

*The following texts were originally created during the 2015 SPILL WRITING programme, facilitated by Diana Damian Martin. The texts shared here are extracted from larger bodies of writing made during the festival. They have been selected for inclusion here by SPILL Festival in 2021. Thanks to Diana and all contributing writers.*

## SPILL WRITING 2015

SPILL Writing in 2015 took that year's festival theme of *Spirit*, and its works, as a provocation to reflect on the potential of radical artists to help us think about new ways of being, and being better, together. It was led by SPILL Writer in Residence Diana Damian-Martin.

Diana was joined by five exceptional new writers, selected following an open call-out, who engaged, responded and developed their practice throughout the festival. The writers were Jonathan Boddam-Whetham, Laura Burns, Anna Mortimer, Natalie Raven, and Carolyn Roy.

**30 October 2015**

### SPILL GEIST: TRICK OR TREAT

**By Diana Damian Martin**

Fall is turning to winter, though the colourful decay of leaves are still the city's connective tissue. Some trees stand barren and stoic, others shape-shifting.

This is a time when the city changes its pace, where duration is marked in these brief encounters with the natural.

You can't ignore the movements that invade the urban landscape (some refuse to, though, don't they), the rain, the wind, the floating leaves; or the bodies that gather around these, in poetic repetitions.

At this time, a festival becomes a different kind of intervention, embodied and aesthetic; thresholds open up, we tiptoe around presence and disappearance, and encounter the physical, spiritual, secular and contemporary.

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I think of Spill as an essay that constantly writes itself. I think of Adorno's meditation of the essay as a 'speculative investigation of specific, culturally predetermined objects'. Luck and play are essential aspects of the essay (are they not of any art?), he tells us, that 'mirrors what is loved and hated'.

The essay (the festival?) presents but also holds in suspense. The festival is a temperature check, the essay is diagnostic.

As we near All Hallows Eve, as those spaces between begin to open, we begin with ritual, with constructing a contemporary folklore, with dismissing art histories for understanding its presence and shape now.

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What is ritual, in our secular age?

Well let's begin with a folk glossary, what is ritual for you?

[I think, will we speak of representation, catharsis, intimacy, being in between, reclaiming, delineating, I think, what traces are we leaving now, I think, how easy it is for ritual to be taken away, I think, ritual as a space of demarcation.]

And we say:

The ritual as ceremony

As transcendence (some disagree)

As collective

As experience

As repetition

As breakage

As necessity

As marking

As agency

As breaking

As knowledge

As autonomy

As 'the moment when words stop'.

[I think, are we creating a contemporary mythology, I think, what gets recognised as ritual and by who, I think, are we the poets of now and is ritual our language, I think, can ritual resist spectacle, I think, is ritual a process, an event, a regime, I think, all in good time.]

And we say:

Some of us have problems with ritual as transcendence

Others think catharsis is significant

Some of us tie this to our own Christian upbringing

Some of us think, ritual is devoid of religion but not of spirituality

Others think ritual seems to be a paradigm of live art  
Others think, so many values tied to this form of delineation.  
Some of think, ritual is mundane, everyday  
Others think, no, it's marked, it's sacrificial  
Some speak of the figure of the scapegoat  
Whilst others ponder in silence.

And we ask:

What do we have to fight to claim ritual  
What is the journey of identity in ritual  
What is ritual in relation to narrative  
What is ritual in relation to repetition  
What is ritual as a journey of resistance  
What is ritual as something that does not end?

And we end with thinking about spaces that are open, that linger there.

[I think, stone tape theory, the impulses inscribed into spaces, the narratives that accumulate, and how we can learn to listen.]

**6 November 2015**

## **SPILL SPIRITS: KAREN FINLEY (WRITTEN IN SAND)**

**By Diana Damian Martin**

'And after they've died, there is something in me that dies. Something is always lost. I have something more in common with the other side than this side.'

Karen Finley, 'Departure' (Shock Treatment)

Karen Finley's writing is so fiery, so full of spirit that it haunts you; it emerges through her voice, peppered in the room, words thrown out of the body, swallowed and caressed: a staging of lives now gone (and a reminder, that time washes over so quickly, that scales of loss are forgotten).

Some incredible memories were written in sand that night; the witness to one of Freddie Mercury's last concerts, to Finley's ICA performance (you are amazing, you are incredible). The stories in-between that cut through, that kept us in balance – Finley as hostess, shifting between the uncomfortable, the dead, the lost, and the now. The memories between poetic interludes, the dying once, and again and again.

And as I heard these prayers, I thought of Ginsberg, I thought of howls, of odes coming from the stomach, of history and the ways in which Finley's language is

embedded with affect and anger, with loss and confrontation. It travels in suburban homes, greeting politicians, greeting artists, remembering friends, chasing ghosts.

‘Tell me’, she says, ‘what to say when I visit and my sick friend says, When am I going to get better?, And all I can say is, If we could make you better we would’. This rhetoric of address (though how delicately these words stage the same act in Shock Treatment)

As I walked past Ribbon Gate, this temporary memorial of gentle remembrance, I thought about generational gaps, about histories of victims and those of victors, and about language as a mode of imprint.

Ageing plays a part here too, because there is space made for it to come to visibility. I thought of the evocative nature of Finley’s performance texts, of the ways in which the artist becomes medium, of the vantage point from which she speaks, and the landscapes and lives she recalls in-between. It washes over you, through you, you receive them all, body to bodies.

An address to a room of generations whose relationships to conflict, to oppression, to loss and illness are different, but brought together by these prayers (beats in time, language sculptures). In the nuances of the voice, the ways in which the body carries these messages, there’s an invocation at play, one that bridges and marks time simultaneously.

Finley is more than a guardian or historian here; she invokes these stories mapped onto streets and living rooms, cafes and gigs and bars, and it all smells differently, embedded in a different culture, American flags and dreams and lovers who grieve. Patriarchies, families that forget, the homeless and the poor, the sick and the forgotten- they appear in Finley’s texts, they march through her body, passing through the gentle rhythms of the piano, punctured by occasional sound effects, by sentences that jar to give us pause.

Of course, we know of Finley not only through these psychic portraits, not only in speaking about scarred bodies and death, and grieving and not fitting in, and family and forgetting. We know of Finley as the artist who battled representation and morality; we know of Finley as one of the NEA Four (National Endowment for the Arts), whose funding was withdrawn following accusations of obscene representations (and the battle still continues). And of course, Finley was also censored in the UK – in her own words, because ‘it’s ridiculous, women can’t take their clothes off and speak at the same time.’

In an interview with Richard Schechner (The Drama Review, 1988), Finley speaks of her work as being part of a tradition (mentioning both The San Francisco Art Institute and New York as a place for artistic communities). She cites Truman Capote, Uta Hagen, Tennessee Williams, Johanna Went and the Butthole Surfers. She speaks

about automatic writing, about affect and her own relationship to text, about working from the gut. And in moving from rock to literature, performance to theatre, material to voice, she sediments histories of others peppered with intimacy and domesticity, a gentle longing that builds over time.

