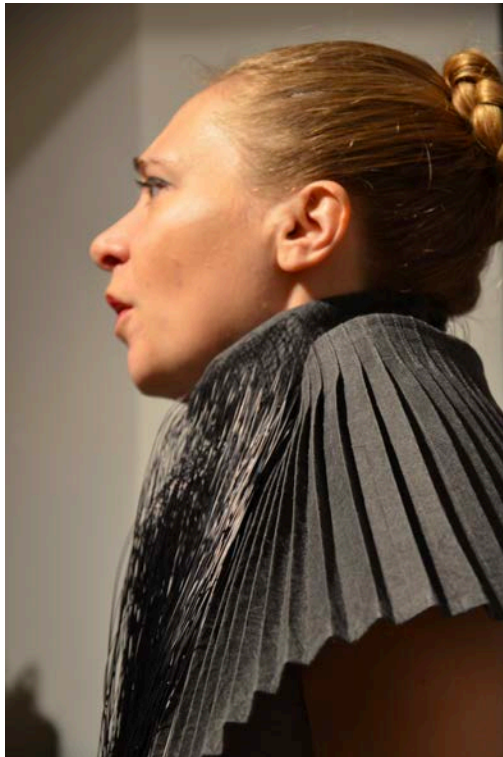
155. I used the floorpiece as a path through which to enter the performance space.



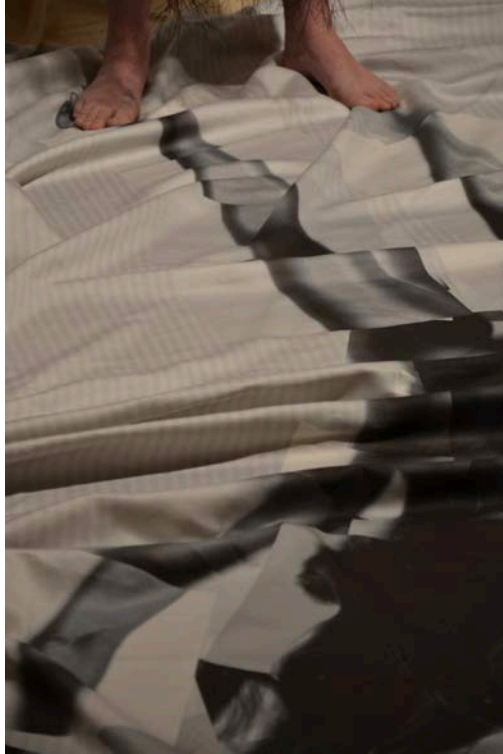
156. Reciting the performance text.



157. Reciting the performance text.



158. Reciting the performance text.



159. After reciting the text I left the room using the route over the floorpiece.

Appendix L



160. *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (b. 2012).

Of Gilgamesh, And Others (b. 2012), duration 6.5 hours

L.1 Details

Garment: Fabric design by Ruth Barker. Cut to Vogue pattern.

Date: February 2013, The Old Hairdressers, Glasgow.

Synopsis: The performance retells the Gilgamesh myth through glimpses of my own personal history, suggesting that the story cannot be told without telling the story of the teller at the same time. The story becomes impossible to tell, full of tangents and unresolved images. The line between the myth and my own story becomes blurred.

Related work: This work was originally developed for (and performed at) Cartel Gallery, London in March 2012 (see Appendix G).

L.2 Narrative Account:

In 2012 I was invited by The Old Hairdressers Gallery, Glasgow, to re-perform and develop *Of Gilgamesh, And Others*, for February 2013. Because I had the opportunity to revisit the work, I made several changes to it.

I developed the written text, and extended it to 36 000 words (corresponding to a 6.5 hour reading). As part of this development I incorporated the scripts of all the *Gilgamesh* performances I had made to date, placing them into the narrative at approximately the points to which the performance texts nominally referred.

I designed a print for a heavy brushed cotton fabric, which I had printed at the Centre for Advanced Textiles in Glasgow. The print used digital 1:1 scale scans of my own body, assembled into a collage, and was a development from the floor piece I had made for The Agency gallery (see Appendix K). I had this fabric made into a dress using a commercially available *Vogue* pattern, as my budget would not allow for a bespoke pattern to be developed. As with other work, I kept my feet bare throughout the performance and wore my hair and make-up in the style I had used for other performances.

I produced a floor-mat using the same fabric print of the dress, and insulated it with a thick fabric base. This was intended to protect my feet from the cold, as well as to demarcate a performance space. I stood for the full duration of the performance, remaining static on the floor-mat (plate 161).

I read from a printed copy of the text rather than the laptop screen (as in *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* [b. 2012]). The printed script was presented on a music stand (plate 162). I had rehearsed a method of turning the pages of the script that did not disrupt the flow of the performance.

Two short comfort breaks were scheduled at regular intervals in the performance and were signposted in the full performance schedule, which was available to visitors and

distributed in advance. During breaks I exited the space to wait in a 'green room' that was not visible to the public. Rather than being seated at individual tables, the audience were seated on pews of connected folding chairs arranged on three sides of the central, spotlit, performance space.

At my insistence, the gallery was kept much warmer than on the previous occasion. Visitors stayed much longer at the 2013 presentation than they had at Cartel Gallery the year before, with many individuals staying an hour or longer. As at Cartel, the greatest concentration of visitors occurred at the very end of the performance.

L. 3 Photography by Niall Macdonald



161. I stood for the full duration of the performance, remaining static on the floor-mat.



162. The printed script was presented on a music stand



163. The duration of the performance was 6.5 hours.

L.4 Performance Schedule

Saturday 9th February 2013.

2pm

Chapter 1

Sit down and I will tell you the story of Gilgamesh. A description of the clay tablets of Uruk.

Chapter 2

To sing of Gilgamesh. The King and his city of Uruk are introduced. We fall into a repetitive dream of the city walls.

Chapter 3

And the picture in my mind's eye is coloured by another story. The goddess Ishtar creates a wild man, Enkidu. I return to the landscapes of my childhood, and while I am there I think of a gun.

Chapter 4

The hunters were angry. Gilgamesh wishes Enkidu to be brought to him.

Chapter 5

Shamhat is sacred her body is worshipped. The sexual initiation of Enkidu. The prophetic dream of Gilgamesh.

3.30 – 4pm BREAK.

4pm

Chapter 6.

Enkidu listened and became angry. Gilgamesh's dream is further interpreted. I tell you about my mother's dreamtime city. Enkidu travels towards Uruk. Shamhat leaves the story.

