

The Female Bouffon

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Nilufer Ovalioglu

Dedicated to my uncle, Ali Guler

Abstract

This dissertation examines the notion of the female in performance, the latter term applying to occasions that are outside as well as within theatrical venues. I attempt to address the complex and mutually entailed interrelation between the 'normative' as it has, and continues to, govern female behaviour, and those manifestations deemed transgressive of these in some respect. I seek to postulate a conception of the performing female as a phenomenon which owes its force to the presence of both polarities.

My preferred term for such a figure is the female *bouffon*, and after a preliminary definition of associated terms, I discuss the carnivalesque, socially licenced occasions of 'misrule' in pre-modern societies, where norms were temporarily suspended to permit women to 'make a spectacle of themselves'. Some contemporary parallels are furnished. I then address the larger and more discursive issues of the reflexive and self-applied norms of proper female conduct as offered and justified by industrial, scientifically authorized societies.

From the above, I turn to the extraordinary creative ferment of the turn of the twentieth century, which witnessed the rebellious re-institution of older performance *genres* as well as the invention of new ones. I then discuss the associated theatrical theorizing that accompanied this era.

After a detailed examination of the work of two contemporary practitioners, who, I consider, gather together past and present themes of *bouffonerie* in a compelling way, I give examples of my own performance practice, and some analysis of its reciprocal relation with an audience. I conclude with some speculative thoughts as to the future of the *bouffonesque* female performer.

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Introduction

This thesis is about women and the norm. Most societies which preceded, or which have never experienced that movement we conveniently call the European Enlightenment considered it fitting that women conformed to certain norms of conduct, association and dress in keeping with their natural place in those societies. Even when the Enlightenment and a closely successive process of industrialisation seemed to vitiate these norms, fresh ones, or perhaps paraphrases of the old, appeared, justified by science, and seeking to commend themselves to women's assent rather than to command them directly. In the 'liberal' West, a century of women's social, political and economic emancipation has supposedly left them without any such outer or internalised constraints. Yet the norms, vampire-like, rise again from the graves of their ancestors. Popular media documents the incessant negotiations women feel obliged, often in a voyeuristically public context, to conduct with norms of body and behaviour. And cosmetic surgery supplies ever more sophisticated means to conform to the former. My thesis does not intend to chronicle these norms in sociological detail so much as to highlight the various dramatic attitudes of those women who were perceived to transgress them often in the name of entertainment, of art, or of both admixed with direct social critique.

The methodology of my research is practice-led. My performance practice takes as its point of departure, for each project, a collection of spontaneous ideas produced without too much reflection, which serves as my raw material, on which I then reflect, in order to infer from this material dynamic narrative structures. Having shaped 'the story' from these, I then subtract redundant components from it one by one, paring away elements of story so as to accentuate character, and then exhibiting the latter through details and disclosing physical pose until I reach by quasi-sculptural means a 'state' of free standing and, I hope, resonant autonomy. I finally reflect on my practice in a more intellectual sense, by reviewing pertinent literature in order both to make connections with theoretical context and to compare with antecedent historical examples which serve to define the lineage or 'tradition' within which, possibly unconsciously at first, I have produced the performance in question.

My particular focus is on the fields of experimental, real-time, and ‘artifactual’ performance. I examine how norms can be subverted or directly resisted in such dramatic contexts, as well as selectively taken to excessive, that is, grotesque extremes. I wish to address the phenomenon of woman *making a spectacle of herself*, both on or off stage. My shorthand and *portmanteau* phrase for a woman doing this is the female *bouffon*, or clown. The spectacle in question may range from the mildly socially embarrassing to the shocking; all have in turn been material for subsequent reflection and performance.

The term ‘bouffon’ has a distinguished and well-documented usage in twentieth century performance practice, and it has assumed a tradition of its own. It is a term that spans life and art, as spectacle frequently does. But it has antecedents in the pre-modern past. In my first chapter I briefly review the historic themes of carnivalesque episodes and various pathologies attached to female deviance from postulated ‘normality’. In my second, I turn to specifically aesthetic features of the establishment of norms, and discuss the artistic reactions to these in the last two centuries. In my third, I give case studies of two leading practitioners, Pina Bausch and Cindy Sherman, who make visual material in two different disciplines, dance and photography, both extensively treating various representations of the gendered body.

In my fourth chapter, I attempt to integrate these themes with nine examples of my own recent performance practice, which directly or obliquely addresses the role of femininity in contemporary times.

Finally, I conclude with inferences drawn from these, and I conjecture as to what form female *bouffonerie* may take in the future.

Chapter 1

Female Bouffon: A Preliminary Overview

This dissertation attempts to discuss matters arising from the distorted representations of femininity in contemporary mass, dramatic and artistic culture, the interrelations between these, and correlative notions of the normative as applied to femininity, from which such distortions are defined as polar concepts. These matters are examined as they intend to, and inform, current themes of performance practice, including my own.

It is important to note that this research is conducted within a discourse which cannot but reflect a perspective I inhabit as a partial outsider with regard to Western culture. As a Turkish woman, raised in a Muslim country, though as a recipient of a European, Francophile education, I consider that I have been given by this background a capability to step inside, but also to distance myself from an assumed Western metanarrative framework and so to examine its norms in an accordingly defamiliarising way. Of course the meanings that the female body projects are dramatically different between Eastern and Western cultures, but it is not my intention to address the former, which would require a lengthy study in itself. My research focuses on early modern and contemporary Western treatments; they are, after all, in the foreground of dominant cultural *mores*, and of my own social upbringing. A semi-Oriental background remains precisely that, at the fringes of conscious attention.

In the field addressed here European languages reveal by their etymologies the close relations obtaining between a certain families of concepts, which in itself reflects the patterns of usage licensed by past cultural expectations. ‘Distortion’ as an English word is derived from the Latin participle *distortus*, meaning misshapen, deformed or perverse; this in turn is derived from the verb *distorquere*, meaning to twist or to torture (Langenscheidt *Shorter Latin Dictionary*). Thus in its history this term has connoted a range of mutations, from those of character or moral conduct, to those of

sophistical debating tricks, through to those created by outright violence. The English ‘parody’ ultimately derives from the Greek *paroidia*, itself a contraction of *para oide*, meaning literally ‘an alongside poem’, and in usage, ‘a poem giving a burlesque treatment of an elevated subject’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Thus the element of imitation connoted by ‘parody’ is tempered by the requirement that it does not wholly convince the reader or spectator, but rather, exhibits characteristics to immoderate and so amusing effect. ‘Burlesque’, borrowed from the French music-hall, ultimately has its origins in the Italian *burla*, meaning mockery (*OED*). These three words display in their evolution the conceptual interrelation between what may be ultimately transgressive or subversive intent in social, political cultural or religious fields, and the strategies of (a) obviously selective imitation of features, (b) formal mutation of these beyond all bounds of ‘normality’ (however this latter is defined), and (c) production of an artifact which by engaging in such a *reductio ad absurdum*, implicitly renders the norms instantiated by the object (in whatever sense) imitated, or those norms contained in the contextual culture which produced that object, less binding and open to interrogation or dispute.

Two further terms used in this text attest to the close relations between transgression of norms in the social and aesthetic spheres. The Anglicized ‘buffoon’ comes via the French *bouffon*, from the late Latin *buffo*, meaning comic actor or clown, which, it has been speculated, derives from the verb *buffare*, to puff up, possibly itself cognate with *bufo*, a toad. If this line of descent is true, then the grotesquely self-inflated toad is not so distant a metaphor for the self-important object of buffoonery, stripped of seriousness by calculated exaggeration. Lastly, *grottesca* entered Italian comparatively recently, from the noun *grotto*, or cave, following the rediscovery of a Roman decorative convention of interweaving human and animal forms, which was typically applied to the ornamentation of cavernous garden retreats. This was revived by the workshop of the artist Raphael (Dacos, 2008). It could be argued that the association of the grotesque with both earth and orifice was established with the coining of this word, and this has been inferred again by recent commentators.

These terms have obvious applicability within the history of European theatre, but they have also have impinged upon power structures and social conventions, and this

has in turn effected their modern use and interpretation. The most familiar manifestation of the buffoon is the character most commonly known as the ‘jester’ (Otto, 2001). Chosen from the physically unattractive or disabled, the jester was licensed to hold the court, its officials, and sometimes even the ruler, to ridicule, both to amuse and often to serve as a channel of criticism which bypassed the demands of diplomacy, etiquette and flattery.

As well as individual ‘professional’ jesters, there were occasions when their mockery and subversion of authority was temporarily allowed to all, usually at certain festival times in the religious calendar. In Latin Christian societies these became the institutions of the ‘Feast of Fools’, at Christmas, and of Carnival, preceding Lent. This kind of social inversion entered literature most famously in Hugo’s novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831), where the deformed bell ringer, Quasimodo, is carried on the shoulders of a crowd who both acclaim and deride him as the ‘Pope of Fools’ parodying the elevated chair of the ‘real’ one. His deformed physique is an implicit critique the moral deformity of the Pontiff. In the *mundus inversus* structure of the carnival festivities, Quasimodo is an involuntary ‘buffoon’ used to assert the arbitrariness and emptiness of a hierarchical order.

Whilst the English ‘buffoon’ has now rather left its theatrical origins, and declined into a term of abuse for the socially inept, its French counterpart *bouffon*, was ‘recoined’ by Jacque Lecoq in the early 1960’s at L’École Internationale de Théâtre, to describe players who perform a ‘mockery pushed to the point of parody’ reproducing everyday life (Lecoq, 2006: 118), mocking society’s ‘absolute values’: family, honor, love and war (Lecoq, 2000: 105). Their bodies too exhibit a reflexive mockery of proportion, with distorted costumes exaggerating convex and concave planes. (Lecoq, 2006: 119). In such a ‘theatre of the image’, they are given certain liberation from visual, physical normality, permitting them to perform parodies of social behavior as if to amuse themselves (Lecoq, 2000: 121).

Another practitioner, Philippe Gaulier, mindful of their history, defines *bouffons* within the ‘misfortunes of the body’ and the ‘outcasts of society’ (Gaulier, 2005), including minorities with a precarious position in Western society: homosexuals,

Jews, prostitutes and Africans. The bouffons mock the body politic through a 'physically abnormal' body, yet their outcast body also liberates them from social restrictions, allowing them to joyfully parody the hierarchically superior (Gaulier, 2005). Although Gaulier's bouffons are transposed from the outcasts of Western society where the hierarchal value is the image of 'normative', the bouffon is initially an actor depicting aspects of the outcast within the theatrical enactment of society (Gaulier, 2005).

Moving closer to the intersection of this lexicon of terms with that denoting women, Mary Russo has reanimated the association given above by devising the neologism the 'grotto-esque', a condition of metaphoric relation to the 'cavernous anatomical female body' in literature and art (1994: 1). In his book *Rabelais And His World* (trans. 1984), Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that the Kerch terracotta figurines of 'senile pregnant hags'¹ are the typical example of 'strongly expressed grotesque,' which transgress the limits of the female form in order to 'become another body,' in transition from 'decaying flesh' to 'the flesh of new life.' The bodily co-existence of morbid old age and impending birth shows 'the two-fold contradictory process of life.' This bodily existence is not finished but 'in the act of becoming' and as such reflects the 'grotesque concept of the body' (1984: 24).

The notion of the grotesque, as stated above, is definable only by invoking that of the normative, and so when it is applied to women the dual questions are instantly raised of, firstly, female bodily self-reflection and its accompanying reproaches and anxieties, and secondly, the norms, whether articulated or not, which urge on these judgments. According to Philip Thomson, the 'grotesque' strongly resembles the '*physically abnormal*' (1972: 9). Thomson believes that the 'grotesque' is an 'appropriate expression of the problematical nature of existence' (1972: 11). In contemporary times, cosmetic surgery has made enhancement of every part of the body possible, but it has also allowed free and unopposed play to forces which persuade women that their bodies have infringed norms and require constant correction. As a result of this and the ease of digital manipulation of images, a climate of judgment has made it *de rigueur* that bodily excess (large thighs, buttocks, colonial breasts) is hidden (Russo, 1994: 53). Even for Bakhtin, writing before this

age, all the activity of the ‘modern body,’ in relation to the corporal convexities and orifices, is ‘eliminated, hidden, or moderated.’ For Bakhtin, the contemporary body communicates normality with an ‘impenetrable façade’ (1984: 320). Russo further adds that when bodily excess is visible, a woman is thought to be ‘making a spectacle out of herself’ and becomes ‘unruly’ (Russo, 1994: 53). This ‘unruliness’ is perhaps associable with the imputation that such a woman has a different relationship to others.

According to Bakhtin, the ‘grotesque body,’ in Rabelais’ novels, has a ‘dynamic’² relation to the outer world and other bodies by virtue of its corporal convexities and orifices (1984: 317). In the theatre of the image, *bouffons* can communicate through forms such as ‘enormous bellies,’ ‘enormous chests’ and ‘enormous buttocks.’ They move as ‘catastrophic acrobats’ (Lecoq, 2006: 119). *Bouffons* adopt a grotesque performance as an expression of their norm-defying forms. The costuming of the bouffons is designed to push in, push up, lift, shape, contour, slim down, highlight, sex-up and sophisticate like the contemporary female costuming products. The body’s deformation establishes a new relation with nature. In the female’s case, artifice and deformation may also give status.

The forces of bodily correction have now produced ‘grotesque’ results of their own, and in so doing have created exemplary female bouffons amongst the fashionable and famous. Victoria Beckham is one such. As a counterproof to fashionable and full-bodied women of the fifties she has altered her body with complex technologies. Her unnaturally thin figure, augmented breasts and her impassive mask-like facial demeanor create a sense that she is *unreal* and *impossible*. This perfection gives a sense of insubstantiality, suggestive of a consuming anxiety about her own appearance. Further examples could be cited in the *personae* of such celebrities as Katie Price (Jordan) and more remotely, Wallis Simpson. They represent a generation of women whose essence disappears in the pursuit of a parody of received notions of bodily perfection.

Having reviewed these terms, my own intentions as a performance practitioner can now be examined. I propose to study my performances, reconsidering them with the

persona of a female *bouffon* deriving from elements of the perception of twenty-first century women, but which is also historically derivative of such figures as the court jester and Quasimodo, as well as Lecoq's and Gaulier's more recent *bouffon* outcasts.

The 'unruly female' in the carnivalesque context

The context in which the 'female' performs is crucial to the meaning of her performance. This meaning changes dramatically when the latter is outside the domestic realm. According to Russo, the female body becomes naturally 'transgressive' in carnival context (1994: 60). In carnivalesque context, when a woman is seen to be 'out of her place' (that is, not in the home but on the street), she is necessarily in breach of social rules, and that female 'unruliness' projects possibility that 'anything *may go*' (Turner, 1977: 41). According to Turner, the female in carnivalesque context 'threatens any social order and seems more threatening, the *more* that order *seems* rigorous and secure' (1977: 41). But the rule-breaking implicit in women on the streets only led to more infractions by men: the history of carnival suggests that women suffered physical abuse during various festivities in the sixteenth century (Ladurie, 1979: 212). The transgression that the female provokes can be observed in contemporary carnivals such as the one at Rio de Janeiro where 'forced kisses' are performed on women who get caught in a corridor of men (Monsters and Critics, 2007). The rules which surround the female in contemporary carnivals are erratic and eclectic. In carnival, 'anything may go' signifies the possibility of the female form being transgressive, therefore putting it outside a rule-bound sphere, and so rendering the female form open to exploitation.

