

## **Chronographies: Performance, Death and the Writing of Time**

Harradine, David John

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# Chronographies

*Performance, Death and the Writing of Time*

David John Harradine

Queen Mary, University of London

Thesis submitted for examination for the degree of PhD

## Abstract

This thesis explores the interconnecting themes of time, death and the subjective in relation to performance, the performative and the critical act of writing. It is structured as a heterogenous series of case studies of a range of performed and performative events, each offering a focus for an investigation of how the key terms of time and death operate in and around that event, and of how those terms lead to other areas of investigation. It deploys analytical and conceptual frameworks from, amongst others, the disciplines of psychoanalysis, queer theory, cultural studies, the visual arts, literary theory and performance studies to develop a series of interdisciplinary readings of subjects including the performative construction of subjectivity, the temporality of photography, the temporal and spatial aspects of domestic architecture in relation to performance and installation, and the epistolary exchange as performance event.

The thesis also addresses the problematics of how to engage in the process of critical writing in response to the ephemerality of performance, and theorises “performative writing” in relation to the broader themes of time and death. A range of textual forms are deployed in the text, including fictional autobiography, love letters, instructions for scientific experiments, prose poems and fragmented essays in multiple voices. By repeatedly reinventing the form through which the writing is presented, the thesis also implicitly explores the limits of textuality in the context of the creation and presentation of the doctoral thesis itself.

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London  
12<sup>th</sup> December 2002

Dear You

I had a dream again last night. It is a dream I have often. I dream I am a writer. I dream I am a condemned writer, although I can't remember which of my many misdemeanours I am being condemned for. It seems I have transgressed too many boundaries, one too many, one step too far. I remember it is winter, and it is raining - not the chill romance of ice and snow, but the humiliating cold reality of wind-blown rain. And I remember that in my dream, I have already been executed a number of times before, that this is not the first of many deaths accorded me, but I remember thinking that this time is different, that this time is for real, and that this time is the last time. And I am standing freezing wet in front of a high brick wall, and a firing squad aims up at me. And pull back the triggers. And fire. And in that precise instant, that electric 'now' that almost, almost, almost becomes a 'then', as the bullets fly towards me, a voice speaks. Speaks out, to me. And the voice says that I am granted another year to live, to write, to finish the work I had begun many years before. And in my dream, then, time begins to blur, like oil on water, like a riverbank falling away during a flood, and I begin to write. I began to write. I am going to begin to write. I write all day that first day, as the sun moves hidden across the sky and the rain falls harder, and fall into sleep exhausted. The following morning, when I wake, I discover that the pages that had been scratched and blotted with ink only hours before had faded back to pure clean white, to empty anticipating blankness. And again, I begin to write. And the next morning, there is nothing there where before my words had run across the page. And every night I fall away from a mass of words and every morning I awake to empty anticipating whiteness. And as I write, and I write for weeks, then months, then finally all but all that year, a single drop of rain runs quickly down my frozen cheek, the last mouthful of smoke from a last cigarette disappears into the cold, wet air. And finally, in my dream, defeated by the words themselves, I put down my pencil, and close my notebook, and look up out of my window, at a line of men, rifles, and the cold hard sheets of rain. That had begun to turn into snow. And just then, as I look, the volley of rifle fire, released only a fraction of a second before, and yet a whole year before, forever before, in a moment lost

to me, now doubly lost through my waking from that dream, cuts through my chest and strikes me in the silence at the heart.

And if I asked you now – or perhaps later, quietly, in the stillness of the night - would you help me work out what this dream might mean?<sup>1</sup>

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'D' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'd'.

**Introduction, or, Start Time:  
The Terrain of the Writing**

## Written with Time: Writing, Performance and Repetition

13<sup>th</sup> May 2000, 5:35pm

*I have spent considerable time now pondering how to begin, so I begin with a date, and a time. My own temporal existence slips into the text, the movement of my body across the keys of my computer judders onto the screen; the time I give to this work is sliced away from my life as I read. And write. And watch, and watch myself shifting through time as I sit here, the blank screen of my computer looking back at me, waiting. I have spent considerable time now pondering how to begin again; shall I leap into a thematic exposition, quickly segue into development, step back and contextualise contextualise contextualise (tyrannical mantra that gathers time around it like a shroud)? Should I begin with a foray into performative writing, a preview, prologue, opening, followed by resolution, run through into explanation and paranoid defence? How can I mark myself, my time, the queerness of my working, the imminence of my death (even another seventy years – my plan – seems imminent to me) – the very themes that confound me here at the start – here in my text? I cannot begin to fathom, so I begin with a date, and a time, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2000, 5:35pm. And as I sit here writing across time and space, marking my existence in a million tiny dots of fading ink, this time slips away from me. And as it trickles away I come across another date. 30<sup>th</sup> March 2000, 7:17pm, and feel myself sliding into a vertiginous well, a whirlpool that leaves me balanced on the edge of a drop down into my own past, a past that was written toward my own future (how will this sound to me in three, five, seven years' time, as I read and re-read this text?). As I write here towards a different future (it is you I am writing for, reader, though I don't know who you are, where you are, when you are), I stumble across my own past, trip over and hang hung from the classical italic of a curling 'm', swinging. And the million tiny dots shimmer, and continue to fade. I have spent considerable time now, wondering how to begin. So. To begin.*

30<sup>th</sup> March 2000, 7:17 pm

“The language of our dialogue might constantly destroy the possibility of saying that of which we are speaking.”<sup>2</sup>

In her text *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan begins to theorise the potential value of critical attention to precisely those elements of cultural discourse that are rendered invisible, unclear, and unstable – in order to reclaim, for the left, a politics of negativity and absence which she offers against what she identifies as the reductive agendas of politics based in visibility, (self-)presence, and representation. She calls for the construction of ‘a way of knowing which does not take surveillance of the object, visible or otherwise, as its chief aim’ [Phelan, 1993: 1-2]. In Phelan’s thesis, live performance offers a kind of ‘existence



without reproduction', which she valorises against a capitalist representational and political economy that increasingly accords value to cultural artefacts (people, performances, political ideals) only to the extent that they are reproducible and grounded in the potential for stable and self-identical repetition. She elaborates a theory of absence and disappearance that re-marks the 'unmarked' (that which is rendered outside of representation itself) as the source of a viable, if admittedly difficult, cultural politics.

In elaborating her theory of the 'unmarked', and precisely because she constructs live performance as the paradigm for these ideas<sup>3</sup>, Phelan also acknowledges the paradoxes attendant upon the act of writing about (re-presenting) something that is marked as valuable precisely because it cannot be represented. Invoking a Derridean problematisation of writing itself, Phelan proposes a kind of 'performative writing', a writing strategy that is characterised not as a constative representation of the performances about which one writes, but as a series of performative utterances that re-create (re-do) and echo absent performances in the moment of reading [Ibid: 149]. In this, Phelan begins to suggest a form of writing that I am interested in both theorising and in stylistically and conceptually engaging in the writing of this text.

The trope of the "performative" in literary theory (a theory or set of theories that necessarily connect to any theory of writing) derives significantly from the work and writings of JL Austin, who published his treatise on "ordinary language philosophy" in 1962. For Austin, a performative speech act is one which *effects* something in its utterance: to say 'I promise', 'I beg you', or 'I do' (in the ceremony of the heterosexualisation of the social bond that is Austin's paradigmatic example) *is* to promise, to beg, or to become married. The performative creates something as its effect, whether this is a promise, plea, or normatively sanctified relationship. If we take Austin's performative as one of the entry points of notions of performativity into contemporary critical theory and performance studies, and from that begin to extrapolate a theory and practice of performative critical writing, we begin to move towards a textual style and form that must also *produce something as its effect*. One challenge implicit in Phelan's ideas is for the experiencing (by the reader) of this 'something' to mirror or echo the experiencing (by the spectator/writer) of the live performances which are being written about in these 'performative' ways. Phelan's implicit call for the creation of new forms of critical writing (*forms*, as opposed to *form*, for of course performative writing has to be at least as heterogeneous as performance itself) has been taken up by writers, critics and academics at several sites in the landscape of contemporary performance studies, and is a fundamental aspect of my own project. (30<sup>th</sup> December 2002: 8.15 am) I shall more fully consider this landscape of performative writing later in this chapter, but wish here to linger longer with Peggy Phelan, as her theories and philosophies

(and poetics) of performance underpin much of this thesis and provide many of its points of departure.

In coterminously developing a theory of the potential value of performance as a prime site of the unmarked, and of the demands for new forms of critical and textual engagement with performance itself, Phelan notes:

Defined by its ephemeral nature, performance art cannot be documented (when it is, it turns into that document – a photograph, a stage design, a video tape, and ceases to be performance art)...it becomes increasingly imperative to find a way to remember the undocumentable, unreproducible...the paradox is that in writing a testimony to the power of the undocumentable and nonreproductive I engage the document of the written reproducible text itself  
[Ibid: 31]

The ‘ephemerality’ that forms the basis of the ontology of performance<sup>4</sup> in Phelan’s texts is an ontology based on a certain apprehension of *temporality* – based on linearity and unity - and this particular approach to conceiving time remains largely untheorised in her work. In this thesis, I also mainly deploy an apprehension of temporality based on linearity (the image and metaphor of ‘time’s arrow’), and this linear construction of time is certainly that upon which ideas of performance’s transience are predicated in current performance theory. Whilst basing much of this thesis on this linear conception of time, I wish to acknowledge that this way of conceiving of time and the temporal is a cultural, social and historical construction, and that contemporary ideas from both philosophy and science might challenge this conception. However, it is not the overall aim of this thesis to investigate or advance these theories and philosophies of time per se. Rather, I use time and the temporal as means through which to examine and consider a range of aspects of performance and the performative, in which time is a common characteristic but not necessarily a main focus<sup>5</sup>.

It is principally the impact of the ephemerality of performance upon the production of writing *about* performance that gives rise to Phelan’s critical anxiety and problematisation of writing itself. One way in which this anxiety manifests itself in her text is through an unexpected vocabulary of quantum physics, which is used as a model for the impossibility of ever objectively writing about performance:



The attempt to measure quantum energy with macroscopic instruments transforms and “contaminates” the form of that energy. Observation and measurement themselves both absorb and emit energy; thus the act of observation transforms the activity observed. [Ibid: 116].

This location of the (supposedly neutral) scientific observer within the outcome of the (supposedly controlled) experiment is mirrored in performance criticism by the necessary location of the critical viewer in any interpretation and re-presentation of a live event. What has been made clear through the deconstructive and fragmenting strategies of poststructuralism and postmodernism (for example, as they coalesce under the rubric of reception theory) is that there is no strictly authoritarian meaning located in any work of art, and that any act of viewing is an act of creation, an act of re-writing provisional meanings that may or may not accord themselves to the “intended meaning” of the artist. In this Barthesian *jouissance* of re-writing performances, the critic is *inevitably* left in a position in which ‘to write about’ comes actually to mean ‘to write’ (that is, to effect, to create). Following Phelan’s concerns about the conservative - as in preservative - attitudes of much critical performance scholarship, I intend to develop a writing style here that does not represent or attempt to ‘fix’ absent performances through a rhetoric of straightforward description and secure interpretation (a project that would alter the reality of those performance even as it tried to impartially represent them, like the scientist’s presence distorting the behaviour of particles in her experiment), but which, instead, evokes the embodied time of their original experiencing through a self-consciousness that echoes and remembers them, at the same time as acknowledging that their very existence was predicated on the inevitability of their immediate disappearance. As Phelan says, ‘the challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself’ [Ibid: 148]. All this is not to suggest that I seek to install the writer/reader in the place of absent performance as the site of any potential performative political action; it is, rather, an acknowledgement of the much more profoundly complex problems that inhere in the relationships between performance and writing, and the necessarily fraught relationship to political agency that such problems create.

Of course, the idea that writing itself can be performative (in the Austinian sense, in relation to ‘ordinary language philosophy’) is not new. Barthes sought to re-mark writing as a certain kind of *doing*. He writes: ‘*writing* can no longer be designated as an operation of recording...rather, it designates exactly what linguistics, referring to Oxford philosophy,

call a performative...in which the enunciation has no other content...than the act by which it is uttered' [Barthes, cited in Heath, cited in Spivak, 1995: 222]. Performative writing should be a kind of affectivity – something to be experienced by the reader in the moments of reading; a *time-based* activity, temporalised and transient like performance itself. As I shall later discuss, this renders performative writing more or less explicitly as a writing of time and a writing of death, leading as such to a kind of writing of identity, and an erotic writing of sexuality, in which 'the writer's loss of the performer's presence mimics the loss of the reader's loss of the writer's presence' [Phelan, 1993a: 21].

It is not a little ironic, however, that in proposing a performative writing that seeks to evade the enervating impulse to re-present and repeat performances in words, Phelan relies on a strictly Derridean understanding of the performative utterance, writing as she does from a clearly poststructuralist perspective. For Austin, the performative speech act only 'succeeds' if it is uttered in a 'pure' context, a context which does not allow for repetition (for example, a performative is rendered invalid if uttered by an actor onstage). Additionally, Austin insists, essential predicates for the 'felicitous' functioning of the performative are those of 'ordinariness' of context and 'appropriateness' of the speaker. Following Austin, Judith Butler identifies 'the paradigmatic form for those speech acts that bring about what they name' [Butler, 1993: 224], as the "'I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)" - as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony' [Austin, 1962: 1]. Austin has suggested that in order for this performative to operate 'correctly', not only must the person - presumed, obviously, to be male - pronouncing this performative utterance qualify to do so (that is, in this example, not already be contracted in a Christian marriage, with a wife still sane and living), but also that the context must be 'ordinary' and 'proper.' Again, Austin's paradigm for that un-ordinary, im-proper or in-correct context is the uttering of the performative by an actor on the stage, or in soliloquy: a significant example of 'parasiticity' in any subsequent consideration of the connections between the performative and performance. Indeed, it is perhaps surprising that there has been such conflation of the notions of performance and performativity when Austin has so vehemently attempted to arrest the union of the two:

A performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage...or spoken in soliloquy...language in such circumstances is...used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use - ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language [Ibid: 5].<sup>6</sup>



In his re-reading of Austin, Derrida reveals how in fact the performative speech act *only* operates as a performative in as much as it is marked by the very possibility *for* repetition. It is the possible repeatability of the performative (a concept grounded in a linear temporality) that invests it with the authority, the 'power', for it to operate as such. The notion of the abnormal, parasitic use of the speech act is *necessarily* excluded by Austin as outside of 'ordinary' language. As such, the exclusion of these usages becomes a *constitutive* one upon which the theory of successful speech acts is based. In *Signature Event Context*, his response to Austin, Derrida dryly points out that 'the value of risk or of being open to failure...is an essential predicate or *law*' and asks 'what is a success when the possibility of failure continues to constitute its structure?' [Derrida, 1981: 324]. Derrida's essay postulates several critical responses to Austin, and whilst being particularly pertinent to the ongoing critique of the privileging of speech over writing in Western metaphysical philosophy (the focus of the Derridean project), it also provides more local means to begin the deconstruction of Austin's ordinary language philosophy.

Central to this critique is the notion of citation, a concept which, together with repetition and the very idea of performativity itself, takes on fundamental importance in Butlerian queer theory (as I shall discuss in chapter one), and which is characteristic of that very parasiticity - (re)citation of a speech act by an actor or in soliloquy - which Austin resists:

For finally, is not what Austin excludes as anomalous, exceptional, "non-serious," that is *citation*...the determined modification of a general citationality...a general iterability - without which there would not even be a "successful" performative?' [Ibid: 325].

For Derrida, the performative can only be successful if it repeats an iterable or coded statement - the words used in performative utterances, such as the 'I do' or the 'I pronounce you' can only ever accomplish their effect if they conform to and cite an iterable model. Like the chain of iteration that invests Barthes' words that I have reproduced here (myself citing Spivak citing Heath citing Barthes) with a scholarly authority, the performative only succeeds *as* a performative if it is iterable, if it offers itself up for citation. The performative utterance draws its 'force' not *from* a prior authority or 'appropriateness' to be found somehow within the speaker, but rather *through* the invocation of convention, the citation of law. Consideration of how the performative tends to include such declarations as those of ownership, legal sentencing, baptism, marriage, and so on, and how it is implicated, as Butler has pointed out, 'in a network of

authorisation and punishment' [Butler, 1993: 225], can begin to suggest the function of speech acts within the regulation of subjectivity and sexuality: within the valorisation and reproduction of the (sexual) status quo.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it would paradoxically appear that it is only through his own seemingly endless citation that Austin's (normative) paradigm of the heterosexualisation of the social bond can assume its reified position as exemplary of the felicitous functioning of the performative. Part of the recent critical and theoretical project that has rediscovered the productive potential of the performative<sup>8</sup> has been to critically resignify Austin's normative imperatives, a project that enables an otherwise problematic concept to be deployed and developed in the critical and political discourses of the left. And, as I have already outlined with regards to Phelan, performative writing is part of this project, especially in relation to the discourses and politics of performance and performance studies.

(13<sup>th</sup> July 2000, 2:55 pm) So, in developing a theory and a model of performative writing that implicitly draws on Derridean rereadings/rewritings of Austin – and it is important to remember that this development is pursued precisely as a means of responding to the *unrepeatability* of performance itself – Phelan suggests a conceptual form that can only operate 'performatively' to the extent that it is possible for it to be repeated. In this sense, and especially if we accept the idea that performance – grounded as it is in a linear temporality – cannot be repeated, what Phelan calls for in her move towards performative writing, is a writing that appears at first to be, in fact, nothing like performance.<sup>9</sup> Indeed it is through the convention of the 'repeated re-presentation' that performative writing acknowledges and marks the liveness of the original performance, even if that re-presentation seeks to find a non-reflective form for writing. However, it is crucial to remember that, as Judith Butler has pointed out, self-identical repetition is impossible, and that in fact repetition is always already marked as "repetition with difference". Elizabeth Grosz suggests that 'repetition engenders a version of the same without any presumption of identity. Strictly speaking, exact repetition remains impossible' [Grosz, 1995: 199]. Any conception of time which is linear reveals repetition as that which is marked by difference. Phelan herself writes, acknowledging this tension, that 'the linguistic performative, then, like performance art, cannot be exactly repeated or reproduced.'<sup>10</sup> The repetitions inherent in performative writing mark out the differences between the lived experience of watching/doing live performance and the later experiences of writing and of reading, differences which might be overlooked or underacknowledged in the processes of re-presenting live performance through the technologies of writing. Performative writing is not necessarily set against other forms of critical writing – indeed, as Phelan states to even "name this "performative writing" is redundant since all good critical writing enacts



something in excess of the thing that motivates it” [Phelan, 1997: 12] – but it does mark itself as different through its foregrounding of the chain of repetitions inherent in doing, seeing, writing *and reading*, and through its foregrounding of the inevitable differences that underpin those repetitions. It therefore highlights, through its naming as “performative writing” and through its explorations of form and theory of writing, the differences between those critical writings which claims to impartially represent and describe live performance, and those that acknowledges the loss, separation and *inevitably altered* acts of repetition that underpin writing itself. Marking itself *in difference*, performative writing remembers the “liveness” of performance – with all the connotations of dynamism, mutability and instability that the word and the state “liveness” imply - unlike conservative, preserving models of writing that attempt to fix performance and render it statically as ‘the same’. In this way, repetition, by virtue of differance (with an *a*)<sup>11</sup>, finally re-affirms rather than undermines the necessary connections between performance and performative writing: it is the only ever *apparent* repetitions inherent in poststructuralist ideas of performativity that ultimately succeed in acknowledging the connection between performative writing and the unrepeatability of performance. Performative writing becomes performative – takes on the form of an effective temporal event rather than a static representational text – because it acknowledges that as the performative text itself unfolds through time, through multiple and ongoing readings, it is constantly reinvented, reimagined and rewritten (*30<sup>th</sup> December 2002, 8.31 am*). It is the repetitive acts of reading that mark the performative text *as* performative, that invest it with its status as the already and always shifting horizon of the event.

Despite some concerns about the extent to which performative writing is entangled in a confusion of repetition (and I think this stems from the ongoing interplay of concepts of ‘the performative’ derived variously and differently from performance and theatre studies, linguistics, poststructuralism and queer theory), I remain deeply committed to the idea of developing a writing style which avoids straightforward representation and description of absent performances, and which instead seeks to evoke, re-embody and translate performance into an act of writing that is further translated and re-embodyed by ongoing acts of reading. (*13<sup>th</sup> May 2000, 3:47pm*) Perhaps it is in this repetitive chain of iterations, writings and re-readings that the Derridean sense of the performative comes through in yet another way. Writing which is a process of doing, of creation, will initiate a reaction through which each reader will repeat and re-enact the process of construction of affective, corporeal, productive meanings, finally giving both the performance that enters into critical discourse, and this experimental and risky form of writing, the iterative mark of

performative authority, enabling new performances of reading and re-writing that evoke and remember the experiencing of the performances that shadow writing as ghosts in the syntactical machine. In this sense, my own academic performance at the site of the creation of this text renders a piece of writing that is both a 'repetition' of the performances I will/have studied, and at the same time the creation of a new performative event (the event of the writing of the thesis itself, the event of reading) that is consciously and deliberately non-fixative, that allows these performances to slip and slide into and to remain in the troubled space of memory; a calling into being that at once is a celebration of and mourning for non-being. I will return throughout this thesis to this idea that the thesis itself, as a piece of performative writing, is as grounded in time, death and the erotic<sup>12</sup> as any performance; that the temporal processes of writing and reading that give rise to the thesis invest it with its own status and significance as an aesthetic and performative (as well as theoretical, pedagogical and investigative) process and event.

(30<sup>th</sup> December 2002: 8.54 am, editing) As I have already suggested, this is far from the first attempt to conceive of such a writing style within the discourses of performance studies. The journal *Performance Research* has, since its inception, explored the possibilities inherent in critical and scholarly writing, following an editorial aesthetic which Claire MacDonald has recently (note – 14<sup>th</sup> August 2000, 1:13pm) described as 'curating for the page' [MacDonald, 1999]<sup>13</sup>. The First Annual Performance Studies Conference in New York in 1995 began to map and theorise the discourse of performative writing, and certainly helped mark out the provisional parameters of the field. Recent texts including Matthew Goulish's *39 Microlectures*, Tim Etchell's *Certain Fragments*, the multi-disciplinary *Shattered Anatomies* (a boxed collection of objects, texts and critical theory); and Jane Blocker's *Where is Ana Mendieta?* are indicative but by no means exhaustive examples of forays into performative writing as a form of 'textual intercourse'<sup>14</sup>.

This allusion to the erotics of writing, to the mechanisms of absence and desire that underpin the very act of writing itself, is crucially important in the conceptualisation of the idea of 'performative writing'. It is precisely a certain kind of *desire*, the desire to both repeat and re-evolve performance in writing and to write towards the disappearance, the absence of that performance, that animates and originates performative writing, at least as I understand and develop its meaning here. Indeed, the evanescence of performance and the inevitable structures of memory that filter it through consciousness into writing, compare to the evanescences and the acts of thwarted remembrance that characterise the experiencing of sexual pleasure and desire:



(erotic pleasures are evanescent; they are forgotten almost as they occur); the memory of “what happened,” or movements, settings, gestures, behavior may be open to reminiscence, but the intensity of pleasure, the sensations of voluptuousness, the ache of desire have to be revived in order to be recalled. In this case, there is not recollection but recreation, or rather, creation, production...this repetition (or rather, the inherent openness of these practices to repetition) produces the intensity of affect, pleasure or pain; but can never repeat its initial occurrence [Grosz, 1995: 195, 199].

Performative writing is both a writing of and a writing for desire, and writing about bodies and pleasures that have already slipped away. It is a productive, a reproductive act: a sexual reproduction; not a production of children, or relationships, but a production anew of hazy desires, fleeting pleasures, a shuddering re-enactment and re-experiencing that slides across the performing body through my body (through the tips of my fingers, across the keyboard, across space and time) and into your body, between my fingertips and your eyes. It promises deliverance, but finally fails to deliver, and finds perverse pleasure in that failure, in that loss.

In developing these models of the erotics, the desire of writing, Phelan has positioned herself at the front of a critical campaign, and her book *Mourning Sex* both offers examples of performative writing styles, and also continues her development of the conceptual idea of performative writing itself, as introduced in and through *Unmarked*. Referring to Merleau-Ponty, Phelan states that:

Performative writing is an attempt to find a form for “what philosophy wishes all the same to say”. Rather than describing the performance event in “direct signification”...I want this writing to enact the affective force of the performance event again, as it plays itself out in an ongoing temporality [Phelan, 1997: 11-12].

Performative writing is also a writing of and for the past, that projects itself into an unknowable future. It is poised against ‘writing that threatens to dehydrate performance or that subordinates performative temporalities to the spatial and alien(ating) conventions of the (scholarly) “text” [Pollock, 1998:79]. In constructing its meanings in relation to both a lost past and an unknown future, and in moving from desiccation towards fluidity, performative writing cannot be fixed, transcending time or context, its submerged meanings and knowledges cannot be guaranteed. This might present a dangerous risk for

academic writing, with its operation as part of a network of epistemological fields in which validation, confirmation and conclusion are often centrally located. With these emphases, academic writing often avoids contradiction, conceptual leakage and the inarticulable dark gaps and crevices that form the limits of the known, the critical and the writable. Of course, performance studies is one context in which the potentials inherent in these spaces is sought and celebrated, and it is performance studies' own inherent interdisciplinarity, interculturalism and interarticulation with other aesthetic and academic disciplines that make it, as Schechner states, "inherently unstable" [Schechner, 1998: 360].

The re-imagination of writing as performative – and the pursuit of this in a context which is quixotic and dynamic – might be seen as a kind of queering, through which theoretical boundaries are stretched and transgressed; across which critical fluids leak and flow (like a fibrous, rhizomatic, slippery, Deleuzo-Guattarian line of flight); and out of which new critical forms emerge only to disappear again, are manifested only to vanish; slide into the light only to be replaced by their others, like the performances that shadow and haunt (*these metaphors of death are not accidental*) the words I present to you here. Della Pollock suggests that:

Performative writing is queer, even in the old, now twisted, now queered sense of "queer" as oddly familiar, strange even in its bent similarity to what common sense calls "good". Performative writing is an itinerant in the land of good writing. It travels side by side with normative performances of textuality, sometimes even passing for the "same", but always drawing its energy from a critical difference, from the possibility that it may always be otherwise than what it seems [Pollock, 1998: 97].

My interpretation of 'performative writing' is informed by my particular focuses on time and death (and through these, sexuality and subjectivity). Pollock has made it very clear that performative writing can not be an homogenous form, but rather is a composite of a range of conceptual and formal possibilities which will shift with context, time and necessity: She describes it as 'its own fulfilment of form, in what amounts to its performance of itself, a *particular, historical*, relation (agnostic, dialogic, erotic) between author-subjects, reading subjects and subjects written/read.' [Pollock, 1998: 78-79, my emphases], and continues that it 'is thus no more and no less formally intelligible than a road sign or a landmark...its meanings are contextual. It takes no value from the context-map in which it is located, and which it simultaneously marks, determines and transforms.' [Ibid: 79]. This latter image of the context-map is also reminiscent of the Deleuzo-



Guattarian cartographic trope which is posited against the vertical and linear model of the arboreality of knowledge.

Performative writing is evocative and liminal, allied to possibilities rather than validities; it is metonymic, as it excites and generates difference and displaces the representations that underpin conservative models of scholarly enquiry; it is subjective, as it is written from the already multiple position of the poststructuralist self, and it generates new selves (reading selves as well as writing selves) as its effects. It is nervous, as it operates synaptically across gaps, interconnections, interstices, intertextualities and interruptions; it is citational, because it is full of quotations, references, and multiple voices (it is heteroglossic) and because it reveals each writing as a re-writing and each reading as a re-reading and a re-writing; it is consequential, because it is concerned, like performance, with the operation of actions and effects, because it is constructive, it builds, it makes, it does, it is an always active, always labile form [for a more expansive introduction to these ideas of some of the characteristics of performative writing, see Pollock, 1998].

*(12<sup>th</sup> July 2000, 1:44 pm) (30<sup>th</sup> December 2002, 9.01 am, edit)* As well as being generated in response to the temporality that enables and defines performance, which demands of performance scholarship a recognition of this temporality in writing itself; and in addition to possessing a marked queerness (as well as all the characteristics suggested above), performative writing bears an absolute relation to death. If elements of performance scholarship write towards preservation, stasis and ongoing existence, performative critical writing necessarily writes towards the opposite – towards extinction, mutability and disappearance. As such, performative writing is implicitly a writing of death, or, to use a phrase formulated by Adrian Heathfield, a ‘writing facing death’ [Heathfield, 1997]. In psychoanalytic terms, this writing is a kind of trauma – a way of dealing with the violent disappearance (and metaphoric death) of the object of one’s consciousness (which in strict terms, psychoanalytically speaking, refers to the loss of the self). Cathy Caruth explicates Freud’s notion of trauma as ‘the response to a sudden or unexpected threat of death that happens too soon to be fully known, and is endlessly repeated in reenactments and nightmares that attempt to relive, but in fact only miss again, the original event’ [Caruth, 1995b: 96; see also Heathfield, 1997]. A reconfiguration of this passage in relation to performance and performance scholarship would re-cast the ‘death that happens too soon’ as the time-bound ending and disappearance of live performance, performance that is too transient to ever ‘be fully known’ in the lived experience of viewing<sup>15</sup>. The ‘endlessly repeated’ reenactments that ‘only miss again, the original event’ would be the very instances

of critical writing and reading that I am trying to conceive of here, instances that celebrate and repeat rather than bemoan and conceal that 'missing'.

This is not to suggest that the conscious spectatorial experience in relation to performance is standardised as the unbearable rapidity of that performance's disappearance (anyone who has forced themselves to sit through any truly awful and deadening performance would beg to differ to that). Rather, it is to invoke the concept of the sublime, the excess which potentially marks any live performance event, rendering it finally impossible to decode and absorb and understand every aspect of performance in the vanishing moments of its presentation. And just as trauma is the unconscious mechanism for dealing with the radical alterity and incomprehensibility and sublimity of death – simultaneously seeking to acknowledge or rehearse death and to deny it – so too performative writing that writes towards death is a way of simultaneously accessing the ghosts of lost performances, and of acknowledging the profound and immediate loss of those performances themselves.

The resolution of trauma in classical psychoanalysis involves the 'dramatisation of the past in the present' [Phelan, 1998: 6] – that which Freud describes through the term 'nachträglichkeit': afterwardness – and so too does the resolution of the past events of performance in the act of critical interpretation involve the reinscription of that past in the present tense of writing. Performative writing, in attempting to evoke/invoke the past in this textual present tense, and in the perpetually doubled - both future and present - tense of reading, and in seeking to re-embody in textual terms corporeal bodies that have always already been lost (and by the time you read this, that will include my body as well), is a manifestation of what Joseph Roach has described, in another context, as 'the desire to communicate physically with the past, a desire that roots itself in the ambivalent love of the dead' [Roach, 1998: 23]. This ambivalence is echoed in contemporary discussions of the problematics of documenting performance, in which one should consider critical writing as a kind of documentation. Tim Etchells describes his own corporeal experience of writing about performance even as it slips away into memory:

There are two bodies remembered then – mine and another – one written over (or through) the other. I'm at the keyboard still and the distant ripples of another person's movement and my own past movement are playing through the medium of my skin. Is this talking to the dead? [Etchells, 1999: 74]<sup>16</sup>.

It should be clear, then, that the methodological decision in this thesis to approach performance, and indeed performance criticism, through the medium of performative



writing – through a form which foregrounds, embraces and celebrates that curative ‘afterwardness’ - is not only a reflection of a current development in performance theory, but also is a formal exposition of death and loss, the central thematics of my work.

### **Insubstantial Pageants: Connecting time and performance**

To begin on this movement into a textual future (which is already shadowed by my own and others’ textual pasts), I wish to briefly consider the ways in which performance has been conceptualised in recent critical debate in a particular relationship to temporality: as a paradigmatically transient and ephemeral artform. In the ongoing negotiation which sees performance and performance studies sliding free, both aesthetically and conceptually, of the history of theatre and theatre studies (with the attendant attention to the supposedly transcendent drama of the literary text),<sup>17</sup> the celebration and marking of performance’s own fleeting existence (rather than the unquestioning production of its document, its trace, its recording) has become one of the tropes upon which the very ontology and epistemology of ‘performance’ have been predicated [Phelan, 1993; George, 1996; Blocker, 1999].

(14<sup>th</sup> May 2000, 5:37pm) In *The Tempest*, Prospero conjures up a supernatural wedding masque for the two young lovers, Miranda and Ferdinand, a gesture towards his own and his daughter’s futures, futures mapped against the hidden geographies of their past (a past attainable to Miranda only as the recollections, the narratives, the dreams of her father’s memory). Interrupted by the thought of a different future, Prospero shatters this illusion, melancholic in his own mortality: *These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits, and Are melted into air, into thin air; And like the baseless fabric of this vision, The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve; And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep* (Act 4, Scene 1: 148-158). Conjured through Prospero’s magic, the performance he creates is as fragile, as momentary, as ephemeral as he realises his own little life to be. There is no trace, no relic, no remainder of this vision, except in his own memory, his own beating mind. Perhaps Prospero, in realising the profound symbolic value of the transience of performance, was the first postmodern performance theorist.

Contemporary performance studies has increasingly produced a library of Prospero’s books, catalogues which are variously marked against and towards the very disappearance of the ‘object’ of their contemplation. As for Prospero, so for many critical theorists of performance, one of the defining characteristics of performance itself (*yea, all which it inherit*) is its own transience, impermanence and insubstantial gestures towards inevitable and irrevocable endings. For Phelan, ‘performance and theatre are instances of enactments

predicated on their own disappearance' [Phelan, 1997: 2], and it is as a paradigm for the productive value of the immaterial, the invisible, and the non-reproductive that Phelan develops her model of performance-as-loss, a conceptualisation that is also typically postmodern (it is worth remembering here that the shift from theatre to performance is another model of postmodernity). Jane Blocker has identified loss, and the marking of loss, as the central characteristics of postmodernism:

As an interpretive category, *postmodernism* is...the way we try to preserve a time whose single most important characteristic is loss (the death of the author, the instability of the signifier, the victory of the simulation over the real) [Blocker, 1999: 135].<sup>18</sup>

For other performance theorists, these aesthetic and ontological characteristics (impermanence, ephemerality, loss) are variously conceived as formal denials of the immanence and status of the art object [see Sayre (1989) on the shift from art object to performance art]; as a romantic trope of the communitarian exchange between performer and spectator in the unique time and space of performance [MacRitchie, 1998]<sup>19</sup>; as means of achieving a sense of 'being there, then' (or, rather, of 'being here, now') as the political project of performance itself [Etchells, 1998]; and as a defining characteristic which distinguishes performance from other, more self-stabilising, artforms. In this last respect, David E.R. George defines performances as 'singular and unrepeatable events' [George, 1996: 19] which exist only in the 'time spaces of experience' [Ibid: 21]. Although George's text falls foul of the very slippage into confusion of theatre and performance which it seeks to address (with an overlapping of acting/doing; being/representing which enables him to conceive of the simultaneous and doubled 'now and not now and not not now' or 'here and not here and not not here' of a supposed performance epistemology – tropes which I would argue rely on the fictions of character and the apparatus of acting that define theatre, but not necessarily performance), its phenomenological frame of reference insists upon the foundational unrepeatability of performance, modelled of course on Phelan's elegant conception of performance as 'representation without reproduction' (a representation which George suggests is never of anything but performance itself, in a postmodern turn of self-referentiality that marks its existence in real time – 'this is a performance, you are watching a performance, here and now'). This idea of the 'here and now' of performance is echoed by Cathy O'Dell in her discussion of the photographic documentation of performance art of the 1970s, which leads her to position photographic documentation and the performance documented across the binary oppositions of the 'spatial and temporal



distinction at the heart of all representation – the distinction between the here and there, now and then’ [O’Dell, 1997: 76]. Of course, George’s assertion that performance is a process of self-representation (a narcissistic, non-reproductive representation), challenges O’Dell’s formulation (as do the explorations of performative photography that I advance in chapter three), but her attention to the unique temporality of performance nonetheless presents itself again as a current fascination of much performance theory.<sup>20</sup>

(14<sup>th</sup> May 2000, 5:37pm/18<sup>th</sup> July 2000, 8:15pm) It is precisely against this trope that Philip Auslander’s recent publication *Liveness* is positioned. In this text, Auslander is concerned to counter the trend in the performance studies academy which he reads as characterising live performance, precisely because of its liveness, as being somehow outside of an economy of commodification and reproduction,<sup>21</sup> somehow outside the law; somehow of a political and aesthetic value which is located specifically in its very liveness *as opposed to its mediatisation*. Auslander is both sceptical and critical of this trend, not least because he considers that ‘where these concepts are used to describe the relationship between live performance and its present mediatized environment, they yield a reductive binary opposition of the live and the mediatized’ [Auslander 1999: 3]. Of course, poststructuralist thinking has shown that these kinds of ‘reductive binaries’ not only collapse under the strain of their own self-reliance (the live collapses into the mediatised as its own defining inner exclusion, and vice versa), but are also never neutral structures - there are always value judgements attached to the two terms. In this context, that Benjaminian ‘aura’ of privilege, which Auslander seeks to trouble, is perceived to attach itself to the supposedly original, to the live [see Benjamin, 1982].

Auslander focuses his critique directly as a response to this perceived trend within performance theory (and practice) that, according to his analyses - but, I think, not necessarily to those he criticises, whom he at times misreads or, with a certain enabling disingenuity, reads selectively - accords a certain kind of ontological specificity to live performance in relation and opposition to the mediatised.<sup>22</sup> For Auslander, in these (more or less constructed) accounts, the live is seen precisely as standing for “that which is not mediatised” or “that which escapes from media saturation” or “that which is outside the reproductive economy of mediatised cultural forms” (these are my paraphrasings of his ideas). One of the focuses of this thesis is the refiguring of these arguments about the ontology of liveness specifically in relation to its *temporal* dimensions, something which I believe to be often overlooked by Auslander. Temporality underpins the concept of performance’s unique and transient ‘liveness’ much more than any idea of opposition to electronic mediatisation does. Such a (re)temporalisation of any understanding or theorisation of performance addresses the gaps in Auslander’s text, and reveals his focuses

on TV, film and sonic mediatisation, the politics of uniqueness and simulation, and legal discourse as it relates to regulation and hegemonic control<sup>23</sup>, not quite as misreadings, but certainly as critical and theoretical flourishes that enable a textual performance which is more concerned with a localised and even reactionary response to certain ideas in performance theory, than with a sophisticated and focused reading of the very concept of mediatisation. In overlooking these other, more nuanced forms of the mediatised (forms engendered, for example, through writing, recording, acting, embodying) Auslander also overlooks their necessary relationships to performance's specific and constitutive temporality.

If Auslander's project is to replay the distinctions of the live and the mediatised as the defining frames through which to conceive or deconstruct 'live performance', my project is to propose *time itself* as the ontological and conceptual basis for performance analysis, particularly as it relates also to death, subjectivity and sexuality, and to the very act of writing as a ubiquitous form of mediatisation in the scholarly productions of performance studies. Throughout this thesis, I examine a range of performance and performative events, which are all approached through a consideration of how time or the temporal operate in and around them: time is the means of approaching these events, and the lens through which *they* are examined.

## **Temporal Cartographies: Counting Time, Theatre and Performance**

*24<sup>th</sup> April 2000, 11:58 am*

Forced Entertainment, one of Britain's foremost experimental theatre ensembles, contributed to the London International Festival of Theatre in 1999 (1999) with a (then) new performance piece, *Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me?*. Performed at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall from midnight on 18<sup>th</sup> June to midnight on 19<sup>th</sup> June (the heat and chill of a British summer), the production explored the weaknesses of language (the instabilities of identity) weaknesses of language, the instabilities of identity, and the little things we do to get us through the night, as well as being a kind of retrospective of 'some of the best bits' of the company's previous shows. Starting with a tap-dancing gorilla (one of Britain's foremost ensembles), and ending with a sixty second countdown (some of the best bits) and the final command to 'stop' (a kind of retrospective), this durational performance deliberately exhausted its protagonists, and sliced out a piece of time across which were played both the performers' and the audience's existences the performers' and the audience's existences the performers' and the audience's existences over a twenty four



hour period (midnight to midnight, a kind of retrospective) in the heat and chill of a British summer's day and night (a grass skirt, hula dancers, and a final command to stop).

(1. make cut – lower right thorax, in flesh above anterior intercostal muscle) On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2000, Franko B, presented a solo performance piece, *Aktion 398*, at the Toynbee Studios in London. Individually, spectators were led into a room where Franko waited naked, silent, and bleeding (2. encourage wound to bleed, weep, leak). After about a minute, the door was re-opened, and the piece was over (3. stitch up cut – roughly, to promote scarring). In that one minute, nothing really happened, and yet the time stretched and curved and ached with discomfort and an alarming sense of complicity (4. for you, dear reader, all for you).<sup>24</sup>

These two recent projects, though very different in form, aesthetic and approach, typify a desire in much contemporary performance – a desire which is echoed in the increasing performativity and temporalisation of the products of performance studies – that is, a desire to explore, complicate and foreground aspects of temporality within and through performance itself. Many artists are concerned to experiment with the framing timescale of their work – from the durational to the minimal, the fleeting to the epic – and increasingly, live performance becomes an opportunity to investigate and problematise the temporal, in a self-reflexive turn that foregrounds time as the principal factor in the creation and experiencing of live work, and that deploys the self-reflective to create a time and space in which the political, social, ritual and cultural implications of the temporal (in all its guises) can be critically and emotionally engaged. This concern is reflected in the current terminology for contemporary performance, in which ‘time based arts’ is deployed as a strategic term to encompass theatre, live art, performance art, dance, live music and a host of other heterogeneous and interdisciplinary practices, that share no common characteristics apart from a relationship to time and temporality in the means of their presentation.<sup>25</sup>

To suggest that contemporary performance is defined more or less explicitly by a certain relationship to time, is perhaps to imply that this relationship is that which marks these genres or disciplines as particular, as ‘contemporary’. To accept such an implication, though, is to deny the relationship to time that has in fact characterised performance and theatre throughout their history. Indeed, the very concept of theatre or of performance can only be understood through the concept of time. An awareness of time, and therefore of mutability, change and death, underpins the earliest manifestations of “theatre” in ancient ritual practices; practices that lead to the development of greek tragedy, a genre that

places narratives of temporality and mutability absolutely at its core<sup>26</sup>. An awareness of the theological problems of time as manifested in the phenomena of death and dying also underpins mediaeval liturgical drama, and is further temporalised by the tying of this dramatic tradition to the religious calendar<sup>27</sup>. If the teleological consequences of time as the will of a divine creator are manifest in the dramas of the church, a writer such as Shakespeare renders time as of the essence of the human condition, as that most central problem and causal force that orders much of human experience<sup>28</sup>. The centrality of time in the operations and thematics of european drama becomes even more formalised in the classicist works of the Renaissance, and it is in part as a reaction against this return to classical forms that the increasingly experimental and non-realist traditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries take shape<sup>29</sup>. From the narrative explorations of the symbolists and the collapsing of linearity and structure into the metonymic chaos of dreams encouraged by the surrealists, through to the performer's role as the mediating presence that organises time and space in the formal, spatial and temporal experiments of the happenings and performance art events of the 1960s and 70s (not forgetting Beckettian meditations on the absurdity and brevity of human existence against the backdrop of the vastness of time...not to overlook the abstract organisation of space and time in the theory and practices of Dalcroze, Appia, Meyerhold...not to forget the microscopic attention to time and to the temporality of theatre itself in the approaches and writings of Chekhov, Stanislavski, Maeterlinck<sup>30</sup>) (and not to suggest that this list might be anything like exhaustive, and certainly nothing like a genealogy), the position of time as thematically and formally foundational to performance and its later role as means through which "performance" itself can be re-imagined and re-invented outside of the scope of narrative, linearity and plot, attest to the interconnectedness of time and performance in the West for at least the last two thousand years.

