

Elaine Aston

'Transforming' Women's Lives: Bobby Baker's Performances of 'Daily Life'

In an earlier issue of *New Theatre Quarterly*, NTQ55 (August 1998), Marcia Blumberg examined the setting of the kitchen in performances by Bobby Baker and Jeanne Goosen, arguing for the 'transitional and transgressive' possibilities of this domestic-cum-performance space. Here, Elaine Aston returns to the 'kitchen' in Bobby Baker's performances of 'daily life'. The article examines Baker's 'language' of food which 'speaks' of domesticity, and her conjunction of comic playing and the hysterical marking of the body, to show how her performance work constitutes an angry, feminist protest at the lack of social transformation in women's lives. Elaine Aston has authored a number of studies on contemporary women's theatre, and is Chair of Contemporary Performance and Theatre Studies, Lancaster University.

IN THE 1960s, before second-wave feminism, sociology lecturer Hannah Gavron researched the lives of young mothers from middle-class and working-class families in North London. Her research was published posthumously as *The Captive Wife* (1966).¹ Her sub-title, *Conflicts of Housebound Mothers*, points to a domestic and maternal narrative of isolation, frustration, and confinement for women that second-wave feminism began to address and to challenge in the 1970s.

Among the four demands of the liberation movement, the request for twenty-four hour nurseries and free contraception and abortion on demand were central to the possibility of a social metamorphosis of women's maternal and reproductive lives. Despite these feminist demands, however, relatively little was to change. In particular, the conflict for women between the roles of mother and worker, which Gavron had highlighted,² if anything grew more acute in the Thatcherite 1980s, which promoted the myth of the Superwoman – the working mother who could 'successfully' combine professional life with family life.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Gavron's study remains ominously familiar, and that, despite certain class differences, middle- and working-class mothers with care of young children remain 'isolated from

the mainstream of society',³ and still experience the difficulty of combining work and family.

Performance artist Bobby Baker takes the 'conflicts of housebound mothers' and wives as a key (although not exclusive) subject for her shows. Like the women researched by Gavron in her study, Baker is also a North London mother. She introduces herself – in interviews and in the opening to her shows – as a middle-class housewife and mother of two from London N7. In particular, she marks the tension between motherhood and work. This tension was one which Baker experienced in her own career: after training as an artist, her emergent performance career in the 1970s was interrupted by an eight-year break in which she birthed and cared for her two children. When Baker returned to performance in the late 1980s she created *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, and in the 1990s established her 'Daily Life' series, which so far includes *Kitchen Show* (1991), *How to Shop* (1993), *Take a Peek!* (1995), and *Grown-Up School* (1999).⁴

That Baker's work imports her autobiographical 'daily life' experiences into a performance context is important. Of course, when the autobiographical 'I' enters the fictional frame of performance it raises many complex questions and issues around iden-

tity, authenticity and construction of self – questions which have received consideration elsewhere.⁵ What is important in Baker's case is that her observational style of comedy is dependent upon the sense that she has direct experience of the events she describes. As one reviewer explained in a commentary on her 1980 show, *My Cooking Competes*: 'The audience knew that this presenter had actually performed all these tasks, that they had taken up her time, just as they wear away the time of countless women, day after day.'⁶

In this way Baker, like Gavron with her empirically researched mothers, finds a means of introducing the 'real mother' into a sphere of representation from which she is traditionally absent. For instance, in *Motherhood and Representation*, E. Ann Kaplan examines the discursive levels of the socially constructed mother (historical) and the mother in the unconscious (psychoanalytic) in literary and film texts (fictional), but claims that the fourth mother, the 'real life' mother, is not representable.⁷ Instead, she hopes that her analysis of historical, psychoanalytic, and fictional mothers will be of some benefit to the 'conflicted, difficult, and marginalized life' of the 'real mother'.

By contrast, it is precisely this 'conflicted, difficult, and marginalized life' of the real mother which Baker introduces by taking herself as subject of and agent for her work. She uses her personal memories, experiences, feelings of her 'real life', or 'daily life' as a middle-aged housewife and mother of two to challenge the socially constructed (historical) role of the mother. Her experiences as a mother combine with her skills as an artist to transform the patriarchally constructed mother by unleashing the intense pains and pleasures conventionally repressed and constrained by this dominant ideological formation.

