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Marcia Farquhar: Divergent auto/biographies and lines of hope

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Beginning

‘You could have been someone’, a friend said, and I answered, ‘Well, so could anyone’, and that little couplet made its way into a very famous song and I very rarely get credit for it. But this is just a segue into the archive and how bloody disappointing it is for some people not having been remembered.

Farquhar (2015a)

Marcia Farquhar has been creating performances since the 1970s. Her twenty-first century catalogue alone comprises more than sixty different works, many shown in or commissioned by significant arts organisations and galleries ranging from the V&A and the Imperial War Museum to the South London Gallery, the National Review of Live Art, Tatton Park Biennale and the Venice Biennale. By any account, Farquhar is an accomplished, prolific and enduring artist. Yet, in her own words, albeit delivered in a self-effacing tone, she admits to constantly asking, ‘Why am I not located in books and put in museums, and collected?’ (Farquhar 2015b). Farquhar might pose the question with a self-mocking wryness, but there’s an authenticity which prompts other questions relevant to this collection: Who gets to tell histories and from what perspectives? What is remembered and what is forgotten? What sources are used in the process of gathering and reconstruction and what – or who – is absented as a result?

Farquhar’s *Vox Box* (from 2015) demonstrates an enduring engagement with processes of live art history-making and a creative attempt to acknowledge and

redress gaps. Drawing on Acme Gallery's archive,¹ *Vox Box* repurposes a Jukebox for a collection of 7" vinyl recordings of interviews Farquhar conducted with friends and colleagues. Each interviewee recalled artists and performers from the 1970s, many of them documented in the Acme archive, even if only as a signature in the gallery's Visitor Book. As Farquhar reflected in a presentation, *Vox Box* provided an opportunity for different voices 'to remember those days in whichever way they want, [to] put themselves back in the archive' (Farquhar, 2015a). *Vox Box* is determinedly addressed to the absent, offering itself as a tool of historical inscription; a material practice which makes possible the resurfacing of the immaterial or overlooked.

Farquhar deployed her jukebox idea again in a Live Art Development Agency DIY project (2015), *Jukeboxing*. The project's summary distils Farquhar's historiographic intentions:

We will embark upon a co-operative reconfiguration of questionable gossip, misheard hearsay, fakeloric legend, and minor myth. Through this re-telling of well-worn tales, we will attempt to unburden ourselves from the stories of the past by submitting them to a process of polyphonic revisionism. Performing an extended and contradictory family history, we will develop new multi-authored narratives from the stuck records of life's stories. ... This series of single edition spoken word 45's will become

¹ Acme was founded in 1972. Realising that many houses in London had been identified as slums and were due to be demolished by Greater London Council, a group of recent graduates registered as a housing association in order to temporarily acquire the derelict houses and shops and repurpose them as artists' live-work spaces. Over its first decade, Acme's enterprise expanded from two disused shops to over 250 properties. In 2013/2014, Whitechapel Gallery mounted an archive display of this first decade. See http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/downloads/PR_ACME_Archive_Exhibition_Final_08.07.pdf

a new non-hierarchical, non-linear and deeply personal audio archive.

(Farquhar, 2015c)²

I find it useful to begin this essay with Farquhar's explicit recognition of histories' partial and multiple ways of mis/tellings. The orientation of *Jukeboxing* speaks to some of the challenges signalled by this collection – what and who is included in the term Live Art? How does the term's aesthetic, historic reach and genealogy serve to marginalize or make invisible? *Jukeboxing's* summary sets off numerous threads which I will follow as I try to know and tell something of Farquhar's work: reconfigurations, hearsay, fakeloric, and minor myths, re-tellings, polyphonic revisionism, contradictory histories, multi-authored narratives, non-hierarchical, non-linear and personal archives woven together into a dynamic surface of some sort. Farquhar's discussions about the historicising of live art acknowledges at the outset my inevitable failure at writing anything resembling a 'comprehensive history' of Farquhar's live art catalogue. Live art is always ephemeral and I was not (always) there. Even if I was (sometimes) there, I am bound to misremember, see things my own way, make my own connections, draw my own conclusions and repeat – wittingly or not – half-truths as well as downright lies. Farquhar's approach to the archive, her jukeboxing, relieves the pressure somewhat by granting permission to fail; which, in the terms of her process and politics, and following in the wake of one her significant influencers (Samuel Beckett) might be to succeed. Either way, I am grateful.

Owning the impossibility of producing a comprehensive account, I hope that I succeed at the very least in stitching Farquhar into the history of live art and revising

² LADA's DIY scheme, which launched in 2002, offers development opportunities run by artists for artists.

that history in some small way as a result. The etymology of 'jukebox' reflects the challenge of presenting Farquhar's work and her place within a 'Live Art History': the word 'jook' or 'joog; is African-American vernacular for 'wicked, disorderly' (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=jukebox>). Farquhar's mapping of her practice on her artist's website offers a 'wickedly disorderly' genealogy.