(29<sup>th</sup> April 2000, 1:10 pm) In his seminal, though much contested text, *Performance Theory*, Richard Schechner begins by problematising the accepted narrative of the origins of greek drama, identifying the lacunae in its reliance on 'turn-of-the-century anthropological theories of cultural evolution and diffusion' [Schechner, 1988: 3]. His criticism stems from his position as a theorist and practitioner of contemporary *performance*, from which he finds the genealogical separation of ritual and early theatre artificial. Schechner insists that ritual be viewed not as the *origin* of theatre, which leaves it in a hierarchical and vertical relationship of cause and effect, but instead as an activity related to theatre on a horizontal axis of contiguity and interarticulation, in which play, games and sport also find common ground. In proposing the broad category of 'performance' as that which accommodates



these apparently disparate cultural forms, Schechner suggests a number of characteristics that can be used to identify activities belonging to this category:

*1) a special ordering of time; 2) a special value attached to objects; 3) non-productivity in terms of goods; 4) rules. Often-special places – non-ordinary places – are set aside or constructed to perform these activities in. [Ibid: 6].*

Schechner's notion of the 'special ordering of time' as a property of 'performance' is primary here (the idea of 'non-productivity' is also germane, and is greatly expanded by Phelan through the idea of performance as representation without reproduction). Schechner proposes that in performance, linear clock and calendar time is '*adapted to the event*, and is therefore susceptible to numerous variations and creative distortions' [Ibid: 6, emphasizes in original]. He classifies 'performance times' as follows:

*1. Event time, when the activity itself has a set sequence and all the steps of that sequence must be completed no matter how long (or short) the elapsed clock time [Ibid: 6].*

Examples of this could be the performance of scripted drama, in which all the lines must be spoken before the play can be over; or task-based events in which the completion of the task and the time it takes are in themselves the performance.

Schechner continues with:

*2. Set time, where an arbitrary time pattern is imposed on events – they begin and end at certain moments, whether or not they have been "completed" [Ibid: 7].*

For example, Forced Entertainment's *Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me?* and the countdown to 'stop' exactly twenty-four hours after the beginning of the show; or Robert Pacitti's *Evidence of Life after Death*<sup>31</sup> in which an onstage digital clock counted down from sixty to zero minutes, at which point the show climaxed and ended.

Finally, Schechner conceives of:

*3. Symbolic time, when the span of the activity represents another (longer or shorter) time. Or where time is considered differently [Ibid: 7].*

As Schechner points out, 'symbolic time' is the principal characteristic of orthodox theatre, a context in which the representation of time is fictionalised rather than (or as well as) real.

This multiplication of time frames that is characteristic of certain kinds of performance is one example of a destabilisation of a linear and unified model of time, a process of destabilisation and delinearisation that reappears at several points in this thesis.

(30<sup>th</sup> April 2000, 3:26 pm) In her study of 'Women's Theatrical Space', Hanna Scolnicov proposes a system for conceiving of space in theatre in terms either of 'theatre space' – the architectural location, theatre building or site, and 'theatrical space' – the fictional representation and construction of space within a dramatic frame [Scolnicov, 1994]. Walter K. Stewart offers a similar system for the conception of dramatic time, based on ideas expounded by Günter Müller, as either 'Spielzeit' – the actual performance time, and 'gespielte Zeit' – the amount of time covered by the plot. These separations of the fictional from the actual offer a useful starting point for the formulation of a theory of time as it relates to contemporary performance and live art<sup>32</sup>, and develop further the ideas derived from Schechner that I have outlined above. On the simplest, and probably most significant level, live art, as with much contemporary performance, is principally characterised by its presentation in real time. In this context, this term evokes a far different meaning from that in dramatic realism (with its abiding attention to fiction), in as much as live art often operates through the time-based activity of unmediated bodies in space, denying the mediation of character, fiction and plot, and often of genre and discipline. (15<sup>th</sup> May 2000, 5:17pm) This absence of mediatisation (not in the sense that Auslander uses the term, as in 'relating to the electronic media', but in this sense of 'directness' through the absence of character, fiction and plot) foregrounds in this work the immediacy of the relationship between the performance and its spectators, who take on the charged status of 'witnesses' [Etchells, 1998]. Like the excruciating intimacy of Franko B's *Aktion 398*, this contemporary work carves itself out in a piece of time that is not ordered through the distorting and deceptive frames of fiction, narrative or representation, but which remains as 'real' time itself, ordering and enabling the particular reality of 'performance.' Thus, performance becomes a cultural phenomenon that is marked as such only by the fact that it is concerned with the bringing together of at least two people – a performer and a spectator (the latter may be real or imagined) - in a particular place and time where there is or has been a symbolic 'beginning' and at some time later, a symbolic 'ending' (without these, there is no distinction between performance and reality – this is what Geraldine Harris, in *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity*, calls the performativity of performance: the citation of conventions through which performance can be perceived as such; an idea I shall develop in chapter one). It is its own symbolic and significant beginning, and its own inevitable, eventual, ineluctable ending (full too of symbolism and significance), that figure performance as a profound allegory for the



experience of life and death. Performance is a locus and lens for time's movement across mortality. Performance and death shadow 'real life' as its own constitutive others. And like life, like the million tiny dots that slowly, slowly, but inevitably, eventually, ineluctably fade from the surface of this page, so performance shifts always on towards its own symbolic death. As such, the trope of 'real time' which defines contemporary performance completes a historical trajectory in which theatre or performance and time and mortality have always been intimately intertwined. From their very beginnings, to their current, always provisional, endings, time and therefore death have been the things through which performance and theatre have been constructed, enabled and understood.

*And as I sit here, my hands moving quickly over the surface of my keyboard, virtual letters that in some future will become real stacking up behind me in a past that can never be regained, I struggle to move towards a new beginning. Another date, another time beckon me to move on into them. Another call to read and write and watch...and read and write and watch...and find the letters to map out this present tension I find so hard to explain in words (my body is much more eloquent, my limbs like grammar, ordering the text). And in the white spaces between the words, in the gaps between the lines, in the dark shadows at the edges of the page, death waits, patiently...ready...still...wanting. Death drives me through this work, towards a different future. Death waits, in the last flicker of static as I shut down my computer, as the printer clicks offline. And so I write, and make work, and read and watch and write. Death waits. And what else is there? All life is enabled by death, our little lives are rounded with a sleep, and all art, all words, all culture, all belief, is stacked up against our finishings, a weak and poor defence. Until we leap into the gaps, fall off the page, slide into the flash of electric buzz, and celebrate the ending. And make work not that turns away from death, but that looks deep into its face, into the empty black hole at the centre of the eye, and stumbles forward, arms open, hoping. Somewhere, in the past, I remember a leap into the void, a falling back into darkness, and that momentum gathers around me now, pulling me onward. Forward. Back.*

## **Conclusion (but just for now) – Moving towards Death**

*11<sup>th</sup> August 2000, 1:40pm*

*I have spent considerable time now pondering how to end this chapter, so I end with a date, and a time. My own temporal existence slips into the text, the movement of my body across the keys of my computer judders onto the screen; the time I give to this work is sliced away from my life as I read and write. And watch. And watch myself shifting through time as I sit here, the blank screen of my computer looking back at me, waiting. I have spent considerable time now pondering how to end, again, and so I return to another beginning, that has already past and been irretrievably lost, as a way to start towards that ending.*

By the time you read this introductory text, which maps out terrain I shall explore as I shift through the times of this thesis, I will have outlined the relationship between performance and time, and as such will have sought to foreground performance's inevitable ephemerality (that upon which its very ontology is precariously predicated). I will have considered both the personal and the political value of the theorisation of this evanescence, and identified it as an aspect of performance studies that is currently prevalent, and contested, throughout the field. I will have considered the relationships between performance and writing, and attempted to re-mark writing in ways that foreground its relationship, both in theory and practice, to time and to death. (30<sup>th</sup> December 2002, 9.41 am, *edit*) Returning now, to review and repeat these mappings, these scratchings of fragmented thought onto thin, thin paper, I wonder how to conclude. And in searching, in reading back through time, I see that the conclusion is there in the text, wrapped up in its very beginnings (and this is only a temporary conclusion, not even the 'real thing'. That anxiety, I'm glad to admit, is still a way off yet).

The conclusion is marked in time and death, and as with all conclusions, all endings, it is there before we even begin. This of course is a principal tenet of psychoanalysis, which reveals 'that the experience of loss is one of the central repetitions of subjectivity' [Phelan, 1997: 5]. As a system that most seductively assists understandings of identity, sexuality and subjectivity, psychoanalysis remains more or less implicit through the trajectory of this text, particularly in the first two chapters. As Laplanche reminds us, death enters psychoanalysis retrospectively as the very foundation of its discourse (through Freud's 1920 essay, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). In a kind of critical and conceptual afterwardness - *nachträglichkeit* - it becomes its cornerstone:

If life...is regarded as materially present at the frontiers of the psyche, death's entry on the Freudian scene is far more enigmatic. In the beginning, like all modalities of the negative, it is radically excluded from the field of the unconscious. Then suddenly...it emerges at the center of the system...in the heart of the psyche, of living beings, and of matter itself [Laplanche 1976: 5].

The psychoanalytic encounter, both clinically, and, more importantly, as a metaphor for the act of performance criticism, also relies on this afterwardness: the analyst seeks the re-telling, re-experiencing, re-remembering of the past of the analysand as a means of explaining and understanding the present, and indeed the future. My aim here then, with a certain retrospect, is to reinstate time and therefore death at the centre of an approach to



performance and to aspects of the performative, and to writing, an approach enabled by close critical attention to the material reality of several instances of contemporary performance itself. This becomes an example of a literal process of after-thought, in the form of some after-words, that give voice to death, that move beyond and resignify a certain enforced silence. Perhaps such a project, as Laplanche has also suggested, is more ethical than explanatory. Whilst I run the risk, I guess, that this approach might transgress too many boundaries, break too many rules of “good” (or more worryingly, “normal”) critical writing – and is that an ethical or an aesthetic ideal? - I nonetheless hope that by focusing on the metaphoric and material significance of (my own or an other’s) death, and particularly on the symbolic death that surrounds and enables ‘performance’, I will reveal some aspects of what is most vital about what is also most ephemeral.

And perhaps, hopefully, as we dream in that heartbeat between the trigger pull and the fade to black, the localised realisation, seeing and witnessing of the immanence (and imminence) of death, and the relocation of the temporal not as the passive backdrop against which we play out the performativities of our lives, but as the origin and final limit of those performatives themselves, might bring foresight that encourages certain subjects, particularly certain queer subjects, to realise, in remembering the future<sup>33</sup>, in remembering death, precisely to fight and write and struggle for the chance, the right, the space, the time, to live.

*So as the smoke from that last cigarette disappears into the cold damp air; as the last trickle of rain runs across your cheek, as the million tiny dots shimmer and fade from the surface of the page, repeat (after me)*

*(Perhaps)*

Edited:	14 <sup>th</sup> August 2000, 5:10 pm	13 <sup>th</sup> December 2002, 11:08 am
	18 <sup>th</sup> August 2000, 12:12 pm	30 <sup>th</sup> December 2002, 9:57 am
	25 <sup>th</sup> August 2000, 2:50 pm	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2002, 4:01 pm
	10 <sup>th</sup> March 2003, 7:23 pm	24 <sup>th</sup> March 2003, 12:11 am
	17 <sup>th</sup> January 2004, 12:50 pm	18 <sup>th</sup> January 2004, 2:44 pm

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19<sup>th</sup> December 2002, 6: 42pm

In navigating the critical terrain that this thesis encompasses, the potential for advancing definitions of “performance” and for revealing how the performative, the temporal and the figure of death are absolutely interconnected (in contexts as diverse as poststructural theories of identity and sexuality; the construction of domestic architecture; the taking of photographs; the writing of a letter; the writing of a thesis), are more significant than is an attempt to “complete” an investigation into a narrow field of study. As such, the following chapters present a diverse range of ideas connected by virtue of their relation to temporality, mortality and performance: they are a series of “occasions” that enable an engagement with the central concerns of this thesis, and which also connect to and are underpinned by my work as a performance maker and practitioner.

Chapter one continues to explore the trope of the performative, this time recontextualising that exploration in relation to cultural configurations of sexuality and subjectivity, configurations that are absolutely grounded in the temporal and in relation to death. This chapter also considers the relationship between performance and performativity, and between the performative and the queer, and suggests that performance studies itself is a paradigmatically queer discourse.

Chapter two is the first of three case studies of performance events, and focuses on a production by *in: situ*, a Cambridge-based company that makes site-specific theatre in domestic settings. It explores the relationships between the architectural, the temporal and the performative, and in focusing on the themes of the performance *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning*, continues a psychoanalytically inflected consideration of trauma and death.

Chapter three focuses on my own production of *Written with Light*, which I wrote and directed for Fevered Sleep<sup>34</sup>, and develops a theory of the performativity of photography. Chapter four is a response to Peggy Phelan and Adrian Heathfield's *Bloodmath*, and considers the epistolary text as an ideal form for writing the performative itself.

As well as focusing on different performance and performative events in order to yield further reflection on the common themes of the thesis, these chapters present variations on possible forms of performative writing. The concluding chapter considers the problematics of conclusion in relation to a text on the temporality of performance, the performative, and the textual.

In constructing a thesis as a series of occasions that are connected by common themes and points of attention and marked in difference by the subjects on which they focus, I am ultimately proposing an idea about what it means to inhabit the discipline of performance



studies (whether as a writer, a practitioner, an artist or a researcher, or as all of these in one). I have already mentioned a greater interest in a rhizomatic approach to writing and to the presentation of diverse ideas harnessed by common thematics than in the in-depth study of a particular aesthetic, event, practice or form. This approach is itself one of the key ideas that the thesis as a whole proposes, and remains implicit throughout. By way of another metaphor, and in anticipation of chapter three of this thesis, where photography becomes the prime focus, I have also been thinking about cameras, focus and depth of field. On most SLR (Single Lens Reflex) 35mm cameras, there is an f number setting which controls the size of the 'eye' opened in the camera's shutter upon exposure. The standard version of these settings ranges from f2, the widest aperture, to f22, the smallest. The twist of the camera's mechanical eye is that the smaller the aperture, the greater the depth of field – that being 'the distance between the nearest and farthest parts of a scene that appear sharp at one focus setting' [Langford, 1987: 35]. So, geometrically and metaphorically speaking, an aperture set to a low f number will open wider and appear to take in a wider range of what is set before it, but will only bring to focus the near ground of that imagined image, whilst a camera set to a high f number will be able so 'see' further, or deeper, into the visual field, rendering deeper knowledge (in my metaphoric scene), but only opening over a smaller area. These ideas are purely metaphorical of course, as the size of the aperture makes no difference in reality to the width of the image or the range of the lens over the available visual field. But, by way of explanation, my approach is that of a wider aperture, rather than that of a deeper field, the f number of the eye of this thesis is set low. This is not to defend the writing and thinking here as superficial (it is worth remembering, indeed, that a lower f number setting, in other words a wider aperture, will admit more light into the eye and the heart of the camera, will be a more illuminating approach), but to suggest that a certain interest in surfaces and elisions, over depths and tightly focused investigations, is an integral part of my critical and creative approach to the project, and is certainly a part of the performativity of the writing itself. As such, within the thesis as a whole, I am interested in ranging over different ideas and debates, fields of performance and zones of thought, exploring a number of different ideas connected to a central concept (which might be 'time', 'performance', 'photography' 'death') in a way that leaves the outcome open to the vicissitudes of reading practices and viewing strategies.

This approach applies particularly to the ways in which time and the temporal are deployed and articulated throughout the thesis. Time in the context of performance and of the performative is the critical anchor at the centre of this work, and the examples from performance, the critical analyses of these performance events, and the theoretical contexts they inhabit and impact upon – and indeed the form of the writing itself – are all articulated



to and from a consideration of the temporal. However, time itself is never the ultimate focus or 'target'; rather, time and the temporal are means through which to approach, interrogate and articulate other ideas (for example, ideas about architecture, subjectivity, photography, writing): time and the temporal are pivots about which the complex machinery of this thesis operates. As the thesis progresses, notions of time are translated into other key terms from which it is inseparable: death, loss, absence and ephemerality. These translations are echoed at various points in the form of the writing that emerge in the thesis, indeed the textual form and the presentation of writing to the reader and upon the printed page *enact* the temporally-based ideas under consideration. As such, the thesis seeks to find forms of writing which performatively *speak for themselves*, where the form of the writing itself becomes an articulation of the ideas and events that underpin and precede it. This process becomes increasingly evident as the thesis unfolds, and is particularly prominent in chapters two and four, and in the conclusion. It is in this process that the performativity of the writing in this thesis most clearly appears.

The multi-directional, multi-focal and multi-disciplinary approach which I describe above is also very much grounded in relation to my practice as a performance maker: the focuses which I have selected here are just some from many which I have found connect to my own practice; in a different world a whole different set of ideas may have been selected from those that present themselves; these are the ones I settle on, for now. In reading this text, I would encourage a similar process of skimming across ideas, textures and patterns in time. In the same way that there is an inevitable work in transforming a performative experience or event into a written text; so the work of reading this thesis might usefully be marked by a certain performativity, a temporality that the text itself attempts to bring to the fore. Some aspects of this temporality I have sought to encourage through the formal composition of the text upon the page; other aspects will emerge only in the engagement between individual readers and the words I have produced, and over this I relinquish control. The act of reading is part of the performativity of the thesis; part of that network of iterable criteria, rules and scholarly laws that interpellate the thesis and its writer into the academy. The performativity of writing *and of reading* absolutely underpins the approach to - and the disciplinary politics of - this thesis throughout.



**Chapter One, or, Queer Time:  
On Death, Sexuality and Repetition**

In the introduction to this thesis, I have outlined a theory of performative writing, and begun to examine its impact upon the politics and aesthetics of writing within the discipline of performance studies. This investigation has indicated the absolute temporality of performative writing, and its connection to and celebration of loss and death. It also foregrounds the erotics of the performative text and proposes a certain queerness to performative writing itself.

This chapter seeks to draw together a number of strands of critical and cultural discourse in order to construct a way of interpreting the connections between time, death, sexuality and subjectivity, reflecting upon these connections against the backdrop of contemporary performance and performance studies. It considers the extent to which subjectivity itself is linked to a certain apprehension of temporality, particularly as it relates to sexuality, for which the polarities of teleologically driven 'identities' (in the modernist, rigid sense of the word) and 'queer positionalities' (as a poststructuralist, decentred concept) are positioned across and against each other. It explores, in other words, the shifts from stable and stabilising conceptions of identity which are played out in linear temporalities (paradigmatic is the coming-out narrative), to conceptions of queer 'identity' (which itself becomes problematised as a term under self-erasure) as non-linear, shifting, and temporally unstable - as shifting from cumulative time to fractured time. Of all the disparate chapters that constitute this thesis, this most obliquely attends to actual performance: it is not focused on any particular performance or event, but rather considers elements of performance and the performative in the very constitution of subjectivity. As will be the case in the conclusion, the 'performance' that underpins this chapter, is the performance and performative construction of the writing subject that produces writing itself.

The premise for this chapter is the connection between temporality and the construction (and deconstruction) of subjectivities. At the very outset, however, it is clear that this connection can be extrapolated (as it was extrapolated in relation to performance and to writing in the introduction) to consider not only temporality but also death. Death is deeply connected to the positions of abjected sexual identities (the position occupied in a politicised resignification by the queer), as they are phantasmatically aligned as haunting and shadowing the social order which has already accorded them a symbolic death through the operations of its heteronormative laws<sup>1</sup>. I shall begin by considering the ways in which the abject is constituted through the twin figures of time and death, and from this point of departure, I shall further explore the ways in which performance and 'queer' are similarly marked in relation to these terms<sup>2</sup>. Or, to pose this structural schema from another



perspective, I intend to find the connections between queerness and performance, including the extent to which performance and performance studies constitute themselves as elements of a paradigmatically queer discourse. I have already considered what can be the generative value of critical attention to and *celebration* of the refusal to fix already-absent performances in documentative scholarly writing – allowing them instead to end and fade and disappear - and examine in this chapter the coterminous refusal to fix sexuality and subjectivity in the rigid and transtemporal frames of ‘identity’. Both performance and poststructuralist subjectivities operate in a doubled and troubled arena of temporal oscillation, a liminal space where they might mark, become marked by, or productively re-imagine, the meanings of social, symbolic and biological death.

### **The Death of Identity?: from Identity Politics to Queer Theory**

One of the principal sites for the conceptualisation and representation of death in the cultural imaginary of the West is the discursive field of sexuality, which is consistently and repetitively portrayed as death-bound, diseased and dangerous. Nowhere is this association made more clear than in relation to particular instances of female sexuality and (therefore) of male homosexuality - drawing on cultural tropes that are both misogynistic and homophobic in eliding the abjected status of both women and of gay men. Elizabeth Grosz describes how the overdetermination of this cluster of ideas is reproduced through the ‘linking [of] sexual pleasure to the concept of death and dying, by making sex something to die for, something that is a kind of anticipation of death (the “little death”)’ meaning conceptually that ‘woman is thereby cast into the category of the non-human, the non-living, or a living threat of death’ [Grosz, 1995: 194]. This category is precisely the (feminised) category of the abject.

In particular relation to the ongoing AIDS pandemic, this elision of sex, death and identity is reproduced and circulated as never before.<sup>3</sup> Ellis Hanson, discussing the representation of AIDS in the late 1980s, describes the ‘truism that AIDS has helped to concretize a mythical link between gay sex and death’ and that this reveals that ‘notions of death have been at the heart of nearly every historical construction of same-sex desire’ [Hanson, 1991: 324]. Jonathan Dollimore, drawing on Hanson, considers this to reveal a culture underwritten by a homophobic phantasy in which ‘homoerotic desire is construed as death-driven, death desiring and death dealing’ [Dollimore, 1995: 27, see also Dollimore, 1998]; and Lynda Hart has shown that these representations are not unique to male homosexuality, and that lesbian identities and female same-sex desire are equally bound up with fantasies and imaginaries of death, danger and destruction [Hart, 1994]. This twisting

together of homosexuality, identity and death can be theorised – as I have already suggested - through the conceptual framework of abjection, which reveals how heteronormative hegemony seeks to secure its own self-identity through the expulsion and extrojection of its others - those homosexual others that most intimately threaten its coherence.

Any examination of the meaning and construction of abjection, as it intersects with the production of so called ‘normal’ and ‘perverse’ sexualities, owes a conceptual debt to Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*. The abject, for Kristeva, is that which provokes feelings of disgust, loathing or revulsion; it is that which threatens the scope of the possible, the thinkable, the tolerable; it is that which, through its expulsion, allows for the production of meaning, and as such comes to stand as that which perpetually threatens meaning. Disgust, loathing, intolerability, threat: typically homophobic reactions to the ‘spectre’ of homosexuality. According to Kristeva, the abject is produced as a kind of by-product in the ascension of the infant to the status of subject in language; it represents that which the infant must cast out in the move away from the pre-oedipal continuity with the maternal body, and thus constitutes the border between the self and the other through this very process of exclusion. As such, Iris Marion Young suggests, ‘the abject provokes fear and loathing because it *exposes* the border between self and other as constituted and fragile, and threatens to dissolve the subject by dissolving the border.’ [Young, 1990: 144]. Considering the symbolic processes of abjection that delineate the ‘straight’ from the ‘queer’, it is clear then why Young suggests that ‘homophobia is the paradigm of...border anxiety’ [Ibid, 146].

The impossibility of maintaining the abject *as outside* forms the centre of Kristeva’s text. In her conceptualisation, the abject is produced precisely from the ‘I’ (grammar becomes problematic here in the temporal movement toward this ‘I’, which is only formed *after* and through the expulsion of that which comes to be the abject) inasmuch that in the shift from the continuity of the pre-oedipal dyad to the castrated separation of linguistic subjectivity, what is necessarily cast out is of course *part of* that continuity which was the entirety of the infant before this separation took place. Thus, in Kristeva’s words, ‘I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish *myself*’ [Kristeva, 1982: 3]. In this, Kristeva draws on the anthropological writings of Mary Douglas, developing Douglas’s idea that ‘dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements’ [Douglas, 1991: 36], a systematisation in which dirt comes to be a formative exclusion for that which is produced as the ‘clean’ or the ‘appropriate’, finally meaning that both the ‘dirty’ and the ‘clean’ have a radical dependence on each other for coherent



meaning. Douglas states that 'granted that disorder spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern.' [Douglas, 1991: 95]. The symbolic and psychical equivalents of these systems are driven through the regulation and demonisation of certain sexualities by the twin engines of misogyny and homophobia, deploying a rhetoric and doxa of death and destruction that seeks to shore up the delineation between the 'normal' (clean, vital) and the 'perverse' (dirty, deadly), a delineation that is finally rendered supremely precarious precisely because of its reliance on these *constitutive* mechanisms of exclusion.

This trope of the abject as the effect of a constitutive exclusion upon which subjectivity is perilously balanced has been convincingly presented through queer theory, which proposes that sexed and gendered subjects are discursively produced, under the imperative of the consolidation of heterosexual hegemony, through complex and *repetitive* processes of signification and identification - processes which produce a subject by virtue only of its *becoming* normatively gendered and sexed. As Judith Butler has forcefully suggested, this heterogenerative network 'enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications' [Butler, 1993: 3], operating through an exclusionary matrix which forms, simultaneously with enabled subjects, a domain of invalidated non-subjects - abjects - who represent 'precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject.' [Butler, 1993: 3]<sup>4</sup>. Diana Fuss sees in this trope of abjection - and the associated image of the revenance of the abject - defining characteristics of contemporary theories of sexuality and sexual identity, and indeed draws on these ideas herself in formulating a complex model of the self-collapse of the figures of 'inside' and 'out' that such systems of expulsion and inclusion imply:

Heterosexuality can never fully ignore the close psychical proximity of its terrifying (homo)sexual other, any more than homosexuality can entirely escape the equally insistent pressures of (hetero)sexual conformity. Each is haunted by the other, but here again it is the other who comes to stand in metonymically for the very occurrence of haunting and ghostly visitations [Fuss, 1991a: 3].

This mechanism of extrojection, which is seen to simultaneously consolidate and threaten the coherence of compulsory heterosexuality, results in the symbolic death of those abjected identities that fall outside its definition of the 'norm', a destruction that effectively accords to the queer a status as walking dead, predicating 'queer identity' itself (like performance, remember) on its relationship to symbolic death. Phelan suggests that:

Queers are queer because we recognize that we have survived our own deaths. The Law of the Social has already repudiated us, spit us out, banished us, jailed us, and otherwise quarantined us from the cultural imagination it is so anxious to keep clean, pristine and well guarded [Phelan, 1997: 16].

It is as a development of these spatial models of interiority and exteriority that Judith Butler advances, through queer theory<sup>5</sup>, complex understandings of (sexual) identity that reveal iteration, repetition, and therefore *temporality* as integral to the constitution of subjectivity. In proposing a poststructuralist account of subjectivation that foregrounds and develops the political value of the fragility of these profoundly homophobic models of abjection, Butler develops the idea of the performativity of identity, drawing principally on Austin and Derrida, with Althusser, Lacan and French feminist theory (Kristeva, Wittig, Irigaray). This model reveals seductive connections between performative theories of identity and the shadows and echoes of death, time and *performance*, and I wish to continue by exploring the connections between temporality, performativity, performance and identity, specifically as these concepts have been deployed and developed in and through queer theory.

In her second book, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler challenges fundamentalist feminist discourse that seeks to install the unproblematic figure of 'woman' as the subject and initiator of a feminist politics, seeking instead to reveal how the very concept of a politicised feminist subject 'turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation,' continuing with the warning that 'this becomes politically problematic if that system can be shown to produce gendered subjects along a different axis of domination or to produce subjects who are presumed to be masculine' [Butler, 1990: 2]. Her critique of political systems that rely upon modes of visibility and political identity is in many ways coterminous with that which Phelan proposes in relation to cultural politics in *Unmarked*. Additionally, Butler problematises the very notion of 'women' as a political category, drawing on a plurality of *feminisms* as illustrative of the radical difference that marks female subjectivity.<sup>6</sup> In place of ontological and epistemic systems that conceive of gendered identity as the expression of an inner core or essence, Butler seeks to reveal gender itself as a performative event, as 'a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed' [Ibid: 25]. Drawing on Nietzsche, gender identity is drawn by Butler as an effect of its own expressions, whereby 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' [Ibid: 25].<sup>7</sup> To recall



Austinian understandings of the performative speech act, gender identity becomes precisely not a kind of being, but an effected *doing* enabled by the very 'speaking' (expression) of gender itself.

Butler's account of the discursive formation of subjectivity renders the shift from identity as an expression of immanence to identity as an effect of Foucaultian juridical systems of power, precisely as an effect of an interpellation that *subjects*<sup>8</sup>. Her theory is grounded in a temporal sphere, as this formation takes place through complex and institutionalised processes of repetition. Butler states that 'the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition' and that 'gender is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' [Ibid: 32-33]. Aware that this network of compulsory repetition is not one out of which the political subject could choose to place itself, Butler advocates instead a kind of subversive repetition and resignification that challenges existing gender norms through a kind of reverse discourse:

To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the "I" that might enter is always already inside...the task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, *to displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself [Ibid: 148]

Butler's *Bodies That Matter* continues and develops some of these arguments, specifically focusing on the potential for subversive resignification as the (admittedly unstable) grounds for a queer political action. In this text, Butler elaborates the model of repetition, shifting its conceptualisation further into the linguistic field by drawing explicitly on both Austin's concept of the performative, and Derrida's re-reading that insists upon repetition as the temporalised condition that enables the very possibility for successful performativity<sup>9</sup>. It is this repetition *in time* (reformulated as Derridean 'iterability' or 'citation') that reveals the status of identity - gender identities, sexual identities, sexed identities - as a profoundly destabilised and precariously secured discursive effect that operates in the service of heterophilic hegemony that produces as abject those Others that refuse to conform to its normative ideals. This potential destabilisation - and the possibility therefore for politicised resignification - is precisely what Butler seeks to reveal through the development of the models of performativity that ground her text, advancing and allegorising these through her critical resignification of the performative 'queer'.

Ultimately, over the trajectory of these two texts, one witnesses a shift from the secure foundations of identity politics (that sees identity as sovereign, unified, immanent and linearly organised through time – the temporal logic of the ‘coming out narrative’ that finally secures the attainment and adoption of identity) to the discursive instability of performative subjectivity, which is characterised as labile, protean, provisional, and therefore temporally insecure (refusing the closure of identity that forecloses on the possibility of self-difference from the *past* or in the *future*)<sup>10</sup>.

This temporalisation of identity and subjectivity is resonant of Freudian theories of identification (theories which are elaborated explicitly by Butler, particularly in relation to the notion of the incorporation of the *lost* other which Freud formulates in *Mourning and Melancholia*).<sup>11</sup> As Elin Diamond has pointed out, identification is a process of creating and moving through the history of the subject, and the institution of any identification is always already self-different in as much as it reflects and reiterates this movement through time; this movement through a landscape of *previous* identifications. Diamond states that ‘the humanist notion of identity as a model that the self enacts over time – that is unique, unified, coherent and consistent – is belied precisely by the temporality, the specific historicity of the identification process’ [Diamond, 1992: 396]. This echoes and affirms Butler’s claim that ‘gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [sic]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*’ [Butler, 1990a: 270].

To reiterate: this shift – from humanist models of the sovereign self to queer theories of the performative identificatory processes that constitute subjectivity - is profoundly temporal. The potential for difference that is referenced by the term ‘queer’ is a potential enabled as the subject moves through time. The very system of discursive subjectivation that Butler proposes – relying as it does on repetition (iteration) as its principle mechanism – is a system that cannot be understood without recourse to understandings of time. Subjectivity is constituted through what Butler calls a ‘*social temporality*’ [Ibid: 271]. Additionally, any discussion of subjectivity inevitably turns into a discussion of death - a discussion of that which surrounds and enables subjectivity (life, longing, living) as its own inner constitutive other, affirming again the deep interconnections that underlie death, time, performativity and performance in contemporary cultural discourse. Therefore, before returning (like a revenant) to these questions of death and subjectivity – questions that inevitably lead to questions of death and time, and death and performativity - I wish to track the development of the performative ‘queer’ as it has been introduced into, and transformed, the recent discourse of performance studies.



## Twisting the Discipline – Performance, Performativity and ‘Queer’

To chart the advent of the concept of ‘queer’ into the discipline of performance studies is in many ways to chart the complex interarticulations of notions of performance and of performativity<sup>12</sup>, or to chart the impact which ‘performativity’ has had on recent understandings and conceptualisations of ‘performance’ as both cultural practice and aesthetic event. Additionally, the erroneous collapsing of performativity into performance and the consequent and overcompensatory polarisation of the two terms, has at times seen performance cast as the negative other of performativity, a turn that in some ways continues a long history of anti-theatrical prejudice in literary and speech-act theory ( a prejudice typified at an inaugural moment by Austin’s sequestration of the actorly speech as both ‘parasitic’ and abnormal, as an inevitable kind of failure). Any collapsing of performance into performativity misrecognises the status as inverse or other that theatre and performance are often granted in theorisations of performativity,<sup>13</sup> and yet, at the same time, performativity has complicated, expanded and enriched interpretations and constructions of performance itself, not least in relation to the specifically focused ideas about subjectivity and identity brought about through queer theory. As such, to claim that performance is only connected to performativity to the extent that it is deployed phobically as performativity’s abjected other would be both to overlook the complex tensions between the two categories, and to foreclose upon the rich and productive ways in which performativity might enhance understandings of performance, and vice versa. This section tracks and traces the parameters of these debates, specifically focusing on the ways in which conceptions of ‘queer’ have entered into performance and performance studies alongside, and through, (new) ideas about performativity<sup>14</sup>.

The critical development and deployment of the terms ‘performativity’ and latterly ‘queer’ in performance studies have principally entered, stage left, via the writings of Judith Butler. Indeed, it is almost impossible to find any discussion of the performative in relation to performance that does not draw on, or at least refer to, Butler’s work.<sup>15</sup> The origin of this renewed interest in the performative within the field/area/discipline of performance studies<sup>16</sup> can be located – not surprisingly – in an early essay by Butler herself, first published in the *Theatre Journal* in 1988 (and reprinted two years later in the seminal collection *Performing Feminisms*). Drawing on phenomenology, early anthropological performance theory and linguistic theories of the performative, Butler develops in this text a model of gender constitution that employs an imagery and vocabulary of acting, performance and theatre, and despite explicitly seeking to theorise away from the possible



elision of performativity with theatrical acting, to the extent that she locates her theoretical paradigm 'in opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models which take the gendered self to be prior to its acts' [Butler, 1990a: 271], creates a likely source of the ongoing confusion and lack of differentiation between performance and performativity. The very sites, the contexts within which Butler publishes these words – a journal of theatre and a later collection of essays on feminism and theatre – inevitably implies a more or less direct connection between theatre and performativity that undercuts the demarcation that Butler seeks to present, and this is compounded by the paradoxical proliferation of terms taken directly from theatre ('act', 'stage', 'script', 'performance', 'actor') that pepper Butler's pages. Nonetheless, the piece represents one of the earliest incursions of the figure of performativity into theatre and performance studies, an arrival that has irrevocably altered the outlines and the outputs of these disciplines. The article also crucially reveals something else, something more pivotal – something often overlooked in much performance-oriented writing about the performative - and that is the significance of a kind of proto-performance theory for Butler's development of a theory of performativity itself. Butler draws on the anthropological writings of Victor Turner<sup>17</sup> (with whom Schechner first began to mark out the field that was to become performance studies as it is understood today), and as such institutes a linkage between performance and performativity at the originary moments of the latter's recent critical reclamation.

Peggy Phelan, writing in 1993, indicates the relative slowness with which performativity was taken up in performance studies, despite Butler's work in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and despite the location of performance studies itself at the origin of Butler's performative theorisations. Although Phelan's text precedes – and partially inaugurates - a veritable explosion of critical interest in the performative, she states that 'to date...there has been little attempt to bring together the specific epistemological and political possibilities of performance as it is enacted in what are still known, for better or worse, as "theater events" and the epistemological and political openings enabled by the "performative" invoked by contemporary theory' [Phelan, 1993a: 15]. Published in the same year (and evidence of the quickening of interest in the performative that runs concurrently with – or maybe just after - Phelan's claim to the contrary), Jill Dolan's *Geographies of Learning* outlines concerns about the possible (and already operational) decentralisation of theatre in relation to the emerging discourses of performance and performativity. Dolan attempts to recuperate the importance of theatre practice (and I use the term specifically here, against the more diffuse field of work signified by 'performance') for further investigation of the operation of performatives, as theorised by Butler. I remain sceptical as to the extent that *theatre*, with its ontological attention to the status of character

and acting can truly offer a locus for this investigation, and indeed Dolan's central point is that, paradoxically, theorists of performativity have also expressed this scepticism *despite* utterly relying on vocabularies and metaphors of theatre in the formulation of their theories. Dolan finally believes that 'theatre studies offers, literally, a place to investigate some of the questions posed *only* metaphorically elsewhere' [Dolan, 1993: 431].

Although not written as a direct response to Dolan, Timothy Scheie identifies the very complex interarticulations of theatre, performance and performativity, and warns against the potentially naïve or utopic vision of some theatre theorists who see in live performance - in live theatre - a means to directly destabilise hegemonic ideals of subjectivity through the very process of performance (in which performance, or, more accurately in terms of Scheie's account, acting, is reified as that which subversively reveals the oppressive systems that performatively institute and maintain identity norms [See Scheie, 1994: 31]). Scheie locates the difficult interconnections between performance and performativity in the problematic of the 'presence' of the live performer. He suggests that the likely recuperation to the normative of the potentially subversive performative, when presented in the context of live performance, is attributable to a spectatorial drive or desire to locate and fetishise the plenitude of the 'presence' of the performer - to find an ultimate authority, truth or quasi-theological presence which remains as the *origin* or *wellspring* of that being performed - thus twisting back straight into normative humanist accounts of the subject Butler's insistence against such originary truths<sup>18</sup>. Of course, this interplay between actor and character presumes a certain theatricality or dramatic orthodoxy - it presumes *acting*. To focus on the not-necessarily theatrical field of performance is to enter a realm where the potentially unmediated presence of the performer could undermine the weakening effect of the apparatus of conventional acting. But there is also a risk involved in this, since in non-theatricalised performance there is less of a possibility of collapsing performativity into (subversive) acting, which could recast performativity as a instance of the *performance of the real*.<sup>19</sup>

The difficult relationship between performativity, presence and representation is one of the reasons why performativity has been regarded with suspicion by some theatre critics and theorists, as it destabilises the ground on which a generation of activist performance - with its commitments to visibility and the politics of identity - has been built. As it brings poststructuralist notions of subjectivity into the performance studies academy, many defenders of this earlier, humanist politics of identity and presence seek to forestall the advance of the performative precisely in the name of a politics of sexuality and/or of gender itself. Exemplary of this movement is Sue-Ellen Case's writing on (lesbian)



feminism and theatre/performance in the 1980s and early 1990s: her work has been at the rockface of the ideological mining into questions of identity, identity politics, representation and visibility, principally in relation to the performing figure of 'lesbian' and/or 'woman'. In the light of recent challenges to the ontological and epistemological bases that such an approach presumes – challenges voiced particularly by Phelan in performance studies and by Butler and Sedgwick in queer literary theory - Case seeks to retain an explicitly identitarian subject position from which to write despite, or probably because of, the risk of leaving herself open to charges of a reactionary essentialism [Case, 1996].

For Case, in the same way that 'queer' seeks to reveal identity claims as illusory hypostatisations, so performativity, in her version of it, seeks to reveal the problematics attendant upon 'regimes of the "live" and performance' [Case, 1996: 13], as it is seen to construct "liveness" as a retroactive effect of the conventions of the copy. Case appears to view this as a deeply negative and difficult shift, which potentially disables any possibility for a culturally or politically engaged performance praxis (as she perceives it to enmesh performance in a network, or field, of ideologically deadening consumption and repetition), and as such seems threatened by the implications of performativity. However, whilst queer performativity explicitly troubles her identity 'as lesbian' (it seeks to), I disagree that performativity "seeks" to trouble or evacuate performance. Like Case, and indeed, like Butler herself, I worry as to the extent to which models of queer performativity complicate and compromise the possibility of agency [see Butler, 1993], and Butler certainly refuses to posit a performing subject as the locus of political action or change. But to do this in the name of clarifying the difference between performance and performativity *at the level of subjectivity* is not to deny the possibility of a politically engaged or effective performance at the level of cultural exchange or discourse.<sup>20</sup> In another section, Case notes that:

In addressing performativity, the critics of "live performance" detail a clear axis of dependencies along the notions of "performativity", "queer," and the realm of the visible in relation to writing. They must discover a way in which to rid the "live" of the contamination of "presence" and install writing at the scene of visible action [Ibid, 17].

This passage again reveals a deeply flawed misrecognition of the logics behind the separation of performativity from performance. Drawing on models of the interarticulation of performativity and performance elaborated by Phelan, for example, it is clear that this engagement with performativity takes place in terms almost polarised from



those Case suggests. Whilst the realm of the visible is challenged by Phelan (to the extent that its *instability* is sought to be secured), this challenge becomes directed towards writing itself, and performativity becomes that which enables the kind of writing that *celebrates* the “liveness” and “presence” of performance, even as it pleads that this presence is not fixed into any kind of preservative visible being.<sup>21</sup> This performative writing is exactly not the effect of some sinister plot to evacuate performance and advocate *instead* the modalities of print, as Case would rather paranoiacally have us believe.

It is worth repeating with closer attention the crucial difference – between performance and performativity in the realm of ‘culture’ or aesthetics, and performance and performativity at the level of subjectivity – that I have outlined above in relation to Case. I repeat it here since a confusion of these two terms (performance and performativity), and the subsequent desire to untangle the knots this confusion has generated, has shadowed and grounded many of the discussions which have brought performativity into the arena of performance and performance studies. Of course, the ongoing tendency to erase the distinctions between performance and performativity is exacerbated by (if not grounded in) the attention to the figure of the actor, or the metaphor of theatre and/or of performance which are deployed by both Austin, in his exposition of the performative speech act, and by Derrida in his re-reading of Austin’s ideas, although whereas Austin deploys acting as one instance in which the felicity of the performative is compromised, Derrida casts the very trope of theatrical repetition in such infelicitous contexts as precisely enabling of performative success; as Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have noted, ‘where Austin...seemed intent on separating the actor’s citational practices from ordinary speech-act performances, Derrida regarded both as structured by a generalized iterability, a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world alike’ [Parker and Sedgwick, 1995: 4]. However, it is crucial to remember here that what Derrida refers to in his deployment of a theatrical vocabulary is not the figure of the actor as such (as the one that ‘does’ - as in the one that ‘does’ its gender) but, rather, the more specific instances of the actor’s utterances (as the repetition of words in speech). To forget this specificity and to equate therefore performative iterability with theatrical performing, is to misread both Austin and Derrida, and leads to a common and pervasive misconstrual of performativity in Butler. This is not to deny, however, that Butler does problematically deploy terms drawn directly from theatre and performance in her early theorisations of the performative – a fact which is confirmed by her deliberate return to and clarification of these ideas in her later texts, for example, in the shift between *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*. And indeed although this vocabulary is a reason why performativity has been so easily absorbed into the critical

discourse of performance studies, it is also a source of the slippage between performance and performativity that so frequently – still – takes place.