All these references become embodied in her performance, which sustains an engagement between narrative and voice. There are many frames brought into play: the musician (Paul Nebenahl) and her relationship to him (pick it up, she says), the sand laid out on the floor, the burning candles, the chair downstage; it's an intimate, domestic, but also public space that's created. It's a space that recalls, but also asks, what next in the process of remembrance?

What was written in sand, that night: poetic testaments, odes of remembrance.

**6 November 2015**

## **SPILL STAINS: RECALL**

by **Anna Mortimer**

On the surface, Hartley's Recall explores recollection and the re-writing of memories. It becomes apparent that something is slightly awry in this performance, for the spotlight is on you. The tables have been turned and the audience is the performer and the artist is not present in the space.

Hartley appears to me on a television screen, an evocation of a classic sculpture, a bust against a dark background; all I see are her head and shoulders. She is a mediated presence through a live video link. She tells me that she cannot see me (it is an odd concept to grasp when the atmosphere feels so intimate). As she poses her questions and slowly asks me to recall a memory, the feeling that she is able to see me intensifies; her gaze seems to be fixed on mine and it is hard to look away.

It is evident that although I am the author of this piece she is the director. Her instructions are quietly emphatic and I know that she knows I will do as she says. She is the one in control and now that she holds my memory in her hands, the sense of exposure and vulnerability is acute. At the end of the session, and indeed a session with a therapist is what it seems to have become, she holds up a token, a gift.

There are many layers to this work, with its weight and gravitas dealing as it does with the minefield of potential trauma and difficult memories in our personal and shared history. The work asks for dis-ease, to sit with psychic discomfort, to be vulnerable and honest. Hartley asks us to trust her, she shares in this act of endurance, this act of excavation. A palimpsest of uncovering and recovering.

Of writing, re-writing and erasure.

Of undoing and repair.  
Of quiet action.

There are also the peculiar echoes of a society under surveillance considered here too suggested by the presence of the video screen. Who is watching who? What is going to happen to the information that Hartley is gathering here? What is my identity if my memories are changed?

One click...is someone watching me?  
One click... record...no erasure here.  
One click...the brainwashing is complete.

I remember encountering Hartley's work in Ipswich, and think of its refinement since then. The finer points of the performance have been worked on and the details more carefully thought through. There is evidence that Hartley's mentor Sarah Jane Norman has lent a hand here. Norman also makes works that are visually stripped back and intricately detailed; both artists explore marginality, memory and trauma and play with the both the real and imagined boundaries between audience and performer.

This finer working of the piece adds to its sophistication and a real sense that I am indeed the performer, which leaves a peculiar, unsettled feeling in the stomach. The visual content of the work is pared back and minimal, leaving more space for thought particularly afterwards. There is nothing extraneous to distract here.

As I place my box with its cats pictured on the lid, my parting gift, I am left with a sense of the uncanny, those cats so similar to my childhood pets and those I have at home...how did she know?

**8 November 2015**

## **SPILL SPIRITS: CASSILS**

### **(INEXTINGUISHABLE FIRE) - A PROLOGUE**

**By Diana Damian Martin**

In anticipation of fire and the construction of the image and its reverberations from the National Theatre.

In the echoes of all the works we've encountered around historical trauma and representation, the narratives that have been buried, the skeletons left behind, the legislation of victors and the distance of the witnesses.

In the echoes of public spaces of protest, of consumption and appropriation of iconographies, of symbols we do not see or read. In the echoes of discussions on the urban landscape, on energies and the importance of recognising processes and shifts, on identity and its representation. In the echoes of memories we reconstruct, of those we hear distorted, of histories we have forgotten and relics we walk over. To thinking of labour and participation, and art as a space to consider contemporary citizenship and liberty.

If self-immolation as a practice is connected to a history of resilience, of no choice, of a physical process that marks and destroys the body, then we anticipate this ritual, taking place at the National Theatre, not only as a proposition about how we construct empathy and its social and political significance, but also a meditation on recognition, on canonisation and the relationship between ideology, representation and history.

Given their training both as a painter and as an artist working with performance, Cassils' work is characterised by a particular formalism, an engagement with the sculptural that maintains an aesthetic rigour and a conceptual dimension that ignites such complex discourses on the work itself.

Speaking to Cassils about *Inextinguishable Fire* unleashed a conversation around the politics of visibility, around what mechanisms and structures legitimate our reading of and relationship to the image and its experience, and on the poetics of attempting the impossible. We speak of Harun Farocki's film of the same title as a politicised engagement with processes of mass destruction, and they tell me that the shift is not from the cigarette Farocki lights on his arm to the fire that will take over their body tonight, but [a consideration of those politics of visibility now](#).

There is a strong engagement with historical representation: Cassils mentions Picasso's *Guernica* and the work of Michael Asher, and we speak of the histories of self-immolation, but also the recent events that have marked US politics (Ferguson or Baltimore, to name just a few), the reverberations with wider political shifts, from ISIS through to the recent movement of migrants in Europe. Silently, I think of the (now over) thirty burning bodies at Colectiv club in Romania.

*Inextinguishable Fire* is a diptych, unfolding live in front of an audience in the National Theatre, and through a film screening. This navigating between the theatre as a space to deconstruct such modes of representation and embodied construction of the image (Cassils worked with a professional stunt team who are highly involved in the live act), and the cinematic to foreground the constant shift in frame (Cassils speaks of the foley sound for the film as well as the use of slow-motion) plays with temporality and our relationships to bodies and the abstraction of trauma. It's perhaps telling that the trailer for the work itself attempts a brief confrontation that doesn't try and hide the process of its constitution; there's the visual fascination, the

desire of the gaze, but also the reminder of the context, of the humanity of the body taking part, the idea of a body consuming and being consumed, and the reality of the danger.

I want to emphasize this here because the reality of the danger is occurring in a particular space – the National Theatre – and the implications of this are significant. This act asks questions about the institutional relationships and cultural boundaries in which experiences and images are reproduced and disseminated, drawing links between their mediatisation and their political implications.

Cassils's practice engages with issues of representation through both identity – trans as a destabilising force, a political position that offers lack of fixity – and an aesthetics of transformation. In *Inextinguishable Fire*, Cassils moves beyond the body as site of subjectivity to invite questioning of our understanding of the image, and of ways in which we negotiate distance, privilege and engagement.

What happens when the body is ignited, unrecognisable, yet sustained just enough to reveal the mechanisms of that ignition, the resonance of the anti-spectacle, the change in context as it unfolds, marking our own processes of recognition and engagement? What can we be, in this encounter?

**9 November 2015**

## **SPILL GEIST: BREATHLESS, IMPRISONED BODIES**

**By Diana Damian Martin**

Over the past few days we have amassed memories from and onto bodies (and it's Remembrance Day, and with all its complex politics, it acts as a frame, a gesturing echo). And amongst these, we've encountered condemned bodies, imprisoned bodies, narrative and subversive bodies. And today, when we begin with bodies encased in latex and end with a burning body, we consider our own relationships to structures and frames, to mediation and engagement.