In post-Renaissance Europe women were not (yet) allowed to be actors or professional political figures, and were frequently enjoined by religious authorities not to attend festivities such as Carnival. Yet the parody of the unruly female was part of the carnival's anti-hierarchical structure, which was itself realized by men (Russo, 1994: 58). In England, for example, in the 'Skimmington ride' (1641), a cross-dressed man would play the role of 'Lady Skimmington,' a 'husband-beating unruly woman', and 'her' victim would be paraded as the 'beaten *man* ... backward

on an ass by noisy revellers' (Davis, 1975: 140). By overturning gender hierarchy, such a wife 'transgressed community sexual norms' and so in order to reinforce 'people's sense of the rightness of the rules' (Dentith, 1995: 74), she had to be degraded by a performer who theatrically unsexed her. Lady Skimmington was mocked in performance by men because she represented a woman behaving like a man, so making an intolerable escape from her social and sexual role.

But the direction of cross-gendering can be reversed to equally moralizing effect. In 1969, in her guerilla performance piece *Action Pants- Genital Panic* (1969), Valie Export entered a porn movie theatre wearing trousers cut open around her crutch, and carrying a machine gun. In this iconic manner Export materialized and yet re-fortified the objectified female body. She brought a 'real' vagina in a porn cinema, challenging the phantasm versions on the screen tailored for males. Thus in a modern context Export embodies the unruly female body in carnivalesque context in order to disrupt the ordered and lucrative objectification of the female body.

It is my thought that, over centuries, certain representations of the female have remained unchanged, but the contexts in which these may be offered, where women may perform and attend, has widened to include theatrical, festive and political stages. The Carnavalesque has been an essential *modus operandi* for the 'Women's Movement', so as to permit the limitations of female rule-following to be transgressed. This may be no mere revival: Natalie Davis argues that the 'widening of behavioural options for women' was the result of the gender *mundus inversus* performances throughout the history of European carnival (1975: 131). Such regular episodes of derogation from social codes had the cumulative effect of displaying how constructed, and so arbitrary, they really were. The feminist action of appropriating the masquerade of femininity was, therefore, another attempt to evince a broader critique, according to Kathryn Morgan (1991: 44). For Russo, exposing and exploiting the grotesquery of femininity, even, and especially, when undertaken by women, uncovers 'the power of taking it off' (1994: 70), that is, the capacity to show (by the selective exaggeration referred to), that femininity is a mask in the first place.

Stereotypes of beauty and ‘sameness’ in industrial societies

The social codes which Carnival transgressed were enforced by religious and civil authorities for reasons which derived from concerns to preserve static and ordained hierarchies. After a century of industrialization, with the rise of literacy, mass media and increasing capacity to buy consumer goods, the centre of feminine norms had changed significantly. Since the taxonomies of science, however freighted these were with judgmental positions, held the sway previously occupied by religion, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the female body’s appearance and behavior was subjected to categorization like every aspect of everyday life, from hair color to sexuality (Makela, 2003: 201).

These norms were more empirically founded than their precursors. According to Thomson, after industrialization, ‘appearance’ became a ‘primary social resource’ (1996: 12). During the Weimar era in Germany, scientists like Gerhard Venzmer published ‘scientific’ statements advising the ‘roundness’ of the female as an appropriate ‘form’, and obedience as an acceptable behavioral trait to distinguish the ‘female’ from the ‘male’ (Makela, 2003: 201). Cultural codes are tied to acts associated with the female. According to Judith Butler, the mimicry of femininity is assimilated culturally and learnt. The female is culturally expected to be an actor. In other words, the female is made through a ‘*stylized repetition of acts*’ (Butler, 1988: 519), such as a feminine laughter, a feminine posture or a feminine walk. Simone de Beauvoir’s claim ‘one is not born but, rather, *becomes* a woman’ (1949: 267), points to the stylization of the female performance which, renders an ‘idea’ of the female as opposed to an individual.

With such quasi-scientific norms came the technologies to effect them. The female body’s potential reconfiguration for ‘sameness’ and ‘efficiency’ has been an industrial opportunity for cosmetic manufacture, and latterly plastic surgery, since the 1920’s (Makela, 2003: 204). The ideal female, the uniform, the prototype form was, and is, now mass-produced and standardized. The female body has been homogenized, its shapes compared, and the ‘different’ forms, for instance, the ‘ugly’ and the ‘plain,’ have been excluded. As a result, the gendered ‘sameness of form’

has produced the ‘choice of apparent over the real’ (Morgan, 1991: 28). Morgan applies Foucault’s theory of the ‘docile bodies’ on the female body, which is ‘explored, broken down and rearranged’ in Western industrialized cultures (1991: 35). In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault puts forward the model of ‘docile bodies’ in the context of prisons and armies. ‘Docile Bodies’ are ‘subjected, used, transformed, and improved’ (Foucault, 1979: 136). According to Foucault, the regime of power in schools insists that pupils conform the same model by comparing, differentiating, and excluding the disruptive; it ‘hierarchizes’ and ‘homogenizes’ (1979: 182-3). This model can be adapted to Thomson and Morgan’s views of the ‘sameness of form’ as a bodily value for the female.

Transcultural engraftments

Although the last century has witnessed the ‘liberation’ of women in Western culture, it also masks the normalization of the artificial female (that is, constructed by an *artifex*). Morgan depicts a ‘normative diversion,’ stating that ‘ugly,’ ‘plain’ and ‘old’ women ‘will increasingly be stigmatized and seen as deviant’ as we witness the ‘*normalization* of elective cosmetic surgery’ (1991: 28). The spread of Western power and media has also made this prototype a sought-after commodity in non-European societies; such a variant may be dubbed the ‘colonial body’.

Sculptor Takashi Murakami criticizes the consumerism and sexual fetishism in contemporary Japanese culture where the colonial female body’s transformation and objectification is normalized, resulting in a body that transgresses the corporal identity of the Japanese female (‘Takashi Murakami’, 2003-5). Murakami’s *Hiropon* is a larger-than-life erotic figurine, related to the Manga and Anime culture of Japan. The slim classical body shape of a Japanese woman is enhanced with long legs and large breasts, springing out of her bikini top as *Hiropon* squeezes her breast milk out of her large nipples with an ecstatic facial expression. Channel Four’s series *Science’s Last Taboo: Race* (2009) contained the documentary ‘Bleach, Nip, Tuck: The White Beauty Myth’ exploring the use of cosmetic surgery to make bodies appear Western. By making their breasts ‘colonial’, by sexually hyperbolizing their

bodies, the women of different races, sizes and genetic codes, become a parody of the Anglo-Saxon body.

The abject female

According to Julia Kristeva, abject is neither subject nor object. Abject is a familiar form, de-familiarised through some kind of incompleteness, like the corpse of a human, dead yet still human. The appearance of ageing female links to theories of the abject and the female. Kristeva claims that ‘at the doors of the feminine, at the doors of abjection ... we are also ... given the most daring X-ray of the “drive foundations” of fascism’ (1982: 155). By examining the anti-semitic French writer Paul Celine, Kristeva finds the foundations of his fascist *weltanschauung* in his view of women as passing through episodes of abjection. The first is childbirth. The newborn hangs between the inside and the outside, the self or the other, and experiences the line between life and death, mother and new individual. The maternal is the ideal form of the female, which evinces a particular perfect form over all others. The last is ageing, the end of women’s fecundity, ‘a horrible sight’ (Celine quoted in Kristeva, 1982: 169). When this ideal form is spoiled and reaches an end,³ it becomes ‘abject’ and the older female becomes a ‘muse of the lowly genres’ such as carnivalesque (1982: 169).

It is no accident that in the decade preceding, ‘age first became an issue in mass culture in nineteen twenties’ (Makela, 2003: 204). Kristeva relates the notion of the abject to fascism where all corporal forms are reduced and normalized in a uniform body. The abject threatens identity and order, like the female bouffon who challenges patriarchal order through transformation and performative exaggeration. I will touch upon examples of such women in paragraphs to come.

Hysteria and performance

According to Ilza Veith, ‘scientific’ observations, found on ‘the earliest pages of recorded medicine,’ define hysteria as solely ‘a disease of the female’ (1965: 1). Derived from the Greek word *hustera* (uterus), hysteria was believed to be generated

by the female womb, the ‘animal within an (the) animal,’ (Adams, 1856: 285-87 quoted in Veith, 1965: 23). With symptoms resembling the disease of epilepsy, women’s hysteric outbursts were thought to be caused by the womb changing its position within the body (1965: 11). Plato believed that ‘a female viscus, closely resemble(s) an animal’ (1965: 24) and that the womb itself was ‘erratic’. With the spread of Christianity, the hysteric female was thought to be ‘possessed’ or ‘bewitched’ (1965: 47). Augustine claimed that ‘concupiscence was released by the eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge’ (1965: 51), and so Eve, by causing the ‘fall of man’, was the first woman to express sexual desire, as such, the first hysteric. This insufferable state could only be remedied by the compatibility and union of ‘conjugalinity and procreation’.

The female ‘was thought (to) be prone to be disordered’ in early modern Europe (Davis, 1975: 125). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, physicians, such as Baron Ernst von Feuchtersleben, blamed increasing women’s education for giving them the ‘impulse to relate to sexuality’ (Veith, 1965: 190). In the Salpetriere Hospital, the neurological scientist Jean-Martin Charcot examined female hysteria patients ‘infected’ by what he called ‘hystero-epilepsy’. The female hysteria patients mimicked attacks of epilepsy patients, with whom they shared a hospital room (Veith, 1965: 231). Moreover, in lectures, these hysterics seemed to be performing for the benefit of Charcot’s students; the women ‘*acted out* what they knew was expected of them ... at the precise time of lectures ... before an appreciative audience of lecturers and students’ (Veith, 1965: 235). Charcot discovered that to a considerable level, women *perform* hysteria. This points to a peculiar theatrical intelligence possessed by such patients.

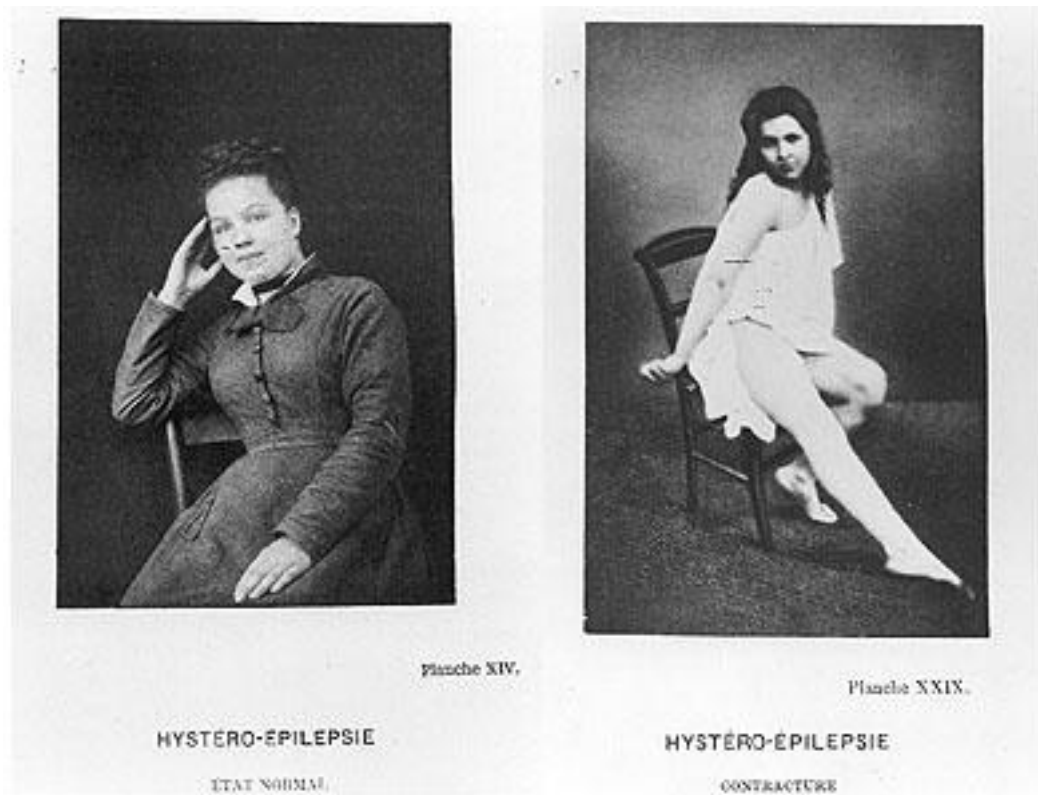


Fig 1: Jean-Martin Charcot Hysteria induced epileptic seizures, 1878

Photographs of hysteria patients that Charcot commissioned expose the ‘hypereroticism of hysterical patients’ (Veith, 1965: 235). Russo compares these photographs to the ‘fashionable histrionics of the great Romantic actresses’ who posed in dramatic poses (1994: 68). According to Russo, the representations of these women are ‘arranged by and for the male viewer’ and they ‘display the display’ (1994: 68). If I may parodically adopt a nineteenth century tone, I would state my inferred opinion, that the female is politick (astute) while performing. She performs the female ‘idea’ and is capable of manipulating social contacts via this act. Judith Butler considers gender as ‘a corporeal style, an “act” as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “performative” itself carries the double-meaning of “dramatic” and “non-referential”’ (Butler, 1988: 521-22).

What may be called the ‘hysterical-corporeal’ style has its manifestations in contemporary popular media, particularly ‘reality’ shows such as *Big Brother*. Nikki Graham, a contestant of the television show’s seventh series, aired in 2006, ‘makes a spectacle of herself’ as a strategy to attract attention in the *Big Brother* house, where

strangers live isolated from the world and under the surveillance cameras for months. Her ‘compulsive overacting’ of the idea of the female hysteric is as studiously ‘dramatic’ as the hysteria patients that ‘act out’ their disease in lectures. Catherine Clement comments on hysteria as a ‘language not yet at the point of verbal expression, restrained within the bond of body’ (Clement quoted in Richman. 1980: 69). She argues that this corporal reaction ‘remains convulsive. Men look but they do not hear’ (1980:69). Nikki seems to symbolize the female hysteric who is exposed in popular media, yet not heard or listened to, or at least not directly. Luce Irigaray conjectures that ‘to play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be reduced to it’ (1985: 76). She performs ‘ideas’ about herself ‘that are elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make “visible”, by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language ... if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply reabsorbed into this function’ (1985:76)

The separation between hysterical visual behaviour and its accompanying verbal trope is exhibited the use of recordings of female hysterics in lip-synching performances by drag queens in performances such as *Lypsinka! As I Lay Lip-Synching* (2003). John Epperson, the producer and performer of the character Lypsinka, exaggerates the spectacle of lip-synching, synchronized with pre-recorded voices of hysterical female voices from the fifties and sixties. Epperson transposes this stylistic language as a performance form. In my opinion, the lip-synching technique can be observed as a metaphor for the female aggression inhibited by the representation of the feminine as decorously mute. Gender mimicry of the drag queen reveals the masquerade of femininity and the silencing that hysteria seeks to overcome.

