

Kira O'Reilly photo: Richard J Anderson

THE WEAVER

AN INTERVIEW WITH SPILL

THINKER-IN-RESIDENCE KIRA O'REILLY

Kira O'Reilly is a UK based artist whose practice, whilst both wilfully interdisciplinary and entirely undisciplined, employs performance, biotechnical practices and writing with which to consider speculative reconfigurations of *bodies that matter and the matter of bodies*. O'Reilly has made 'dances', with her forty-something year old non-dance trained body; has tried to grow muscle, bone and nerve cells onto spider silk in a laboratory, supported by Wellcome Trust and University of Birmingham; has made *Falling Asleep With A Pig* for The Arts Catalyst exhibition INTERSPECIES, and *Stair Falling for Marina Abramovic Presents...* She continues to attempt to make at the edge of unknown and known.
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Sheila Ghelani originally trained in contemporary dance before making the crossover into Live Art/Performance. Her international solo practice stems from her own experience of being mixed heritage (Indian/English) and addresses ideas that emerge from notions of 'mixing' or being mixed. Her work often includes 'live-ness' or engagement with an audience, and usually employs materials and objects in unfamiliar ways (often leaving a carefully choreographed strategic mess behind). As an artist she actively seeks to contribute to the contemporary debate surrounding race, terminology and its signifiers. Sheila also works collaboratively and is a core company member of Pacitti Company and a Blast Theory associate artist. She has performed internationally for both companies and regularly leads artists' workshops for Pacitti Company. Sheila also teaches in academic contexts.
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Kira O'Reilly is an Anglo-Irish performance maker based in the UK. Since graduating from Cardiff School of Art in 1998 she has shown her work extensively in exhibitions and festivals worldwide. In 2007 Kira was commissioned to produce *Untitled (Syncope)* for the first SPILL Festival. In 2009 she became SPILL's first Thinker-in-Residence. She also starred as Strength in the SPILL Tarot, was a performer at *Visions Of Excess* (a large scale counter-cultural event curated by Ron Athey and Lee Adams), and was the host of the SPILL National Platform weekend. The following interview with Kira took place at Pacitti Company's London studio in February 2010, conducted as a structured conversation by Robert Pacitti and Sheila Ghelani.

R/S: Kira, can you talk about being SPILL's first Thinker-in-Residence? And in what ways does that relate to your own practice?

K: In essence my role was one of making connections: between different modes of practice, different disciplines, and different contexts. Across all the ways in which I've been involved in SPILL - from direct participation, to my relationship with other SPILL artists' work - there has been a sense of picking up connections and rearranging them, as a responsive tactic rather than an overriding strategy. I think that's intuitively how I work; my art practice is a sort of responsiveness. There's a sense of not wanting to engineer connections in any mechanistic kind of way, but to identify and reveal connectivity. So that was primarily the way that I approached the role - it seemed natural, straightforward and direct. There were so many layers to the festival that it was interesting to approach and consider these from multiple directions, and to weave many different pathways throughout them, as audiences might. 'Thinker-in-Residence' might suggest something different to other practitioners (for example a writer, a theoretician, or a philosopher) but my approach was definitely more of a performative, perhaps even embodied practice.

R: In inviting you to become SPILL Thinker-in-Residence there was a clear understanding from the outset that we wouldn't necessarily end up with an essay, a tome or a lecture. That was exciting to me - that actually we might acknowledge the conversations in a bar after seeing work as also really vital, and just as valuable as formal outcomes. For me there's complete parity between you asserting your practice as embodied and your physical presence at the festival as Thinker-in-Residence.

S: Yes, one of my over-riding memories is of you being present throughout the whole festival and how important that was.