Performances from 2006 onwards are gathered into a stack of 'boxes', each box titled individually: 'At Home', 'Child's Play', 'Dressing Up', 'Dressing Up Box', 'Expedition', 'Instruction and Information', 'Juke Boxer', 'Leadership', 'Refuse', 'Revisitation', 'Spirit World', 'The Lonely Voice', 'The Tourist', 'The Tour'. Each of these suggests a label under which Farquhar's work can be categorised (Farquhar, 'Work'). However, upon opening the boxes the same performances appear multiple times, in different boxes. They simply will not stay put. These lively performances are intent on dismantling borders and moving between. They demolish taxonomies. The locating or situating of performances made before 2006 uses a different method, with diagrams showing more explicitly the flow between performances and their multiple relations (see Farquhar, 'Alas Poor Humpty'). Perhaps one reason for Farquhar's marginalisation within existing histories of live art is her and her work's dynamic mobility.

Beginning Again

I might like to work backwards to the beginning of the biography because I think it's quite difficult for me to know where to start (Farquhar 2015b).

At the outset, I claim my perspective: I approach Farquhar's work in this essay through the lens and lines of auto/biography. It is July 2015 and I am in London to interview Farquhar. My intention is to put her live art biography into print for the first

time. Having seen several of Farquhar's performances over the years, I should have known better than to ask her to start at the beginning. This is not how Farquhar tells stories. Instead of starting at the beginning – How could such a time be identified? When does one 'become' an artist? – Farquhar takes me out for a walk. This walk unfolds over many miles and hours, intersecting with the routes of performance-walks Farquhar has created over decades (*Walking, Talking, Living Yarn*, 1999; *Beano to Blustens: An Artist's Shopping Spree*, 2005; *Flaxman's Exchange*, 2013). The long paragraph below presents auto/biographical li(n)es extracted from what I mis/heard and is mimetic of the walk we shared. I have resisted the impulse to join up the dots or reorder the lines.

Farquhar's Irish mother ran a boarding house in Chelsea. Her mother was and remains a consummate storyteller ('tell Dee that story...' Marcia requests.) Marcia's childhood brought her into contact with death and mental illness. Learning – books and more books – offered her liberation from what she perceived as the grip of morality, goodness and fear emanating from her home environment. Part of her self-education was directed towards trying to understand madness and depression. She started with Freud and found R.D. Laing's *The Divided Self* on her brother's bookshelf. She attended the Philadelphia Association, where she asked Laing for some tips on dealing with depression. He told her to dress well. At 14 she saw *A Clockwork Orange* and the very next day did not want to go to Church because she wanted to be in the real world, one which included darkness. She digresses, she says. She considers herself a fine artist, working with concepts and scores. She loses her scripts in venues and is sure this is unconsciously related to being in the present. Her mother said that her father 'regretted the past, dreaded the

future, and could not enjoy the present'. She remembers writing a dissertation at art school and putting in an errata and then another, and then she thought that she'd like to write a book, have it published and then go everyday to every bookshop and put the errata in, so actually the errata would swell the book, and then she thought she should just make the book open, like a file, so it never ends, and never begins. She has often said that she trusts art more than science because at least it doesn't say it's true. She has a slight regret that she is not a mathematician. Her father was a trained physicist. She excelled in maths as a child. Her father taught her fractions when she was three. Following her father's death she had a very deep longing to die so she could be with him, because that's what she was told. Not by him, because he was a Marxist. She grew up in a time when there was a Welfare State and she was on the welfare side. She got into RADA, but chose not to go because she knew that though she could create great tragic or comedic effect it would be drawn from a deep interiority and she didn't know how she would put it back in after and shut the door. Sometimes her motivation is self-preservation. She has never taken heroin or anti-depressants. She is keen to bludgeon on through and learn. She is influenced by English surrealism – Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. And Absurdism. And James Joyce. And Samuel Beckett. And Camus. And Punk. She studied at University College London in the 1970s shuttling between departments, including The Slade, and graduated with a degree in English and History of Art (after a Professor's wife invited her to lunch and said she was to settle down, choose her subject and graduate; she had wanted to abandon her studies and move to Spain). She remembers making a big metal face mask that went up to the Edinburgh Fringe and never

came back. Those were the times – not holding onto the things you made. She returned to UCL in the 1990s to complete a Masters and now appears as a visiting artist and guest lecturer. She doesn't like too much divulged about her family. The day after her father died, a friend of the family took her in and said 'Marcia is being wonderful'. (She delivered a great performance of wonderfulness on top of grief.) This was the rock upon which she perished because when she heard her say that, she thought, 'I've got to be wonderful from here on in'. Jollity and eccentricity are covers for other emotions. A lot of the people she is drawn to might be called 'cracked' but through that comes wisdom and insight. Genet's Saints and Lou Reed are more influential to her as auto/biographers than Spalding Gray. Their work is more tangential, less diaristic or close to the 'truth', but nevertheless ghosted by reality. She loves storytellers. Her nickname at The Slade was Joan, after Joan of Arc (and her coat of armour). Playing with language was very much part of her family of origin. She is always going on archaeological digs in her mind. She spent ten years in therapy, from her late 20s to late 30s. She considers herself an amateur psychologist, in fact an amateur at lots of things, motivated both by love of them and by necessity.