Butler explains that gender is a ‘rehearsed act’ and claims that the transvestite ‘does more than simply express the distinction between sex and gender, but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality that structures a good deal of popular thinking about gender identity’ (Butler, 1988: 527). In the media’s representation of the female, the appearance and reality is undistinguishable.

Contemporary woman becomes the unruly bouffon

In his experimental bouffon play/text (2005), Philippe Gaulier reveals ‘the truth of the devil.’ Bouffon ‘Eve’ is depicted as the daughter of Bouffon ‘Devil’, a female body that ‘suggest(s) the rounded delights of the devil.’ The Bouffon ‘Devil’ promises her that if she takes a bite from the forbidden fruit, she will become the ‘first learned person’ (Gaulier, 2005). Bouffon ‘Eve’ derides authority through her unruly act. Gaulier recites the myth of the earth’s salvation through ‘Eve’, a female bouffon, a *dis-graced* (fallen) body whose wisdom is precarious; her curiosity makes her a bouffon.

‘Eve’s’ wisdom and disgrace is reflected in the contemporary female. It could be said that there is a certain genre of performance which operates at the margins of feminine grace, where the stereotype of the female as beautiful object, overlaid with those of ‘stupid blonde’ or ‘material girl’, are reproduced for display with a knowing detachment.

As an example, Marilyn Monroe, the ‘sex symbol’ of the sixties, was widely suspected to be involved with President John F. Kennedy, which made her a dubious and somewhat despised figure in popular opinion of the time. On 19th May 1962, at Madison Square Garden, in New York, she displayed her desire for Kennedy publicly when she ‘emanated sex as she breathlessly sang “Happy Birthday”’ to the President (Bell, 2010). Monroe’s performance could be seen to reflect the jester who performs a message to the hierarchal leader, in this instance, the head of state. Especially in the sixties when glamour and female masquerade was the norm, Monroe, the ‘sex symbol,’ violates the rules of the female through exaggerated and provocative femininity. Her characteristic hip movements are as eloquent as her breathy singing. This touches on my initial point regarding selective imitation. According to Bakhtin, the subject of mockery in carnival is degraded through suggestion of ‘the lower stratum of the body’, which brings the subject down to earth and materializes it through the parts of the body related to filth and birth like bowels and genitals (1984: 21). The female bouffon, Monroe, materializes, brings

down to the level of her own genitalia, the President's (as we know, intensely exercised) sexuality. She goes so far as to violate the identity of the American President by reminding the spectators of his sexuality.

There are strong connections between incipient scandal, exposure and grotesque. The birthday party of the president of the United States, a 'sophisticated and civilized' event, is made a carnival by Monroe's marginal performance. Monroe challenges the order by making a political and ritualized place into a carnival. The popular judgment made at the time of her conduct was accurate beyond colloquialism: she had *made a fool of herself*.

In perhaps a more determined manner the singer Louise Ciccone, Madonna, has organized the perception of herself as a sex symbol since her career began in the 1980's. Her stimulation of masturbation on stage on her *Blond Ambition* tour in 1990, exemplifies and also commodifies the liberation gained through unveiling female sexuality. According to Jacques Lacan, the female masquerade is the rejection of 'an essential part of her femininity' (1982: 84). The female masquerade is an attempt to be the phallus, the 'signifier of desire,' which the female 'expects to be desired for' (1982: 84). This implicitly attempts to make a male sexual response into the kind of passive expectation of action expected by convention from the female. Both Madonna and Monroe bring forth the sexual female's dangerous potential when performing their own sexuality as opposed to performing for a male fantasy. Instead of being the phallus they appropriate the female sexual organs related to filth and birth as the signifier of desire, therefore, challenge the order of sexuality which is almost always perceived as being centered around the male.

For Russo, referring to classical mythology, 'the grotesque figure of Baubo, the obscene crone impudently displaying her genitals like an ironic smile' represents the liberation gained by appropriating exposure and 'being cruelly observed to detail' (Russo, 1994:6).⁴



Fig 2: From ancient Greece a representation of the goddess Baubo said to derive from Egypt.

But now the ‘grotesque’ is commodified, and transgression is absorbed as a ‘norm’ in Western popular culture, albeit in a ‘conventionalized’ form (Remshardt, 2004: 14). After Monroe and Madonna’s iconic spectacles, the exposure of the female sexuality is also normalized in the twenty-first century. Sexually suggestive choreographies are popular in music videos. The lower bodily stratum dominates language, appearance and leisure choices. Television shows compare ordinary females who are then publicly enhanced to become ‘sexually attractive’.

For Baudrillard,

Obscenity may be sublime or grotesque, if it shatters the innocence of a natural world. But what can porn do in a world pornographed in advance? What can art do in a world stimulated and travestied in advance? Except bring an added ironic value to appearances? Except tip a last paradoxical wink – of sex laughing at itself in its most exact and hence most monstrous form, laughing at its own disappearance beneath its most artificial form?

(1996 :129).

It is my contention that the female form disappears under the shadow of exposure. When Baubo lifts her skirt to entertain Demeter the goddess of Spring, her vulva resembles a harmless physiognomic socially coded gesture. Perhaps both Baudrillard and Baubo point to the disappearance of the female body, as the parody of the sexual female becomes a norm.

This dissertation is a study of the dis-appearance of the female body. Why is Baubo smiling ironically and what is the irony other than a paradoxical power exercised by the female, previously defined as the ‘weaker sex’? Are we witnessing a carnivalesque reversal where social power is lastingly taken over by the female or is the female imprisoned as ever? In the next chapter I will discuss the female grotesque rebels that made the history of female bouffonery.

Notes

¹ Kerch terracotta figurines were found in Ukraine. They are small sculptures of elderly laughing women with impregnated bellies.

² I use the word ‘dynamic’ to signify suggestion of a form, especially narrative suggestion. The dynamic of a body’s posture suggests the movement that follows that posture. We perceive the dynamic of the body by imagining the one moment after or before the posture. In the same way, traits on a body suggests the moment that the body lived before. In the grotesque body of Bakhtin, the relationships between corporal shapes suggest prurience. Lecoq’s bouffons carry dynamic forms such as big buttocks that suggest a narrative about who they are.

³ According to Celine women ‘wane by candlelight, they spoil, melt, twist, ouze ... The end of tapers is a horrible sight, the end of ladies too’ (Celine quoted in Kristeva, 1982: 41). He points to the fragility of the corporal aesthetic of the female on the edge of becoming abject.

⁴ Baubo is a Greek mythological character who jested with Demeter, exhibiting ‘her secret parts.’

Chapter 2

Theories and practices of the grotesque body and the (re)birth of the female bouffon

The technological resources afforded by the Industrial Revolution gave unprecedented means to document and to attempt to systematise appearances and behaviours, both in everyday life and in theatre. I have already mentioned the new empirical norms for ‘femininity’ produced by early twentieth century scientists. Here I turn to examine the impact of these technologies on the foundational notions of theatrical performance as a feminine activity, both directly and by force of analogy. My treatment is thematic rather than chronological, since dialectically these impacts produced cultural abreactions which, I would argue, saw the recasting of the bouffon archetype in new presentations.

Science and appearances

The systematizing of human expression has been a fascination of scientists and thinkers for centuries. Possibly the first discussions of these occur in Aristotle, and from the Renaissance into the Baroque the codification of various facially expressed affects became integral to the artistic curriculum, the so-called *tetes d’expression*. A parallel iconographic tradition sought to find connections between human and animal physiognomic codes. The most notable example of this are the physiognomy chart drawings prepared by Charles Lebrun (1619-1690) investigating the animal facial gestures as interpreted within human physical features (Remshardt, 2004: 39). There is both a satirical purpose here, after all to compare some humans to animals has always been an instrument of mockery; but there is also a proto-anthropological conjecture, that in a way that cannot be ‘articulated into words’ humankind shares a deep grammar of emotional expression with animals. To an age innocent of the theory of evolution this would not be a routine connection, though ever since Leonardo’s studies of wizened heads it had been evident that certain human expressions project a potential for ‘the art of the grotesque’ (Remshardt, 2004: 39) and so, by extension, for the monstrous.

With Darwinism such fanciful connections were strengthened into direct lines of descent, and with it the hitherto secure sense of humanity's transcendence was put under threat. Darwin himself believed that there was 'forensic evidence of the beastliness of man' pointing to the uncanny animal expression of such faces (Remshardt, 2004: 39-40). The engendered feeling that man might lose a fragile civility and quickly revert to beast was given its most popular expression in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde* (1886). As Jose Ortega y Gasset was to put it later, there is a potential for the uncanny in human expression: the tiger 'cannot be detigered', whereas, man is 'always on the point of not being man' (Ortega, 1968: 190).

There was also the question of the connection between technologically empowered Europeans and those conquered and/or enslaved peoples to whom a status was given somewhere between man and beast. Paradoxically, the gradual abolition of slavery by the colonial powers was followed, by the end of the nineteenth century, by varieties of theory which a biologically founded notion of 'race' became the unit of a hierarchy of attainment and intellectual capacity. The colonized body, so to speak, could be in, practical terms, compared to and thought of as an animal (*The Human Zoo: Science's Dirty Secret*, 2009) or, at most, human, but encased within an animal husk. Given the photographic resource the colonial powers possessed, the racial superiority which was their entitlement to colonize could be explicitly demonstrated by illustrations of determined bodily values and parameters. Such inferences from facial expressions and appearances could also be used to distinguish and so separate the superior races from their own genetic aberrations; a vast production of documentary photographs aimed to exhibit the expressions of the deranged, the feeble-minded or the morally degenerate, so as to determine policies for their incarceration in newly-built networks of asylums. There was also a voyeuristic fringe to this; America and Europe saw the height of the circus freak show at the beginning of the twentieth century (Thomson, 1996:11). And even when such displays passed from favour in these countries, and their accompanying judgements were questioned, the totalitarianisms of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia saw abnormal bodies encamped in sites for 'socially designated anomalies' (Russo, 1994: 76). But one can say that the legacy of this era was more enduring, by categorizing the abnormal, the

quasi-legislative powers of ‘scientific’ documentation justified hiding the grotesque body from society. The conventional body type became the uniform of the human body.

A more intimate problem concerned the powers of photography itself. It seemed to imperil centuries of conventions of portraitists’ flattery, as well as offering seemingly incorrigible images to those who could never have afforded portraits. The widespread dissemination of photographic portraits at the beginning of the twentieth century created the ‘anxiety surrounding the exact relationship between one’s image and one’s self’ (Smith, 1999: 353). My performance *Mirrorland* (2006) tells a story exemplifying this anxiety, which is felt by a stranger of indeterminate origin visiting the West for the first time, confronted by hitherto unexperienced self-reflections (see chapter 4). Walter Benjamin argued in 1931 that as photographic technologies spread ‘one will have to get used to being looked at in terms of one’s provenance. And one will have to look at others the same way’ (Benjamin, 1979: 252). Early photographers could and did ape the conventions of painting to ‘improve’ their subjects, but there was no escape from the brute facticity of the unmalleable material they had to work on.

For women this was particularly threatening. Photography stripped away the ‘mystique’ of possible faults being annulled by charm and sweetness of deportment in the eyes of the male interlocutor; it also made the woman viewable by those men she might never want to meet. In the article ‘The Magnetic Daguerreotypes’ published anonymously in the *Photographic Art-Journal* of June 1852, it was suggested that the female costumers of the early photographic technologies feared the daguerreotype, which, opened ‘a window onto the world of their subjects and private feminine interiorities ... imagined as they are pried by masculine gazes’ (Quoted in Smith, 1999: 353). A columnist, Fanny Fern, criticizes the sexualized relationship between the camera and the female body as early as 1859 (Smith, 1999: 93). According to Fern, a physical ‘likeness’ becoming public, objectifies a ‘beautiful face’ that is treated like ‘a specimen of sea-weed, or a stuck insect for the gaze of the curious’. I suggest that the performance of the feminine was transformed by the invention of photography, which put the objectification of the female in

concrete terms. Photography, from its documentary uses with female hysteria patients, had become a tool which enforced on every female subject the need to adopt a conscious posture or performance (Smith, 1999: 93).

An additional consequence was photography's capacity to fix exactly what those 'blemishes' were. This could only lead to comparisons with some equally determined ideal, and the implication that something should be done to make reality fit. I have mentioned the effects of the spread of plastic surgery after the First World War, but although the history of medicine had procedures to improve the appearance of the body since the beginning of recorded medicine, I contend that the appetite for its peacetime use can be traced back to the 'enlightenment philosophy of the nineteenth century that each individual could remake him or herself' (Gilman, 2005: 63) and the physical details of this remaking could only have been provided by photography. It created a 'beauty-conscious environment' in which ageing passed from inevitability to enemy (Makela, 2003: 208).

The artistic reaction

The years immediately preceding the appearances of modernism across the arts saw cultural changes of a rapidity and complexity which it is outside the scope of this essay to discuss, but one can agree with many commentators that by the end of the nineteenth-century the alliance of photographic method and a tepid 'degraded Hellenism' of taste had homogenised physical and cultural *mores* across bourgeois Europe. Appearances, now so accessible to their subjects, had prescribed everyone to be a 'poseur'. But in the same epoch, the backwash of artifacts and anthropological reports from European colonial empires were beginning to suggest other performances might be valid.

Alfred Jarry's play, *Ubu Roi*, premiered in Paris in 1895, marks the beginning of the era of cabaret sub-culture, and also the definitive manifestation of the modern male bouffon. The premiere of *Ubu Roi* offered a depiction of future art forms of 'a rampant objectivity and inhumanity' (Yeats quoted in Remshardt, 2004: 1). In his address in 1896, Jarry presented the 'fat greedy main character' Pere Ubu, as the

symbol of excess in the face of new inventions and mass-production (Jarry, 1896). According to Taxidou, the scatological play was performed in a ‘buffoonery and general carnival atmosphere’ (Taxidou, 2007: 50). The play might be seen as a reaction to Paris of the thirty-year *belle époque* when the capital seemed to have ‘lost (or found) itself in an extravaganza of public display, frivolity and self-indulgence’ (McGurn, 1989). The period is depicted in Jarry’s novel, *The Supermale* (1902), which gives a critique of technological triumphalism through the story of ‘a grotesquely dehumanised race against an express train’ of five men on bicycles (McGurn, 1989). The ‘uphill bicycle race’ (Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor: 1980) is ‘the symbolic form of popular struggle’ (Appignanesi, 1975: 167).