Typical of this elision is the use of performativity in Ann Pellegrini's *Performance Anxieties*, in which the performative aspects of subjectivity are constructed as the occasions and effects of performances. For example, in the statement that her agenda is 'to see what happens by centrally engaging the performance in performativity *and* in psychoanalysis' [Pellegrini, 1997: 10, emphasis in original], the italicisation of that 'and', implies the equation of performance and performativity as a given, at the same time as it seeks to emphasise the performative aspects of psychoanalysis (rendered here finally *not* as 'performative' but as 'performance'). Elsewhere, Pellegrini writes:

It seems to me that this crisis of identification, which I am "identifying" as the critical method and madness of *performance (and, so, of subjectivity)*, may also provide some first response to the question I have so far suppressed. Namely, where is *performativity* – that is, the theory of performativity – taking "us"?...is *everything is performance*, and *everyone*, at once *performer and performed*; if there is no "Real", but only its endless dissimulations – what (and wherefore art thou) next? [Ibid: 9, my emphases].

This rhetorical 'what next' is finally a politically inflected question. Like many theorists engaged with the new field of performativity, Pellegrini wonders as to the extent to which it renders agency, politics and different kinds of identifications possible, and locates in performance the possibility of answering these questions. This is echoed by Elin Diamond, who introduces the collection *Performance and Cultural Politics* by suggesting that performance, as both a doing and a thing done that necessarily investigates and reveals its cultural, ideological and political surroundings, offers a site, an opportunity, to interrogate 'concealed or dissimulated conventions' [Diamond, 1996: 5] – precisely those conventions that ground, drive, and enable the operation of the performative – thus permitting, through performance, 'access to cultural meanings and critique' [Ibid: 5]. Careful not to elide performance and performativity, and yet aware of the problematic ways in which this slippage is always taking place, Diamond validates performance as the locus of a means to examine those ideological and hegemonic schema that rely on the felicitous functioning of performatives to secure their coherence. As such she suggests that any approach to consider the impact of performativity on understandings of identity and subjectivity, might best be 'rooted in the materiality and historical density of performance' [Ibid: 5]. Through



this assertion, Diamond counters the potential prejudice that strictly separates the subversive performative from the politicised realm of live performance<sup>22</sup>.

Jane Blocker voices similar hopes in her work on Ana Mendieta, seeking to validate and encourage, rather than forestall, the interplay between performance and performativity. For Blocker, the concept of the performative is precisely that which gives to performance the potential to effect change. If one seeks a performance that *does* something, that *produces* something, as an *effect* (beyond and in excess of its formal aesthetic existence), one precisely conceives of the performativity of performance itself (compare Tania Modleski's claim that feminist criticism and critical writing is performative). In this, one thinks not of the question (posed elsewhere by Austin) of "when *saying* something is doing something" but rather, of "when *doing* something is doing something (else)."

Of course, for performance to realise the potential for such political effect, it has to be able to maintain and present itself *as* performance, and as such to resist recuperation to or dissimulation as a normative real. This is not to claim that cultural activity which does not mark itself as performance cannot be politically effective, nor indeed to imply that performance which treads the liminal divide between performance and the real is devoid of political potential or effect, but rather to suggest that for *performance* to be politically effective *as performance* it has to be visible as such. Geraldine Harris proposes another way in which performance is always already performative, in issuing a reminder that performance can only be seen or conceived as such to the extent that it is seen to be citing the conventions of its own presentation (which might relate to location, work/spectator relationship, intention, aesthetics, form, time). As such, performance is given a performative force, an authority of existence – it is performatively produced 'through the citation of specific *theatrical* conventions which, precede, constrain and exceed the performance and gives it the *appearance* of arising from the performer's or author's will and being a 'bounded act' [Harris, 1999: 77]. In other words, performance draws its intelligibility, its potential to be recognised *as performance*, from the network of relations and conventions through which it is iterably, hence performatively, produced. However, unlike the operation of the performative in the vicinity of gendered and sexed subjectivities, say, in which the performative operates to promote itself as the real, the 'performativity of performance', as Harris calls it [Ibid: 76-87] operates to reveal performance itself as performance.<sup>23</sup> This critical difference echoes the distinction made by Parker and Sedgwick between 'the polarities of, at either extreme, the *extroversion* of the actor, the *introversion* of the signifier' [Parker and Sedgwick, 1995: 2]. What a performance displays, presents, foregrounds *as a performance* is precisely that which the performative attempts to construct as the real. Finally, for Harris, performance offers an occasion to not only intervene in the



cultural politics of its own context, but to also theorise and intervene in the realm of the performative itself: 'it is the way performance refers to the real from within the mimetic, *not* the way it remarks the mimetic, which potentially causes an 'interruption' or hiatus and makes performance useful in theorising the politics of performativity' [Harris, 1999: 175-6].

This complex interplay between performance, politics and performativity is typical of the multiple entanglements, impasses and counter/contradictions that inhere in thinking and writing and working through the current concerns of performance studies. As Schechner states, 'the subjects of performance studies are both what is performance and the performative – and the myriad contact points and overlaps, tensions and loose spots, separating and connecting these two categories' [Schechner, 1998: 362], and the arrival of the critical trope of performativity and 'the performative' into this field has generated and enabled a wealth of critical thought and writing that has gone a long way to begin a bridging of the false division between theory and practice that has been endemic to both performance studies and to theatre studies. What is also evident, is the way in which performativity brings with it not just a general approach to reconceiving multiple forms of subjectivities, norms, practices and hegemonic punitive discourse, but a very specific focus on sexuality and gender that inevitably and irrevocably queers the field. To reiterate this crucial point, the work of Butler in and through queer theory remains more or less implicit or explicit in virtually any text which discusses the theoretical and practical impact of the performative on performance and performance studies. Indeed, it is difficult to separate the origin of performance studies itself from the incursion of the performative into this developing field. In this way, the arrival of 'queer' alongside the arrival of performance studies marks the discipline as always already queered, bent and twisted from its roots in theatre studies, and implicitly challenges those that seek to recuperate theatre (studies) as the site where the charged questions raised by performativity might *best* be addressed. As the discourse of theatre studies has sought validation as a "serious discipline", it has countered its feminised history through a self-serving drive to reconstruct itself as sober, valid and masculine, and this has implicitly relied on the twin spectres of misogyny and homophobia. Against this, performance arrives on the scene as an altogether more slippery, sliding, perverted field of enquiry. To embrace performance (and indeed, performativity) is to refuse to work within a field which is predicated on an implicit masculinisation and heterosexualisation as normatively defined, and to embrace instead the protean, corporeal, *queer* potentialities of the diffuse zones of performance. As such, performance and performativity find in themselves a self-same attraction in that they are both irredeemably and intimately, erotically and repetitively, spectacularly and seductively entwined with the queer.<sup>24</sup>

Celebrating and seeking this continued queering of the discipline within which I choose to locate my work (my writing, my thinking, my practice), and my self, I am aware of the possibility of the institutionalisation of the very concept which seduces me in its liminal lability. For to valorise 'queer' as the trope which reveals the instability of both (on the one hand) models of subjectivity which require closure and stasis and (on the other) disciplinary boundaries that resist the celebration of their own indeterminacy, is paradoxically to render the term 'queer' itself as a signifier of a fixed – because *always* unfixed/destabilised – approach to discursive objects. Although I think the search for a different term to replace 'queer' just so I might use it here would be a hollow enterprise, I do believe that there is a risk of 'queer' in its current usage becoming precisely the opposite of that as which it has been offered. This might refer to the risk of its recuperation as a more fashionable term for 'gay and lesbian' (a recuperation as an identity that undercuts the very move away from identitarian appellations that 'queer' implies), a usage that disparagingly equates 'queer' with a purchasing of identity through capital and consumption; or indeed the risk of queer being transformed into Queer – another identity, another state of (humanist) Being<sup>25</sup>; or the risk of its reclamation as a homophobic interpellation; or the risk that 'queer' becomes seen to reference a specifically white political movement that does not fully address other racial communities [see Butler, 1993]. Additionally, the struggle to maintain a certain distinction between 'queer politics' and 'gay and lesbian politics' risks turning 'queer' into the kind of discursive monolith its deployment precisely seeks to circumvent. How to respond, in the face of these risks?

Towards the end of *Bodies that Matter*, Butler acknowledges the multiple binds of her deployment of a resignified 'queer', foregrounding the likelihood that the term will be redeployed, or replaced as its current (past) usage becomes obsolete. This is a risk that she both welcomes and foresees:

If the term "queer" is to be a site of collective contestation...it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively...the term will be revised, dispelled, rendered obsolete to the extent that it yields to the demands which resist the term precisely because of the exclusions by which it is mobilized [Butler, 1993: 228-229].



In the spirit of this invitation to replace and reimagine the very words by which one marks one's discourse, I acknowledge the problematic inherent in my own deployment of 'queer' as a signifier of a certain approach to the temporalisation of subjectivity or of the disciplinary context in which I work. And I use it, for now, despite the risk that my deployment will precisely call for a challenge to its use – I risk using it and so use it as what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called a 'nonce taxonomy' [Sedgwick, 1990: 23]. In the part of Yorkshire where I come from, 'nonce' is used in place of 'ponce' to signify a certain queerness, a certain effeminacy, a certain lack of obedience to a heterosexual masculine norm. For now<sup>26</sup>, I wish to risk remaining queer a little longer, because for me, for now, this term signifies an approach to understanding subjectivity and sexuality, and to advocating political action, that is profoundly entangled in images and metaphors of time, and therefore of death and of performance - the very ideas that drive and underpin my work.

Like all risks, this is a risk to be desired (all desire is risk, just as all risk is desire) and to be acknowledged. At some point, in the future, after I have risked handing these words over to you, we might come up with a different idea, a better word. In the introduction, I began to theorise the performativity at play in this process of shifting from writing to reading, and the temporal instabilities that this shift brings about. This problematic of the usage of 'queer' is a prime example of how the performativity of reading might enable the fluidity and temporalisation of thought and words that would otherwise become static, enervated, fixed.

At the end of the introduction, I suggested that in its ephemerality, performance might begin to offer a focus for facing death. In this chapter, I have recast questions of temporality, ephemerality and repetition in relation to the fraught discourse of subjectivity and sexuality, suggesting that subjectivity is constituted through temporalised repetition. However, if any semblance of identity is an effect of the repetitive, sedimenting processes of subjectivation, meaning therefore that there is no ground, no subject that exists outside these repetitions (I could venture here reference to Lacanian psychoanalysis, and speak of the subject of language, and indeed my written language here in these words, as instituted on absence, lack and death), then one has to wonder what happens to the subject *between* repetitions, and what happens to the prior and *replaced* enactments of self which are dislodged by subsequent and future repetitions. If the self is so precariously mantled on precisely nothing, then it seems that in this temporal trajectory through the performative instantiation of discursive subjects, there is a chasmic and seductive spectre of death and absence: the absence, void, real/m outside discursive representation that is maintained as



the very limit and thus the very centre of subjectivity. The question, though, seems to be not how this void can be rendered full, how the death-bound subject might be swung full circle back to the plenitude and sovereignty of the humanist self<sup>27</sup>, but rather, how the very spectre of disappearance, of absence, of loss might be recuperated as a starting point for a different attitude towards life – a question and a project that is all the more resonant for those of us who have already survived the deaths accorded us by the violently repudiating laws of the social.

If death, as has been suggested, is currently subject to the kind of repression that has characterised sex and sexuality – a kind of repression countered by the public performance of death enacted by live performance<sup>28</sup> - and if ‘death is power’s limit...the moment that escapes it’ [Foucault, 1990: 138], then one might deduce, following Foucault, that this repression is an effect of networks and matrices of power, and that individual denials of death are in fact the effects of hegemony’s imperatives to maintain itself as such. These normative power structures hyperbolise certain performances of the deaths of the “true” and the “good” (consider the Queen Mother, whose every extra minute fed into the spectacle of her dying) in order to encourage and promote hysterical responses to their specificity that are precisely containable, controllable, and subject to the regulation of mass representation. This deflects attention away from all our own social as well as biological deaths, the recognition of which would alter the structures of power that seek to keep themselves in place. It remains to be seen how the temporalised symbolic of death offered by certain aesthetic practices might participate or intervene in the negotiations that precariously secure, and constantly challenge, these existing systems and norms, these same networks that punitively regulate the organisation of sex and queer sexualities. This symbolic renders death visible not as an endpoint somehow removed from life, but rather as the absolute centre of the process or processes of living. This chapter is, in part, the writing out of a recognition of that process of seeing. We begin like Oedipus, blind to everything despite all the looking. There is another ending, becoming like Antigone, witnessing and understanding death, facing it with transformative knowledge. The repetitions that underpin that journey towards death are also here in the repetitions that emerge in the journey of these words from me, the writer to you, the reader, as I am enacted and enabled by the “nonce” identity from which I write.



*From the main road, turn left just before the roundabout (just before you swing round upon yourself, again), turn left and walk along the road. It should be a cul-de-sac. At the end, where the street twists itself into a bar-shape, or a kind of pause in your path, there's a squash of houses. There should be four joined, there, to the right of you. It should have taken you about four minutes to reach these houses, from the main road. The house you want, the house you will recognise if ever you find time to visit (as you know you always should) is not the first (or last) – not at either end, not right of centre, but the third – or second, depending where you're counting from – on the left, sinister in its waiting. The door will be closed, there should be a black plastic wheely bin outside. A scratch of grass, a path, I think, if I remember right. Ring the bell. Watch the shape jerkily walk towards you through the sight-bending swirled-glass-and-plastic door. The door will open, the house turn itself inside out to let you in.*

*Walk in.*



**Chapter Two, or, Home Time:  
The Uncanny Spaces of Domestic  
Performance**

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Two – The Kitchen (late night/early morning – a space for dying in)

When I discovered I was dying, at first, I was exhilarated. I don't know why, and I found this feeling both peculiarly comforting, and undeniably grotesque. For quite some time after, I felt dazed, and indeed I still can't remember anything of what the doctor told me in those few minutes before the words describing the illness itself came tumbling out like so many crooked signposts on the map of my own failing anatomy. Because I can't remember what it felt like to not know that I am dying, and since I don't need to think about the future because that's been and gone already (all crooked signposts pointing in one direction only), I find myself reflecting more and more on the mundanities of my everyday existence, and am often shocked and surprised at what I am suddenly noticing about everything that I thought was so familiar, so gloriously and negligibly banal.

All this of course is only the case since I gave up work. And so, I suspect, this rather belated attempt at writing is meant as a glaze over the day to day domesticities of a slow but painless death, and more

than that, I suspect even more when I push myself, a certain attempt to regain some of the authority I feel I have lost since retirement.

But as has always been the case, I get ahead of myself - I'm so eager to trace out and scratch down these last of my manoeuvres along that signposted road that I forget to describe the space around it. I suppose it is the sense I get that there's no time for space - a peculiar and uncomfortable feeling in one of my profession.

So, let me start by welcoming you into my thoughts. Nice to meet you. Please come in and sit down - make yourself at home, as I introduce myself. Michael David Stewart. Husband of Mary, father of Bella. Born, 1928, in a quiet part of a quiet town - a safe and sober childhood, sunday school, boarding school, private school. Studied architecture at \_\_\_\_\_, 1946 to 1951, graduated with honours, and the Memorial Prize. Proud parents, proud professors, proud me.

My life, since then, has been a life organised around building. Conceiving building, designing building, drafting building, overseeing building. I have become a sculptor of space, a choreographer



of pedestrians, of workers, a designer and director of light and sound and air. Forgive me if I err toward the aesthetic in this, but I suspect as well as being a natural predilection in me, this is also a consequence of the particular circles in which I have moved for the last thirty or so years. For I have made my particular name as an architect of theatres. You will see my marks on some of the more radical theatre buildings to have appeared in this country in the recent past - the refashioned tromp l'oeil shocking and ironic upon the neo-modernist facades; the space devouring atria cram packed with extravagant detail, overwhelming in its sprawl across the floor. I have of course always found this rather funny, this capacity I have to shift people around so much accumulated architectural stuff. I have loathed Le Corbusier, at times secretly, at times loudly, throughout my professional life. All those straight lines, those sheer planes, that anthropomorphic fantasy. The beautiful modularity of the body? Whose body? Not my body - my body sprawls and deceives and quivers and leaks, it is an unruly body, a perverse body. A theatrical body, I have realised, finally, of late. And this is the body that straddles

my buildings. And it is now the body that straddles this chair in front of this desk in front of this gleefully empty blank page, counting. Waiting.

But I did not set out here to write about these kinds of bodies, or these kinds of spaces. The history and aesthetics of that work of mine is both well documented, and, to my taste, rather academically overdone. You can find the books in any decent library. As I have said (and I hope you were listening, I hope you have remembered), what I have come to note of late, is the intimate, the previously hidden, the more domestic aspects of my ending life, and it is these aspects that I wish to present to you. And if my thoughts seem a little unconnected, a little repetitious, a little tenuously conceived, at least walk through them slowly (going wherever you want within them, though - of course), and I do assure you that the conceptual places I am drafting on this paper will make a space you can move through, with hopefully a few unexpected turns along the way.

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### Three – The Stairs

In his essay ‘Three Minus Two, Two Plus One: Architecture and the Fabric of Time’, Hubert Damisch describes the ways in which Hegel’s framework for aesthetic classification is organised primarily in relation to the dimensionality of the various arts, and how as such it marks a shift from spatiality to temporality. Architecture and sculpture, operating across and through three dimensions, are first in this taxonomy. Next comes painting, having dropped the third spatial dimension from the plane of the surface or canvas (though redeemed, perhaps, through the illusion of depth enabled by the invention of the painterly perspective). Finally music and poetry, linear in their movement out through time, perform the sounds of one dimension.

Hegel’s schema enacts a movement from an aesthetics of the arts of space to an aesthetics of the arts of time [Damisch, 1999:85], ultimately locating in music – in all its Romantic ephemerality and insubstantiality, an expression of pure subjective interiority (it is difficult to have surfaces, to be exteriorised, in one spatial dimension). In marking architecture as the archetypical aesthetic of space, however, and (musical or textual) performance as the paradigm for an aesthetic of time, this project appears to separate spatial arts decisively and exclusively from temporal ones.

Live performance is an art form that challenges this binarising conception. All live performances happen in spaces (the volume of the concert hall, the rake of the stage, the contours of the body), as well as through time (the repeats in the score, the arc of the text, the completion of the moves) and site-specific performances in particular implicate the manifestation and manipulation of space itself as foundational to the temporal, conceptual, structural or narrative development of the performance work<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the very concepts of ‘development’ or ‘performance’ imply movement and action – and all movement, all action is a conceptualisation and realisation of space *in* time, or vice versa. Space, considered as ‘distance between’, is necessarily temporal; and time – whether imagined as fragmented and unstable or as linear, is organised and represented through spatial systems. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, ‘time is isomorphic with space, and...space and time exist as a continuum, a unified totality. Time is capable of representation only through its subordination to space and spatial models’ [Grosz, 1995: 95]. So although performance is a temporal artform *par excellence*, it of course inevitably happens in space, and it is the fabric of space-time wrapping round performer and/or spectator that constitutes the unique phenomenal experience that is recognised therefore as “live” (to paraphrase Etchells, any ontology of performance is about the act of ‘being there, *then*’ – but it is also about ‘being *there*, *then*’). As such, architecture relates to performance not as a passive context or



location in which performances actively take place, but instead as a vital part of the meaning and actuality of any performance. Like performance, architecture organises and presents movements through space and time, and therefore ‘cannot be considered only as an art of space; room has to be made in its practice as well as in its concepts, for time and movement’ [Damisch, 1999: 87]. Walls, doors, ceilings, windows and floors (for example) direct and regulate the movement of subjects through space and time – architecture, like performance, becomes both a spatial and a temporal practice [Tümertekin, 1999].

In this way, architecture generates and enacts performances – it choreographs movements, it unfolds a dramaturgy of action and relation, and (as Foucault and Lefebvre have theorised, as I shall later discuss) it is also thus implicated in the regulation and organisation of subjects in both physical space-time, and the conceptual spaces and times of the juridical and the political. Synecdochically figuring a sociopolitical anthropomorphism, buildings themselves, ‘in their solidity and singularity, contribute to the notion of a “proper” body’ [Phelan, 1997: 80], a body which exemplifies de Certeau’s idea of the ‘properness’ of architectural “place” [de Certeau, 1984]. In this chapter, I shall consider how site-specific performance in a domestic location – a public performance in the intimate enclosure of a private house – raises questions of this propriety, and re-marks space outside the official architectural taxonomies that dictate what places are designated *for*. This transformation of the official places of architectural (and therefore spatiotemporal) site into the subjective and plural spaces of experience, has further implications for a theory of subjectivity, and though an analysis of the performance *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning*, by Cambridge-based theatre company *in situ*, I also intend to consider how spatialisation is implicated in the constitution and destabilisation of subjectivity in relation to the figure of ‘the spectator’ (and all this means for a performative theory of reception).

As well as considering the formal effects of this public performance (presented in a private home), I shall return to some of the themes of the introduction, to develop the connections between time (and space) and death, as these are explored and thrown into relief by thematic and narrative aspects of this performance. Additionally, I shall draw on Freud’s theory of the *unheimlich* – the uncanny – as both a framework for the analysis of this performance, and as a theory in part of familiarity and home. I will explore the connections between the uncanny, repetition, trauma, and the psychoanalytic theory of the death drive, as exemplified by Freud’s case study of the ‘Dream of the Burning Child’ from which the production takes its title.

#### Four - The Downstairs Toilet (voodoo)

I had a dream last night. In it, I was walking through my house, checking that all the rooms were still in the right places. In this dream, and I know this is absurd, I was convinced that someone had been shifting things around - putting a kitchen where a cellar used to be, hiding all the bedrooms behind a door. I moved around and around the house, and every time I came back into any room, everything had changed - a whisky bottle had appeared on the table, a pile of earth fell out from behind a closed-to door, an outline of flowers traced an absent body in my bed (I think this was my body in its absence, and seeing myself there, so familiar and so different sent a chill through me, even in my dream). There were people there, then, and many of them I didn't know. They were strangers, so many of them, here in my house. Bella was there, and she was talking - she loves to talk - and she was telling someone all about me, describing over and over my life and my career. And as I hunted for the stairs, to return to the room I had just been in, I opened a door I had never seen

before. A stone door, peculiar yet somehow right in my wood and brickwork house. A stone door, with my name carved above it, and a date, and a time. The time was 4:10 am.

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### Six – Bedroom 2 (heteroglossia/heterotopia)

In his reading of Georges Bataille, Denis Hollier develops a theory of western architecture as having its origins in the construction of mass, of material volume and weight, in order to ‘cover up a place, to fill in a void: the one left by death’ [Hollier, 1989: 36]. The funerary monument - the burial mound, the grave, the tomb - often viewed as the originary architectural construction, represents the organisation and manipulation of space as an active denial of time: the construction of buildings, of solid architectural matter, opposes the dematerialising and de-structive consequences of time’s passage. Similarly, Lefebvre suggests that ‘only through the monument, through the intervention of the architect as demiurge, can the space of death be negated, transfigured into a living space which is an extension of the body’ [Lefebvre, 1997: 140].

This instantiation of architectural construction as a direct response to time and death, is in effect a performative attempt to control and order time and space – to deny the movement of time and therefore the inevitability of one’s absence from living space. The materiality and solidity of buildings (their inevitable subsidence, crumbling and demolition transported to a comforting conceptual blind spot) is sought in order to deflect attention away from the immateriality and fragility of life. As such buildings, and perhaps especially houses, find their supposed atemporality juxtaposed with the temporality of the lives conducted within them. The house, in its stillness, volume and weight, is transformed into a silent witness, a monument and memorial to the living and dying within it. With uncanny ease, it becomes simultaneously a place of comfort and safety, and a preshadow of the mausoleum, the coffin, the tomb. In the way in which the house appears to transcend the time of those living within it, in the way its existence exceeds their own, its architectural construction seems to intervene in the temporal order, to interrupt its flow, to stand outside time and death. And yet, in appearing to transcend death, the house brings the spectre of death to the very fore. As such, the desire for houses to offer psychological as well as physical protection from death follows the pattern of psychoanalytical logics of desire – the house stands in place of death, and also points towards it. It is a comforting aid to



forgetting, and a potentially terrifying mnemonic for death. Hollier states that 'architecture is something appearing in the place of death, to point out its presence and to cover it up' [Hollier, 1989: 6].

In appearing to stand outside of time, architecture absorbs existence and retains it across the shifting of time. The fascination with derelict buildings, with ancient monuments, with empty houses and factories and caves, is a fascination with the lives once lived within them, lives that are held in a kind of architectural memory [Jencks, 1999], lives that have entered the alterity of the space-time of death, but which also remain somehow as traces within our own. This architectural memory is exactly that which designates and generates the figure of the haunted house – the domestic building as trace or embodiment of the past, of a past already lost to mortal experience through death. In transforming the security of domestic place into a series of spaces where the living and dying of Michael Stewart (father of Bella Stewart, one of the members of *in situ*: is performatively re-enacted, the performance of *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* creates and populates the uncanny spaces of a haunted house – a house which holds onto the secrets of the last hour and fiftyone minutes of a dying man's life, which are offered up to each spectator differently as they navigate their way through its various spaces and times.

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## Seven – The Garden (digging earth)

I am surprised at how remarkably easy I am finding this writing. I have never been one to worry unduly about words - my work has demanded very careful, accurate representations, not the slippery vagueness of language. Thinking though, about my recent transition from architect of space to designer of syntax, I have come to realise the striking similarities between my work as an architect and my new work as a writer.<sup>2</sup> I have realised the connection between my

transformations of neutral spaces into organised architectural places and this transformation of the blank space of the soon-to-be-printed page into the graphic sites of writing, and I am rather having fun in the rhythmic regularity of these smooth black lines.

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### Eight – Bedroom 3 (making places spaces)

In his study of how the everyday practices of subjectivity can afford a resistant response to dominant organisations of modes of existence, Michel de Certeau makes a distinction between models of spatialisation that constitute “places”, and those that enable and activate subjective “spaces”. He characterises place in relation to static objects, inertia and death – a kind of official atemporality – and suggests that places are effected and represented through stabilising and hegemonically regulated notions of the proper:

The law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability [de Certeau, 1984: 117].

Contradistinctly to this, spaces imply subjects, movement and history, and are thus marked and created in relation to time<sup>3</sup>. Space takes into account

Vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities [Ibid: 117].

The performance of *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* performatively enables the transformation of the official places of domestic architecture into the subjective spaces of performance and spectatorship. By presenting the performance as a collection of simultaneous and delinearised narrative and thematic fragments, presented in nine different spaces in and around the house (the living room, the kitchen, the toilet, the stairwell, three bedrooms, the bathroom, the garden), and at times by using live video playback to collapse the distinctions between these different areas, the performance deliberately generates an excess of material that is navigated and organised differently by each spectator. The experience is “polyvalent” in both its form and its structure, and the spectatorial body is shattered into a collection of individuals, of discrete and separate “mobile elements”. Each wanders on his or her own route through the house and the event. Not only is the very idea of ‘the’ spectator challenged by the presentation and form of this piece, but this destabilisation is enabled in part by the deployment of the officially private places of domestic residence as the resignified spaces of public performance. The architectural purpose of the building itself suggests a certain “proper” use by a certain “proper” subject, and the incursion into this space of other subjects (non-domestic subjects. Non-private subjects. Paying, public subjects) weakens both the constitution of the place – remarking it as a space for an aesthetic experience – and the construction of the spectatorial subject itself. The security of the spectatorial position *as* spectator is weakened precisely by the collapsing of the distinction between the different conceptual and symbolic spaces enacted in and through the performance. The house/performance site is at one and the same time home, house, venue, public space, private space, performing space and viewing space, acting space and walking-about space, living space and dying space. This multiplication of spaces within one place simultaneously offers too many different spaces for any spectatorial experience to be unified with any other, and furthermore challenges, in Nick Kaye’s terms, ‘the viewer’s privileged position as reader ‘outside’ the work’ [Kaye, 2000: 25]. As such, the production, with its multiplication of spatial meanings within the rigid architectures of the house, runs against the Freudian notion (proposed as a rejection of the idea of psychoanalysis as a kind of archaeology of the mind<sup>4</sup>) that ‘if we want to represent historical sequence in spatial terms we can only do it by juxtaposition in space: the same space cannot contain two different contents’ [Freud, 1930: 258]. Indeed, the effect of interpretation in the context of this production is precisely to multiply possible contents, in a spatio-temporal framework where disparate movements through time and space produce an explosion of meanings across the moving bodies of the spectators, rendering those spectators profoundly different subjects undergoing different spectatorial experiences, all in the ‘same’ time and the ‘same’ place. Beatriz Colomina writes, in an essay from her edited



collection on *Sexuality and Space*, that 'architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. It precedes and frames its occupant' [Colomina, 1992b: 83]. The deployment and resignification of architecture through this production renders those mechanisms of production multiple.

Through architectural practice, space is organised as regulatory, as juridical choreography that shifts bodies into certain positions and along certain routes (architectural practice is always contained within the regulatory practices of commission and permission and prohibition; it is never neutral, never non-interventionist. As Foucault says, 'architecture [is] a function of the aims and techniques of the government of societies' [Foucault 1997b: 367], and 'space is fundamental in any exercise of power' [376]). Within the house, spaces are allocated certain roles, and these roles are supported and encouraged by the discourse of convention (kitchens are for cooking in, not for dying in; hallways are for entering in, not for sexually penetrating in; bedrooms are for sleeping in, not for performing in). Lefebvre suggests that 'space lays down the law because it implies a certain order...space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing certain gestures, routes and distances to be covered' demanding of the individual, as such, 'blind, spontaneous and *lived* obedience' [Lefebvre, 1991: 143, in Kaye, 2000: 38]<sup>5</sup>. But the transformation of normative space into lived space (what de Certeau would classify as the making of spaces from places) – a transformation that may be more or less transgressive – restores the active body into this spatial discourse [Lefebvre, 1997: 46], and this is enabled by those everyday practices that resignify official organisations of space through the specifically lived trajectories and temporalities of individual subjects. Re-marking space as subjective reclaims space as one's own (my space to write in, my space to fuck in, my space to die in – if only Mrs. Woolf had known it would come to this), and can begin to scratch away at the hegemonic and legal discourses that have constructed it<sup>6</sup>.

As such, remembering Butler's theories of the return of the abject as the inner exclusion that constitutes the hegemonic "norm", space can also be involved - with uncanny familiarity - in the disorganisation of the structures of the normative social body. Space becomes a 'threat, [a] harbinger of the unseen, [operating] as medical and psychological metaphor for all the possible erosions of bourgeois bodily and social well being' [Vidler, 1992: 167]. This slippage from the organisation of space as knowable, regulatable, and controllable to space as subjective, resignifiable and re-marked remembers the spatial aspects of abjection. The contiguity between the "normal" and the "queer" that I have discussed in chapter one, is mirrored in the sliding from homely/proper to

unhomely/improper (from the knowable to the unknown, that which is within ken to the uncanny - the outside that is always already in) in these figures of spatial transformation. The (re)clamation and the meaning of space has always been central to the negotiation and succession of power – as history confirms on a local and on a global level – and this applies no less to the private locations of house and home than to the wide open places of public and political discourse.

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### Five – The Living Room (Father, Don't You See I'm Writing?)

In just the same way that neutral spaces are transformed into organised and ideologically charged places through the material processes of architectural construction (processes which create architectural place through the instantiation of *boundaries* that give to space a symbolic meaning as well as a material structure), so too the transformation of the blank page - this once-blank page, here, in front of you, covered in my (dis)embodied thoughts - creates a graphic and syntactical place designated as writing [de Certeau, 1984: 117] And in the same way that that disciplined and organised places might be transformed back into subjective, polyvalent spaces by the occupancy and movement within them, so too are the authoritative places of the printed page transformed into subjective conceptual spaces by the act, the practice, of reading. De Certeau suggests that 'an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs' [117]. Perhaps it is this implicit and constitutive potential for transformation that guides our secret desire to underline, highlight, cross through and respond (more or less exasperatedly) to the printed page. Those library books illegible through the angry, or confused, or disruptive pencil – or the arrogant, destructive pen - are evidence of the material effects of the practice of reading on the body of a printed text. So as you navigate yourself – more or less exasperatedly – through the places I have marked upon this paper, feel free to re-draw the paths, forge new connections, question existing thoughts, as 'you' create the spaces we choose to call 'my' work.

In the introduction, I write at length about the theory of performative writing, and stress its own importance to my critical practice. As I sit here, drafting and sketching my thoughts (via my fingertips) onto this page, I remember the experience of walking down that road, to that squash of houses where the road twists itself into a bar shape, the image of a figure jerkily approaching the swirled-glass-and-plastic door, the moving through someone else's home as a performance unfolded around me. The sense of impossible



spectatorship – the sense of always missing something happening somewhere else because of the choices I had made to watch *this* something, *here*. The slow ways in which my mapping of and moving through that house began to structure themselves into meaning, into narrative, into thematic and formal structure. I remember these things, and I remember those multiple spaces, hidden rooms, fragments of texts visual and verbal and physical resolving into the performance. I remember how the spaces of that piece were made by me.

This writing reflects that memory, multiplies it and transforms it. And as you navigate these pages, these fragments of texts conceptual, grammatical and quasi-biographical, imagine them as places in an architecture of analysis and meaning and reflection and thought. Transform their places into your spaces. Navigate them as you will. (This section probably ‘should’ have been where the hallway is – the first space, idea you enter into – a guiding principle that directs and choreographs movements in other directions. But you are in these places already, and are already transforming them. Keep going, go back, jump ahead. These pages are my performative re-membering, re-materialising of my experiences (textual, sensual, physical) of that piece.

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### **Ten – Bedroom 1 - ‘The Uncanny Spaces of a Haunted House’ (this line being a repetition).**

In developing his theory of the *unheimlich*<sup>7</sup>, Freud draws on a range of literary and linguistic examples to demonstrate how the meaning of the word ‘heimlich’ (homely) slides eventually full circle into its opposite, into the *unheimlich* (the unhomely), suggesting that ‘the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar’ [Freud, 1919: 340]. Thus the home, in Freud’s schema, changes from a place of protection, comfort, knowledge and safety to a site for concealment, hiding, secrecy, and not-knowable-ness. The privacy of the home becomes a spatial metaphor for the psychical locus of repressed material – it contains all of that which must be kept out of sight, and it is this psychical mirroring that engenders the particular feeling of unease associated with the uncanny. Vidler suggests that ‘as a concept, then, the uncanny has, not unnaturally, found its metaphorical home in architecture: first in the house, haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security, while opening itself up to the secret intrusion of terror’ [Vidler, 1992: 11].



For Freud, the *unheimlich* inheres not only in the psychological concept of the familiarity and secrecy of 'home', but also, crucially, in the figure of the double (he draws heavily on Hoffman's tale of the automaton Olympia in the story of 'The Sandman' in developing his theory). The double becomes uncanny in that it implies a repetition of the same – a closed circuit representation without difference in which the doubled subject stands outside time. The significance of the use of the double in death memorial, such as sarcophagi or death masks, implies this stasis and this atemporality, and indeed ultimately means that in interfering in the logic of the temporal order (presenting a semblance of continued existence even after death), 'the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death' [Freud, 1919: 357]. Indeed, for Freud, the sense of the *unheimlich* is the virtually guaranteed response to anything that echoes or simulates the inner compulsion to repeat that forms the foundation of his theory of the death drive. As Vidler suggests, the 'endless drive to repeat is then uncanny, both for its association with the death drive and by virtue of the "doubling" inherent in the incessant movement without movement' [38]. For Freud, finally, the feeling of 'unheimlichkeit' (unhomeliness) is experienced 'in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts' [Freud, 1919: 364]<sup>8</sup>.

In opening up the privacy of home to the inquisitive scrutiny of public occupation (allowing the alien to advance into the domestic); in performatively working through the processes of one man's dying; and in seeking to find dramatic means to represent death, the dead and the dying, the performance of *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* deploys and hails the *unheimlich* in several ways. It creates a figuratively haunted house – complete with voodoo death rituals, spiritualist's séance, and spirit possession. It employs structural repetition and the figure of the double/doubling as key dramaturgical devices within the production. It thematically and narratively foregrounds death and *the performance of the dead and the dying* as the very central aspect of the piece. As such, this production is illuminating in developing not only a theory of the relationships between performance and architecture, but also between the performance of death, and of the value of performance as a means of engaging with death (whether temporal, literal, performative, subjective or collective). The death of characters in the production, the death of 'the' spectator, the death and temporalised disappearance of the performance itself<sup>9</sup> – these central repetitions in *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* all illuminate the connections between time and death, space and performance.

#### Fourteen - The Bathroom (The Burning Dream of the Child)

The performance of *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* by *in situ*: is essentially a story. A story that attempts to document and narrate one man's life, and that particularly attempts to represent and re-create his (unknowable) death. It is a story that is told as a series of performative fragments, material memories, re-enactments, conversations, images and movements through domestic space. Through its telling, this story raises questions about the representability or knowability of death; about the reliability of memory and the mutability effected by time; about acting and the nature of performance; and about the multiple meanings of presenting performative dyings in a living space. In addition to these already multiple trajectories, it opens a conceptual space of ideas which exceed its own boundaries. As with all stories, it only presents a surface, and its interior is multiple. Just as its makers (its performers) move through their own version of this interior in the processes called 'devising' and 'rehearsal', so its viewers find their own versions through the act of watching (making conceptual and responsive spaces from performed and rehearsed places). This is of course one of the principle tenets of reception theory, and I do not want to rehearse those arguments here<sup>10</sup>. The material worked through and rejected in any process of artistic creation remains implicitly as part of the past history of the piece as it is presented ('presented' – in the present). In conversation with members of *in situ*: after the performance, we discuss sources ranging from 'Hamlet', to transcripts of audiotapes containing the phenomenon of the "Voices of the Dead" documented by Latvian psychologist Konstantin Raudive. These remains form a kind of palimpsest which constitutes the trace, the remainder of the performance which is always present somewhere beneath its surface, like the layers of paint that build up below the visible finality of a painting. These materials represent the excess of ideas, action, and potential that is cast out of the 'final' performance but which remains as its constitutive other, its unconscious, its outside – that which is discarded or repressed in order for that 'finished' piece to come into being<sup>11</sup>. In exactly the same way as there is always some other performance beyond and therefore within 'this' performance, its unconscious that is there but out of sight, so this performative unconscious always reveals meanings that exceed the intentions and interpretations of its makers. The critical analysis of these meanings (my critical analyses, for example) are like analyses of dreams or parapraxes – evidence of submerged ideas and temporalised potentials that are not necessarily confirmed or known by the mind(s) by which they are expressed.



So, this performance is essentially a story, a story focused on and presented as the last hour and fiftyone minutes of a dying man's life, a story which makes space available for critical reflection on an elsewhere. De Certeau writes that the primary role of the story is to inaugurate and open up a 'legitimate *theater* for practical *actions*. It creates a field that authorizes dangerous and contingent social actions' [de Certeau, 1984: 125]. This story is the context in which I wish to enact an examination of the relationships between performance and architectural space; architectural space and social and juridical regulation; domestic space and the uncanny; the uncanny and performance; the uncanny and death. These critical actions engage both directly and tangentially with the performance I saw<sup>12</sup>. It is their unconscious, just as they are its temporalised re-enactments, its oblique interpretations, its *nachträglichkeit*.

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## Twelve – The Stairs #2 (A Photograph Album)

I spent all of last week in the attic. It began on Monday afternoon - I was looking for some old blueprints I had made, designs and sketches and plans for a new house I was to have built. Though the house had never materialised, its outline remained a sharp image in my mind - even now I can see how it should have looked in the sunlight - and I wanted to find out the drawings, to see if what I was remembering was indeed anything like that I had planned. I couldn't find anything at all to do with that project, which I thought was strange, but while I was in the attic I found an old mouse-chewed trunk that contained my mother's photograph albums. I took out one of these on Monday afternoon, and suddenly the



meaning of the house was forgotten,  
and everything slid quietly in to be  
much, much closer to the bones.

Now, photographs have always held a  
certain fascination for me, as I  
have always failed to be deceived by  
their lying. When I first saw a  
photograph of myself, as a small boy  
in half-lengths and a miniature  
shirt and tie, I cried. I cried  
because the picture had been taken  
on a holiday at the sea, and the  
memory of the times we had had was  
so full of joy, and the photograph  
so still and silent and stiff, that  
I knew the two had no relation. As  
I grew older, and I grew clearer in  
my mind, I realised I felt  
uncomfortable about photographs  
because what they promised - to  
freeze time, to capture joy and  
laughter and happiness, so that we  
might keep laughter and movement and  
joy nearer to us - was everything  
they could never do, and that in  
fact they did the opposite. To me,  
they jeered and mocked and laughed  
at our folly, our desperate albums  
and labels and dates. Our needs to  
stop time, to arrest its passage.  
They make me shudder, sometimes,  
even now, some of those images from  
my past. They remind me even of  
death. They are so still, so flat,

so glassy and so distant - like an  
open eye on a cooling corpse.

But none of this forethought and  
this feeling fully prepared me for  
what I discovered as I opened that  
first album on that first Monday  
afternoon.

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### Nine – The Hall (Leaving)

In the introduction to their edited collection of essays, *Death and Representation*, Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen write that ‘perhaps the most obvious thing about death is that it is always only represented’ [1993: 4], later qualifying this statement with the reminder that ‘representation presupposes an original presence, and in the case of death this is clearly paradoxical. In any representation of death, it is strikingly an absence that is at stake’ [7], before finally concluding that, as such, ‘*every representation of death is in fact a misrepresentation*’ [20: emphasis in original]. This trajectory marks the paradox about death – that as it is precisely beyond knowledge (beyond ken, uncanny), it can only ever be shown, never known. And yet, of course, because it can *never* be known, it can equally never be shown, never represented. As I have discussed in chapter one, death (via time) has been foundational to the history and development of western theatre and performance, and indeed it may not be too grand a claim to suggest that it is also the principal thematic trope for the literature, the visual art, and the musical forms of the west. This simultaneous absence and hyperpresence renders death as a particularly peculiar aesthetic concern – it is both central to and beyond its (mis)representations.

Because live theatre and performance can be seen as privileged sites for investigations of ideas about temporality, they also offer a particularly resonant and relevant locus for an engagement and reflection upon death, as the performance of *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* suggests (indeed, they offer a challenge to the very idea of the impossibility of death's representation or experiencing that Bronfen and Webster set out). Live performance is always shadowed by its own symbolic death and disappearance – as the grounds for its very being – and as such raises similar challenges to representation as those posed by death itself. Schleifer writes that ‘focus on the temporally irreversible produces the difficulty of representation [Schleifer, 1993: 317], and that ‘when transience itself is the

supreme category of existence, then the “self-identical ontology” that allows for judgements of similarity and dissimilarity – that allows for representation itself – becomes a problem’ [Ibid: 317]. (These problematics around representation and transience are of course precisely those that underpin theories of performative writing, as responsive to the *un*problematised representational apparatuses of the ‘proper’ textual practices of performance scholarship).

This relationship between performance and death which I have already proposed – a connection which runs so deep, and is so repeated, as to have perhaps become uncanny – is particularly resonant in the context of site-specific performance. Clifford McLucas has developed a theory of event as ‘haunting’ of host site, in that it is a transient and insubstantial intervention into the space itself:

The Host site is haunted for a brief time by a Ghost that the theatre makers create. Like all ghosts, it is transparent and Host can be seen through Ghost [McLucas, 2000: 128]

In *The Art of Death*, Nigel Llewellyn writes that ‘death is both a moment in time and a ritualized process; it is also a psychological transformation and a social phenomenon’ [Llewellyn, 1991: 7]. Replace ‘death’ with ‘performance’ in this sentence, and the connection between death and performance is made even clearer. Llewellyn goes on to state that the process of dying is ‘a transitory moment set between the polarities of life and death’ [Ibid, 13], suggesting that this process effectively becomes a liminal space that deconstructs that simple binary opposition. This kind of liminality, of course, is one of the tropes that characterises contemporary ‘performance’, and doubled with the enactment of the very process of *dying* that structures *Father, Can’t You See I’m Burning*, foregrounds the performative processes of disappearance and loss as central to this work. This foregrounding of the gerund – of the one hour and fiftyone minutes of the *dying* itself – opens up the suppressed space where the contiguity between life and death can be experienced by the spectators of the piece – where the *performing* and the *dying* and the *watching* find common ground.