'Drawing on a Mother's Experience'

Fundamental to Baker's performances of 'daily life' is the way in which she communicates her experiences through the 'language' of food.⁸ After formally training as a painter, Baker began to work not with the

paints of the artist's palette, but with the colours and textures of the oral palette – of food. Before she began work on food sculpture, she 'among other things . . . danced with meringue ladies, recreated the history of modern painting in sugar, and made a life-size cake family in a sugar-decorated prefab entitled *An Edible Family in a Mobile Home*.'⁹ Even when her work began to incorporate dialogue, food remained her primary 'language' – a means of communicating the experiences of domestic, 'daily life' which she shared with women in her audiences.¹⁰

After her eight years away from the stage to have children, Baker returned to performing with her food-painting show, *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, in which she describes the experiences of becoming a mother and her subsequent transformation into a working mother. In *The Captive Wife* Gavron quotes from a Marriage Guidance Council booklet published in 1963 to describe the time with young children as 'a time of "pots and nappies, crying, feeding and the all important business of burping. It is the most extraordinary mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous, the anxious and the funny".'¹¹ One might be forgiven for thinking this was a reviewer commenting on *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*.

The performance of *Drawing* begins with Baker laying out a polythene sheet to protect the floor. Onto the polythene she spreads, as neatly as possible, a white double bed-sheet (her 'canvas'), onto which she proceeds to mark the experiences of becoming a mother. Starting in one corner, Baker presses down slices of cold roast beef to make a 'sensitive' mark recalling the birth of her first child. In the style of a Jackson Pollock action painting she makes further marks/memories out of milk, fish pies, stout, yoghurt, blackcurrants, preserves, tea, biscuits, black treacle, egg yokes, and whites. Verbally she refers to herself as a mother who is skilled at thrifty shopping, at recycling materials to avoid waste, and as someone who is most experienced in cleaning and clearing up after others.

Conscious that such daily realities are treated as mundane, boring, and insignificant, she looks for short cuts in her maternal

and domestic re-enactments to spare her audience the monotony of time-consuming, labour-intensive tasks, or the embarrassment of the abject, reproductive body. At the close, she exits as she entered – with all her food-stuffs packed into two plastic shopping bags, leaving not a trace of her presence in the performance space.

In *Drawing*, the food painting ‘speaks’ the anxieties provoked by the idea of the ‘successful’ mother which women frequently internalize. Many of these are linked to the business of feeding. Baker, for example, narrates the experience of being ‘consumed’ by the worry of feeding’, and marks the early days of breast feeding her first child with possets and dribbles of milk on the sheet. But this marks not only her ‘success’ at being able to breast feed (which she tells us she was able to do to excess), but also the consumption of her own body. As Rosalind Coward explains:

Around the child’s feeding, a whole drama is played out around anxiety, around which the adequacy of mothering can be assessed. And this anxiety, produced by medical and scientific opinion, overlays the already anxious relations which a mother and child will have on the subject of food. Such opinion crosses over the unconscious conflicts which a woman experiences between the command to provide, to give out and nourish, and the fear that, in so doing, she may be consumed and disappear altogether.¹²

As Baker’s narrative/painting unfolds, her nourishment of the baby raises the issue of who, in turn, will feed the mother. It is possible to read this both literally in terms of the incredible appetite which accompanies breast feeding, and metaphorically – as women’s hunger for keeping something of their own lives, their autonomy.

Baker’s need for self-nourishment is signed through the action of the stout, bottles of which she rolls across the sheet to produce marks which are more pronounced than the ‘sensitive’ marks made by the roast beef. She then repeats the action until she succeeds in making the bottles chink – a sound which reminds her of the chink which the empty bottles made as they rattled in the



Bobby Baker in *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*.

pram tray as she bumped her way over the pavement to take the empties back to the office. (Delightfully, she tells us of the troubled gaze of the health visitor who, on one occasion, happened to witness this not-quite-so-‘proper’ image of the mother.)

The ‘Old’ Mother and the ‘New’

‘Drawing on a mother’s experience’ takes on another or double meaning, as it refers also to Baker’s own mother. While the husband is busy rushing off to work, it is Baker’s mother, she tells us, who feeds the hungry daughter. Although psychoanalytically the time of becoming a mother is seen as a moment of potential reconciliation between mother and daughter, in reality it may also be a period of difficult and complex negotiation between the ‘old’ mother and the ‘new’; between the different, generational, internalized systems of ‘successful’ mother-

ing, or between the desire to be a mother and the fear of becoming one's own mother, etc.¹³

Baker gives 'voice' to these generational tensions through the mark of the fish pie: the food her mother brought to nourish her, which had orange crumbs, rather than her own pie with wholemeal crumbs. Then the hidden tensions of drawing on one's own mother's experiences are further imaged in a mark made by a pudding of yoghurt and blackcurrants. On the one hand, this signifies a comforting moment of self-infantilization, with Baker the 'child' who eats up all her mother's puddings, even though she does not like them.¹⁴ On the other hand, the repressed resentment which this occasions explodes in the urge to pop the blackcurrants, to crush them underfoot, and to admire the chroma this produces in the painting: an intensity of pink as the red of the currants dominates the white, milky yoghurt beginnings of the mark.