From the end of the nineteenth century, changes in European life, particularly the demise of the aristocratic *salon*, led to a sub-culture where artists, thinkers, writers and performers of all disciplines met in cafes and bars which often had small stages. There was already a tradition in such venues of burlesque songs and sketches which comically reprised the ‘high’ forms of *opera seria* and tragedy, as well as, to a limited extent, contemporary political rhetoric. With the infusion of new intellectual life, the targets of mockery became more contentious, and the anarchistic culture of the ‘cabaret’ was made possible. In the Montmartre neighbourhood of Paris, in 1881, the first official cabaret, *Le Chat Noir*, allowed ‘means by which the people could record their daily history and publicly voice their reactions to contemporary events’ (Appignanesi, 1975: 2). Cabaret is a variety of music show, variety show and carnival, where contradictions are resolved ‘in the spirit of satirical laughter’ (9). These places also allowed the intermixing of ‘high’ and demotic cultural genres; much cabaret involved the intellectual use of hitherto despised popular forms.

For Harold Segel, the aftermath of Jarry’s play was that the ‘grotesque became a dominant aspect of the cabaret ambiance’, and, with other spectacular forms like the Italian *teatro grottesco* which originated at this time, he argues that the cabaret was ‘in the vortex of aesthetic change’ (Segel, 1977: 56). According to Lisa Appignanesi, the essence of cabaret parallels Bakhtin’s investigation of carnival, which ‘consecrates inventive freedom’ (1975: 42).

It is conspicuous that in the visual arts of the 1900's clowns make increasingly frequent appearances, most notably in the work of Picasso and Rouault. A fascination with forms of street theatre characterizes several earlier pieces by Stravinsky, culminating in his suite *Pulcinella* (1920). Even before the First World War, it can be inferred that evocations of the clown and the carnivalesque represented a calculated attempt to puncture the bombast, inflated scale and sententiousness of late-Romantic art forms. An association can be made between these and the cabaret; according to Appignanesi, the creative extravagance of carnival originates from 'the spirit of the clown' who is 'the age-old ancestor of the cabaret' (1975: 40). Lecoq's analysis makes the clown the original subverter of pretence, overturning social poses whilst wearing a 'little red nose', itself the 'smallest mask in the world' (2006: 116). The clown overturns a certain order by being naïve and exposing his 'thin legs, big chest, short arms with silly cloths' where most people would hide them (115).

Man or Marionette

Since the French Enlightenment mechanistic accounts of human behaviour had been increasingly pervasive; both technological development and contemporary scientific methodology seemed to commend the reasonableness of seeing man as machine. The technological analogy penetrated the theatre as well; in 1810, Heinrich von Kleist wrote an influential essay called 'On the Marionette Theatre' that metaphorically relates to human actors (Taxidou, 2007: 10). In a conversation with a leading dancer, Kleist discusses the mechanics of a puppet that is 'exceedingly graceful' (1972: 22). According to Kleist, the puppet offers 'the path to the soul of the dancer', and has the 'virtue of being immune to gravity's force' allowing it to reach heights and attitudes that the dancer cannot, because it is controlled through its centre. 'Only God can measure up to' its movements (26).

For Kleist, the puppet's graceful movements are free of man's self-conscious postures and imperfect physicality which have created a disordered body, a body that has lost its innocence. The essay concludes that 'grace returns after knowledge has gone through the world of the infinite, in that it appears to best advantage in that human bodily structure that has no consciousness at all- or has infinite

consciousness- that is, in the mechanical puppet, or in the God' (Kleist, 1972: 26). It has to be said that the increasingly regimented pedagogical regimes for ballet in the following century all aimed at creating the 'weightless' female gliding on her toes, so Kleist's paeon was somewhat prophetic, but he might also be seen to be reacting against a Romantic theatrical practice which cultivated facial and verbal gesture at the expense of all else.

The later nineteenth century witnessed a critical rejection of the declamatory and escapist excesses of Romantic theatre; early modernism was often accompanied by the gleeful adoption of mechanistic tropes. *Ubu Roi* itself contributes to the puppet analogy; Jarry originally wrote it for a puppet show. In the premiere, all the actors 'imitated' marionettes, wearing masks and exaggerated body parts such as Pere Ubu's excessive cardboard belly (Taxidou, 2007: 2). At the beginning of the twentieth century theatre practitioners aimed to replace the actor who is 'corrupted and weakened by the act of mimesis' with a mechanized performer and an artificial act inspired by the grace of the puppet (Taxidou: 2007: 17). Edward Gordon Craig, a designer and director of the time, suggested that the actor be replaced by an '*Ubermarionette*,' the term inspired by the Nietzschean 'superman' or *Übermensch*, in an attempt to redefine 'the art of the actor' (Goldberg, 1979: 17). Vsevolod Meyerhold, another practitioner, based his practice on the idea that 'taylorism of the theatre will make it possible to perform in one hour that which requires four at present' with his bio-mechanical exercises for training of actors. Similarly, the futurist performance investigated 'the mechanization of the performer' (Goldberg, 1979: 17). Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller were among performers who went beyond 'muscular possibilities' and aimed for the 'ideal multiplied body of the motor' (Goldberg, 1979: 18). Craig and Meyerhold differ in that Craig aims to 'de-materialise' the human form with the *puppet's* ghost-like quality, in contrast, Meyerhold aims to *puppetise* the human form itself (Taxidou, 2007: 32). Meyerhold aimed to control the mechanics of the body through the performative grace of the puppet and its possibilities, in order to abstract, stylise and estrange expression (Goldberg, 1979: 12). According to Ralf Remshardt, at the Bauhaus, Oskar Schlemmer went a step further in performances such as *Figural Cabinet* (1923) and the *Triadic Ballet* (1922) (2004: 171). He aimed to reconfigure the dancers/actors as

‘pure abstract figures in space’ in an attempt to substitute the body with the ‘mechanical human figure,’ the *Kunstfigur*. This effect was achieved by costumes, designed to ‘metamorphose the human figure into a mechanical object’ emphasizing the ‘object’ quality of the performers (Goldberg, 1979: 69).

According to Taxidou, the invocation of marionettes reflects practitioners’ fascination with the efficiency of the human body after industrialism (2007: 10) The puppet with no history, no identity or gender as employed by Jarry, was subsequently used by the Russian Formalists who viewed the ‘puppetised’ performance as an ‘estrangement’ (Taxidou, 2007: 33). This is the theoretical antecedent of Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, properly translated as the ‘de-familiarisation effect’. For Taxidou this is first materialised by Jarry in *Ubu Roi* as a mixture of ‘aspects of disgust and wonder, fear and awe, distance and familiarity’ (1). It can be said that the puppet is familiar, and yet distanced enough to provoke the uncanny. I have made use of this ambiguity of effect in my street performances, notably *Agent Provocateur* (2006-2008), in which I move encased in a life-size Barbie Doll costume eliciting a range of responses from passers-by (see chapter 4).

Women performers and the marionette

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the stereotype of histrionic female performance was still pervasive, despite the incipient critical naturalism of theatre after Ibsen. The rise of the impassive aesthetic of modernist neoclassicism made the female presence still more problematic. According to Taxidou, the analogy of marionettes by such practitioners as Craig is also a way of ‘neutralising the incongruity of women on stage’ (2007: 35) and ‘there is no such thing as a neutral body and, usually when one is evoked it acts as a disguise for the male body’ (33). The theory and practice of the era suggested parallels between the newly employed electric power and feminine performativity in such pieces as *La Donna e mobile* (*Woman is Fickle*, 1909). The correlation of the energy of technology and the female ‘hyper-sensitive nervous system’ had reflections in such female automata characters as Fritz Lang’s ‘False Maria’ in *Metropolis* (1927) (Taxidou, 2007:38).

Performers such as Isadora Duncan, Eleonora Duse and Zinaida Reikh address the problem as to how a contemporary female can perform. Taxidou argues that the relationship between women and the stage is particularly fraught because women are comparatively new to it and the representation of the female body is objectified (2007: 56). Isadora Duncan, for instance, uses her body as ‘a medium’, claiming not to be a dancer. Duncan takes the first steps to challenge the conventional representation of the female body from object to subject by treating her body in this way. ‘The female body ... through the work of the performers of the period, becomes a site that renegotiates the representational efficacy not only for the male gaze, but of the whole edifice that creates it.’ (Duncan quoted in Taxidou, 2007: 56)

One can sum up the mechanistic analogy as being itself ambivalent as regards the reception of the female bouffon. On the one hand, austere theorists like Craig, in accordance with an absolute privileging of deliberation (as he puts it, the ‘accident is an enemy of the artistic’ (Taxidou, 2007: 24)), the female presence has to be effaced by strict routines in an almost misogynistic way, on the other, the women-as-marionette/robot invited somewhat darker fantasies from Lang and others who saw the possibility of a technologically empowered monster, a bouffon with teeth, so to speak. What both these tendencies opposed, however, was the naturally arbitrary and serendipitous qualities that were thought to be intrinsic to the female performer. The artificial puppet and its mechanics provide a contrast to the female body that is socially and performatively self-aware and accident prone. But as I have said, the clown exposes the human mistake, and the parallel between the feminine and the clown re-appears here. In my performance *Agent Provocateur* I run together both the marionette and the fool by use of an archetypal doll, supposedly ‘ideal’ which, by extraordinary enlargement, is revealed as comically, and grotesquely, misproportioned.

The female’s culturally gendered performance exposes femininity, which is thought of as a weakness if not a mistake. Virginia Woolf argues that ‘disaster is more common among actresses than among other artists, because the body plays so large a part upon the stage’ (Woolf quoted in Taxidou, 2007: 56). In a way, the female body’s ‘fraudulent representation’ dispatches her from the stage since it cannot achieve the non-gendered, artificial and mechanical performance of the puppet. In a

certain sense, Feminist Actionism of the sixties aimed to reconfigure the representation of the female, and with it, theorisations of the female body's place on stage.

Women, expressionism and cabaret

The mechanistic analogy was not totally pervasive, however, and by the end of the twenties as modernism turned from reflecting an industrial outside to exhuming a subconscious inside, there was a recrudescence of expressionist tendencies across the arts. In the years leading up to the Second World War, Expressionist or 'free' dance evolved through practitioners such as Isadora Duncan and Emile Jacques-Dalcroze. Rudolf von Laban divided movement into 'centrifugal movements, radiating from the centre' (Gordon, 1975: 38). He choreographed 'movement choirs' to express emotions through collective movements. Mary Wigman, his pupil, developed a more dynamic and solo style with emotional intensity. Her performance originated from 'primitive expressiveness and the grotesque' (39).

For Gordon, Expressionist dancers found for their inspiration in the cabaret, which served as a liberating place for female performers (1975: 39). Gertrude Valeska, known as Valeska Gert, was 'the inventor of her own grotesque dance characterizations' (De Keersmaeker, 1981: 55). According to the latter, she was referred to by Meyerhold as a 'bio-genetic dancer' and further inspired Brecht's thinking regarding epic theatre (56). Her dances were similar to those of Expressionistic dance, yet Gert rejected Expressionism, finding it 'overly abstract', such as in Wigman's choreography. With her dances Gert violated 'every form of normative beauty' (58). According to Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, her unconventional performances were 'an audacious rejection of the aesthetic criteria proper to the bourgeois culture'; like Phillip Gaulier's bouffons, she depicted 'whores, procuresses, cast-offs, those who had slipped' (1981: 58).



Fig 3 Valeska Gert Künstlerische Tanz, Der (Eckstein) Nr. 63

In *Canaille* (1919), she portrays ‘a sensitive whore,’ with an erotic performance of miming ‘the coital act’. Gert scandalized the public opinion by scrutinizing how ‘her body had been exploited by money’ (61). She experimented with speeding-up or slowing down the movement as well as with repetitions. Inspiring the dance theatre of Pina Bausch, her dance revealed the inner experience of the character through repetition of movements. According to Appignanesi, Gert’s experiments could be seen as defamiliarization techniques which served as material for Brecht (1975: 191).

The objectified female body is the conventional representation of the female, yet defamiliarising ('alienating') this body renders it the subject. This was the main attempt of female expressive performers in the twentieth century like Duncan and Gert (Taxidou, 2007: 56). Diamond argues that Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, when performed by a female, produces a 'female body in representation that resists fetishization' (Diamond, 1997: 44). The female bouffon rejects fetishization by alienating the function of the mimetic female, her object status. In my opinion, female bouffons such as Gert 'alienate', that is, defamiliarize femininity by exposing an habitually concealed performance of it. such as the coital act.

Women's performance art, body art

At the risk of generalization, the more advanced performance practices of the thirties were, in the post war years through the fifties, progressively absorbed into mainstream dance and theatre in a way which causes a hiatus in their evolution. Performance art, beginning in the sixties, has made use of the 'malleable, transitory, and risky moment of performance', precisely those qualities so anathema to theorists like Craig (Remshardt, 2004: 51). As the body becomes the object and subject of the artwork, the audience's conventionally passive reception is taken into 'the realm of pure experience, from which there's no distance'. The constant 'discourse on the body' since industrialism redefined 'modes of art perception and consumption' and created performance art as a new format for critical representation (Remshardt, 2004: 51). For instance, the transgression in Marina Abramovic's body art, the factor of risk and shock in such performances like *Rhythm 0* (1974), where she gave the audience a loaded revolver among other tools to torture her naked body, shatter the boundaries between reality and performance (Remshardt, 2004: 55). The use of real space and genuine aggression create a carnivalesque atmosphere of real and incipient threat: everything could easily turn very nasty. Remshardt argues that performance art resembles the grotesque nature of performance 'bound to double business between now and not-now' therefore, it simultaneously acts as the 'reminder and defier of death' (2004: 50). Performance art carries this grotesque feeling within its 'frequent subject/object ambiguity' which makes it carnivalesque in the fullest and most ambivalent way.

Valie Export's performance work is of significance to this discourse on object/subject ambiguity. In *Tap und Tastkino (Touch Cinema, 1968)* she invites passers-by to touch her naked torso that she covers with 'a mini-movie theatre (plastic box with curtains) over her bare chest' (Mueller, 1994: 18). Export redefines the objectified female body in the pornographic cinema, where 'the promise of disclosure of the forbidden ... revolves around the body of woman' (15) As she causes the viewer to face 'the real thing,' she describes this performance as 'woman's first step from object to subject' (18). It could be argued that by 'exposing and mocking' the woman-as-object, Export becomes a female bouffon. My street performances with *Agent Provocateur* cause the same carnivalesque effect as Export, for the Barbie Doll is itself a cypher for the kind of objectifiable body girls might be thought to value as their future state, but which by becoming life-size is now threatening.

Feminist Actionism 'seeks to transform the object of male natural history, the material "woman" ... into an independent actor and creator, object of her own history.' (Export quoted in Mueller, 1994: 29). Roswitha Mueller argues that female performance artists of the sixties searched for 'subjecthood' (29). It can be argued that performance art and its antecedents in cabaret share the same quality of object/subject ambiguity because the line between the audience and the performer has been constantly and consciously blurred. In a sense this is the legacy of cabaret's requisitioning of popular theatrical genres which expected audience interactivity in a way 'high' theatre did not. This in turn can be used to make performance an instrument for exhibiting how the blurry the line really is. Gert and Export's outrageous acts 'alienate'/defamiliarize the audience and draw it in to face the female as subject.