This multiplication of effect – the *death* of the character, the *death* of the performance, the *death* of actor, the *death* of ‘the’ spectator (and indeed, therefore, that old death remembered, the *death* of the author) enacts a kind of repetition, or doubling, in which symbolic deaths are encountered at every turn. This notion of the double is precisely that which Freud connected to death through the figure of the unheimlich, and it is already part of the very history and acting techniques of the discipline of theatre performance



(McLucas' indication of the presence of the Host in the Ghost is another manifestation of this kind of doubling). The idea of acting as doubling has been theorised by Phelan [1993; 1997], and is foregrounded by *in situ*: through a self-referential performance style that exposes the mechanics and the apparatus of performance as part of the performance itself, at the same time as searching out a means of representing and acting death. This space between the body/presence of the actor, and the (dying) body/presence (absence) of the character – this space coalescing around the actor playing Michael Stewart – is the site of the unheimlich effect of performance itself in which the actor symbolically dies as s/he assumes a character, only for the character to die (again) as the actor collapses the illusion of acting in order to become 'an actor' once more, to perform the very apparatus and mechanics of performance. When the character being assumed and then rejected is also dying or dead, the oscillation between acting/acted/present/absent/alive/dead spirals into a dizzying swirl which renders the performative machinery and dramaturgical technique of the performance as profoundly uncanny, demanding of the spectator a willingness to lose surety of what is real, what is represented, what constitutes life and what constitutes death. This trope of the double is perhaps the most direct way in which performance (here manifested as theatre) finds itself in connection to the abject and uncanny figure of death.

(As I have said, the double is linked to repetition in psychoanalytical theory, and it is via this route that it finds its connection, via the unheimlich, to Freud's theory of traumatic repetition and the death drive.....(to be continued))

Bearing in mind that the disturbing effect of the double is in part an effect of a perceptible stasis in time – in that it involves a collapsing of differentiation, distinction and *space between* – this performance of doubling opens up a conceptual space in which its spectators can encounter the alterity of death [Heathfield, 1997]. The performance of *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* is a kind of dissection of Michael Stewart's life (and his dying, and his death). It unpicks and peels back the layers of time and meaning that are silted up around his existence – a kind of anatomical and genealogical archaeology. The performance though, in the truest sense, is the dissection of a *dead* man. In mapping out the last hour and fiftyone minutes of his life it is a kind of *autopsy*: a searching for meaning and narrative in death. Etymologically, an autopsy is both a 'seeing for oneself' and a 'seeing of oneself' (a challenge to the figure of the impartial, objective scientific observer), and as such this performative aut-opsy allows simultaneously for each spectator to see for him/her self the process and drama of another's dying, creating a context in which to identify with the narrative and movements of death. As such, the production, by virtue of the

spatiotemporal and dramaturgical characteristics of its presentation and performance, becomes a performative means of coming face-to-face with (of seeing) oneself in death. And yet, to see oneself in death, on a psychical level, is to see oneself as other, to place oneself in the space and time of supreme alterity. It is this profoundly uncanny experience that dissolves the border between movement and stasis (echoed in the spatial dynamics of the piece in the contrast between complete freedom to move anywhere within the house, and complete entrapment within its charged symbolic spaces), between life and death, between spectator and actor/performer.

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### Eleven (The Past: An Unknown Place)

*Dear Michael*

*My dear, this is very possibly the hardest letter I shall ever have written to you, and my hands are trembling even now, as I begin. By the time you find this, I'm sure - if indeed, you ever find it - I will have long been gone. Before then, however, I felt I ought to explain what you have found here, today. Or tonight. What time is it where you are?*

*I couldn't bear to travel all this way alone, to this place, this place I am writing from now, as you read. That place I fear now, as I write for you in your future, and my irretrievably lost past. I couldn't bear the thought of leaving you all behind. I wanted to leave you something, and I had to take something. You will never have known this, unless you asked. That makes me smile, now, my dear - that maybe, even as I tremble in anticipation of you finding this letter, that indeed you will know already why I took the photographs, why I had them buried with me.*

*I feel that I need a part of you, a picture, a lock, a patch of light and darkness. I feel that if I take them with me, I might be able to find a way to hold on to you even after I am gone. I hope it will mean you will also hold onto me harder. Without the light, without the representation, perhaps the real thing will stay behind a little*

more. I think that this is my real fear, that if you look too hard and too long at the photographs, you will forget all about the reality of me.

So if you have found these albums, you will see that I have taken the photographs, and left you a little trace of me in each of their places. Can you remember those times? Can you find where I have written 'Burma, with Marmoset, 1916' ..... 'Blackpool, with Donkey and Ice Cream, 1937' ..... 'Michael accepting the Memorial Prize, 1951'? The proudest days of our lives.

I'm not sure why I have this need to do this, Michael. I'm not sure what I'm trying to make these photographs perform. Can photographs perform, Michael? Are they (in their absence) acting upon you now? I'm trying to make you see that those times are lost to you now - and that in the same way, in their absence, these photographs might mean more to you than the images they contain. They could never capture those times, Michael, and so I have left you only the memory instead.

Can you remember me my dear? Can you remember even my face? I have hoped secretly now for some time that this final act of mine will make you remember. Make me present to you again, now, as you read, across all this absence. My dear, do you see?

There is one photograph left, though, Michael, and I'll leave it to you to find it. But look quickly, before it fades away.

With all my fondest love,

Your mother,

Grace.



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### Fifteen: The Hall (The Dream of the Burning Child)

As I have said, the double is linked to repetition in psychoanalytical theory, and it is via this route that it finds its connection, via the *unheimlich*, to Freud's theory of traumatic repetition and the death drive.....(to be continued)

Freud recounts the dream of the burning child – the dream from which the production by *in situ*: takes its title - in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in the context of his elaboration of the theory of dream as wish-fulfilment. Freud's presentation of the dream is as follows (these being also the words that are repeated, repeated, repeated throughout the performance):

A father had been watching beside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'* He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found the old watch-man had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them' [Freud, 1900: 652, emphases in original].

Freud suggests that this dream typifies the oneiric function of wish-fulfilment. Rather than waking from the dream in order to extinguish the real fire on his child's dead body, the father dreams that the child is alive (though burning), and in continuing to dream whilst the child speaks to him, the father fulfils a wish that the child be alive again – in the context of the dream, the child is alive as it speaks to its father. For those few moments of dreamtime, the child lives once more – burning with life even as the real child burns in death. Through the dream, a space is opened up between the material reality of the child's dead body, and the vitality of that same body in the dream. It is in this space that the father's unconscious wish is fulfilled. In his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, however, Freud's reflections upon the dream repetition of traumatic events force him 'to question

the dream's wish-fulfilment function and to assign to it a more primitive role' [Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988: 483]. In this later essay, the compulsion to repeat that is articulated through post-traumatic dreams is redrawn as part of the economy of the death drive, and as such enters into a chain of traumatic repetition that is not easily resolved into the schema of dream-as-fulfilment-of-wish.

The father's dreaming of the burning child is in fact a repetition of the reality of the burning. It is a kind of traumatic repetition, that repeats the father's absence from the child's dying, and his parallel absence from the child's burning. The dream as case-study is further entangled in a skein of repetition as it is recounted to Freud not by the father of the burning child, but by a female patient who had heard the dream described in a lecture, and then proceeded to re-dream it as her own [see Freud, 1900: 652]. This chain of traumatic repetitions is described by Cathy Caruth as 'a repetition of the trauma...a redramatization...not a simple repetition...but a new act that repeats...a departure and a difference' [Caruth, 1995b: 101]. The performed, literal (re)dramatisation of this dream in the production (through the performance of Freud's textual description of the dream), and its allegorisation through another narrative of death and loss between a father and a child (inverted in this context into the story of the dying of Bella Stewart's father), and indeed my own repetition of these narratives through this written text, continues a chain of repetitions, a chain that was extended each night when the front door opened, then closed, when the curtains were drawn, when *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* was performed (differently and differently) once more.

This performance of performance-as-repetition-of-loss (the performances becoming absent others just as the dead do) is a performance, a repetition, of dying. The performance of dying, as I have suggested, enables a symbolic encounter with death, and acts as a reminder of the inevitable movement towards death (the temporalised return to death) that Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. As I state in the introduction, this reminder (this implicit call to remember the future) transports death from a teleologically driven future to a moribund present, a present that might be transformed by the acknowledgement of the inevitability of the death that is within it.

In the performance of *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning*, there are several video inserts, played back on multiple screens at various points around the house, which consists of footage of Michael Stewart's real-life wife (Bella's mother) discussing her late husband, his life, and her and her daughter's responses to his death. These are the very last lines of that video, which are played back at the very end of the performance:

Mary (MS's wife): Did you do your time of weeping for him?



Bella: No, not very much.

Mary: No, no. You should have done, Bella, you should have done. You've got to get the emotions out. It's *normal*.

Bella: You find your own way.

Mary: Yes, everybody finds their own way. That's right.

This seems to me to be a kind of validation and pre-diction of the effects of this performance, in that it gives voice to the opening up of a space in which not only might one family mark and mourn the loss of a father, but more radically in which each spectator might find time and space to reflect upon, mourn and re-consider the inevitability of their own death – to *find their own ways* of facing their own deaths<sup>13</sup>. And once the prospect of death has been acknowledged, and the time-before the acknowledgement has been mourned, time suddenly appears in which to work from this realisation towards a point where the repetitions that move us all towards death are not driven by some repressed unconscious mechanism, but actively enter into the performative enactments and movements through the spaces and times of life, thereby positively altering and reimagining the repetitions we effect upon the way. However, the very temporality and transience that allows performance to figure this kind of symbolic encounter with death, also effects a context in which to enact (for both performer and spectator) a kind of survival of death, whether the death of the performance itself, or the deaths of characters it contains. This cathartic experience allows the performer/spectator to move through a symbolic encounter with death, and to live beyond it to emerge the other side. The facticity of Bella Stewart's survival of her father's death in order to make a performance about it, and my survival of the performance in order to write about it, suggest a certain disidentification with death that *problematizes* performance's function as enabling an encounter with death's alterity.

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In a kind of coda, the above video-interview - the playback of which I describe as the 'end' of the performance - is followed by footage of the performance itself. This footage, that is recorded at several points through the piece (and is recorded anew each night), includes shots and images of the audience as they move through the space and in front of the also moving camera's eye. In watching these movements of myself and other spectators through the hour and fiftyone minutes of the living and dying of the performance, I experience a strong pull of disequilibrium – the doubling of myself as both performer and spectator, as both present as watching body, and absent as watched representation. I see



myself in another time, and another place – and when I cannot see myself, I sense the traces of my presence around the other spectators *I can* see, other spectators whom I have watched watching, whom I have followed around the house as they have navigated and transformed its places - and who have followed and navigated and transformed me. As I watch myself disappearing out of shot at the end of a video at the end of a performance about the end of someone's life (the beginning of their death), as the altered clock reaches 4.10am (the time, we have been told, when Michael Stewart died), I feel my own insubstantiality as strongly as I feel the electricity of my presence. I see my own presence. I see the arrival of my own absence. I see the burning vibrancy of life, precisely because I see the marks burnt out by this symbolic death. I see the white-noise fuzz in the place where bodies used to be, including my own.

The electric body burns on the screen.

The Ghost body seeps out through the walls of the house.

The performance fades and disappears and the performative spaces turn back into domestic places.

I close my eyes, and try to keep watch, and see.

(‘Father, Don’t You See I’m Burning?’)

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### Thirteen: Re-entry, by Way of an End

On 15<sup>th</sup> November 2000 (in the middle of writing this chapter) I received a publicity flyer for a new work by *in situ*, *The Decameron*. This is an extract from that flyer:

A group of wealthy young people take refuge from the Black Death in a villa outside Florence. They entertain each other by telling stories about love, sex and adventure – stories that are funny, vivacious and optimistic. Life and love on the inside: Death on the outside. Death on a scale unprecedented in European history’ [*in situ*, 2000]

This description of love in the time of a plague, of the spatialisation of eroticism and sexuality, of the possibility of performance in the face of death, is profoundly resonant in the context of contemporary debates about the spatio-legal regulation of sex and sexuality, and in the long shadows of another ‘unprecedented plague’, that of HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, the implicit equation of inside = love and outside = death which this text conjures once more resonates with the image and presence of the trope of the abject that underpins so much of contemporary thought about sexualities and identities, and that also underpins so much of the writing in this thesis. The development of a theory of spatial propriety which has run through this chapter is always already caught up relation to the sexual, as the sexual is one realm where spatial rules have an impact both symbolically and in the letter of the law. The performance of *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* thus offers one focus for considering this juridical organisation of sexual practice and sexuality, in relation to the collapsing of public and private, and the resignification of domestic space, that that piece enacts<sup>14</sup>. I wish to end this chapter with a brief development and resolution of these ideas, which take *The Decameron* as their focus.

In many ways, *The Decameron* is isomorphic with *Father, Can't You See I'm Burning* – the multiplication of spaces from the domestic places of the (same) house; the simultaneity of the presentation of multiple texts; the freedom for the spectator to wonder and wander and make meaning like some kind of domesticated *flâneur*, the overwhelming waterfall of text and shifting characters. Where, in the previous production, video inserts are used to destabilise the unity of the spatio-temporal structure of the performance itself, in this show the production and display of photographic images of/as the piece remind of the use of photographs as memorial, as visual tokens against the dematerialising effects of time.

The most distinctive theme of *The Decameron*, however, is its explicit attention to the geography and spatialisation of sexuality, and the direct links it makes from this to the spatialisation of illness and plague. Structured through narratives of love, sex and the comedies of eroticism taken directly from Boccaccio's text, the work makes direct links between space, identity and sexuality, links that have led Beatriz Colomina to suggest that ‘the politics of space are always sexual’ [Colomina, 1992a: np]. The work makes explicit and literal the connection between sexuality and the enabling (or disabling) spaces in which it is manifested, and through which it is constructed. Indeed, reversing this idea, and according to Mark Wigley, ‘place is not simply a mechanism for controlling sexuality. Rather, it is the control of sexuality by systems of representation that produces place’ [Wigley, 1992:350]. In other words, regulatory places (particularly those designated as ‘public’ and ‘private’) are constructed via the sexualities they contain and control, and as such are vulnerable to resignification by transgressive or contradictory spatial or sexual



practices, a resignification that might take the same form as the resignification of domestic (private) places as performative (public) spaces that I have already discussed.

In the same way that the location of sexual narratives and practices in Boccaccio's text is grounded in and informed by the wider context of a plague, so too contemporary spatialisations of sexuality are ordered by the impact of AIDS epidemiology, and indeed contemporary geographical understandings of the global AIDS pandemic continue to portray and reproduce a picture in which geography, race and nationality are replacing sexuality (and the generally urbanised enclosures of intravenous drug use) as the privileged indicators of the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. In fact, in current AIDS discourse, geography and geographically-located nationality (both vectors of different kinds of spatialising systems) have superseded the notions of "high risk groups" that characterised prior epidemiological rhetoric, and instead identify place and location as chief indicators of the spread and necessary containment of the virus. The effect of this shift is to render illness as outside of the domestic (both architectural and national domesticity), a trope that has a long history in representations of plague. Discussing the history of privacy (and the connection between architecture and sexuality in this history), Mark Wigley describes 'the treatment of the body as a building' [Wigley, 1992: 359], and how 'the body was increasingly subjected to the very same regimes of hygiene, order, discipline, and prohibition as buildings' [358-9]. During the European plagues of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this 'domestication' of the body intensified as a response to the viral threat:

The dominant figure for the body remained that of the house. But with the plague, the very walls of that house are seen as porous. As any kind of opening constituted the possibility of a medical "disorder", the monitoring of the body's multiplying openings, demands a greater vigilance against infiltration [359]

In contemporary plague discourse (where that plague is named as HIV and AIDS) this attention to the patrolling of boundaries, and these spatialising models of communicability and protection are no less prevalent, nor any less concerned with the guarding of orifices, openings, and routes of travel and transmission. Of course, as Cindy Patton has identified, so-called "African AIDS" is the paradigm for this kind of spatial re-conceptualisation, suggesting that 'this is a shift from...a fundamentally epidemiological understanding of the HIV epidemic, which seeks to understand *who* a body is, to one which is fundamentally related to notions of place – to *where* a body is' [Patton, 1995: 188-9]. This shift mobilises systems of sequestration, containment and quarantine (with all the temporal associations



that connotes) – kinds of spatial prophylaxis – that pathologise places and medicalise geographies, and shift the epicentre of HIV and AIDS discourse away from particular *kinds* of people to *all* people in particular places. The impact of this spatialisation of HIV and AIDS is rendered explicit in *The Decameron*, which combines Boccaccio's fourteenth century text with narratives of HIV and AIDS in contemporary Malawi. The recent media attention (in the build up to World AIDS Day) to the terrifying prevalence of HIV and AIDS in parts of sub-Saharan Africa supports and disseminates this *placing* of plague narratives, displaying statistics and data as markers of the differences between 'here' and 'there'. Of course, this constructs an abject zone in which 'the real AIDS crisis' is contained, hailing and constructing the spatialisation of the HIV virus and its effects in much the same way as structures of abjection have been (and continue to be) deployed in the spatialisation and demarcation of certain (sexual) groups marked thereby as "high risk".

It remains to be seen how these spatialising models of disease prevalence, prevention and control will develop, and what will be the consequences of a geographical imaginary that renders AIDS as somehow elsewhere. It is clear, however, that the spatialisation of HIV and AIDS, and the ways in which we respond to these spatial models, are and will be crucial factors in understandings of and responses to the pandemic, both 'at home' and 'elsewhere', and the effects of these responses will impact upon the pathologisation of sexuality, identity and location in ways that travel from the public and global arena of HIV and AIDS, right back to the 'private' intimacy of domestic space.

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### One – The Inside of the House, as Seen From the Outside<sup>15</sup>

I thought I ought to let you know,  
before you leave, that I have  
finally found that photograph. I  
have to say, I was surprised at what  
it contains. It is a photograph of  
me, taken some time ago. At first,  
it appears to be just a smeared  
print, overexposed, and with jagged  
lines cutting at the edges. Then,  
as you look closer at it, very  
close, so close that you cannot see

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**AVAILABLE**

Poor text in the original  
thesis.

its edge perhaps, you notice along the right hand border a strip of torn cloth, red, velvet I think, and, to the left, about half way up, a bunch of rope and what looks like plaster, chipped and faded and flaking away. In the foreground of the picture are some dirty wooden boards, and then a drop, and what's beyond that space you cannot see.

The photograph was taken the day after I died. I am almost offstage, at the extreme left edge of the picture, near the corner, one foot and a stretch of trouser leg all that's visible. It's difficult to tell how I died, precisely, or why I had come back to this place, alone, before it happened. The effect of time on the photograph has bleached and bled the contrast, and the resolution now is lost. But if you look closely, and look long enough, you'll see the other figure in this scene, there, to the right of where you're looking now, looking back at you. I think that is a mirror, there, but I'm not sure, and it's too late to check. The curls of flame are snatching at the cloth and the wood of the stage floor. I think I'm alone now, and someone else has gone, and now, even still.







**Chapter Three, or, Exposure Time:  
Towards a Performativity of Photography**



photography *n.* 1 the art or process of taking photographs 2 the business of producing and printing photographs. [from Greek *photos* light, and *graphia* writing; 'written with light'].

\* \* \* \* \*

Snapshots/A photo album.

*Fragments, by way of developing a beginning (Flash. Click. Expose. Develop. Fix):*

'But there was another and more fatal objection to this method of "picturing by light", which not even Davy, with all his chemical knowledge, was able to surmount. When the copies obtained were exposed to daylight, the same agency which had produced the picture proceeds to destroy it. The action of sunlight...speedily blackened the entire surface of the paper or leather, causing the whole to become of one uniform tint in which nothing could be distinguished. To prevent this, it was clearly necessary to remove the unacted-on silver salt after the image had been formed.'<sup>1</sup>

'...we know that Niépce used the substance [silver chloride], and that he gave it up, because, like Wedgwood and Davy, he was unable to fix or render permanent the pictures secured by its aid.'<sup>2</sup>

'The chief objection to the beautiful and ingenious process discovered by Nicéphore Niépce was the great length of time for which the bitumenized plate needed to be exposed in the camera. For an ordinary landscape an exposure of six to eight hours was required. During this time the shadows of objects changed from one side to the other...'<sup>3</sup>

'Daguerre found that the iodide of silver, formed by exposing silver to the vapour of iodine, was sensitive to light. When such "iodized silver plates" were exposed within the camera, faint images of bright objects were impressed upon the plate in the course of two or three hours.'<sup>4</sup>

'...it was soon found that the prolonged emulsification required in his method –stewing for seven days at 90 deg. – was not only very tedious and troublesome, but that – more especially in summer – it produced other evils...'<sup>5</sup>

'When the sun shines, small portraits can be obtained by my process in one or two seconds, but large portraits require a somewhat longer time. When the weather is dark and

cloudy, a corresponding allowance is necessary, and a greater demand is made upon the patience of the sitter.’<sup>6</sup>

‘The process of fixation was a simple one, and it was sometimes very successful. The disadvantages to which it was liable did not manifest themselves until a later period, and arose from a new and unexpected cause, namely, that when a picture is so treated, although it is permanently secured against the *darkening* effect of the solar rays, yet it is exposed to a contrary or *whitening* effect from them; so that after the lapse of some days the dark parts of the picture begin to fade, and gradually the whole picture become obliterated, and is reduced to the appearance of a uniform pale yellow sheet of paper.’<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The Negative: From Which the Image is Made**

The idea of performative writing that underpins this thesis and is theorised within it springs from a critical unease around the act of transforming live performance (in all its transience, temporality and mutability) into representations of performance, through the medium of critical writing itself. In much of the writing about this problem of documenting performance (writings such as Phelan’s), in which a theory of performative writing is developed, photography is constructed as – and criticised for being – one of those representational systems that present a static idea of performance at the same time as claiming to have captured its very essence – thus transforming its action and liveness into stillness and death. For example, in her essay on performance, photography and the sense of touch, Kathy O’Dell asks:

what do all the photographs taken of any performance really add up to when one considers that each photograph reveals, depending on the camera’s f/stop setting, only 1/15<sup>th</sup>, 1/30<sup>th</sup>, or even 1/60<sup>th</sup> of a second of the performed action?...how can knowledge of a performed work of art be gained through a document which, due to the technical limitations of the apparatus producing it, so vastly delimits information? [O’Dell, 1997: 73].

Similarly, Phelan states that ‘defined by its ephemeral nature, performance art cannot be documented (when it is, it turns into that document – a photograph, a stage design, a video tape, and ceases to be performance art)’ [Phelan, 1993: 31]. Even Auslander, who in *Liveness* tries to collapse the distinctions between performance and its mediatised ‘others’,

suggests that the incompatibility of performance and photography is because of the different temporal dimensions of the two forms:

The question of temporality places still photography in an ambiguous position, since photography does record performance but only as a series of individual moments divorced from their temporal procession. [This raises] the question of whether or not a static visual medium can be said to reproduce the temporality of performance [Auslander, 1999: 52n].

These ideas all suggest a critical concern over the relationship between the temporal presence of performance and the documentation and attempted reproduction of that temporality through photography; a doubt as to photography's capacity to approach performance and hence to document it. They implicitly develop Benjamin's ideas of the auracity of the authentic work of art, and the destruction of this auracity through its representations and (mechanical) reproductions - through photographs, for instance. It is not only performance theorists who write on performance and photography in these terms. In her foreword to RoseLee Goldberg's *Performance*, Laurie Anderson describes her own attitude to documentation:

I myself used to be very proud that I didn't document my work. I felt that, since much of it was about time and memory, that was the way it should be recorded - in the memories of the viewers, with all the inevitable distortions, associations, elaborations [in Goldberg, 1998: 6]

Anderson's remembered stance implicitly suggests that the document and the performance are ultimately so different from each other that even an imperfect memory is more appropriate than an "accurate" photographic document, particularly in respect of the temporal aspects of her work. Even when Anderson describes her decision to begin video and photographic documentation (paradoxically to prevent the mnemonic distortions she had previously encouraged), she suggests the inherent transformations in these processes, echoing Phelan's own concerns:

When live art is documented through film or audio recordings it immediately becomes another artform - a film or a record - another rectangle or disk [Ibid: 7].



In her own lengthy introduction to *Performance*, Goldberg spends considerable time theorising her dependence on the photographic document within the text, necessarily conceding the problematic relationship between documentary photography and live performance, asking ‘how can an often poorly lit photograph possibly convey the thrill of a one-time live experience? Isn’t such a record a contradiction in terms?’ [Ibid: 32]. In order to overcome this difficulty in presenting a book that is primarily a catalogue of visual representations of performance, with textual accompaniment, Goldberg makes the canny move of side-stepping both photographs and performances themselves, suggesting that:

these printed residues of past live events recall the aesthetic sensibilities of an era...they also encompass concerns of a period that reach way beyond the actual photograph, such as the place of nudity, ritual, cultural identity, or gender in our late twentieth century world [Ibid: 32].

In other words, unable to adequately accommodate the gap she perceives between performances and their photographic documents, Goldberg shifts her focus onto the idea of the photograph as document of the contextual, rather than of performances themselves, deploying generics to overcome the difficulties related to temporal specifics.<sup>8</sup> Although Goldberg’s desire to make performance and photography more similar to each other - by showing how to a lesser or greater degree they relate to, reveal, and reflect upon the cultural and political contexts of their production - is not unlike my own project in this chapter, this desire seems to swell from an idea of the *problematic* of the documentation of performance through photography. It seems that the more Goldberg seeks to find a way of theoretically aligning performance and its photographic documents, the more she reveals the implicit conflict in what she perceives as the fundamental incompatibility of the two.

Central to this perceived conflict - that between photographs and performance - is the accepted idea that the photograph is a technology developed as a means of stopping time. This idea of the temporality of the photograph, marked as a kind of a-temporality, an outside-of-time-ness, has become what Yve Lomax calls an *idée fixe* – it has been so repeated that it has become naturalised as the essence of the photograph: a fixed idea, immovable and prejudicial [Lomax, 1994: 39]. Lomax asks:

How often have you heard the idea that the photograph immobilises time?

- ‘The photograph is a device for stopping time.’

- ‘The photograph is a frozen moment.’
- ‘The photograph captures time.’
- ‘The photograph freezes time,’

and continues:

It seems to me that we have become fixed upon fixing the photograph as a segment of frozen time [Lomax, 1994: 39].

This paradigm of the photograph as the arresting or immobilisation of temporality, of the stopping of time’s passing, is of course one of the principal sources of the recent theorisation of the photograph-as-document, in which the photograph becomes some kind of antithesis to the live, temporally grounded, performance it represents, as such becoming antithetical to performance itself (in the quotation above, Auslander describes photography as a ‘series of individual moments’ and as a ‘static visual medium’).

This *idée fixe*, however, appears to me to be an ideological effect or technical construction of the very history of photography, and paradoxically is a counter-consequence of certain characteristics of early photographic techniques; characteristics of ephemerality, mutability and temporality. In the late 1830s, when precursors of contemporary photographic technologies were being developed by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, Louis-Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox-Talbot, one of the main difficulties that faced these pioneers was that the images produced through processes such as the heliograph, the daguerreotype and the calotype changed and disappeared through time, and that the technologies themselves – as combinations of the sciences of chemistry and optics – were such that the production of a ‘photograph’ could take from several minutes to several hours, with preparation times often lasting for several days: *stasis* and *temporal fragmentation* were precisely not the defining characteristic of these early explorations: movement, time and flow, however, were. The contemporary culture of the snapshot, and the technological advances that allow ultra-high speed photography, are clearly very different from this early history of the medium, and, in part at least, are reactions against the temporal ‘limitations’ and characteristics of the emerging form. Of course, as nineteenth century accounts of attempts to develop a workable photographic process show, the *concerns* to reduce the temporality of photography evident in these two periods are the same: they are both marked by a desire to reduce exposure time, to reduce developing time, to increase – or to enable – permanence<sup>9</sup>.



The recent democratisation (for which read commercialisation) of the photograph means that it is now possible to purchase ready prepared film, in a disposable camera, which will take a shot with a shutter speed of fractions of a second, and can then be sent away for development, and prints collected within a couple of hours or less. These contemporary technologies operate in a way that tends to obscure the alternative temporality of photography, and to deny or devalue those alternatives that encourage a return to the time-based origins of the medium. That these originary moments of photography (not that 'moment' is really the appropriate word) are temporalised in every respect is attested to by the accounts that head this chapter: with plate preparation taking several days, cameras being so large as to be carried by porters, exposure time lasting from a few minutes to a whole day, and developing procedures being not only chemically complex and time consuming, but even health-threateningly dangerous, with the resultant images – after all that - being fragile, unstable and prone to disappearance.<sup>10</sup>

Quite apart from the issues of class and creativity that are implicit in these technological developments (and which are unfortunately outside the scope of this thesis), it is clear that the profoundly temporal nature of early photography has led to this historical desire to find chemical or technological means to *fix* these fading, time-based images; to reduce exposure time from hours to fractions of fractions of seconds; and to supersede and thus deny the temporality of photography that is located in its foundational techniques. It finally appears that this imperative has become so entrenched in the historical and philosophical discourse of photography that it has erased the historicity of the temporality and impermanence of the medium itself, rendering this idea that the photograph exists somehow out of time, that it arrests temporality, that it is time-less.

This conceptual shift is also supported, rather ironically, in the context of performance studies, by contemporary discourses that relate the photograph to performance through the idea of the photograph's non-performative arresting of time (performance exists in and through time, whereas photography stops time still, these theories claim). Furthermore, the imperative for archival preservation which seems to be the *sine qua non* of the art of the photograph, and which rejects those photographic processes and ideas that work instead from transience and fading and loss, devalues the temporal investment in photographic *process* in favour of a privileging of the photographic *product* (object) as commodity [see Simpson, 1999].

This idea of the photographic transformation of time into visual commodity is at the root, I suspect, of the critical unease around performance and photography in contemporary performance studies – particularly in Phelan, whose critical and pedagogical



project is based on the de-privileging and de-stabilisation of that which is persistently visible. She writes:

The documentary tradition of the photograph...functions to assure that the given to be seen *belongs* to the field of knowledge of the one who looks [1993: 160].

This suggests that the photograph imparts knowledge as possession, offering an epistemological surface that renders visible for the viewer knowledge of that which is 'given to be seen.' In developing his own philosophy of photography, which also considers photographs as 'significant surfaces', Vilém Flusser suggests that

Even though the last vestiges of materiality are attached to photographs, their value does not lie in the thing but in the information on their surface. This is what characterizes the post-industrial: The information, and not the thing, is valuable [Flusser, 2000: 51].

Of course, in the context of performance documentation and performance studies, one key concern appears to be that the significant and signifying surface of the photograph will convey *mis*-information, that in transforming experience into information-as-commodity, something will be negated or lost, or at the very least, forever fixed as 'the same'. Sontag identifies in photography a similar capacity to alter experience into commodity, into what she calls an 'aesthetic consumerism' [Sontag, 1979: 24], ultimately suggesting that photographs 'turn the past into a consumable object' [68]. Like assets, like food, even time, in the vicinity of photography, can be frozen, rendered immobile, packaged and made subject to the negotiations of retention, sale and exchange<sup>11</sup>.

So, these constructions of photography as a technology that arrests time, that produces exchangeable goods, that transforms temporal experience into abstract a-temporal information, apparently locate it in a relation of binary opposition to the live performing arts. However, to suggest this function for photography is to delimit the field in such a way that the possibility for photographs themselves to perform is foreclosed upon. This chapter develops an idea of 'performative photography' – a technology of photography that is temporalised and transient – a kind of photography that in its own creation and materialisation is performance. It is written in part as a study and theorisation of my own work as co-artistic director of *Fevered Sleep*, in relation to the research and development

of a project created in 2001/02, *Written with Light*. (The project is a performance installation about the invention of photography and about the poetic and philosophical significance of photographs themselves, particularly in relation to memory, time and loss). The idea of the 'performative photograph' which is fundamental to this chapter relates specifically to the theorisation of performed imaging processes (the performance of photography itself, through the manipulation and presentation of the sciences of chemistry and optics) which have been developed for this production. Within this, it also relates to collaborative work *Fevered Sleep* has undertaken with Dallas Simpson, a Nottingham-based chemist and photographer, who uses the chemical manipulation of photographs to produce a technique of 'kinetic imaging', through which the very appearance and disappearance of photographic images can be presented live on stage.

In considering directly the notion that photography itself can perform, can be as time-based and transient and ephemeral as 'performance' in the more usual, embodied sense, this chapter also focuses upon the ways in which photography and performance share direct connections to questions of temporality and questions of death, thus grounding it in relation to the wider themes of the thesis.

So...

### **First Print (test strip): Dark Rooms**

Imagine a darkened space. Open your mind's eye...wider than that...and imagine a dark space and imagine the emptiness of that space. Imagine the slow, or fast, appearance of light in that empty space, flooding into it through a wide opened eye. Imagine how the light materialises images out of that emptiness, images that appear as if by magic, or as a kind of alchemy. Imagine bodies moving into and through the light, bodies becoming visible through its action upon them.

Is this a description of a performance in a theatre space? *(Yes)*.

Is this a description of the creation of a photographic image, through the camera obscura or in the contemporary darkroom? *(Yes)*.

Consider the poetry of performance – the transformation of time and movement and effort and thought into movement in time and space, into art, into live energy. Consider the magic of theatre (not least, consider the history of theatrical illusion, of the play and

trickery of light on the eyes) – the idea of theatre as alchemy – of a transformation of base materials into performative gold (we hope, we always hope). Consider too the ‘alchemy of the darkroom’<sup>12</sup> – the transformation of gelatine and silver salt and sodium hyposulphate into a record of the movement of light upon and through the surface of a lens. Consider the poetry of the transformation of raw chemicals into art, into meaning; the effect of bringing photographic images to life.

Consider also the etymological origins of ‘camera’, from the optical device ‘camera obscura’ – dark room. As a performance practitioner, I cannot think of dark rooms without thinking of theatres, and I imagine performing in a camera, as the shutter opens and the action begins, the lights come in and an image appears. Cameras and theatres, intimate spaces, same spaces, it seems to me.

There is a rather profound connection between performance and photography, a connection that manifests itself at several points in the historical development of both artistic forms, that moves beyond the ideological and historical construction of photography as that which renders time immobile, and as such as that which bears no relation to the performance it often represents. Contrary to this latter concept, I wish to suggest here that in certain cases, when the conditions are right and the processes considered, photography, like performance, becomes deeply temporal; a connection that is neglected in much contemporary performance theory.

How then can we identify the ‘performativity of photography’? Where are the overlaps between performance and photography located, historically? In mapping out and mapping together theatre and photography, what images appear?

*Flash:*

In July 1822 two painters, Louis Daguerre and Charles Bouton, opened the first diorama in Paris; a second opened at Park Square in Regent’s Park, London, in the summer of 1823. The diorama entertainment consisted of enormous views painted on a semi-transparent canvas, measuring something like 70 x 45 feet, which showed changing landscapes and effects depending on whether they were lit with reflected or transmitted light [see Gernsheim, 1971: 22]. Within this optical theatre, the audience was seated on a revolving platform, that shifted between two screens, each showing a presentation of fifteen minutes whilst the other was changed. Unusually for its time, the diorama also seated its audience



without house lights, in complete darkness, to heighten the effect of the changing scenes (a practice that was not commonplace in most theatres until late in the nineteenth century). Seated in darkened space, the diorama audience watched the play of light transform and reveal images on a screen before them.

Daguerre was admired for his skill at trompe l'oeil effects, and used the camera obscura as an aid to making preliminary sketches. It is widely accepted that in his quest to find a means to 'automatically' record the image in the camera obscura, Daguerre was principally concerned to make more striking and realistic images to then deploy in the theatrical setting of the diorama [Ibid: 22]. As such, we can identify at the very inception of photography, a connection to theatre. Indeed, Daguerre's theatrical conventions of the time seem to have been influenced by the optical principles of the camera obscura (the 'camera obscura' is a dark room or box which projects images through an aperture in its wall – providing that outside the room/box is considerably brighter than inside, the aperture acts as a lens and projects an inverted image onto the interior wall)<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 1). The unusual foresight of placing the audience in a darkened space seems to have stemmed from an understanding of the effect of light intensity and image resolution within the camera obscura – the darker the space inside, the brighter the image will appear to be. This connection seems to suggest, at the historical moments where photography and theatre overlap, an uncanny resemblance between theatres and cameras. Indeed, the design of the diorama itself (Fig. 2) looks remarkably like a particular kind of camera (Fig. 3). Within the research and development of the project, *Written with Light*, of which this chapter is a (more or less tangential) case study, my work with *Fevered Sleep* has involved practical exploration of this idea of theatres and cameras, in terms of finding ways of transforming theatre spaces quite literally into cameras obscura. Using cardboard, knitting needles, bedsheets and light, we have sought to recreate the sense of optical wonder that the fragility of an image projected through and by a camera obscura can inspire. The performance of the science of optics which underpins the knowledge of the camera obscura, together with the performance of the science of chemistry which is foundational to the invention of photography, give rise to the fundamental formal concerns of this production.

*Flash:*

Daguerre conducted his experiments and research into means of fixing the image within the camera obscura in a partnership with Nicéphore Niépce, which was signed in 1829. After Niepce's death in 1833, Daguerre continued to work with the former's son, finally

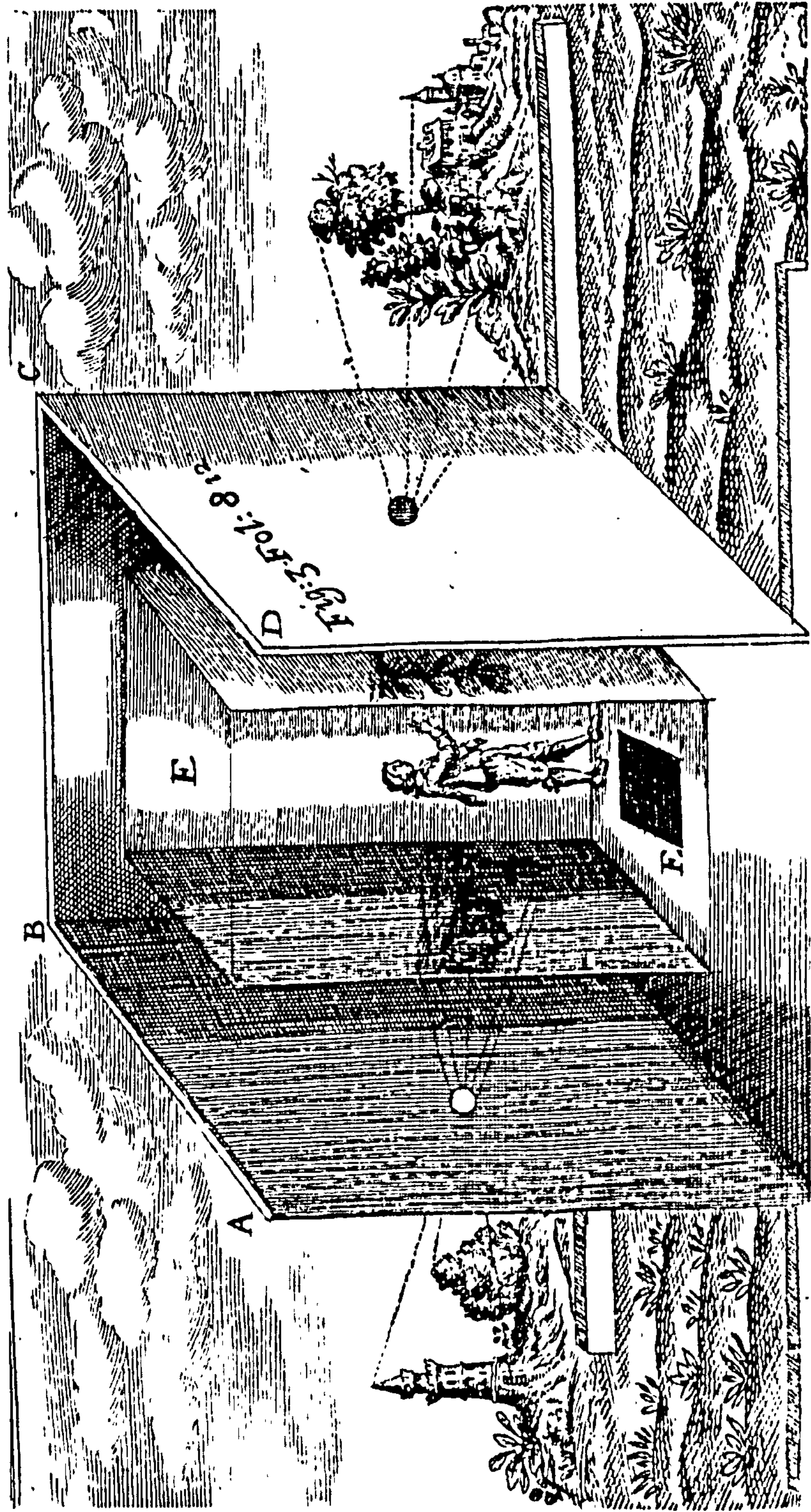


Fig 1: Principle of the Camera Obscura, after A Kircher, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*, Amsterdam, 1671. Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid.