I have written elsewhere about the relationship of auto/biography to performance, and how it is that performance's engagement with auto/biographical material gestures towards hope, looking forwards rather than backwards (Heddon 2008: 13). Farquhar's approach to auto/biographical production, evidenced in our walk together, is sideways, tangential, and oblique rather than straight-ahead. The future persists, but its co-ordinates are not yet plotted; radically, that 'not yet plotted' applies to the moment of auto/biographical performance as much as it does to the

life being lived. In Farquhar's live art the auto/biographical presentation is live too. Connections through time and space are made in the here and now.

Auto/biographical lines

Many of Farquhar's works are offered explicitly as auto/biographical. *Acts of Clothing*, first performed in 1999 at the South London Gallery, shares tales from across Farquhar's life, each one prompted by and attached to a piece of clothing. Farquhar performs *Acts of Clothing* every seven years. Over the course of the performance, she slips out of and into garment after garment, some from other decades, some made for the occasion, including her flamenco tartan dress that pays homage to a supposed Scottish/Spanish heritage (her name – Marcia Farquhar – is a synecdoche of that heritage). Her bespoke dress is fitting attire for her improvised rendition of a Scottish Highland Flamenco Dance, unpolished and amateur in delivery but joyful in its unfettered, foot-stamping passion. Each outfit worn by Farquhar is set in its context – why she chose it, where she wore it, who else was there, what happened. After its turn, the outfit is dropped at her feet on the catwalk, a personalised form of action painting with the clothes' colours like paint pigment. The tales, often meandering, are hilarious, insightful, poignant, and painful, not just between or across, but within. Throughout her performance, Farquhar addresses the audience that is present, weaving their presence into her performance too through observations, responses, and direct address.

Afternoon: Content May Vary (2000), programmed by Deptford X, blurs explicitly the auto and the bio (Farquhar, 'Afternoons'). For this piece, Farquhar video recorded the afternoons of six female protagonists: the schoolgirl, the mother, the teacher, the patient, the artist and the shop assistant. The recordings offered a view

into the real, everyday lives of each woman. Each afternoon, over six days, installed in a high-rise estate flat, Farquhar wore the clothes of her protagonists and performed as they had performed in the recordings. The piece functioned as a 'femme' (a brilliant Farquhar neologism) to the everyday lives of women and to the different, multiple lives – or selves – that women perform; indeed, that Farquhar herself has performed. She has been these women.

The Londoners (2005) experimented further with the auto/biographical form (Farquhar, 'Londoners'). A multi-cast show, the title references directly Joyce's *The Dubliners*. The piece was shown in six episodes, over six days, at Artsadmin's Toynbee Studios. The publicity material makes explicit the multiple universes brought into play: events from Farquhar's family history (including sixty years of boarding-house life), TV soap operas, and contributions from the performers – a rotating group of artists which included Gary Stevens, Jem Finer (her husband), Ella and Kitty Finer (her daughters), Franko B, Peggy Atherton, Ansuman Biswas, J. Maizlish Jack Brennan and his mother Sophie Richmond (who had been Malcolm McLaren's PA). Some of the performers had personal knowledge of the events Farquhar had 'fictionalized', whilst others had none (ibid.).

Where *The Londoners* extended the auto/biographical form by bringing in other performers and showing the piece over a number of days, *The Omnibus* (2010) explored a single, long-durational experience. Programmed for the National Review of Live Art's thirtieth anniversary in Glasgow, *The Omnibus* was thirty hours in length and conceived as an 'open-plan seminar ... personal, political and punkish by nature' (Farquhar, 'Omnibus'). Drawing on thirty years of personal history, Farquhar mixed up confessions, ruminations, reminiscences, commentaries, demonstrations, readings, record-playings and dressing-ups and -downs, demonstrating that the

personal is always historical too. Spectators could come and go throughout, with arrivals and departures often noted and addressed by Farquhar as she weaved them into her narrative. As the performance progressed – though ‘progress, with its teleological overtones, is not quite the right word here – Farquhar would return to previous scenes and stories, criss-crossing not only her own life and the lives of those she shared (friends, family, acquaintances), as one storyline interrupted another, but criss-crossing across her live performance too, returning to a previous thread, running with it again, before letting it drop as another tangent is taken, and so on. As she reconnects with an earlier thread, she reminds the spectator of its presence, of her and our having been here before. Her performance is a remarkable feat of memory. Numerous histories are mobilised – personal, social and cultural history, as well and alongside the history of the live performance being made in front of the spectator. The long-durational form both prompted and held Farquhar’s meandering style, with forgettings and repetitions inevitable. By the end of the performance, the multiple, diverse stories seemed to have made an almost tangible surface of anecdotal history, the history of the past thirty years alongside the history of the past thirty hours. Lines were enmeshed and knotted; some were thicker than others as they were returned to and retold or extended; other lines continued as if they might go on to infinity. Farquhar’s *Omnibus* reminds us that no life story can ever be finished or told completely or from one perspective.