Orlan is a French multimedia and performance artist whose performances extend from sixties' to present day. In the nineties she remodelled her face through seven cosmetic surgeries in her project entitled *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan* (Ince, 2000: 1). The 'operating room' was decorated in vivid colour and theatricality that displayed the carnivalesque nature of her 'passive' performance, designed by top

designers in a party atmosphere (2000: 20). According to Rosanne Stone, Orlan's performances had an effect of 'entranced revulsion', a mixture of fascination and disgust among the audience (Stone, 1996: 43). The grotesquery of the performance further challenges the idea of cosmetic surgery as an activity for the sake of beauty alone. Orlan's face is reconfigured according to facial attributes of the *Mona Lisa*, Botticelli's Venus, Diana, Psyche and Europa (Ince, 2000: 125). According to Parveen Adams, the reconfiguration of a transsexual is a 'wish not to become a woman, but to become The Woman' and Orlan is a 'woman-to-woman transsexual.' (1996: 144). Using this term, one can say Orlan is reconfigured into 'The Woman' yet her surgery aims to 'expose and circumvent the formative and normative power of a psychoanalytic gendered ideal of *femininity*' (Ince, 2000: 124) I consider that Orlan is a bouffon challenging the cultural implications of plastic surgery, by using it to expose the normative appearance and expression of the female face. She rejects the fetishization of her body through a visceral statement.

In her *Official portrait in Bride of Frankenstein* (1990), Orlan touches upon Mary Shelley's seminal novel of 1818. Just as theatre practitioners such as Craig imagined a correlation between the erratic energy of the female and electrical technology, Orlan depicts the partner for Frankenstein as a monstrous woman produced by technology, revealing the anxieties surrounding the erratic female (Ince, 2000: 82).

Orlan is conscious of gender specific implications of the portrait in relation to the face and head. In Ince's opinion, the head signifies intelligence and masculinity while the female hair signifies sexuality. Therefore, the words 'woman' and 'head' mentioned as a pair, 'works against the grain of patriarchally coded meanings and images' (Ince, 2000: 87). Orlan embodies a dangerously intelligent monstrous female made by technology, as opposed to the erratic female depicted by practitioners of the twenties. The connotations of the head taken alone are an implicit challenge to the sartorial, social and sexual display embodied in the codes of female portraiture in patriarchal culture. I make an examination of the use of the detached head, (although not a woman's) relating to these notions, when discussing my performance *I killed my husband* (2009) in chapter 4.

Female performance art has made use of the head to challenge and reconfigure the 'attitudes to women and to female corporeality' (2000: 87). The female self-portraits by Cindy Sherman in her *Untitled Film Still* series (1977- 1980), use photographic representation of the 'female body as object of empowered male gaze' (Jones, 2006: 45). In her *Untitleds* created in 2000, Sherman performs 'Hollywood doyennes' in heavy make-up repairing the look of aging on their faces (2006:52). Jones calls these portraits 'dead types,' I will discuss Cindy Sherman's practice in the next chapter as a case study.

Women's performance and personality

The female bouffons discussed above have taken steps to reconfigure the female performer from object to subject. They transpose the reality of the female body beyond its objectified representation. But the 'world pornographed in advance', mentioned above, is a problematic stage for them; contemporary mass culture is capable of making all original performance into a product. Performance art's shocking qualities 'can be read as a continuous battle of escalation in the bid to pierce through the ever-expanding buffer zone that the rapid reabsorption of all provocation extrudes around the savvy spectator' (Remshardt, 2004: 52). Female bouffons have placed the female in the carnivalesque arena of the twenty first century, breaking through the normative, yet this rebellious female image is once again rapidly normalised and consumed in the media. But this does not consign all performance to the status of ephemera; in the next chapter, I will examine the deeper question of what realities such artists as Pina Bausch and Cindy Sherman attempt to explore, and how these ventures give rise to concentric layers of seriousness and satire.

Chapter 3

Contemporary Bouffonerie: Two Case Studies

I now turn to examine case studies of two creators dealing with issues of parody, and of implicit and represented distortion, as they affect women and their relations to models of femininity. The kinds of bouffonesque and grotesque which they construct are on the whole quite distinct from the products of ‘burlesqueing’ as practised in the early twentieth century; nevertheless their strategies are similar. By taking women’s everyday performance as their point of departure, with its reciprocally influential relations to the images of popular media, they each engage in a kind of Husserlian ‘bracketing’ of fragments of the seemingly banal for close inspection (Husserl, 1996: 18), thus exhibiting the artifice of social behaviour, and so, by extension, its habitual masquerade.

Pina Bausch

Born in 1940 in Germany, Pina Bausch, is regarded as the pioneer of German dance theatre, *Tanztheater*, whose invention by her dates from approximately 1973 (Broadhurst, 1999: 70). She trained under Kurt Jooss at the Folkwang School in Essen, absorbing its philosophy of movement rooted in *Ausdrucksstanz*, Expressionistic Dance (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 18), a subjectivist practice originating from Germany in the first half of the twentieth century and influencing the work of dancers such as Isadora Duncan and Mary Wigman who treated the body, as I mentioned, more as a medium than an object of their performances, and who broke through the fixed lexicon of classical balletic moves. (1998:117). She then engaged in further studies in the United States.

Her work builds upon the legacy of Expressionistic choreographers such as Rudolf Laban, Oskar Schlemmer, Mary Wigman and her teacher Jooss (Cody, 1998: 117). But Bausch’s work is distinguished from other Expressionistic dancers through ‘her particular type of realism ... which avoids standardized ideas of beauty’ (Broadhurst, 1999: 70). In a manner similar to Gert, Bausch discards existing conventions of theatrical ballet to revive a dance that affronts ‘bourgeois sensibilities’ (Broadhurst, 1999: 70), which embrace the consumable appearances that I have mentioned above.

She choreographs the ‘social representations of gender, race, and class’ through a movement style that rejects classical teachings of dance (Cody, 1998:118). Bausch’s work subjectifies the social body and investigates its movement’s dynamic (Servos and Weigelt 2008: 25).

A question of reality

Before *Tanztheater* it could be argued that dance practice had been ‘a world of pleasant appearances’ (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 22). When Bausch became the director of Wuppertal Dance Theatre, she established a new way of writing for, or rather with, the body (Broadhurst, 1999: 70). Bausch reconsidered dance as an object in itself: ‘suddenly the body served as a medium through which to talk about reality just as effectively as through the spoken word’ (70).

Her choreographies deliberately expose technical processes on stage in an attempt to break the boundary between the audience and performers (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 23). Bausch re-considers the audience’s experience. The choreography often extends beyond the stage onto the audience area which creates a cabaret-like ‘unmatrixed performance’ (Cody, 1998: 119). Therefore, finding meaning in Bausch’s pieces requires new ‘habits of perception’ and imagination on the part of the audience (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 20). This ‘non-linguistic mode’ of signification (Broadhurst, 1999: 69) has reflections in performance art where the experience of the audience is of primary importance.

For Birringer, the ‘concrete human body’ has in Bausch’s *Tanztheater* a ‘personal history’ (Birringer, 1986: 86). Bausch derides previous theatre practitioners’ fascination with the graceful marionette that has no gender or personal history. She re-invites imperfect and consciously controlled human movement, and the personal history of the performer, into dance, via parody of gendered actions. According to Birringer, the human body’s movements are reflected in the ‘representational economy with which a culture directs and dominates what is perceived as reality’ (86). Bausch makes use of this culture while revealing the inner impulses of the body. The audience is drawn into a relation with movements which are then exaggerated and reconfigured to grotesque effect, through obsessive repetition of

social movements, patterns and physical and emotional violence (Broadhurst, 1999: 71).

In a quasi-Brechtian manner, Bausch makes use of the *gestus* (a theatrical device which discloses motivation both in the immediate and in the larger narrative scopes), as primary source for her choreographies (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 25). The *gestus* of pedestrian reality is made provocatively ‘palpable’ in dancers’ movements (21). Her particular de-familiarization technique, shared with Valeska Gert, is achieved by doubling, and repeating movements at varying speeds and in differing *montages*. For Gabrielle Cody, both figures share an interest in ‘stereotyped roles and forms drawn from popular entertainment’, although Bausch follows the expressionistic approach of Wigman, in terms of aesthetic motive (see Chapter 2), she is closer to Gert her choreographic strategy (Cody, 1998: 118). Whilst Wigman, like other female soloists of the time, ‘confounded the conventional image of femininity’ through explicitly transposing movements counter to gender expectations, Gert revealed the female through satire and parody (Manning and Benson, 1986: 38). Gert’s work deals satirically with the anxieties surrounding the social female whereas Wigman aims to reveal her spirituality.

The repetition of socially conditioned behavioural movements in Bausch’s work aims to reveal the longing and desire of the body (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 26). The ‘outer state’ of a character, the façade, is dramatized by slowing down and speeding up movements which reveal an ‘undertone of sadness’ (26). In her Graham-based dance classes, Vivien Bridson, who worked with Kurt Joos and attended school with Pina Bausch, explains that repetition in dance is not aimed at reproducing a mechanically exact iteration of a sequence, but rather at progressively re-performing, re-considering, re-discovering and re-expressing the movement (Bridson, 2010). Similarly, Broadhurst argues that the repetition in Bausch’s work ‘provides not sameness but “difference”’ (1999: 78). Bausch’s dancers transform movements into metaphors by repeating social movements, which cumulatively disclose their inner individuality and complexes. Birringer emphasises Bausch’s argument for repetition: ‘we must look again and again’ (1991: 137). It can be said that in this way she unveils the oddness (even the *unheimlich* quality) of performative everyday movements. Bridson claims that in Bausch’s choreographies,

repetition is grotesque because ‘people’s movements are initially grotesque’ (Bridson, 2010), an aspect which she has brought to prominence. I followed an analogous path while creating my performance *Period Girl*, where the character is frozen in the moment of reaching out; a banal, but when de-familiarized, disclosing gesture.

Women on stage

Pina Bausch’s work clearly has antecedents and contexts which pertain to the discourse concerning the female body on stage, which I have discussed above. The ‘iconic’ modernist ballet *Les Noces* premiered in 1923 in Paris is one of the first choreographies where a female character’s inner state was expressed through a movement choir, as opposed to choreographies that represent the female as a single, isolated appearance (Taxidou, 2007: 107). In the marriage plot of this ballet, there is no leading role for one particular bride but an abstracted choreography by such a choir, which becomes the ‘form’ of the bride’s inner state (108). This was the necessary condition for Bausch’s achievement.

In discussing Craig’s theoretical ‘distrust of female emotion’ Blau considers that this ‘carries over’ to contemporary times (Blau, 1991: 87). For the latter, ‘the emergence of realism ... was inseparable from the dramatization of hysteria’ (87). Up to *Les Noces* dance was created and informed by a conspicuously patriarchal point of view. *Les Noces* is significant because it challenges this tradition by embracing the emotional state of the female (Taxidou, 2007: 108).

By the eighties, Bausch’s work began to examine gender as a compulsory performance (Cody, 1998: 121). I have suggested above that gender is learnt and confirmed, by and through, a ‘stylized repetition of acts.’ According to Butler, these acts are conventional indices of feminine or masculine identity. (1988: 519).

Diamond argues that defamiliarization ‘challenges the mimetic property of acting’, in that its renewed strangeness deprives us of a familiar object that is seen to imitate, and further claims that this technique, used theatrically as a critique of gender can be

‘powerful’ (1997: 45). In Bausch’s work, the ‘bracketing off’ of gendered movements reveal femininity to be an encrustation of physical *mores*. By looking and looking again, Bausch subjectifies the cultural representation of gender and reveals its comic and grotesque aspects.

Bausch, in Birringer’s view, scrutinizes the problem that ‘women pose and are posed as victims in our society’; characters expose the ‘re-imposing and re-hearsing’ of the image of femininity (1986: 88). Her dance theatre seems to expose the status quo of gender relations without any explicitly feminist statement, depicting gender in its oddness. Yet she takes a step further in expressing the *poseuse* quality of the female by exaggerating an implicit and yet habitually disguised compulsive exhibitionism and developing this selected trait to grotesque effect. Since Diamond considers that ‘a feminist practice that aims to expose or mock the strictures of gender, to reveal gender-as-appearance, as effect, not the precondition, of regulatory practices, usually uses some kind of Brechtian A(lienation) - effect’ (Diamond, 1997: 46), we could be faced with the interesting regress that a performance examining the compulsorily performed nature of gender is itself methodologically compelled upon its creator.

There is an additional paradox that the rules surrounding femininity are so precise, and for many women so inwardly constitutive of their own sense of identity, that a directly transgressive challenge is not possible; the recourse is, rather, to appropriate their induced behaviour in a way which serves as an instrument by which to critique a patriarchal order. Marilyn Monroe’s ‘bouffon act’ at President Kennedy’s birthday party thus challenges the reality of femininity when she scandalizes the party, or rather, hints at its scandalous substrate, and makes herself the transgressive subject. Monroe’s act and Bausch’s choreographies use femininity’s appearance as it is and reveal its critical effect through appropriation and calculatedly sexualized enhancement.

In the world that Bausch creates, characters suffer on high heels, and are constricted in suits and dresses. Their compulsion to perform their gender is a ‘corporeal project’, best expressed in *Kontakthof* (Cody, 1998: 121). The ‘weak-female-and-strong-male’ theme is conspicuous; men dance with women until the women become lifeless bodies. In *Two Cigarettes in the Dark* (1985), a man stands in the middle of

the stage wearing women's underwear and high heels, unable to move. He appears 'endangered' like other women in the choreography (Cody, 1998: 121). Similar to the drag queen, which I have discussed above, Bausch makes the audience aware of the appearance of the symbols of gender (Butler, 1988: 527). In this case the assumed 'feminine' act unveils the reality surrounding the sartorial and the inner state of the female, stuck in a pair of high heels. The costumes, the clothing of the dancers are a package for the body, as if to wrap the 'flesh' to sell. According to Servos, 'clothes make the (wo)man' in Bausch's characters. The function of the clothes as 'restrictive casing' is once more taken to a grotesque extreme (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 28).

A dance of the clowns

For Manning and Benson, Gert's 'dead-pan expression distanced her self from her performance; in this way she mocked and commented on the forms she used' (Manning and Benson, 1986: 38). Such a lack of facial coding made all the more clear an anarchistic (dis)order of bodily expression. This is also the path that Bausch takes to create the parody of social relations. According to Birringer, Bausch's dancers cross between contrasting atmospheres and through dead-pan expression they withhold any facial explication of their movements when they traverse these (Birringer, 1986: 90). The similarity with the clown's mask is obvious, and the tragic-comic quality of Bausch's deliberate exposure of processes is also structurally intrinsic to the clown's act. The clown displays mistakes naively in a catastrophic performance (Lecoq, 2006: 115), and in this sense, because the 'act' is never successfully accomplished, clowning is the style of acting that is closest to reality. For the Lecoq technique of training, there is essentially no 'act' to fulfil in the first place; the performer is placed on stage alone without any instructions or text, and gradually, performing nothing, displays his/her own genuine impulses on stage in form of a gesture, sigh or vocal. The discovery of one's genuine response to standing in front of a crowd, purposeless, brings out the sincere response springing from the body. This is the reality of the clown.