The lighter colours in the first part of the painting, the early days of mothering, are gradually overlaid by darker colours produced by foodstuffs which, for example, narrate a stressful time of money worries – marked by the strong-smelling, brilliant red of her home-made, money-saving preserves. The birth of a second child, marked by tea, barely makes an impression, and if anything is 'slightly dull' and immediately swamped by strong swirls of black treacle. The treacle hints at a life outside of children as Baker makes reference to her training as a painter and leads into her penultimate sequence: the transformation into a working mother.

Baker chooses to celebrate this transformation with a recipe for a pudding which she recollects making at this time for dinner parties. Preparing food for the entertainment of others is a different kind of cooking ritual: a social occasion, signifying the mother's return to a public life – or rather a working life that she has to combine with the work of mothering. Separating the yokes from the white of the eggs, Baker rushes around the sides of her sheet, trying not to trip up, to attend separately to the preparation of each part of the egg, and, finally, to fold these both into the painting.

The recipe fails if the yoke and the white do not separate – which speaks volumes to those of us whose daily lives are a constant battle to make a life split between children and work more manageable. Very briefly, she takes delight in the feathering effect which this produces before, dramatically, cancelling out her drawing by sifting flour over the whole sheet. There is, she explains, an element which is too painful to talk about. As Griselda Pollock argues: 'The painful memories will not be left, sanitized by their aesthetic look, assimilated back to the action painting they cleverly resemble.'¹⁵

The white blanket of flour cannot, however, cover up all these marks/memories. Nor should they, as Baker's final sequence suggests, be completely repressed. Instead, Baker rolls herself up in the sheet so as to resemble a 'human swiss roll' and takes these marks on to her body. The struggle to get to her feet, whilst swathed in the marks of maternity, is considerable. She tells us she used to worry she would not get out, but that she learnt not to panic. Then, in a quiet moment of celebration, she begins to dance. Previously she had told us she was not skilled at dancing, but this is a moment in which she pleasures herself – a final *gestus* showing the struggle of the professional artist, successfully emergent from the 'sheet' / maternal, despite the way in which the body is weighed down, making it difficult to move. Baker's choice of song to dance to, Nina Simone's 'My Baby Just Cares for Me', is, she informs us, not significant: a final ironizing of the mother, who, in truth, is always at risk of being consumed by the act of caring for others.

'Kitchen Show'

While I was researching this article I kept remembering an independent feminist film from the late 1970s which I used to teach for the Open University: *Often During the Day*, directed by Joanna Davis. The film shows several shots of a kitchen, interspersed with extracts of text from Ann Oakley's *The Sociology of Housework* – the text of which is presented both on screen and as voice-over –

and uses a looped sound-track of everyday kitchen noises: tea-pouring, bread-cutting, chairs scraping. The technique of the sound loop effectively brings home the unchanging, mindless, repetitive, endless, and thankless tasks of domesticity. In the film, it is a woman who is imaged as repeatedly clearing up after others. It made for extremely uncomfortable viewing – but that of course was the point.

Like *Often During the Day*, Baker takes the kitchen as her setting for the first in her 'Daily Life' series, *Kitchen Show*. When she began performing *Kitchen Show* in 1991, Baker reinforced the point about the spheres of domesticity/private and work/public by staging the show in her own North London pine kitchen, rather than in a theatre.¹⁶ The piece is structured through twelve daily actions which take place in her kitchen, each of which she marks on her white overalls which have now become a hallmark of her shows.¹⁷

As she performs each one we hear about the domestic story, event, feeling, experience, sensation, or memory associated with it, delivered in a documentary-style ('to-be-taken-seriously') voice-over. The reviewer for *Time-Out* explains:

The kitchen is the stage where she presents her private self through twelve actions she might carry out any day, from clearing out the cutlery drawer to rinsing spinach. These are strung together with female confidences, reminiscences, and send-ups of the apologetically appreciative middle-class wife and mother, and her inspired ramblings take the lid off a woman's mind and make sense and nonsense of the routines of running a home.¹⁸

Baker re-presents the kitchen as a site of many mixed emotions and pleasures: of anger (marked by the action of hurling a pear to relieve tension); of joy (as she rinses and peels carrots under running tap water); or of the oral pleasures of 'taste sensations' – the repeated action of nibbling away at food (marked by red lipstick).