These short summaries propose Farquhar’s approach to auto/biographical telling as radically non-teleological. Her yarns are spun through multiple divergences, deviations, digressions and tangents. A storyline is set off, often in the middle of its trajectory, only to become in turn another tangential line, which in turn diverts again. These multiple tangents and diversions nevertheless remain connected to each

other in ways that are complex and criss-crossing. Farquhar's model is one we might call a *rhizomatic auto/biography*. In coining this phrase, I borrow from Deleuze and Guattari, who differentiate the rhizomatic structure from the genealogical, arborescent model. Where the latter produces roots and branches, determined points and positions, the rhizome is an assemblage of ceaselessly established connections and multiplicities (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 8-17).³ The rhizome has the capacity of exploding into 'a line of flight' (ibid., 10). In a rhizomatic structure – or a rhizomatic process – any point can be connected to any other, in distinction to points which are plotted and fix an order (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 7). In fact, there are no points as such, there are only lines – ruptured, lengthened, prolonged, relayed and varied which produce 'lines of *n* dimensions and broken directions' (ibid., 9; 12). Rather than moving from a beginning or a foundation, the rhizome proceeds from the middle (ibid., 28). With its conjunction of 'and... and... and', it uproots the verb 'to be'. As the authors warn us, the questions 'Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for?' are totally useless (ibid., 27). Witnessing Farquhar's performances, we usually -- and delightfully -- have no idea where she or we are going or coming from or heading.

Farquhar's rhizomatic performance is supported by the assemblage of personal, historical, mythical and fantastical; alignments and juxtapositions which confound certainty. As she writes; 'The line between truth and fiction is always unclear, and, for me, that uncertainty is key' (Farquhar 2009: 29). Her commitment to

³ Deleuze and Guattari are not intent on establishing a binary between the rhizomatic and the arborescent. The 'tree' can be seen as rhizomatic too, its roots forming a rhizome with other things outside (2004, 12). As they write, the rhizome is immanent to all roots, and the root is immanent to the rhizome: "The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel" (2004, 22).

navigating a fine line between fact and fiction is explicit. Publicity materials repeatedly reference the tactic of undecidability: 'Farquhar probes the nature of biography and autobiography and grapples with storytelling as a strategy that is forever renegotiating its relationship with truth' (Farquhar, 'Omnibus'); 'other aspects borrow from personal narratives, blending the biographical and autobiographical, while calling into question her authenticity' (Farquhar, 'Grand Union'). This intermixing is part of her dramaturgy's *mobility*. Farquhar creates a texture from her text, but it is shifting, dynamic, unpredictable, disorientating and exhilarating in equal measure. The effect of the work recalls Brian Massumi's comment in his introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:

The question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body? (Massumi 2004: xv-xvi)

While many of Farquhar's performances appear at first sight to be monological – Farquhar is alone on the stage – that alone-ness is undone rapidly as the space fills with memories and stories of and from other people, alive and dead, real and fictitious, known intimately or vicariously. *The Londoners'* multiple cast makes that not-aloneness or inter-connectedness explicit. However, even when Farquhar is physically alone on stage, it is not the – or her – single voice that is emphasized. It is, rather,

the individual as a product of social relations, a sense of selfhood grounded in both the absolute uniqueness of one's location in space and time and in the recognition that one is not a fixed and unchanging monad or inviolable 'truth',

but is an entity always caught up in process and exchange with others (Suchin 2009: 17-18).

Farquhar's performances are busy with people, each person multiple but singularized in their uniqueness, and each offering other lines of flight out of and towards thinking the different and unexpected, undoing the self along the way.

The Doubled Self in an Eccentric Macrocosmos

The dynamic multiplicity of Farquhar's auto/biographical approach shares resonance with the opening lines of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*: 'The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd' (2004: 3). However, given the threading of R.D. Laing through Farquhar's autobiography, it is worth pondering her complex model of multiplicity in relation to his ideas. Indeed, Farquhar cited Laing directly in *Mind Your Heads* (2013), using a recorded reading of his writing (Farquhar, 'Mind Your Heads'). *Mind Your Heads* presented three 'characters', each held in its own large bin – a reference to Samuel Beckett – and each presenting a different position on an argument. As Farquhar explains, this was a three-way dispute 'between *herselves*', offering a literal representation of Laing's 'divided self'. After this dispute, Asuman Biswas and Jem Finer joined Farquhar, each taking a bin and making the differences of opinion more tangible. The bins, 'as well as hosting the divided self', were 'nomadically' moved 'pulpits ... from which three ideologically opposed speakers could move further and closer to each other in space, time and paradoxical speech' (ibid.). The multiplicity of 'self', then, refers not only to the relational self but also to the possibility of selves holding shifting and even contradictory positions. Farquhar is no

autodidact; her work resists simplistic or dogmatic polarities. Ideological positions and beliefs are offered as sites of openness and contestation.

Farquhar's repeated references here to the 'divided self' offer obvious homage to Laing's book of that name. Notably, Laing and Guattari were linked to each other through their shared interest in radical psychiatry. Massumi notes Guattari's 'uneasy alliance with the international antipsychiatry movement spearheaded by R.D. Laing in England and Franco Basaglia in Italy' (2004: x). Guattari was uneasy with Laing's 'communitarian solution' which he viewed critically as an 'extended Oedipal family' (2004: 568).