In my opinion, Bausch's choreographies mostly end with comical effect because she lays bare the impulses beneath social behaviour in a way according with the tradition of satire. According to Servos, dance theatre has the potential to depict people without the bodily self-control prescribed by the industrial age (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 31). Bausch's characters are clowns who are trying to be socially correct but who cannot restrain their inner volitions. But this purpose is not itself subject to a cold self-control. Bausch often instructed her dancers to 'push their physical limits', to express and experience a real exhaustion (Cody, 1998: 120). Bausch asks 'what moves a dancing body' and Servos claims that this is where 'the subjugation of "outer nature" accompanies that of "inner nature"' (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 31). By making her dancers experience real exhaustion, she succeeds involving the audience in the reality of the performer.

Kontakthof

In *Kontakthof* (1978), 'the concrete working situation of public performers,' men and women, are displayed through the choreography of posing (Birringer, 1986: 88). The *scena* is a dance class. At the beginning, the dancers display parts of their body such as teeth, profiles, hands and feet in order to test their bodies' 'market value' (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 66). Their exhibitionism derives from a compulsion to perform their gender in the transformative repetition of movements, this 'gestus of showing' turns into 'an hysterical euphoria' (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 28). 'The smiling, respectable façade' of dancers in *Kontakthof* and the contradictory sadistic games they play with their partners paints the 'public display as a circus parade' (Servos and Weigelt, 2008: 67). This grotesque layering of complexes reveals the open market of similarly contradictory appetites in which the body is exhibited (67). Dancers parade with 'imaginary double chin(s), disguised by sticking the neck out; allegedly big hips, or big, wonky noses which have to be concealed' (67). It can be said that the bodily concaves and convexes of the bouffon finds its reflection in the dynamics of these dances. The dancers implicitly deride the complexes of the social body by flaunting unwanted bodily extensions. Bausch's theatre of the image exhibits the bouffonesque potential of 'self-conscious post-modern bodies trained for media acts' (Cody, 1998: 120). These are gestus of 'conventions and internalized

norms we no longer see' (Birringer, 1986: 87). So it can be said that the social body which performs the restraining of potential excess of the found body of everyday life is also a bouffon, as in the comedy of women who hold in their stomachs and push out their breasts to look slim.

I would encapsulate Bausch's treatment of the feminine by a scene in *Gebirge* (1985) where 'a man in leotard and tiara suddenly whips across the stage, stopping only to ask the audience, "Why are you looking at me?"' (Cody, 1998: 123). This is the impulsive play of pose and anxious self-regard that bodies trained for mediated gazes perform everyday; the human body exposed, examined in intricate detail and trained to attitudinize to attract both brute attention and also social recognition.

Cindy Sherman

Cindy Sherman's work has marked a journey from the photographic recreation of female stereotypes to images of the monstrous female, all informed by an 'emphasis on dressing up and playacting' (Mulvey, 2006: 284). Sherman's work is influenced by Laura Mulvey's arguments on the male gaze and subjectivity (Jones, 2006: 44) and especially in her earlier *Untitled Film Stills* series (1977-80) she 're-represents' the female body as the 'object of an empowered male gaze', melancholically recreating the coiffure, make-up and attitudes of the female in fifties movies (Jones, 2006: 45). As both the artist and her own model, Sherman transforms herself into images of women, which 'challenge questions for contemporary feminist aesthetics' (Mulvey, 2006: 240). This exploration of filmic stereotypes saw her career 'arrive', perhaps because in the context of the seventies an intense discourse on representation of the female was in the vortex of feminist action, performance art and theory (Durand, 2006: 284), and the legacy of images from twenty years previously was considered to make up the iconographic background of the pervasive, great fictional role models which women both sought to fulfill and also escape. According to Mulvey, Sherman plays upon the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of femininity, 'in which the insistent sexualization of woman is integrated into style and respectability' (Mulvey, 2006: 289-90).

Sherman has borrowed from ‘a library of stereotypes’ (Criqui, 2006: 277). Her ‘chameleon-like’ changes from one stereotype female to another, reveals ‘the impalpability of the self, and the omnipresence of illusion’ in particular for the image of the female within society (Durand, 2006: 230). Amelia Jones argues that Sherman depicts the ‘instabilities of human existence’ through self-photography, which Amelia Jones calls the ‘*technology of embodiment*,’ (Jones, 2006: 43). This embodiment is also the primary style of representation in contemporary times, revealing human complexes through the genre of the portrait (Durand, 2006: 230). Durand argues that Sherman explores the human’s ‘capacity to ... invent parallel lives - a capacity that we share with no other living creature’ (230).

Photography and death

According to Jones, the subject of the self-portrait is ‘an apparatus of perspectival looking’ and by freezing this particular representation, the portrait reveals the absence of the body as its being potentially or presently dead. Jones argues that this absence is ‘always already dead – in intimate relation to lack and loss’ (Jones, 2006: 42) She further discusses Barthes’ theory on photography as a ‘death-dealing’ representation (42). Photography unveils the impossibility of retaining the moment, and therefore the impossibility of arresting ageing. For Jones, we are attracted to the photographic portrait because its illusion delays death (46)

Jones infers that photography fetishizes its subject through its potential to ‘freeze’ or ‘project as object’ (Jones, 2006: 44). According to Jones, ‘the fetishizing aspect of photography is ... linked definitely to *death*’ (46). In the case of the female body, photography is motivated by the desire to ‘freeze the female body as reassuring fetish,’ yet, it fails to fulfil this task since the frozen moment is also ‘already dead’ (46). It can be said that the male gaze searches for a dead female body. Since, (as I have already quoted from Remshardt) performance is ‘bound to double business between now and not-now’, it also simultaneously acts as the ‘reminder and defier of death’ (Remshardt, 2004: 50). It can be concluded, then, that the connection between performance and photography is their capacity of at once reminding us of, and, so to speak, out-facing, death. This particular point links Bausch’s work to Sherman’s.

Sherman performed Marilyn Monroe on the cover of the Anglo-American avant-garde magazine *ZG* (1982) in a cover-girl pose. Although she adopts a familiar signature attitude with her ‘eyes ... half open with head position thrown back’, the expression reveals, however, an inner unhappiness that ‘seeps through the cracks’ (Mulvey, 2006: 299). According to Mulvey, Sherman reflects upon Monroe, ‘America’s favourite fetish’ as a self-created stereotype; she further argues that ‘the veil of sexual allure now seems, in retrospect, to be haunted by death’ (299).

From parody to grotesque body

In *Fashion Untitleds* (1983-1984), Sherman was invited to use the Comme des Garçons fashion house’s designer clothes as both model and artist. The items sent to Sherman were designed to project an ideal of ‘hipness’, youth, slenderness, and beauty. But in an oppositional statement to the fashion industry, Sherman transforms herself, the model who is supposed to show off these items, into ‘grotesque, caricatural figures’ (Durand, 2006: 253). Bausch also ‘parodies the kind of feminine image that is geared to erotic consumption’ as ‘she inverts conventional codes of female allure and elegance’ (Mulvey, 2006: 291). According to Mulvey, Sherman strikes a position in ‘binary opposition to the perfect body of the fashion model’ and in ‘response to the cosmetic svelteness of fashion’ (291) which is that of the grotesque. The implicit background choice of marionette over human, as made by theatrical theorists, can also be observed here; the fashion model is a body that ‘defies gravity’ and is preferred as such. But Sherman studiously reverses this, exaggerating the physicality of fashion models and deliberately depicting women ‘heavy in body and groundedness’ (Mulvey, 2006: 291).

For Jean-Pierre Criqui, these portraits have ‘fallen out of love’ with the viewer (Criqui, 2006: 278). The exhibitionism and seductive quality of *Film Stills* is quite absent in these images. These ‘defeated’ images of women who are themselves defeated, are ‘difficult and challenging.’ They remind us of death and its omnipresence (278). In my opinion, Sherman’s reminder of this condition is also a *memento mori* of somatic reality, within a culture that chooses the marionette as opposed to human.

In Fairytales (1983-84), she unveils another reality, the female's 'monstrous otherness behind the cosmetic façade' (Mulvey, 2006: 292). It is as if femininity is blurred by the uncanny make-up and distressed poses in which the female is presented. In *Disasters* (1986-89) she brings her journey to the point of 'full-blooded' abjection, where the body disappears into prosthetics, vomit, menstrual blood and hair, the secret constitution of bodily devices and unmentionable fluids, which cosmetic interventions attempt to conceal.

Sherman represents the 'division between surface allure and concealed decay' and this division is the female's 'dualistic mythology... the opposition between truth and artifice' between 'enchantress' and 'hag' (Mulvey, 2006: 294). One might follow Mulvey in casting this as a 'mythological contradiction lived by women under patriarchy' (295), but any perusal of the coverage of celebrities by popular media would reveal that this is more a knife-edge of stereotypical response to a woman's public *persona* which has to be the one or the other without middle ground. By completely different means and informed by quite opposed theoretic intent, she brings us in these works to Celine's (previously quoted) 'horrible sight', itself, if one may use a pun, a *horror-able site* of the remains of un-concealed femininity.

Sex Pictures

Criqui argues that the works comprising *Sex Pictures* (1992) depict the same 'grotesque body' which Bakhtin has described as 'unfinished and incomplete, always under construction, and itself engaged in the process of constructing another body altogether' (Criqui, 2006: 281). For Criqui, Sherman's work takes us back to the modern linguistic origin of the grotesque, the Roman murals uncovered in the Renaissance within the remains of Nero's *Domus Aurea*, where synthesized 'hybrid' bodies (281) seemed to equivocate between ornament and person.

Durand argues that *Sex Pictures* criticize the 'disturbing dehumanization' in contemporary media, where products are advertised by pornography-ing everything. A reflection of such dehumanization can be observed in my character, *Agent Provocateur* (see chapter 4) whose ornamental plastic facade hides a human

underneath. Figurative images from art history are ‘debased’ to pornography, ‘as our only abiding source of universal imagery and entertainment’ (Durand, 2006: 259). Sherman’s grotesque objects made with plastic material, lacking human skin, ‘midway between human and nonhuman,’ represent the ‘dehumanization of sexual desire’ (259). These images reduce human forms to orifices exposing the grotesquery that lies underneath everyday images disseminated by the media.

Ageing

I would like to introduce here a term which I find offers a compelling polar opposite to the various stages of abjection which I have mentioned previously. Rather than talk of the ‘ideal’ body as a consummation of a closed system of values, I think that the notion of the ‘utopian’ body, that is, the body of, in the Greek, *ou topos*, or ‘no place’, is more comprehensive (Nobus 2009). A significant example of the utopian body in transition is ‘the appearance of youth on an aging body,’ which Morgan finds ‘irreversibly alienating’ (1991: 39). In *Hollywood/Hamptons Types* (2000-2002), Sherman depicts ageing women who adopt the cosmetic and sartorial styles of youth in order to grasp at a ‘utopian’ condition which, all too apparently, they cannot attain. These are the traces and remains of women within their project of defying death through the masquerade which the genre of the portrait projects, and which has been defined as ‘intentionality’ (Jones, 2006: 43).

Sherman puts forward these women’s desire to sustain a certain aesthetic of the female stereotype ‘within the domain of the symbolic’ (Durand, 2006: 245)

According to Durand, these ‘types’ have ‘fallen by the way side of the *Hollywood Dream*’ and they represent a yearning for recognition within the ‘game board of accepted, predetermined identities’ (266).

These photographs can be seen as Sherman’s response to the stereotypes of advertising shots ‘in a human marketplace’ (Durand, 2006: 266). According to Durand, the ‘type’ that makes it in Hollywood has ‘no visible identity of his or her own but is capable of assuming every identity’ (266). In other words, the desirable trait is a chameleon-like adaptability to a pre-existent code. For this reason the film maker Peter Gidal stated in 1978 that he did not work with female actors because the

images of women cannot be ‘separated from the dominant meanings’ (Gidal, 1980: 169). As with theatre practitioners’ theorizing at the beginning of the last century, the female cannot be the subject of the image; she is either transformed into a stereotype, or banished from the image due to meanings she cannot escape.

Women depicted in *Hollywood/Hamptons Types* pose ‘as an object in order to be a subject’ (Owens, 1985: 212-215). Sherman explores the female at the margins of accepted appearances and who cannot be classified as a standard beauty. These are ‘scenes of feminine subjectivity’ in which they assume a mask, a conscious pose ‘in order to be seen’, in order to be the object of the male gaze (Jones, 2006: 51). Their masquerade hides and also expresses their failure to fulfil such a task. The more these women conceal their particular characteristics, the more they expose their mask. Sherman uses masquerade in exaggeration in order to expose the aching need for this concealment.

Sherman’s images have studied the alienation that the female experiences towards her own body. This relation of corporeal self-estrangement and its entailed willed illusion is best exemplified in *Untitled # 360* (2000). The figure depicted here is wearing nipple prosthetics that make her nipples look like a young female’s. The image of her breast’s artificiality is balanced by a large mole on her face that she cannot conceal.

It can be said that Sherman’s depiction of femininity, as with Bausch, uses a certain kind of Brechtian defamiliarization. The women in these photographs are ‘a re-representation, a making strange’ within the narrative of the feminine (Mulvey, 2006: 286). In a way similar to Bausch and Gert, Sherman exhibits her subjects’ thwarted quest for happiness and unveils their inner longings through appearance. Bausch, Gert and Sherman dig through the appearance of the female that hides this substrate of unhappy unfulfillment.

Abjection again

According to Mulvey, Sherman’s work ‘comes close to depicting the Kristevan concept of the abject: that is, the disgust aroused in the human psyche by lifeless,

inanimate bodily matter, bodily wastes and the dead body itself' (Mulvey, 2006: 298). When represented through the death-dealing photographic medium, the anxious, the desperate, and the artificial image of the female becomes abject. To quote Kristeva directly:

All transitional states such as the grotesque, which infer that the body is exceeding its boundaries, posit a threat to the symbolic. Any depiction of the female body that defies classification because of its ambiguity or refuses to belong to distinct Cartesian categories emanates threat and danger. It is at the margins, the very edges of categories, that the symbolic is challenged.

(1982: 245)

Sherman skilfully uses the qualities of stereotypes to create an oppositional response to the symbolic. In *Hollywoods/Hampton Types*, as in her preceding work, the ageing female characters 'seem to be poised between past and present' (Mulvey, 2006: 303). They slide off the margins of the feminine through artifice, and though they would wish to be such, they fail to achieve the symbolic, and so, clown-like, become carnivalesque.