Chapter 7

Like a wife you will love him, caress and embrace him. Gilgamesh and Enkidu meet, fight, and love. I find a piece of paper that traces similarity in art and myth, and I throw it away.

Chapter 8

And so the story surged like a stomach turning over. Gilgamesh and Enkidu decide to travel to the Cedar forest.

Chapter 9

In the morning they walked the hot land. The heroes walk to the cedar forest. Gilgamesh dreams.

Chapter 10

When we walk we are bound to the ground. Gilgamesh and Enkidu arrive at Humbaba's home. I walk through Tel Aviv. The heroes fight, and Humbaba is killed. There are rabbits' heads on my kitchen table. There is a short silence.

Chapter 11

Gilgamesh gleamed in glory. In Uruk, The goddess Ishtar courts Gilgamesh and is rejected. I wonder about the lost stories of pre-Roman-Britain.

Chapter 12

Ishtar's rage filled heaven. The goddess sends the bull of heaven to the city of Uruk. Enkidu mocks the goddess, and he and Gilgamesh kill the sacred bull. I remember other bulls that I have seen.

Chapter 13

That night, Enkidu dreamed. Enkidu foretells his own death, sickens, and dies. Gilgamesh weeps.

Chapter 14

We are most of us frightened of dying. Thinking About A Lacuna or, a Digression on Death. A meditation on the moment of Enkidu's death, and its relation to storytelling, and to thought, and to our own thoughts of dying.

6pm – 6.30 BREAK

6.30

Chapter 15

Enkidu, may the burnt out cars mourn you. Gilgamesh is consumed by grief and walks away from the city of Uruk. I remember a conversation with an archaeologist about tombstones, and what they are for.

Chapter 16

I am mourning my friend and my love Enkidu. Gilgamesh seeks the only man who will never die, Uta-napishti, the survivor of the deluge. His quest is told in traditional form, with repeated phrases, questions, and answers.

Chapter 17

What is the voice on a record after all, but only a cast voice? I wonder about the relationship between speaking and casting. I walk through a museum looking for certainties in the glass cases.

Chapter 18

Uta-napishti was like something that had always been there. Gilgamesh reaches the home of Uta-napishti, who tells him that death is inevitable and cannot be escaped.

Chapter 19

We are standing on the sands at Scarborough, in the dusk. I imagine Gilgamesh and Uta-napishti standing on the beach in the evening. Scarborough becomes the place at the end of the world.

Chapter 20

Pare the earth. There is blood beneath the soil. Uta-napishti's story of the deluge. He is a dark continent, a story within the story.

Chapter 21

Mouth open in an open O. The story is retold again, as a series of personal mythic images.

Chapter 22

And then the restless heart of Gilgamesh was finally empty. Gilgamesh returns home to the city of Uruk. He reflects upon immortality. I remember a childhood vision.

Chapter 23

This story started a long long time ago. I return to the clay tablets of Uruk. We need to tell each other stories, after all.

8.30 (approximately) CLOSE.

L.5 Script (extract)

Chapter 3

Gilgamesh was restless and Gilgamesh was brutal. He did not lead well. He was a wild young bull, trampling his people. What do the people who rule us do, when they prove themselves to be untrustworthy? What does any ruler do to abuse our trust? Gilgamesh did those things to his subjects. He was a despot and a tyrant when he was young, closing the mouths of his people, stopping them up, preventing them from singing and speaking and saying what they wished.

And so I imagine the young Gilgamesh. And the picture in my mind's eye is coloured by another story, the story of the Arab Spring. Was I there? No, No, but I saw it on television. I read about it on the BBC website. I watched it on Al-Jazeera. And perhaps when I went to bed after watching the news late at night, I dreamt that the story of Gilgamesh was there. Perhaps I dreamt that the story of Gilgamesh was there in the square, in Egypt or Tunisia, or Libya, or Bahrain, or Syria, or Yemen. Perhaps the story was there. Perhaps. It doesn't matter.

I imagine the young king Gilgamesh. I imagine him today and a long long time ago. I imagine the restless heart of Gilgamesh silencing the blogs and the RSS feeds. I imagine the young king Gilgamesh; huge, and handsome, and radiant, he is monitoring Twitter and he is executing with impunity. He prevents the BBC from reporting, and the NGOs are getting nervous. Aid is not getting through. Amnesty International is preparing a report. Long ago, today, on the streets of Uruk, a crisis is building. There is talk of sanctions, and corruption.

And then, a long long time ago, the people of Uruk cried out. They gathered together in a square at the centre of their city and they opened up their mouths, and they said 'Help.' Peaceful, and with one voice, they opened up their mouths and said 'Enough.' Their mouths said 'Stop.' They said 'this thing that is happening, it is Not Right'. And they said these words loudly and clearly enough for someone to hear them, and to intervene.

And it was not a group of nations, working together under a treaty. It was not a unilateral force. It was only a goddess, Ishtar.

And Ishtar heard, and Ishtar said 'I will do something about it'.

But Ishtar did not destroy Gilgamesh. Perhaps she understood something of the power of stories, when we make them strong like bone and wire and rumour, these things that are impossible to diminish.

Because Ishtar did not burn down the palace of Gilgamesh. She did not open her mouth and say 'Do not commit abuse and murder. Do not rape. Do not tear apart the sense of wholeness and safety that your subjects deserve.' Ishtar did not flash out the lungs of the king with an atom bomb, or level his pavements with daisy cutters, or plant landmines behind the walls of Uruk. Ishtar did nothing to Gilgamesh, or his people, but she went away and she made Gilgamesh a gift to calm his restless heart. Ishtar made Gilgamesh a gift to claim his restless heart.

Ishtar made a man to balance Gilgamesh in the world. The man was huge and handsome and radiant and perfect. From clay, or from her own hair, or from puppydog's tails, or from whatever else new men are made from, Ishtar moulded and shaped a man until he was beautiful and strong. Then the man looked a lot like Gilgamesh. And Ishtar put him into the wilderness, outside the city walls. And she named him Enkidu, and she dropped him, like a cargo plane drops altruism in a humanitarian crisis: bouncing, and rolling a little on the ground. And when Enkidu raised his head from his dusty fall, he did not know that it was Ishtar who had made him, and he did not know that he had been made, and as he looked out at the horizon, he knew that he had always been there, in the wilderness, squinting at the sun.

