Reconfiguring the human: 
the becoming-other of performance

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Abstract

This thesis argues for a revision of formulations of the subject in performance, in both theoretical terms (largely following Deleuze and Guattari) and in practice (through considerations of body art, collaborative and relational performance). Through the contextualisation of my own practice and works of other artists (Abramovic / Ulay, Hsieh and Montano, Beuys, Kulik, Coates) I suggest the radical potential of practical and productive reconfigurations of subjectivity in the field of body-based performance. In an exploration of performance’s multiple “othering” of the human subject, I interrogate notions of authorship, audience, identity and representation and argue for a politically engaged, experimental and enfleshed aesthetic practice.

The thesis is structured around six performances of my own, and their presentation, reception and significance within wider theoretical and political frameworks. Chapter One looks at Becoming-snail in relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of nomadism and becoming, as well as Kristeva’s notion of abjection and aspects of queer theory. Chapter Two examines Collaborations #1 and #2 (with Manuel Vason) and The Public Love Project (with Kathe Izzo) as performances of collaboration and intersubjectivity. Chapter Three explores ideas around shamanism, ritual and the anomalous in performance, in discussions around Becoming-goat. Chapter Four serves as a conclusion, reflecting on Becoming-locust and on the practical and theoretical work that preceded it in this project.

As both the theory and practice have developed interdependently over the course of the project, there has necessarily been something of a feedback loop, of re-evaluating ideas and methodologies through theoretical enquiry as well as through performance. For the purposes of assessment, the written and practical components each represent 50% of the overall submission. Accompanying the written element of the thesis is a DVD containing photographic, video and textual documentation of my performances, which relate and should be viewed as outlined in the Introduction.
Acknowledgements

I must first and foremost thank the supervisors of this project, Professor Simon Jones at the University of Bristol and Helen Cole, formerly at Arnolfini and now at Inbetween Time Productions, without whom this project would never have happened. As well as securing the Collaborative Doctoral Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which has supported this project, they have been a constant source of encouragement and inspiration in their guidance, intrigue and belief. I would also like to thank my colleagues and peers both at the Department at Bristol and at Arnolfini, and in my associated networks particularly in Cardiff and in the international performance art scene. I must acknowledge the many teachers and colleagues over the years who were, and continue to be, an inspiration. They include Charles Lamb, Fran Dendy, Jill Davis, Gavin Carver, Rosi Braidotti, Nicola Shaughnessy, Gregg Whelan, André Stitt, Kim Fielding, Sara Rees, Phil Babot, Heike Roms, Kathe Izzo and Norbert Klassen. Finally, I cannot acknowledge enough the support, encouragement and understanding of so many friends and loved ones who have seen me along this journey. They are too many to name and their contributions too great and varied to describe here, but the greatest ones know who they are.

I dedicate this to them, to my teachers and to my family.
Authors' Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

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Introduction

This project presents the culmination of almost four years of practice-based research in performance, the point of departure for which was research previously undertaken for, and developed from, my MA Fine Art dissertation (‘On the question of the animal in contemporary live art practices’) and the series of Becoming-invertebrate performances begun in 2003 (of which Becoming-snail was one of the first). These performances were initially created within a framework informed by elements of the work of poststructuralist theorists including Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, and by feminist, queer and psychoanalytic theories focussing on identity and body politics. The artistic context in which they were conceived was a contemporary experimental visual arts milieu, specifically the performance art scene of Cardiff, whose distinctiveness “derives from a fusion of global artistic developments with local cultural and political desires” (Adams, 2006: 63). My performance work has certainly been informed by its development in this environment, and by the study of classic action art, body art and performance art during my MA Fine Art under André Stitt in the Department of Time Based Practice, at Cardiff School of Art and Design.

Prior to my MA at Cardiff I had completed a BA in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Kent, and significant to my time there was my introduction to feminist theory, ritual theory, carnival and celebratory performance, and devised performance and live art. My BA also involved a year spent studying in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Utrecht, during which I studied not only contemporary performance, dramaturgy and literature, but a number of cultural studies and women’s studies modules under Rosi Braidotti; these were perhaps most formative to the development of my theoretical engagement with ideas about identity, difference and subjectivity. My work to date then, like my academic education, has woven between - and often reacted against – the different disciplines within which I’ve placed myself. But in the same way that my performances have variously attempted to be anti-theatrical, anti-representational, anti-theoretical and anti-art historical, so too have they sometimes revisited theatricality, representation, theory and art history, albeit with a certain critical position.
With the series of Becoming-invertebrate performances as one of my starting points for this project, I have not only re-performed versions of Becoming-snail in different contexts during the course of it, but also created a number of new becoming-animal performances – including Becoming-goat and Becoming-locust, about which I write in this thesis – that came out of the personal and theoretical reflections that I was making to contextualise my existing practice. Also during this time, I have created a number of collaborative works – including The Public Love Project and Collaborations #1 and #2, with Kathe Izzo and Manuel Vason, respectively – which have arisen seemingly tangentially (I had at one point questioned whether or not to include them in this thesis), but which I realise are necessarily linked to the development of the project. I have also created a number of works during this time that I have not included in the project, including a number of relational performances created in 2006 (Moscow Love Songs, Varazdin Love Songs and Vodka Fuelled Love Revolution) and a new series of largely untitled works created since 2008 that have been something of a departure from previous work but no doubt heavily informed by it and by the work of this project. The exclusion of these works from this project is for practical as well as conceptual reasons; I have had to be selective about the amount of work that I am reflecting upon, as well as upon what might sit together more cohesively as a body of work.