Clowns

It is no surprise, therefore, that recently she has come to address this theme directly: 'the clown is the logical extension of many fundamental themes in Cindy Sherman's work' (Durand, 2006: 268). It can be argued that Sherman's previous 'clowning' before the camera has been a metaphor for the performative responsibility that the female carries in social context, both naive and self-exhibiting in the manner of the bouffon.

According to Durand, a sort of clowning loaded with 'contradictions and excess' is hinted at in Sherman's earlier works such as *Hollywood/Hampton Types* (2006: 268). *Clowns* (2003-4), a series of works depicting in garish colours precisely that, also carry qualities of Lecoq's and Gaulier's bouffons. Whereas in *Hollywood/Hampton Types*, the figures are at the margin of the grotesque, and

would never consider themselves to be such, they are already bouffons in that they embody an excessive masquerade in an attempt to be loved. And where *Hollywood/Hamptons Types* long to fit into and satisfy certain aesthetic codes, and fail, *Clowns* 'no longer struggle for identity' (Mulvey, 2006: 303). *Clowns* is the natural progression from *Hollywood/Hamptons Types*, as Sherman now explicitly exposes her female *bouffonerie*.

In the next chapter I will attempt to discuss my own practice as bouffon in relation to the themes raised here.

Chapter 4

Performance in the first person: my bouffonerie

I now turn to a discussion of the development of my own practice as it acts exegetically upon my research concerning the themes of the female bouffon, the grotesque and the social mode of the carnivalesque. At the start of my career, my practice was as a sculptor, habitually dealing with manipulations of form. The manual process of sculpting a bodily form entails dynamics which equivocate between the straightforwardly normative, and the offering of potential licence to embellish, distort and transform, which may yield hyperbolic, and so *a fortiori*, grotesque formations. Primarily, I consider the bouffon's concave and convex forms from a sculptural point of view. I also, in a broader sense, situate myself as a creator within the complex cultural *locus* of being a Turkish woman, being, as it were, a 'convex other' in relation to received notions of European culture received hitherto, but also a 'concave recipient' of confluent representations of my own identity as it comes from both European and wider 'Asiatic' sources. Sculpture and physical theatre thus meet in my practice (and, by implication in myself), through the process of creating a performance with an emphasis on the representation of 'sculptured out', and therefore distorted, forms and bodies which challenge the normative. My activity as a sculptor has taken on a temporal and performative dimension which plays with and, I hope, extends beyond notions of the normative.

My practice deals with the problem of what seems to be the female body's incapability of being neutral and of escaping pre-existing meanings loaded onto representations of her. I appropriate this incapability and I attempt to distance the female from these meanings via exaggeration and parody. I have tried to defamiliarize and to reveal the fragility of the concept of the female. Much like Sherman, my explorations began with dressing-up for the camera, to create frozen dramatic moments that suggest narratives. I moved to performing inside video projections, so entering the context of performance art.

I have already alluded to Remshardt's opinion that performance itself is 'abject', taking that term in a Kristevan sense, staging the past in the immediate moment, the 'now' and the 'not-now', a reminder and resister of death (2004: 50). This perspective has assisted me to create performative visuals with the dynamic of

gestus, the theatrically epiphanic gesture or event. I hope that my work has reached the point where the body and the costume as its extension is at once the performance and the set. I work with costume as a (frequently grotesque) performative bodily extension. Latex, giving the effect of skin, is an appropriate prosthetic material, merging the body's surface with the artifice.

Fairytale and *Mirrorland*

Mirrorland (2006) is a digital performance piece, which narrates the (de)formation of my bodily identity in the style of a fairytale intensified with video production visuals. The narrative is told from the point of view of 'the girl from the land without mirrors'. She enters this land and sees her reflection for the first time, but the images in the mirror reflect back multiple selves disclosing her reaction to this new world. One of her reflections is a human size 'Barbie Doll'.

Mirrorland is a metaphor for a 'foreigner's' cultural shock when meeting a materialistic world that endows status to artifice, especially for women. The girl from the land without mirrors is reflectively transformed into the Barbie Doll, the symbol of western beauty, and thereby gains social esteem. She now assumes the name *Agent Provocateur*, a doll, as her name suggests, made to provoke.

The fairytale is a style of literature that usually enforces a patriarchal ideal of femininity. My use of its form is, for my practice, a primary link to the world of grotesquery. By contrast with *Mirrorland*, in my story-telling performances, *Infectious Stories 3 and 4* (2010), I have purposefully avoided creating a set and costuming so as not to be reduced to a sculptural creation. The two fairytales which I narrate on stage explore making imagery with hand gestures and a minimum of props. These performances, free of staging 'complicities', allow me to reconsider the experience of the audience in relation to the performer's effort to connect with them. The physical theatre medium explores this connection.

***Agent Provocateur* in street performance**

Having assumed the status of an autonomous character, *Agent Provocateur* now figured in eponymous street performance (2007-2008). Her appearance, that of a

small Barbie taking on life-size proportions, struck many spectators of *Mirrorland* as being quite grotesque, and my treatment of her performance has been similar to that of Jarry's 'puppetised' performers. My stylisation, through costume, resembled that of Schlemmer's *kunstfigur* 'metamorphose(ing) the human figure into a mechanical object' (Goldberg, 1979: 69). I was, in a sense which balletic theorists like Craig would not have foreseen, attempting to puppetise the female body.

For Remshardt, performance art 'aggravates' the grotesque nature of performance by integrating into itself the provoked experience of the audience (Remshardt, 2004: 2004). Agent Provocateur's potential to provoke impulsive reactions from the audience was most conspicuous on the Southbank in London, where she was performed in a busking manner in the summers of 2007 and 2008. Taxidou's defamiliarization, mixing 'aspects of disgust and wonder, fear and awe, distance and familiarity' (Taxidou, 2007: 1) can be observed here, and I offer the following analysis as a paradigm case of how the grotesque is received by a 'found' audience.

Firstly, the doll is accessible to every passer-by without any shielding distance that the theatre stage might provide; the audience can go as far as touching the performer without any predetermined consequence. The performance's format and placement in pedestrian space has connotations of the circus, the freak show, the art gallery, body art and a 'human zoo' where the exposed body/object is observed to detail and commented upon in a socially interactive environment. The proximity of passer-by and performer depends entirely on the passer-by's social judgement.

Secondly, at the first instance the doll gives the initial illusion to a passer-by of an inanimate sculpture, provoking the latter to investigate the nature of her peculiar form. I turn now to examine that peculiarity in detail. The format of the street performance in London is often that of a monumental sculpture embodied by a performer using costuming and body paint. The doll both and contradicts extends this format through the latex costuming which covers the facial features of the performer completely, but which permits the doll to move in an uncanny automaton-like fashion. Freud discusses the effect of waxwork figures and other such ingeniously constructed dolls in his celebrated positing of the uncanny, or *unheimlich* effect, which:

Arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes
(2003: 151)

The Barbie Doll has served as a ubiquitous symbol of some kind of aspired-to femininity, her creator, Ruth Handler saying in 1959 that she aimed to make a doll for 'girls to imagine what they themselves might grow up to become' (*Barbie Doll History*, 2006). But the zone of the symbolic is preserved by her scale, 11½ inches in height. Agent Provocateur is monstrously out of proportion, and the distortion acceptable in miniature as a shorthand for attractiveness has now become the gross excess and distortion of the signifier 'blown up' into a signified.

In a Kristevan sense the enlarged Barbie can be said to be abject too. She has exceeded the boundaries of her 'natural' scale, and so overturned her symbolic status; she presents to us as a hypostasized, that is, objectified, condition of what was only licensed before as a representation; she is a previously employed symbol 'at the margins, the very edges of categories' where the symbolic 'is challenged' (Kristeva, 1982: 245). The Barbie Doll reveals, when five feet tall, how impossible her aesthetic really is. Just as Sherman's work reveals the 'monstrous otherness behind the cosmetic façade' (Mulvey, 2006: 292), a big Barbie displays how a cosmetically 'pleasing' form can disclose its monstrosity. I think an analogy can be drawn here with the inflated scale of Jeff Koon's paintings and sculptures of kitsch toys, which renders them into sinister presences.

Thirdly, by busking, the doll becomes a product, effectively soliciting whatever gratuities are offered in the hat. Her performance approaches that of a beggar; passers-by cannot but attend an unexpected performance 'on the street' that is imposed on them. The audience can choose to reward the performance with donations, but this discretion extends to their being free to respond or to pass critical judgements in a way which can be dubbed carnivalesque. She is, in Russo's terms,

an unruly female become naturally 'transgressive' in carnival context (1994: 60), out of rule, in the sense of scale, and out of her place, by being on the street.

So Agent Provocateur elicits a large variety of impulses and reactions from the passers-by, criticized, degraded or admired according to the audience's background. It is illuminating to give some cases:

1. A woman wearing a burqa approaches Agent Provocateur and examines the eye holes which are the only portals linking the eyes of the performer (me) inside the mask and the outside world. This interaction is particularly interesting because it seems to create an implicit dialogue between the figural context of the burqa and that of Agent Provocateur. Both costumes instantiate background statements about the representation of the female body. While the burqa-clad woman is covered to hide herself from male gazes according to a strict interpretation of Islam, she is also exposed because her outfit is unusual, even for some provocative, in a Western context. The reverse is the case for Agent Provocateur, her costume projects a weirdly hyper-sexual presence which exposes her to gazes, yet the latex also functions as body armour protecting her from those who attempt to exploit her, such as teenagers who try to hit her breasts. These two differently exposed women meet through the eye holes of their costumes, from where they look out into the world. Both costumes at once reveal and hide.

2. Disabled or in whatever way physically abnormal passers-by, seem to show particular interest in Agent Provocateur. As with the burqa-clad woman, they approach as closely as their disability permits. In contrast to the rapidity of the usual crowd response they examine her at length. Once again, this is a scene of two 'exposed' bodies meeting under the same social spotlight; the disabled and disfigured attract the same curiosity from the 'normal'.

3. Reactions to the doll vary according to the age group of the audience. Teenagers engage in a carnivalesque mockery of her. Young English speaking males typically interact with the doll by making sexually suggestive gestures on her breastpiece. Agent Provocateur, true to her name, creates impulses towards the female form that are exercised under an unstated carnival licence that 'anything may go'. Perhaps the teenage reaction is indicative of a generation surrounded by images 'pornographed in

advance’, and for whom such a presence has an infinitely manipulable, ‘virtual’ status, that is, a kind of hyper-sexual avatar. Perhaps this generation reads Agent Provocateur as a product whose bouffon-like nature is now transposed into the digital sphere; possibly for them the carnivalesque exists almost entirely online.

4. Pre-adolescent children’s reaction varies widely according to their cultural backgrounds and the codes in which they are raised. Children from Western countries generally admire Agent Provocateur, and are encouraged to do so by their parents. Some children who seem to be of Middle Eastern origin, and who do not speak English, show hostile behaviour towards her, and may kick her. This may indicate that they are unfamiliar with the original of the Barbie form, which at home might be culturally transgressive in the first place. If that is the case, then the objectified symbol that is the big Barbie has no domestic and parodic connotations for them, and they perceive simply a monstrously sexualised female which is scandalously transgressive. Because for them there is no norm to be familiar with, there can be no carnivalesque defamiliarization.

Exploring Ageing

The Old People (2007) is a devised piece inspired by the tea dances organized for older people in London. The piece combines real and abstracted moments in older people’s social life. The physicality of older people is explored through musicality, rhythm, dance and text. Although their movements are limited, their physicality carries a ‘personal history.’ This piece is particularly important in understanding the thin line between characterization and parody, taking that term in its least charitable sense. Dealing with any reflection of old age is challenging in that any ‘impression’ of age may teeter on the latter. Their bodies’ witnessing of their personal history projects a kind of exaggeration of physical traits and features, and exploring older ages does entail examining how certain lifelong movements have configured the physicality of their subjects, leaving bodily traces of work, life and accident.

In *Tricks of the Present Tense* (2010), devised with Kathrine Axlev for ‘The Art of Ageing’ Seminar Series at Brunel University in 2010, the characterization of the main character Ruth is explored via two performers who play her in her younger and older age.

In both this and the previous piece an there is an emphasis on musicality. *Tricks of the Present Tense*, creates a world as experienced by a dementia patient, explored and reflected in music played on the piano. As a Chopin waltz undergoes musical distortions and becomes grotesquely unrecognizable, Ruth's brain loses her grip on ordered memories. There is no possibility of sequential linear narratives in a demented mind and this is expressed by the fragmented scenes that result.

The genre of grotesque

At the London International School of Performing Arts (LISPA), the initiation year of Physical Theatre training consists of reconsidering and exploring human movement in order to find approaches to theatrical territories. The second half of the second year explores the theatrical territories of the grotesque, the bouffon, the cabaret and the clown. The students re-live childhood in a series of workshops. According to Lorna Marshall, children universally move free of social restrictions up to the age of four. At this age they start to form their 'gender body' and 'family body', and to learn layers of codes of movement that form their identity (2001: 10). The theatre students first mimic children's play in an attempt to move without these layers. Then the students explore how the child develops into a socially 'correct' person and, by way of reversal, are asked to create sequences around the theme 'adults acting like children'. Exaggerated and obsessive rituals are played out to understand the body's movements prior to consciousness of socialized self-control.



Fig 4: Bouffon Study Nilufer Ovalioglu, 2008

These movements are enhanced by costumes exaggerating bodily convexities and concavities with padding. Such deformed and reconfigured bouffon bodies perform with the physicality of a child and the outcome is grotesque. Costuming is an important layer of theatricality in Lecoq's pedagogy; it serves as a layer that does not ridicule the character but creates a body that operates in the universe of childhood. In the Space Lab workshops that I attended at LISPA, I produced sculptural pieces with cardboard and explored their movement in space. Cardboard is a convenient and lightweight material to shape and move with.

This digression into physical theatre gave me the opportunity to reflect upon how the burlesquing of adult human behavior by associating it more with that of children and animals has served to reinforce an implicit hierarchy of behavioural codes. I now decided to attempt a performance which brings these codes to a point of equality and redistributes them. In *Pigeon Love* (2008), a narrative taken from real life is transposed into a grotesque world where performers play enormous pigeons in large cardboard costumes. The heroine is a little girl wearing a skirt also shaped with cardboard. Three theatrical territories are combined here: Clowning (the little girl), the grotesque, and musical theatre. The little girl's play of making pigeons fly off builds up to actually killing one. The pigeons then become an organized choir and sing the song 'It's stupid to cry' as they counterattack and intimidate the girl. Finally, she retaliates and kills another pigeon in rage. The 'art of mockery' in Lecoq's terms (Lecoq, 2006: 118), is instanced by a 'grotesque' chorus deriding the melodrama's hero(ine). While the little girl persuades herself that she fights for the 'great values' in life, like honour and love, the chorus 'mocks' these. This is the clash of melodrama and the grotesque, two opposite theatrical territories, but which almost by accident ends up reanimating the medieval genre of the bestiary, where animals satirize human vices. In *Pigeon Love* I have attempted to underscore melodrama with clowning, and in a way which cannot but have Hitchcockian overtones, given animals a social grievance against human actions.