That the kitchen also evokes childhood memories indexes the relatively unchanging patterns of the familial/maternal life which



Bobby Baker in *Kitchen Show*, as performed at the London International Festival of Theatre, 1991. Photo: Andrew Whittuck

continue to situate women/mothers in the domestic.¹⁹ Lack of social transformation is arguably a reason for the way in which Baker draws on hysteria as a protest against her domestic 'confinement'. As Catherine Clément explains, the role of the hysteric is both 'anti-establishment and conservative'. 'The hysteric unties familiar bonds, introduces disorder into the well-regulated unfolding of everyday life', and yet 'the family closes around her again'.²⁰ Performing hysteria, therefore, is a way of marking a protest against domesticity: of disturbing the 'order', the social system which continues to position women within the maternal and the domestic spheres.

Hysteria as Performance

Baker creates a performance register out of a combination of clowning and physical/hysterical markings of the body to relate events, and experiences from her daily life, in a way highly reminiscent of the three-phase 'performance' of *la grande hystérie* by the patients of the nineteenth-century 'expert' in female hysteria, Jean-Martin Charcot.²¹ In the final phase of *la grande hystérie*, known as the *attitudes passionnelles*, the patient would mime events and emotions from her life.²² Similarly, Baker's hysterical marking of her body is a way of 'writing' events, memories, sensations, and emotions associated with the 'madness' of the kitchen.²³

For example, the first mark in *Kitchen Show* is one in which Baker talks about the ritual of making tea. At the end of this sequence she marks the ritual by binding or bandaging her hand with elastoplast into a teaspoon-holding position. The hand remains thus bound, contorted like the hand of the hysteric, as the performance continues. Each action/mark is posed for the camera; the memory of an event or an emotion is thus written on to the body and 'photographed'.²⁴

The last mark, her thirteenth mark – just to make it a Baker's dozen – is to exhibit herself, complete with all twelve marks of ritualized domesticity, on a cake-stand. In presenting herself rather than the meal as the 'product' of her domestic labours, Baker reverses the visibility/status of the food/meal and the invisibility/low status of the woman who labours in the kitchen on behalf of her family.

Moreover, in this final, Charcot-styled pose, she demythologizes the myth of the 'body beautiful'.²⁵ In offering herself up for visual 'consumption', Baker highlights the way in which food regulates body image for women. Her overalled body is neither streamlined like her cats (as she reminds us with the plastic black bin-liner pegged on to her shoulders), nor can it 'glide' in the blue sky (marked by the blue J-cloths stuffed into and trailing behind her slippers).

Her head is doused in water, her hair is knotted with a wooden spoon, her face is

smudged with margarine, and her lips are covered in red lipstick. And yet what is most important, Baker explains to us, is the look which these marks make when they are seen all together. Hysteria, as Elaine Showalter summarizes, is 'a form of expression, a body language for people who otherwise might not be able to speak or even to admit what they feel'.²⁶ The vocabulary of Baker's thirteenth mark, all her actions put together, articulates the domestic/the 'feminine' body as festival and refusal; writes the 'language' of the kitchen on and through her body both as a celebration of and a protest against 'daily life'.

'Spitting Mad'

One of the dangers in the reception of Baker's work is that the reviewers see only the clowning, not the anger; that they tend, as Claire MacDonald (commenting on *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*) explains, to read her performance only through one self: 'the experienced mother' who makes them 'feel they are in safe hands'.²⁷ However, in *Spitting Mad*, Baker's short film for BBC2's 'Expanding Picture' series (1997), it is hard to avoid the rage of the maternal. In this 'in-your-face' performance Baker unleashes the anger of the mother which is traditionally silenced by the dominant, caring, nurturing image of maternity.