Laing's *The Divided Self* (1959) offers an existential, phenomenological account of the schizophrenic subject. In part a heart-felt political treatise on the categorisations of sanity and insanity – the statesmen in control of nuclear weapons are more estranged from reality than many of those diagnosed and labelled as psychotic, and are also more dangerous (Laing 1990: 12) – *The Divided Self* also offers an analysis of schizophrenia. Given Farquhar's enduring interest in Laing, his analysis provides an interesting context and lens through which to approach her dialogical and multiply inhabited performances.

Laing describes the schizophrenic person as unable 'to experience himself "together with" others "at home in" the world' and instead 'experiences himself in despairing aloneness and isolation' (1990: 19). Alternatively, the schizophrenic feels utterly merged with the other, the outcome of which is an absence of sense of self because one is separate only through relatedness. The sense of complete merging leads to a desire for complete isolation, in the hope of detachment but also, relatedly, as symptomatic of a need to be in control and to sustain a transcendent self, thereby mitigating the contingency of life and living (ibid., 83). The polarity, then, as identified

by Laing, 'is between complete isolation or complete merging of identity rather than between separateness and relatedness' (ibid., 53). Either way, the schizophrenic ends up isolated. For Laing, such isolation produces an impoverished life: 'the self by its detachment is precluded from a full experience of realness and aliveness' (ibid., 83). Though the isolated self develops an internal microcosmos, an intra-individual world (ibid., 74), this is no substitute for the shared world which, by contrast, allows for a mutually enriching, '*creative relationship* with the other' (ibid., 83).

Viewed from the perspective offered by Laing, Farquhar's staged cosmos registers as an interpersonal or even eccentric macrocosmos, the 'self' multiply connected rather than divided. This connected self is a self of immanence rather than transcendence and as such is precarious but also enriched. The richness of Farquhar's performances and stories is a result of connectivity. Looking at the map of *The Londoners* reproduced on Farquhar's website (Farquhar, 'Londoners'), she seems firmly in favour of Laing's extended family. What looks initially to be a typical genealogical 'family tree', with Landlady Priss and Landlord Hoffnung at the top, is revealed as a mapping of storylines rather than bloodlines (rhizomatic rather than arborescent then). Each subject is a multiple connector. And in the live moment in front of us, Farquhar is the dynamo; detecting, connecting and rerouting energies

Farquhar admits fascination with the potential of the performer to be an energy-conductor and energy-shifter (Farquhar 2015b). Reflecting on the play of energies, she draws inferences to both chemistry and physics (ibid.), seeming to work at the molecular level of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as 'material forces' (2004: 377). As Laura Cull explains, 'molecular perception perceives the world immanently' (2012: 36). Notably, one of the characters in *The Londoners* references precisely life's immanent creativity:

If you wait long enough it will fix itself. How? Well, it's just a random ordering of particles, and particles, if you wait long enough, will go into any number of forms. It's just the way the universe works (Farquhar, 'Londoners').

Lively Lines and Yielding Surprises

Farquhar supports her orientation to the immanent through a commitment to the paradox of rigorous contingency, a strategic mixing of plot and line. Versed in the terms of conceptual art, she produces what she refers to as 'the score' or 'the fluxus card', 'copious notes and scores and scripts' which, in the moment of live performance, she departs from (Farquhar 2015b). As an undergraduate student at Slade, Farquhar's sculptor tutor observed that, problematically, she tended to 'hold onto the material' (ibid.). As Farquhar explains, while the planning stage of sculptural practice, in terms of concept and material, must be clear and defined, there comes 'a certain point, which is exciting for an artist ... when the material rebels in some way, does something surprising, yields a surprise'. Farquhar reflects that on reaching that point she 'was frightened. I would always hold on' (ibid.). Working with the material of live performance – time, space, spectators – Farquhar has succeeded in developing an approach that is sculptural. Before the performance, she has a rigorously conceived concept; in the event of the performance, she releases the material and then follows it, alert to its liveness. The work does not pre-exist its enactment but occurs in the very process and moment of its making. Farquhar's departure – or what she refers to as 'drift' – from her script is a responsiveness to the live moment, an attentiveness to 'the chemistry' of that moment (ibid.). We might consider this performance's immanent potential, the 'mobile, material energy of the world' or 'matter-energy' (Laura Cull 2012: 27). Responding to matter-energy, Farquhar

‘opens herself to being’, taking some ideas but then ‘seeing where they go in a conversation’ (Farquhar 2015b). I am reminded of Deleuze and Guattari’s proposition that the force of immanence sweeps the artist along so that ‘one launches forth, hazards an improvisation’ (2004: 343; see also Ingold 2010).