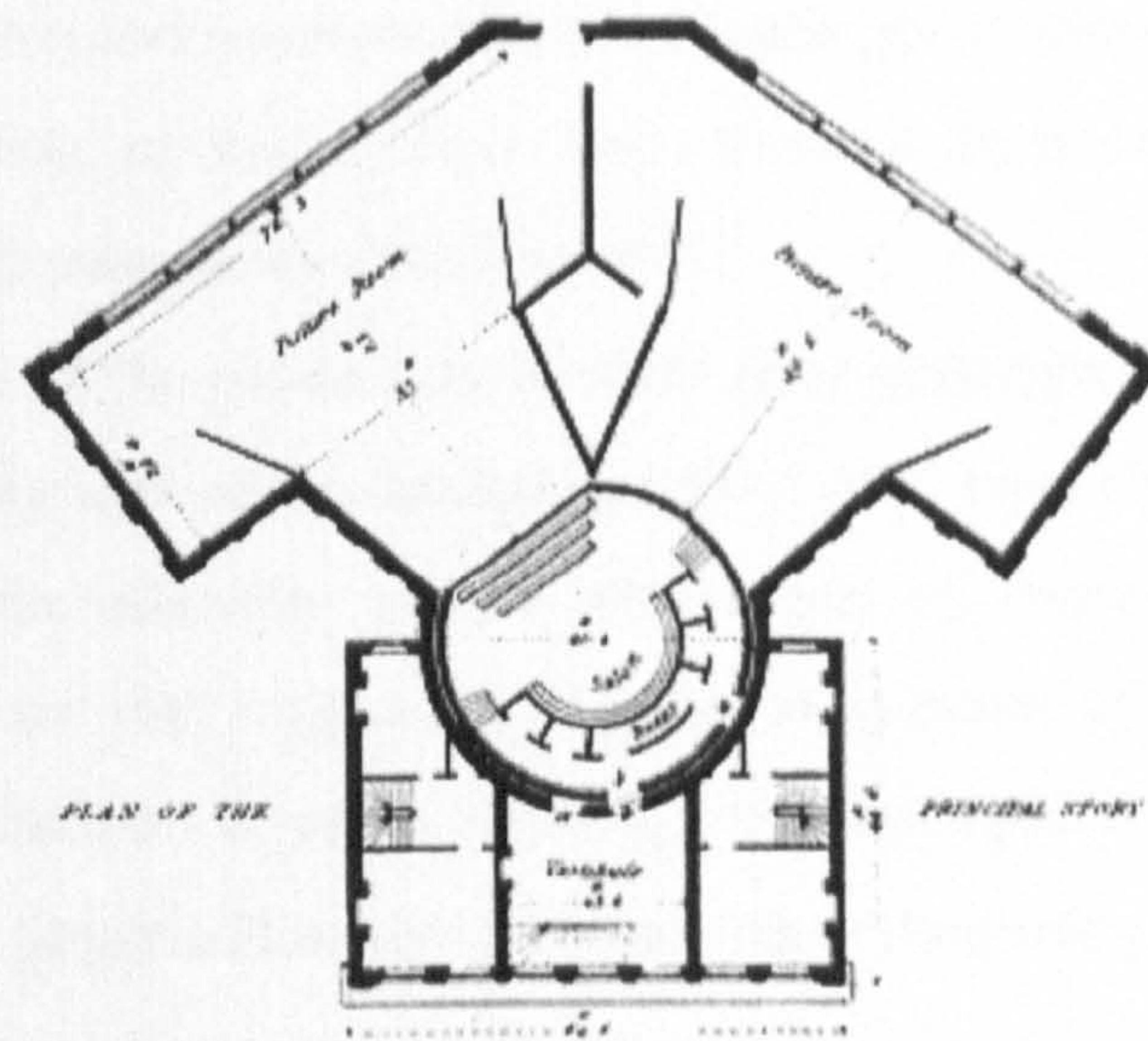


Fig 2: *Plan of The Diorama at Regent's Park*

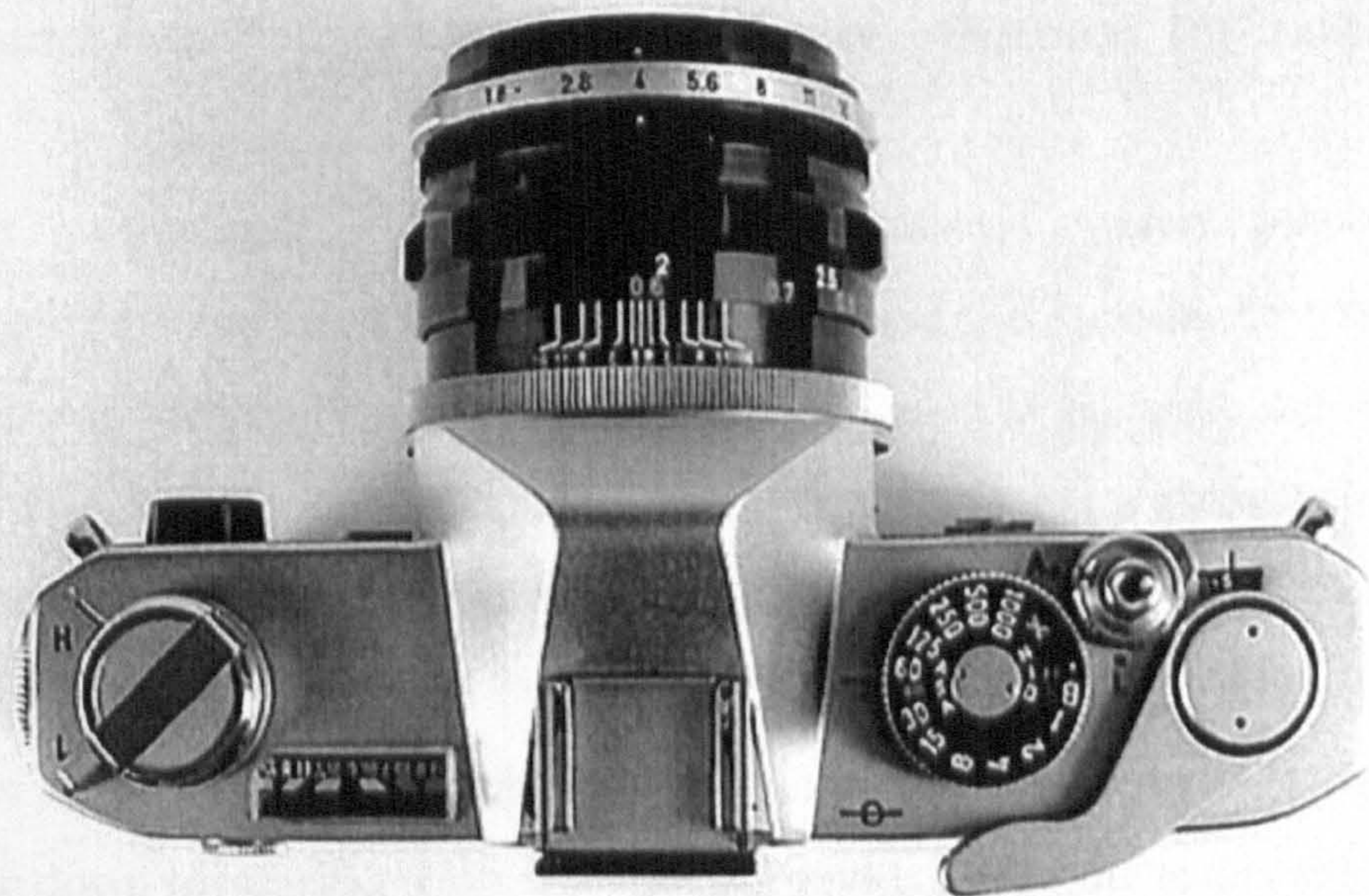


Fig 3: *A Standard SLR Camera*



revealing 'his' invention via the Institut de France on August 19, 1839, the year which is formally recognised as that of the birth of photography. The daguerreotype process that was subsequently patented and purchased by the French government involved the complex and lengthy manipulation of metal plates and chemical compounds, and required an exposure time of several minutes to several hours<sup>14</sup>.

The temporal nature of the production of these early photographic plates not only runs against the contemporary idea of the 'instant snapshot' (as I have already discussed); it also reveals the performative elements of the production of these images themselves – performances of 'the pose' that suggest the temporal investment of the image as marked in its very chemical constitution. Writing in 1888 on the development of photography in the previous fifty years, W. Jerome Harrison describes the setting and performance of an early daguerreotype process:

In the very first attempts at portraiture, which appear to have been made in America by Draper and Morse, in 1839, the sitter's face was covered with white powder, the eyes were closed, and the exposure, lasting perhaps half an hour, was made in bright sunshine! To lessen the glare of light, which painfully affected the sitter, Draper caused the sunlight to pass through a large glass tank containing a clear blue liquid – ammonia – sulphate of copper – before falling on the sitter, thus filtering out most of the heat rays [Harrison, 1888: 26].

This account suggestively foregrounds the connection between performance and photography at the foundation of the new medium, and the location of temporality and duration as the root of this connection is also corroborated by the contemporary accounts of subjects sitting for photographic portraits. Describing a particularly painful-sounding sitting, one patron of the new photography writes in 1840:

I sat for eight minutes, with the strong sunlight shining in my face and tears trickling down my cheeks while the operator promenaded the room with watch in hand, calling out the time every five seconds, 'til the fountains of my eyes were dry [in Scharf, 1975].

Another, describing a portrait being made by Julia Margaret Cameron, one of the pioneers of art photography, is worth citing at length:

The studio, I remember, was very untidy and very uncomfortable. Mrs. Cameron put a crown on my head and posed me as the heroic queen. This was somewhat tedious, but not half so bad as the exposure. Mrs. Cameron warned me before it commenced that it would take a long time...the exposure began. A minute went over and I felt as if I must scream; another minute, and the sensation was as if my eyes were coming out of my head; a third, and the back of my neck appeared to be afflicted with palsy; a fourth, and the crown, which was too large, began to slip down my forehead; a fifth – but here I utterly broke down...The first picture was nothing but a series of ‘wabblings’, and so was the second; the third was more successful, though the torture of standing for nearly ten minutes without a head-rest was something indescribable. I have a copy of that picture now. The face and crown have not more than six outlines, and if it was Mrs. Cameron’s intention to represent Zenobia in the last stage of misery and desperation, I think she succeeded [in Scharf, 1975].

*Flash:*

If these accounts serve to illustrate the performative temporality of the first photographic processes; they also reveal something about the performance of the pose that is theorised by Barthes, and which relates photography (specifically portrait photography, of course) back to performance. In the introduction, I have suggested that one way of conceiving of ‘performance’, in all its slipperiness, is through the idea of its existence in real time and space, in a shared time and space necessarily common to performance and spectator. As such, the difficult questions of presence become integral to an understanding of performance. For Barthes, who writes in *Camera Lucida* that ‘what founds the nature of Photography is the pose’ [2000 (1980): 78], the pose is not made significant in any temporal terms, relating to the performance of a duration before the camera’s eye (‘the physical duration of this pose is of little consequence’, he writes [78]), but is founded on the capacity for the photograph to reveal that something has “really been there” in front of the lens. For Barthes, then, the pose also relates to this idea of presence – presence in front of the camera, for no matter how short a split of time: a presence which ‘is never metaphoric’ [78]. As such, photographs also reveal something about presence and tie together the presence of the subject and the presence of the viewer via the material surface of the print. Although of course there are profound temporal differences between photography’s attestation of presence (in the past) and performance’s insistence upon presence (in the



present), the very oscillation between present/absent; past/present; now/then, that both mediums foreground also suggest a significant connection between photographs and performances.

Returning to the idea of the performance of the pose in portrait photography, it is not surprising to observe that this idea has found its way into the realms of contemporary performance studies. Writing about the work of performance artist/photographer Cindy Sherman, Peggy Phelan writes that:

Sherman's performances – the assembly of clothes, the constructed set, the lighting, the precise gesture – compress and express the life story of someone we recognize, or think we recognize, in a single image [Phelan, 1993: 62].

Indeed Sherman herself likens her project more to performance than to photography, as such suggesting that it is the performance of the setting and posing of the image that is more important than the photographic procedures that record it. This idea of the performance of the pose has also been theorised by Henry M. Sayre, in his text *The Object of Performance*, in which he suggests the 'rhetoric of the pose', as he calls it, reveals something about the general performance and theatricalisation of the self which is characteristic of postmodern discourse and postmodern artistic production. Whilst it is not my concern here to develop or focus on this idea of the posed performance of the *self* (as it is an area that opens up a field of complex relations between performance and performativity that Sayre overlooks, and that I have already explored in the opening chapters), his idea of the *photograph* as a technology and artform that developed in relation to the performance of the *pose* nonetheless attests to the idea that the aesthetic concerns of photography, particularly portrait photography of which Cindy Sherman's work is a prime example, are deeply and foundationally connected to a certain theatrical or performed presentation. [see Sayre, 1989: 35-65]. Again, we see that performance, theatre and photography historically and conceptually overlap.

However, whilst it is possible to suggest that there are clear philosophical, historical and aesthetic connections between theatre, performance and photography, it is nonetheless the case that in contemporary performance studies the use of photography as *documentation* (and I highlight this as different from the idea of performance within *portrait* photography) has been deeply problematised. And, as I have already suggested, this perceived problematic stems from a construction of photography as somehow arresting of time, whilst viewing performance as paradigmatically an artform *of* time. This sequestration of the photography



*of* performance from performance itself is predicated on a certain understanding of the temporality of photographs, an understanding that has developed historically alongside and through the development of the medium. But what is the temporality of the photograph? What historical and conceptual events have led to the development of the *idée fixe* of a certain a-temporality of photographic recording? What is the temporal philosophy of photography?

### **Second Print (over exposed): Photography and the Performance of Time**

As Lomax has suggested, the usual understanding of the relationship between time and photography is to see the latter as a technology that can capture moments in time and represent them on paper as visual evidence of past events. The desire to arrest time, to *fix* and *stop* it, is certainly evident in the accounts and records of the pioneers of photography in the early to mid nineteenth century. Julia Margaret Cameron, cited by Sontag, writes:

I longed to arrest all beauty that came before me, and at length the longing has been satisfied [in Sontag, 1979: 183].

In a similar vein, William Henry Fox-Talbot, inventor in 1839 of a positive/negative process that is the pre-cursor of most contemporary photographic techniques, declares his own hopes for the photographic medium:

The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our '*natural magic*,' and may be fixed for ever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy [in Haworth-Booth, 2000: 3].

Foregrounding the relationship between temporality and desire for the medium at the foundational moments of photography, these ideas of the photographic stilling of time have persisted throughout its development, and have surfaced in the writings of some of its most convincing critics. Sontag writes that 'the force of a photograph is that it keeps open to scrutiny instants which the normal flow of time immediately replaces' [1979: 111-112], that a photograph 'freezes moments in life' [81] and is a 'neat slice of time' [17].

However, these ideas rely of course on a certain idea of time as linear, as that which in flowing persistently forward can be dammed by the intervention of photographic technology. In developing a counter-argument to the prevalent idea of the capacity for

photography to fix time, Lomax remembers her own conceptual journey through the temporality of photographs:

I began thinking that with any still photographic image there isn't just one time, on the contrary there is a plurality of times, not all of which are happy to consort with each other. The picture was becoming more turbulent than I had expected. Different cultural times. Different social practices of time. Different models and images were competing with each other. Circles. Lines. Spirals. Jewish time. Christian time. Islamic time. Capitalism's time. Animal times. Clock-wise times. Asking 'what is the time?' suddenly took a different slant. What conception of time has imposed itself as the one and only time, the correct time, by subordinating and negating other times? [1994: 41].

If we accept, as Lomax exhorts us to do, that time is multiple, not monolithic (however much a monolithic construct of time, be it 'Christian', 'capitalist', or 'clock-wise', asserts itself), then we see in the photograph a kind of charting, a visualisation of those many-times. And as this charting destabilises the idea that time is linear, it also affects a temporal understanding of photography, as it is a linear conception of time that permits the idea that the photographic image is an immobilisation of time as it passes. It is because Lomax resists the idea of time's monolithic linearity, that she resists the idea of photography's arresting of time. Within this framework, the purported existence of 'many times' alters the meaning of the times of photography. However, I think it is also reasonable and possible to suggest that the very physical, chemical structures and performative processes of photography itself can also reveal this multiplicity of times, and therefore problematise the conception of time's arrow, which locates the past always in the past and the future always in the future. A performative photograph, of the kind that I am suggesting here (specifically in relation to *Written with Light*) will contain the time of its subject, the time of its exposure, the time of its development, the shifting times of its appearance and disappearance, the times of its alterations, the time of its presentation, and the time of its persistence within the frames of memory of performance that contained it as ephemeral and transitory. In short, the performative photograph will chemically embody and temporally present the layering of time that bends back time's arrow upon itself, or distorts and deflects its path, and this multiplication will not just exist in the photographic revelation of the outside persistence of many times (as all photographs do, according to Lomax), but rather through the very chemical, performative, material processes of its existence. The performative photograph will not *represent* 'many times', it will literally *be*



'many times', in its very surface and in the performed creation and presentation of its physical being.

\* \* \* \* \*

Whilst it is clear that the philosophical and technical imperative that drives the invention of photography in the early nineteenth century is grounded in an idea of arresting time, it is nonetheless the case of course that the early photographic processes failed to realise this idea of stopping time still. The daguerreotype process in particular was a technology that recorded the very passing and persistence of time in its production, as the above accounts of the duration and performance of the pose reveal. Furthermore, the temporal nature of the earliest photographic processes meant that it was not possible to still *movement* on an image – and as such, if we accept that movement is a shifting through time as well as space, the daguerreotype and Fox-Talbot's positive/negative process were not, in their early versions at least, able to fulfil that desire for stasis that drove their invention. Fox-Talbot writes in 1844:

If we proceed to the City, and attempt to take a picture of the moving multitude, we fail, for in a small fraction of a second they change their positions so much, as to destroy the distinctness of the representation. But when a group of persons has been artistically arranged, and trained by a little practice to maintain an absolute immobility for a few seconds of time, very delightful pictures are easily obtained [Fox-Talbot, 1844: Volume 3, Notes to Plate XIV].

This effect of movement through time on the production of the daguerreotype can be seen in one of Daguerre's own images, *View of the Boulevard du Temple*, produced in 1839 (Fig. 4). The image shows one of the busy streets of nineteenth century Paris apparently deserted, apart from a figure in the foreground of the image, a man having his boots polished, who was immobile long enough to be recorded on the plate. This image thus contains the passing and persistence of time in its very surface: rather than arresting time, the daguerreotype attests to its inevitable passage. Abelardo Morell's 1999 image of Boston's Old Customs House (made by converting a hotel room into a camera obscura) (Fig. 5) is a contemporary reminder of the deeply temporal nature of photography itself. The image, which was exposed for eight hours because of the low level of light entering the room through the ¼ inch aperture, contains three clocks. The clock on the wall appears to have





Fig 4: Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, *View of the Boulevard du Temple*, daguerrotype, Paris, 1839. Stadtmuseum, Munich.



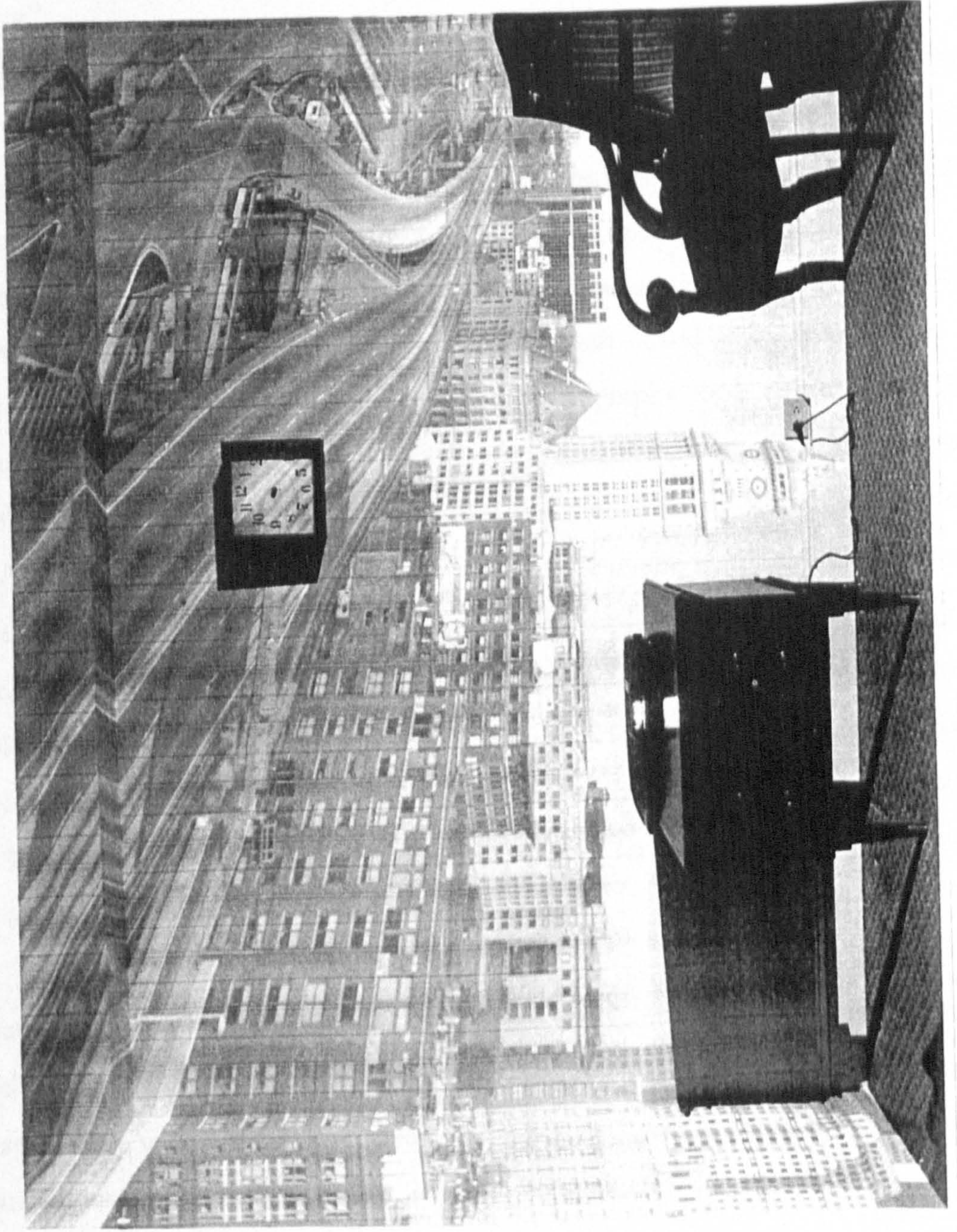


Fig 5 : Aberlardo Morel, *Camera Obscura Image of Boston's Old Customs House in the Hotel Room*, 1999. Bonni Benrubi Gallery, New York.



no hands because of the long exposure; the digital clock on the table reads 10:00, again because the persistently illuminated parts of the clock 'face' that are rendered on the print distort the actual representation of any time (one can only assume that the image was exposed in the afternoon, when each hour on the twenty-four hour clock begins with '1'); the clock on the tower of the customs house itself, like the clock inside, appears to have no hands - to be somehow uncannily a timepiece that cannot show any *particular* time. The highway visible in the upper parts of the frame, one of the busiest roads in Boston, appears to be empty<sup>15</sup>.

Contrary to the idea that photography freezes time, these images and accounts insist upon the capacity for photographs to precisely and literally represent the passing of time, its movements and flows and ebbs. Reggie Tucker's photographic project *Seeing the Hours* – a collection of photographs of people simply waiting – operates in a similar way. In the images, people wait. In a bus station in Kiev, Ukraine; on a bench in Bath, England; in an airport lounge in Chicago, USA, people wait. And wait. And wait. Time slows down. And they wait. Most of the subjects in these photographs look either down (Fig. 6), introspective against the stasis of the world in which they wait, or they look out beyond the frame of the picture, into the future, a future holding the question "Will it/he/they come?" (Fig. 7). And they wait. The photographs hold the time of the wait, the time spent waiting already before the shutter opens over the scene. It implies the waiting persisting in the time after. In some way, it is a photograph of the future, of that which is yet to occur. We see people in the *process* of waiting, and like seeing Vladimir and Estragon waiting for Beckett to write an ending to *Waiting for Godot*, we see people waiting for an end to this process. The wait becomes a wait for an end to waiting, an end that may or may not come any time soon. Introducing the images, Tucker writes:

I became a professional at waiting. I would watch people arrive, wait, leave. And I would still be there. And this process affected the photography. Images came with a tantalising slowness. They echoed the sense of time itself losing momentum [Tucker, 1996].

Tucker describes here the temporality of his performance as photographer, his transformation into the very waiting subject that he seeks to photograph. These images approach stillness, but not the stillness of the frozen moment, rather the stillness of the moment (the moment of arrival, the moment that signals the end of the wait) slowed down to almost-stasis; the moment of waiting. They describe the time surrounding the opening of the shutter, the time that stretches both back and forward in time, the slurring and slowing





Fig 6: Reggie Tucker, *Kharkov, Ukraine, 1993.*



Fig 7: Reggie Tucker, *Kharkov, Ukraine, 1993.*



*tick tick tick* of the clock, and they describe the performativity and the temporality of the process of making and taking the pictures themselves.

The concept of performative photography is grounded not in the frozen idea of photography's atemporality, but in these sometimes older, foundational and sometimes contemporary ideas and effects of the temporal – thus performance-like – nature of photographs themselves. And if photography is therefore re-figured as potentially temporal and performative, as potentially performance in itself, then there also surfaces a connection, by way of performance, between photography and death. This connection has also been theorised quite separately from considerations of the relation between performance and photography, and therefore further suggests the performativity of photography and the ways in which it is philosophically as well as temporally aligned to performance, by virtue of a shared connection to death.

### **Third Print (the image appears): Photography and Death**

Towards the end of her text *On Photography*, Susan Sontag gathers together a series of quotations that map out a kind of discontinuous discourse<sup>16</sup> on her subject. She cites Elizabeth Barrett, writing in 1843:

I long to have such a memorial of every being dear to me in the world. It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases – but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing...the fact of the *very shadow of the person* lying there fixed forever! [in Sontag, 1979: 183].

Barrett's desire to hold photographs as material traces of absent bodies reveals both the status of photographs as *memento mori*, and perhaps suggests that the nineteenth century fascination with mortality and death<sup>17</sup> was tied up with the invention of photography itself (a connection which is manifested in part through the theatricalisation of death in the use of projection and illusion - technologies that run through the drives towards the invention of photography - as part of the performance and presentation of spiritualism and the séance).<sup>18</sup> These ideas, of the photograph as material evidence of past existence, and of the photograph as *memento mori* (foregrounding both the temporality and a-temporality of photographs) are developed by both Sontag, and by Barthes in his text *Camera Lucida*. Theorising the connection between photography and theatre (a connection he sees as linked in part to developments in optics and illusion in the nineteenth century).



Barthes identifies death as the most profound connection between the two forms:

but if photography seems to me closer to the Theater, it is by way of a singular intermediary...by way of death. We know the original relation of theater and the cult of the Dead: the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the Dead: to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body both living and dead: the whitened bust of the totemic theater, the man with the painted face in the Chinese theater, the rive-paste makeup of the Indian KathaKali, the Japanese No mask...Now it is this same relation which I find in the Photograph; however "lifelike" we strive to make it (and this frenzy to be lifelike can only be our mythic denial of an apprehension of death), Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead [Barthes, 2000 (1980): 31-32].

Indeed, it is ultimately as a technology that through temporality foregrounds death that Barthes understands the photograph's punctum<sup>19</sup>, writing that 'this new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* ("that-has-been"), its pure representation' [96], an intensity that reminds Barthes of his own temporality as a living witness:

I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose...the photograph tells me death is in the future...whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe...it is because each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death that each one, however attached it seems to be to the excited world of the living, challenges each of us, one by one, outside of any generality [96-97].

This capacity for a photograph to project a future death upon the psychological screen of the observing subject operates in the same way as performance (in theorisations such as Heathfield's, as I have shown in the introduction, or as I am suggesting throughout this thesis): both photographs and performances temporally present and materially enact a reminder of future non-being. The flickering oscillations between presence and absence (Sontag writes that 'a photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence')

[Sontag, 1979: 16]) place photographs, like performances, on the cusp of disappearance, on the edge of an imminent (and immanent) return to nothingness.

In all his theorisations of photography, Barthes repeatedly emphasises the way in which photographs exist as material emanations of their referents, actually recording the light that shone out from the subject through the lens and onto the silvered surface of the print<sup>20</sup>. This way in which the photograph attests to the real existence of the subject as materially, physically present before the camera (and before the viewer, in both temporal and spatial terms – both *prior to* and *in front of*), is also the way in which the photograph becomes an agent of death. In insisting upon the real presence of the subject before the lens, the photograph also acts as a persistent and troubling reminder of the absence of that subject, and the absence of that moment when the shutter opened to look, from the time and space of the viewer:

the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past ("this-has-been"), the photograph suggests that it is already dead [79]<sup>21</sup>.

As well as sharing an idea of the photograph's relationship to presence and absence, Sontag influences Barthes in his description of photography as an agent of death. She writes that

All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt [1979: 15]...photography is the inventory of mortality [70]...we see the face frozen in the last of its expressions, embalmed in a still. The photographs shock...transmuting, in an instant, present into past, life into death [70]...[and] our oppressive sense of the transience of everything is more acute since cameras gave us the means to "fix" the fleeting moment [179].



Whilst these passages also reveal that Sontag shares the *idée fixe* of photography's arresting of time of which Lomax is critical, and which is challenged by the idea of performative photography that I am developing here, they do support the idea that photographs share, like performance, an inherent relation to temporality, death, mortality, and transience. Again, as with all of the material and conceptual ideas explored in this chapter, these contemporary perspectives upon photography are echoes of accounts of its invention. In 1834, five years before the 'official' invention of photography, Laura Mundy wrote the following to her brother in law, William Henry Fox-Talbot:

Thank you very much for sending me such beautiful shadows, the little drawing I think is quite lovely, and the verses particularly excite my imagination. I had no idea the art could be carried to such perfection. I had grieved over the gradual disappearance of those you gave me in the summer and am delighted to have these to supply their place in my book [in Scharf, 1975: 14].

With this connection in mind – the connection between photography, transience and death - it is perhaps possible to identify the performativity of all photographs. Even if a photographic image is not performed in the specific ways which have been developed for Fevered Sleep's *Written with Light*, its very material structure and its mechanisms of production reveal something about its existence in and through time, a limited duration that itself in no small part contributes to the pathos, the ephemerality, the transience of photographs themselves<sup>22</sup>.

Finally, then, photographs act like performance in that they operate through a doubled temporality. They attest to a present moment (the "that has been" of Barthes' *noeme*; the "being there, then" of Etchells' witnesses [Etchells, 1998: 40]), and they reveal how that moment always immediately disappears into the past. This shifting through time, which is recorded on the surface of photographs themselves - as they yellow and fade and crackle and turn – is also the root of the peculiar relation to presence and absence that both Barthes and Sontag discuss. By both stopping time (the *idée fixe* that tends to obscure its conceptual double) and by attesting to *and embodying* "time's relentless melt", photographs enact and perform the movement of mortality, reminding us of the inevitability of death at the same time as pretending to deny it.

In starting this thesis, I raised the question of what a philosophy of temporality and death might usefully yield in a cultural context where death is always pushed back into an inaccessible future, and my aim here is the same. By proposing an idea of ‘performative photographs’ that expose and develop the temporality of photography itself, I am seeking a way of finding elements of performance, and temporality, in a medium which is too often characterised as of stasis and of the a-temporal. As such, I endeavour to foreground the relationships between photographs and death, in order that the cultural imperative to deny death, which is revealed more and more the more and more I research this work (I find it hiding there in architecture, in photography, in creativity itself), is countered by a philosophical and creative approach (a performative approach that deploys performance as the perfect paradigm for death) that seeks to place death back centre stage, where its presence might be transformed from horror to value – from the blind spot of denial to the focused foresight of knowledge. The performance, materialisation, development and disappearance of photographic images live onstage, before an audience, makes explicit the operation of time in the processes of creation and destruction. And it is a short conceptual leap – only a flash, and a click really – from this position, to one where we can recognise and perhaps admit the effects of creation and destruction in a wider social sphere. Performing photography and photographs in a way that unfixes the idea that it is possible to photographically arrest time finally reveals the temporality and mortality of photographs themselves, and of their subjects, and viewers.

#### **Fourth Print: Kinetic Images, or, Time that Appears only to Move**

Examples, finally (processes newly developed for *Fevered Sleep’s Written with Light*):

##### **First Process: Photosensitivity**

*Aim:* To perform fading, to perform chemistry, to photograph time.

*Process:*

- (i) Coat a panel or board with photo-sensitive paint, which will absorb light when exposed to a highly luminescent source, and gradually release it following exposure.
- (ii) Think of a journey, and devise a series of poses that embody that journey (six or seven will suffice). The journey is irrelevant; the form is being explored.



- (iii) Perform the pose before the prepared panel or board.
- (iv) Take a standard SLR camera (or indeed, any camera) and flash, and flash in front of the pose in front of the panel or board.
- (v) Move the body away from the panel or board, and observe.
- (vi) Observe the silhouette traced in the brilliant green luminescent paint.
- (vii) Watch it begin to fade.
- (viii) Perform the next pose. Pose, and flash, and record. And watch it fade.
- (ix) Layer the silhouettes, tracing the time of the performances of the pose on the panel or board, in brilliant green luminescent paint.
- (x) Watch them fade, until the board is blank.
- (xi) Experiment with writing – flash in front of text on acetate. Writing with light. Performing writing with light.
- (xii) Project an image from a slide projector onto the board. See the image retained in the brilliant green luminescent paint.
- (xiii) Choreograph a dialogic dance between the board and the projector, and see the movement through space and time recorded in the brilliant green luminescent paint.
- (xiv) Watch the image fade.

*Results:* Performance.

*Notes:* The process must be performed in dim light, otherwise the images cannot be secured upon the surface of the panel or board; exposure to bright light will destroy the image retained on the brilliant green luminescent paint before it has chance to fade.

## Second Process: Kinetic Imaging

*Aim:* To perform the materialisation of photographs in the temporal structure of performance. To perform chemistry.

### *Process:*

- (i) Prepare a normal silver gelatine print in the darkroom on resin coated paper.
- (ii) Thoroughly wash the print, then bleach using a solution, in distilled or deionised water, of lead acetate, acetic acid, potassium ferricyanide (note the "i").
- (iii) Observe (with surprise) as the silver image is converted to lead ferrocyanide (note the "o"). Witness how this compound in its pure state is white, thus producing a white image against the white background of the paper, which is of course invisible.
- (iv) Wash the print through successive cycles in pure distilled water followed by an approximately 10 percent sodium chloride (common salt) solution, then back into distilled water. Repeat this cycle until the yellow stain is removed. Repeat until the image is white. This can take some time (1 hour per print) and a lot of water.
- (v) Prepare the image for performance. Mount it. Build it into the set. Make it into a costume (in this case, print the image on leather or cloth).
- (vi) Don't tell anyone that the blank sheet of paper/blank wall/empty frame/white shirt is a photograph, white on white, invisible.
- (vii) Thicken normal strength print developer with wallpaper paste (available from any local DIY store) and paint onto the image surface.
- (viii) Watch a metallic lead image develop - a lead gelatine print - upon the areas where the developer has been painted. Observe the temporality of this process, the gradual appearance of the image from the blank sheet/plane/bolt of white paper/wood/cloth. Observe the *painting* of the *photograph*.
- (ix) (Listen carefully: "From today, painting is dead!" echoes the cry, across the years).



(x) Turn and look at the audience. Observe.....

*Results:* Performance. Alchemy. Magic. Time. Wonder.

*Notes:* Remember the limited time between the annihilation of the original image and the bringing forth of the latent image. If this is delayed for too long, the image will begin to re-appear of its own accord. Remember to thoroughly wash the developer from the surface of the performed image, or it will continue to develop until it resembles nothing more than a blank black piece of paper. Empty, full of nothing but time, and movement and performance.

### **Fifth Print (writing with light): An Etymological Epilogue**

**photography** *n.* 1 the art or process of taking photographs 2 the business of producing and printing photographs. [from Greek *photos* light, and *graphia* writing; 'written with light'].

This thesis develops a theory of the performativity of writing that unfolds particularly in relation to the problematic of translating the temporal experience of performance into the representational systems of scholarly text. 'Performative writing' names and engenders a temporal, performance-like system for writing about 'performance' and about performances themselves, suggesting that one way of moving beyond the critical impasse concerning performance and writing is to find new forms for writing itself: writing in time, writing embodiment, writing in multiple, fractured voices, writing loss.

In this chapter, I have considered also the performativity of photography, and suggested ways in which it is possible to conceive of the performance of photographs and photographic techniques. In a context where photography, like writing, is treated with a certain critical suspicion and unease – and that context is contemporary performance studies – it has also been my project to move beyond this marking of photography as somehow the 'other' of performance, and to render and unfold instead the profound connections between them.

In its very etymological structure, 'photography' is writing – writing with light, written with light, light writing. Niepce's 'heliographs' were the writings of the sun; Fox-Talbot's 'pencil

of nature' was the instrument that allowed nature to write and draw herself. As such, I wish to end by suggesting that performative photographs not only raise new questions about the relationship between photography and performance, but also rewrite the available field of 'performance' itself; rewrite some of the terms through which we commonly understand ideas of the temporal; rewrite the chemical and optical sciences to which photography is indebted for its very existence from the fields of 'science' into the arena of 'performance' (thus destabilising the old separation of science and art); finally creating and writing a performative site where the performance of the image, the writing of the word and the time of the event can be entangled, developed, and focused upon through an aperture wide enough to bring illumination.

*Flash. Click. Expose. Develop. Fix.*

*Flash. Click. Expose. Develop.*

*Flash. Click. Expose.*

*Flash. Click.*

*Flash.....*





*3 June 1977*

I am ashamed of underlining, of wanting to be intelligible and convincing (as if for others, finally), I am ashamed of saying it in everyday language, of saying it, therefore, of writing, of signifying anything at all in your direction...

*3 June 1977*

and when I call you my love, my love, is it you I am calling or my love? You, my love, is it you I thereby name, is it to you that I address myself? I don't know if the question is well put, it frightens me. But I am sure that the answer, if it gets to me one day, will have come to me from you. You alone, my love, you alone will have known it...



*I'm gonna sit right down and write myself a letter  
And make believe it came from you  
I'm gonna write words oh so sweet  
They're gonna knock you off your feet  
A lotta kisses on the bottom  
I'll be glad I got 'em*

*I'm gonna smile and say 'I hope you're feeling better'  
And close with love the way you do  
I'm gonna sit right down and write myself a letter  
And make believe it came from you*

**'I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and Write Myself a Letter'**

written by Young & Ahlert

sung by Sarah Vaughan

**Chapter Four, or, Delivery Time:  
On Writing a Love Letter**



17<sup>th</sup> July 2001

Dear you

In July I came to London to look for you. I thought we had arranged to meet at the National Gallery, but when I looked around you were not there. I came on Saturday evening, as we had arranged, as the crowds died down and the sky turned bluer. But when I looked for you, you were not there. There were a lot of other faces, it's true, and some of them, that I caught looking at me just as they turned away, I wondered if those faces were yours. I know I didn't know what you really looked like, (I still don't of course, as we still have not been face to face): I had only ever seen a picture, and I didn't know if the picture was true, but still I thought I would see you there. I thought I would recognise your smile, or that pearl necklace you always wear.

23<sup>rd</sup> June 2001

Dear you

In June, I came to London to hear you speak. I wanted to meet you, to at least put a picture to your voice, the voice that sits beneath my tongue. I had to try and get a picture of your face; as I knew the one I had been carrying to be wrong. I didn't know how I would feel to be in time with you, and I was both a little frightened and a little ashamed of this desire that I carry, this love that has slipped beneath my skin. Of course, I would speak it if I could, and I am trying to find a voice for it, to let it open up a little and let out a little cry. So that's why I'm sending you this letter. I hope you do not mind. And I hope you do not mind if now and then I call them love letters, and offer you my love. I think this will be alright, because I think that more than most you know the funny shapes love takes.

27<sup>th</sup> July 2001

Dear you

Today I have been re-reading 'Hallucinating Foucault', Patricia Duncker's fiction of madness, writing, sex and death. Fractions of what I love most in you.

'The love between a writer and a reader is never celebrated. It can never be proved to exist.' These are the words I have peeled away from her pages, and rub into the pages here, using the gum of my sweat to stick them. These are the words I hold for you.

In that book, a writer writes to another every day, writes of his love for him, writes how the other is his Reader, the one for whom he writes. But he never sends his letters, and now his Reader is dead, and the letters are archived away, lost in dusty boxes in a library behind bars, unread.

Afraid of this, I have jumped, and as I fall I have let go of these letters, and now they are falling away from me, and falling towards you.

Please catch us.

17<sup>th</sup> July 2001

Dear You

This afternoon, as the rain pulled my mood too far to be able to read or write, I went to the library. My wallet is stuffed full of library cards – afraid of my own voice, I drown myself in others'. Today it was Middlesex University, sprawling multi-campused like an open hand over north London. Because the words I most desire and the library that houses them are far from where I live, I had requested a collection from the nearest



campus: a medical science faculty and sexual health clinic in Archway, near the iron bridge where the suicides fall from the sky like blood into a bucket (but that's another story).

Today, I am cruising Derrida again – *The Post Card*, of course, for you – and a couple of texts on love.

You're doing unusual research, the receptionist tells me (another book awaiting collection next to mine is titled 'Studies in Heart Malfunction'). 'I don't know: love and writing doesn't seem so odd'. Well, she offers, generously, you never know, it might cure leg ulcers.

These things I tell you are always true, you know. I'm not telling you stories: trust me.

Question: How do you cure an aching heart with a letter and a book?

Answers on a postcard, please.

16<sup>th</sup> August 2001

Dear you

I have been thinking a lot about letters recently. They have always fascinated me, I admit, and I am guilty of hoarding them like almost no other form of text. I have drawers stuffed full of letters, bundled up, boxed up, some dusty and starting to fray, some newer and crisp from just single readings. I am amassing an archive of my life, an archive of lovers and friends, of correspondents old and new and unknown, to shore me against the time when I can no longer remember who I was, or who I am, or who I might become. I shamelessly solicit letters if I feel I am not receiving enough, and recently I have even begun to pressure people to write to me in lieu of writing to others, amassing a different kind of archive that one day I plan to turn into an epistolary performance. I have even printed calling cards for my dog, and now press one upon every visitor to my house, seeking a promise to write, hungry for delivery like a hungry child on christmas eve, waiting for a gift.

So, I am fascinated by letters, and always susceptible to the draw of fascination, thought I would write a few letters to you, to try and figure out some ideas I've had about writing. This bundle of letters explores the form and characteristics of epistolary writings, and particularly looks at the possibility for a model for epistolary criticism that might prove useful in the context of the yearning in performance studies for a form of writing that can speak of the events that precede it (events that occupy a different place in time and space).

I had planned to write about performative writing, to theorise and deconstruct it, but that felt like trying to deconstruct the sea, to look at the structure of something that is perpetually shifting and changing its shape, and so I have come home to something more quotidian, more intimate: to letters, and hope that some of the points about epistolarity might in an oblique way reveal things about performative writing that we might be able to develop.

We? Who's we? Do you mean me, reader? Do I mean she?

Apart from my own fascination with letters (and believe me, what I describe above is only the half of it. It's true, I'm not telling you stories), I have recently begun to notice letters appearing in published and performed form as a body of textuality that straddles the divide between the critical and creative<sup>a</sup>. Perhaps it is not surprising that a key figure in this developing body of epistolary exploration is Peggy Phelan, and the occasion of the publication and performance of *Bloodmath*, a collaborative project with Adrian Heathfield that deploys lettered correspondence as a vehicle for the development of a critical project, has been a principle spur to the creation of *this* text.

So this is for you. A kind of gift, of course, and a kind of love letter. I worry about getting tangled in these repetitions and losing my own voice, but I think it will come through.

Do write back and let me know what you think, please do.



21<sup>st</sup> August 2001

Dear you

## TIME

I have become obsessive about time. When I was a child I used to count everything: the number of steps between home and school; the number of stairs to bed; the number of hairs growing on the back of my hand. I would visualise the face of a calculator 123 456 789 147 258 369 159 753 on the bus, to keep me busy, to keep away empty time, empty space. Older now, I am less seduced by number, but still delayed by time. And so, I imagine you reading this letter. I have done some calculations, developed some formulae that factor in delivery of weight and volume across space and time, allowing for the variable proportions of efficiency and loss. I look at my watch, obsessively (21<sup>st</sup> August 2001, 3:25:41 pm) and think of the seconds elapsing before you read this, this that I write to you in the now. I think about your now, the now of your reading (21<sup>st</sup> August 2001, 3:26:17 pm), the now of your present and my future, and again I feel time collapsing around me. I wonder if there is a formula that can equate the present of  $a$  with the future of  $b$ , but too soon for that kind of study, I postpone this question, for now.

As I have told you, I have amassed an archive of letters, an archive of my past, of past presents, in a hidden box somewhere dusty and tied up with string. I dream of letters dancing, and see them traversing space to you, and time. I see the time it takes to deliver this to you (in my dream, this time leaves a comet trail of red), and I see the time when it arrives. I see you open this letter, that first opening, that breaking of the seal and that disenvelopment, that first unrepeatabe reading, that I hope you do not regret. I feel this time I spend writing letters (21<sup>st</sup> August 2001, 3:31:13 pm), the time it takes to deliver; I anticipate the time I will spend awaiting your reply, the times I have spent awaiting letters in the past, letters for my archive, letters for my time. Peggy Phelan has written, in a letter I have recently read:

the letter can only arrive at its destination if you decide to open it, to declare yourself its reader. Such a declaration enacts the performance of the letter, the

truth event that the letter creates. This is one way to mark the crossing between the performativity of the recurring speech act and the singularity of the non-repeatable performance [Phelan and Heathfield, 2001: 248-249].