Briefly, *Spitting Mad* opens with Baker in her garden luxuriating in the fresh, white, linen cloths hanging out on her washing line. A quick tug on a cloth, and we switch to her spotless linen cupboard, where we see Baker taking pleasure in the cleanliness and softness of the neatly stacked washing. From the cupboard we move to a clinical space set with table, chair, and kitchen-style cupboards. The encoding of the clinical again suggests an association between the kitchen and the asylum: a kitchen table and chairs are set in front of a sash window, the bars of which, lit like the furniture in harsh, bright light, link the activity of the kitchen, of food, to madness. In her white overalls Baker signifies both housewife and ('hysterical') patient/inmate.²⁸



A white cloth is laid out on a bare table. Baker presents her materials: some household foodstuffs, which variously include oranges, a tin of soup, jams, wine, and sauces. Out of these she proceeds to make a series of five tablecloth paintings. All of the five food paintings are made *via* the mouth, through spitting. In painting number one, Baker chews on orange segments, takes them out of her mouth, squeezes them into the cloth, and knots them into the material with twine.

As she twists and knots the segments into the cloth we note a surge of anger in the action, and the anger mounts through the succeeding four actions/paintings: Weight

Watches tomato soup, sucked up through a straw and blown out onto the cloth to make a lined pattern; strawberry and apricot jams pressed out of her lips onto the cloth; red wine gargled and sprayed out over the cloth; and sauces (yellow and red), chewed and spewed into and onto her 'canvas'. While the paintings start out with patterns (oranges) and lines (soup) the symmetry is upset and distorted by rising anger. Working with the jam painting, Baker abruptly announces that she finds the lines of the lip-shapes of jam pressed onto the cloth boring, and promptly spews out mouthfuls of pink (presumably strawberry) yoghurt to make it more alive.

In the final painting, the camera moves in for a close-up shot as Baker, angrily, tells us that she needs to concentrate to make sure that we get her point. Whereupon she tilts back her head, opens her mouth wide, and pours in the Heinz tomato sauce until her mouth is full, overflowing, and then vomits the red sauce out over the cloth. The anger in this final 'spitting mad' action, signed through the mound of red sauce splattered on the cloth, is especially violent.

It is through the mouth and the symbolism of the regurgitated food that Baker 'speaks' the rage of the mother in *Spitting Mad*. As orifice, opening on/to the body through which food/fluids may pass, the mouth refuses the idea of the bound, pure, proper body, and highlights the abject: the 'dirt', defined in Mary Douglas's terms as 'matter out of place'. 'Where there is dirt there is a system', Douglas argues.²⁹ Systems of domesticity/maternity are exposed in Baker's film as she upsets the idea we have of the kitchen as a site of cleanliness and hygiene – the idea that anyone preparing food (and, as Baker established in *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* and *Kitchen Show*, traditionally in the family this means the mother) has to be clean, hygienic: in her 'proper' place. Not to obey all the rituals and rules around cleanliness – hand-washing, food-tasting, etc. – is to contaminate, to pollute, to create disorder.³⁰

Moreover, the angry regurgitation of food re-visions the 'natural'/nature imagery of the mother who feeds her young in the nest, to suggest not the 'good' mother/breast (in Kleinian terms), but the repressed 'mad'/'bad' mother who fears that she will be sucked dry by the baby/child who must always be fed; and anger, at the way in which, as Coward elucidates, 'domestic relations are ordered around the satisfaction of men's and children's oral needs. Women are expected to nourish not to demand.'³¹

If one takes the Freudian infantile theory of birth in which pregnancy is equated with eating (birth with defecating),³² then expulsion rather than ingestion of food symbolically encodes a refusal of the child/family in the interests of self-nourishment. Or,

borrowing from Kristeva,³³ the spitting-out may be read as a means of protecting the self from others – in this case, refusing the maternal self to establish 'myself', which is especially marked in the spitting out of the Heinz soup (a sign of children's food/meals).

As in *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, working with the white tablecloths, which become messy through the food painting, gives expression to the way in which a mother's work is a repetitive daily round of tidying, cleaning, and creating order (as in the linen cupboard) only to have the family create disorder, dirt, mess, chaos.

Whereas *Spitting Mad* opens with the clean sheets hung out on the line – lovingly touched and admired by Baker – it closes with a row of 'painted'/'soiled' cloths on display. This 'dirty protest', out in the public space of the garden, is not, however, public enough. Instead, Baker selects two of her paintings/cloths from the line to take with her on a boat on the River Thames. Out on the river she acts as pilot, waving her cloths, signalling in semaphore, to the repeated voice-over, 'Provide better feeding'.