I have also necessarily distilled much of my research and abandoned lines of enquiry which, although rich, were beyond the scope of this project. At the beginning of the project I had been interested in the question of the animal in performance, influenced by Derrida’s essay ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)’ and the vast amount of work being done in animal studies and particularly on the subject of the animal and contemporary art. Despite making some fifteen becoming-animal performances, and making a number with live animals, it is less the animal that I am interested in than the human, or rather the post-human, or the in-human. For this reason I have chosen to focus my engagement with the animal – except for a discussion of the live snails in Becoming-snail in Chapter One - on the concept of becoming-animal, although I am aware of the possible contradictions in doing so. I have also restricted my project to the study of performance art practices that I characterise as developing out of a politicisation of the body and the dematerialisation of the art object in the latter half of the twentieth century. Following Thomas McEvilley, I see these practices not just as part of the historical lineage of theatre, nor that of
visual art, but as also developing out of a postwar rejection of western cultural forms, “a sinking of oneself in another psychological milieu where pre- and extra-civilizational forces and events may be encountered” (in Abramovic, 1998: 25). Many of the other artists that I refer to are those who were beginning to work in the 1960s and 1970s, and who have since gained international notoriety. My selection of their work is largely for illustrative purposes and stems partly from the availability and currency of documentation of their works and criticism on it. This project therefore is not a survey of such works, nor of contemporary performance art, live art or theatre practices engaging with the animal or processes of becoming-animal, but a thesis that makes reference to them (in the same way that it could have made reference to other possible examples). The specificity of these examples is, however, important. Much of my own performance practice bears a direct - if ambiguous - relation of appropriation and parody to the canonical works about which I write and which I greatly admire; this is something to which I will return later.

The thesis then is structured around six of my own solo and collaborative works - Becoming-snail, The Public Love Project, Collaborations #1 and #2, Becoming-goat and Becoming-locust – which have all been presented in professional contexts. They are written about here in chronological order, a structure that is not intended to be simply historiographical but to serve as a way of ordering the works that facilitates useful thematic connections between them. Each chapter is centred on one or more of these performances and discusses it in the context of a specific set of theoretical ideas that I consider pertinent and productive to it. Although each of the chapters has a certain independence of focus, they contribute to a much wider exploration of the formulation of the subject in performance, relating my own experimental practice to historical precedents in performance art, and to theorisations of subjectivity both in critical theory and in performance studies.

Chapter One, ‘Experiments in queer nomadism and the performance of abjection: writing on Becoming-snail’ begins with an introduction to the historical and political context of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, that of post May 1968 Paris, and the critique and reinvigoration of philosophical and psychoanalytical conceptions of power and subjectivity. I offer my own reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s key concepts of becoming, rhizomatics, Aeon and Chronos, assemblage and haecceity, which I develop through an examination of the
performance *Becoming-snail*. I then further reflect upon elements of the performance within discussions of duration and liminality, before turning to look at the relation of subjectivity to identifications and identity within discussions of queer theory and Kristeva’s notion of abjection. Chapter Two, ‘The performance of encounter and collaborative becomings: writing on The Public Love Project (with Kathe Izzo) and Collaborations #1 and #2 (with Manuel Vason)’ opens up discussions of subjectivity by examining collaboration as performance, in the three performances of the title, as well as some those of Ulay / Abramovic and Tehching Hsieh and Linda Montano. I explore the different modes of subjectivity at play in both collaborative and relational performance processes, as well as in performance-for-camera, arguing that whilst certain modes strengthen the self-representing urge of the fixed subject (itself the subject of economies of representation), others can subvert the indexing of self through identity by the affective blurring of boundaries of intersubjectivity between artist and audience and overcoming what Deleuze and Guattari call the “abstract machine of faciality” (1987: 168). Chapter Three, ‘Shamanoid performance and the politics of the anomalous: writing on *Becoming-goat*’ furthers considerations of the audience and relationality through the contextualisation of my *Becoming-goat* performance within discussions of ritual theory and models of masochism. In a reflection on the transformative potential of performance - my own and on examples drawn from the work of Joseph Beuys amongst others - I propose the notion of the *shamanoid*, a self-marginalised but critical persona that is appropriative and performative of difference. This I also relate to Deleuze and Guattari’s discussions of the scapegoat and the anomalous, to performance’s asociality and within it the subject’s Body without Organs. Chapter Four, ‘When the body becomes too much: writing on *Becoming-locust* and the spectacle of theory’ reflects upon the final performance of the *Becoming-invertebrate* series and also acts as a conclusion to this thesis. It contextualises the performance of *Becoming-locust* by returning to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of nomadic subjectivity and referring to the Situationist International for their relevance not just to readings of Deleuze and Guattari’s cartographic impulse but to the formation of installation art, Debord’s critique of spectacle and the Situationist International’s strategy of *détournement*. I also reflect upon recurrent theoretical themes explored in the thesis and the performative position taken towards them, a position I characterise by humour, the grotesque body, and the ambiguous performance of camp and deadly seriousness. I also make important conclusions about the relationship between theory and practice in the project,
both through discussions of word and action in performance, and of the wider symbiosis that exists in my integrated practice of the performance of theory.

As such, this project is perhaps unconventional as practice as research, in that it seemingly reflects not upon the experimental processes of production, but more upon the works in their completed and performed state. The studio practice involved in creating my performance works is both cerebral and instinctive, rarely involving rehearsal, dialogue or collaboration (except, of course, in collaborative works, with which I deal specifically in Chapter Two), but instead activities of quiet contemplation, sketching, drawing and list writing, as well as going on shopping trips, usually to hardware stores, sports shops, markets and supermarkets. The decision making involved at this level is variously guided and inspired by theoretical readings and my own conceptual frameworks, by memories of other works that I have seen, by autobiographical associations (conscious or otherwise) that I have with certain materials or actions, and by spontaneous attractions to certain things and to their inclusion in performance. This process I think illustrates the relationship between theory and practice in my work, which is both integral and integrated, taking place through processes of osmosis and feedback between creating, presenting and representing performances, and reflecting upon them personally and theoretically. Thus, that the performance as presented in front of the audience is often the only performance of the set action or task (i.e. it is not rehearsed) and is in a sense controlled by my own scoring of it (as a vow, or as a predetermined set of actions that leave little room for improvisation) is for me the locus of the performance itself. It is in its realisation in front of an audience in time and space that the work ‘happens’: both in the conventional sense of it being read and written as a theatrical text, but also in its actualisation as a performative assemblage of which the witnessing or participatory audience, the location, and the presence of my body performing the action, are all integral parts.

The connections and processes of stimulation and exchange that occur in the many practices that result in, amongst other things, my creation of artworks and critical reflections on them, are vast and multifarious. As will, I hope, become clear, the literary research and theorisations that I have been undertaking during the course of this project have informed decisions that I have made about making, presenting and restaging performances contemporaneously. In the writing of this thesis then, the selective approach that
I have developed is to map certain critical theoretical frameworks on which to locate the specific moments of the performances themselves, as remembered by myself and spectators and documented in different forms. Thus the focus on theory, creative process, self-reflection, presentation and reception, shifts throughout the chapters of the thesis, in the same way that those elements have constantly shifted and taken different precedence both in the course of the project and in my remembering and revisiting of them.

