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## What's in a Name?

Dee Heddon

As someone who has written extensively about autobiographical methodologies, I resist 'origin stories'. Nevertheless, I have given birth to one of my own. It goes something like this...

I grew up in various villages and towns on the West Coast of Scotland, including Campbeltown ('Mull of Kintyre') and, latterly, Dunoon. There were no theatres in any of the places I lived, so I never went to the theatre. But I do remember that in primary school we performed nativity plays in the village hall, and that on at least one occasion I played Mary. (I also recollect that, playing a blind Mary, I really closed my eyes and ended up falling off the stage. Was this my first 'real action', my first 'act of resistance'?) Later, when I moved to Dunoon Grammar School in my third year, though drama was not on my O'level or Higher curriculum I could opt to take drama classes. I remember that I play Jo in a scene from Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*. And from there to the Scottish Youth Theatre's summer Festival, in the year of 1986, at the age of sixteen, in the (big) city of Glasgow. I remember being in a show directed by Alan Lydiard (was it called *Colonists?*). I came back to school, formed a 'drama club', and directed a bunch of first and second years. I remember that I asked them all to bring in rubbish from home, we found some huge sheets of corrugated metal, and as the devised 'play' began, the pupils formed a line, walked down the stage as one, then off the stage and into the auditorium, looking intently at the spectators, at which point they all dropped the rubbish they were carrying, including the sheets of metal. (This, for me, was the highlight. After it, the 'story', about religious divisions, began.) To this point, I had still never stepped inside a professional theatre (even as a spectator).

Looking back on this paucity of experience, it seems remarkable to me that I should apply to study theatre at University. But that's what I did, beginning my degree in Theatre Studies and Sociology at the University of Glasgow in 1987. In my first year, I saw a lot of theatre. And spent a lot of time feeling simply bewildered – and a little bit frustrated. It seemed such an odd thing to do – to watch other people pretending to be other people who were somewhere else than here and trying to buy into that pretence, that other world, pretending to myself that I wasn't here either. You might call this a problem with suspending my disbelief, a difficulty in colluding with that act of make believe. Then, in my third year of University, a visiting lecturer, Brian Singleton, made my year group attend an event called the National Review of Live Art, at the Third Eye Centre.

At the National Review of Live Art 1989, my first National Review of Live Art, my mind is blown away. I am watching *The Herbarium*, by Polish student company, Scena Plastyczna. Strobe lights, loud, thumping music, people in white flying through the air, the gust of wind on my face, a large white egg in the centre of the floor cracking open

and something human - but not quite human - emerging. Nearly thirty years later, I remember my wide, amazed eyes; the hairs on my neck rising, my heart racing, my breathing, fast and shallow, my palms sweaty. What did I just see? What was that? What sort of theatre was that? I am speechless. Whatever that was, it was fantastic, amazing, electrifying. And so it begins, so I begin, where to begin?...

Derek Jarman, Lindsay John, Oscar MacLennan, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Scena Plastyczna, Richard Layzell, Gary Stevens, Peter Zegveld, La Loca, X-Legged Sally, Brittonioni Bros, Anne Seagrave, Alan MacLean, Richard Downes and Thomas Roper, Fran.k, Jason Bowman, Allison Inkpen, Sebastiane, Robin Blackledge, Stark Theatre, David Richmond, Kristel Collison, Michael Mayhew & Becky Edmunds, The Damned Lovely, Mehdi Moghadassi, Bodies in Flight, David Izod, The Grand Opera of Oklahoma, Fast Food Zoo, Mark Hudson, Man Act, Krzyztof Miklaszewski, Tim Etchells, Stephen Taylor Woodrow, Annie Griffin, Neil Bartlett.  
(National Review of Live Art, 1989)

I began at the National Review of Live Art in 1989. If I could have prophesied the words that Adrian Heathfield penned in 2004, this is what I might have said: 'The drive to the live has long been the concern of performance and Live Art where the embodied event has been employed as a generative force: to shock, to destroy pretence, to break apart traditions of representation, to foreground the experiential, to open different kinds of engagement with meaning, to activate audiences' (Adrian Heathfield, *Live: Art and Performance* (2004)).