Farquhar edits each performance in the moment of its occurrence, every performance a result of who is there and how it feels. This is to approach performance as ‘event’, a ‘realm of matter and energy, bodies and forces’ (Bayly 2011: 44). Though the material produced by live art is mostly intangible, the lines that Farquhar *goes along* are, to borrow from Massumi’s presenting of the rhizome, ‘a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connected routes could exist’ (Massumi 2004: xiv).⁴ This almost-tangible dynamic fabric is a social plastic (Maizlish 2009: 14). That is, the dynamism of social relations are the lines that Farquhar works with. Nevertheless, she relies on the script, because without it ‘there’s no such thing as spontaneity’ (Farquhar 2015b). The script is the line’s possibility, the architecture for its immanent performance.

The ‘social plastic’ of Farquhar’s work is perhaps most evident in those performances dependent on spectators’ participation. In *The Pool of Fun and Games* (2004, Camberwell Leisure Centre), for example, Farquhar invited spectators to wear nighties, climb into the swimming pool, and float as if dead whilst she threw gladioli into the water, creating an ‘Ophelia effect’. When the music changed, she invited participants to perform other choreographic moves, including shooting each other. Theatre critic Leo Benedictus captured the improvisational energy in his review:

⁴ In some of Farquhar’s performances, residual sculptures remain, for example, molten lead, baked cakes, vaginal imprints, a massively oversized hobby-horse, a furball of old coats and toy carcasses stitched together.

It's marvellous fun. In a spontaneous moment (suggested by [his partner] Sarah during the Love sequence), I pick her up and carry her, drooping-heroine-style ('like Juliet'), around the pool (Benedictus, 2004).

In *The Doctors and Dreamers Game* (2005, South London Gallery), presented in August – apparently the month when analysts take their holiday – Farquhar offered dream analysis for those left behind. Participants were invited to bring a dream with them, or to have one in the gallery (encouraged by the provision of beanbags). Farquhar offered analysands a deck chair, with other spectators invited to sit and observe the session (Farquhar, 'Doctors'). *The Interpretation of Everyday Life* (2007) focused again on psychoanalytical procedure, though this time in a lecture theatre where Farquhar listened 'to the everyday anxieties, pleasures, proclivities and desires of volunteers', providing a 'prognosis and prescription for the appropriate dream (or dream series) to assist in the sublimation of that individual's conscious concerns and/or wishes' (Farquhar, 'Interpretations').

Evident in these works is an enduring interest in the psyche. Resisting polarities, Farquhar has demonstrated an equal fascination with the psychic and the supernatural. Many of her performances draw on practices of divination or supposed conversations with the dead. *You will find love in a public place* (2004), for example, projected the shapes of molten lead onto a wall to divine the future (Farquhar dressed in a black dress and shawl for the occasion), while *Fortune Cookie* (2005) predicted the future from projected images of eggs, cake mix and dough.

These 'psyche' and 'psychic' works are necessarily improvised, responding to the agency of people and materials in the space. Thinking rapidly in, for and to the present moment perhaps circumvents momentarily some of the repressive mechanisms of the conscious mind, prompting something more like a stream-of-

consciousness, or stream-of-the-subconscious. Former tutor Stuart Brisley refers to Farquhar as a 'narrator breaking out of the raconteur's mode', with 'child's play' allowing the 'deep rumblings of the psyche (to) erupt every now and again' (2009: 9). This eruption of the psyche – a surrealist methodology – offers one way to interrupt everyday repression, resingularizing subjectivity and displacing what Guattari refers to as its 'mass-media manufacture, which is synonymous with distress and despair' (2008: 23).

Where R. D. Laing focused his analysis on the subject experiencing schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari use the term schizoanalysis to figure the unconscious as rhizomatic (2004: 18). The political ambition of schizoanalysis is to resist reducing the unconscious through interpretation. Instead, 'the issue is to *produce the unconscious*, and with it new statements, different desires' (2004: 18-19). Representational thinking is exchanged for *nomadic thought*, which offers a 'conductivity that knows no bounds'. The nomadic thought is a vector: 'the point of application of a force moving through a space at a given velocity in a given direction' (Massumi 2004: xiii). I propose that Farquhar's performance modality is that of the vector. Contributors to Farquhar's book, *12 Shooters*, make reference to her 'quirky sidetracks' and deviations, 'highways and byways', 'twists and turns', 'slippages' (Suchin 2008: 18) and 'diverted trains of thought' (Maude-Roxby 2009: 189). Notably, these descriptions of her practice *place* the work, as if her performances have a given or presumed geography or map from which she deviates, defying expectations and habits, including perhaps the expectations of auto/biographical storytelling.

Literal Drifts

The contingent nature of Farquhar's work is perhaps most apparent in her guided tours, where the 'real world' – with its encounters, accidents and mistakes – takes a visible role in and reroutes the score or script. As with all her performances, Farquhar's tours, also auto/biographical in content, respond to the specificities encountered. They are never repetitions. In this sense, we might recognise her work not as reproduction, iteration or reiteration, but rather 'itineration' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 410), or perhaps 'situation'.