K: Well it's quite something to be one of the few people who had the privilege to be at virtually everything in such a comprehensive festival. And it's interesting what you say about having those conversations in a bar after encountering a piece of work - there's a collective unpacking that happens which can be precious, almost tentative, but equally can be undertaken with tremendous mastery and knowledge. I'm thinking about the many different kinds of audiences who come to see the numerous types of work SPILL offers, and their generation of these conversations; and how these conversations start to circulate and then become ongoing, in that they literally happen



Carla Esperanza in Tears of Eros
photo: Margo Photography

in a bar then relocate and regenerate, move and shift around multiple locations: at a SPILL Feast, or at the National Platform, or any one of the festival's numerous locations. So places and works become partial and contingent framing devices as the audience and festival move. You might watch Jan Fabre's *Orgy of Tolerance* right after seeing Harminder Singh Judge's *The Modes of Al-Ikseer*, but with a sense of these works becoming momentary lenses - the artworks and the audiences coming into various, temporary relationships with each other, whilst all the time being part of the same larger conversation.

R/S: One of the things we set up as a frame with the SPILL: Overspill writers group was the notion of porosity, and that's explored throughout this publication in various ways. But when you talk about conversations travelling and ideas becoming re-packaged, do you think there was any sense of accumulation, or rupture?

K: I definitely think there was accumulation, an incremental gathering of energy. There were drifts of audience who could pick up, receive and engage with the multiple aspects of the works offered, because this was such a huge festival - I mean absolutely massive - and yet seemingly quite intimate as well in terms of the audience communities that gathered; and also that sense of a physiology of the festival as an organic, emerging experience. So these concepts of porosity or permeability were again experienced by this idea that you would start to read and reflect on works from the festival through one another - a sense of dynamic connections starting to form that suggested energetic architectures of references. This could happen in quite funny and unexpected ways, like seeing Rajni Shah's slow transformation during her work

Dinner With America, and then seeing her within the collaged, frenetic cut-up pictures of Forced Entertainment's work *Void Story*. The rupturing was always the energetic precariousness of these as being always partial, liable to be undermined by another work.

R: Energetic is a really great word for it, and it's interesting to hear you start to talk about structure. Spilling, but at the same time with this potential for a build.

R/S: SPILL 2009 was curated around notions of agency. How did this signposting play out for you, and to what extent? Did it impact upon your responses?

K: Yes. I know the idea of agency was very specific to SPILL 2009 but I think it was also there in the inaugural 2007 SPILL too, because it was spearheaded as something artist led - which in itself speaks of agency - as well as a connection with audience in ways that imply immediacy, momentum, urgency and by implication a politic.

With SPILL 2009 agency was very clearly present across the curated programme, but also in the different levels and scales the festival manifested in. It was very clear in that there was a platform for emerging artists, and a strong message of their significance within the festival; and equally in that many of the other more established works in SPILL just aren't normally seen in the UK - like Romeo Castellucci's giant trilogy (which was received in so many different ways). There was a sumptuous realisation that it was happening, that it wasn't being compromised, and that it was just standing there for us to engage with and deal with, which was really quite astonishing. That in itself was facilitating a very specific kind of questioning around what agency might be, and what it might mean for a maker at that scale or level.

Equally, encountering the exquisite gold bodied, Butoh slowness and unravelling intimacy of Carla Esperanza Tommasini's solo work *Tears of Eros* in a dark careful space in Shunt. I know not everyone might describe that space as careful, but for me that's what the fabric of the space was that night - it was careful as to how her body moved through it. In relation to agency then, all of this activity gives a very clear sense of something splendid being allowed to emerge in how we might think of performance.

R: Obviously some of the younger artists in SPILL, say at the National Platform, have now shown work in a peer-led festival context alongside Castellucci, Fabre etc. I never had that experience in my own practice until I created SPILL, so it's a very clear example of creating a context that can be aspirational. I'm interested in the ways we as artists might stand shoulder-to-shoulder with shared purpose, and wonder what your thoughts are on that?

K: Shoulder-to-shoulder is really important, because it's precarious to make work; it's precarious all the time and this never ends. In a way you're hoping to fling yourself onto precariousness no matter what - and often you might not want to, but the skill and the verve and the momentum of the flinging is bolstered by that sense of coalition you talk about. Guillermo Gómez-Peña has talked in the past about nomadic, tribal gatherings of artists, where there's never a set shape of who comes together across the many geographical locations we work in, but there is a temporal sense of community. It's about support, but also change - and again, agency.