Exactly.

From the National Review of Live Art (1989) I made my way to Performance Art (because that's the only reference I could find at that time), but already the boundaries were blurred, between 'performance' and 'live art', between 'art' and 'theatre', between 'dance' and 'art' and 'dance' and 'theatre', between 'art' and 'music', 'performance' and 'demonstration'... Confronting many works called either/both Performance Art or/and Live Art, I realised that they were also, variously and in combination, in league with all sorts of other forms, including dance, theatre, cabaret, video, music, ritual, painting, writing, political action, monologue, stand-up... And their materials were, variously and in combination: time/duration, action, image, concept, location, performer, spectator... The spectrum was inclusive rather than exclusive.

If the blur of forms was already present in 1989, by 1998 the terms had really merged, as RoseLee's Goldberg's book, *Performance: Live Art Since the 60s*, made clear.

Rezah Abdoh, Marina Abramović, Vito Acconci, Act-Up, John Adams, Alien Comic, Laurie Anderson, Eleanor Antin, Janine Antoni, Jacki Apple, Penny

Arcade, Joey Arias, Karole Armitage, Robert Ashley, Ron Athey, Alex Bag, Bobby Baker, Matthew Barney, Pina Bausch, Anne Bean, Vanessa Beecroft, Joseph Beuys, Black Market International, Eric Bogosian, Glenn Branca, Stuart Brisley, Trisha Brown, Tania Bruguera, Gunter Brüs, Chris Burden, John Cage, Cai Guo Qiang, David Cale, Laurie Carlos, Romeo Castellucci, Brian Catling, Patty Chang, Judy Chicago, Lucinda Childs, Colette, Jane Comfort, Coum Transmissions, Merce Cunningham, Dance Noise, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Laura Dean, Jim Dine, DJ Spooky, DV8, Ethyl Eichelberger, Catherine Elwes, Rose English, Brian Eno, Valie Export, Jan Fabre, Garth Fagan, Falso Movimento, Feminist Art Workers, Molissa Fenley, Karen Finley, Forced Entertainment Opera, Richard Foreman, William Forsythe, Simone Forti, Ronald Fraser-Munro, Coco Fusco, Diamanda Galas, Garhel and Galindo, Rose Garrard, Cheri Gaulke, Gilbert & George, Philip Glass, Gob Squad, Heiner Goebbels, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Dan Graham, Grand Union, Spalding Gray, Peter Greenaway, Red Grooms, Guerrilla Art Action Group, Guerrilla Girls, Gutai Group, Ann Halprin, Ann Hamilton, Mona Hatoum, Julia Heyward, Hi Red Center, Danny Hoch, Rebecca Horn, Holly Hughes, John Jesurun, Joan Jonas, Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, Kim Jones, Isaac Julien, Allan Kaprow, Mike Kelley, John Kelly, Mary Kelly, Kipper Kids, Yves Klein, Milan Knizak, Alison Knowles, Paul Koek, Beryl Korot, Jannis Kounellis, Shigeo Kubota, Yayoi Kusama, Leslie Labowitz, Suzanne Lacy, La Fura Dels Baus, John Latham, Michel Laub, Jan Lauwers, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Ralph Lemon, Robert Lepage, Robert Longo, Charles Ludlum, Mabou Mines, Paul McCarthy, Robbie McCauley, George Maciunas, Bruce McLean, Alastair MacLennan, Steve McQueen, Ann Magnuson, John Malpede, Peiro Manzoni, Christian Marclay, Christoph Marthaler, Ana Mendieta, Gustav Metzger, Tim Miller, Meredith Monk, Linda Montano, Charlotte Moorman, Mariko Mori, Yasumasa Morimura, Kevin Mortensen, Otto Mühl, Bruce Nauman, Kestutis Naka, Neuer Tanz, Hermann Nitsch, Tere O'Connor, Lorraine O'Grady, Claes Oldenburg, Pat Oleszko, Pauline Oliveros, Yoko Ono, Luigi Ontani, Dennis Openheim, Orlan, Jill Orr, Lucy Orta, Tony Oursler, Nam June Paik, Gina Pane, Stephen Petronio, Adrian Piper, Alain Platel/Arne Sierens, Sally Potter, Stefan Pucher, Tamar Raban, Arnulf Rainer, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Rauschenberg, Carlyle Reedy, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Klaus Rinke, Rock Steady Crew, Nigel Rolfe, Ulrike Rosenbach, Rachel Rosenthal, David Rousseve, Tomas Ruller, Niki De Saint Phalle, Richard Schechner, Carolee Schneemann, Cindy Sherman, Roman Signer, Jack Smith, Annie Sprinkle, Station House Opera, Stelarc, Gary Stevens, Andre Stitt, Elizabeth Streb, Meg Stuart, Min Tanaka, Sam Taylor-Wood, Saburo Teshigawara, Rirkrit Tiraviniya, Ting Theatre of Mistakes, Carmelita Tropicana, Ulay, Urban Bushwomen, Ben Vautier, The Velvet Underground, Wolf Vostell, Claude Wampler, Andy Warhol, Robert Whitman, Faith Wilding, Hannah Wilke, Martha Wilson, Robert Wilson, David Wojnarowicz, the Wooster Group, La Monte Young, Mirian Zazeela.