Space permits only fleeting reference to Farquhar's extensive walking performances; placing Farquhar firmly into live art's history, I want too to signal her place in the history of walking aesthetics.⁵ Farquhar has been making by walking for decades. *Walking, talking, living yarn* (1999), commissioned by the British Library, invited spectators on a tour of the Kings Cross area, sharing stories from former residents who had lived there before its regeneration and gentrification, and who by 1999 were part of the British Library's audio recordings collection. (Residents included Jem Finer, Rose English and Suzanne Moore.) Though never herself a resident of the area (she was an insider-outsider), Farquhar had been closely associated with many of the individuals who lived there in the 1970s. *Beano to Blustens: An Artist's Shopping Spree* (2005), constructed as an anti-shopping trip, took participant-spectators from Berkeley Square to Farquhar's local hosiery shop, Blustens. Less a walking performance than a touring one, as spectators were bussed to Blustens, Marcia sold 'Marciapièces' on the journey (Farquhar, 'Beano'). *The Dangerous to Know Society* (2008), commissioned by Nottingham Contemporary, offered a tour of the house and grounds of Newstead Abbey, the ancestral home of Byron. In this, Farquhar shared

⁵ Farquhar is even more absent from the rapidly emerging history of and discourses about walking aesthetics than she is from live art.

'testimonials and confessionals from all the Byrons in her own life, and the women who loved them', alongside histories of the Abbey (Farquhar, 'Dangerous'). In February of 2010, Farquhar led a guided procession to the seaside shelter in Margate where TS Eliot had been inspired to write. The location offered a context for an exploration of the 'physical, historical and social terrain between Dreamland and Wasteland' (Farquhar, 'Margate'). As the publicity stated, Farquhar led 'bemused locals through landscapes with which they'd previously thought themselves familiar'. It also noted that 'Farquhar herself spent the early years of her life just across the Estuary in the seaside town of Felixstowe, over which sweep the same Russian Winter winds' (ibid.). A more recent work, *Flaxman Exchange* (2013), University College London's inaugural arts commission for the museum, offered a 'misled' tour of the newly refurbished Flaxman Gallery. This not only drew attention to prominent – but little discussed – sculptures and their makers (invisible art and artists), but also unnoticed interventions (loo rolls hidden behind a bust presumably by the cleaners) (Farquhar, 'Flaxman').

Farquhar credits as influences in her work both Punk and the Situationist International (SI) (Farquhar 2015b). It is worth noting the entanglements between these two movements. To take just one example, Malcolm McLaren's final project for his degree at Goldsmith's College was a psychogeographical film of Oxford Street (though this film, like his degree, remained unfinished). McLaren wrote some notes about his intentions in 1970:

30 September: To use a kid's eyelevel to describe ordinary situations and to get the utmost out of these situations. Showing the structure of Oxford Street thru the eyes of a child and the effect it has on him and his elders. ... Cut into

this an older person's viewpoint... Showing how an adult is still a child still no control. (McLaren, 1970, in Savage, 2010: 13)

By the mid-1970s, McLaren and Vivienne Westwood had launched a new line of clothing, 'Couturiers Situationnistes' (Savage 2010: 210), with one of the slogans on a shirt sold in McLaren's and Westwood's shop being a direct appropriation of an SI slogan: 'Demand the Impossible' (Savage 2010: 239). Intersecting with Farquhar's commitment to liveness and aliveness was punk's response to boredom: get up and 'Do It Yourself'. Farquhar's proclivity for amateurism is indebted to this DIY-aesthetic – 'punk allowed you to try anything, but not as an excuse for failure' (Farquhar 2015b). The enemy of psychogeography was boredom too; as the slogan proclaimed: 'Boredom is Counter-Revolutionary'. Psychogeography – like Farquhar's performances – by contrast was 'turned towards desire, towards excitement, towards life' (Pile 2005: 13).

Psychogeographical practices are visible in Farquhar's guided-tours. Psychogeography was intended as a radical intervention in the alienating and deadening experience of urban spatial experience and sought to create new knowledge of the city at the same time as it revealed current but unrecognised habits and atmospheres. One technique for creating new encounters was the *dérive* or drift, described by SI founder Guy Debord as 'a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances' involving 'playful-constructive behaviour ..., which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll' (Debord [1958] 2006: 52). Steve Pile underlines that 'chance and coincidence are significant' for psychogeographers because they 'allow for unplanned discoveries to be made' (2005: 11). Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift meanwhile refer to such unplanned discoveries as the immanent forces resident in the everyday (2002: 9), adding that the 'lived

complexity' of the city 'requires alternative narratives and maps based on wandering' (ibid., 12).

Though Farquhar had routes planned for her tours, the eruption of the 'everyday' ensured the drift from her scripts. She recollects that on one of her *Walking, talking, living yarn* tours (the term 'living yarn' is suggestive of dynamic, mobile threads or lines) she coincidentally bumped into one of the 'characters' she was telling stories of/from. Unaware that a performance was taking place, he asked her for fifteen pounds for a billiard cue. Everyone on the tour presumed he was a plant (Farquhar 2015b). The tour ended at Argyle Square Gardens, which Farquhar revealed had been a plague pit and then the site of a failed fair. More recently, the park was a place for drug consumption and sex, with cheap hotels used by prostitutes surrounding it. One of Farquhar's 'fixed' lines spoken here was 'some places are just resistant to fun', a reference to the repeated, layered 'failures' of the space and to the still-tangible atmosphere of desperation.