The presentation of documentation alongside the writing in this (or indeed any) thesis is not unproblematic. I have attempted to include as wide and varied a collection of material as possible – from first person anecdotal accounts written shortly after the performance, to video footage, photographs, weblogs and texts / scripts - which should help the reader to form and access some impression of the performance, albeit an incomplete one. The quality, quantity and variety of the documentation inevitably varies from piece to piece and from the different versions of some of the performances as they have been performed in different contexts. Although the slightly contingent nature of the documentation available may seem a disadvantage to the reader – as, of course, may the fact of not having seen or experienced the works first hand – I think it may instead only emphasise the contingency of documentation and indeed spectatorship itself. There are inevitable gaps between the performance as experienced by myself or spectators and as experienced in reports or representations, and it is in these very gaps that the presented documentation exists. It in no way stands in for the performance, but as part of the wider theorisations that make up this thesis, presents a conceptual proposition that attempts to be productive, performative and enfleshed, that demonstrates itself off the page and in relation to an audience, be it a “live” audience in the traditional sense, or a live reader / viewer experiencing the work in a different space and time.

It is my intention that the documentation of the performances be viewed alongside the writing, particularly that the relevant elements of the edited documentation on the main DVD are viewed before beginning each chapter of the thesis. Extra DVDs with fuller versions of video and additional photographs are included as further appendices, which the reader may find useful to consult after reading the chapter or if wanting to look at the material in more depth; I leave this decision up to the reader.
Chapter One

Experiments in queer nomadism and the performance of abjection: writing on *Becoming-snail*
“Quite apart from the lopsidedness that relates to helical coiling, gastropods are highly modified by a peculiar process called torsion, during which the visceral mass, mantle and shell become reoriented at 180° with respect to the head and foot. As a result of torsion, the nervous system becomes twisted into a figure of eight, and the products of the animal’s digestive, excretory and reproductive systems are all discharged on top of its own head. The advantages of such an arrangement are not clear, but the process can be observed during gastropod development and appears to result from rapid asymmetrical muscular contraction.”


For three hours I make a mucous trail with my tongue over the interior surface of a greenhouse, wearing only a jockstrap and a camouflage-print gym sack. Inside the gym sack is a large water bottle full of my own urine, which is sporadically discharged over my head and body. The greenhouse is shared with a number of live snails, themselves moving and existing independently of, but alongside, me on the panes.

Figure 1. Becoming-snail performance, Arnolfini, Bristol, 2005. Photograph Mark Simmons.
Created as part of an original body of becomings-invertebrate, exhibited at Cardiff School of Art and Design in 2003, *Becoming-snail* has since been performed (for two and three hour durations) at the National Review of Live Art, Glasgow (2004), Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol (2005), Reykjavik Museum of Art, Iceland (2006), and Fifth Parallel Gallery, Regina, Canada (2008). For the purposes of this study, the presentational analysis of the piece will focus on its incarnation at Fifth Parallel Gallery. The above texts accompanied the installation of a greenhouse in which the action was performed. The conceptual framework of the piece was both explicitly theoretical - exploring Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of *becoming-animal*, Kristeva’s theory of the abject and aspects of queer theory – and contextualised quite literally against zoological classification (see above).

Although *Becoming-snail* was informed by an elementary understanding of Deleuze and Guattari, it was also an attempt at understanding through practice some of the ideas that I had been formulating theoretically: ideas around subjectivity, sexuality, human / animal difference and the body. *Becoming-snail* was one of the first explicit becomings-animal that I performed - explicit symbolically and physically, and seminal, likewise. It was an overt attempt at exemplifying Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *becoming-animal*, both in its framing of the performance action as a becoming-snail and as a more metaphoric interpretation of becoming-animal, within a queer politicised framework. Before looking at the piece itself, I think it important to look at some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts and the historical context from which they originate, a context that overlaps with that of the emergence of body art. Such an expounding of the historical and theoretical framework of my research will hopefully provide a useful cartography on which to examine the political and aesthetic impetus of my practice.

For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is a theoretical project that serves to reconfigure the subject through (and in spite of) philosophy and psychoanalysis, for essentially emancipatory ends. Both were young intellectuals in 60s Paris, at the time of the student-worker revolts of May ’68 when the role of the intellectual in society was being radically questioned and with it the ethics of theory. Deleuze was a philosopher, classically trained but fervently critical of the ‘State philosophy’ that preceded him (Massumi, in Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: x); Guattari was a psychoanalyst trained under Lacan and Oury and a long-term
practitioner at the anti-hierarchical La Borde clinic of psychoanalysis outside of Paris, considered an “activist intellectual” and referred to, somewhat flippantly, by the French press as “Monsieur Anti” (Genosko: 2). The work of both is considered part of the larger theoretical and political project that came to be known as poststructuralism (with Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray amongst their allies), which aimed at the dismantling of the representational thinking and unified subject of western metaphysics. This came out of an attempt at reconfiguring the theories of Marxism, in particular overcoming the problem of false consciousness – that social subjects were disempowered by their own lack of awareness of their oppression, through the ideological apparatus of the State – through a much wider consideration of the subject, its formation and its potential for transformation. The impulse of poststructuralism then was a political one, to free the individual from social subjection and into a position of power. This is a theme of great significance for Deleuze and Guattari as for Foucault, who both make important distinctions between the two French words for power - pouvoir (referring to a personalised range of potential, a “capacity for existence” and a “capacity to affect or be affected”, similar to Nietzsche’s “will to power”) and puissance (referring to an “instituted and reproducible relation of force”, a “selective concretization of potential”) (Massumi in Deleuze and Guattari 1987: xvii).