(from RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since the 60s* (1998))

So many names and so, inevitably, so many different practices. Live, Art, and Performance. I think it's called having your cake and eating it. And why not?

I don't really care what it's called or where it comes from. And the long lists of names that I reproduce here are not intended to tell the 'history' or fortune of live art, not its beginning, middle or future. As I've said, I have a problem with 'origin stories'. And I want to be surprised by the future. Every list reveals that any such story can only ever be partial and told from a particular perspective for a particular purpose, and at a particular time. My own purpose, here, in importing these names, is simply to impress (upon mind and flesh) the impressive vastness of this 'field', a field that seems all the time to be expanding too. (I find that now I can go back into the theatre, my disbelief, though entirely intact, is no longer problematic. In fact, I can now go into the theatre and find myself in the company of Forced Entertainment, Curious, Third Angel, Bobby Baker, Stan's Café, Penny Arcade...) This vibrant, diverse field, that ranges from only the spectator's body in space (perhaps alongside an instruction printed on a card), to a performer entirely alone in a space (engaged in an unwitnessed but self-conscious ritual act), to a one-on-one performance (with one performer engaging intimately with one spectator), to a performance with a large cast of 'real' people, ostensibly being 'themselves', pushes against all and any categories. The question of 'what it is' (art? theatre? performance? performance art? live art?) is not as important as what it does or what it might do (to me, to you, to our world). Surely that's the only thing that matters?

I remember:

Bobby Baker, Tim Miller, Leslie Hill, Helen Paris, Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver, Mike Pearson, Graeme Miller, Phil Smith, Stephen Hodge, Carmelita Tropicana, Laurie Anderson, Brith Gof, nva, Penny Arcade, Robbie McCauley, Coco Fusco, Ron Athey, Franko B, Kira O'Reilly, Lisa Watts, Lisa Wesley, Fiona Wright, Goat Island, Nancy Riley, Geraldine Pilgrim, Janine Antoni, Quarantine, FrenchMottershead, Dance Noise, the Wooster Group, Michael Mayhew, Adrian Howells, Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage, Karen Finley, Black Market International, Claire, Alexis O'Hara, Lee Wen, Grace Surman, Nic Green, Silvia Ziraneck, Crew, Dogs In Honey, The People Show, Annie Griffin, Stan's Cafe, Forced Entertainment, Uninvited Guests, Elevator Repair Service, motiroti, Donna Rutherford, Helen Quinn, La Ribot, Marilyn Arsem, Neil Bartlett, Ian Smith, Roddy Hunter, Reckless Sleepers, Third Angel, Marcia Farquhar, Sheila Ghelani, Richard Layzell, Robert Ayers, Harinder Judge, Richard Dedemonici, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Rona Lee, Maya Chowdhry, Lone Twin, Sarah-Jane Grimshaw, Clanjamfrie, Marisa Carnesky, DV8, Wladyslaw Kazmierczak and Ewa Rybska, Paul Hurley, Kris Kanavan, Annie Sprinkle, Diamanda Galas, The Kipper Kids.