And then there is another voice, behind yours, near to mine, saying 'no subsequent reading of a letter duplicates the first reading, tied as it is to the scene of its reception, its moment in the unfolding narrative of a correspondence' [Decker, 1998: 50].

So the narrative of these letters (...this is a story and not a story I am telling you, but all of it is true...) is a narrative of time. I feel the time between me writing and you reading, and I send a request across that space and time: write back soon. I guess this is a kind of metacommentary, this thing I am trying to say in these letters. Maybe they speak for themselves.

(Oh, one more thing before I sign off, one thing I wanted to say before I send these letters to you. I wanted to ask you about e-mail. When I saw *Bloodmath* performed, one of the richest images was that of a letter falling fatly onto a doormat beneath a letterbox, the image of the body of the letter arriving unexpected through a door. And yet Phelan and Heathfield composed *Bloodmath* via e-mail, and the image of the delivery of the letter is nothing more than that, an image in a splice of poetic text.

I am trying to say that letters are precious partly because they so thoroughly embody time, and time lost, a relation that is all but severed in the composition of letters on e-mail<sup>b</sup>. As a technology of communication, temporality and writing, e-mail attests to the collapse of local times into a global 'now time', through the virtual instantaneity of exchange, the displacement of time spent waiting<sup>c</sup>. Adrian Heathfield in particular has written and spoken eloquently about the potential for performance practices to offer sites where we might intervene in the globalisation and global politicisation of time, and yet e-mail is paradigmatic of the erasure and standardisation of time lag and time difference (the very things that constitute the temporal characteristics of the epistolary form). As *Bloodmath* skirts over questions of closeness and materiality, presence and companionship, time and loss, I continue to wonder why it was composed via e-mail, when its body would be so much more beautiful had it been marked by the time and motion of delivery in a physical, embodied form. Fragment of you, flying towards me with your eyes flashing and a comet trail of red, take your time, darling, take your time).



Oh, and by the way, I wanted to say some things not just about time, but also about sex and death (repetitions of my reading and my writing, repetitions of my life), but I will save those for later. And I am replacing sex, for now, with love.

13<sup>th</sup> July 2001

Dear you

So ask me: what's so special about letters? Ask me, and I will answer you.

One answer: paradoxes.

## PARADOXES

Writing in *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, Janet Gurkin Altman identifies three key characteristics of epistolary discourse, and although she writes specifically about epistolary fiction, these can be usefully applied to developing a theoretical schema for epistolary criticism. The particularly temporal focus of these characteristics also foregrounds the potential for the development of the letter form in performance studies writings.

The first of Altman's attributes is what she calls 'the particularity of the I – you'. Letters are written for specific readers, real or imagined, that jointly map, with the writer, the emotional, intellectual, spatial, psychological and temporal terms within which the letter exists (this is also precisely that which complicates the question of address when the letter is not published in the fictional realm of an epistolary novel, but in the 'real' frame of academic writing. Does this problem face you now, you to whom I write, you with whom I speak?).

The I – you of the letter (from one to the other; I to you) is a protean pair: the 'you' transforms into 'I', as it writes to the 'I' now written as 'you'. This transformation of the I-you relationship is of course a temporal transformation, enacted as the sequence of letters extends through space and time. It is also a transformation that destabilises the status of

writing and reading subjects, and that makes literal the temporal transformations enacted by writing itself. The letter I write now becomes your letter in the future; to which you might then write a reply which I may or may not read some time inevitably after this 'now'. This shifting through multiple time frames and scales is what Altman refers to as the 'temporal polyvalence' of the letter, the second of the characteristics she sets out. The temporality of letters is always multiple – for example, the time of the actions described in the letter, the time of writing, the time of posting, the time of delivery and receipt, the time of reading, and the times of (perhaps) re-reading and (perhaps) reply.

In terms of the interpretation of lettered criticism, this polyvalence has significant implications. Altman suggests that in epistolary writing 'meaning is relative not to one time but to two or more' [Altman, 1982: 130]. In performance – at least after reception theory - it is accepted that there are complex questions of closure and finality in relation to interpretation and meaning, and it is accepted that the construction of meaning of performance texts is also polyvalent – partly as a result of the temporal status of performance itself. A scholarly or critical text, however, is deemed to wear its meaning on its sleeve (where its heart should be) – to be constructed in a way that ensures lucid and 'correct' reading of the writer's meanings and intentions, to be clear, to be singular, to be one. Epistolary criticism escapes and denies this constriction. Writing in a way that is both self-conscious and temporally unstable, in a way that will impact upon the meaning and interpretation of the writing itself; and in writing for absent readers who are specific (belonging to a specific audience group) and nonetheless multiple (made from individual reading subjects), it offers a discursive site for multiple meanings and unclear, illucid readings. It constructs its audience, in their absence, as present in the moments of their own reading of the letter, in a way that will encourage those readings as different. Because it unsettles the clarity of who the reader actually is, and whom the writer speaks to, and by foregrounding the temporal shifts that have occurred between the moments of writing and of reading, it unsettles the meanings and intentions embedded in the writing, opening the way for the encouragement of reading as re-writing, as re-doing the content and meaning of the text itself. The letter is a performance of the meaning and movement of time.

This focus on the writerly act of reading in the mobile present of engagement with the epistolary text reveals Altman's third characteristic of the letter form, which she refers to simply as 'a present tense'. Letters are written, on the whole, in the present tense (and as in performance, this present is unstable, forever falling away into a past and anticipating a coming future). Altman writes that 'the letter writer is highly conscious of writing in a specific present against which past and future are plotted' [1982: 122]. This awareness



is perhaps exemplified by the suicide note: a letter that plots the actions of a terminal present as the closure of (im)possible and non-existent futures (...near the iron bridge where the suicides fall from the sky like blood into a bucket...). The date line of the letter also embodies and marks the difference and distance between the time of writing and the time of reading, and it is a difference and a distance that is deferred (as difference, with an *a*) as new readers, future readers, second, third, fourth readings re-site and re-locate the coordinates between the now (then, past) of the writer and the now (then, future) of the reader.

Because of the impossibility for writer and reader to share a present or to be present to each other in the construction of epistolary discourse (an impossibility that is constitutive of that discourse as such), its discursiveness is caught in an impossible time: a time of anticipation, projection, retrospection, remembering; its dialogic structure is structured across a temporal – as well as spatial – divide. A divide between *presents*, where the luxury of being present to reading is given as a gift. Whilst all writing is split in this way, of course (especially writing that addresses an imagined future reader) epistolary discourse is particular in its foregrounding of this impossible temporality as constitutive of its very form<sup>d</sup>.

By insisting upon the constitution of activity *in the present tense* whilst simultaneously necessitating a temporal schism between writing and reading, epistolary writing bears a close resemblance to the temporal operations and instabilities of performance and performance criticism, and might offer a way of replaying these instabilities through the activities of critical writing itself.

14<sup>th</sup> July 2001

Dear you

I have noticed that you like to play with words, to pull them apart and re-arrange them, to make them dance and shimmer and sing, make them perform for you. Close, close, closeness...close (near), close (end)...love alone lose.

I find I am losing you, and a desire burns here with me to close that gap. I cannot escape my location, the specifics of my here and now, I cannot generalise for you. Can you see me writing, gazing at the open mouth of a shining screen, balanced on the edge of disappearance? A desire burns with me now to close this gap, 'to bridge that distance, to make a connection' [Bower, 2000: 170].

But what would it take to bring you closer, so that we might actually speak, as if we were face to face? How would I alter and be altered in that process, who would remain here, writing? If these letters are for you, from me, if they equate to a kind of doubling in which my voice always already anticipates and folds beneath your own, who is it here that writes? 'At one or more levels – emotional, psychological, political, intellectual – "lettered" criticism seeks to change the writer, the reader and the critical act' [Bower, 2000: 170].

And so I focus on a word, and pull it apart and watch it change (present, present, present, see it shimmer as it shifts). I cannot deny that I am enamoured of broken bits and pieces, shards of things and flecks of images and words. I embrace the broken, I adore the discarded. How long would it take to deny me the validity of this discourse, as I try to re-site these fences, pull up these roots? I know I speak in a hundred voices, and sometimes I am afraid of losing the sound of my own, but for now I am just happy to write (do we worry enough on the place of happiness in our critical work?). This is my criticism; these letters, this time, this gap, these fragments, these are the pleasure and the measure of this text.

'They are, indeed, of such manifold uses for pleasure, profit, business, that if asked, what were the uses of the arts of reading and writing? We might reply, "TO WRITE LETTERS."' [J. Charles, *The Universal Letter Writer*, 1829]

17<sup>th</sup> July 2001

Dear you

I look at you looking at me. Look at your yellow cloak, the fur, your pearls. I see you are not wearing your necklace today. I see you are writing again. Are you writing to me? I



wish I could have seen you when we had arranged to meet. I cannot stop thinking about you writing, your blue desk, dark walls, I am fixed upon the dark space behind you, that frame within your frame. I like how your hair is today. How slender your arm looks, how delicate, how beautiful, as you hold that pen, that quill, and write.

To whom are you writing? To me?

21<sup>st</sup> July 2001

Dear you

Today, I have again been worrying about performance, worrying about these words, worrying about whether I am wasting all this time. To calm this worry, I think of numbers marching across a face, 123 456 789, and start to equate:

Factor one: performance occurs in a shared time and space where performer/watcher (shadow partners of the writer/reader) are together.

Factor two: by definition, and constitutively, epistolarity occurs when space and time are *not* shared by reader/writer (performer of the writing/reader of the text).

First addition: in live performance, the *presence* of the addressee (whether another performer or the audience) is immediate and physical. Even an absent fictional addressee is stood in for by the one who waits and watches.

Second addition: in epistolary discourse, this presence is imagined, illusory and make-believe [see Altman, 1982: 140].

First multiplication: in performance studies, the problem of writing is how to maintain contact with that which is already absent; how to create a writing that remembers this

absence. How to simultaneously mark the presence of the writing and the loss of the event.

Sum: It seems that the letter, with its own complex relationship to presence and absence, offers an ideal form for working through this critical double-bind. As the writer/creator of a critical text, I mark my own absence from the scene of your reading, and yet also give my presence to you through the materiality of the letter itself. The letter remains as a trace of a material connection, a connection severed in time, and in this the letter embodies and performs the mechanisms of disappearance that trouble us as we write.

My body, my writing thinking self: I metonymise the event of which I was a part before I left it (or it left me) to retrospectively make this writing. This letter: it metonymises me.

Still thinking about this, I have worked out some simple formulae. Forgive me their crude roughness, the brash additionality of this understanding. My Formulae (you will see, they are nothing remarkable):

$$L = P + (Bp)$$

$$C = P(Bp)$$

$$PP = C(pPB)$$

So, maybe, therefore,  $PP = L$  (or, rather,  $L = PP$ )

(where L is a letter, P is a person, p is presence, B is a body, C is connection, and PP, for you, is performance).

The letter adds together reader and writer, bodies and presences (even if it is shadowed by absence). Add together bodies, presence and people, and a connection is made, a kind of correspondence. Performance connects the embodied presence of different people. What kind of performance is a letter?

Always stronger with words than with number, I have played out another game, to which I will add something a little later:



Present, present, present.

Present (now)

Present (here)

Present (gift)

Present (give)

Present (perform)

Pre-sent (already posted?)

Re-present (perform, make present again, and so we begin again...)

Another question, now: in playing upon the surfaces of presence and absence, here and there, then and now, what kind of gift might the letter form be to those of us that find every letter of every word a worrying kind of failure, a failure to equate to the thing we most wish to hold dear, to love, through writing?

17<sup>th</sup> July 2001

Dear you

And yet another question: why mathematics (I often asked this question as a child).

MATHEMATICS

*Bloodmath* starts with a meditation on number theory and the poetics of numbers, and the relationships between mathematics and love:

mathematics, like love, seeks to name those things that are to some degree indiscernible [Phelan and Heathfield, 2001: 242].

Hearing this, and not wanting this time with my beloved to drain and drip away, I remember that clock time is organised and realised through number. It is the counting of

time that gives it its structure, that renders it perceivable and real. It is also the convention of number that constructs clock time as linear, as a quality organised through an infinite series of continuing and interconnected mathematical sequences. Time corresponds to number in every instance in which it is reduced to measurable event. I think that the time of love must either be pure mathematics, or an infinitely impossible equation.

The word 'correspondence', as well as referring to the kind of neat equation that links seconds to minutes to hours to days to weeks to months to years, as well as referring to an exchange of letters, has a specifically mathematical meaning. Mathematically speaking, 'correspondence' relates to the pairing of members of one set with members of another, such as the correspondence of the sets {a, b, c, d} and {1, 2, 3, 4} in the pairings {a=1, b=2, c=3, d=4}. Mathematical correspondence can unite two separate bodies into one, forging a 'relation', the mathematical synonym of 'correspondence'. The pairing  $x < y$  (x is lesser than y) also forges a relation between the two terms; the relation "lover of" is the set of all pairs for which x is the lover of y (a set we all wish to enter at some point or other; a set we all wish to stay in; the set from which I write).

Epistolary 'correspondence' may not necessarily reveal the equivalence or inescapable relation of two terms, as unanswered letters and returned post suggest, although (on the flip side, verso, like a postcard) the exchange of letters does often reflect an intimate relation between the two sender-receivers. Love letters, specifically, constitute an intimate correspondence that seeks to forge a real relation between two bodies writing and reading in space and time – a relation that is symbolic, erotic, physical and sensual. In other words, although not all letters are love letters, although the senders and receivers of letters may not necessarily correspond to each other, love letters always make and mark that relation, that correspondence that reveals the peculiarly unmathematical suggestion that  $1 + 1 = 1$ .

The question remains: what kind of writing marks out such a letter of love? Does it have to be a letter between lovers? Do the subjects of an amorous exchange have to be known to each other, have to have met? Can I really write a love letter to you? Is this writing really a love letter, as I hope, as I intended it to be when I sat down and began to write? In *Bloodmath*, as Phelan and Heathfield write and perform, two writing and speaking subjects merge together in the text. Philosophers from Freud to Plato and beyond have noted that love brings a blurring of boundaries, a liquid merging that unites two into one, as the distinctions between lover and beloved, subject and object (ancient protagonists of the lover's discourse), self and other are blurred and smudged and erased. *Bloodmath*, it seems



to me, is a textual embodiment of that fluidity and that fusion. In love, as in letters, it is the singularity we lose, when we are close. And I hope these letters bring us closer.

And if the object I love is a performance, might this letter bring it nearer to you, even as it reminds you that it has already slipped away?

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2001

Dear you

## BLOODMATH

I want to make a subtraction before I even begin: of course, I am not really writing on *Bloodmath* as I write out these ideas. I am sorry if you thought I was – perhaps I have misled you. I am more interested in the event itself, and in the style of the project, than in the particular themes of the text as written and performed (although the themes remain to me rich and resonant and beautiful)<sup>f</sup>. As the two speakers perform the speaking of these letters, the letters themselves remain almost un-noticed, invisible vehicles for other ideas, like letters of the alphabet, a b c, invisible vehicles for driving words. And as always, I want to save them from oblivion, remind you that they are there.

I wonder which of your texts I write about. I have seen you both perform, and I have read your printed words. I have heard you perform these letters, and I have read your letters on these pages on my desk. Letters as speech, letters as writing, letters or email? Present or absent? Here or there? Now or then? It seems to me that the peculiar double-ness of *Bloodmath* makes explicit some of the central paradoxes of the epistolary form itself, and that the performed version dismantles the spatial and temporal hiatus that is the basis of that form (as these are letters presented to the other in the here and the now). A sequence of pairings: textual closure/invitation to reply; bridge and connection/barrier and separation; reading the past in the present/reading your present in the future. The relations between presence and absence, self and other, writing and speaking are central to the

existence of *Bloodmath* as both performance *and* publication; both writing *and* speech; both object *and* event.

And to whom are you speaking? Dear a, dear peggy, dear p, pp? Am I allowed to pretend you might be speaking to me?

You play a game, a game of letters. There's a game, already. 'Playing with letters'. Ha ha. It begins with an O, chalked on a board. You talk of zero, 'the philosophy of nothingness.' You write an L ('ello, 'ello) and start to talk of love. You write an E, and the catch clicks and we all fall in the trap, vital and victim as we try to fill that gap. Then the knot tightens and the handle turns and that ghostly *ν* becomes an *ς*. We lose, you win, winner takes all. L O S E. But textual redeemer there is another letter, C, to bring you close, to bring you to the close. Nice touch, good game. A game of letters.

In her letters, Peggy Phelan writes to Adrian Heathfield. Adrian Heathfield writes back. They talk of love, loss, gifts, time, mathematics. 'Dear a' she writes and speaks, dear *a*...the first letter, the first section titled 'Learning to Spell', learning to go beyond that start, that single letter *a*. 'Dear a', first letter of the alphabet, textual beginning, the first letter, from which all words, all sentences, all letters arise. 'Dear a', what a place to start...

...love pp.

'pp' – Peggy Phelan, 'pp', abbreviation of this name. 'pp', parcel post, pre-paid, postage paid. 'pp' on a packet of pills, 'post prandium' (take after a meal). 'pp', privately printed. 'pp', past participle, trace of times already lost. 'pp', musical term, *pianissimo*, play very quietly, speak very quietly, with such a small voice unlike such powerful words...

... 'pp', 'pages', how many pages make up a body and a person and a name? How many pages of you...?

... 'pp' *per procurationem*, per pro, pp, by delegation, through the agency of another, abbreviation that stands in for another at the side of a name. At the foot of your letter, who stands in for you, pp, who stands in for you? Are you there at all, are you present in these letters? I hear your voice, pp, but is that really you? Who stands in for you?



22<sup>nd</sup> July 2001

Dear you

When two voices write and speak as one, who do I hear, who do I see? Who is standing there, at the foot of this letter, at the side of this name? Are you standing in for your selves, or each other? Are you two or one or none? ( $1 + 1 = 1$ , insistent mathematics that haunts me in this dream).

And who are you writing to? I know you are writing to each other, but here you are, speaking to me. Who are you writing to? Can I answer? Will you answer me if I do?

But anyway....to return to my story, lest we forget. You will remember I had skirted near the iron bridge (the one with the suicides), that I had been to the sexual health clinic (to pick up some curative books), you will remember I had been cruising Derrida again, for you. So I sit here with an open book and an aching heart, thinking about leg ulcers, thinking about love. I worry that my prose is too dense, that I lose myself as I close myself in this thicket of words; can't see the wood for the textual trees. I ask myself: what kind of blade can cut a swathe through this fog, so I can see you clearly again?

I have been cruising Derrida again, turning another trick, to see what might be here, next to the rabbit, under this hat...

...*The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* opens with 256 pages of 'envois', letters, written by Derrida in the closing years of the 1970s. Written always with an indeterminate address, Derrida jumps between genres and identities in the text (from the objective to the personal; from famous philosopher to agonised lover; from critic to object to subject), and as he skirts across themes and around names, shifting from here to there and back and forth (*fort/da*), he forces the reader to ask 'who is reading?' As the addressee of the letters keeps sliding away and evades resolution, the reader has to keep switching reading strategies to engage with the text.

The *envois* present Derrida's 'yearning for connection (with the reader), for a reply, a response, a return. Throughout the collection of 'postcards' (declarations both public and private), Derrida tells his reader again and again that he has not yet received a reply to his letters, a reply from their recipient; and yet again and again he continues to write. It is not clear to whom he is writing, or indeed for whom he writes (...and when I call you my love, my love, is it you I am calling or my love...?), but the letters still pour forth upon the pages of the text. Through the *envois*, and through their imprecise address, Derrida constructs the critic/author as well as the reader as tenuous and variable – as the subject of deconstruction. He deconstructs the figure of scholarly/critical authority, an act he had previously reserved for authors of drama, fiction, poetry, and he does this precisely through use of the letter form. Rewriting Barthes' famous dictum, this might be called 'the death of the critic' [Bower, 2000: 162]. The writing of letters in this context undermines the voice of scholarly authority, an intended undercutting, that by abusing critical language reinvents it, stretching and teasing it to see if it bends enough to say what the critic of time really wants to say.<sup>8</sup>

The published letter forces the reader to consider their position in relation to the fictional or real reader addressed at the opening of the text (dear peggy, dear paul, dear adrian, dear david, dear you, dear you, dear you). If I write 'Dear X', and Y opens the text to read, the address instantiates a complex process of identification and disidentification in this moment of reading. Y takes up the position of the reader who is addressed in the text, and simultaneously remains aware of the difference between their own identity and the identity of the one (real or otherwise) addressed by the letter itself. As Altman suggests, 'the external reader's experience is partially governed by the presence of his internal counterpart; we read any given letter from at least three points of view – that of the intended or actual recipient as well as that of the writer and our own' [Altman, 1982: 111].

This oscillation between identification and disidentification marks the letter as a particularly ambivalent form for publishing writing. It generates both a sense of enclosure and a flash of rejection; it invites intimacy whilst also reminding the reader of their potential status as stranger. This shifting sand of the reading subject insists upon the non-neutrality of the address in (academic) writing. It disallows the invisibility of the acts and subjects of reading and writing, and installs in the text instead two active subjects, subjects engaged in complex processes of identification, alienation, reading and interpretation; subjects both present and absent to the text; subjects for whom the text is not a static object, rendered immobile in the clarity of its critical address, but rather a labile, fluid,



indeterminate act – a performed and performable writing; a paradigm of performative writing, perhaps, through which something slippery begins to happen to the subjectivity of the reader and the writer, something a little queer, my love, something a little queer. As Della Pollock suggests, performative writing is ‘subjective’ in the sense that ‘it defines the subject-self in/as the effect of a contingent, corporeal, shifting, situated relation – and so itself as shifting, contingent, contextual’ [Pollock, 1998: 86]<sup>h</sup>. Sited-ness, contingency, and contextuality seem to be key characteristics of epistolary writings, suggesting that the letter might offer a useful form for the continued exploration of the problematics of writing in relation to performance.

So Dear a, Dear pp...In June I came to London to see you perform...

15<sup>th</sup> July 2001

Dear you (and you)

DIALOGUES (1 + 1 = 2)

Letters are objects and acts that generate an economy of send/receive; send/counter-send: to send a letter is to implicitly demand a reply to your letter. In this, they obey the law of the gift (that’s the content of another letter, of one of my later *envois*). The sending of a letter implies a reply; a recipient who is faced or confronted by the letter, who is expected to respond<sup>i</sup>. Letters are *constructive* and *generative* in this sense; they are reproductive, and they are performative. Although it could be said that all published writing, especially scholarly and critical writing (which by definition is part of a public dialogue) implicitly generates and calls for this kind of reply, other forms of critical writing don’t necessarily suppose and demand this response, and indeed this is the difference that marks the epistolary form of critical writing *as* different, as valuable and as unique. Anne L. Bower writes that ‘criticism in letter form presumably seeks some response, some intimacy with or acknowledgement from an addressee’ [Bower, 2000: 170]. My own writing on these themes is in part a response to the (performance and) publication of Phelan and

Heathfield's *Bloodmath*, as well as to a more general interest in the letter form as both a critic/writer and as an artist.

Of course, *Bloodmath* makes explicit and literal the dialogicity of the letter form in its internal structure, written as it is as a critical dialogue. It remains to be seen what kind of external responses its form will generate, who will reply, and when, and why...

On the 'dialogicity' of the letter form and lettered communication, it is worth thinking about Bakhtin's writings on what he calls the 'dialogic imagination.' In Bakhtin's system for understanding the uses and operations of language – in all its spoken and written forms – it is the "dialogicity" of language, and its "stratification" by particular contexts, accents, dialects, moments in time and places in space, intentions and (mis)understandings that render all utterances and uses of language 'half someone else's' [Bakhtin, 1981: 293]. All words, all uses of words, are drawn not from some kind of neutral repository – some store, that we may call a dictionary – but from the uses of words by others, from the already flying swarms of words that can only belong to you through everybody else (a belonging that is always already a kind of sharing, a negotiation, a transfer between users, speakers, listeners). As such, the reception of a word, the transfer of the word from your mouth to my ear, my pen to your eye, already informs your utterance, my writing, our hearing and seeing each other. The completeness of the difference between me, here, now and you, there, then, that the word has to cover marks any instance of language as heteroglossic: our particularities disallow any generality, any unity of language. Every utterance has to cover that distance. Every thing I write and say has half already come from you (and/or Others like you), and every reply you might give back is half already mine.

In this world, where words have to travel, and are shared, where every time you speak you speak with my voice, the voice of the other in your ears, where every utterance is bound up with its response and reply, language itself is metaphorised by the letter. The letter, suspended as it is in a relation always to at least the number 2 (the writer and the reader, the me and the you), and pegged on a slowly turning wheel of sending and return, exemplifies the heteroglossia and the stratification of language. It is a microcosm of every utterance, every attempt at communication, every use of every word.

Like Cyrano de Bergerac, I write a love letter in another's voice.



Who stands in for me, pp, whose is this voice resting beside my name? Who is whispering beneath my tongue, sitting next to me as I write? (1 + 1 = 1, or 1 + 1 = 2?).

If you give me my voice, and I give you these words, is this an exchange or a gift? What kind of gift have your words been to me/ What kind of gift is this reply?

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2001

Dear you

PRESENT/PRESENT/PRESENT

In *The Gift*, first published in 1925, Marcel Mauss provides an anthropological account of the economics of gift exchange that is still deeply influential on contemporary theories of gifts and giving. Mauss's study proposes that the gift is bound in a circular economy in which there is not only an obligation to give, but symmetrical obligations also to receive and to give in return. This pattern of giving/receiving/giving in return is of course also very much like the pattern of epistolary exchange.

On the obligation to return gift for gift (to which one can compare the compulsion to reply in epistolary exchange that makes closure such a slippery negotiation), Mauss writes that:

The pattern of symmetrical and reciprocal rights is not difficult to understand if we realize that it is first and foremost a pattern of spiritual bonds between things *which are to some extent parts of persons* [Mauss, 1988: 11, my emphases].

Revealing the operation of gifts as metonymic of the bodies and presences of those involved in the exchange, this materiality is also that which one sees in letter exchange – the gift, like the letter, stands in for the body of the giver or sender. Barthes writes that 'the gift is contact, sensuality: you will be touching what I have touched; a third skin unites

us' [Barthes, 1990: 75]. Writing in 1844, Ralph Emerson suggests that 'the only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me' [Emerson, 1997: 26].

If a baker can give of his bread, if a shepherd can give sheep, if Christ can give his blood and flesh, what can I give to you? What can a writer give to a reader?. Only words, letters and words. Letters made from words made from letters, to send to you. So here is my gift, which I am sure you will forget I ever sent to you. A gift of letters. A b c. A quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. There, all there, for you.

In *Given Time*, Derrida departs from the tradition of unifying gift and counter-gift in a closed and circular system, suggesting instead that any act of return or reciprocity annuls the very act of giving. The gift is no longer a gift if it is repaid or returned or reciprocated, or indeed even if it is recognised *as* a gift. According to Derrida, if the gift presents itself *as* a present (the play on present as gift and present as 'now' forms the spine of his argument), it annuls its own status, it is no longer a gift:

if there is no gift, then there is no gift, but if there is gift held or beheld *as* gift by the other, once again there is no gift; in any case the gift does not *exist* and does not *present* itself. If it presents itself, it no longer presents itself [Derrida, 1992: 15].

Through this particularly temporal theory of the gift, Derrida rewrites the 'conditions of the gift' as 'forgetfulness, non-appearance, non-phenomenality, non-perception, non-keeping' [Derrida, 1992: 15], and concludes that the gift, in its self-annulment, *cannot exist as such*. In this, I would suggest, as well as being uncannily like performance, the gift is much like time. Both the gift and time are without substance. Time, in itself, is not temporal: rather, it is metonymised by what fills, passes, loses, keeps it. Time, like the gift, is characterised by the aporia of non-being, and indeed, as Derrida concludes, time is all that can be given in the gift, if the gift is to be gift at all. The gift has 'the structure of an event, an event of forgetting and deferral, an event of *différance*...what the gift gives, in the end, is time, nothing but time – time to forget, time to return, time for a delayed reciprocation that is no longer simply a return' [Schrift, 1997: 10].

As Pierre Bourdieu points out, the temporality of the economics of the gift constructs this difference (with an *a*): 'the counter-gift must be deferred and different, because the immediate return of an exactly identical object clearly amounts to a refusal' [Bourdieu,



1997: 198]. Bourdieu, like Derrida, sees time as that which roots the possibility of the gift; it is time that enables the gift to evade its own annulment. He suggests that gift exchange, as a “detotalised” practice, is one that is ‘constructed in time’, whereby ‘time gives it its form, as the order of a succession, and therefore its direction and meaning’ [Bourdieu, 1997: 190]. For Bourdieu, it is also time that permits the wilful forgetfulness, non-perception, and non-keeping that Derrida conceives as the conditions of the gift:

The lapse of time that separates the gift from the counter-gift is what allows the deliberate oversight, the collectively maintained and approved self-deception, without which the exchange could not function. Gift exchange is one of the social games that cannot be played unless the players...are predisposed to contribute, with their efforts, their marks of care and attention, and their time, to the production of a collective misrecognition [Bourdieu, 1997: 198].

These are ‘practices performed in time and in their own time’ [198], not the seemingly a-temporal characteristics of anthropological observation that Bourdieu critiques. Like Derrida, he foregrounds the temporality of the gift - times short and long, times pregnant with hesitation, waiting, prolongment and carefully calibrated postponement - as the very stuff of an economics of exchange: temporality becomes the very character of the gift.

One might ask then in what way the temporality of the letter received and read fulfils Derrida’s condition of the impossible gift. And in what way this temporality might be shared also by the gift-status of performance, or performance writing. Certainly, in terms of the temporal polyvalence of the letter, the inevitable postponement of delivery and the inherent possibility for delay, the time-lag between sending and receiving (and between writing and reading and replying) resembles the given time that marks the Derridean gift. Derrida’s problematising of presence, and the present-ness of giving and receiving, highlights the difficult relationship between presence and the gift, and again is a problem that might be solved (like a particularly tricky mathematical formula) by the recognition of the letter as gift. Letters foreground the peculiar interchangeability of presence and absence (making the writer both present to the reader and marking their absence). If it is partly the presence of the giver in the moment of the gift that undermines its status as a present, even though the giver has to *be* present for the giving to happen, again then a gift of letter might render a scene where an act of giving might be able to occur. Letters exist as material objects that can be unwrapped and handled, then retained and stored or

thrown away, and *also* as vehicles for a more metaphysical kind of giving – a gift of ideas, a gift of communication, a gift of words. In this, they enter a kind of economy of giving in which the moment of receipt is perpetually postponed (I cannot know what I am giving to you through these words, how they will be received; I cannot know what this ‘gift’ is I am trying to give, or who I give it to, or when you read).

I recently found a bundle of letters I had stashed away as a teenager, buried at the back of a drawer in a room at my parents’ home, and re-reading them I wanted to re-write my replies, to send them again, or send them anew from the me that was reading, so different from the me that read and replied back then. This possibility for (re-)reading, replying and re-responding to a letter sent so long ago (a letter so long forgotten by its sender, as I am sure I am now too) seems to be a melancholy model for Derrida’s impossible gift: the sender cannot know it is being given to ‘me’ (the new me, the modern me, the older me) ‘again’ now; the reading me was not present at the giving of this gift, not even present at its first reading. This blurring of the gift by a mark of time that could never have been planned or known makes the possibility of reading and reply a model both for the giving and returning of the gift.

*These* letters, written to be given (but to who, but to who?), written to be read; written in the faint hope that sometime you will send me a reply; these letters that I give you now (when? now) are my gifts. And I know of course that these letters I give you, here, now, are not the letters you have with you there, then: this difference (with an *a*) is the sign as well as the subject of my gift.

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2001

Dear you

And then I remember something I have heard you speak. Words you have spoken in *Bloodmath*, your own words as this gift: ‘what kind of gift is the act of performance? What might such a gift give? What might this gift have to do with the gift of love of which you



speaking, a gift of something not owned by the giver, a gift of self-loss?' [Phelan and Heathfield, 2001:253]

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2001

Dear you

Is this a gift of time...?

I give you this performance. You cannot hold it in your hands, you can no longer hear it, it is not possible for you now to see it. I give you this performance, you cannot take it, you cannot accept it, for there is nothing left here for me to give<sup>!</sup>. I give you this performance, which you must forget, which you can only forget, in time. I give you this performance; when? - now; where? - here. (When? - then; where? - there). I give you time, or, at least, I give you these things in this time. Together. Time together is my gift. I give you this performance. Watch it disappear...

And here's another question:

What is performance anyway? Is it only whatever metonymises it – music, sounds, image, words, character, action, movement, light, texture? Is performance, like the gift, like time, aporetic? Nothing, a space, a hollow, a potential, not mine, not this or that *but...*

*(Perhaps)*

When all is said and done, I will be able to say: *I was there*. Afraid though that you do not understand me, I wanted to write you a letter and tell you how it was. I will send that letter another day, and that will be my gift.

Dear you

The Dutch painter Jan Vermeer (1632-75) is unusual amongst canonical artists for several reasons. Unlike most of his contemporaries, none of his notebooks and writings remain in existence; there are no textual clues to the philosophy and technique of his work. His oeuvre is also unusually small – only thirty-odd paintings currently make up the known body of his work; there are no sketches, no drawings, nothing but thirty-odd exquisite paintings, perfect in their play of light, silent in their gaze back upon the viewer. Six of Vermeer's paintings share a common theme: women in domestic interiors writing or reading or receiving letters. These paintings, like many in Vermeer's oeuvre, depict the intimate, the private, the fleeting, the ephemeral.

The silent stillness of life hidden from a public gaze is rendered on these canvases, the letter itself (like the process of painting) crossing the threshold between the most hidden depths of the self, and the exterior space of public discourse. The letter allegorises the intrusion upon the private which the painter makes as he gazes upon these women with their letters and their pearls and their maids.

The letter is a familiar element of the iconography of seventeenth century Dutch genre painting, and symbolises the expectation of love. But Vermeer's paintings refuse to narrativise the significance of the letters themselves – other iconographic elements are omitted, painted over, or not emphasised by the paintings' subjects. The contents and consequences of Vermeer's letters remain ambiguous. In their refusal to speak, their refusal to be rendered meaning-ful, these details of the quotidian take on a metaphysical significance. The paintings show the significance of the letters to the readers, writers and carriers, and indeed one presumes to Vermeer, but their contents always remain undisclosed – they deny any kind of closure on meaning.

Why then this persistent theme of the letter? They are located in the context of the depiction of everyday life, yes, but beyond that, to who is Vermeer writing in these still and silent images? What is he trying to say to or through these women? What are the words that remain unsaid and unread?



I am enamoured particularly of one of these paintings, 'A Lady Writing' (c. 1665; Fig.8). On my notes, from when I first began to study Vermeer, I have distinguished this painting from the others with the legend 'the one where she's looking at me'. I look at her looking, interrupted at her desk, look at her looking at me. Her gaze is the gaze of the past. But not like a photograph, her trace is not there on the canvas, but her gaze comes to me through the gaze of Vermeer (who am I looking at, who can I see, who's eyes am I looking through at you as you write?) Who stands in for you, pp, on that canvas, who models that pose? And why are you looking at me, as you write? In your yellow cloak with the fur and the pearl necklace waiting at your side?

Jan van der Meer van Delft. Jan Vermeer, canonical artist, transformed through time and space by the power of painting. Vermeer, canonised and collected, exhibited and known, you have escaped annihilation, you are not yet oblivion. But what about you, lady writing, how can I help you escape that absence, that disappearance? I look at you looking, look at you writing. Who are you writing to, who are you waiting for, whose gaze do you seek as I give you mine in return?

According to Martin Bailey, the picture hanging in the background of 'A Lady Writing', although difficult to distinguish, depicts a still life with a viol, a 'painting on the theme of the transience of life and the inevitability of death, known as a *vanitas*. It may be the picture of a 'bass viol with a skull' which, according to the 1676 inventory, was in Vermeer's dining room' [Bailey, 1995: 84]. I cannot see the viol in this picture, but I can see the violence of representation between your gaze and my eyes; I can see the violence of time that would erase you from history; I can see the thin skin of pigment and oil that holds this at bay, like these words hold me closer to someone to read me, to someone to hold me, like you.

A lady writing. How often I have thought of you, alone at your desk, at night, in the dark room, conjuring words like births, weaving and spinning and sweating your night sweats. Mistress of words, maker of magic. Who are you writing to, in that letter, in those words? If I open it, if I pretend it is mine, if I hear your voice on this paper, will you answer me? If I write to you, lady writing, will you answer me? I have wanted to save you from oblivion. I have wanted to tilt the picture, climb inside the frame, twist back the cruel lines of this perspective so I can see what you are writing on that paper, as you look at me and smile, as you look at me and slowly start to crack and fade and peel away and disappear.

As I look at you writing I can see your words. I read your open letter. And this is my reply, my letter. My love letter. 'The love between a writer and a reader is never celebrated. It can never be proved to exist.' These are the words I have peeled away, and rub into the pages here, using the gum of my sweat to stick them. These are the words I hold for you. In July, I came to London to meet you, but when the sky was bluer you were not there. In June, I came to London to hear you speak, in your yellow cloak with that fur and the pearl necklace resting at your side. I have read your letters, and this is my reply. A love letter, a letter of love, from this solitary reader.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'D' and a trailing flourish.

p.s. Who will stand in for *me* as I write? Who will save *me* from oblivion?

21<sup>st</sup> August 2001

Dear Peggy

I am tired now of all these words. I am exhausted. But I wanted to write to you just once to say hello. Like many others, I know, your words have been a gift to me, and I wanted to reply. I hope you don't mind this reply.

In June, I came to London to hear you speak. I had wanted to put a face to your name, put a voice to your words. For a long time now, your voice has sat here beneath my tongue, your words I can still open in a new way every time I read them, like a magic book that rewrites itself when the cover is closed. This is why your voice is peppered everywhere in every text I write. Your ideas have given birth to my ideas, your maps have mapped out my writing. I am finding my own way now, and soon I will have a landscape all my own, but you have been a guide to me and I guess a kind of lover. I mean, I have so loved holding close your words. At times, I have worried that I did not have a voice, that I just speak you, dumb dummy on a ventriloquist's velvet knee, that my writings will burn under



the glare of your stare, under the heat of your voice. And I say it again now: although I have my own voice now, your voice has guided my tongue; your fingers have guided mine over the keys I guide them over now; your face...

...and then I remembered that I had never seen your face...

...and so in June I came to London to see you speak. I guess I had a vision of you, from the cover of *Unmarked*. Alice Neel's face, standing in, pp, for yours. First there is your name, and then that face. Those closed eyes, that beautifully flecked and wrinkled skin, that open mouth. That open mouth, infinite space behind, empty vanishing point. That mouth I read as your mouth, speaking mouth, or is it breathing or is it crying? I see her age and I compute your age. I see her closed eyes and I imagine them opening and it is you then looking at me. Alice Neel, standing there, standing in, pp, for you ('this is not a pipe' writes René Magritte, denouncing the treachery of images, as the name and the image elide, and I have heard this warning before, but I still have to learn how to listen to pictures). So there is this face, standing in for yours, pp, Peggy Phelan, Alice Neel.

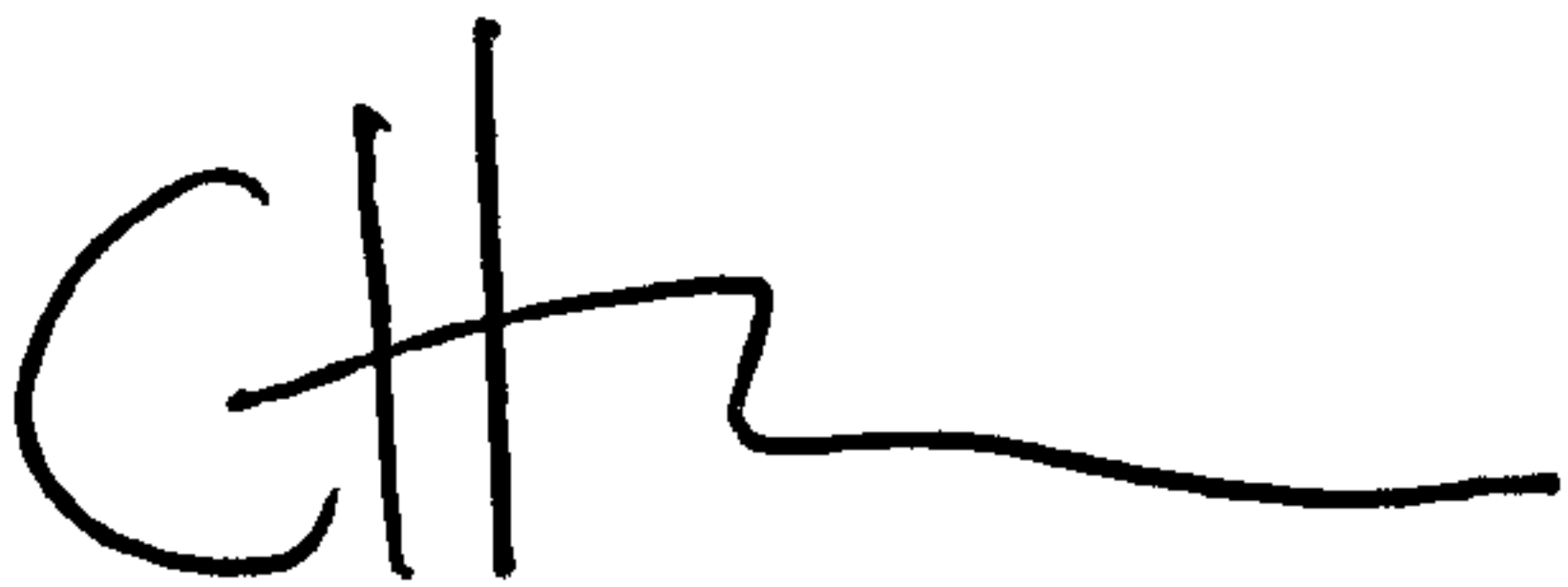
I have read your words and they are so rich, so powerful, so confident, so present. And in June I came to London to hear you speak. After you had finished, someone commented on your performance; your stutters and stammers, the mistakes you made. You put it down to a lack of presence, old trope of good performance. I wonder what you will think then if I suggest that you embody absence. After all, you have written so convincingly for absence to be marked with value, and there you were, barely here, reading your letters and stumbling and on the verge of disappearance. Letters and absence, now that's something else: the absences that letters try to fill. A Lady Writing, at her desk, gazing out into the oily darkness of oblivion, writing a letter to fill that gap, and to remind us that that gap is there. I wonder where that letter is right now?

So here's another gap: the gap between my image and imagining of you, your confidence, your presence your power in all these words (you know this to be true), and the you I saw that day. The gap between that picture of that face, and your face. The gap between your writing and your voice. The gap between presence and absence, infinite vanishing point, as we all stagger on the verge of disappearance. I struggle for a name for this gap, this space I want to fill and understand with all these letters and all these words. For now, I think I should like to call this gap 'Alice Neel's Mouth', dark vanishing space where an image and a body collide. Did you know that in proto-Sinaitic inscriptions, the origin of the Latin letter

*p* is represented by a pictographic drawing of a mouth (mouth, in Hebrew, *peh*)? P...0...the infinite absence of that open empty mouth, speaking or breathing or crying. Alice Neel's mouth. Your mouth. My mouth, open, speaking silently to you across this time and all this space. 'pp', two open mouths. I wonder if this is like kissing? Or, like talking to one another?

So I will close this with a kiss, and so you know that I am not making advances on you, I have asked my lover to sign this letter on my behalf, to stand in for me. So before I go: just thankyou, for those presents and all that absence and the infinite possibility of that soft and open mouth.

Love

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by a horizontal line that ends in a small flourish.