Such a move towards subject-specific conceptions of power were an intrinsic part of thought and activism around May ’68 and have permeated activist movements and theory to this day. It is here, perhaps, that we really see the complexification of the notion of ‘personal is political’ – the struggle between the attempted realisation of an individualised subject against the social conditions of identity and ideology. We can see similar complexifications happening through the emergence of body art, a phenomenon of which the exact roots are historically and geographically disputable, but a term that can be loosely understood to describe a set of practices beginning in the 1960s in which visual artists began conceiving of their bodies “as a site of social inscription” (Berghaus, 2005: 134). Developing at the same time as quite significant cultural and political changes across the West (mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War, the Women’s Liberation movement, civil rights campaigns, Black Panther activism, the ‘sexual revolution’, etc.) (Ibid.: 133), body art came to employ the body as a tool of liberal expression, exploring identity, conflict between the self and society and as a means for sexual, social and political
agency. It must be pointed out that there never existed a uniform and homogeneous body art movement as such, but rather a “multifaceted conglomeration of artists with widely diverging aims and strategies” (Ibid: 138), of which certain common themes and approaches may be discerned: the artist’s attempt to transgress physical or psychological boundaries, often violently; the use of the self as subject (through autobiography or regression to traumatic or pleasurable moments) and the body as object; the appropriation of philosophy, religion and (shamanic) ritual in performance; the embodiment of the phrase that ‘the personal is political’. Without a doubt, my own study of body art and of poststructuralism, as well as personal interests in counterculture and political activism, was (and still is) of great influence in the shaping of my academic interests (through Drama, Women’s Studies and Fine Art) and in my motivations as an artist. *Becoming-snail* (originally created when I was 24, at the end of an intensive MA Fine Art, and impassioned about queer and gender politics) was a provocative expression of *pouvoir*, an attempt to free the individual (myself) from the representational and institutional powers to which it was subjected.

Deleuze and Guattari’s work is a critique of power and resistance: an exploration of the multiplicitous ways in which the individual is subjected, mechanically enslaved (by technology and by the individual’s position in the capitalist ‘machine’) and deterritorialised by the State, and an attempt at freeing the contemporary subject from its Oedipalised libidinal inertia into more creative and revolutionary flows of desire. In their 1972 text *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari write that “social production and desiring-production are one and the same”, but that they “have different régimes, with the result that a social form of production exercises an essential repression of desiring-production, and also that desiring-production – a “real” desire – is potentially capable of demolishing the social form.” (116) Their assertion is that forms of desire are socially created, and that “the ‘privatised individual’ that psychoanalysis studies within the Oedipal family unit is an artificial construct, whose social function is to trap and control the disorder that haunts social life under capitalism” (Weeks, in Hocquenghem: 32).

The regime of social production is, in Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis, that of capitalism, and driven by the production of desire towards the conservative impulse of accretion of capital, through the “deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy” (1972: 28). “Lack” is used here as a translation of
the French "manque" which can mean lack, want or need, and is doubtless related to Lacan’s formulations of lack as that which causes the arousal of desire – the “manque-à-être”, the “want-to-be” (http://nosubject.com/Manque) – and to later critiques of the psychoanalytic and social production of sexual desire and subjectivity. The problem (or, one could say the success) of the capitalist regime of desire, in which the subject is driven by a need to fulfil its lack, is that in fact desire doesn’t lack an object, but rather a subject: “there is no fixed subject unless there is repression” (Ibid.: 26). Whilst Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus stems from a critique of capitalism, we can clearly see it as a critique of an entire system that produces controlled subjects and economies of desire, as has been a focus taken from it by numerous theorists within feminist, gay and lesbian and queer studies (Grosz, Braidotti, Hocquenghem, etc.).

Although not denying the broader political aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s (and poststructuralism’s) work, it is its micropolitical level – the localised level of the individual subject and situation - that most interests me and is that on which I see my work mostly operating. It is to this that Becoming-snail responds, in the performance of desire that is both that of the subjected individual – acting out an aimless and continuous desiring / consuming – and an expression of the perversion of this desire. Perhaps not coincidentally, the French phrase “lècher les vitrines” (to lick the [shop] windows) is an equivalent to the English “window-shopping”, an activity founded on a desire that is never satisfied, but that simply produces more desire. My own performance presented references to sexual desire – the white jockstrap and socks (the ‘twink’ aesthetic of gay pornography), the oral eroticism of the licking action (which did, at times, feel like giving oral-anal sex to the greenhouse) and the inclusion of bodily fluids that would be discharged over my body – that affirmatively alluded to non-normative sexual practices, aiming to challenge assumptions of desire based on Oedipalised notions of object choice, perversion, etc.

Queer desire and the abject are something with which I will deal in more depth later, but the tensions between discourse around the psychoanalytic subject and the political theoretical one are, I hope, becoming clear. Jeffrey J. Cohen and Todd R. Ramlow write of Deleuze that “we find in [his] work a provocative reconceptualization of subjecthood and desire, a becoming-queer” (http://www.rhizomes.net/issue11/cohenramlow.html). The becoming-queer that
we see in Deleuze and Guattari’s work is also a central aspect of my own work, in the strategy of literalism that I employ to ‘queer’ (to interfere with, to divert, to ridicule) not only heteronormative categorisations of sexual practices, desires and identities (which I will discuss in more detail later), but psychoanalytic theory and some of the theories of Deleuze and Guattari themselves. Deleuze said in 1977, about the writing of his earliest books (whose titles read “like a Who’s Who of philosophical giants” (Massumi, in Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: x)): 

What got me by during that period was conceiving of the history of philosophy as a kind of assfuck, or what amounts to the same thing, an immaculate conception. I imagined myself approaching an author from behind and giving him a child that would indeed be his but would nonetheless be monstrous. (1977: 12)

Such a playful, radical, and consciously subversive approach to the establishment was characteristic of Deleuze’s work - alone and with Guattari - in the dismantling and reconceptualisation of the subject. It is perhaps one of the things that draws me to their work, to the performative, critical and practicable nature of their philosophy; it is also something that I employ as a model in my own practice, for the queering of canonical body art works.