R/S: Before the festival we discussed the possibility of dissecting the 'connective tissue' of the curated programme. Did this happen for you? Is there blood on those hands?

K: It's a good metaphor to use - connective tissue is that which links, bridges and fills within the body, around the vital organs, the inbetween spaces. It



Ron Athey

suggests the vitality of asking:

How can I keep rethinking my making; or my programming? How am I as an audience member? And what is my engagement here with this live event?

What you often hope for, as a maker, is that you create something that has a residue, some duration or legacy. For me it's also a sense of textures: the festival created a kind of ground that meant different things came into stark focus at different times. So the connective tissue is perhaps potential - to be surprised, to be astonished, to have the opportunity for astonishment.

S: At the time of the festival you made some fantastic connections around animals. There were the attack dogs at the beginning of Castellucci's 'Inferno' and the horse that got splashed with red paint in the same piece. Is that a thread of thought that's still live for you?

K: That work really confused people so much, then to add another species in, to add two other species in, it sets up something very ambiguous and strange within a theatre. So what we could possibly talk about as an ethic here was suddenly up for grabs. And not just this particular piece by this particular practitioner, but across every level of the festival, across this whole politics of theatre:

What are we doing here? What are we watching and why? What are we seeing? What kind of mechanisms of viewing would we like to hide behind or use right now? And what are the reference points?

Nick Ridout spoke about this beautifully in relation to another work by Castellucci that he saw in Italy during which flickers of re-presentation and presentation seemed to become confused, and there was a sense of "I don't actually know what I'm seeing right now because reference points and consequently perception has been so confused". In Castellucci's *Inferno* I don't think our perception was being played off in terms of vision, it was being played with in terms of ethics and politics - that's what made the work very exciting, but also troubling. And I was interested in imaging the scene backstage and all that was happening there; with those dogs who were so shocking in their ability to behave in such a vicious way, but then a mere whistle and they were gone; and that horse...

R: There's a cute story about that: the Barbican did a fantastic job of ensuring care around the way the work was presented, and there wasn't just one horse backstage, there were two - so the performing horse wouldn't be lonely. The scale and complexity of that work backstage is really incredible, because it's truly huge.

There's something else interesting around this notion of ethics that I want to extend here around consent. There were a number of children under the age of 3 involved in that piece, playing in a one-way mirrored box so that we (the audience) could see them but they weren't aware of us. I wonder to what extent this question of consent plays itself out around the roles of the dogs and horses for you?

K: Well I should qualify this a bit: when I'm talking about the ethics of using the dogs and the horse I don't mean something as simple as asking is it alright to work with non human animals within theatre and the attendant implications of power. Rather I'm trying to suggest something that's more of a provocation, a tearing at the fabric of theatre, which we might think of as an ethics of theatre. However, watching the children was interesting because in some ways that of course seemed more troubling. Yet it was very obvious what was being set up - the back stage was actually on stage, the mechanisms were very clear, and the precautions or possibilities to set up these framings were literally made transparent.



Inferno by Romeo Castellucci photo: Luca Del Pia

R/S: You've worked extensively across species in your own work, from leeches, to your very well known work with pigs, and your current work with spiders. I wonder if this sort of conversation then - obviously in a SPILL context here - is something ongoing for you, or if it's more latent than that in terms of a decision making process?

K: It's certainly ongoing in terms of frameworks - the tensions of how I might think about and work through issues of representation and re-presentation, within the context of an artwork that is conducting an exchange with an audience; and the power chains inherent in using the body as the specific focus for those questions, specifically the slipperiness of the body's cultural significations; and also in terms of an ongoing questioning of the relationship between human animal and non-human animal species, within and without art making cultures. These issues are being rigorously explored in the field of animal studies, which is a fantastically multi-disciplinary area contributed to by scientists, social scientists, geographers, historians, theologians, cultural theorists and so on - with discourses coming together enabling a fruitful destabilisation of disciplinary fields, the upshot being the enabling of some really important conversations.