What did he do then? Where did he go? This new man, Enkidu. His name is unfamiliar to me. It does not have Gilgamesh's stature as a name. Enkidu. The Wildman. He is like a fantasy, or a metaphor. Enkidu lived in the wilderness, outside the city walls. Gilgamesh

knew nothing of his existence. The people of Uruk did not know that he was there. He lived in the wilderness as if he were his own golden age, at peace with the animal kingdom, and somehow indivisible from his surroundings. The animals were not afraid of him. He could run as fast as an antelope, and he ate and drank with the wild things of the world, although I do not know what he ate or drank. Perhaps he put down his head to drink fresh water from the source. Perhaps he buried his head in the fur of beasts to drink their milk. Perhaps he ate the animals themselves, or perhaps he lived on grasses and berries.

What do you eat when you're away from civilisation? Did you ever make dens as a child? In the summers of my childhood, we would play in the woods, wandering free and unobserved, invisible and lawless. We would make dens under hanging trees or behind muddy banks, hidden from the imagined eyes of dogwalkers, glue-sniffers, and bigger kids. Sometimes we would protect our havens with pits concealed with leaves, small traps to wrench ankles and betray an enemy presence. Sometimes we would operate by stealth, devising elaborate systems to indicate imagined danger. I try to remember what we would eat on these long summer days, but I cannot bring anything to mind. It didn't seem important at the time.

Our woodlands were intricately mapped by childish feet that ran or scrambled into the spaces behind the brambles, down the railway embankments, to the walls of the electricity substation, or the gaps behind the bins. These half-hidden places contained the esoteric landscapes of our private discoveries: The mysteries of burnt out cars, torn pornography, discarded bags of glue and empty bottles. They were the spaces of our own transgressions – stolen booze and sly cigarettes, swear words and tiny muddy fires among the wet grass. These are the unclaimed spaces in the gaps of a northern English city, the places unwanted by the people who prefer to stay on the pavements, and we adopted a temporary ownership gladly, singly, chaotically, amongst the dog shit and the cow parsely and the Indian balsam, and the stinging nettles.

And I can picture Enkidu the beautiful Wildman here. The animals he lives with are not antelopes or porcupines, but urban foxes and fat grey squirrels. They are not date palms casting shadows over him, but beech trees and slim-trunked silver birch. He is building dens behind the flats while the blackbirds watch him, pouring out their songs like liquid joy among the crisp packets. He is hanging out in the wasteground behind the shops, in the place where sometimes there are condoms in the grass.

Once, we found a gun in the ditch behind the bike track. It was ugly, black, and heavy. The metal felt cold when we touched it. Cold even through the fabric of the jacket sleeves we tucked over our nervous hands to conceal our fingerprints. Curious and frightened we took the gun away, and hid it in a hole in the ground behind the allotment wall. We buried it, putting dead leaves over the disturbed earth, and a yellowish rock to mark the place. Then the next day we returned and dug the gun up again. We squatted on our heels around the hole, looking down at the dirty black metal. In the evening, we covered it up. And for the rest of the summer the presence of the gun drew us. Wherever we looked we saw its outline under the ground. The gun was a weight at the corner of our minds, tugging our eyes down toward the guilty, hidden place. In time we forgot. Though the gun may be still there.

I feel as though Enkidu is like the gun. He is connected to this image somehow. Perhaps it is only in the sense that Enkidu also was waiting, in an unexpected place, to be found.

Appendix M



164. *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (a. 2013)

A Love Song, For Gilgamesh (a. 2013), duration 20 minutes

M.1 Details

Garment: Carmel O'Brien. Gold lurex dress with russet velour covering

Date: June 2013. SS Rotterdam, Rotterdam Harbour (2013). Through Sils Projects, Rotterdam.

Synopsis: The performance focuses on the final image of the Gilgamesh epic, where Gilgamesh attempts to discover the secret of immortality from Uta-Napishti, on a beach at the far side of the waters of death. I speak with the voice of Enkidu, who has died and been left unburied, and I call Gilgamesh back, towards the world. Key images include the house of dust of which Enkidu dreams on his deathbed. The middle section of the work is influenced by the structure of the ancient Egyptian hymn *Dispute Between a Man and his Ba* (commonly known as 'Death is before me today', after

the hymn's first line) and recorded on a papyrus dating from circa 2000BC.

Related work: This work was reperformed at Camden Arts Centre, London, in September 2013 (see Appendix N). The audio recording of this performance was re-presented in artist Mat Jenner's 'FOAM' archive.

M.2 Narrative Account

This performance was commissioned by Sils Projects, Rotterdam, to coincide with the Rotterdam International Poetry Festival. It took place on the SS Rotterdam, a former cruise ship now permanently moored in Rotterdam Harbour and re-purposed as a luxury hotel. The audience were invited via *Sils'* own advertising networks. Attendees were told that they must RSVP due to very limited availability. Because of the health and safety constraints of the SS Rotterdam itself, only 20 audience members were allowed to be present at each performance. For this reason it was decided to perform the work twice on the same day at 6pm and again at 8pm.

The audience were invited to gather at their designated time on the quay-side of Rotterdam Harbour in the Netherlands (plate 166). They were then escorted onto the SS Rotterdam, to which access is usually limited to (typically wealthy) patrons. A uniformed hotel staff member escorted the audience in a single group to an empty swimming pool three floors below decks (167). The same staff member explained the 'rules' of the space – no mobile phones, no photography, no access past the steel poolside barriers – before the audience were allowed to enter and find a space to sit or stand. After a short pause I entered the space from a concealed side entrance wearing the performance garment. I descended into the empty pool using the pool ladder (168), collected my thoughts (169), and began to recite the work from a point in the centre of the pool (170). At the end of the performance I climbed out of the room using the pool ladder (171), and exited (172) using the same concealed side door. The audience then clapped.

After I had left the room, the audience were guided up five flights of internal stairs to the top deck of the boat. They then purchased drinks from the boat's bar, along with the hotel's regular patrons, and watched a spectacular sunset over the Rotterdam skyline (173). Both performances followed the same format.

In late 2013 I was asked to participate in Mat Jenner's peripatetic project 'foam'. Conceived as both an experimental platform for commissioning and an expanded artwork, foam presents selected artists through a series of commissions, events, and published materials. I was asked to produce a one-off dub plate 12" record for an archive, for which I contributed an audio recording made by Sils of the 8pm performance on board the SS Rotterdam. The archive was presented as an exhibition and as an artwork, at various gallery locations. At each private view, audio works were selected played by Mat Jenner and a gallery assistant. During regular exhibition opening hours, visitors could select and play the records themselves.

The gallery presentations were:

24th May - 15th June 2014, P/N Project Space, London.

4th July - 2nd August, And/Or, Gallery, London

30th August, Wysing Arts Centre (Space/Time festival).