I think of the confrontation with breath in Adam Electric's *The Tomb*, the outlines of bodies in latex, sculptural and liminal (from womb to tomb). The uncomfortable encounter with this sealed, exhibited space of the other (in equal measure controlled and loose, living and dead), which both enacts and blocks affect (who are we, hearing this body and its cries, this dramaturgy of life and death and narratives of breath). The breath and voice become the poetics through which the confrontation is staged, as we consider the pause, the interruption, the being in between. This is a spectacle of struggle: in order for the vacuum to be maintained, breath needs to flow outwards and as it does, our relationship to the bodies changes.



The Tomb is both monument and sculpture; it is made by and through breath, which provides our own space of confrontation. I am confronted with suffocation (and its embodiment), with working through the body, with agency and invisibility, with these outlines that are constantly abstracted by the material, with their own howls and calls for response. (And I think of processes of life and death, of communication and shared languages).

Perhaps the voices in Dead Rat Orchestra's Tyburnia are still echoing, in their singing through and for history, breathing through history (and what a buried history this is). In dialogue with James Holcombe's beautifully evocative and politically-nuanced film (Tyburnia: A Radical History of 600 Years of Public Execution), Dead Rat Orchestra's collection of ballads and field recordings enters a duet on crime and criminalisation, political control and changing ideas around bodies and their agency. (I think of punishment and changing mentalities around oppressor and oppressed, of the erasure of the spectacle of execution, of torture and pain and their role. I think of the neoliberal as a silencing mode of governance which twists the relationships between abuser and abused).

The film (all shot on 8 and 16mm, presented in an ever-shifting triptych) presents moments in the history of the Tyburn Gallows, London's place for public execution for six hundred years stretching westwards along Edgware Road, alongside contemporary incidents of religious contestation and political protest. We are already referencing the boundary stream, the echoes of those executed (the spectacle of their cries and moans, of the public torture and shaming, silenced by time and by a changing moral, ideological compass). We wander through these historical moments and consider the loss of the voices of those who perished, of the relics that staid behind, and of how folk culture can dig these out.

Both the film and the music hold a strong relationship to materiality and the body; Holcombe's film reminds us of its qualities as we experience chemical interventions and overlaps, marking its fragility almost to the point of disappearance (Tony Blair's yellow, burning face, disappearing into itself). The poetics of the document (the sound as séance and the body and bones as relics) remerge, confronting the public spaces we now cross daily.

And for its reference to a public site erased in the 19th century, returning as a new marker of exclusivity, Tyburnia presents a politics of erasure, embodying death and punishment and erasure: in the chemical processes, the relics and skeletons, the narratives that awake in these ballads, trembling and precarious, resurrected and already fading.

Dead Rat Orchestra pepper their works with Peddlers French, underworld sounds and field recordings, creating waves of meaning; we meet executioners and martyrs, who rise up through these voices and sounds. But we also hear of religion, of more contemporary battles occurring in public space, and wander about buried histories

and relics, monuments and historical twists. There's a powerful narrative hyperbole (I think of Godspeed or Silver Mt Zion and Jem Cohen's work) that works between etchings, bodies and bones, in these ballads of now, which seem to stretch time and compress it, washing over.

The ballad of resurrection, the liminal space of the breathless body, the prosecuted body and the imprisoned body.

9 November 2015

## SPILL GEIST: FOUR MEDITATIONS ON STILLNESS AND THE BODY (AND AN EPILOGUE)

by Carolyn Roy

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Poppy Jackson, Site

First viewing. 30 October.

I caught sight of Poppy Jackson through a window as I went up the stairs. She was sat astride the apex of the building outside. I saw her from behind and from above. I felt as though I had caught her unawares. I could see the backstage workings, her safety harness with its rope, her hands grasping and releasing the concrete coping, seeking stability somewhere in a precarious pose. She seemed too close, too exposed to my gaze even as the window cut through the space between us, tracing a mesh over her body and screening out sound. My angle of view was oblique. Was it that – I felt almost a voyeur, seeing sideways through the window of a shadowy stairway where I stood unseen; almost, but not quite. She was so far away, a remote image of a woman sitting still on a coping surrounded by the formal accretion of brick, concrete, glass, ceramic, iron, slate, that makes this site, her naked flesh just another material rising to the surface to cap it all. Later, looking upwards towards her from the ground I saw other insubstantial watchers in the position I must have held, standing back in the shadows, present but not quite.

Second viewing. 30 October

Do not call it fixity. At the still point. Being still. Naked. Neither flesh nor fleshless. Neither anchored nor adrift. Neither from nor towards. Sat apart. Quite still. There the

dance is, 'the vibratile microscopy' of a barely perceptible dance, neither arrest nor movement. Where past and future are gathered. At the still point. Do not call it fixity.<sup>1</sup>

I'm considering stillness as an activist action, the act of taking and enduring a position, the meaning of which is left open to speculation by others. A stance that is neither for nor against. Though neither is it neutral. Sitting astride the apex, not supporting, not resisting, but laying bare a site of negotiation. This is not only the stillness of dance. This act of being still is a form of negotiation. To be still is to be present between stop and go, between the desire to leave and sense of arrival, between acting and sleeping, between participation and absence. Stillness calls our attention to now. Stillness opens the space of now to any sensations, memories, thoughts that might emerge and ask consideration. Stillness asks us to dwell in our presence. Stillness asks us to negotiate our humanity. Stillness does not offer a point of view but gives us a site for reflection.

I'm considering the neutrality of the naked body. Or rather I'm wondering, is it because I am a dancer so accustomed to bodies as abstract that I look at a naked female body astride a building without any sense of the significance of her gender, her sexuality, her cultural transgression? She is purely and simply present, inhabiting her site. Not that I see her as an object. I am looking beyond her subjectivity, beyond body-image, beyond corporeality to the microscopic dance that is stillness. I am purely and simply attending this act through training my own micro-perception.

I'm considering the way she touches and invites the touch of her situation. The cold abrasion of delicate flesh against raw concrete. The cold penetrating damp of the autumn day as it fades towards evening. Legs graze lightly along the line of the apex, braced against falling; pelvis thrust forward, chafing against the rough surface to facilitate balance. What kind of preparation does it take to endure such a time in such a place? Something reptilian perhaps, slowing down the metabolism to survive in response to a changing climate, barely breathing to conserve a little warmth? Or something more spiritual or transcendent? Mind over body? A meditation? What does it take to form an enduring proximate relationship with a hostile environment?

3rd viewing. 31 October.

On arrival at Toynbee Hall I had a glimpse of the space where yesterday Poppy Jackson sat astride the apex of the building. I had a sense of emptiness, of something missing. A presence felt no longer seen. A site no longer inhabited.

4th viewing. 31 October.

A leaf falls.

Where is her gaze? What does she see?

I notice her discomfort. She fidgets and tries to find poise through the residue of yesterday's endurance still present today. As she left her trace in the empty space, so the site is painfully branded on her body. Each time she recomposes her limbs to

find relief I too am unsettled. I had counted on a quiet presence, and the detached space of contemplation afforded by a remote and neutral body. All yesterday's thinking is disrupted. Mere paper words. She is no longer a still presence but more vividly here, now. These signs of suffering and her palpable desire yet unwillingness to endure, make her a person. I could place myself in her place and suffer too. This is what it takes to move me to a visceral response. A glimpse of humanity. Is it because I am a dancer?