R: Relativities

K: Yeah exactly. And what becomes really compelling is when these conversations become extended in a variety directions - when conversations emerging within animal studies are being teased out in utterly other contexts by other means: for example in the theatrical event of a work like *Inferno* that then has terrific import. It quite literally fleshes out what those conversations and discourses can be, that they don't exclusively occur in academia or even within language - they can be non-verbal, performative, sensory, they occur through image making, action in time and space, working with event, performances, film...



Mem Morrison in *Ringside* photo: Dan Burn-Forti

R/S: Through your own inquisitiveness you're very open to the possibilities of these researches happening in lots of different spaces. In your opinion are the arts considered as viable a manoeuvre by people active in other spaces such as science and biomedical territories, or is the area still marginalised?

K: I've certainly begun to get more invitations to talk about my art works from animal studies groups and other interdisciplinary research groups. And I know they don't want me to stand there and talk theory because they know it much better than I do. They get excited when I talk about art works that suggest another type of possibility or situation that can contribute or facilitate reflection. So from my perspective, yes there is a warm welcome to artistic discourse opening up and contributing to other fields.

R/S: That's very significant. Similarly we're interested to ask you whether you think those connections can be made around magick?

R: I'm interested because SPILL is evidenced through a mass collective will to affect change. In broad terms the SPILL initiative has already garnered widespread international peer support, and audiences have plainly voted with their feet to attend events that aren't otherwise happening. So SPILL is vibrating on a number of registers, and for me one of those is magickal. *Visions of Excess* has a stated hypertext of Bataille's work around it, but perhaps also references the work of Austin Osman Spare. We made the SPILL Tarot pack, and we're going to talk about the SPILL Salons in a while. Did any of that 'connective tissue' focus on magick?

K: Yes, absolutely. I think it was Diana Granger-Taylor (professional Tarot reader and activator of the SPILL Tarot deck) that spoke of the Minor Arcana being the connective tissue of the Tarot. She pointed out that you can't fully read Tarot without the Minor Arcana, and it's full range of synaptic possibilities.

I spoke with *Visions of Excess* curators Lee Adams and Ron Athey a few days after its 12 hour long SPILL manifestation. We talked about the potential for and real occurrence of transformation, whereby you set up a series of events - in this case art works - that can facilitate actual transformation for an audience. The audience become part of that inherent operation, there's no separation. So whatever is happening within that space is all part of the mix. I think that's a remarkable and important quality with *Visions of Excess*. Again it's that sense of things renewing / remaking - how you see things alongside and through each other, kaleidoscopic, that also enables the transformative.

Magick is of the senses isn't it: and ritual, an operation of theatre, of change. There's a very palpable sense of what that can be through shared experience, and what transformation might - and does - occur.

R/S: You convened weekly SPILL Salons throughout the festival - free to attend afternoon conversations above a gay bar in Soho. How did you decide their focus: Sex in Performance, Feasts, and Shuffle?

K: Well, to a great extent the Salon's focuses emerged from conversations with you, and my thinking was to allow less obvious connections to be made with what could be viewed as themes running through SPILL. Of course these might already be clear to some audience members - and others may disagree

- so it wasn't trying to set up a prescribed reading of the festival, its intentions or through-lines. More, it was concerned with inviting a lavishness of disparate but meaningful tangential reference points or mappings. Ron Athey spoke about the salon as a space where unrehearsed ideas could be presented, that the salon is different from a symposium in which we present rehearsed and known to us ideas; so within the salon there can be more of a thinking out loud, of an unfolding. I wanted a space that we could be quite protective of in order for that to happen. And of course a salon has all of its histories of the literary salon - the idea of mingling and the cross fertilisation of ideas. So the SPILL Salons were an opportunity for crossings to happen, for people to encounter each other, and form their own knots and points of cross over. They worked very successfully and at times, powerfully. They were strange beasts amidst this much larger event that delivered some fantastic discussions, which carried on post-salon as people clustered and continued - *'have them, they're yours, you've made them happen, not somebody else'*.