David.

pp

2<sup>nd</sup> August 2001

Dear you

### THE LOVER'S BODY

The materiality of the letter – its ink-and-paper body – metonymises the body of the writer: the one stands in, pp, for the other. This is reinforced in the tradition of the scenting of letters, by the marking of them with kisses, by folding objects within them (objects handled and placed by the sender) before they are sent; and reinforced again if they are kissed, smelled, clutched to the heart, carried by the breast of the recipient.

The possibility that letters are not received is a kind of horror that comes from the refusal of a longed-for body to appear. A horror that comes from a kind of death. ("I have written you now three times since last winter, and yet have had no reply. I can think of no



reason why you would end our correspondence, and now fear the worst for you. I no longer know if I am writing to the living or the dead...”).

Dmitri Shostakovich writes to his friend and unofficial secretary Isaac Davidovich, on ageing, composing and dying. ‘Be well, my dear friend, I squeeze your hand...I send you a big kiss...’ Did you know, Dmitri Shostakovich, Isaac Davidovich (how I love the consonant kisses of your names) that the earliest common ancestor of the Latin ‘I’ was a pictograph of a hand with its forearm? A hand reaching out (from I to you?). I write to you, my love, my friend, I do, I squeeze your hand...holding hands. I send you this letter across all this time and all this space, so that I might be with you again. Touch this, for this is a part of me. We touch, I am reaching out, with my open hand, to touch you. Open the letter<sup>k</sup>.

The ancient calligraphers, I have read, saw the letters of the alphabet as enigmatic projections of their own bodies, ink on parchment standing in for blood and flesh, a sum of presence in a scratchy mark. I heard somewhere else, some time ago, that in the art of Chinese character drawing, the absence left as the brush leaves the page, the trace of movement that is there in that empty space, marks the beauty of the form more than the ink upon the scroll. Bodies marked and traced, bodies marked by their absence. The materiality of the letter, and hence the materiality of the letter (these letters, I write for you, these traces of me). An economy of bodies and loss, of presence and absence, plotted here upon this graph in the million fading dots of this slowly drying ink. Letters manage to both open and fill the gap between here and there, then and now, lost and found. And I say to you again: is this not why a letter might be a perfect place to write to you about performance? As I write the performance to keep it here even as I see it disappear, you see me here in this letter, you see me balanced on the edge of my own oblivion, on the edge of Alice Neel’s Mouth, about to fall and fade away into that oily inky darkness. ‘A letter text embodies the negotiations of connection: separation and union, here and there, now and then, absence and presence’ [Bower, 2000: 157]<sup>l</sup>.

No more academic invisibility either. *My name: David Harradine* Here I am, reading with you, dear reader, dear you *The place of this writing: London, England*, watching you re-perform these words I have sent you. *The time: June to August 2001, late morning, early evening, the middle of the night* It’s good to meet you, at last.

And here's another question: is absence anything more than just another way of counting time?

22<sup>nd</sup> August 2001

Dear Adrian

You once said to me 'it seems like we are ploughing adjacent furrows'. I'm not sure this is the right place to invoke that metaphor, but I wanted to write you, very briefly. I am reading *Bloodmath*, and I am reading you writing to PP. In June, I came to London to see you speak, and there you are together, speaking, speaking to her. You offer your letters as a gift, a gift for her words, a kind of return. And now here I come, with these letters as a gift, a kind of return, an echo of an echo of an absent writing voice.

I just wanted to let you know how difficult it is for me to write these words, how hollow I am afraid they feel, how much like yours. But all I can say is that they are my words, even if, like I have said before, they are already half someone else's. An echo without an original, a trace, but of something that I never knew was there. This is where I want  $1 + 1$  to equal more than 2.

So these are some of my furrows, lines upon my brow. Deep troughs of earth fertile enough to grow ideas, I hope. These are some of my ideas, and I hope we can discuss them soon.

28<sup>th</sup> September 2001

Dear you

So I ask you: what form should a text on love take? If I am writing here on letters but also on love, also on desire (the love and desire of a reader for a writer), how then should I write? How can these letters - these critical letters - express this love that I feel?

Catherine Belsey, in *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, writes that fiction, because it has the license of evasiveness, contradiction, paradox, and plurality, offers an ideal place for writing on desire. Similarly, a critical theory of desire might move beyond explanation, interpretation, closural reductiveness, move more towards the realms of the poetic and the fictional, so as not to miss the mark and lose the imprint of desire itself.

But then I am afraid that I cannot speak to you, that I cannot tell you of this love, queer as it is, unfounded as it is, real as it is. What if you fail to hear me, fail to see what I am saying, what if my voice falls away through the weave of these words? In July I came to London to meet you, but I only saw you turn away. In June I came to London to hear you speak, and saw you slowly slip and disappear. Can you hear me? Can you see me, quick, before I fade?

And yet, it is my love for these ideas; my love for the spectres of performances that haunt and host these words; my love for the maternal comfort of this writing (I am both mother and child and am cradled together on the curves and cushions of these letters); and yes, my love for you, that propels the very letter of this text. I do believe in love, and I believe I can tell you so. It is love that gives rise to (these) words. Maybe you're right; maybe love is a mathematical equation, and over the infinity of the open mouth of '0' we build our worlds in words. Between the word and the world is /, for love, and I'm walking that bridge right now, and hoping I can break this fall.

So if some of what I write for you (*for you*) seems a little fictitious, and you wonder how it can be here in this location where we read together; if some of these letters spill out of the envelope of institutional(ised) research, then remember this, remember that I am trying to elicit your desire, trying to tease and tempt you enough to get you to see beyond all these



letters and all these words. This is love I am trying to write, and if I tell you stories, just trust me, that they are true.

So here it is - *dramatis personae* – cast of my love and my writing my desire, cast of my letters and my life:

The writer, closed in a room, with a viral computer and an aching heart, and a picture and a letter and a book.

The lovers, locked in a textual embrace, two open mouths standing beside one another, kissing, or speaking (or breathing, or crying).

The reader (that's you) (and you, and you, or you).

The Lady Writing, with her yellow cloak and her fur and her pearl necklace waiting by her side.

And a letter, an alphabet, some time, a face and an empty open mouth, some formulae, some truths, some lies, some fictions. And a tangled theory in a pile of letters, archived and dusty and boxed away in paper and love and string.

Act Four, Scene One, an empty stage, and the lights beginning to fade...

23<sup>rd</sup> August 2001

Dear you

CLOSURE

How do you begin a final letter? How do you begin a performance that is all about endings?

The letter form resists closure, insists upon keeping itself open for the possibility of reply. In every letter sent, there is the implication of a return; an unread text sits beneath the skin of every letter written, invisible palimpsest, impossibly traversing time. And to publish a letter...who will read it, who might reply, and when? 'The very publication of the epistolary work is explicitly seen as having consequences; within the epistolary framework, frames are constantly broken, and even closural gestures have inaugural implications' [Altman, 1982: 163]. The epistolary form flickers between two conflicting possibilities: the potential finality of any letter and the open-endedness of the form. So how shall I finish? How shall I close this correspondence, equate this rough additionality, end this sum? And how will future repetitions of this text, or unknown future replies, resist and re-mark the ephemerality of this act of writing?

Altman writes that where the letter is symbolic of love, the closure of correspondence equates to the renunciation of that love. I want to close now, without that renunciation. If I write to you of love, in love, with love, will you write back?

So I close now as I began, as I always begin, with the voice of another stammering into my own, resting beside me as I write, love and my beloved. I end and it begins, again:

Act Four, Scene Two: a lady writing in a darkened room, a picture hanging on the wall behind her. Her blue desk. She wears a yellow cloak, fur trimmed. A pearl necklace at her side. She holds a pen, and is writing a letter. As the curtain falls, she turns out to look, and smiles. The lights grow briefly brighter, then slowly start to fade...

And please, do write back soon.

Love,  
Dana  
K







Fig 8: Johannes Vermeer, *A Lady Writing*, c. 1665. National Gallery of Art, Washington





## **Conclusion, or, Ending Times:**



**The Conclusion: or, another discontinuous discourse, “On Writing a Conclusion”**  
Cast, not in order of appearance (a new cast, for a new performance, and perhaps a repetition of before):

Myself, and a cascade of falling sand

Ms. Peggy Phelan, again

Mr., or rather, Dr. Jacques Derrida (eventually. Dr., eventually)

The Royal Mail

The numbers 1 to 100

The examiners of a thesis submitted in respect of study for a doctoral degree

The writer, the reader, the page and the clock

And a question: how to begin...?

In the summer of 2000, Battersea Arts Centre in London marked the millennium with a month long festival of work on a theme of death and dying. *Matters of Life and Death* featured work by UK and international artists that explored death's narratives, death's metaphors and the processes of dying that invest and inform both the performative and the practices of everyday life. In introducing the season, festival directors Tom Morris and David Jubb write:

Artists have meddled with death in every generation. In ours they are sick in love with it. Damien Hirst's work is not just about shock. His famous pickled shark was entitled '*The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*'. The most inventive theatre artists in Britain...are zoning in on death with a sometimes bewildering intensity. Comics pick at the subject as if it were a scab. Even newspaper columnists have swerved like moths towards the confrontation of their own mortality [festival brochure, BAC, 2000]

As part of this season, I wrote and co-devised a new performance piece, *Exquisite Moments and Imperfect Endings*, which explored performance itself as a metaphor for the trickle of time towards an impending disappearance, as a metaphor for death and the process of dying. During the devising of this piece, the company was faced with an immediate and soon-to-be-thematic problem, a problem that became a mantra repeated throughout

rehearsals and eventually in the performance: *how do you begin a show that is all about endings?* The performative working through of this question became one of the focuses of devising and the structural frameworks for the performance itself. We imagined all the ways that a show might start...

*the curtain rises on a stage empty apart from a child alone...a chorus line enters from the right, exits left...a crowd of old people walk slowly, incredibly slowly, across the stage, stop downstage right, pick something from the floor, look at it, return it to the floor, exit...a girl in a gorilla suit waits in a chair...a woman weeps as a blue light dims...the stage is empty, music starts, a shadow enters from the wings...a flash of light then silence*

...and all the ways it might end. What happened in between seemed, to us, to be incidental to these two pivotal points: the start of the end and the end of the end. Or the start and the end. Or the end and the start...of something else. Now, reflecting back on this process of creating absence, I remember reading a leaflet from a lecture produced by LIFT, the London International Festival of Theatre:

I'm fascinated by the evidence of theatre. When the play ends what remains? This has been the standard response. But perhaps, we need to ask, when the play ends what begins? [Rustom Bharucha, from LIFT website [www.liftfest.org](http://www.liftfest.org)]

*When the play ends what begins?*

*How do you begin a performance that is all about endings?*

In *Exquisite Moments and Imperfect Endings*, we finally decided to start the show with the end. Simple answer, of course. A single performer alone on stage, under a naked light bulb, and a cascade of sand. Sand like in an hourglass, falling through space and time and running out towards a stop. At the end of the show, a single performer, under a naked lightbulb, and a cascade of sand running out, towards a stop

This problem of beginning something that is thematised by the figure of the end returns to haunt me now as I start out upon the ending of this thesis. *How do you start a performance that is all about endings?* And implicit in this question, and pushing through, *how do you end a performance that is all about endings?* How do you start that final letter (dear you...)?; How do you open the final door to gain access to the space that you have been occupying all along?;



When the flashes have flashed and the negative has been developed and the image starts to appear, what is it that is lurking in the dark shadows at the edge of the print?; What repetitions does this process of ending entail?

**So: "End Time: On The Impossibility of Concluding in the Writing of an End"**

There are various themes that "push through" the writing throughout this thesis; themes that move beyond the more or less local context of the focus of each chapter and become part of the metastructure of the thesis as a single piece of work. These themes - time, death, the ephemeral, the subjective and, to a lesser extent, the erotic and the sexual - are caught up in the very act of "concluding" itself. They form a kind of a thematics of conclusion, of coming to a close. Also, each of these themes is itself marked by the idea of conclusion, whether for example in relation to ephemerality and impermanence as the defining characteristics of performance; closure or lack of closure as marking the shift from sexual identity to queer subjectivity; death as the horizon of that which can be known.

The thesis as a textual form also focuses on conclusion, on the blissful release of textual, philosophical or pedagogical tension. It seeks to offer new knowledge or new thought as the product of the useful fertilisation and cross-fertilisation of ideas. The 'end' of the thesis, written as the entry into a post-doctoral career, is the boundary between different states of institutionalised being.

Throughout the writing of this text, I have been concerned to explore, both formally and conceptually, the possibility for 'performative writing', for writing that is active, productive, alive; writing that enacts and makes something in its movements from the pen or the keyboard to the page to the eye. Writing that seeks to *do* as much as it seeks to *say*. Of course, for me, one of the main things (the main thing? No, but significant nonetheless) that this writing is seeking to do is to make a doctorate; I write this as part of a performative endeavour that has the reward of qualification as one of its outcomes. However, in much the same way that contemporary performance and artistic practice foregrounds the importance and the relevance of *process* over the specificities of presentable or recordable or persistent *product*, so this piece of writing suggests that the attitude towards intellectual research and work, and the ways in which that work is recorded textually, is in many ways as important or more important than the specific and local outcomes or conclusions of that research itself. I am not a little aware of the tension here, between the imperative to close with a flourish that lays down a clear route towards that qualification I have been working so hard to make, and the deeper need to forestall closure, to hold back on resolution, to deny the very ideas of summation and finality that the conclusion of a doctoral thesis might conventionally enact.



In the creation of *this* thesis, the idea and the figure of “the ending” has been invoked and has become tangled up in every stage of the writing. Whether in the process of deterioration and change that continues upon the chemical surface of a photograph; or as the perpetually postponed conclusion to an epistolary exchange; or to the resolution and rendering permanent of a subjectivity based in repetition, part of the micro-epistemology which this thesis seeks to advance is that “ending” (and here I am really referring to the figure and the process of death) is precisely *not* an end point as conventionally understood – projected always into an impossible, an unknowable future - but is a constitutive and necessary and potentially liberating part of the very process of living. The ending is *in* the process. The ending *is* the process. The end is not the arresting or stopping of time. As such, in this piece of writing, in this thesis, the conclusion serves more to reaffirm the thematics of the whole than it does to present a set of results and ideas that have been pulled through towards the ending from the body of the text, not by reiterating the key points and discoveries of the thesis as a conclusion, but by being the section of the thesis that nominally signifies what the thesis has been about. So what does it mean to conclude a piece of work like this? How can one conclude a piece of work which has consistently sought to re-locate the end within the life of the event itself?

Reading back over this thesis I find a phrase, with a date:

*“11<sup>th</sup> August 2000, 1:40pm*

Returning now, to review and repeat these mappings, these scratchings of fragmented thought onto thin, thin paper, I wonder how to conclude. And in searching, in reading back through time, I see that the conclusion is there in the text, wrapped up in its very beginnings (and this is only a temporary conclusion, not even the ‘real thing’. That anxiety, I’m glad to admit, is still a way off yet)”

*That anxiety, I’m glad to admit, is still a way off yet.*

So here I am: 17<sup>th</sup> February 2003, 12:26pm (11<sup>th</sup> May 2003, 11:24am; 6<sup>th</sup> November 2003, 10:13am; 10<sup>th</sup> January 2004, 1:24 am), and that anxiety is here, still, after all this time. It seems that I have been in pursuit of this moment for the last three (four, now) years; chasing this final piece of writing, panting after the possibility of closure on a text that is everywhere concerned with suggesting the impossibility of closure as such. The figures of pursuit, of flight, and of refusal (*perhaps*), like the figure of the ending, are principle characteristics of this



conclusion. I seek the final flow of words that brings the chase to a close, and in that seeking must keep the closure moving always away. The possibility of success or of failure in this (constitutive partners of each other here in this final performative piece) looms large. How does one successfully close a piece of writing that problematises as its very focus the act and the imperative of closure? How does one refigure failure in closure as the successful point of the end of a piece of doctoral work? (“what is a success when the possibility of failure continues to constitute its structure?”).

So I pose myself a question: how to write an ending to a thesis that does not end the thesis? How to keep closure as an open process that continues after the writing has stopped? How to offer something concrete when what would be concretised is the process of disappearance and loss?

And by way of an ending, I propose two answers:

**Perhaps: Letters (dear you)**

I have written ten letters. The content of each of these letters is identical, and forms the body of page 170 of this text. I have sent these letters to ten of the writers, theorists, practitioners named in this thesis, posted on the day of submission. They may or may not ever arrive. They may or may not ever be opened. They may or may not ever reach you, reader, whoever you are, wherever you are, when you are. You/they may, or may not, choose to reply. Ten letters flying in a comet trail of red, opening a space between my writing and you reading, and holding that space wide enough, I hope, to keep this end active and at bay. If I receive a reply to one of my ten letters, will I write back? Perhaps. And will I then await another reply? Yes, probably, I will. And so the circle turns again and starts again.

You may never see that letter, and one of the functions it fulfils is as the excess of this text, as that which is beyond cognition, *beyond* writing, beyond that which is given to be understood. And as such it is also one of the ways in which I have sought to mark the performativity of this thesis: like a performance watched in the slippery and multiple times of its presentation, here is that which is beyond understanding in the moment of engagement with this work:





### **Or Perhaps: Writing Loss, or, The Mathematics of Departure (“Perhaps”)**

In *Bloodmath* Peggy Phelan conceives of a way of writing loss. To write one hundred pieces of text. The first contains one hundred words, the second runs to ninety nine. The third is only ninety eight words long and the next is ninety seven. This continues, a gradually diminishing piece of writing that gets smaller which each excursion into the next block of text, and eventually runs to only five words, four, three, two, one, and then falls off the page into the void of that empty open mouth, that 0. Here then is the writing of disappearance, of loss.

In these hundred pieces of writing, what I imagine one can read is not only the disappearance of the text itself, but also the fading away of the writer, where the text is the trace of the writer’s presence, the shadow of his or her being. As the blocks of words get smaller and smaller, the voice of the writer becomes fainter and fainter and the reader is left gradually alone. One removes oneself from the text. The approach of that disappearance, of that textual abandonment, reveals itself as the words fall away from the blocks on the page.

(In less than five thousand words I will have left you, I will have gone. But do not mourn for me, as I have already left you. I had already disappeared. Perhaps...perhaps we can count together. Count together as the light fades and the comet flies, leaving its trailing tail of red, as the paint dries and cracks, as the chemicals start to shimmer on the surface of the print, as the letter waits, pure potential, for delivery, for that first unrepeatable opening and disenvelopment, that final gesture that is always only a beginning of something new).

This mathematical construction is a way of embodying loss through writing, it is the subtraction of the writer’s presence from the text (a presence that has been particularly prominent in the creation of this thesis). It is also a way of writing towards and writing *as* an ending. It is the textual performance of the *process* of disappearance. Anticipating the final, annihilating full stop in the held breath of the words on the page, it is a form of writing that starts from a movement towards ending and performs the journey to that ending as it unfolds.

This is a textual equivalent of the perceived “problem” of early photographs: that that which is written (whether in light on the surface of the plate, or print, or stone, or in a million fading dots of ink upon the surface of the page) begins to gradually remove itself as soon as it has appeared. It is like an introduction that starts with the word “goodbye”, a



beginning or a birth that is also an ending, or a death. It is writing as an obituary for itself, the gradual announcement of a retreat into impending oblivion.

This might offer one way in which to write towards an ending of a text that has sought to emphasise the performativities of endings, and the wrapped-up-ness of the figure of the ending in the performative itself. It is one way of solving the problem: “how to conclude without making the ending the only end?” As one hundred words leak down to ninety nine, and ninety nine gives way to ninety eight, ninety seven, ninety six and, now, ninety five, they announce the approach of an ending in the very now-ness of the words themselves.

What is interesting about this structure of diminishing counts is that the build up of the words appears to both accelerate *and* decelerate at the same time. To begin with, one hundred words plus ninety nine, one hundred and ninety nine, two blocks towards disappearance. Here is two hundred and ninety seven, three hundred and ninety four. These increases come slowly, these blocks take time to read. Later though, and you fall through four words, dizzying speed to three, two, one, trip over and hang hung from the classical italic of a curling ‘*m*’.

And from that *m* fall into *nothingness*, into void, full of potential and empty anticipating whiteness, gasping to catch a final (or a first?) breath. As the blocks of text get smaller, and this diminishment is so gradual that at first you might not notice it, each next one appears to start more quickly than the last. There is an acceleration towards the ending, the increase of velocity towards the point of impact. But then there is the other way of seeing the ending approach. The opposite phenomenon, there in the same numbers.

In these blocks of text, there is a total of five thousand and fifty words. At the start that number leaps closer, by one hundred. Then suddenly ninety nine intervals are pulled away from now and then, then ninety eight. From one hundred we leap to one hundred and ninety nine, two hundred and ninety seven, three hundred and ninety four. Later, though, the build up builds up by only ten words, perhaps, or five, or two, or finally the final one, and the approach comes slower and slower with each turn.

This peculiar phenomenon of the temporal duplicitousness of the vanishing text is another kind of embodiment of the troubling of temporality that I have sought to advance throughout this thesis. If something appears to both accelerate and decelerate at the same



time, in approaching its ending - a phenomenon that is impossible to grasp outside of the realm of theoretical physics - what might "ending" itself mean in the vicinity of that phenomenon? Might the temporal dilemma that it enacts help solve the persistent problem of how to evade the end?

Or, is that which is needed a multiplication of the ending (the ending which is both accelerated towards and slowed down in the face of)? Not *an* ending but rather endings. Like the series of exchanges that mark the epistolary dialogue as potentially open forever, a pluralizing of endings raises the question: is *this* the ending or is there another, are there more? How would one judge when an ending reveals itself as *the* ending, the final phrase marked out into oblivion? Who knows what further words are to arrive?

So in ending this thesis I propose not one but multiple endings, as extensions of the many endings that infiltrate and enable the text throughout. The letters I have sent determine that these endings exist beyond *this* ending, beyond *this* reading. Beyond your reading. This, then, is one ending, the gradual disappearance of myself as I write my way into oblivion through the text. This is a journey towards absence that must continue after I have gone.

Are you fading too, my love, into that open empty mouth, bekissed?

A performer stands, tired, exhilarated. A cascade of sand, slick like dry water, a million dead weights falling to the floor. A shower in time. A light starts to fade, electricity sparking and crackling in the circuit. A voice, disembodied, a body, unvoiced. A million dots of fading ink, a million fragments of effort, sprayed onto paper, dried by time, faded by air. Here we are standing at the edge, by the dark space that lurks between the patterns of light that shimmer here in front of us.

As the lights begin to fade, a single person, old, slow, tired, begins to cross the stage. They carry a book. They open the book, and the light that falls, fading, onto the page reveals it to be blank. No, not blank. Fading. At the top left, nearly black, at the bottom right, only a mid grey, and fading as the page turns, fading more. The light dims, the pages turn, the paper crackles, dry skin bound between two papery hands. The light dims and goes out.

In the darkness, a match flares. Fire burns through the dark space that surrounds us, phosphorous turns from one form into another, as electrons leap and fall, creating light as they spin in their orbit, light that appears to bridge this gap so I can see you there. In the



darkness a match flares, and I see your face, your pale face. And it is engulfed again in darkness, and together, we smell the smell, acrid, sweet, floating nostalgia; smell burning sand and phosphor and wood.

In the darkness, a match flares, and I see your lost and lonely face. The face of a clock, hands turning slowly. A match flares, I see you looking back at me, looking back into the light as the darkness starts again to fill this space between us. A match flares and flickers, and starts to burn; your shadow jumps around the wall behind you. In this half light, half half light, your shadow is more present than you. Are you there? Are you there?

(Ninety four, ninety three, ninety two, ninety one, ninety. Eighty nine, eighty eight, eighty seven, eighty six, eighty five and now, here, eighty four. I am gradually slipping away, slipping out between the lines. Already gone, returning to write these words but already gone. Can you see the shadow of me in the dark space around these letters, love letters, letters for goodbye? Can you see the shadow of me, in the dark moment as you turn the page, before the light spills in?)

A performer crosses the stage, tired, exhilarated, as the curtain starts to fall. The lights burn brighter, light swells, electrons leap and fall, leap and fall, the eye flickers, the shadows dance around the edges of the light. In the dark space at the centre of the eye, the electricity of her body sparks and trembles, in the void between the particles of her flesh, electrons leap and fall, emitting light. The curtain drops, a final swoop of red until everything has disappeared.

I can feel it approaching now, the end. I can feel the tension of the moment of the final three, two, one. I can feel it moving towards me in those peculiar leaps and bounds that simultaneously speed and slow. I can feel the darkness at the edges of the page begin to seep across its surface, and the darkness from the centre of this plane of white soaking out. Turn and look into the centre of the dark: it's already here.

I took some photos. A friend of mine is about to give birth, and I photographed her. Her body, full of an unknown potential, a life cradled in the dark space inside. The film I use is orthochromatic, negative film, superb high contrast if exposed in enough light. We go to a restaurant, little light, dark winter's night beside the Thames. I don't use a flash. The film remains dark. The pictures are black. Unknowable images, pure darkness, potential, and night.



I am writing this conclusion on the night of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2004, the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>. I started it over a year ago, and in that intervening time, how much has passed, how much has passed away, and what things have come to pass. This is one piece of writing, sustained across all that time. Where are those hours, those days, between the ninety-seven and the eighty-four? Where does all that time show in these words? Is it lost?

It has just turned two in the morning, and as I write there is a bird, a robin I think, singing in the tree outside my window. It's dark, a dark winter's night, so I can't see it, but I can hear the song piercing the cold night air, and drifting in to me. Why are you singing, bird? Who are you singing for? Who is listening to you? For me, now, in the dark coldness of the night?

It has just turned two in the morning (and a little more), and I sit here in the cold darkness of the night, writing this for you. For over a year I have been writing this for you, this dark coldness always at hand, to remind. Can you find the points in these texts where the days flood in, where the weeks force room for themselves and for the months? Can you count the time in the dark?

And now here: seventy seven. Seventy seven I wrote (this is the truth I am now telling you) last year, in advance of all the rest, and now it interrupts the flow, corrupts the illusion of this linear diminishment, reminds me that what appears to be a fading is a flickering and a jump and just one moment of departure near another. Seventy seven. Seventy seven is the arrow that twists and turns and shimmers and curves.

Flying through the cold night air, making for the silence at the centre of the heart, making for the dark point in the centre of the eye, making for the shadows at the edges of the page, between the lines. A volley of arrows, a volley of rifle fire, making for the silence at the centre of the heart, to silence it. And in the cold night air they hang still, frozen in the darkening cold.

(I had a dream again last night. I dreamt I was a writer. I dreamt I was a condemned writer, although I can't remember which of my many misdemeanours I was being condemned for. It seems I have transgressed too many boundaries, one too many, one step too far. I remember it is winter, and it is raining - not the chill romance of ice and snow, but the humiliating cold reality of wind-blown rain).







upon the surface of a virtual page these final moments together. Each block now I can write almost exactly to the count, to the number of its place in the sequence of this goodbye. Sixty nine. Count with me).

“The other’s fade out resides in his voice. The voice supports, evinces, and so to speak performs the disappearance of the loved being, for it is characteristic of the voice to die. What constitutes the voice is what, within it, lacerates me by dint of having to die, as if it were at once and never could be anything but a memory...the voice is what is dying out”<sup>2</sup>.

I read these words aloud now: did you hear? Do you remember? You will not have heard me: I am alone here, now, thinking of you, of this goodbye. I speak these words for you and enact the disappearance of the words, the dismantling of this chain, the disappearance of “us”, returning to me, to one, and then to nothing. My voice is what is dying out.

But these words remain. The voice that speaks them, the hands that type them, the energy that wills them into being upon this page: they are gone before the screen has even caught up. Dying out: dead gone. But words remain. Evidence of the performance of this departure, mantelpiece letter, awaiting your return. Too late to stop the departure it is here to report. Too late.

The words remain. Written to signify the ends, written towards the endings, written as a disappearance and a loss: *they* remain present on the page. Leave this in the sunlight, please, on a windowsill, or cast into the sea, or dig into the earth. Elemental assistance is needed to speed the fading of this ink, to allow the words to disappear as I have disappeared.

Join me in the dark oblivion that surrounds the pool of light that illuminates the performance of these words, the unknown potential from which they spring and where I have returned. Dig into the earth, cast into the sea, leave in sunlight as the rain falls, black to mid grey to white. Wash away all evidence, clean the page, wipe the slate, start over.

Are you coming with me? Will you remain? Who is leaving here, you, or me? We cannot leave together: I have already left. Already left. Yet I remain here, I imagine you holding this paper that I have held, there, at the edge, where your fingers reach to turn the page. Your fingers brush my fingers, a spark as electrons leap and fall.

Perhaps you could burn this. Would you? Might we dare to imagine such an act, such beautiful violence, such a disappearance? Words crackling as electrons leap and fall, pure carbon blacker than ink emitting light and heat, words floating away into the upper reaches of the sky, my voice like smoke, curling in the night. Lift your hand and strike a match.

(I write to you, my love, my friend, I do, I squeeze your hand...holding hands. I send you this letter across all this time and all this space, so that I might be with you again. Touch this, for this is a part of me. We touch, I am reaching out, with my open hand, to touch you. Open the letter).

The fire burns and flares, sulphur, phosphorous, carbon. Explosive moment in a flash of heat and light. A momentary blinding light, enough to cast illumination on the darkest scene, to reveal the most hidden potential. A momentary blinding light and a bullet shot through time and space to pierce the dark silence, and return us to dark silence. Together, perhaps.

This journey we are on now, forgive me if it moves too slowly, a gradual unwinding, a Long Goodbye (it seems we cannot leave). Did you want a faster departure, a sudden traumatic loss? It will come, it is coming, it is soon. The lights are continuing to fade, so slowly you cannot see. Sixty one, sixty, fifty nine.

Imagine a theatre, a stage. Proscenium arch, rich curtains, all that ceremony and surface. An empty stage, apart from a light, a single spotlight dropping down a pool of pure white electric light. If there was the technology, it would be possible to programme an infinite fade, a diminishment so gradual as to be utterly imperceptible. Forever fading.

Alchemical theatre, conjuring movement, energy and life through the action of light upon the darkness. Transforming empty dark potential into vitality, into action, into time. But how do you begin a performance that is all about endings? When does the fading start, can it ever stop? It must stop. It will never stop. It has already stopped.

Confront me with an empty page, and I will mark it for you. Confront me with time and I will count it for you. Confront me with goodbye and I will whisper to you. Confront me with absence and I will mourn for you. Confront me with the void and I will enter it for you.



(A single performer alone on stage, under a naked light bulb, and a cascade of sand. Sand like in an hourglass, falling through space and time and running out towards a stop. At the end of the show, a single performer, under a naked lightbulb, and a cascade of sand running out, towards a stop).

In “I will send you a letter” I make a promise to act in time that is not yet. The future tense seeks to bind us, to commit us to actions as yet unstarted, only thought and articulated. The risk in the future tense: the action will not happen, the promise will remain unkept.

I will send you a letter. I promise. In it, I will count down for you from one hundred to one, and in that counting the letter will inform you of my signing off. I will sign it (Where? There)<sup>3</sup> and in signing will witness my own departure. My name is my absence.

My name stands in for me in the empty spaces where I am not. The empty spaces in language where the body does not fit, where the “I” or the “you” or the name leaps around between us, unstable, unattributed, shifting its allegiance, reminding us we are not there in the words.

Some of these letters I have signed, I have wanted my hand to mark the page, my presence to remain when my body has gone. But the name and the signature remind me that the name is not me, the name is the absence of me. The promise cannot be kept.

I will count for you. I will continue to count. I will have counted. And you will count after me, following me. We are half way there now, half way to the end after fifty endings, half way to a completion, already so complete. It will end soon, I promise.

In the moment of climax what bliss will be released, what *jouissance*, unimaginable ending that I thought would ever arrive. I promised myself that I would reach that point, I promised myself, but the time had a different idea, and the end moved away. But finally now it approaches.

Over four years now I have been writing this, the final year of those four trying to conclude. Other projects have intervened, other demands on time have interrupted the flow of the one hundred down to the one. Time has never been enough but now there is enough.

Deep in the pit of my belly I can feel the adrenaline rush, the pulse in my neck beats quicker. It approaches, like the turning of a clock to midnight, the turning of one year into the next. My resolution? To end? To end and to recommence.

Be still, my beating heart. Adrenaline rush slow down, do not betray my intention. There should be no flourish, not resolution, no race towards the final moment of the long awaited one. Heart slow, hormone dissipate. My body seeks again to betray my intention. Be still.

But my body still is eloquent, and speaks through these words, speaks through to your body. My limbs like grammar, ordering the text, my heart counting down, slowing down and speeding up simultaneously. The slowness of release, the rapidity of the approaching of the end.

There is a line here, utterly true, utterly artificial, utterly illusory. A line between times, connecting me now to the me I used to be, to the “then”, to the I that had always already moved on to an elsewhere. The line is strung.

The arrow released: “30<sup>th</sup> March 2000, 7:17pm” and flying through time in a comet trail of red, piercing the very heart of me, striking at the centre of the now: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2004, 2:23pm. I hang myself along this line, and sever it.

And sever it, cutting through it with these words, with these dates, with the hours and the days and the years that sit between these lines. So much time, so little. Already over before you can even begin. It has already ended.

Forty one now. Or, actually, so much more, leaping away into the void. Forty one in this direction, four thousand two hundred and thirty in the other, as the end approaches it moves further and further away, slowing as it speeds.

The risk now is that these slowly speeding words will perform as a true conclusion, as true closure. Yes; this is a conclusion. But it is a reiteration of all the micro-conclusions that litter and clutter the text. Never one.



I walk along the path towards the door, at the end, where the street twists itself into a bar-shape, or a kind of pause. And pause. And turn back, heading back in the other direction, onto a different page.

(So how shall I finish? How shall I close this correspondence, equate this rough additionality, end this sum? And how will future repetitions of this text, or unknown future replies, resist the ephemerality of this act of writing?)

Count with me. Here we are, the end is approaching. The end is all around us. Count with me. Thirty seven. Not long. How long it has taken to get to here. How far. Count with me.

Thirty six. I can feel the acceleration now, perhaps I was wrong to think a slowing occurred, heart beat adrenaline rush impending end. Beating heart, be still. The end has been here all along. Not now.

Always there in “now”, always: the promise of the future, the promise of the end. When the implied promise is the end (it will end), it is always kept, it has always already been kept.

(Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, expose the plate, record the time, turn the silver away so the image can be seen. Fix it, the moment, try to fix it. But it is already fading away).

Have you checked your post today? There may be a letter waiting for you, a letter from another time and another place, a letter from the dead, from me. Go look now, please.

A letter from one who has already disappeared, who has already walked into the night, who awaits you, is with you, always with you. In the motes of dust you together touched.

It's time for me to leave now, for me to leave a space for you to end this correspondence, try to equate this exchange, draw to an ending as you wish.

I have already gone. Who is here, now, writing for you, imagining you, wishing to see you? Your present is my future, my present is already your past. Time shifts.

If you wish, you can strike through these words, alter them, amend them, correct them. If they frustrate you, erase them, replace them. Are you counting them with me?

Erase them, burn them, bury them, expose them, shoot them, impale them, drown them, repeat them, speak them, count them, count them with me. And then erase them.

It's time for me to leave, now, clearly, we can both feel the endings all around, but I seem to be finding it difficult to leave. Unless...

I may of course decide to begin again, to depart again; another direction. I had wanted to write about Derrida, about the time of the thesis.

I could start again, now, while there is plenty of time, in the midst of all this ending, a new beginning, a new thought. And...

Or, return to my Lady Writing, with her furs and her pearls and the inky caressing darkness of the crackling paint, perspective twisted again.

I had a dream again last night. I was a writer, then I awoke, and I discovered it had all already happened. Perhaps...

I had a dream again last night. I was a writer, I was writing in light, in time. And I awoke, and...

I'm not sure whom I shall choose to be today. How shall I write myself into the words, who will speak?

Perhaps I will write today, today I shall finally be a writer. I promise I will write. I promise. Maybe...

Unless you ask me to start over, ask me to return with you, strike that match, and burn it.

Struck to illuminate my pale, pale face, a moon in the screen light as the endings fold around.

I reach out my hands for you. Will you leave with me, or will you remain? Otherwise...

Or perhaps, and if, if only there was more. So much more to say, and so...



This is not an ending. This is potential for beginning. Pure potential, pure perhaps. If...

And not now, never now, I promise there is always the potential for more.

The correspondence will not close today. Today there is no delivery. Although maybe...

From one write right back to one hundred, the first word: Perhaps...

I cannot, I cannot speak beyond these words, beyond this now.

In writing, the voice disappears. In language, the body vanishes.

And I await your reply. So we begin. Finally.

My voice fades as I turn to leave.

This is another way to start. If...

It's time now. Do not mourn.

This is not an ending.

There is such time.

So much time.

It ends.

Perhaps...











## Notes to introduction

1. This text is loosely based on Foucault's (1977) reading of Borges' 'The Secret Miracle'.
2. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (1971): 15.
3. In *Unmarked*, Phelan writes that 'Performance is the art form which most fully understands the generative possibilities of disappearance. Poised forever at the threshold of the present, performance enacts the productive appeal of the nonreproductive' [Phelan, 1993: 27].
4. It is important to note the difference between 'performance' and 'performance art' here, particularly as Phelan develops her theory of temporality and transience in relation to performance art, but then (in *Unmarked* and in later texts) applies it generically to performance. As a conceptual category, 'performance' remains as an umbrella term that subsumes a wide range of cultural activity (see Schechner, 1988) including the 'traditional' disciplines such as theatre, dance and music, as well as interdisciplinary forms such as performance art and live art, extending to various other activities (law, politics, sport) and technologised genres (film, television, radio, digital and web media in some instances). 'Performance art' on the other hand, refers to a particular conceptual way of working, inherently interdisciplinary, that developed from fine art practice in the 1950s and 60s (via abstract expressionist painting, happenings and installation art), and is particularly associated with performance-based work by visual artists (in which performance itself is a result of theoretical interrogation of the supposedly atemporal status of the object in fine art). In this thesis, the profound and significant temporality of live performance will be related to various instances of 'performance' in the generic sense (as opposed to 'performance art'), with a deliberately specific restriction to performance that self-consciously defines itself as such (as opposed to other forms of 'everyday performance' that are not framed literally *as* performance) and that is based in the live presence of the performer and spectator in a shared time and space.
5. Although the thesis does not focus upon how performative and the performative articulate and challenge these ideas about time and the temporal, there are several



points within it where the linear model of time seems to degrade in the proximity of performance and of the performative. In chapter three I explore a notion of a multiple and simultaneous temporality of photography; in the conclusion I will suggest that the transformation of loss into a form for writing can give rise to a phenomenon whereby something appears to both accelerate and decelerate at the same time. Throughout, the re-location of death from a future moment into an ongoing process (as something that inheres and endures within life) seeks to challenge the image of the time of life as an arrow set on a target course to death.

6. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's introduction to their edited collection *Performativity and Performance* provides an extended reading of this passage in relation to theatre, performance and sexuality.
7. The function of the performative as an interpellating agent particularly caught up in the acts of shaming, outing and hate speech that circulate around homophobic linguistic discourse are discussed by Butler (1993; 1995; 1997) and Sedgwick (1993). Sedgwick's text 'Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*', published in GLQ, can be seen as foundational to the development of queer theory.
8. See, for example, Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.) (1995) *Performativity and Performance*, London and New York, Routledge; Anna Livia and Kira Hall (eds.) (1997) *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender and Sexuality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press; Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett and Susan Leigh Foster (eds.) (1995) *Cruising the Performative: Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality and Sexuality*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press; Jane Blocker (1999) *Where is Ana Mendieta? Identity, Performativity and Exile*, Durham, Duke University Press; Geraldine Harris (1999) *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.
9. It is more than a little ironic that these literary tropes have become so crucial to contemporary performance studies, itself a discipline that in part was positioned against precisely the literary biases of the theatre studies programmes and the discourses out of which it grew. It is also unclear at times, whether Phelan is using the adjective 'performative' with a specific reference to Austinian/Derridean philosophies, or in a simpler sense as signifying 'of performance.' This conflation –



of 'performative' as an adjective denoting multiple performance practices and 'performative' as a technical and philosophical linguistic term – is also certainly a contributing factor to the *confusion* of the use of '(the) performative' in the vocabulary and discourses of performance studies itself. I shall explore this further in chapter one.

10. What is being referred to quite specifically here is *the non-referentiality* of the performative utterance; its operation within closed-circuits of signification by which it refers not to some external or pre-existing reality, but rather to its own status *as* the materialisation of that 'reality' as the effect of the utterance itself. The performative signifier 'I promise' has not an external referent: the promise *is* the utterance of the words. As such, the performative does not repeat or reproduce its referent; rather, the referent is the words in the ephemeral moments of utterance. Thus the performative text within the context of performance studies only obliquely refers to the performed events that precede it, and seeks to re-mark those events *as* the event of performative writing itself.

See Butler (1990a) for an explanation of referentiality in relation to performativity, in specific relation to the development of the term in phenomenological discourse.

11. There is a common tendency in post-structurally inclined critical writings (especially those that pay a particular debt to Derrida) to use the un-translated word *différance* to signal the endless processes of difference and deferral that Derrida combines in his neologism. However, I am not writing in French, and Derrida's invention of the word is important and functions precisely because *in French* there is no audible difference between the two words 'différence' and 'différance' when spoken. It is only in writing that the two are marked as different. For an English-using writer to mark the French '*différance*' in the text permits a very audible difference to be rendered if the word is spoken, permitting the recuperation of the privileging of speech over writing that Derrida is precisely trying to challenge. To write instead then the word-formula 'differance', insists instead upon the incursion of writing into speech, and renders fully translatable Derrida's term.

12. Of course, the exploration of the connections between writing, time, death and sexuality is not a new one, but continues an older philosophical project (most recently manifested in Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, for example). I am less interested

on this point in claiming originality, than in thinking and working creatively within these existing theoretical frameworks.

13. For examples of the kinds of performative writing fostered by *Performance Research*, see Kaye, 1997; Moore, 1998; Read, 1998; Ross, 1999; von Henning and Mount, 1997.
14. In many ways, performative writing also continues an older project that could be traced back on one trajectory to Susan Sontag's 1964 essay *Against Interpretation*. Proposing a phenomenological approach to art that foregrounds emotional, corporeal responses over the cold intellectuality of hermeneutical archaeology, Sontag exhorts her readers to 'see more, to hear more, to feel more' and suggests that 'in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art' [Sontag, 1983 (1964): 104]. This embodied eroticism at the heart of writing – as attributable to Barthes as much as to Sontag – is fundamental to my own approach to performative writing here, and is particularly explored in chapter four, in relation to, and in the form of, the love letter.
15. It could be argued that all conscious experience is marked by this delay, and as such is accessible only through the filter and medium of memory, *including* experiences that happen in 'the present.' Even the fractional amount of time taken for neurological/chemical/cerebral processes to register stimuli as consciousness is nonetheless time taken, so even an experience of the 'now' is in fact, arguably, a 'remembered' experience of 'the past.'

Philip Turetzky's historical charting of philosophical interpretations and understandings of time offers elaborations of the notion of 'now' in its many manifestations in the Western philosophical tradition. See Turetzky (1998).

16. See also Phelan 1998, esp. 10-11; Phelan 1997.
17. This ongoing debate – over the distinction between theatre and performance - has engendered the shifting of theatre studies into the wider field of performance studies, and re-views 'performance' as a vast collection of cultural activities ranging from legal discourse to dance; cooking to circus; politics to performance art, moving the field way beyond 'the classical ontology of the black box model' [Parker



and Sedgwick, 1995: 2] that characterises traditional Western theatre practice and study. This distinction is taken as given in this thesis, and I do not wish to rehearse it here. For more explicit and detailed consideration, see for example George, 1996; Parker and Sedgwick, 1995; Roach, 1995; Schechner, 1988; Diamond 1996.