In this, her closing image, Baker is a veritable embodiment of the 'mad', carnivalesque mother. Hers is the 'off-side' maternal body, which Cixous and Clément describe: a dangerous site of disorderly refusal.³⁴ Like the river (which eventually flows out to *la mère*, sea/mother) she spills out into the city; refuses to be repressed or contained. Baker introduces or 'paints' the 'mad' mother into the foreground of the male-dominated cityscape: Westminster, Big Ben, and the Houses of Parliament are here in the background. 'Provide better feeding', the State's command to mothers, is 'regurgitated' through the food paintings as a feminist demand for the transformation of women's lives: the better provision for and nourishment of a mother's 'daily life'.

Notes and References

1. Hannah Gavron, *The Captive Wife: Conflicts of Housebound Mothers* (London: Routledge, 1966; revised edition, 1983). Gavron committed suicide in 1965, before she had turned thirty.
2. Gavron, *The Captive Wife*, p. 140.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
4. Baker has plans for a further 'Daily Life' show set in a church. During the 1990s she has been performing a series of 'Occasional Tables' – short one-off food performances created for specific events. In this article, my discussion of Baker's performances is based on the video recordings of her shows which are distributed by Artsadmin, London.
5. See Claire MacDonald, 'Feminism, Autobiography, and Performance Art', in Julia Swindells, ed., *The Uses of Autobiography* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995), p. 187–95; and Deirdre Heddon, 'What's in a Name?', *Studies in Theatre Production*, No. 18 (December 1998), p. 49–59.
6. Lynn MacRitchie, review of *My Cooking Competes*, in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds., *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement, 1970–1985* (London: Pandora, 1987), p. 230.
7. E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: the Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6–7.
8. In her autobiographical talk given at the New Works Festival, Leicester, in September 1997, Baker described the three fundamental principles of her work as (1) drawing on her own experiences; (2) working with food; and (3) striving for artistic integrity. Her principle of integrity she explained as her desire that a work of art, a performance, should be 'complete', or 'undiminished' – an almost impossible task, Baker claimed, but one for the artist to aspire to.
9. Quoted from publicity issued by Artsadmin.
10. See, for example, Lynn MacRitchie's review of *My Cooking Competes*, in Parker and Pollock, *op. cit.*
11. Gavron, *The Captive Wife*, p. 130.
12. Rosalind Coward, 'The Mouth', in *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (London: Paladin, 1984), p. 121.
13. See Vivien E. Nice, 'Mother to Mother', in *Mothers and Daughters: the Distortion of a Relationship* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), Chapter 6.
14. It is also interesting to note that in Baker's life-size cake family in *An Edible Family in a Mobile Home*, the baby was modelled on herself, and was significantly the most distressed figure in the familial tableau.
15. Review, *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, *Performance Magazine*, November 1990.
16. Similarly, in her next show, *How to Shop*, Baker presents the domestic task of shopping through the public discourse of the academic lecture. For a commentary on the kitchen as a private domestic setting used for performance, and the transgressive possibilities which this affords, see Marcia Blumberg, 'Domestic Place as Contestatory Space: the Kitchen as Catalyst and Crucible', *New Theatre Quarterly*, No. 55 (August 1998), p. 195–201.
17. The overalls signify not only domesticity, but also the idea of woman as patient. In *Take a Peek!*, for example, Baker wears several layers of overalls, which are removed, sequence by sequence, to expose social and medical objectification of the female body in a style of grotesque, circus-style, freak-show playing.
18. Caroline Stacey, review of *Kitchen Show*, in *Time Out*, 10–17 July 1991.
19. On this point, see Nancy Chodorow's seminal study, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).
20. Catherine Clément, in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 5.
21. For details see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (London: Virago, 1985).
22. The first and second phases are the epileptoid phase (the patient losing consciousness and foaming at the mouth); the phase of clownism (the patient producing incredible contortions, distortions of the body); as explained in Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 150.
23. The parallel between Charcot's patients and Baker's own style of hysteria is not lost on Baker herself. Reviewing Baker's show *Take a Peek!*, Marina Warner explained: 'When [Baker] saw the images of herself grimacing, she realized they caught the feeling of the photographs Charcot had taken to illustrate the passions that surfaced in the hysterical condition.' See *The Guardian*, 21 June 1995.
24. Similarly, Charcot would photograph the *attitudes passionelles* of his female patients, and add his own captions as titles (see Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 150). In Baker's performances, however, it is she who authors her own image and determines meaning.
25. See Coward, *Female Desire*, p. 37–46.
26. Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 7.
27. Claire MacDonald, 'Feminism, Autobiography, and Performance Art', p. 190.
28. See Note 17, above.
29. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 36.
30. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 34.
31. Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire*, p. 119.
32. See Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 104.
33. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2–3.
34. See Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, p. 8.