1 A mash up from T.S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' in Four Quartets and with reference to Andre Lepecki 'Still: On the Vibratile microscopy of Dance', In: Branstetter, G. & Völckers, H. (eds.) Remembering the Body. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers. pp. 334-366.

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Sarah Jane Norman, Stone Tape Theory

No trace of a body here. Nothing physical or corporeal to house the spectral voices that trawl this dark landscape as if searching for a place of rest to carry out their final disintegration. We are witness to the last moments of their dying presence. Is this how it is, this slow and inevitable transition from being absent to being irrevocably forgot? Or will memories perpetually rise to the surface, even to the surface of Lethe.

Lethe, the river of forgetfulness carrying our drowned memories underground. Memories slowly eroded through repetition.

Elusive memories fragmenting from the moment they are made.

Telling and retelling does not fix them but wears them down.

Insensible Lethe, the river of forgetfulness running through a tomb dark space.

I am at rest here. At peace from my own memories whilst those of others crumble around me.

10 November 2015

## SPILL GEIST: ON THE SPIRIT OF RESISTANCE

By Jonathan Boddam-Whetham

Geist – Hegel's word – a phenomenological study – of Spirit or Mind.

Zeit – the 'age' – or epoch – in essence 'time' [if time has an essence?].

At Spill Festival Geist is spilling out and staining London. I think there is a struggle for recognition, a Master/Slave dialectic at work here; the City and the Transgressors.

Zeitgeist is the Spirit of the Age, what though does it mean for us here? Certainly the term has a momentum, a progression, moving towards or perhaps away from

something. But it is also definitive in that it imbues that culture with a sens [both meaning and perhaps touching the senses], but is also both present and absent. It clings to the metal monoliths of the City like a shroud.

But playing out around and under this shroud are hauntings, inexorably leaking out – rupturing the ‘spaces’, making the City unheimlich – an uncanniness that seems to be a contagion that resonates with the audiences and infects the body of the City itself. Transforming it, for a time, or perhaps in more permanent ways, the appearance of which are yet to be fully present.

Touching Silence spilled out into the evening at the end of one night. Where the fractured limbo between this world and Faerie was brought about. Otherworldly creatures, where once were formed of rock and leaf, are now formed of humanity’s detritus. A branch here, a left over glove there, a broken garden rake as a shoe. Stepping out into the City air – nothing was the same walking back through the forest of steel and glass buildings that night. The working haunted it.

Hegel says that Spirit is, in short, a mutual recognition – a common self-awareness with the other ‘person’. In a language not very Hegelian, but still very German, this is, I would argue, a Being-with [Mitsein]. Spirit is characterised by a struggle for this recognition, famously epitomised in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit in the chapter on the Master/Slave dialectic. This is a violent dialectical progression of dominance and servitude until both self and other come to an common understanding, or rather a necessary understanding; the self can only affirm its own self-awareness if it allows the other the same kind of status. We might ask whether Spill Festival itself is in this dialectical struggle with the City itself? Not a full on battle, more a spectral guerrilla warfare, an army of ghosts.

At last year’s Spill Festival in Ipswich, the theme was On Surrender. The political acts of surrender, resistance, of sacrifice bleed through all the workings. And this problematisation of servitude, dominance, and resistance carries through to On Spirit this year. What is particularly apposite is this idea of struggle and recognition. Whether through dialogues on the creation of identity, and its precarious contingency, to the artists themselves engaging in a struggle with the spaces, rupturing it like little volcanoes breaching the City’s mantel.

What if the ‘Age’ somehow captures this Spirit – dominates it – so that it just becomes a semblance? A kind of invocation. To invoke and evoke are obviously linked, in and out, and to evoke is to make all the more present, to draw into a space. Evocation is a resonance, and as Jean-Luc Nancy says, we are resonant beings. We are attuned to the world, we cannot be anything else. Just as we find ourselves happy or sad, it is the emphasis on the fact that we find ourselves already coloured by a particular mood [stimmung]; perhaps a particular Geist or semblance of one?

Just as the shaman stands between two worlds, that of the community and of the other spectral world, so to do the artists haunting the City with their workings. But the gravity of the zeitgeist, the shimmering shroud of the City, draws us away constantly trying to get us to recognise ourselves in it, its 24/7 corporatisation of life and death, [re]constructing our identity, so that we become like it, an unending line of simulacra of the same.

But there is something in-between, disrupting this procession down the avenues of glistening steel cathedrals. A haunting resonance drawing us away – do the artists themselves embody this spectrality, shamans bridging the divide? Do they not exorcise the captured semblance, this remnant, so that Spirit ruptures through the shroud? Spirit is the name for this resonance – the in-between or the with – which seems so difficult to identify.

I said that 'Age' [History?] seems to try to capture some aspect of this resonance somehow, appropriate it. In its search for Truth, that is what philosophy does, it attempts to understand in order to get to the essence of Truth. But then is this philosophy as violence; an inexorable force driving towards wisdom? Philosophy is violent.

There was a working of privilege on the last day. Perhaps too difficult to write down. But let us say that the drive for Truth and understanding can represent a certain totalitarian internal movement within philosophy itself. The relation between the political and the philosophical and what Claude Lefort calls a 'soft' totalitarianism. The search for understanding, peeling the layers away like an onion skin, or perhaps a polar bear's? A struggle for recognition for what is and what is not our selves. We must make the other like us in order to be us.

But Spirit itself is not defined by struggle, it is rather a resonance of sharing what is between us as finite beings. Beings as Heidegger says, who are mortal; it is death that individuates us [it is my death and no one else's], but contra Heidegger it is also a [co]possibility that is already shared by us as mortal beings. The recognition that I/ We die, each other's own possibility, but one shared in common.

So Spirit is both limit [mortality] but also transgression, the spacing of the with between beings. Spirit is that clinamen that is both commonality and rupture. Death is both that hole in being and is the whole of being; it is what carries sense and meaning even though it is senseless. So zeitgeist is we could say, dynamic, it is a struggle, an attempt to capture the wisp of the in-between, like a moth fluttering by the light, although as soon as we do grasp hold of it, we are just left with mottled dust tattooing our hands, and the moth behind glass, named and studied. Yet it is our shared mortality, our shared Spirit that resists this, which spills out into the City.

11 November 2015

## SPILL GEIST: ON DISTURBANCE: THE FRAME, THE SHOW, THE TRICKSTER

By Diana Damian Martin

In *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord talks about the ways in which the spectacle has integrated itself into reality to such an extent that it both describes and reconstructs it. We're no strangers to simulations, to cultures in which authenticity is shattered and displaced, in which the original is no longer fixed. We constantly reconsider the ways in which representation and reality function, and performance's relationship to social, political, cultural and personal ways of being and doing. How do we move past performance's appropriation (from the workplace to the staged spectacle) or instrumentalisation (is it in failure, in intervention, in duration?) and turn to a different way of engaging political aesthetics?

A lot of this seems to be tied to the shifts in performance's presence politically and culturally. I am thinking here of institutions and their quest to appropriate live and performance art histories into other narratives (or tag them in their programming, often with mediocre curatorial conceptualisations), thus rendering performance as a simple paradigm for art's experience, rather than a practice with its own registers, vocabularies and ideological positions; the incessant need to commodify or quantify the ephemeral; the relationship with fetishizing what is confrontational; or recontextualising provocation. There is a constant battle of framing and legitimation that sets contexts against each other, rather than marking joint areas of discourse, flagging up the relationship between performance, modes of thinking and being, political and social participation.