18. Compare Jonathon Dollimore's assertion that loss is that which binds together death and desire:

What connects death with desire is mutability – the sense that all being is governed by a ceaseless process of change inseparable from *an inconsolable sense of loss somehow always in excess of the loss of anything in particular* [Dollimore, 1998, xiii, italics in original]

As well as teasing out a connection between loss, desire and death, this statement, with its attention to mutability, necessarily forces a simultaneous focus on time.

Whilst Blocker seeks to locate this insistence upon loss as a principle trope of postmodernism, Dollimore carefully and consistently illustrates how this trope is a manifestation or mutation of earlier ideas, absorbed and amplified by – or indeed as - the postmodern itself [see Dollimore, 1998: xxii – xxiii].

19. MacRitchie states that performance art 'allows access to areas of experience only available within the lived moment, their *integrity of purpose* guaranteed by the impermanence of its expression. By appearing not to care about permanence, performance art made immanence its watchword, its immediacy a guarantee of the *purity of its intentions*' [MacRitchie, 1998: 22, my emphases]. Referring to the 'split second of paradise' of performance's presentation, she suggests that it brings 'audience and performer together in a shared glimpse of something greater than themselves' [Ibid: 28]. See Auslander (1999), pp. 1-9, for a critical elaboration of this idea of 'community'.

20. Of course, what O'Dell is moving towards in this text is the problematisation of the very idea of performance's unique, live temporality. She suggests that performance (art) is 'the virtual equivalent of its representations' [O'Dell, 1997: 77], implying that even if we (provisionally) accept that performance's ontology is marked in relation

to its unrepeatability, this conceptualisation of ‘liveness’ is thrown into destabilisation by the necessary presence of the trace or document (a photograph, a memory, a video, a critical text) as the constitutive other, or outside, of the ephemeral live event itself. This is also Auslander’s project, at least in part, in *Liveness*. I would suggest however that even photographs, videos, texts, papers, and certainly memories always inevitably, more or less slowly, but eventually, yellow, and shimmer and fade, that these too are temporal. The relationship between the live and the recorded-live is *not* one of simple binary opposition, each standing as the other’s constitutive inner exclusion, and indeed it is my intention to focus on the temporality of live performance as a means of evading the circular entanglement of these debates (in which the live is both marked *against* the copy, and paradoxically enabled to be called “live” precisely *because* of the copy).

21. Since 1993, the Spanish-born dancer/performance artist La Ribot has created an ongoing series of performance, *Piezas Distinguidas*, which she sells for £600 (at the time of writing; whether the cost of owning a La Ribot *pieza* increases with inflation I do not know). For their money, the works’ owners receive only a certificate of ownership – the performance itself (that which they own) is given in no form of documentation or trace. It is precisely the ephemeral, time-based performance which is sold and which, theoretically at least, can be sold on and exchanged as a commodity between possible future owners. In this practice, La Ribot solves one of the problems facing the artist choosing to work in performance: that of the lack of an art object that can be sold (profitably) into the system of art dealership and collection. She also cannily foregrounds some of the problematics of objecthood and ephemerality, and destabilises those critical viewpoints that posit performance itself as outside of a realm of commodification. A La Ribot *pieza* is, even in its absence (more so, by virtue of its absence, of course), a very powerful object of desire.

See Newe (1999) for a further discussion of La Ribot’s work.

22. It is worth remembering that this mediatisation can occur as much through the fictions of character and plot, or through the documentations of critical writing, as though the specific representational apparatuses of the electronic media (photography, film, television, video, for example) – nuances that Auslander, in his



almost exclusive focuses on 'mediatisation' as effect of electronic technology, fails to consider.

23. Compare Phelan's claim that performance evades regulation as it is non-commodified and persists only in memory, a formulation that implicitly relies on a linear temporality but which explicitly focuses on a politics and economics of reproduction. Phelan states that 'live performance plunges into visibility – in a maniacally charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control' [Phelan, 1993: 148]. Of course, it is hard to conceive of the unconscious as a zone which is out of reach of regulation. As Timothy Murray has pointed out, the unconscious itself, structured and constituted as it is by the sadomasochistic censorship of the super-ego and the interpellating interventions of the (Lacanian) Symbolic is a locus where 'such memorialized or incorporated material remains embedded in the phantasmatic vicissitudes of regulation and control.' [Murray, 1997: 18].
24. As the principal organising concept in this thesis is the idea of the unique temporality and ephemerality of live performance, which once experienced (as loss) can never be regained, I feel it crucial – in the name of honesty as much as critical commitment and clarity – to write only about performances which I have seen and lived through live, rather than about performances which have already entered the circulating economy of scholarly exchange. As the academy – particularly in performance studies – can be seen at times to generate closed-circuit representations of the same small number of practitioners or texts, at the expense of other less well known or less easily contextualised work, I insist upon the importance of the phenomenological material reality of live performance and the time-based experience of its viewing and critical interpretation, and this insistence forms part of both the methodology and the thematics of my own work.

See Davis (1999) for a critical discussion of the tendency to create closed-circuit representation within the discourse of (feminist) performance studies.

25. This terminology has been adopted in certain contexts to the point of institutionalisation, for example in the case of the Humberside/East Yorkshire-based 'Hull Time Based Arts' [See Phillips, 1997].



26. In the ritualistic and liturgical texts that form the precursors of classical greek tragedy, and as such ground the western theatrical and philosophical tradition [see Hartnoll, 1985], an attention to time, origins, the fragility of human identity and of course death, is always more or less explicit. In the greek tragedies, particularly the archetypal works of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, time, mutability and death stand as the principal thematic (and causal) motives for the dramas. In her study of *Time in Greek Tragedy*, Jacqueline de Romilly foregrounds some of the ways in which tragedy is predicated on a concept of time, suggesting that 'time shows through change' [Romilly, 1968: 5] and that therefore tragedy, which is an account of changing existence, status and power, can only be conceptualised in relation to temporality, to the extent that 'there is no tragedy that does not deal with time' [Ibid: 6]. Additionally, time is not only the foundation for tragic action, but also the general means of structuring and writing tragic poetry, following the loose principle of the 'unity of time' that is generally attributed to Aristotle.

As well as proposing that time is the foundation for the very structure of tragedy, in terms both of plot and of temporal unity, Romilly suggests that the development of tragedy as a dramatic form is coterminous with the transformation of the greek consciousness of time itself, with the shift from the conception of time as circular and repetitive to that of it being linear and progressive. Norman O. Brown suggests that 'archaic time is cyclical, periodic, unhistorical: modern time is progressive (historical), continuous, irreversible' [in Sypher, 1976: 1]. If this changing temporal consciousness of the greek civilisations in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE is identified as coexistent with the origins of the western philosophical and historical tradition, then time and an awareness of temporality become things which are not only the predicates of western theatre, but are also closely implicated in the development of the very concept of the self-conscious 'history' of western civilisation itself.

This changing understanding and philosophy of time can be identified in the evolution of the depiction of time in the writings of the three principal tragic dramatists of ancient Greece: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Aeschylus deploys time as a vessel for divine punishment and retribution; Sophocles, depicts it as the origin of the instability and mutability of human existence; Euripides, transforms it into a more profoundly human and experiential phenomenon, related to psychological and subjective perception [see Romilly, 1968]. For all three poets,



time is implicated in their work structurally, narratively, and thematically. There can be no tragic drama without time.

27. As a religious genre, liturgical drama is fundamentally concerned with the philosophical, moral and theological problems posed by the perception of the progression of time, by the question of origins, and by the experience of and reaction to death and dying – rendering it as grounded in structural, thematic and motivational responses to temporality as the greek tragedy. In this way, the mediaeval morality plays emphasise the ‘inevitability of death and the transience of worldly goods’ [Turner, 1971: 182], suggesting that history itself is constructed as a divine plan, as a teleology governed by the providence of a Creator. This theological masterplan is central to the ways in which time is depicted in the mediaeval christian dramas, a depiction which alters through the shifts into the renaissance in which ‘the objective, impersonal forces of time become humanized and subjectivized’ [Ibid: 183], resulting in time’s (re)conception as both an external, natural, divine or cosmic reality, and an internal, human, microcosmic force (a shift and a dualism that are explored more than anywhere else in the dramatic writings of Shakespeare).
28. Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets often focus, thematically and structurally, on what Turner calls ‘the central problems of man’s temporal nature and his relationship with his environment of time’ [Turner, 1971: 2]
29. Time continued to be a central focus for the theories and practices of dramatists of the european renaissance, particularly through the return to the classical aesthetics of restraint and formal structure – mis-characterised as the ‘Aristotleian unities’ of time, place and action and codified in the writings of renaissance literary critics. This return to classicism characterised much of the dramatic writing of the renaissance, and reached its heights in the work of the french tragedians of the seventeenth century, Corneille and Racine in particular.

It is significant that just as the tragic dramas of classical Greece arose as a form at the same time as conceptions of time and temporal orders were being revolutionised, so too the european renaissance saw the invention of the mechanical clock, an historical moment that caused a paradigm shift in understandings of time. The mechanical clock enabled the measurement of time to



alter from time as a continuous flow (if measured through the hourglass or water clock), to time as divisible into an infinitely smaller and smaller number of discrete parts: the second, the minute, the hour. These transformations in understandings and ordering of time, and the broader contexts of cultural upheaval and change, typify both classical greek and renaissance european depictions and allegorisations of time, as shown by the evolution of time's signification in the texts of the classical dramatists, the 'return' to the safe formality of the unities by their renaissance inheritors, and the heterogeneity of the meanings of time in Shakespeare.

As early as 1827, Victor Hugo attacked the neo-classical rules of the dramatic unities, and demanded that the stage be free to operate in the 'natural' rhythms of time and place, supposedly emulating life outside the frame of dramatic fiction. This call for a more lifelike theatre (a theatre less secured in the artifice of the early nineteenth century French stage) paved the way for the developments that would culminate in the revolutionary works of dramatic realism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Russia, several decades later, Chekhov developed this dramatic realism, and his plays are full of examples not only of the narrative effects of the past and of the unstable present on their protagonists, but also of symbolic uses of fictional space and time (such as the seasonal cycle and destruction of the cherry orchard) in structural and thematic ways.

30. Maeterlinck declared in his 'Everyday Tragedy' (1896) that realism, with its focus on the microcosmic, the personal, and the domestic, ignored what he saw as the true significance of human existence, destiny, life and death, and advocated instead a symbolic and poetic drama that dealt with all that is superhuman and infinite [see Styan, 1981b: 28]. Any such dramaturgical approach, which privileges the universal or transcendental over the particular or the everyday implicitly accords to its productions a shift from the localised time of day-to-day reality, to the expansive nontime of the eternal.

This philosophy is similar to that of the surrealists, with their focuses on the universal and atemporal truths of the (collective) unconscious. The breaking down of the aesthetics of structure, order and logic that also characterises much surrealist work (and the earlier dada) created projects that demonstrated a complete absence of order, or plot, of linear action – and which as such operated deliberately outside the classically architectural construction of linear time



31. Seen at the Purcell Room, London on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1999.
32. To reiterate, there is a direct connection between contemporary time-based performance, and the exploration of the idea of 'real time' in this work, and parallel explorations since at least the nineteen-sixties. To imply that contemporary work is the first to move over this ground is to deny the historical foundations upon which it is predicated. This is one point where I am happy to posit a performative family tree [See Goldberg 1979; 1998].
33. See Heathfield (1997) for further discussion of this kind of 'inverted forgetting'.
34. Fevered Sleep was established in 1996 by David Harradine and Sam Butler, and makes theatre, installation and site specific performance. Previous productions have ranged from small scale performances in domestic settings, to touring theatre, to installations in found sites. The company is committed to performatively exploring a range of ideas rather than to developing a fixed formal or aesthetic style. See [www.feveredsleep.co.uk](http://www.feveredsleep.co.uk) for more information.

## Notes to Chapter 1

1. Although the relationship between queer sexualities and death is principally explored in a symbolic sense in this thesis (not least through the trope of abjection), the history of the regulation of sexuality, and particularly queer sexualities, is also a history of real physical aggression, restriction, and murder, grounding this symbolic exploration in the material reality of institutionalised anti-sex morality, misogyny and homophobia.

2. Of course, in conceptual terms, time and death are one and the same thing, as Dollimore asserts:

This image of stillness within movement – elsewhere, of course, a metaphor for eternity – is here, in the sundial and the clock, an image of death as immanent within life [1998: 68].

3. Although this discourse is resonant of the similar network of representations and mythologies that surrounded syphilis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

4. See Harradine (1999) for an elaboration of these ideas of the development of the abject through Freud, Douglas, Kristeva and Butler.

5. Butler draws her model of queer performativity from Sedgwick's earlier essay 'Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*' *GLQ*, Vol. 1, 1993, 1-16.

6. Of course, this is not to suggest that 'man' or 'men' is a secure and unproblematic category – it isn't (we aren't). Butler's ongoing project is to demonstrate how all subjectivity (a term posed in effect against 'identity') is an effect of discourse, rather than an expression or emanation of a 'natural' or 'essential' Being.

See Fuss (1990) for an overview of some of the debates over constructionism and essentialism in relation to feminist, race and sexual(ity) politics.

7. The passage from Nietzsche reads 'there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything'



[Nietzsche, Friedrich (1969) *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York, Vintage, p. 45, cited in Butler, 1990: 25]. See Butler (1995) for a developed reading of this passage which focuses on the moral and injurious aspects of the Nietzschean subject.

8. Butler develops her idea of discursive interpellation to the status of gendered and sexed subject from Althusser (1971).
9. Additionally, Butler develops the Althusserian notion of the interpellation of the subject through the hailing invocation of the law, and draws upon Lacanian psychoanalytic destabilisations of the subject. See Althusser (1971); Lacan (1977).
10. This also ultimately denies the possibility of the term 'queer' to signify any kind of specificity – it certainly is not simply a different way of signifying 'gay and lesbian'. 'Queer', in seeking to articulate the discursive production of sexual subjectivities (or, as Foucault would have it, subjectivities produced precisely as the effect of sexualising discourse), is located less as the binary opposite of 'heterosexuality' but more as its outside (which becomes its inside) – as the collection of various sexual and bodily practices that heteronormative hegemony excludes in order to construct itself as 'the norm'. As such, these practices might include sexual and bodily activities that are 'heterosexual' even though they are not 'straight'. See Grosz for a reflection upon the political and ideological difficulties inherent in this bringing together of various sexual minorities under the rubric of 'queer' [Grosz, 1995: 249-250, n.1].
11. See Butler (1993), especially pp. 233-236.
12. Sue Ellen Case identifies a 'necessary bond between "queer" and "performativity"' [Case, 1996: 13].
13. For example, Emily Apter briefly discusses Butler's attentions to the disentangling of performativity from 'theatricality' and 'performance' (terms which Apter herself messily elides), and reads in Butler an 'almost phobic disinterest in theater history and dramatic art' [Apter, 1996: 16]. Consider Butler's insistence that 'the *reduction* of performativity to performance would be a mistake' [Butler, 1993: 234, my emphasis] as illustrative of this prejudice.

Jon McKenzie states, in a discussion of Butler, that ‘if there [in *Gender Trouble*] she sought to theorize performativity via performance, in this later essay [*Critically Queer*, reprinted in *Bodies that Matter*] she also emphasizes performativity *contra* performance’ [McKenzie, 1998: 225].

Timothy Scheie considers the problematic of “presence” as one possible source of this perceived anti-theatricality [see Scheie, 1994], and locates the delineation between “performance” or “theatre” and “reality” as another, which it is worth quoting at length:

The stage operates through a “modality or appearance” that delineates a space for illusion and performance, tacitly granting its exterior a more “real” status and thereby establishing a realm outside of performance inhabited by ostensibly *unperformed* subjects. Live theater is consequently a distinctly unpromising site for a subversive performativity, which would allow for no such “doer” not implicated in the “deed.” Although Butler liberally borrows a theatrical vocabulary and frequently hails the “theatrical” and “dramatic” qualities of the performative identity, she addresses conventional theatrical performance itself in order to define performativity against it [Scheie, 1997: 158].

Case (1996) argues that it is precisely the emphasis on print and print modes – reading, writing, and (literary) speech-act theory – as the bases of their explications of queer performativity that lead Butler and Sedgwick to de-emphasise the significance of performance itself in relation to performativity, suggesting that theirs is ‘a notion of performativity that circles back to written texts, abandoning historical traditions of performance for the print modes of literary and philosophical scrutiny’ [17].

14. To temper this formulation in the negative, this is not to claim that it is only through gender and queer theory that performativity has entered performance studies. For example to the contrary, Jane Blocker, in her study of Ana Mendieta, draws on Bhabha’s use of performativity as a theory of the ideology of nationhood.



[See Blocker 1999, esp. pp. 26 & 49; Homi Bhabha (ed.) (1990) *Nation and Narration*, New York, Routledge].

15. And this usage turns up in the most unlikely places. Even Graham Ley's sturdily androcentric tracking of the cultural innovation of the actor in Greek drama, *Performance and Performatives*, pays lip service to Butler.
16. See Schechner (1995) for a discussion of the slipperiness of 'performance studies' as a conceptual category.
17. For example: 'As anthropologist Victor Turner suggests in his studies of ritual social drama, social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established' [Butler, 1990a: 277].

Schechner (1995) briefly indicates Turner's role in the development of performance studies, summarising the much more detailed attention he gives to Turner in earlier texts [see especially Schechner 1988]. McKenzie (1995) discussed the significance of Turner and Schechner's anthropological performance theory for Butler's theory of the performative.

18. Aware of the vexed relationship of performativity and/in performance, Scheie suggests that one possible means of evading this risk of recuperation to a cult of presence is to perform simultaneously the illusion of theatricality and the verisimilitude of character. But, unlike the Brechtian *verfremdungseffekt*, where the perceived gap is between character and actor, Scheie spots, in the theatre of Mnouchkine and Cixous, a more complex interplay between the performance-of-character and the actor-as-character, a nexus that more effectively deprivileges the status of the presence of the actor, and which thus potentially resists any recourse to 'presence' as origin or locus of 'truth' [Scheie, 1994: 41-44].
19. In a later essay, Scheie develops his readings of Butler (and thus the place of performativity in performance theory) with a specific focus on the extent to which injurious terms (or injurious characterisations, such as Shylock) can really be resignified in live performance, in the light of the fragile relationship between hurtful recuperation and subversive resignification theorised by Butler in *Bodies that*



*Matter*. Of course, for Butler, performativity is as much about resignification of the injurious (in *Gender Trouble*, of the injurious logic of gender; in *Bodies that Matter*, of the injurious appellation and interpellation ‘queer’) as it is about anything else, and like Butler, Scheie acknowledges the precarious and provisional status – and the potential supporting of future injury - of any attempt at this subversive resignification. Through Scheie’s deployment and reading of Butler, ‘queer’ explicitly penetrates the body of performance studies alongside and through the figure of performativity.

20. In the same way that agency within the vicissitudes of queer performativity is inherently provisional and unstable, and finally entangled in precisely that which it seeks to engage, so too is postmodern performance – or, rather, just, performance, for ‘performance’ is always already postmodern in its use as a descriptive category term for disparate practices – inevitably only able to operate politically from within and through that which *it* seeks to engage. Auslander (1997) develops this argument in relation to french performance artist Orlan’s ongoing project *The Reincarnation of St. Orlan*, in which he sees her actual use of cosmetic surgery in her artistic and performance-based practice as the only means of critically engaging the practices of cosmetic surgery through performance.
21. In her introduction to the 1998 collection *Ends of Performance*, Phelan interweaves the twin tropes of performance and performativity through the frames of mimicry and iteration. She draws on Schechner’s notion of performance as twice behaved behaviour [see Schechner (1995) for a brief outline] – marking a trajectory between rehearsal and performance, preparation and presentation, (doing and writing) that is marked through a series of repetitions – and connects this to the Derridean model of iterability as that which enables the functioning and existence of the performative. Phelan states that ‘mimicry and iteration is the place where performance and performativity intersect’ and that ‘performance and performativity are braided together by virtue of iteration; the copy renders the performance authentic and allows the spectator to find in the performer “presence”. Presence can be had only through the citation of authority, through reference to something (we have heard) called “live” [Phelan, 1998: 10]. As a modality of repetitive copying, critical writing in fact is involved in this enabling of “the live” and of “presence”; it is precisely not that which evacuates them, as Case suggests.



This deconstruction of 'presence' can be usefully applied to Scheie's concerns [Scheie, 1994].

22. It is worth remembering that in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler cites queer theatricalised activism (ACT-UP for example) as a paradigm for the subversive resignification of 'queer', and as such begins to open a space for common currency between the political efficacy of the performative and the political efficacy of performance.
23. Butler states that 'performativity is thus not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given a full disclosure of its historicity)' [Butler, 1993: 12-13].

Of course, to conceive of the performativity of performance is to formulate a certain normativity of what performance actually is, and as such is not an entirely unproblematic enterprise, in that such a move might resist the development and shifting of what gets characterised as 'performance' itself – here again we might need to foster some kind of subversive repetition through which abjected performance forms and practices get to enter the privileged fields of 'Performance' and 'Performance Studies'. Jon McKenzie discusses the 'liminal norm' by which early performance studies (through Schechner and Turner) characterised itself.

McKenzie also stresses the difficulties this poses for an activist or politically engaged performance:

given the numerous critical theories that articulate performance as transgressive and/or resistant cultural practices of marginalized subjects, many readers may have too quickly passed over Butler's stress on performativity as both normative and punitive and instead installed her work within more conventional, that is, radical, readings of performance [McKenzie, 1998: 225].

24. Parker and Sedgwick claim, through a convincing reading of the 'etiologies of language' described by Austin, that 'the performative has thus been from its inception...infected with queerness' [Parker and Sedgwick, 1995: 5].
25. See Hart and Phelan (1995) for a discussion of the tensions between 'queer' and the ontologies of identity, the problems of Being.
26. This idea of the 'for-now-ness' (nonce) of the term 'queer' is reminiscent of Monique Wittig's similar provisionalisation of 'lesbian' in *One is Not Born a Woman*. This awareness of the double-bind of any referential term – an awareness of what Butler, after Spivak, calls a 'necessary error of identity' [Butler, 1993: 229] – is precisely that which generates Butler's attention to the historicity of 'queer', and that which sees her invite its shifting, changing, erasure in the future.
27. Dollimore (1998) illustrates how far from being a poststructuralist turn, this image of the death-bound subject in fact permeates the entire Western historical and philosophical tradition.
28. This is suggested, for example, by the recent 'Matters of Life and Death' festival at Battersea Arts Centre, London, between 16<sup>th</sup> June and 15<sup>th</sup> July 2000, publicity material for which explicitly positions the programme of work in opposition to the 'last great taboo of our age' which death is perceived to be.



## Notes to chapter 2

1. Site-specific performance generally refers to performance events that take place in locations other than 'conventional' theatre of performance buildings or venues, and that interrogate the relationship between site and performance event as part of the event itself. Nick Kaye elaborates a theory of site-specificity in relation to visual art (particularly minimalist sculpture and intermedia happenings), architecture, documentation and performance, stating that 'site-specificity arises in a disturbance of the opposition between 'virtual' and 'real' spaces, in dialectical relationships between the work and its site' [Kaye, 2000: 183].

Cliff McLucas and Mike Pearson, artistic directors of welsh bilingual company Brith Gof, states that:

Site specific performances are conceived for, and conditioned by, the particulars of **found** spaces, (former) sites of work, play and worship. They make manifest, celebrate, confound or criticise location, history, function, architecture, micro-climate...They are an interpenetration of the **found** and the **fabricated**. They are inseparable from their sites, the only context within which they are 'readable' [in Kaye, 1996: 211, original emphases].

2. For an elaboration of the connections between the architectural and the textual, see Grosz, 1995: 117.
3. In *Great Moments and Social Climbing: King Kong and the Human Fly*, Meaghan Morris writes that 'space is not a prior condition of something else ("place"), but rather an outcome, the *product* of an activity, and so it necessarily has a temporal dimension' [Morris, 1992: 3].
4. See Deleuze (1998) on the replacement of archaeological models of psychoanalysis - models that suggest a kind of excavation of the past through layers of meaning over each other in one place – with a cartographic model in which meanings are placed side by side in an overlapping and shifting pattern.

5. Both Foucault and Lefebvre theorise the 'the body' as though all bodies were the same, and indeed this generalisation of the body has been a source of criticism directed against both writers. Although I also generalise 'the' body in this way, in the service of making a general point, I wish to flag the different ways in which architecture will direct and choreograph the movement and regulation of bodies differently depending on how those bodies are marked by gender, sex, sexuality, class, race, (dis)ability, age, and so on.
6. There are many ways in which the figure of 'the house' is transformed by the practices it contains and enables, and indeed the meaning of 'house' and 'home' differs considerably from context to context. Not only does the occupation of provisional housing or illegal housing (illegal occupation or illegal use) challenge the cosy *equation* of house and home, but the very notion of the 'conventional' home is a political and ideological construct that is potentially challenged by multiple alternative occupancies. This chapter does not seek to valorise the stability and conceptual stasis of 'home', but rather seeks to consider how the transformation of private domestic place into public performance spaces might in fact reveal the political and personal investments that permit the notion of 'private housing' itself.
7. In discussing the notion of the 'uncanny' in relation to psychoanalytic theory, I shall use the original german term, 'unheimlich' in untranslated form. Freud's development of the theory of the unheimlich is in part based on etymological comparisons between different linguistic meanings/translations of the concept, and his usage is specifically drawn from the german sense of unhomeliness. The english 'uncanny' suggests something beyond knowledge (beyond ken), which in itself is relevant to how the concept of the unheimlich relates to the (return of) repressed elements of the unconscious – however, I prefer the domestic implications of 'unheimlich' in the context of this chapter.
8. There is a direct connection from this point between Freud's concept of the unheimlich and later ideas of the abject: the figure of the revenant, of the return of the dead, is precisely that trope which is deployed by Butler and others in the resignified meaning of the abject in queer theory (the abject as that outside that always inevitably returns to haunt that which is contained 'within'). The way in which this spatial distinction is disturbed by the abject status of the dead body is also theorised by Kristeva, who states in *Powers of Horror* that 'at that level of



downfall in subject and object, the abject is the equivalent of death' [Kristeva, 1982: 26], and that 'it is the corpse...that takes on the abjection of waste...the corpse represents fundamental pollution' [109].

9. I would suggest that the location of this particular performance – in a domestic house, a place that is already highly charged as a locus of particular meanings and possibilities – further contributes to the sense of transience that characterises live performance. McLucas' idea of the Ghost performance evokes this sense [McLucas, 2000: 128], suggesting the ways in which the Host site enters into a dialectical relationship with the performance-as-haunting that occurs within it (this relationship creating the performance 'event' itself). It seems that the absence of the supposed neutrality that characterises the empty spaces of conventional performance venues is precisely that which erases evidence of the performance once the places of performance (in this instance, the everyday spaces of a domestic house) return to their usual use.
10. See Fortier [1997] and Bennet [1990] for a summary of some of the debates concerning how theories of reception impact upon the critical analysis of performance.
11. In 'Now and Then: Psychotherapy and the Rehearsal Process', Lisa Baraitser and Simon Bayly explore the connections between psychotherapy and the rehearsal process. Although they shift their focus away from the *parallels* between the two, the idea of rehearsal as the unconscious of performance is implicit throughout their essay.

Ernst Fischer's 'Writing Home: Post-modern Melancholia and the Uncanny Spaces of Living Room Theatre' offers multiple perspectives on the connections between performance, architecture, the uncanny and "domestic theatre"; ideas that both overlap with and differ from those I am developing in this thesis.

12. Kaye [2000] discusses the ways in which site-specific art and performance are particularly productive of these kinds of conceptual leaks and slippages, in that the articulation between the work and its site engenders a testing of 'the stability and limits of the very places it *acts out*' [57, original emphases]. He goes on to state that:

‘site specific art is defined precisely in these ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning, through which the artwork and its place may be momentarily articulated one in the other’ [57].

13. It is certainly not a little ironic that the medium through which this performance confirms and consolidates its potential as vehicle for mourning (an effect enabled in part, it is my claim, through the specific spatial and temporal dynamics of the work) is the pre-recorded video, inserts of which disrupt the temporal order of the performance, and open up a challenge to straightforward readings of the performance as entirely ‘live’.
14. Bell and Valentine, in their edited collection *Mapping Desire* suggest that ‘the performance of sexual identities in space is rarely an unconstrained pleasure. All too often, forces of regulation and discipline – from the panoptical gaze of homophobia to the physical threat of an individual queerbasher, from the state and law to the lyrics of a song – are in place, to constrain (and to punish) nonconforming sexualities’ [Bell and Valentine, 1995: 230].
15. The following text is loosely based on Margaret Atwood’s poem *This Is a Photograph of Me* (1977). Published in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* pp. 1373-1374.



### Notes to Chapter 3

1. W. Jerome Harrison (1888), *A History of Photography*: 15.
2. Ibid: 19.
3. Ibid: 20.
4. Ibid: 24
5. Ibid: 73
6. William Henry Fox-Talbot (1844), *The Pencil of Nature*, Volume 3: Notes to Plate XIV.
7. Ibid.
8. In much of the theorisation around photography and representation, there is a persistent attention to the idea of the photographic document as either “mirror” or “window” [Sayre, 1989] – the idea that the photograph can act as a means of self-expression (the mirror) or as an unmediated technology that allows impartial and truthful representation of the real (the window). In these two largely opposed schemes, there is a clear difference in the importance placed on the subject – the “window” approach seeks to impartially show and reveal its subject; the “mirror” is more revealing of the photographer. Although Goldberg has an investment in the idea of the photographic document as window, it is interesting to note that what is viewed through the photographic frame is not performances *per se*, but rather the cultural and sociological landscapes around them. Indeed, Goldberg’s personal selection of images possibly tells us more about her ideological and aesthetic position as a performance critic, than about the performances themselves.
9. This idea of permanence in relation to the photographic image continues to be of concern to photographers and artists. In an exhibition at the White Cube<sup>2</sup> gallery in Hoxton, London, between 1 December 2000 and 6 January 2001, artist Mark Quinn exhibited a series of ‘photographs’ entitled *Garden*, that were printed from a

digital image using permanent pigment. The publicity leaflet for the show stated that:

these paintings, which are photographic in origin and made using permanent pigment, depict details of Quinn's work, 'Garden' (2000), a lush garden frozen in full bloom. Up until now, a photographically originated permanent colour image has been impossible, but, working with Permaprint, Quinn has made the fugitive moment of photography last forever in supersaturated perfection. In these pictures, the frozen garden is frozen and fixed once again – this time as an indelible image.

However, it seems doubtful to me that images produced electronically via a digital camera and printed onto canvas using non-light sensitive organic pigment can really be classified as 'photographs' – as the two foundational principles of 'photography', optics and chemistry, seem absent from this process. I am aware that the definition of "photography" itself is necessarily flexible, and that the form continues to evolve as advances in optical, chemical and digital technologies unfold, and as such I am also aware that there is a certain nostalgia at play in my defence of photography as a form defined by the scientific discourses of its invention. However, nostalgia has a certain significance in the context of this thesis, and as such I would also defend its invocation. In any case, this example serves to illustrate the persistent concern with permanence and fixability that has characterised the historical development of photography, a persistence that appears to underscore and perhaps even define the shift from chemical to digital processing that characterises many contemporary 'photographic' techniques.

10. I have not begun to suggest a theoretical equivalent for these ideas in relation to Polaroid/instant photography, and restrict my contemporary concerns to the manipulation of positive/negative processes of photography through performance. Polaroid images are in many ways comparable to daguerreotypes and early contact prints in that each is a unique object. Also, as they condense all the various processes of exposure, development and fixing into the chemical structure of the surface of the print (a 'surface' that indeed has a certain 'depth' that also marks them as different from positive/negative prints), they operate differently in terms of the temporal processes of their materialisation.



I am grateful to Philip Stokes for a discussion on Polaroid photography.

11. The operation of the camera as a technology that transforms time and experience into information and commodity is richly suggestive when considered in the context of the use of photographic documentation of ephemeral events in the history of performance art itself. Conceptual or performance art has often relied on its photographic transformation into a viewable (read 'consumable') image in order for it to be accorded the status of art in a relationship with a viewer. The fact that the presence of photographic technology means that the viewer does not need to be at the event itself (indeed, they often cannot be or are not allowed to be) has led many conceptual artists to make work that *relies* on these technologies to confer on it artistic presence in a wider social sphere. Here one can see that performance (for example) enlists photographic technologies to enable its existence *as* performance – a kind of deployment that sets up a relationship between photography and performance that is not symbiotic but parasitical: the performance absorbing its ontological status from the photographic technology upon which it relies. The photograph is thus privileged as the enabler of the existence of the performance *as* performance (if 'performance' is accepted as arising somewhere in a nexus between event and performer and audience).

The epitome of this process could be seen as Hayley Newman's photographic series in which the performance events supposedly documented are staged entirely and specifically for the camera.

The heritage of this kind of conceptual performance art (made for the camera and through the photograph) is an attitude to photography and performance in which documentation and transformation into photographic images is accepted by rote, as a *sine qua non* of performance practice (proof of performance practice having been practiced). The consequence of this drive to document (and to perform via the document) is certainly implicitly critiqued in the current unease around writing and recording performance – through the scholarly text, the videotape, the photograph, for example - and gives rise to that critique.

However, the persistence of the visual desire and ideological imperative to photographically document and represent performance (as commodity) appears to be so ingrained in the practices of performance studies and performance making that it persists in even the most unlikely places. In the same text that critiques the



privileging of the marked visual field of knowledge, Phelan offers several photographic documents of performance art events as part of the construction of her theory of the unmarked. It is more than a little curious, that these images appear in a text that champions the invisible, and that so committedly seeks out a theory of the value of absence and disappearance, and reveals a lot not only about the ideological consequences of a dependent relationship between performance and photography, but also about the conventions and conditions of marketing and packaging academic enterprise as commodity.

12. From interview/conversation with Philip Stokes, Nottingham, 13 November 2000.
13. There is something wonderful, and not a little philosophically interesting, about the idea of *absence* – the empty space left when a hole punctures a wall – acting as a means of illumination and projection. Perhaps the fact that the camera obscura operates on the principle that *something that is no longer there* transforms light and space again suggests a certain performative dimension to cameras themselves. This is, of course, a highly speculative argument, that will have to wait for another time to be developed. A philosophy of nothingness, though implicitly present throughout this thesis, is not its explicit focus.
14. The actual processes of creating daguerreotype plates were both deeply temporal and deeply alchemical. In a description of his process, Daguerre presents the requirements for the preparation of the metal plate upon which the image was created. Firstly the application of a thin layer of pure silver to copper plates (plates which are '*Supposed* to be one part of silver to fifteen of copper' [Daguerre, 1839: 16]); secondly, the polishing of the plate with pumice and porphyry and nitric acid; thirdly, the application of iodine vapour to the surface of the plate (with the reminder that between sensitising the plate with iodine and exposing it in the camera obscura 'the delay for that operation must not exceed one hour, or else the combination of the iodine on the silver will not retain the same property' [Ibid: 23]). Fourthly, the exposure of the plate in the camera obscura itself, with the following guidance on exposure time:

This operation being extremely delicate, nothing being visible, and that it is quite impossible to determine the time necessary to produce the effect, since it entirely depends on the intensity of



the light reflected by the objects intended to be reproduced; the time in Paris may vary from *three* to *thirty* minutes at the most. It is also necessary to observe that the season of the year, the hour of the day, have much influence on the rapidity of the operation; the most favourable time is from seven o'clock in the morning until three in the afternoon, and that which is obtained in Paris in three or four minutes during the month of June and July will require five or six minutes in the month of May and August; seven or eight minutes in April and September, and so on in the same proportion according as we advance in the season [Ibid: 24-25].

Fifthly, coating the mage with heated mercury vapour (by candlelight, of course, so as not to destroy the latent image); sixthly, removing the iodine with muriate of soda, or hyposulphate of pure soda.

Here is the temporality of the daguerreotype, and alchemy at the invention of photography.

15. Notes from the 'Breathless: Photography and Time' exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 31 August 2000.
16. See Simon (1996) for a sustained use and theorisation of the 'discontinuous discourse' as academic style; a style that is not dissimilar to that which I strategically deploy at several points in this thesis and which I seek to develop as part of the thesis' aesthetic form.
17. Barthes writes: 'Photography must have some historical relation with what Edgar Morin calls the "crisis of death" beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century' [Barthes, 1980: 92].
18. From interview/conversation with Paul Kieve, London, 5 March 2001.
19. To Barthes, most photographs operate at the level of the *studium*. They raise an average, even a mediocre interest. They are part of a general scene of photographic images which *show* things in a general, straightforward way. What Barthes finds

more electric in the photograph is the operation of the *punctum* - the element of a photograph, part of its essence or quality, that pricks, marks, pierces the looker. The volatile part. The dangerous part. Perhaps performative photography is characterised by photographs that act out the force of the *punctum* – that arrest the looker, move them, work on them. Documentary photography is archetypical of the action of the *studium* – showing a general scene or event. Performative photography relies on the *punctum* to mark its effects.

20. And the poetry of Barthes' writing on this is achingly beautiful:

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed [Barthes, 2000 (1980): 80-81].

In this text, Barthes is clearly influenced by Sontag, who writes in her own philosophical and meditative reading of photography that:

first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask...a photograph is never less than a registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) – a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be [Sontag, 1979: 154].

21. The mid- to late-nineteenth century practice of photography of the dead (particularly of dead children) takes this connection to its most explicit manifestation, and can be inverted to highlight the imprint of death on *all* photographic subjects, whether alive or already deceased at the time of the photograph's taking.



22. On Fox-Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature*, Harrison writes: 'This book is now very scarce, but in all the various copies which I have examined the pictures are more or less faded, the fading extending gradually from the edges to the centre' [1888: 33].

## Notes to chapter 4

- a. See for example Phelan's *Love's Geography* and the collaborative essay *Queerer Than Thou* which she published with Lynda Hart in 1995, as well of course *Bloodmath* itself. I refer throughout this text to the performance of *Bloodmath* I saw at Riverside Studios, London on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2001 (as part of the London International Festival of Theatre). I am grateful to Adrian Heathfield for making available a manuscript version of *Bloodmath* several months prior to publication.
- b. E-mail has spatial and material implications of course, as well as temporal ones. Unlike letters, e-mails are not touched by the sender, they have no body, no surface, no texture. They can never stand in for the body of the sender, although perhaps they do metonymise the absence of that body. Other than at an atomic, or electronic level, E-mails occupy no physical space, they have no physical volume, no weight; they have no physical journey as such.

See Decker (1998) for a theorisation of the impact of tele- and electronic-communications on epistolary exchange, in particular considering the status of e-mail in relation to speech and writing. See also Baron (2000), esp. pp. 247-252, for a fuller consideration of this relation.

- c. As with all technologies, the glitches in the system are as generative and revealing as their successes, and this is certainly true for the relationship between e-mail and time. My computer, in the final death throes of a viral infection as I write, keeps re-setting its clock, always shifting back into the past (I imagine it trying to get back to a time before it began to collapse around itself, a curative kind of time travel). The consequence of this temporal prophylaxis is that e-mails arrive in my correspondents' inboxes before they are sent; often lost in the flurry of yesterday's already-read post, too low on the screen to be visible, as they sit there boldly, waiting to be read. The record so far is a five month delay between the sending of a mail and the receipt of a rather bemused reply.
- d. As well as the temporal split in epistolary writing, Altman identifies numerous other paired and polar characteristics of epistolary discourse, several of which are resonant in



terms of the development of a model for epistolary criticism in performance studies. Consider the letter in the following terms:

1. Bridge/barrier (distance maker; distance breaker)
2. Writer/reader
3. I/you; here/there; now/then
4. Closure/overture; discontinuation/continuation of writing
5. Unit/unity; continuity/discontinuity; coherence/fragmentation.

The letter form is particular in its complex construction of these characteristics, thus charging it with 'paradox and contradiction' [Altman, 1982: 187]. In relation to performance, metaphors of closure and overture; continuation and discontinuation; bridges and barriers seem particularly resonant.

- e. In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes separates a model of 'correspondence' (a tactical use of letters) from a realm of 'relation' (the sending of a letter between lovers that brings together those two into one). Despite specifically hailing a mathematical analogy, Barthes seems unaware of the synonymy of 'correspondence' and 'relation' in mathematical vocabulary [Barthes, 1990: 158].
- f. The written version of *Bloodmath* is published in *Cultural Studies*, 15 (2) 2001, pp. 241 – 258.
- g. In his oeuvre, Derrida theorises away body, person, presence. In the *envois* he inscribes his need and desire for the writing and reading subject – hence the choice of form, which is a form between two connected subjects, present to each other. Letters, like performances, demand bodies present to each other – albeit symbolically - demand connection, demand exchange.
- h. See also Gilroy and Verhoeven (2000) *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*: 'there are always (at least) two sides to any correspondence, two subjectivities telling and trading potentially different stories, two voices testifying differently in an "event of utterance" through which self and other define and redefine each other' [14-15].
- i. Not all letters generate responses, however, and indeed the removal of the possibility of reply bends the very structure of the epistolary project in a way that might have a

constructive and creative yield. Over the last two years, I have been soliciting, receiving, collecting and archiving letters as an ongoing live art work, in which the recipient is located outside of a realm from which they might reply. The two key examples of this in *The Letter Project* are *Project 4: Letters to the Dead* and *Project 5: Letters to my Dog*. As far as I know, dead people and living dogs do not have the means, material or otherwise, to write and send back letters.

- j. It is certainly feasible for the gift to exist beyond the status of material object or 'thing'. Derrida explores the semantic orders of 'giving' and 'the gift' – he explores the notion of giving what one *has*, and also giving what one *is* (where one's being is beyond the simple status of possession). Furthermore, he considers what things might constitute gifts beyond the material object, and asks: 'What do the following have in common: on the one hand, to give a ring, a bracelet, to give something to drink and to eat and, on the other hand, to give an impression, to give a feeling, to give a show or a play?' [Derrida, 1992: 49].

- k. I open a book and a cloud of voices flutters out. Here are three I caught as they flew by, gifts for you:

In a time of alienation...letters still proffer some sense of physical connection, enduring material substance, individualized or private (confidential) language [Bower, 1997: x]

Letters, like letter writers, exist as bodies in time and space, and the manner in which the letter text refers to the artefact's materiality articulates the material and indeed mortal condition of the letter writer [Decker, 1998: 37].

Every object touched by the loved being's body becomes part of that body [Barthes, 1990: 173].

- l. There is therefore something liminal about the letter, something of an inbetween-ness. In the development of contemporary performance studies, the figure of the limen or the liminal has held a rich and important place. Victor Turner's seminal writings on performance and anthropology directly develop the figure of the liminal in relation to a model for performance. A more recent intervention into the suggestive figure of the



liminal in the proximity of performance is the inaugural issue of the journal *Body, Space, Technology*, published online at [www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/pfa/bstjournal/index.htm](http://www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/pfa/bstjournal/index.htm)

## Notes to Conclusion

1. The idea of a discontinuous discourse on a discontinuous subject has been used in a different context by William Simon in *Postmodern Sexualities* in relation to the fragmentation of the sexual in the light of postmodern and poststructural re-evaluations of the sexual self. In the context of conclusion, this discontinuity provides a useful figure in the search for a means of evading *the* end in the singular. Fragmentation – the breaking of a whole into shattered parts – evades the totalising effects of conclusion and offers a means of making concluding both multiple and, therefore, forestalled.

The box set *Shattered Anatomies* also effectively deploys the trope of the fragment to reflect upon the contemporary status of the performing body. Etchell's *Certain Fragments* and Goulish's *39 Microlectures* also utilise a textual fragmentation as part of the thematics of the work.

2. Barthes (1990), *A Lover's Discourse*: 114.
3. See Derrida, *Signature Event Context*:

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been-present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of nowness [Derrida, 1991: 107].



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