M.3 Photography by Ghislain Amar



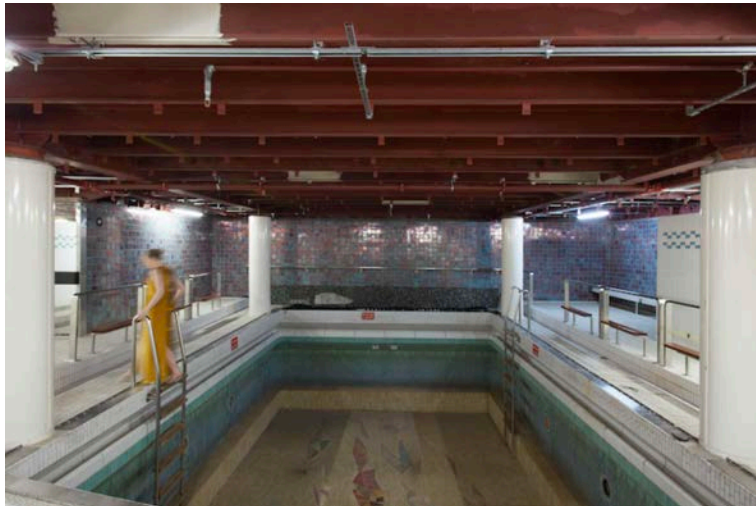
165. Exterior of the SS Rotterdam.



166. The audience were invited to gather at a designated time on the quay-side of Rotterdam Harbour.



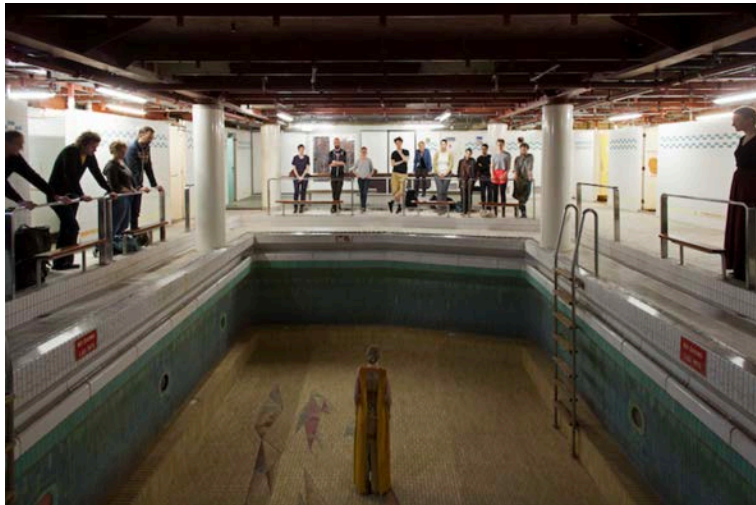
167. The audience were escorted down several flights of internal stairs by a uniformed staff member.



168. I descended into the empty pool using the pool ladder



169. I collected my thoughts.



170. Reciting the work.



171. Climbing the ladder to exit.



172. Exit.



173. The bar on board the SS Rotterdam.

M.4 Audio recording (featured in foam).

Filename: Audio 4

M.5 Script: (pg 1 of 5)

I stand here before you today

I am a young man.

I have eaten clay.

I have swallowed the soil underground.

My lips are ash.

Here in the house of dust,

Here in the house of dust,

We have entered.

And now with my arms like dumb wings

I will sing for you.

Script. (Pg 2 of 5)

First: A Love Song

Where are you, at the edge of the world?

Who will you see there?

What will he say?

Behind my eyes lies an image of you, waiting.

Behind my eyes lies the wash of a great ocean

Chasing the storm of the waves

With sea spume and pebbles the colour of fingernails.

Dry pink, white tipped, dusky.

Behind my eyes the sand is damp with this morning's rain

The beach is pitted with hollows.

Behind each air-hole hides a tiny mouth

And bivalve heart, beating.

There are morsels to eat here, if you are hungry.

Snatch up the pale razors,

And the fists of cockles. You taught me how to scoop

Them up with spoons, hearing the shell clamp

Shut through the sand grit, sighing out

As the silver pries them loose.

Then clack, into the swung bucket,

Where they rattle like teeth in an old jaw.

Clack clack clack: They are talking to us.

What kind of myths do molluscs tell?

You have no stomach for seafood today.

And the cockles stay unscooped.

Here at the edge of the world, you wait to meet a man

And you did not think take me with you.

Your purple shadow fades against the evening sand.

The sea is still. It hangs, weightless,

Full of light beneath the darkening sky.

You have your back to me, standing black and dense in your funeral coat.

Your hands in pockets. Your weight on your right hip,

Your shoulders up, to save your ears from the chill lip of the evening.

And where is he? And what if he doesn't come?

What will you do then?

Will you come home to me?

I'm waiting,

Right where you left me.

On a bier

With a bug in my nose.

I'm covered with silver and gold,

And all the breath of my body

Gone out into the wind, and lost.

Script. (Pg 3 of 5)

Then: A Soft Song.
What did he say to you then,
At the edge of the world?
The sea comes in and out like breathing,
And I am tired of watching you sleep.
Tell me.
What did he say?

That it was not before him
The day the skies were iron and the gulls spread themselves beneath the clouds.

That it was not before him
The day the sun stripped the skin from his back.

That it was not before him
The day the canal closed green and dreaming over his head.

That it was not before him
The day his sight began to fail.

That it was not before him
The day the dew hung breathless on the lawn.

That it was not before him
The day his body flourished with tumours.

That it was not before him
The day he drank it from a bottle.

That it was not before him
The day he placed the hemp around his neck.

That it was not before him
The day the afternoon light lay across his bed like butter.

That it was not before him
The day the flowers he carried left pollen stains on his shirt.

That it was not before him
The day his cigarette tip smouldered into the mattress.
That it was not before him
The day he was hungry and homeless, please help.

That it was not before him

The day his veins ran out over the dashboard of his Toyota.

That it was not before him
The day the gps failed on his luxury yacht.

That it was not before him
The day he insulted a man and it was raining.

That it was not before him
The day he woke in a bedsit room with nicotine walls.

That it was not before him
On the most perfect day, holding his wife's hand.

That it was not before him
The day he was tired.

That it was not before him
The day he was sore.

That it was not before him
The day he needed it.

That it was not before him
The day he was afraid of it.

That it was not before him
The day he was not even thinking about it.

That it was not before him
At all.

And what did you think, my love.
That you could put it aside as well?
No. No, my love. I'm sorry. Come home to me.
I'm waiting. And the gifts you left me
Are tarnished.

Script. (Pg 4 of 5)

Now: A Last Song.