At the same time, to me, frames and form are modes of delineating and distinguishing; of marking an area of visibility whilst also imposing a temporary order or principle of engagement.

We often speak of resistance and subversion in terms of performance's relationship to form and reality, yet *On Spirit* has brought together a fundamental aspect: the navigating between precision and ambiguity, between context, care and framing.

Performance, when it acknowledges its dependence on a particular social or political reality, when it considers its aesthetic and somatic engagement, disturbs boundaries in such a way that it enables discourses to shift from their context. In that way, a lot of the work I've encountered over the past days has sought to reconsider the contemporary paradigm of experience, to move towards something more hidden, more urgent, harder to pinpoint.

\*

I am thinking about a series of frames.

Some are more visible than others; transparent, material, in constant movement, with ambiguous vantage points.

Some are mirrors other windows, and some distort in order to reconstruct.

Some are etched into the fabric of the everyday

And others mark their presence more aggressively.

And all of them return to us; to image and action, and the ways in which these two are inseparable.

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I am thinking about the ways in which Daniel Oliver's *Weird Séance: Incredible Interquel Spectacle!*, Katy Baird's *Workshy* and Jamal Harewood's *The Privileged* all engage with different frames of representation, working from the paradigm of participation. *Workshy* is a confrontation with labour and the very idea of artistic practice; it deliberately trades in spectacle but also in honest exchange, and tackles the relationship between the economic and the personal, cutting across expectations surrounding work and value. It is situated somewhere between actuality and fiction, between manipulation and representation, although it makes its own ideological position transparent too. It teases theatre as a place of didactic exchange, whilst also introducing economics in reflections on the act of spectatorship. Failure becomes subject matter and dramaturgical device, and notions of personal and public, value and accumulation, trading and commodity are embroiled in the same conversation, in which we are complicit.

In *Weird Séance* and *The Privileged*, a performance keeps trying to take shape, but it is destabilised from within. Across all these works, the provocation lies much more deeply with questions of positioning, responsibility and recognition – in a different way than we're used to when confronted with participation as a flippant, theatrical device that either reiterates or challenges the notion of an audience and its agency.

In their different ways, these shows destabilise the relationship between the real and the staged by making the audience complicit – somewhere between the accumulated narrative and the authentic fiction. Discomfort is not theatrical here, it is a device for problematising ways of thinking about certainty, about visibility and about the realities of choice.

In *Weird Séance*, we have to pretend to be in a fictional place that is actually a real place that has been fictionalised; there is an event that never quite takes shape, which we are complicit in reconstructing, but we are also witness to and apparent (deceptively) author of. This is a kind of post-relational play with a real band (wearing hairy suits), and leaves and branches that stand in for trees, and lots of messiness and an incredibly precise manipulation.



This creates a sense of relationality between form and content, between our complicity in this fiction and its authentic dramaturgy, creating a constant need of looking beyond, of trying to find nuance or ideology within the work itself. When it finishes, we dissipate uneasily, unsure of where we stand, and this deliberate state of confusion is contingent on our ability to both contribute to the sustaining of the fiction and dissent towards the event that it is creating, which refuses to occur at the same time. The ethical, the political and the social are irrevocably tied together; the flippancy, the fiction and the sense of pretence construct a complex framework, which we become obsessed with sensing, and which feels like it dissipates and accumulates at the same time.

Weird Séance is provocative not because of its self-critique or reflexivity, nor because of its formal play, but because of the ways in which it collapses and constantly rebuilds frames of representation. It deliberately traces and then critiques its own boundaries, prompts thinking of systems and then flippantly dismisses any ideological play, because it is all transparent and embedded at the same time.

I think of both Daniel Oliver and Jamal Harewood as the ultimate tricksters – complicit, present, guiding, authorial and somehow unaccountable within the show itself. In *The Privileged*, the trickster becomes the teaser of discourse; the artist is both author and victim, configuring a network of social and artistic orders.

*The Privileged* acknowledges its signifiers so fully (echoes of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena's *Couple in a Cage*) – the gaze, the tension, the dialectic of oppressor and oppressed, issues of race and racism, of colonial histories and embedded oppression – that it complicates the ways in which these different layers constitute cultures of agency or limitation. As a frame, it confronts us with ourselves without any ethical purity, but by inflaming a situation.

Harewood pushes the audience to go further, but in an environment deliberately laid out before us, that straddles reality and narrative, play and authenticity, as if without commitment to either. In this way, it reveals the gaps in liberal politics and problematises political and social structures that legislate or organise. This is a real history, Harewood proposes; and we are all complicit in its coming into being, and everything else is choice, and those choices are not outside any system, no matter where they are positioned.

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Participation as frame.

Participation as citizenship.

Participation as critique.

Participation as a mechanism of making visible.

Participation as flippancy.

Participation as care.

12 November 2015

## SPILL SPIRITS: ZIERLE & CARTER (TOWARDS A MATTER OF SPIRIT)

By Laura Burns

Zierle & Carter's Trilogy *The Swan Song*, *Touching Silence* and *Walking the Dawn*, delve into the shape-shifting qualities of three totem animals: Swan, Moth and Horse. Zierle & Carter respond to site, material, image, animal with a methodical combing through, a deep sifting, developing relationships with layers of dreams, stories, and the otherworlds that pass through material and body. There is a palpable concern with the self's relationship to nature, a kind of death that might be required in order to move to the collective pool of memory and re-birth, embedded in ritual and material. These journeys over time, particularly with the animals of this trilogy, manifest during performance in a responsiveness to the ways in which material carries meaning, and an ability thereafter to imbue material with new intention: a constant reciprocity, a listening-to, an attending to the immaterial through the material, remembering the body of spirit in matter.

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There is a layering, a thickness to *The Swan Song* – the first work in Zierle & Carter's trilogy. It is a density of the already-here, in part emanating from the heavy gilt ritual of the masonic temple in the Andaz Hotel of Liverpool Street, a site plastered with ritual and attention (attended-to) over time; such a concentration of consciousness requires an engagement and a listening-to, in order to meet and transform those already present energies. The density is also due to Zierle & Carter's long-term engagement with the swan and its theme of death that travels through story, mythology, symbol, archetype; these also require a sifting, so that images carry their full weight of meaning and ritual is not only aesthetic – a process Zierle & Carter are in long before, as well as during, the performance.

It is perceivable how Zierle & Carter are on their separate yet parallel journeys. Carter holds the space from his mountain throne, dramatically collapsing after almost five hours of meditative pose; while Zierle speaks with, to, from, the ice totem swan, gathering momentum and drawing tension between herself and the swan, both energetically and physically ending up tying and twisting in feathers around the swan totem. In conversation, Zierle reveals the influences and presences she experiences coming through the material during performance; one can witness them moving through her. Every movement is precise, delivered through this relationship. The second day of Swan Song brings with it a care-taking quality, this time Zierle ritually melting, washing, tending to the totem swan, while Carter goes in and out of searching and exorcising a swanlike essence.