(from Dee's memory, just for today, just for this time and place (14 March 2008))

I remember:

Anne Seagrave, *Or Even What Leaving Was* (NRLA, Third Eye Centre, 1990). Animated pencil drawings on a screen, drawings of a door, a

woman trying to open the door, struggling to open the door. A live female performer in front of the screen performing careful, choreographed, tidy, small, precise movements. A recorded soundtrack, the urgency of doors being opened, shut, of needing to get out, of being unable to leave. Bang. Bang. Shut. Slam. Door.

Alistair MacLennan, *Mael* (NRLA, The Arches, 1996). Burnt out cars, smell of charring in the air, the heavy air, weighted with charged events. A man in black, wearing black balaclava, walking slowly, surely, with an air, an air of commitment, to the act, to the walking, to being here, in this desperate, despondent space (of history, of the present, but hopefully not the future). A soundtrack of names being read, first by a male voice, then by a female voice, endless names, ghosts of this space, and the man in black carrying, gently, in his hands, a pair of children's sandals.

Mary-Louise Blaney, *Fish Tale* (NRLA, The Arches, 2000). A naked woman with a coterie of female helpers, gradually, over a long time, being dressed from the waist down in the peeled-off skins of fish, these skins making a glittering, sparkling, shiny new tale. She stands still, steadfast, statuesque as her body is transformed, slowly, into that of a mythical and magical creature, the mermaid. She is sewn into this new, second skin. Liberated or trapped? Beautiful or abject? Ambivalence. This is the stuff of fairy tales coming to life before my eyes. I inhale its fishy scent.

Stan's Cafe, *Of All the People in All the World* (Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 2005). People in white lab coats sitting behind a desk, sets of scales, bags of rice, clear plastic bags, white labels. Around the room, lots of different piles of rice, some of them so minute as not to be a 'pile' at all, but others staggering in their size. Each grain of rice represents one human life. I confront a mound of rice that represents the entire population of Edinburgh. Another tiny amount for all the people to have walked on the moon. Yet another, monstrous and profound, the number of people killed in the holocaust. The domestic, small nature of the grain of rice renders the smallness and fragility of a human life. Curiously, as the small grain takes its place in a huge mound, and the single grains become a mountain, the sheer extent of global atrocities against the human hits home. As I leave, I purchase my own bag of rice – the population of Oban, my place of birth. (Another origin story?)

Zoran Todorovic, *Agalma* (NRLA, The Arches, 2004). Images of two women in a bath, washing each other with soap. Written information on how a bar of soap has been made, from a piece of human flesh – from the artist's flesh. A bowl sits on a plinth, lit by a spot light; beside it a jug of water and clean, white towels for drying hands. A bar of soap. You are invited to wash your hands. I look at the soap, look at the water. I leave the room, hands still unwashed. But I come back because this seems like a ritual I need to participate in. I pick up the

soap, wet my hands, wash gently, dry my hands. I wash my hands many times that day. I cannot remove what feels like an act of complicity. I know that this was intended as an act of giving, an act of love, a crossing between artist and spectator, between self and other, and in the artist's context also between Serb and Croat. He may have given, freely, but was I right to take? What is it to take this particular gift, I wonder?