While psychogeographic practices are evident in Farquhar's work, the word 'drift' applies to her 'drifting' from the lines of her guiding script, rather than literally drifting through geographical space (though that script-drift *does* serve to remap spatial meaning). In this respect, I propose a similarity between what happens in the studio or performance space, and what happens on the guided walks. Similarly, if psychogeography is a practice that seeks to be alert and responsive to ambience in urban space, then Farquhar's alertness and responsiveness to the shifting ambience of her performance space – wherever this is – might suggest a practice that could usefully be called *psychoperformance*. My use of this word here intends to signal a relocation of the ambient 'drift' of psychogeography – a practice which demands attention and response to surroundings – to the performance space. In this context,

the drift is conceived as a dramaturgical deployment, but one no less responsive to and affected by the shifting moods of the environment and which in turn effect that place.

Farquhar's act of drifting from her script seems generatively coincident with anthropologist Tim Ingold's notion of creativity as a practice of wayfaring. Within Ingold's set of references, Farquhar's script could be considered the pre-composed plot providing her with set lines, while the material conditions of live performance allow her to perform as a storyteller and take her line for a walk (Ingold 2011; 2007). Drawing on the writing of Paul Klee, Ingold proposes that the line which goes out for a walk is one that 'develops freely, and in its own time' (Ingold 2007, 73). This line 'takes us on a journey that has no obvious beginning or end' (ibid.), in contrast to the line which 'is in a hurry', getting from one predetermined and fixed point to another, following a set sequence as if completing 'a series of appointments rather than a walk' (ibid.). For Klee, as indeed for Ingold, the line that simply connects dots is static, 'linking a series of points arrayed in two-dimensional space'. In contrast, the line that goes for a walk unfolds *along*, creating a trail through three-dimensional space. Envisioning the walking line as attached to – or making – three-dimensional space offers a graspable and accurate image of Farquhar's ephemeral practice. Ingold claims this way of walking a line as wayfaring:

The path of the wayfarer wends hither and thither... While on the trail the wayfarer is always somewhere, yet every 'somewhere' is on the way to somewhere else. The inhabited world is a reticulate meshwork of such trails, which is continually being woven as life goes on along them (Ingold 2007: 81).

Farquhar not only creates rhizomatic auto/biographies; she is a *wayfaring auto/biographer*. Her auto/biographical performance – like life – is a line of becoming or, more accurately, creates multiple lines that become. Deleuze and Guattari's reference to '*hazarding* an improvisation', noted earlier, is also a precise and useful description of Farquhar process (2004: 343, emphasis added). Improvisation, letting go of the script in the moment of live performance, is undoubtedly hazardous. Farquhar summons and is summoned by the hazardous. The very condition of live art is its liveness, and this liveness, as liveness – in the moment, here and now – must be precarious. The precarious and live/ly are synonymous. Brisley captures something of the precarity of Farquhar's style when he writes:

At times, in the moment of the high rush, when a new thought/feeling intuitively strikes, she is transported – sometimes gracefully, at others akimbo – into new formulations of social connections (2009: 9).

In these moments of the 'high rush' the lines of narrative fly along unplanned tangents, or vectors suddenly bifurcate the story, sending it in oblique and tenuous directions, away from the known and safe. Farquhar goes along as she goes along, her unfolding stories alert to chance. Samuel Beckett, another of Farquhar's influences, is similarly alert to the precarity of life's aliveness, its immanent indeterminacy:

The confusion is not my invention... It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in... To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now (Beckett, 1979: 218-19).⁶

⁶ Indeed, Samuel Beckett is thanked and credited on one of Farquhar's webpages from 2004. See <http://archive.marciafarquhar.com/credits/credits-a.html>

Farquhar's tangential performance practice offers one response to this lively chaos, not an accommodation seeking to control, repress or revise, but rather to acknowledge and perhaps to harness:

The story *is* precarious. If we talk about post-traumatic, how do we talk about trauma on-going? Our precarious state as citizens of the world? (Farquhar 2015b)

Performing her vulnerability in the moment of working with precarity, Farquhar does not just represent the unpredictability of everyday experience, she enacts it. As much as precarity *is* the ontological condition of live art, it also *is* life. In sharing her divergent auto/biographies, created as she drifts along multiple pathways engendered through her performances, accompanied by the living and dead, the more and less real, Farquhar's wayfaring auto/biographer offers a salutary reminder that life is not and cannot be a line to be plotted. The precarious, in its uncertain state, is not entirely hopeless.⁷ Making the connection between life and precarity, Farquhar notes sardonically 'death is the least precarious, I imagine, because it's certain' (Farquhar 2015b).

⁷ I am aware that precarity has different meanings. Prompted by Farquhar's practice, I am choosing here to focus on precarity as being at least a state of openness to different outcomes (positive as well as negative). This is not to deny that precarity is differentially distributed – some people are subjected to precarious conditions and effects more than others.

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