But the artists as mediators, as conduits, make sure we dip into that pool of ritual time also; our intentions are essential for the melting pot. What do you want your last action to be, your final swan song? What would your future ancestor tell your present self? Not often are we allowed these spaces, nor do we carve them out for ourselves, and it is of course a kind of worship. If by worship we can understand that the world and its synchronicities are our way-map, should we be listening, and that spirit exists in it, not out of it; what is required is an invocation. Zierle & Carter pave the way, and like all performance, our commitment shapes the depths with which we dive. Even if we don't plunge in, we certainly witness them doing it.

A sort of time-travel happens right in front of our eyes. What builds is a tapestry of interactions and intentions between the personal, the ancient, the collective, that seem to spiral through these previous embodiments (an almost geological time) and propel forward (the real-time commitment to decisions and precision of action / timing in the piece itself).

To say that their work is material-led is also to say that it is spirit-led. Afterall, words, dreams, images, archetypes, material itself – all have travelled through bodies: over tongues, through teeth; objects moved through hands, images held in mind and dream over millennia. Consciousness travels through matter, is held in mind-matter. But this is not the old vitalism debate, or a case of the meat of flesh needing to be ignited by spirit. Rather, material itself, in all its agency, speaks. Whether we choose to listen, and act on that listening is another question, one that Zierle & Carter are deep in.

Through this listening, the performers come into being, taking on different energies, qualities, movements, in this state of receptivity. It begs the question where do we get our agency from? In this context, I think of agency in terms of ability to respond – response-ability – to the work, the audience, the material. It is a question about what it means to be human, something that Zierle & Carter have carried with them through many performances.

Culturally, the answer to this question seems to assume differentiation: humanness means language, not animal, means mind, not matter, means man not woman, means civilisation, not nature. Of course, all completely constructed binaries, but terrifyingly persistent – and catastrophic – nonetheless. (Think of the reactions this week to Poppy Jackson’s piece). Similarly, agency in the human realm is often perceived as an ability to think, rationalise and make decisions. But if our decisions themselves are material-led, coming from this reciprocal listening, then our humanness is deeply rooted in the material world, in animal, plant, soil, stone. Individuals do not exist as separate and then interact, but rather emerge through interactions, remembering their complex interweaving in the matrix of a world beyond the human. This awareness is evident in Zierle & Carter’s work and our discussions; agency stems from their response-ability to material; knowing what to do and when to do it comes from listening to the immaterial through material.

## Swan

Bound in bandages  
right over the tips  
of fingers is one  
particular way to  
fly. Mouth  
clasped: keeping  
its secrets, words  
sent down a string  
of feathers from  
throat to throat,  
body to ice body.  
This weight will  
keep you down it's  
dripping in ritual,  
a place like this,  
thick enough to  
slice through – a  
knife will do it or  
your intention  
where are you?  
Now? Milk, gorse,  
nettle. Stars  
cracking away at  
their stone ceiling.  
Precision. Dawn is  
a scratch at the  
edge of things;  
your face pouring  
itself away into  
this dark mirror.  
Behind her teeth a  
string of pearls  
that any of us are  
yet to see. My  
throat was tied,  
say the bandaged  
hands, I left my  
mountain, says the  
blind man, I was  
not *like* the swan,  
says the nettle-  
heart, it named  
me, first and  
foremost, before I  
came back from  
the dead.

Since the lights went out  
I've been searching.  
I've been night,  
moving into its darkness slow as a beetle

I've been urgent with my silence  
I've been forgetting myself and suddenly remembering –

I've been my own repercussions, drenched in shadow

trying, trying, trying

(lean closer, if you really want to listen)

and when the search party sets out  
which is to say, lets go of what it holds,

the hair becomes a blanket  
covering the face in a different kind of knowledge,  
and when knowledge feels with its fingers  
the mind leaks out like a root system  
and when the roots touch  
the fingertips become a feather  
finding multiple directions to float itself in  
and when the directions converge  
they pool their darkneses together  
and when darkness gets pooled together  
the moon grows out its light  
from between your bellies:  
beginning and ending,  
panning the body for gold.

A nighttime jungle in the Barbican's conservatory; a wandering in darkness, whispers leafing through the underworld of soft, damp uncertainty. This is a completely different kind of knowledge, animal and plant, that Zierle & Carter are tapping into. A faint trapping holds human to animal: fingers, hair, rake fluttering edges on the other side of two translucent, glowing pyramids. They are whittling themselves down to an essence, touching a quality from the inside, letting it lead their actions.

There is endless trying, and failing; falling, dropping, searching, slipping, stumbling, blindly trying, sensing, struggling. Are they looking for each other? I move between them all night. This is not a struggle that abuses the privilege of the artist, rather, it is a struggle that is lived because the nonhuman world is so delicately navigated. This is kinaesthetic empathy – the ability for flesh to be another, the body's kind of

metaphor; not the ability to imagine oneself from the perspective of another, (we can call this imaginative empathy and it is limited by its reliance on a perception of us / them, me / you and the rational side of self-conscious human logic). The flesh doesn't live by such distinctions.

Zierle & Carter are not acting like a moth, or a swan, or a horse, they are tapping into swan, moth, horse – and in this sense they are embodying metaphor. Metaphor functions by one thing becoming another and leaving space (Zierle is swan, is Persephone, is moth-man, Carter is mountain, is fighter pilot, is the unknown nighttime). This is how biospheres function (repetition breaking out into chance through these constant translations); nature's logic is relational and poetic. Without this possibility of translation and untranslatability (with all its problematics) there can be no creativity – either in biological evolution, or in culture. Of course, the plants understand this, Zierle & Carter understand this, and their words reach out from amongst the foliage in acknowledgement of this different type of 'mind'.

Soundscapes of whispered readings from the audience members' final wishes in *The Swan Song*, emerge out of the undergrowth, as though the plants themselves are speaking and of course they are, in their rooted interlocking language, reminding us that knowledge and its communication exists in a complex variety of ways.

I am reminded of a passage once read to me by the artists, about the ways in which the brain translates something it cannot recognise into something it can, therefore constantly restricting the world to its known boundaries. Keeping on the edge of perception, to linger here, in the unknown, is an act of attention, commitment, and it requires the senses to take over before naming happens. If we can move into this state, we can perceive these other world voices. The performances are set up for this – feeding the senses and the event, (take off your shoes, gorse-drink and golden letters, hidden gifts on returning; dark shoes in the undergrowth with swan feathers jutting out, voices leaning you further towards the smell of root and soil), and it is present in the performers themselves. Intention and embodiment bring about a subtle, feathering journey we witness half-hidden in the dark. It is before the nameable, the explicable, because it is an act of encounter, a questioning, not a final answer.