In the morning,

Walking home across the grass,

You are lost in thought.

Your brogues leave dark stains against the silver dew.

There's a red crease on your face,

Where you have slept with your arm against your cheek again.

You are hungry now.

You have a long way to walk.

Come quickly.

Build walls.

Make laws.

Discover alphabets and geometry.

Eat well.

Bury me.

I'm waiting,

Right where you left me.

On a bier

With a bug in my nose.

I'm covered with silver and gold,

And all the breath of my body

Gone out into the wind, and lost.

Script. (Pg 5 of 5)

I stand here before you today

I was a young man.

I have eaten clay.

I have swallowed the soil underground.

My lips are ash.

Here in the house of dust,

Here in the house of dust,

I have entered.

And now with my arms like dumb wings

I have sung for you.

I have sung for you.

Goodbye.

Appendix N



174. *A Love Song, For Gilgamesh* (b. 2013)

A Love Song, For Gilgamesh (b. 2013), duration 20 minutes

N.1 Details

Garment: Carmel O'Brien. Gold lurex dress with russet velour covering

Date: September 2013. Camden Arts Centre, London.

Synopsis: The performance focuses on the final image of the Gilgamesh epic, where Gilgamesh attempts to discover the secret of immortality from Uta-Napishti, on a beach at the far side of the waters of death. I speak with the voice of Enkidu, who has died and been left unburied, and I call Gilgamesh back, towards the world. Key images include the house of dust of which Enkidu dreams on his deathbed. The middle section of the work is influenced by the structure of the ancient Egyptian hymn *Dispute Between a Man and his Ba* (commonly known as 'Death is before me today', after

the hymn's first line) and recorded on a papyrus dating from circa 2000BC.

Related work: This work was developed for, and previously performed on, The SS Rotterdam in Rotterdam Harbour in June 2013 (see Appendix M).

N.2 Narrative Account

I was invited to re-perform the work at Camden Arts Centre, London, as part of their performance programme. I was given rehearsal and development time and a small budget to rework the piece for the gallery context. I felt that the audience choreography of the SS Rotterdam performance was largely successful and so tried to functionally recreate this within the gallery context. The audience were again asked to book in advance, and were contacted through the gallery's own advertising and booking networks.

The audience were met in the gallery foyer by curator Ben Roberts. Ben then instructed them on how to behave once in the performance space, specifying that there was to be no mobile phones, and no photography. At an agreed time, Ben took the group as a whole up the stairs to Camden's first floor, and through into Gallery 2. From here the group entered the performance studio through a little used rear entrance. Seats were arranged in a shallow semi-circle with an aisle in the centre.

Invigilators then held open the studio's main doors, which were located behind the audience. I entered the room through these main doors (plate 175), which the invigilators closed behind me. I walked down the centre aisle to the centre of the audience (plate 176), turned (plate 178) and paused (plate 179), and began the recital (plate 180). At the end of the performance I exited through the same main doors to the rear of the space. The audience clapped.

The performance was filmed and broadcast live to the This Is Tomorrow website.

N.4 Video Documentation

Quicktime copy of video originally live streamed by This Is Tomorrow on 01/09/13 at 15.56. <http://bambuser.com/v/3873740>

N.5 Photographs by Hydar Dewachi



175. I entered the room through the Performance Studio's main doors.



176. I walked down the centre aisle to the centre of the audience.



177. Approaching the performance space.



178. I turn to face the audience.



179. Pause before the recitation.



180. Reciting the work.



181. Reciting the work.



182. Reciting the work.



183. Having spoken the last words of the performance.



184. Preparing to exit.



185. Leaving the gallery through the main doors.



186. Exit.

N.6 Script (Pg 1 of 5)

I stand here before you today

I am a young man.

I have eaten clay.

I have swallowed the soil underground.

My lips are ash.

Here in the house of dust,

Here in the house of dust,

We have entered.

And now with my arms like dumb wings

I will sing for you.

Script (Pg 2 of 5)

First: A Love Song.

Where are you, at the edge of the world?

Who will you see there?

What will he say?

Behind my eyes lies an image of you, waiting.

Behind my eyes lies the wash of a great ocean

Chasing the storm of the waves

With sea spume and pebbles the colour of fingernails.

Dry pink, white tipped, dusky.

Behind my eyes the sand is damp with this morning's rain

The beach is pitted with hollows.

Behind each air-hole hides a tiny mouth

And bivalve heart, beating.

There are morsels to eat here, if you are hungry.

Snatch up the pale razors,

And the fists of cockles. You taught me how to scoop

Them up with spoons, hearing the shell clamp

Shut through the sand grit, sighing out

As the silver pries them loose.

Then clack, into the swung bucket,

Where they rattle like teeth in an old jaw.

Clack clack clack: They are talking to us.

What kind of myths do molluscs tell?

You have no stomach for seafood today.

And the cockles stay unscooped.

Here at the edge of the world, you wait to meet a man

And you did not think take me with you.

Your purple shadow fades against the evening sand.

The sea is still. It hangs, weightless,

Full of light beneath the darkening sky.

You have your back to me, standing black and dense in your funeral coat.

Your hands in pockets. Your weight on your right hip,

Your shoulders up, to save your ears from the chill lip of the evening.

And where is he? And what if he doesn't come?

What will you do then?

Will you come home to me?

I'm waiting,

Right where you left me.

On a bier

With a bug in my nose.

I'm covered with silver and gold,

And all the breath of my body

Gone out into the wind, and lost.

Script (Pg 3 of 5)

Then: A Soft Song.
What did he say to you then,
At the edge of the world?
The sea comes in and out like breathing,
And I am tired of watching you sleep.
Tell me.
What did he say?

That it was not before him
The day the skies were iron and the gulls spread themselves beneath the clouds.

That it was not before him
The day the sun stripped the skin from his back.

That it was not before him
The day the canal closed green and dreaming over his head.

That it was not before him
The day his sight began to fail.

That it was not before him
The day the dew hung breathless on the lawn.

That it was not before him
The day his body flourished with tumours.

That it was not before him
The day he drank it from a bottle.

That it was not before him
The day he placed the hemp around his neck.

That it was not before him
The day the afternoon light lay across his bed like butter.

That it was not before him
The day the flowers he carried left pollen stains on his shirt.

That it was not before him
The day his cigarette tip smouldered into the mattress.
That it was not before him
The day he was hungry and homeless, please help.

That it was not before him

The day his veins ran out over the dashboard of his Toyota.

That it was not before him
The day the gps failed on his luxury yacht.

That it was not before him
The day he insulted a man and it was raining.