Part of Deleuze’s reconceptualisation is his critique of “State philosophy”: the historical collusion between knowledge production and the State, through the structures and forms of thought that affirm State power both through the official channels of the state - the model of higher education in Europe and the United States throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - and more insidiously operated in the internalisation of ‘legitimised’ knowledge and the production of representational identity. Deleuze describes this State philosophy as reposing on a double identity

of the thinking subject, and of the concepts it creates and to which it lends its own presumed attributes of sameness and constancy. The subject, its concepts, and also the objects in the world to which the concepts are applied have a shared, internal essence: the self-resemblance at the basis of identity. (Massumi, paraphrasing Deleuze, in Deleuze and Guattari 1987: xi)

Although its premise is the critique of State philosophy - or what “deconstruction feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigary have attacked [...] under the name “phallogocentrism”” (Massumi, in Deleuze and Guattari 1987: xii) – much of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, particularly in A Thousand Plateaus (which I read as a kind of expansion of Anti-Oedipus) can be better seen as an active exercise in what he proposes as its alternative: “nomad thought”. In this, difference is not only recognised but celebrated, and the closed system of
representation is replaced by an open one of multiplicities of concepts, subjects and becomings. This clearly has consequences for subjectivity, the fixed Cartesian subject being replaced by a subject always in process and irreducible in both space and time.

Subjectivity is not only a subject for philosophers; it is, of course, important across disciplines. A lifelong activist and practicing psychoanalyst, Félix Guattari was part of the antipsychiatry movement that worked for a more open and non-hierarchical practice of psychoanalysis. Deleuze and Guattari’s work is characterised by an inter- or trans-disciplinary approach to analyses of power and knowledge across philosophy, politics, social sciences and psychoanalysis, and the relation between analyst and analysand were not immune from that. In their later text A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (published originally in French in 1980), the primary text to which I will be referring throughout this thesis, Deleuze and Guattari are very direct in their critique:

Take psychoanalysis as an example: it subjects the unconscious to arborescent structures, hierarchical graphs, recapitulatory memories, central organs, the phallus, the phallus-tree – not only in its theory but also in its practice of calculation and treatment. [...] In both psychoanalysis and its object, there is always a general, always a leader (General Freud). (1987: 17-18)

One could argue that the subject became the very object of Freudian psychoanalysis, as something to be pinned down as one and made the basis for a fixed, singular and stable identity. This is not surprising given the historical and social contexts in which Freud and his immediate successors were working. In the turn-of-the-century era of the bourgeoisie - a time when religious and academic rationality was being critiqued, anthropology and ethnography developed and with them an interest in ‘others’, and discourses around nature were exploded by Darwin - the familial, social and genealogical preoccupations of psychoanalysis are perhaps understandable (Braidotti: 118). The latter part of the twentieth century, however, brought new thinking about identity and the relation of the self to society, thinking that occurred as a result of political and social change as well as of changes in academic and professional ideologies.

As well as being a critique and an analysis, the impulse of Deleuze and Guattari’s work is an attempt to create new strategies, technologies and techniques for reconfiguring the material subject – rather than tracing old maps or knowledges, to make new maps distinguished by being “entirely oriented
In the same way that the arborescent model of the tree is a metaphor for the rooted, vertical and ascendant figure of the fixed subject, so the figure of the rhizome is a metaphor for the horizontally growing, antigenealogy of plants that operate by “variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots” (Ibid.: 21). For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is an “acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General [Freud]” (Ibid.) and as such offers a critical alternative to a subjectivity produced through hierarchical mechanisms (symbolic and relational) of psychoanalysis and the institutional structures of society, the church, the family, etc.

The rhizome is central to an understanding of nomad thought, of a space in which subjectivity operates through lines rather than points, through multiplicities rather than fixity, which “rather than analyzing the world into discrete components, reducing their manyness into the One of identity, and ordering them by rank, [...] sums up a set of disparate circumstances in a shattering blow” (Massumi, in Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: xiii). It is within this space of nomad thought that we can begin to get to grips with the concept of becoming.

Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations: neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own: it does not reduce to, or lead back to, “appearing,” “being,” “equalling,” or “producing”. (1987: 239)

Deleuze and Guattari write a lot about what becoming isn’t, and perhaps the best demonstration of what becoming is the text of A Thousand Plateaus itself. The book is composed as an open system of lines, of concepts, of plateaus – multiplicities “connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome” (1980: 22) –
without an apparent overarching thesis, linear structure or identity. The writing weaves between academic philosophy, political history and literary criticism, and is notably poetic in style. It is the conception of such a nomadic structure that enables the reader to explore a greater mobility within the text, and as such to perhaps experience Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of becoming, as itself something multiplicitous, unfixed and the site of potential.

As Rosi Braidotti, influential Deleuzian feminist of a more recent generation, says “[a]lso known as ‘de-territorializing’, or ‘rhizomatic’, this nomadic style [of writing] is an integral component of the concept of ‘becoming’, and not a mere rhetorical additive” (2002: 8). We can see elements of this unfixed, rhizomatic and nomadic mode physicalised in the performance of Becoming-snail: although the greenhouse in which I was situated was fixed, my movements within it were unplanned, and led by the mobility of my tongue upon the surface of the greenhouse; my relation to ‘snail’ was not one of imitating, nor of becoming in any literal sense a snail, but of entering into a becoming.

For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not “really” become an animal any more than the animal “really” becomes something else. […] This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 238)

For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming embodies the space in-between things, being neither one thing nor the other, and at the same time having proximity to both. Such an attempt at destabilising binary dualisms was part of the project of poststructuralism, and is at the centre of the work of theorists such as Derrida and Foucault. We see with Deleuze and Guattari, however, a more embodied and constructive approach to difference; whilst Derrida and Foucault’s critiques are very much focussed on - but partially restricted by - the binary imperative, Deleuze and Guattari’s work places little emphasis on binary dualisms, instead repeatedly exploring the concept of difference as one of multiplicity.

In both Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus, we see Deleuze and Guattari’s treatise on subjectivity as something that is both theoretical and practical. For them subjectivity is something that is produced through a variety of practices. It is not merely something given, something determined and fixed by principles outside our control. Rather, for both Deleuze and Guattari there is an emphasis on our
pragmatic involvement in the material production of our own subjectivities
(O'Sullivan, 2006:97)

On one level Deleuze and Guattari are obviously concerned with a theoretical conception of the subject, but explore their ideas through what could be called a materialist philosophy that extends “well beyond philosophy into popular culture and everyday life” (Colebrook: 73). Their critique of the subject follows on to an invested interest in art, of which Claire Colebrook writes:

Not only do [art and philosophy] invent forms of experience that are not those of some universally recognised subject, they also destroy the harmony of any single subject such that thinking is shattered into affects, concepts and observations. (73)