The different textures of their parallel journeys with the unknown are palpable and fertile. He searches, sometimes eyes closed or hand covering face, while she goes about her definite business – even in *Touching Silence* when both are blindly searching they punctuate the space with difference; he jolts in sudden flashes and shudders, she strokes the air, a blind old man but measured all the while. There is a tension in this, as well as a comfort, as both slip in and out of holding the space in particular ways, of responding to what is needed with difference. It is refreshing to see gender roles not stereotypically playing out, but there is also a knife edge here – what is being met, who is meeting? Is this a collaboration or a provocation, a calling? Moments of sublime timing – a kettle being ritually poured to soothe the throat of the other, who unknowingly, unseeingly, stops coughing as a result – betray

a life/art blurring of boundaries, and we sense that whatever these separate journeys are, they meet and spring from the same commitment to how the work lives and breathes and what one gives of oneself in order to respond to it.

## Horse

WAKE UP

You heard me. The city plunders on, Rhiannon,  
and there is much, still, to do.

WAKE UP

the sky is a straight, flat answer ///

WAKE UP skeleton-woman!

your handiwork is needed here.

WAKE UP

bones can slot themselves in like a puzzle  
can even spiral, loosely allotted yet precisely interlocking

WAKE UP

head, torso, pelvis: three treasure chests  
writing their bodies against the wall: earth, horizon, stone

WAKE UP

No with its red tape and regulations: I fossilise instantly.

WAKE UP

Bridge, exposure, distraction beating in its urban homeland.  
We're at the heart of it here: the world saying no.

WAKE UP

You walk the plank. Horse-head calling. The time for it is Now.  
The sky lifts off its lid.

WAKE UP



Throw this shackle off my chest as wide as a cathedral  
and capable of echoing more spirit

## WAKE UP

If the rain keeps coming I will match it;  
if the lid keeps closing on this wildness

I will send it out in a million rivulets  
creaking their way under the city,  
coming back up as sticks and limbs  
re-membering wood, hair, bone,

this is the work, and it will be slower  
and more dangerous than we thought:

how to bring back the body in the face of all this,  
how to remain:  
persistent, awake, wildly unknowing.

Today there is something in the air. Flicking wind, persistent rain, Waterloo bridge sending its traffic over in drones, the river the river the great slug of river, Saturday on the Southbank, bustle and hurry, this platform is exposed, its concrete unforgiving, its red tape unending. All the time the world caving in and saying no, the rain hammering down –

Something about the confluence of things on Saturday requires a strength, a backbone, and Zierle responds – gathering energy, pounding up and down the terrace against the grey backdrop of bleak London. WAKE UP! She shouts at Carter; determined to animate this place, she needs all the help she can get. These small deaths – deaths of self, death of individual, death of togetherness, death of moments in performance, death of possibility of unknown, death of spontaneity or risk in the face of institutions, death of reliance on the status quo – they happen as we watch; it is almost so fast that you could miss it, could mistake it for its guise of considered movements.

Friday's Spill Salon rings in the flesh here – how do artists, heathens and city witches forge an urban craft? I am left wondering: if occult practices enter artists' processes, can they also be used as ways of reading performance and the synchronicities of the event, especially for the improvised, responsive rituals Zierle & Carter enact? Walking the Dawn is performed on the Weston Terrace of the National Theatre, and there is an evident tension between the improvisatory nature of the process-led performance and the requirements and cautions of such established cultural

institutions. Mentionable then, to know that this weekend the planets have been doing their thing: Saturn squaring Neptune, Jupiter opposite Chiron in pisces, Uranus and Pluto pretty much square, Venus conjunct with Mars – all the big names, shaking and shifting. It's a time of conflict, of coming up against barriers, of the pressure of a socialisation process, which can be humbling, overwhelming, constricting. (Suddenly the full weight of London's institutional regulations in the face of the breaking free horse spirit feels no longer coincidental.) Pluto is letting go of all stability we used to rely on; Jupiter and Uranus since 2011 are coming to break through limiting core beliefs, and the sabian symbol for all this: the butterfly or moth, pinned to the exhibition wall. A death must take place, in order for expansion.

I am not merely indulging this usually hidden side of my worldview, but a question I believe is worth asking here: what happens when we look at the event of performance in the context of these synchronicities and ancient practices, themselves originally used for ritual; do we gain anything, do we fall down a rabbit hole? Is this the next step that is needed in terms of asking what performance can do, and does, in the context of spirit? (I don't mean everyone has to believe in astrology, but rather that we might see performance and its event as being at the forefront of a perceptual shift in how, and why, things happen, and how we in turn respond.) Performance itself becoming a mediation process, a way of navigating through the world and these increasing challenges, a recovery process to remain wild and human. Zierle & Carter's process and performance opens the way for these connections to be seen, not because they directly reference any of this, but because they are responding to and working with these synchronicities. In that sense there is also a calmness; whatever happens was what needed to happen, and this is where the work is.

So how does this work – work that uses ritual to engage with spirit and material agency – get read in an arts context and furthermore in the context of the National theatre and a tradition of text-based plays and acting? Zierle speaks about how her actions also find their home in the context of healing practices, so what shifts in a performance context? Of course a theatricality enters, a dedication to the aesthetics as well as relationship to an image (there is something Pina Bausch like, in the scenes when you first stumble upon them), but something remains: a belief in, and therefore care with, the energies that are tapped into. Zierle & Carter are meticulous: they do not step on the body of the horse once the shape is fully laid out. In this sense the process is a decolonisation of sorts, because it looks to a way of knowing that is against the value structures imposed by late capitalism, and the mind / matter, seeing-is-believing, science-is-proving Cartesian fallacy we have been painstakingly living with post-Enlightenment. It speaks beyond text or performance as representation, instead consolidating performance as a process of encounter, capable of shifting current contexts and imagining (imaging) new portals of possibility.

To be material-led in order to access the spiritual, can be a political choice: it moves away from the neoliberal individual as sole orchestrator of her/his life, whilst simultaneously unearthing response-ability, towards a collective politicised spirit. It is reclaiming a diversity of knowledge, it is reclaiming intuition in the face of a world which increasingly closes down such diversity, such perceived and intuited knowledge in favour of twenty-four-seven surveillance, of image without activation, of ways of living and reading that limit the possibility of lingering in the unknown.

Seeing the artists come back into their selves immediately after each performance, I witness the different process each animal has sparked; it is clear how deeply they dive, how much is given over to a knowledge outside of them. It makes for humility and assurance – as people and performers – that is its own invocation, its own invitation, ready for us to respond.

**12 November 2015**

## **SPILL STAINS: THE MACHINIST**

**By Anna Mortimer**

Consumed by consumption. It is much too much! Or is it all too much?

The anxiety, the battle, the obsessive mind, the struggle, the anger, the pain, the abuse – they are all here in Guinnane's new work at Spill 2015 situated in large studio space at The National Theatre Studios. The Machinist of the title, is a reference to the actor Christian Bale who lost over 60lbs when preparing to play a part in the film and to the performers who from the 17th – 20th Century starved themselves for the entertainment of their audiences. These were mostly male. At Spill 2014 in Ipswich Guinnane's performance took place in a cell in a disused police station; the site was an integral part of the work. Here the bare brick walls seeping rain water and etched with time and the economical use of props held her and us in a timeless sense of total desolation and dissolute despair. Wrestling with clay, milk, flour she played out the monumental struggle that is the daily battle field of the obsessive mind. It was cruel and shocking, an exposure and a discomposure. In 2015 the carefully placed props and clutter, paraphernalia of every kind, too many to name, echo the themes from which Guinnane continues to fashion her work tackling issues of body dysmorphia, identity, consumption and rage. There is still the little piggy, the food, the clay, the water and the weights; the pacing, the eating and the rituals but the work has become more complicated. There is still the struggle; the weight and punch of the piece reverberate through the introduction of other complex issues which seem to bathe the work with added layers. Replacing the grunts of exertion, the raw sounds of slapped flesh and the splash of liquids is a recorded soundscape with voices, music and nursery rhymes. This has an intriguing, distancing effect between the action and its witness.