That it was not before him
The day he woke in a bedsit room with nicotine walls.

That it was not before him
On the most perfect day, holding his wife's hand.

That it was not before him
The day he was tired.

That it was not before him
The day he was sore.

That it was not before him
The day he needed it.

That it was not before him
The day he was afraid of it.

That it was not before him
The day he was not even thinking about it.

That it was not before him
At all.

And what did you think, my love.
That you could put it aside as well?
No. No, my love. I'm sorry. Come home to me.
I'm waiting. And the gifts you left me
Are tarnished.

Script (Pg 4 of 5)

Now: A Last Song.

In the morning,

Walking home across the grass,

You are lost in thought.

Your brogues leave dark stains against the silver dew.

There's a red crease on your face,

Where you have slept with your arm against your cheek again.

You are hungry now.

You have a long way to walk.

Come quickly.

Build walls.

Make laws.

Discover alphabets and geometry.

Eat well.

Bury me.

I'm waiting,

Right where you left me.

On a bier

With a bug in my nose.

I'm covered with silver and gold,

And all the breath of my body

Gone out into the wind, and lost.

Script (Pg 5 of 5)

I stand here before you today

I was a young man.

I have eaten clay.

I have swallowed the soil underground.

My lips are ash.

Here in the house of dust,

Here in the house of dust,

I have entered.

And now with my arms like dumb wings

I have sung for you.

I have sung for you.

Goodbye.

Appendix O

The White Ink Lecture is a new work that I produced after completing this PhD research study. It is included here to show how my work has developed as a result of the analysis I have undertaken.



187. *The White Ink Lecture* (2015).

The White Ink Lecture (2015). Performance (duration 30 minutes approx).

O.1 Details

Garment: Fabric design by Ruth Barker. Cut to Vogue pattern. This garment previously appeared in *Of Gilgamesh, And Others* (b. 2012). See Appendix L.

Date: July 2015.

Synopsis: *The White Ink Lecture* addresses the audience as a lesson in the form of a reported séance. It summons a sequence of associative

connections between French feminist philosopher Helene Cixous, tattoos, and Google image search. Layering a complex set of nested descriptions with found YouTube footage of Cixous, and of meditation aids, the performance contemporises an *écriture* feminine form to critique assumptions of a singular corporeal / textual experience.

Related work: none.

O.2 Narrative Account

In May 2013 I was approached by curator Alexander Hetherington, who invited me to make a new work for an event he was programming as part of his ‘Ripples on the Pond’ series. Ripples on the Pond is an exhibition which has at its core works from the Glasgow Museums’ Collection. It takes as the starting point Glasgow Museums’ recent acquisitions from Glasgow Women’s Library’s ‘21 Revolutions’ series, relating these to other works in the collection and sparking questions about gender, themes and media choice in relation to women’s practice and visibility. The exhibition is a conversation between the works in the collection on paper and moving image with invitations to Modern Edinburgh Film School and LUX Scotland to programme artists’ screenings, within and beyond the gallery space.

This particular context drew me to produce a new work, which felt like a step forward from my PhD research study. In many ways it contradicts the ways of working I had articulated in my research, and this felt like a healthy provocation that allowed me to break some self-imposed rules and move on.

The piece was written as prose rather than poetry, and was accompanied by two moving image works. I wore a dress I had had made for a previous performance and, as the work was curated as part of an evening event featuring other screenings and readings, I wore the garment throughout in full view of the audience.

I read the text from a printed script that was presented on a black music stand. As I read, I moved my arms in a series of choreographed dance-like gestures (plate 189), which sometimes referred to words I was speaking and other times were more opaque. To my left was a black laptop stand, on which my laptop looped a silent YouTube video clip of Helene Cixous reading a text and making hand gestures as she speaks. Below the laptop, on the stand, was a second smaller shelf on which a rested a blue mug of tea. To my right was a black microphone stand on which my iPhone played a silent YouTube video clip of a meditation candle burning down, against a black background. I made eye-contact with the audience, who were seated, as I spoke. I was relaxed and animated in my presentation and, when the performance came to an end, I acknowledged applause and re-took my seat in the audience to watch the rest of the evening's presentations.

O.3 Photography by Katie Bruce



188. Positioning the music stand and AV equipment in view of the audience.



189. As I read, I moved my arms in a series of choreographed dance-like gestures



190. I made eye-contact with the audience as I spoke.



191. I was relaxed and animated in my presentation.

O.4 Script

Hi there. Thanks for coming.

[*introductory thanks etc ad lib turns into...*]

[...] about how Helene Cixous wrote in white ink, white milk from the interior of her body. But when I try to find images of her with her t-shirt up, milking her pen, there is something else.

Sitting at the desk in my studio, I have my laptop open. To my left is a dark blue mug of sweet tea. To my right is a book, open on the desk with the spine creased. The title of the book describes open wounds on a body, where the broken skin corresponds to the places at which Jesus Christ was pierced on the cross: the palms of the hands, the wrists, the feet. But the picture on the front cover is a photograph of a woman's foot, intact. The foot steps elegantly into the frame from the right of the image. We cannot see the toes, just the ankle, and the heel. Around the ankle, just above the talus, is a tattoo of small flowers linked by the outline of petals, a dark blue daisy chain wound around the skin of the leg. Immaculate.

I have been reading the book, and drinking the tea. I put the tea down, and with one hand on the keyboard of the laptop I open Firefox, and I Google the words White Ink. The page comes up, but there has been a mistake. This is not what I meant. I was looking for a French writer writing in milk, white milk from the interior of her body. I was trying to find out where these words came from (*white ink*), and who spoke them first, and when. But instead a bar at the top of the page says IMAGES FOR WHITE INK, and there are pictures of tattoos. I have Googled *White Ink*. There are pictures of tattoos. They are photographs.

How to start? [pause]. This is my first séance. I've never done this before.

I want you to close your eyes and imagine skin. It may have wrinkles. It may have hairs. It may be soft. It may be toned. It may cover muscle. It may cover fat. It may cover bone. It may be smooth. It may be from the nape of someone's neck, or the palm of someone's hand, or the back of someone's knee, or the underside of someone's breast, or the small of someone's back, or from their thigh or their buttocks or their genitals or their feet or their face or their belly. Keep picturing it.