R: I think the Salons were absolutely contingent on you outlining your role as one of facilitation, but you did also drop some key elements into the room each time... Can you share how those territories crystallised?

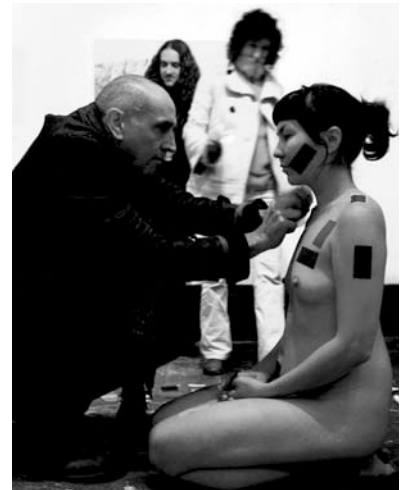
K: Each week I invited 3 specific people to be the kernel of each salon, all of whom are experts in their respective fields. For example, I thought it was valuable to have Ron Athey present as there was going to be a *Visions of Excess* in SPILL. So I discussed with Ron about what a salon might be, and because it is very much part of his work and his research he suggested Sex in Performance, which was fantastic. And it was always intended that the Salons were very open, and so anyone could talk.

R: Really interestingly all of the Salons were absolutely rammed; people were literally squashed up hugger-mugger, with folk standing at the back each time. There were very high attendances from makers, there were students, and people who had just read about them on the website. But in the main they were makers. And it was very exciting to me that this mix of people hadn't come together around specific focussed conversations like that before. Was that your intention? Was that what you'd hoped?

K: Yes. What I wanted was for people to come along and have meaty discussions that then broke up into smaller conversations; that people might meet folk they'd not met before, and continue new conversations beyond what each salon was doing. With the Sex in Performance Salon, it felt important to open up a space that's outside of academia, that's not part of a "lets box this in and analyse it and reference it" culture. It had to be makers talking and less about being on the outside looking in. The Salons were held in the same upstairs room of a bar in Soho, which was ideal because it invited the idea that they were operating in a social sphere as well.

R: And it's called The Edge.

K: It's called The Edge! From my perspective it's really vital to recognise the social as a situation where powerful and informal exchange and discourse can occur. The Feast Salon was also important; because of course it was a wonderful opportunity to foreground the tradition of the SPILL Feasts, but again to facilitate discussion in much broader terms, or to suggest other relevancies. And that's really what the Salons were trying to do: create a spaciousness around these ideas, so that everyone who came along felt included; be that someone like Professor Martin Jones, who's a learned scholar on feasting across the centuries, or a first year undergraduate who's tiptoeing along through curiosity. What's important is that they feel equally entitled and



Sarah Popowa photo: Gregory Scott-Gurner

invested to engage.

R/S: You invited a complexities scientist, an archaeologist, a professional Tarot reader, a range of international artists and a young festival volunteer to activate public conversations at the salons. Was this a deliberate tactic to wrangle critique away from a more usual spread of commentators for live work?

K: Well I don't know if it was to wrangle anything away from the usual commentators, but certainly to add to the mix as I think that's juicier. The people who do actively critique are obviously important but I want to broaden the knowledge base. It has something to do with how we receive knowledge(s) through what we read and see, and a salon can perhaps allow another sense of knowledge development and participation. This also relates to the SPILL Feasts, which create a social situation and a sharing of food to function around a festival in a way where people are able to critique whilst simultaneously being part of a dynamic process together.

R/S: We want to ask about the Shuffle Salon. Perhaps the topic is less decipherable than the other Salon themes in the first instance?

K: Yes, I appreciate that completely. Shuffle was a reference to the SPILL Tarot deck, and a reference to the expanse of the festival programme - going back to the idea of reading works through other works, and that any one audience member's pathway through the festival might be very different to anyone else's. So there are multiple variations (or shuffling) of works one might see, making different connections, all equally valid and equally dynamic. I also wanted to acknowledge what else was happening for people in their lives - what crap TV they'd seen, what was happening in their personal life; just as artworks don't exist in isolation from each other, neither does a festival or its components. So how might we talk about that complexity? How do we even begin to express something that feels very abstract but is also very ordinary, very concrete, fundamental and lived?