In its critique of the subject (which has pervaded western philosophy since Descartes) and its temporary circumvention of the subject-object model, the concept of becoming destabilises the perception of spatio-temporal relations. Rather than thinking of space and time as axes on which the fixed point of the subject is located, Deleuze and Guattari propose a conception of rhizomatic subjectivity constituted through an assemblage of circumstances individuated within space and time. For this they use the word haecceity, an archaic term referring to the individuality of a certain thing and its certain ‘thisness’, comprised of its interrelationality with (and of) other things. Deleuze and Guattari describe the haecceity of subject-event as having “neither beginning nor end, origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, only of lines. It is a rhizome.” (1987: 263). They warn against an oversimplified conciliation, as though there were on the one hand formed subjects, of the thing or person type, and on the other hand spatiotemporal coordinates of the haecceity type. For you will yield nothing to haecceities unless you realize that that is what you are, and that you are nothing but that. (Ibid.: 262)

To explain the spatiotemporal basis of an understanding of haecceities, Deleuze and Guattari frame them with the concepts of Aeon and Chronos, as different conceptions of time:

Aeon: the indefinite time of the event, the floating line that knows only speeds and continually divides that which transpires into an already-there that is at the same time not-yet-here, a simultaneous too-late and too-early, a something that is both going to happen and has just happened. Chronos: the time of measure that situates things and persons, develops a form, and determines a subject. (Ibid.)

The notion of haecceity seems pertinent to an analysis of performance – the understanding of an event, experienced as an “entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate […] defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and

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affects, independently of forms and subjects" (Ibid.). My own approach to performance aspires to assemblage haecceities, to creating or experiencing events that have a richness and a power (of the pouvoir type) that arises out of the particular aggregate of action, materials, space, place, time, audience, duration, etc.

It is here that I would like to turn back to the performance in question, Becoming-snail, which is differentiated from the other of my works in this study by its explicitly durational nature. Becoming-snail was not only substantially longer in duration, but was presented as a continuous action that was taking place before, during and after the audience viewed the piece. The performance was viewable for three hours and no audience member stayed for the whole duration (in any of the places that the piece has been shown). The action itself commenced prior to the opening of the gallery space and finished only after the space was vacated. Thus the experience of the viewer was of an action already-begun and not-yet-finished, and although framed by chronological time, the indefinite time of their encounter of the performance was anticipated more on the level of Aeon: “the time of the pure event or of becoming, which articulates relative speeds and slownesses independently of the chronometric or chronological values that time assumes in the other modes” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 263). Viewers remained for between a few minutes and up to an hour, sometimes just walking into the space and viewing it from afar, sometimes circling the greenhouse, and sometimes kneeling, sitting or even laying next to it, in what appeared to be a meditative dialogue with the piece.

The space in which Becoming-snail was presented was a fairly large, open, white walled gallery – clearly signifying itself as a contemporary visual art space, but so minimal and with no lighting other than the lightbox within the greenhouse, that it also created a solemn and almost sacred atmosphere. The performance was created specifically for such a context, being installed in the space more in the way of a sculpture than a theatrical set. In his book Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space, Brian O’Doherty suggests that the white cube gallery is created as a space “untouched by time and its vicissitudes” (1999: 15) and that

[i]nshadowed, white, clean, artificial – the space is devoted to the technology of esthetics. Works of art are mounted, hung, scattered for study. […] Art exists in an eternity of display […, which] gives the gallery a limbolike status; one has to have died already to be there. (Ibid.)
Such an expression of the “eternity of display” could be identified in a description by artist Marina Abramovic of the conception of time in her work. Abramovic, an artist whose work I will also deal with in further chapters, talks about “energy fields” in performance. Speaking about *Luminosity* (1997), a piece in which the artist was seated naked and still on a bicycle seat, high up on the wall of a gallery for two hours, she says:

If people come there and it seems nothing is happening they stay only for one minute. The thing is that the space has to be charged differently so you lose this concept of time, and it is really now, here and now, just here and now. There is no beginning and no end. That's why I always insist the public enter after I begin and leave before I stop, so they never actually see the beginning and end. (Abramovic, in Rico: 18)

Abramovic’s discussion of time seems to clearly relate to the concept of *Aeon* and to my own durational performance of *Becoming-snail*, but these all seem at slight discordance with the fixed “eternity of display” as described by O’Doherty.

Thomas McEvilley, in his introduction to O’Doherty’s book, compares the gallery to ritual spaces, describing both as segregated spaces “where access to higher metaphysical realms is made to seem available” (1999: 8). One can draw similarities between the gallery and ritual spaces such as the church, in Judeo-Christian cultures, as public spaces signified as distinct from the everyday life of the street through their architecture and through the social conventions that govern them – as silent spaces in which objects of significance (altars, icons, works of art, interpretive texts) are presented for observance and contemplation. What marks the event of performance in the gallery context (a practice that is still not the norm, breaking cultural conventions of both performance in its theatrical tradition and visual art as a static, object-based medium) is the element of temporality and the concurrent presence of the artist and spectator in the realisation of the work. We see this in *Becoming-snail* and see the sacred and contemplative space of the gallery (and installation) simultaneously ruptured by the presence of the abject and the profane, by the immediacy of the body, by anomalous everyday objects (the greenhouse, the snails, the sports socks) as well as by the latent humour and camp irony of the action and its presentation. We see in this again the strategy of queering, but rather than of theory, here it is a queering of the aesthetics of body art, taking place through a partial subversion of the “eternity of display” (O’Doherty: 15) and of what Amelia Jones has called “the ritual display of phallic attributes, specifically in relation to the
masculinized function of the artist” (1994: 265). Jones associates such display with the work of artists such as Yves Klein, Robert Morris, Vito Acconci and Chris Burden, and the ways in which they were exploring – to varying degrees – “a shift towards a more critical approach among male artists to the phallus (to modernism’s heroic artist genius)” (Ibid.: 268). Whilst I share some of Jones’ art historical references, I also see my performance works effecting a queering of more contemporary performance, body and action art - the work of artists such as Marina Abramovic, André Stitt, Ron Athey, Franko B. – and the role of the artist which, regardless of gender or sexuality, can still often be read in Jones’ terms of a phallic and masculinised function and the image of heroic artistic genius.