My boundaries are porous. Parts of me leak out. But things can also leak in. Smells. Thoughts. People. Books. I have begun to think of myself as a medium. When I write, or speak, I have begun to think of myself as a woman sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. I am a medium. I am sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. On the table is a candle. I look at the skin on my hands. There is a tattoo of a bird on my left hand. It is drawn in white ink, immaculate. Its tail trails into the cleft between my thumb and first finger and its head rests on the knuckle of my little finger. In the centre of the table is a candle. I light the candle with a match that is almost the last in the box. The candle is worn down almost to nothing. The candlestick is brass, and comes from my mother's house. From the outside, it looks as though I have performed this action many times before, but I have not. I watch, at the same time as I am speaking.

I say to you, come in and take a seat, and you do. You sit opposite me. I say Do you have a loved one, whom you would like to contact? And you don't say anything at first. Then you say Yes, I

have an aunt, or a grandmother, or someone. I close my eyes. The first image comes. It is a photograph.

I can see a woman's naked shoulder from the hollow of her throat to the first curve of her armpit. I am looking down on her slightly, and there is a sweet dip above her collarbone. Around her neck there is a thin silver chain and from the chain hangs a silver whistle. It is a charm of some kind. Perhaps it means something. The woman's skin is, pale, and smooth. I think she is quite young, though I cannot see her face. High up on her breast there is a tattoo. It is drawn in white ink. I can see a thin tracery of lines that cover her skin with a drawing the colour of milk. I cannot quite make out the pattern, because the pigment is so close to the skintone. It looks floral, although I can see some kind of scroll. The lines curl and join across the skin. The ink has been injected into the skin's dermis layer, and it sits, not quite inside the body, but not quite part of it. Then the milk flowers fade, and the image recedes from the mind's eye. It is dark.

I read on wikipedia that Helene Cixous squeezed her breasts until white milk trickled down her skin, and that she caught it in teaspoons and used it to fill rechargeable printer ink cartridges. You can buy breast pumps these days. I picture her, dark hair close cropped, and her eyeliner sharp and defined. Does she smile for the camera? Does she have any tattoos? Does she move her hands as she talks?

I am a medium. I am sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. On the table is a candle. As I conduct the séance, the words I speak hang in the air between us.

You sit opposite me. I say Do you have a loved one, whom you would like to contact? And you don't say anything at first. Then you say Yes, I have an aunt, or a grandmother, or someone. I close my eyes.

My language has exited my body through my mouth and through the movements of my hands,
and through the form of my shoulders,
and through the space between my elbows,
and through the wrinkling of my nose,
and through the shapes made by every part of my body, my skin,
as each part exists with proximity and distance to you, the sitter.

Tattoos sit between the inside and the outside of the body. The ink is injected into the dermis. Tattoos inscribe the skin. They make the body a text, or they allow us to see the continuum between body and text. When we write on our body we become a text. Tattoos in white ink become a tracery of milk over a porous surface. Indelible, they change as skin changes. They permeate me, permeate you, permeate us. They trace along the physical edges of our selves, marking. On my ankle, I have a tattoo of small flowers linked by the outline of petals. A dark blue daisy chain is wound around the skin of my leg. It attaches me to the ground.

Keep thinking about skin. Remember that I am conducting a séance. I am a medium. I am sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. On the table is a candle. My voice extends the physical edges of my self and extrudes into the world outside of me. It hangs above the table, kept aloft by the updraft from the candle that sits between us. My words exist in the moment at which this extended line of my self meets the line of

your self, and tangles with it. I ask you a question: Do you have a loved one, whom you would like to contact? When conversation occurs, both lines are changed by the meeting. You say Yes, I have an aunt, or a grandmother, or someone. I am not sure whether this is a conversation. Perhaps I will only know later.

Script:

A: Do you have a loved one, whom you would like to contact?

B: [Silence]

B: Yes, I have an aunt, or a grandmother, or someone.

A: [Silence]

As I speak, my words slip between my lips and brush against your ear. As I watch, you listen, and I fall silent. The skin on my lips is very soft. When I wear lipstick the skin on my lips becomes very dry and so I do not wear lipstick. I have seen a photograph of Helene Cixous wearing bright red lipstick. She looks good. I find her attractive. She has short grey hair and she sits at her desk with a dark blue mug of sweet tea in her left hand. The skin on your ear is delicate. There are tiny hairs there. Inside your ear, the hairs help to trap the sound of my speaking. An image comes to me. I describe it to you.

I can see a woman's wrist, from the joint to midway along the forearm. In the centre of her wrist, there is a tattoo. It is drawn in white ink. The skin is pink and slightly inflamed and the text of a single word is tattooed in white ink, standing out clearly against the rosy, irritated cutis. *Believe* says the arm, in flowing, italicised script. *Believe*. There is no punctuation, but below the letters sprouts an underlining curlicue of emphasis. *Believe*. Believe me. I cannot see a single hair or pore. It is dark.

Today, at the same time as speaking, I am also reading. I am reading my own words. I can also read someone else's. I can say: However, Peggy Phelan's proposition that the ephemerality of performance unavoidably stages loss might place performance in closer proximity to de Man's understanding of autobiography as akin to the production of an epitaph. Performance is a fleeting act that sits precariously between being present and absent, here and gone. Once staged, it can never be recovered, other than in memory. Performance then, might be thought of as a rehearsal for our death. *It is dark.*

When I read, especially when I lose myself in a book, I extend part of myself into the text, but I also keep something back. In this way, reading is like conversation: it is a time when I meet another's thoughts halfway, and may be changed as a result. For this reason, reading and speaking are also acts of small eroticism, as I allow an aspect of another person enter into me. This penetration is almost always a pleasure. Sometimes I extend myself into an idea that originates outside of myself. This allows the idea to penetrate me. I realise that this is paradoxical.

In the eroticism of reading, I think about skin. Skin that covers our thoughts and the moment of our fingertips. Skin that defines us like the edges of a page, or the covers of a book jacket. Books can be bound in human skin. I read that the Boston Atheneum holds the memoir of a highwayman who had his autobiography bound in his own skin, and gifted to a man he had tried to murder. There is a copy of *Juliette et Justine* by the Marquis de Sade that has a woman's nipple on the front cover. Looking over the table at you, I turn my mind back to the conjuring of images.

You sit opposite me. I say Do you have a loved one, whom you would like to contact? And you don't say anything at first. Then you say Yes, I have an aunt, or a grandmother, or someone. I close my eyes.

I roll my head into the trance, waiting for something to emerge. I feel the spirits clamouring about my face like gusts of dank air and mildew. I try to breathe through my nose, not wanting to open my mouth to their egress. Behind my eyes something comes into focus. It is a photograph. I can see a bicep. I cannot tell whether this is a man's arm or a woman's. On the arm is a tattoo. It is drawn in white ink. Again the skin is pinkish and enflamed. Now the vision is becoming clearer and I can see a white ink drawing of an anchor, which has become mottled and diseased. Pinpricks of red and bruise-like green are flecked across the white figure. Though the white lines of the anchor are well made, the tattoo is corrupted and the ink is flawed. This inscription is a scar on the page of an unknown body, ugly as correction fluid. It is dark.