I was also referencing the SPILL Tarot as a possibility of breaking down canons and hierarchies - or at very least questioning them. The artists chosen for the SPILL Tarot were one set of artists; another time it could have been another selection. The SPILL Tarot wasn't saying 'here is a definitive list'. That its form is a deck of cards that can be shuffled and tell many, many different stories further demonstrates that.

This also relates to the Future Classic exhibition from the previous SPILL (*a participatory, audience-submitted map of influences: see the cover of this book*), the idea of lineages, and stories of how culturally we got to now - which might be because of some great artwork, or an amazing record, a TV programme, a political movement etc. And I remember Robert when you introduced the idea of Future Classic you talked about folklore. I really like your use of 'folk' as a valid term relating to receiving knowledge and participating in it within the social and lived dimension of our lives.

So the Shuffle Salon was a way of trying to think about these lineages and narratives and stories and their combinations. Therefore it was delightful to invite along Sylvia Nagle, a complexities scientist, someone who thinks about patterns and shifts and chaos, someone who was saying: 'Ok, we've got this ever increasing field of molecular biology that's been concerned with refining and focusing on specific molecular biological mechanisms, generating huge amounts of data - how now do we begin to comprehend the implications of this and draw forth understanding and useful conclusions? How do I understand these specifics combined and holistically, with sensitivity, with appropriateness? And how might we utilise that?'



Aftermaths by Julia Bardsley photo: Simon Annand

R/S: How conscious was the decision not to document the salons?

K: It was very conscious. The initial reason was that when we held the Sex in Performance Salon it seemed inappropriate to have a camera there, with its intrinsic voyeuristic connotations. The salon was a realm of participation. And of course the salons were public events, and so able to be spoken about later, disseminated through anecdote and further discussion. It seemed more congruent to be vital and in the moment, so people could be candid, because we were talking about real sex in real performance, not pretend sex and pretend performance!

R: As you know Kira, the SPILL National Platform is very precious to me, and I am hugely committed to using the festival as a way to promote the work of younger artists alongside established players. You were the host of the National Platform weekend at the National Theatre Studio (where we presented the work of 20 artists selected from almost 300 submissions to a nationwide call out). How was that weekend event for you?

K: Amazing. I felt really passionately about the platform and it being situated within a major festival, in London. The attendance and audiences were remarkable, not just in terms of turn out but also who was there: so many makers and producers and international presenters. I've never seen an audience quite like it for a platform event anywhere before. It was astonishing. The platform ran over a Saturday and Sunday, then on the Monday there was a feedback session, which again was brilliantly attended.

It's always hard as an emerging artist to know quite what the outcomes of a platform showing might be. Perhaps it's your first time of putting on work in any kind of situation outside your usual group or peer network; and a platform is generally going to be running on a pretty fast schedule with limited resources. So it was incredible what those artists managed to show, and the variety of work we encountered.



There was a lot of humour and lightness over the weekend, but there was also some real gut wrenching moments, like Sohail Khan's work *Stress Position*. This very sparse piece presented Sohail in a deeply uncomfortable and actual stress position that we witnessed as we filed past him. The work utilises interrogation techniques and raised the real problematics around what's sanctioned and what's not sanctioned in our post 9-11 cultures. And perhaps because of this it was one of those pieces that was surprisingly and usefully uncomfortable for us as audience at a performance platform, where there's perhaps already expectations of seeing work that deals with performance art histories of duration and physical endurance. His work questioned our ethic as witnesses on these complex registers.

Natasha Davis presented *Rupture*, a delicate piece in a more traditional, theatrical framework that involved a text she had written, and a series of actions carefully composed using a number of props that included her own uterus. Natasha worked at Arts Council England for many years, where she championed contemporary performance, so she's both conversant and sophisticated around art works. But still this was her first time performing her own work, quite another thing altogether.