Guinnane invites us to enter her nightmare world; she pulls us in only to push us away. The audience becomes spectator and the experience of empathy and engagement with her suffering becomes more fragmented in this new space; the mirror along one wall reflecting back on us; the drawn out actions of visual withdrawal and the long periods of inactivity. We wait, peckish as she munches at her apples. We wait, fearful as the clay sits inert in the fridge. We wait, expectant as papers stick to her feet. We wait, fidgety as she disappears inside a crinkly 'Space Blanket'.

It is interesting to note that over the past year Guinnane has been mentored by Kira O'Reilly, who has worked extensively with the interplay of the performer and the audience. In writing about her own work she has said, 'they become collaborators, complicit from the moment they make the decision to be there. Each performance feels like some kind of contract between myself and the audience, clearly negotiated by each party.' This echoes throughout Guinnane's multi-layered, complex work.

**12 November 2015**

## **SPILL STAINS: NO WHERE // NOW HERE**

**(THE PALIMPSEST OF FK ALEXANDER AND LYDIA LUNCH)**

**By Natalie Raven**

She's a warrior.

FK Alexander's I Could Go On Singing was performed at Spill's National Platform in Ipswich. It was a four-hour durational piece exploring 'song as self harm, sound as wound'. As glittering front woman, part Garland, Minnelli, part Winehouse, Holiday, Alexander belted out a bitterly earnest rendition of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow',

Over and over again.

Over and over again.

\*

She displays raw, impassioned energy.

She straddles those trembling lines drawn between strength and suffering, poise and pain.

(And, there is always great, great pleasure in the pain).

She stands tall, open gaze, present. She is fighting a his-tory of female representation from his perspective, his his-tory, conservative, patriarchal order, regulating every-thing, every-body, every-action that has ever failed her, is failing her.

This ought to be fought.

\*

The performance is intimate in proximity; so close you can feel the sweet sweaty caress of breath on face. And yet, is remarkably distant; this is Alexander The Showgirl, showing us what it takes for the show to go on...

(And, the show must go on...)

It was loud.(Really loud). All-encompassing. Offensive.

Art shouldn't be easy, or comfortable, or polite, or safe.

It should reflect the crap that's waded through day after day after day. And it does just that. Relentless.

(The poet needs the pain).

Absolutely, Fabulous.

\*

In I Could Go On Singing, Alexander is significantly situated at the centre of the performance, both physically and metaphorically. This powerful, referential staging of the female body, confrontational, up front (upfront) and central is followed up in No Where//Now Here.

We filter in.

A meditative walk encircles space that is claimed, owned. Alexander absorbs the tension, the anticipative energy.

Lying in wait, we watch, watching, settled, but restless.

A single light, suspended.

Black cord, shining. Choke. Hold. Throw.

Red beams fly amongst us casting shadows, in shadow, a multiple of selves, dancing in the dark.

It was loud. (Really loud). All-encompassing. Offensive.

Lunch appears; the cut-up-flick-flaring-eighties-TV-montage transports back to the pierced-punk-periods, the angry

"FUCK YOU"s.

Furious then, desperate now; lessons not learnt.

Thatcher, Cameron, a right-royal-Eton-mess.

Flaming-fifty-pound-fellatio-pig-fucking-fucks.

The Swines.

Darkness descends, the coal is lit.

And so it begins.

The torturous journey begins, hot, red, glistening wet sweat, trickling, trails.

Shovel, scrape, shove, push, project, punish, please, pleasure, pain.

\*

No Where//Now Here marks Alexander's movement away from the theatricality of I Could Go On Singing toward something more guttural, earthy. This new work feels grounded. Not simply because she is working with coal as medium, but because it moves toward something more physically experiential. This work is sensational; it is experienced physically, uncomfortably. Bodies sit, stand, and sway, absorbing the heavy, rumbling bass which throbs around and within, in space, in time, in side. Both physically and emotionally we are quaking in our boots, awoken, shaken, affected.

Alexander and Lunch.

The Female Artist.

Divine Creator, crafting her own counter-culture, self-styled image.

Self-staged.

Her Own Self.

Birthing brutal, butchered beauty, determinedly defiant.

Alexander and Lunch.

Re-presenting a radical female voice that says nothing and absolutely everything all at the same time.

Stylishly assured

Re-assuring

For us all.

**12 November 2015**

## **SPILL STAINS: TOMB (PLASTIC PLURALITY)**

**By Jonathan Boddam-Whetham**

Inscription // Exscription

We are moving from the singularity of The Machine Legends at Spill Festival 2014 where Adam Electric dealt with fetishism and mythology, creating a singular performance [singularity] that placed the human body within a space of both absence and presence. A second skin that only touched me through breath; a

death-rattle that brought about a presence of the body. His performance became a gravity well, drawing us in with a rhythmic gasping for life. Both freedom and the delineation of the body became problematised through a constraint that also formed and gave life. A singular projection of ego where space surrenders to vacuumed presence.

Moving toward this newest iteration, Tomb resonates with much of the festival workings, where memory and eulogy seem to be inscribed upon those other works. A broken circumference of a plurality of plasticity; a remaking of the self à la Malabou and neuro-plasticity. But this is not just a re-forming – like neuronal pathways – or singular transformation. My breath is our breath, I breathe for you. If breath is life, this is a shared life, but more; it is a shared shaping of bodies in the same [second] skin. If kabbalists inscribe the name of God upon the Golem's forehead to give it life, then perhaps this is what Nancy calls an exscription.

This is an impossible term, referring to that which is outside the text. But 'this "outside" is not that of the referent that signification would reflect', it is not something outside of meaning to which the text refers. But is what Nancy calls the 'infinite withdrawal of meaning'. He talks of an "empty freedom" by which existence comes into presence – absence', but this emptiness is not a lack as such, rather a dynamic movement of being. Which is no-thing as such, not meaningful, but also not senseless. Being is always with and I am never alone even being alone. It is a primordial condition of my being that existence is shared.

Exscription travels through the text, contaminating it with a freedom, with a sharing that is the possibility of death which affirms existence, affirms others in the world. So in this working, the meaning – the with – dances across plastic skin forming and erasing presence and absence in a breathless momentum. In my own possibility of death, I desperately breathe – life – I create a space, an absent and present one, touching others. A monumental tomb where I do not inscribe a eulogy, but exscribe the co-possibility of Being, which is both singular and plural.

Adam Electric moves his working on, not just on a grander scale, but in a reflective way that represents [as such] our existence with others in the world. We do not die alone he seems to write, or perhaps tattoos, on his plastic skin. We are always with others, who we touch, even when we are alone, because meaning always touches, always circulates between us, is able to be because we are with.