I am a medium. I am sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. On the table is a candle.

The erotic spirit: an anthology of poems of sensuality, love, and longing	Poems selected by Birthday Letters
Night thoughts	Moortown
The tabla book of new verse 2000	Lupercal
The tabla book of new verse 2001	Rain charm for the Duchy
The tabla book of new verse 2004	Erotic epigrams of the greek anthology
Birds through a ceiling of alabaster	Crow
The penguin book of new romantic verse	Recollections
Medieval English verse	Selected Poems
Atoms of delight	A Choice of
Ten Twentieth Century Poets	Public property
Scars Upon My Heart: women's poetry and verse of the first world war	Tell me the truth about love
Into a towering passion	Images
Four metaphysical poets	Between the falling rain
Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry	The wasteland
Flora Poetica	Selected Poems
Lyrical ballads	Poems new and collected 1957-1997
The complete poems	Imaginary conversations and poems
Poems	Selected Poems
Orchard End	The Poems
Holocaust	Poems selected by
Looking in at the deep end	The writing notebooks
These days	New Selected Poems 1966-1987
Selected Poems	Poems 1966-1996
Raising Sparks	The madness of the day
Give me your hand	Dictee
Caspar Hauser	Poetry
	Poetry Today.

I am a medium. I am sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. On the table is a candle.

This time I reach deep into myself for an image for you. You have been sitting patiently, but I sense that I am not bringing you what you have been waiting for. Your questions are still unanswered. You are not convinced that I have made a genuine connection. I stare into the candle flame to gather myself. I close my eyes and breathe deeply. I am feeling, groping deep inside the interior spaces of my body with the blank eye of my unconscious. It is dark. The spirits are denying me their vision. Then of a sudden there is bright illumination and I see clearly for a fraction of a second, in the burst of a flashbulb of the mind. There. Pop. It is a photograph. A young woman's face is turned away. I catch a glimpse of her dark hair brought up in a bun fastened at the base of her skull. I see the bow of her ear, the brush of her jaw. Her throat is exposed, and she has turned it to me as if I might fix my mouth to it. On her neck is a tattoo. It is drawn in white ink. The bluish vein is barely visible beneath the skin and across it is a tattoo of a white bird, wings up, tail raised, head a flick of ink across her skin. The drawing is stylised, something between a finch and a phoenix, with a blunt torso and beak and arching many-feathered wings. It is outlined in white ink. It is large, about the size of the palm of my hand. The image recedes quickly, as softly and suddenly as it came. It is dark.

When it leaves there is a sense of loss. I feel a small amputation. I want to fill the space that the image has left. I want to convince you. I want to show you the shape of the things inside my head that I have summoned. I want to show you that they come from the interior spaces of my body and (uncomfortable), to show to you that I am only a vessel for them to pass through. I am a channel. I am a

medium. Conduit, I am holding these images for you. The candlestick is brass, and comes from my mother's house.

I am a medium. I am sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. On the table is a candle. Beneath the table I have placed cheesecloth and wax on a low shelf, where I can reach them easily. Now, I reach for them, easily. My hands know how to make. They are strong. With my eyes closed, I reach beneath my skin again and feel the shape of the hole left by the fading of the last image.

I think of the shape of it: big as my head.

I think of the weight of it: bag of flour.

I think of the feel of it: hard and dull.

I think of the breath of it: still and seldom.

I think of the hue of it: soil and yellow.

I think of the age of it: ancient and new.

I think of the smell of it: slightly metallic.

I think of the sound of it: spade hitting bone.

I think of the taste of it: inedible now.

I think of the life of it: aeons of stars.

I think of the sap of it: splintered away.

I think of the love of it: face turned up.

I think of the count of it: alone in the world.

I think of the song of it: brittle and low.

I think of the heat of it: cool but not cold.

I think of the thought of it: mourned and missing.

I think of the space of it: lying in the crook of my left arm.

I think of the shape of it: roundish, curled in on itself, with a lip and funnel to an inside that is slippery, smooth, and dark.

I am a medium. I am sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. On the table is a candle. I flex my wide hands, slowly. The inside of me and the outside of me are not always distinct. I say to you, come in and take a seat, and you do. You sit opposite me. I say Do you have a loved one whom you would like to contact? And you don't say anything, at first. Then you say Yes, I have an aunt, or a grandmother, or someone.

I say to you, Wait. You have an aunt, or a grandmother, or someone. Something is coming through. I lean my head to one side. Then my head moves forwards, apparently of its own volition. I wait for a while, very still. Then my head comes back up. When it does my eyes are closed. I am breathing heavily. I cannot think about you any more. Something is beginning to happen. Something begins to come from the corner of my eye. It is white and of an uncertain texture. Greyish and somewhat waxy, it forces itself from my body, widening the aperture between my eye and the socket. Gradually it is undeniable. A pushing of matter seeps into the air in front of the candle. Globular and unconvincing, it floats between me and you. I am a medium. I am sitting at a round table, my hands outstretched in front of me. On the table is a candle.

It is dark. We sit in silence. There is nothing left to say. My eyes are open and I look at you. You look back but I cannot tell what you are thinking. There is a faint air of embarrassment. I rub the tattoo on my left hand. It is drawn in white ink.

You are sitting opposite me, across a round table with a candle in a candlestick burning between us. I have been conducting a séance.

You are sitting at your desk somewhere in Paris with your grey hair short and neat, the outline of your eyes sharp and defined, a dark blue mug of sweet tea in your left hand. Your ink is seeping through your shirt.

You are sitting in a photograph that I once saw, and your lipstick is immaculate.

I am sitting at my desk in the studio. To my left is a dark blue mug of sweet tea. I sit with Firefox open and Google images I do not need. Sixty six million and four thousand results in nought point four four seconds. It is a photograph. It is drawn in white ink. It is not what I meant.

Close your eyes now, and imagine her skin. It may have wrinkles. It may have hairs. It may be soft. It may be toned. It may cover muscle. It may cover fat. It may cover bone. It may be smooth. It may be from the nape of her neck, or the palm of her hand, or the back of her knee, or the underside of her breast, or the small of her back, or her thigh or her buttocks or her genitals or her feet or her face or her belly. It is dark. Keep picturing it. This is where the words are. They are drawn in white ink. Immaculate.

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