R/S: It was interesting that as well as Sohail various makers were *silently* in service to their ideas across the weekend. There was Amanda Couch in her amazing *Dust Passing* installation - viewed initially through a peephole and



Inferno by Romeo Castellucci photo: Luca Del Pia

then up close - and Sarah Popowa's *Stick Piece*. And there was definitely a change in the room around Sarah's work - what did you think about that?

K: I remember finding Sarah's work fascinating because it became about what the audience was doing and how they felt about each other's actions: what was permissible, what wasn't, and what was being called into question. She had a wonderful stillness within the piece, and as people placed stickers on her naked body the work underwent many shifts around where or what was the focus.

R: Some people were really upset by other audience members in *Stick Piece*, and I encountered a couple of people outside the room, one in tears and one very angry about how they perceived people were engaging with the work. So where subject and object sat within that work was very complicated. There was also the opposite of these silent presences - noisy work!

K: Yes! We had Rasp Thorne trying to trigger something in the air - and in us - in his work *Blinded Descention*, creating mashed up provocations and invocations. And for an artist like Rasp, who comes from a rock and roll background and has a DIY punk ethic, there's a real visceral vitality to these live provocations.

And there was the gorgeous *Long Winded in Five Parts* by Other Other Other, who worked with sound in a very visual low-fi mode with balloons. This was wonderfully sculptural, very sophisticated sound work. It would have sat beautifully in a sound art festival, but here it was in the platform - and so again we encounter the idea of 'shuffle' - what sits with what and what will you see next? It's another layer of provocation.

R/S: You were also drawing some parallels between Rasp Thorne's work and that of SPILL commissioned artist Julia Bardsley?

K: Yes. Even though these are really quite different works - not least in terms of scale - I think there was something similar going on. Julia Bardsley is a very important contemporary maker in the UK, with incredible experience and sophistication. She's continuously trying to find new ground - or dissolve old ground - to make on and with.

Julia's made 3 connected pieces of work as a *Divine Trilogy*, and her SPILL Commission *Aftermaths - A Tear in the Meat of Vision* was the final instalment. I think in a lot of ways she was trying to do something that seems like it should be obvious but is actually very hard to engineer: questioning what we are as audience, what we're doing together as audience, and the possible energies that sense of connected experience can potentially produce. This is what I think Rasp was doing too, albeit very differently. Like in a live music or club situation where there is a sense of being one body, or a unity that's quite palpable and thrilling. Julia is an architect of scenarios where the audience is integral to the work and it's vision - rather than "we'll open the door and let them in now" the audience is factored in from the get-go when she's conceiving works. Each of her trilogy pieces is specifically engineered to position us, to heighten and energise our experience in relation to her actions and images.

Aftermaths worked with spectacle and allowed a dark, strangeness and humour - Julia created phenomenal strange trans-species mutating hybrid possibilities of bodies. She has a very strong visual sensibility that expends into costume - as sculptural bodily prosthetics - and at the same time she manages to tug at your guts, just as you might experience in a live music situation with a beat that is somewhere deep down inside you, viscerally pulling at your organs. This is fascinating as again we see an artist hurling themselves at that precariousness, trying to organise those vibrational frequencies



into some kind of collective order. It's just remarkable to experience that within the festival, of something that was really trying to work an edge, or engineer what an edge might be.

R: It was a really important commission to me. In the first SPILL Festival we presented *Trans:Acts*, the first part of Julia's trilogy. Members of Pacitti Company had seen it on tour in Belgium but we'd never seen her work in the UK, so there was definitely something about being in service through presenting this incredible vision. It's also important to accept that Julia's work can be confusing or baffling at first, because it's so dense and because she has such an amazing brain; so my decision to commission *A Tear in the Meat of Vision* was one of absolute conviction.

R/S: The other SPILL commission of 2009 was completely different - Mem Morrison's beautiful *Ringside* work, based on Mem's experience of Turkish Weddings and presented in Shoreditch Town Hall. How did that work land with you?

K: Well I loved that work too - I had such a good time. My memories of that are so warm, and I do love a wedding. It was my ideal wedding (because I

can also hate weddings), and we got to experience the warmth and delight of all the wonderful young girls he worked with...