In an attempt to test the pigeons' effect in public, *Pigeon Love* was performed outdoors at the Hackney Empire Clown Festival (in front of the Town Hall) in 2008 and at the Nothing Hill Carnival of 2008. In front of the former, images of enormous pigeons had an 'uncanny' effect similar to that of Agent Provocateur's performances.

But in my opinion Agent Provocateur provokes a response from passers-by because it transgresses the cultural meaning of the Barbie Doll, whilst the pigeons serve as yet another grotesque offering, amongst many any casual browser meets in the media. Perhaps the theatre of pigeons fits within a deep-laid category of satirical genre which exists in popular consciousness, and therefore is easily consumed, like so many other mediated visuals.

Developing a style

I have developed my practice by combining approaches of performance artists that I have worked with and pedagogies that I have undertaken as part of my research. My particular approach to performance merges the two superficially contrary dynamics of performance art and physical theatre, with concerns for the placement of the performance in question.

In 2006, at the *Performance Studies International Conference, PSi #12*, addressing the the theme of Performing Rights, I combined my practice of Shermanesque dressing-up, with Guillermo Gomez Pena's approach to creating performances. Pena provokes artists to build a community through dressing *each other* up, and by adding them to other performers within a performance process. The community so formed dresses disparate bodies with objects and costumes to create some code of meanings, and further directs those who are performers to create visual performative metaphors. The 'performance area' serves as a stage to position a performance or performer that is in relation to, or in contrast with, other performances taking place. The overall image of this chaos is carnivalesque, mostly with exaggerated poses in conflicting costumes, resulting in some frankly political statements regarding identity. Pena's work deals with immigration and minorities in Western countries, and therefore carries reflections of Gaulier's outcast bouffons mentioned in my first chapter. It can be said that Pena's workshop performance is a process of collectively dressing the bouffon.

I have also made incursions into the Japanese Butoh method of training, studying under Frances Barbe. She teaches a certain use of the figurative and explicatory 'still' image of the performer, which serves as a starting point from motionless pose into movement. The performer replicates the pose of a figure in an image from, say,

painting or photography and bases further movements on this pose. These movements are then repeated until they become another kind of body language, and interact with other bodies on stage. The reflection of both Pena and Barbe in my work can be observed in *The Period Girl* (2008, revised 2009).

The Period Girl

The initial pose of *The Period Girl* is taken from the painting of a young woman sitting in a conventionally ‘feminine’ position, both knees locked together, the pelvis pushed back, and leaning forward with arms that lift a book up to read to another woman listening. But the props of the chair and the book are both absent from the performance. She anticipates reading and reaches forward in enthusiasm. I thus embody this pose in space without a chair to sit on, and use the lower legs to move without spoiling the rest of the sitting pose. The resulting body which moves so unusually is pregnant to new narratives. I also reproduce her facial expression of sheer excitement with the mouth and eyes wide open. The frozen facial expression, and the arms reaching out, create a comical yet grotesque image of this figure, that seems to be asking a question cast in emotion, in effect, a creature transposed from a feminine image into a feminine animal. It is important to notice that the defamiliarisation followed in this practice succeeds in transposing a normative feminine body into a kind of new creature, yet the end result is perceived as a hysteric creature with a feminine stance. I reconfigure a banal pose and so propose an oddness that reveals femininity.

Cabaret: *I killed my husband*

The structure of this cabaret sketch consists of a song (chanson) and a ‘scandalous’ act. I have investigated cabaret through two commissions given to me by The Whatworks Cabaret from October 2008 to the present, and their influence is, I think, apparent here. In *I killed my husband* (2009), a bride whose dress has large blood stains is holding the head of her husband, and tells the story of how she chopped it off on their wedding day. She revisits her memories of him and discovers that she can put her hand inside his skull, reach through to his jaw and so make him lip-synch

a duet of the bride's devising. The act transforms into a puppetry act as she tells the story of their break up. The head then progressively takes control of her arm and lip-synchs to the song 'you don't owe me.' This grotesquely comical scene has reflections of Pere Ubu's rampant nature. The bride's hysteric act seems to be a natural abreaction, yet her solution for the relationship problem extends from the boundaries of 'rational' conduct into grotesquery.

The underlying notions are of control and of gender dynamics. The image of her lip-synching a male head is reminiscent of puppetry. The audience experiences, at the very least, defamiliarization, or perhaps a certain *refamiliarization* with the culturally embedded iconography, common in baroque art, of Judith and Holofernes. The bride's hand invades the visceral interiorities of the male head. I have mentioned Ince's theory of the head signifying intelligence and masculinity, whilst female hair signifies sexuality. Here a symbol of femininity and that of masculine intelligence are reversed in power relations. Ince also argues that the words 'woman' and 'head' mentioned as a pair, work against the grain of 'patriarchally coded meanings and images' (2000: 87). The bride is not only a putative hysterical murderess, but also challenges a received patriarchal image of cerebral intelligence.

Serene

Serene (2010) is a performance which, I suggest, absorbs all the themes touched upon in this dissertation. Its title is a semi-pun: sirens are depicted as irresistible yet monstrous female creatures, with the body of a fish from the waist down and possessing beautiful and so beguiling singing voices that charm sailors to their death (Siren, 2010).

A siren's body, half fish, half woman, is certainly grotesque according to Bakhtin's use of that term. A fish is compelled to live in water; a woman to breath air. This contradiction is already symbolic of the impossibility of this creature. This creature is at an extreme point of alluring impossibility, which as a notion underpins so many manifestations of the female *chic*. And her very liminal abode, neither at home in air and water, has something in common with the conspicuous air of delicate,

dangerously rarified preciousness which surrounds the woman at the apex of public fashion. She is not easily transplanted, as the legends regarding the fate of captured mermaids make clear. And she is definitely dangerous to know: the fish tale represents a darker side to her nature, feral and elusive.

At the risk of sounding defeatist, I would cite Export, Madonna, Monroe, Sherman, Gert and Bausch, as all in their diverse ways gesturing to the impossibility of femininity as a mode of practical existence.

The siren tail that I sculpt is created with these associations in mind, depicting the beauty of the female joined in the same form as her repulsive tail, whose animalistic quality also points to the wilderness of nature, and reciprocally, of the female body where is located a lethal and secreted sexuality. This wildness is best articulated in the famous children's story, *The Little Mermaid* (1837) where the mermaid falls in love with a human prince and swaps her life in the sea and her voice, for a pair of legs and a human soul. In other words, she becomes an appropriate partner for the male.

In *Serene*, the live performer wears a latex siren suit, a dark and grotesque fish tail with a female upper body. She performs in a warehouse space, lip-synching to manipulated sounds in frequencies within and also beyond the range that the human ear can detect. She screams in high pitches up to those which seem silent, but which can be sensed as vibrations only. She embodies a silent language. The siren's performance is as erratic as it is animalistic.



Fig: 5 Serene Nilufer Ovalioglu, 2010

I offer her performance as being metaphoric of representations of the contemporary female in the media: liberated and ostensibly sexually free, but yet objectified, frequently grotesque, sexualised to the point of continuous and crippling self-evaluation, and when this has passed, monstrous. The close associations made over millenia between femininity and a closer-than-male relationship to the animal, raises the possibility of the female where the animal and the female co-exist. As I mentioned above, the female performs ‘ideas’ about herself received from a masculine and purportedly logical stance, but makes visible, in such playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: an effacement, itself effaced, of the operation of the feminine in language. The siren embodies such a ‘possible operation of the feminine language’ (Irigaray, 1985: 76) and reveals that this language has been suppressed by a kind of self-induced, stylized catatonia. Which point returns us to hysteria, the disease of the vagrant womb within the consequentially emotionally vagrant woman. In *Serene*, I explore the expression of the female as a convulsive corporal reaction. The catatonically hysterical female is as mute to ‘sane’ ears as the sound frequencies that are beyond human hearing.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Bouffonerie towards the future

As I made clear in my term introductions there are close relations between the connotations of such terms as distortion, parody, burlesque and grotesque, and that of the bouffon. I now revisit these terms to evaluate how my explorations in female *bouffonerie* have touched on these connoted concepts.

The pre-modern carnivals discussed in my first chapter were societally licenced episodes of transgression. Religiously sanctioned norms regarding women's proper role and conduct were subject to a performed parodic subtext which deliberately toyed with contradictory states; the woman out on the streets, beyond her husband's or father's control, and even dominating them both. But in a sense the *burla*, the mockery here was self-limiting, and strictly time-limited. Whatever slow effect the carnival had in displaying the arbitrariness of gender roles, these were robust enough to withstand this assault for centuries, and in effect made use of such 'letting off steam' in order to contain more serious questioning. The pre-modern bouffon was a twist on, a distortion of, norms of femininity which could show to a male audience just how fundamentally sound these latter were.

Industrial society constructed norms very differently. With unprecedented documentary resources, it could mix the spheres of moral *ought* with that of purportedly scientific *is*, so intimately that the resulting norms could be absorbed by an increasingly literate female population as if they were incorrigible facts of nature. Distortion of them assumed the pathology of a disease. And parody, far from being a carnivalesque subversion, was an aspirational act of conforming to their influence. The 'normal' female was now the product of completely internalised forces of conformity. The

mechanistic models of the nineteenth century invaded dramatic theory, as I have discussed, in a way which made the female performer an unreliable substitute for the marionette; she was the inferior of a puppet which was made to parody *her*.

When the modernist eruption finally came, straightforward parody and distortion were so embedded in feminine self-reflection and attempts to attain a hoped-for norm that its burlesque intent had to be seasoned heavily with the grotesque. The female performer was reclaiming her chthonic root not from a condemning Church so much as from a code of manners which rendered it undiscussable. But after a century in which modernism and post-modernism have run their course, and which has seen the emancipation of women in Western societies reach at least a theoretical success, where can the female bouffon be located today? One factor is most salient: the world of celebrity and accompanying, and globally consumed, fashion holds an irresistible sway over women's self representation. In consequence, the frontier between normative and transgressive has become ineluctably fluid. The involvement of powerful market forces, ever seeking commodifiable novelty, has resulted in a state where this season's shock is next season's orthodoxy.

This condition, I would infer, has returned us to a strangely contemporary version of carnival. Whereas past occurrences were discrete episodes of unruliness, we are now confronted with an endless chain of successive parodies and subversions of those preceding which have become fit to be mocked. Put simply, there seems to be no stable norm of femininity to critique. It is certainly the case that, being socially constructed, such norms in past centuries were subject to change correlative with the wider changes in society, politics and economy, but the pace of such changes was slow enough to permit universalizing definitions of proper 'femininity' to be attempted, even if these now appear completely temporalized. At present, however, the

dualism of norm and its transgression, though absolutely necessary as a motor of fashion, is in a process of such rapid, virus-like mutation that none of its states can ever be the subject of such claims. So we find that the imperatives of conformity and rebellion are still present, but they have lost all pretence to be founded in anything with claims to instantiate permanent values.

Perhaps an association can be drawn here with the seeming dissipation in the nineties of the cause of women's liberation into various strands of 'new feminism', which adopted a far less critical attitude to the acquisition of fashionable commodities as well to self-commodification by women. Performance practitioners like Gert and Export explicitly intended to reconfigure the representation of the female from object to subject in a way which paralleled earlier feminism, and transgressed the context in which they performed. But when, as now, the miming of the coital act, and exposure of female desire are normalized performances that are consumed as products, the rebellion has rather lost its cause. If pornography is now both exploitative big business and also in some manifestations, feminist expression, it is clear that the norms of 'justice' assumed by feminist theorists in the sixties have become a great deal more ambiguous. Women, it seems, have a right to objectify themselves; some enjoy it, and a few can make it pay.

So the discourse on the subject/object ambiguity of the female performance seems to have taken a new direction. As an example, the popular recording artist and performer Lady Gaga performs a provocative pornographic act that borders on the grotesque. Much like Bausch she exaggerates the sexual female, yet, unlike her, she is absorbed and categorized as a product of contemporary mainstream mass culture. I would contend that Lady Gaga is not really a female bouffon at all; she does not, despite her nods to performance art, expand any borders of perceptible femininity but reaffirms its objectified status. She exemplifies the most recent phase of feminism which

postulates the freedom for women to expose their own bodies as fetishized object.

Where, then, can space be found for authentic female *bouffonerie* today? Perhaps the answer lies in work like that of Cindy Sherman, who with seeming neutrality, examines by her own persona women negotiating successive ages of fashion and decorum without committing herself to any fixed position of where a condition of freedom may lie. Rather than address the old fairly stable parameters of how women should look and behave, a practitioner like her inspects the *process* of how women react to these. To some extent this is how I intended my *Agent Provocateur* performances. A Barbie Doll is, after all, a beloved friend of little girls who are not fully conscious of its strangely distorted body. As a toy it may well be one instrument of conditioning their adult responses to their own and other women's physique, but when it appears lifesize on a London street, it makes clear to adults and children alike just how weirdly synoptic it is. It demonstrates how contingent is the process of normative reinforcement.

There may, however, be a more shocking site for the bouffon, which is, to excuse the pun, that of shocking sights. The media/fashion worlds may flirt with elements of the grotesque, but they do not linger there for too long. Bodily realities are not something that reliably sell. And in contemporary Western culture, where obesity and poverty seem frequently associated, bodily appetites are obviously not considered in a detached way. What can be exposed about the female body that has not already been exposed? Let me finally cite a performance from the remote past. Hypatia, the Alexandrian Neoplatonic philosopher, 'possessed a body of rare beauty and grace' (Richeson, 1940: 74). One of her students fell in love with her and, unable to restrain himself, let her know. Hypatia could not reciprocate. She brought her female towels, showed him her menstrual blood, and said 'you love this, O

youth, and there is nothing beautiful about it' (Roth, 2008). Could such an act be the answer to annihilate the female's pornographed existence in the twenty-first century? And which women now and in the future will be the female bouffons who will expose the side of the female that is both integral to them and grotesque? I cannot answer these directly, but I think there is more space here than we, or the market, realise.

Perhaps there may be another line of development, and, by way of conclusion, I can sketch out the boundaries of such a space as lying in a wholesale deconstruction of the polarities of gender; that is, to redefine the territories of 'corporeal style', to use Butler's words (Butler, 1988: 521-22), that each seems naturally to occupy at present. The commodification of norms and their transgression that occurs today draws its potency from an intense appetite for self-reference, that with women is, by various mediated forces, encouraged to teeter perilously between narcissism and self-loathing. It may be that this unstable dualism has been exhausted (along with the era of credit-fuelled consumerism it facilitated). The problematized female, forever in need of marketed remedies, has been reflected in her counterpart a problematized male who can only pursue his purposes according to marketable strategies. Both may pass away, since we seem to be at a point when anything can be, and has been, consumed. The future way of the female bouffon may go through a renewal of 'second innocence', reacting against the narrow mirrored corridors of a weary but ultimately inauthentic knowingness. And thus for the bouffon to 'make a spectacle out of herself' (Russo, 1994: 53) may entail nothing more than a *Candide*-like freshness addressing the givens of her own gender. This could be the ultimate defamiliarization, and also its salvation.

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