Katherine Hymers, *You and Me and Nothing* (NRLA, The Tramway, 2008). The space is dark, other than an illuminated plinth, over which a young naked woman lies, prostrate, her head falling towards the floor, the front of her body resting on the hard edges of the flat surface. I walk around this living sculpture, observing it from all angles, all corners of the room, scrutinising her pale form, the shape of her back, the fall of her hair, wondering, even as I admire this 'sculpture', how uncomfortable this pose might be. And then 'it' moves. The artist changes her position, now sitting on the plinth, legs drawn up under her. She looks me in the eye. I move. She moves with me, eyes locking onto, looking into, eyes. She follows me round the room. She won't let me out of her gaze. I'm trapped, trapped into looking into her eyes looking into my eyes, because I will not let my gaze fall to her naked body, not while she is looking at me looking at her. No suspension of disbelief. We are here, together, in shared space and time, two hearts beating, two eyes looking/locking, two people performing, dancing round each other. Hymers is an 'Elevator Artist', at the start of her career, taking up her place on this expansive plinth of performance art, live art, contemporary performance, call it what you will. I call it, variously and in combination, demanding, questioning, challenging, engaging, provoking, thoughtful, playful, necessary...

Richard Layzell, Nan Hoover, Lisa Wesley, Brian Connolly, Marcia Farquhar, Katherine Hymers, Kris Verdonck, Sheila Ghelani, Sanne Van Rijn, Julia Bardsley, Kathy Rose, Caroline Smith, Raravis, Clod Ensemble, Kim Simons, Augusto Corrieri, La Pocha Nostra, Claire, Laura Trevail, Martine Viale, Gary McNair, Hannah Wasileski, Rachel Parry, Altitude 1000, Jason Singh, Qazim Riza Shaheen, Tine Van Aerschot, Angie Dight, Yann Marussich, Hiroaki Umeda, Harminder Judge, Richard Dedemenici, Action Hero, Jo Lane, Tim Brommage, Sarah-Jane Grimshaw, Jenna Watt, Uninvited Guests, Things on Fire, Roy Peters, Eva Weaver, Tom Marshman, John Boehme, Search Party, Helena Hunter, Dan McKereghan, Gertrude Berg, Micol Hebron, Angela Ellsworth, Jeff Huckleberry, Suzanne Lacy, Derek Horton, Marilyn Arsem, Mariel Caranza, André Stitt, Beth Greenhalgh, Roddy Hunter, Lee Hassell, Phil Babot, Heike Roms, Shabnam Shabazi, Adrien Sina, the vaccum cleaner, James Marriot, Leibniz, Monica Ross, Stacy Makishi, Yara El-Sherbini, Rabih Mroué, Ori Gersht, John Jordan, Cabula 6, Adalet R Garmiarny, Gillermo Gómez-Peña, Margareta Kern, The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, Mad for Real, Grace Ndiritu, Jenny Sealey, Ange Taggart, James Thompson, Virgule Performing Arts Company, Lois Weaver, The Yes Men, Kurt Hentschlager, Compagnie Thor, Rui Horta, Remeo Castellucci, Tedd Robinson, Goat Island.

(National Review of Live Art (2008))

As someone who has written extensively about autobiographical methodologies, I resist 'origin stories'. Nevertheless, I might give birth to one. It goes something like this...

My older brother, Stewart, lives in Dunoon. He is 41 and has never been to the theatre. My niece, Rachel, is 17. She too lives in Dunoon. She has been to the theatre, but only to see a pantomime. On Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2008, they are staying with me for the night. I am going to the Tramway to see Rui Horta's *Scope*. I invite them. They accept. The first thing that happens is that we are given coloured wrist bands. Green or purple. Rachel and I wear purple. Stewart sports green. We enter into what appears to be a club setting, a male and female dancer gyrating on podiums, padding themselves up with false 'bits' (he, some muscles and a 'dick', she, a bum and breasts). Then we are each asked to stand on a square that is the same colour as our wrist band, and as the square begins to move, we are instructed to follow our own square. Audience participation. By which means, Stewart ends up in one part of the space, Rachel and I in another. Separated by a curtain. Separated by gender. We watch the same show, only different. A show about love between a man and a woman: about the passions and frustrations and optimisms and despairs of love, about the games and roles and power switches, a gentle show, a destructive show. By the end of the performance we have ended up on the same side as each other, reunited after a surprising journey through emotions and space. 'So how was that for you?' I ask Stewart, hesitantly, falteringly? 'I've surprised myself', he admits, 'because I actually enjoyed that'. Rachel too. They might even be back. And so, perhaps, another journey has begun.