R: They were teenagers that volunteered

K: They were fantastic. He worked with them charmingly. And it's interesting that both of these commissioned artists - Julia and Mem - were so careful and considerate about how they positioned us, the audience, within their works. With Mem's, as soon as we got there we were treated as wedding guests, were shown to our places, and there was this lovely sense of:

"Ah, I'm expected, I am here because I'm invited!"

And it was a beautiful unfolding of actions and objects and storytelling and film - it was an utterly delightful work.

Then there was a moment when Mem performed a dance: an incredible, broken, elegant, fractured, dance that I could have watched forever.

Ringside seemed to pivot on this moment. It became the centre around which everything else rotated, and you realised that what he had set up was delicate, loving, and with tremendous warmth and affection, but that it also has this fundamentally important and slightly off-kilter base.

R: I would use the word 'exposure'. I think there's a moment of genuine exposure in that dance.

K: Yes. And it's incredible to see a piece of work so delicately crafted that it shares that level of affection.

R/S: SPILL Festival of Performance is an initiative of Pacitti Company to force change in the UK cultural landscape - trying to make things better through being in service to other practitioners and audiences. What do you think the implications of the festival being artist-led are?

K: Being artist-led sets up very different internal relationships with all the people you work and collaborate with from the start. There's a sense that, every step of the way, what artists need and how they're facilitated is understood. Because SPILL constantly explores how we can engender a sense of coalition - or as you say Robert "stand shoulder-to-shoulder" - it creates a very different set of perceptions around the festival, both internally and externally. I also think this is somewhat difficult because there's an ideal at stake (and it's absolutely impossible to be everything to everyone, not least because there are issues of finance and limitations to resources).

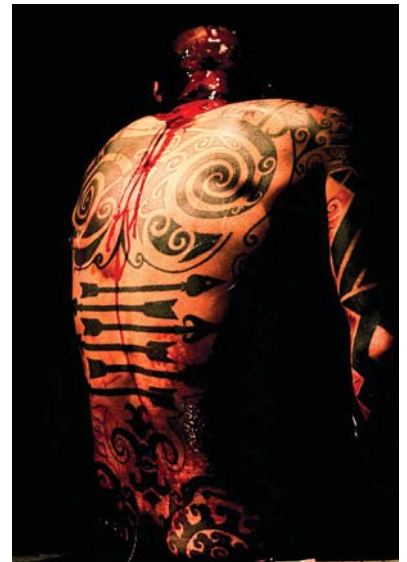
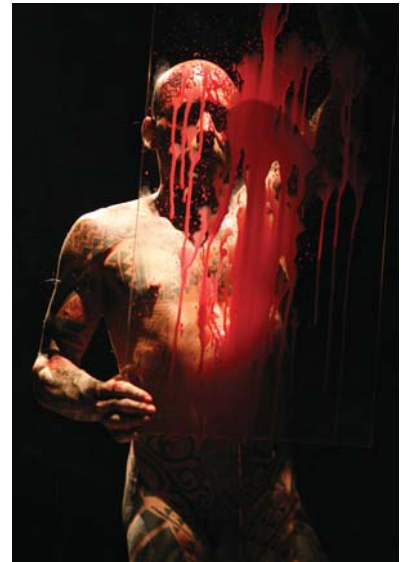
R/S: And finally Kira, we'd like to ask you about risk. Is this loaded term useful in relation to SPILL?

K: Yes, I think it is. I'm always a little shy of using the word risk as it can easily be misinterpreted and is certainly over used in Live Art discourse. But I think in relation to SPILL it means trying to agitate and risk vision. The festival dares to position change: not through the economies of institutions and power, but by being artist-led and offering a re-shuffle of cultural landscapes. SPILL is most definitely a provocateur and so, whether we like it or not (but I think we do), that inherently invites risk.

(Laughter)

(Coffee)

(Cake)



Ron Athey at *Visions of Excess* photo: Richard J Anderson
Ron Athey at *Visions of Excess* photo: Regis Hertrich