The existence of this duality of the sacred and the profane is something that seems to be present throughout my work, operating on the boundary between the two and bringing us to the subject of ritual and liminality in performance. Although often associated with religious and atavistic practices, ritual is something that exists as a phenomenon across cultures and times and can most certainly be related to discussions of performance. Richard Schechner, a theorist who has written extensively on ritual and performance, writes of rituals:

They are the ambivalent symbolic actions pointing at the real transactions even as they help people avoid too direct a confrontation with these events. Thus rituals are also bridges – reliable doings carrying people across dangerous waters. It is no accident that many rituals are “rites of passage”. (1993: 230)

In his classic text The Ritual Process (1969), anthropologist Victor Turner describes the “traditional anthropological distinction between life-crisis rites and seasonal or calendrical rites” (167) – between actions symbolising the (social) movement of a (usually individual) subject and those accompanying change of a collective sort (either at moments in the annual productive cycle or in communal crisis) (168). Drawing on the earlier theory of Arnold van Gennep, Turner postulates the tripartite structure of ritual, of the phases of passage from one culturally defined state (or status) to another, in terms of separation, margin and reaggregation (Ibid.). He writes of the social function of ritual, of the process of separation of the individual and his / her subsequent reintegration – a structure we can easily identify in the process of performance.
Turner also quotes van Gennep’s use of the terms “preliminal, liminal, and postliminal” (166), notions which are central to Turner’s thesis, liminality describing a space “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (95). Liminality, Turner writes, “is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun and moon” (Ibid.). The liminal involves a suspension of social status and signification, often through a physical and mental experience that goes outside of, or away from, the norm. In a later text (1982), Turner differentiates between the liminal and the liminoid, between the collective function of the former (in both calendrical rites and rites of passage) in tribal societies, and the individualised, experimental manifestation of the latter in technologically advanced societies. This shift is for Turner related to industrialisation and to the development and distinction of the different spheres of work, play and leisure

provides the opportunity for a multiplicity of optional, liminoid genres of literature, drama, and sport, which are not conceived of as “antistructure” to normative structure where “antistructure is an auxiliary function of the larger structure” (Turner, 1982: 52, quoting Sutton-Smith, 1972)

Antistructure relates to the concepts of liminality and communitas, the latter described by Turner as

the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate groups such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, nation, etc., or affiliation with some pervasive social category such as class, caste, sex or age-division. (1982: 44)

Such a phenomenon is identified in communal rites of tribal or agrarian societies, in which members collectively experience the temporary and symbolic “abrogation, negation, or inversion of the normative structure in which its participants are quotidianly involved.” (Ibid.: 47). Although we could identify the experience of communitas in certain participatory performance practices (in carnival, or Happenings, for example), the processes at work in solo performance are different. Turner goes on to discuss the role of the artist:

In the so-called “high culture” of complex societies, [the] liminoid is not only removed from a rite de passage context, it is also “individualised”. The solitary artist creates the liminoid phenomena, the collectivity experiences collective liminal symbols. This does not mean that the maker of liminal symbols, ideas, images, etc., does so ex nihilo; it only means that he is privileged to make free with his social heritage in a way impossible to members of cultures in which the liminal is to a large extent the sacrosanct. (Ibid.: 52)
His distinction is an important one. “One works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid” (Ibid.: 55), play being an important part of his theorisations of both ritual and art. Whilst play is an obvious component of theatrical performance, it becomes in performance art and body art a somewhat more difficult term to apply. This is something with which I will deal further in Chapter Three, in relation to shamanism and performance, and in Chapter Four, in relation to theatricality and camp.

Of the liminal and liminoid, Richard Schechner writes that

Liminal rituals permanently change who people are. These are transformations. Liminal rituals effect a temporary change – sometimes nothing more than a brief experience of communitas or a several-hours-long performance of a role. These are transportations. From a spectator’s point of view, one enters the experience, is “moved” or “touched” (apt metaphors) and is then dropped off about where she or he entered. (2002: 63)

Whilst we can, following Turner and Schechner, describe the performance of Becoming-snail as liminoid, there are elements within it (and in many other examples of performance and body art) that could be identified as liminal. Marina Abramovic talks of the suspended state of performance, which she calls “in-between”:

You haven’t arrived yet. You have left home but you still haven’t arrived to a new home. So you are in-between. [...] We are alert, we are sensitive, and destiny can happen. We do not have any barriers and we are vulnerable. (1998: 50)

This state is, for Abramovic, a metaphoric or metaphysical space. Akin to the ‘betwixt and between’ of the transitional phase of a ritual event but experienced on a microcosmic level, it is always temporary, the gallery presenting a kind of “non-space [...] where the surrounding matrix of space-time is symbolically annulled” (McEvilley, in O’Doherty: 8). Although the experience of non-quotidian temporality is an intrinsic element of both the liminal and the liminoid, and echoes some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts, the state of the liminal is a different one to that of becoming. Whilst on some levels the figuration of the liminal may be useful, it is contradictory to Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion that to become “is not to progress or regress along a series” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 238) but rather, “since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block” (Ibid.). Thinking of becoming as a block, we see that rather than annulling time as in experiences of the liminal (experiences outside of everyday time, but paradoxically existing within an intrinsically linear relation of temporality to the
pre- and post-liminal), it reconfigures it internally. As Deleuze and Guattari write: “Becoming produces nothing other than itself” (Ibid.).

_Becoming-snail,_ although framed by chronological time (the start and end times of the gallery), was created to operate on the level of _Aeon_ – the trance-like state into which I entered was punctuated only by moments of acute awareness of the physical discomfort that my body was in (caused by the repetitive action of my tongue against the surface of the greenhouse and my prolonged kneeling on the damp compost that lined its interior floor). For Deleuze and Guattari, spatiotemporality is directly related to the experience of subjectivity, and in my performance of the _Becoming-snail_ action and my entry into / becoming a trance-like haecceity this was very evident - “[a haecceity] is what you are, and [...] you are nothing but that” (1987: 262). Becoming, however, is not a singular concept, but one that occupies an indefinite region, on the near side of which Deleuze and Guattari posit becomings-woman and becomings-child, and on the far side becomings-elementary, -cellular, -molecular and even –imperceptible. Becomings-animal are “segments occupying a median region” (Ibid: 248). _Becoming-snail_, like many of my performance works, was intentionally constructed and framed as a becoming-animal and was inspired by the following passage from _A Thousand Plateaus_:

An example: Do not imitate a dog, but make your organism enter into composition with _something else_ in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be canine as a function of the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity, into which they enter. Clearly, this something else can be quite varied, and be more or less directly related to the animal in question: it can be the animal’s natural food (dirt and worm), or its exterior relations with other animals (you can become-dog with cats, or become-monkey with a horse), or an apparatus or prosthesis to which a person subjects the animal (muzzle and reindeer, etc.), or something that does not have a localizable relation to the animal in question. (274)

Like earlier works of mine such as _Becoming-dog, Becoming-rabbit_ or _Becoming-sparrow_ (which variously employed leashes, dog food, carrots, straw, cages, perches and the strokes of audience members), _Becoming-snail_ literalised Deleuze and Guattari’s description of becoming-animal to illustrate it, through a direct translation of defining elements (food, relations with people / objects, biological functions) of the animal that I was becoming. In this way, it followed the strategy of literalisation that is also employed by artist Marcus Coates, about whom Tracey Warr writes:

instead of rational or scientific analysis he explores his subject by doing and imitating, by immersing himself in other modes of being and literally
inhabiting their skin. He crawls along the ground on all fours with a deer strapped to his back. In *Sparrowhawk Bait* he runs through the forest with dead birds tied to his hair. In the video *Stoat* he tries to gallop in a pair of stilts that mimic the footprints and stride of a stoat. [...] Coates employs the comicality of his imitations as part of their effect. (2001: 2-3)

Much of Coates’ work of the late 1990s and early 2000s concerns the differences between humans and animals, although it does so with a playfulness and ambiguity that leaves one unsure of how ‘serious’ he is about the pursuit, or at least about the way in which he is presenting it to the viewer. This ambiguity we see continuing through his more recent work directly informed by shamanism, which I will come back to in Chapter Three.

As well as through the performed process of literalisation, *Becoming-snail* also, however, operated in a more abstracted mode of aggregation. The use of the greenhouse and its floor of compost was, of course, a reference to garden horticulture and to the most common place of encounter with snails, but also to the real point of reference for Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphoric rhizome. The use of the tongue was an attempt at engaging in molecular proximity to the snail: as gastropods, the snail’s mouth is its foot and is the sole point of contact with the surface on which the snail moves; the trails left by it are of mucous, as my trails on the interior surface of the greenhouse were of saliva and condensation. My wearing of the gymshack full of bodily fluids (a mixture of faeces, urine, vomit and semen in the original version, but in later performances only urine) was a direct allusion to the snail’s process of torsion (but also a slightly tongue-in-cheek suggestion of a shell); it was also a symbolic incarnation of the abject, in the already-abject content of the gymshack and in the abjected-being of the invertebrate, and in the debasement that I presented myself enduring through the performance. The proximity of real snails in the greenhouse (whose trails, and sometimes bodies, I would accidentally touch with my tongue) functioned to further underscore and affect these processes of abjection.

One aim of bringing together these elements in the performance was to create an event – an assemblage haecceity - in which “the relation of movement and rest, or of molecular proximity” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 274) was more snail-like than human, the duration of the action being key to this. The movement was very slow, and the greenhouse was situated in a darkened gallery with three low-level gallery spots as the only light source. My own
experience of the piece was of time “slowing down”, and feedback from audience members suggested that a number of viewers entered into what can be described as a meditative or trance-like state. The slowness of the action in the piece and the subtlety and detail of it demanded a certain type of concentration from viewers. The gallery space itself was rather spacious, and empty except for the centrally positioned greenhouse and other viewers. Visual focus was concentrated on the greenhouse and the performance of my own slow and erratic movements within it, led by the few square inches of my tongue pressed against the panes, and matching the unhurried rhythm of the live snails. My eyes were often semi- or fully-closed, and I made no eye contact with viewers. Viewers were able to come right up to the greenhouse, to observe me or the snails, some of which were also moving, very slowly, on its interior surface. In my experience of doing this and other performances with live snails, one can observe a particular engagement of the viewer with the animals. As part of the assemblage of the piece, rather than as distinct objects which were separate (physically or symbolically) from the greenhouse or myself, their meaning changes. As Steve Baker suggests, “the postmodern animal is there in the gallery not as a meaning or a symbol, but in all its pressing thingness” (2000: 82). Baker cites Jannis Kounellis’ Horses (1969), an installation of twelve live horses tethered in an otherwise empty gallery, restaged at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London when I saw it in 2002, as well as Joseph Beuys’ Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me (1974), with which I deal in Chapter Three.

In their own “pressing thingness” (Ibid.), snails usually inspire a certain fascination, be it one of admiration or disgust, and because of their size demand a close proximity of examination. Gaston Bachelard writes quite a lot about snails in a chapter on shells, in his 1958 The Poetics of Space. He suggests that [e]verything about a creature that comes out of a shell is dialectical. And since it does not come out entirely, the part that comes out contradicts the part that remains inside. […] And the fact is that a creature that comes out of its shell suggests daydreams of a mixed creature that is “half fish, half flesh,” but also half dead, half alive, and, in extreme cases, half stone, half man. (1994: 108-9)

In his analysis of the figuration of the snail, Bachelard posits it as something ‘in-between’, in an indeterminate space that we have come across several times in this chapter already. The snail seems to embody the contradiction of binary dualisms, being at once hard and soft, geometric and amorphous, a delicacy and a pest, homeless and housed, a foot and a mouth (a gastropod),
sophisticated and prehistoric. My employment of it then is no coincidence. My initial interest in the subject of invertebrates was in their smallness and vulnerability (having accidentally killed one too many on the garden path on wet Autumn nights) and the varying attitudes I noticed from acquaintances – from similar anthropomorphising guilt to ruthless demonisation (from gardeners, of which I am now one). I soon developed an allegorical conceptualisation of the invertebrate to form the basis of a body of work that quite clearly referenced my own queer subjectivity, desires and sexual identity. One of the key elements of this conceptual framework was the literalisation of the notion of the abject, something that has perhaps been most notably theorised by linguist, psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Julia Kristeva, in her text *Powers of Horror* (1980). Although published in the same year as Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, and having many overlaps in its concerns with subjectivity, its conceptualisation differs greatly. Kristeva’s work, which traverses a number of disciplines, is marked by a strong rootedness in psychoanalytic theory, particularly that of Lacan, and a clear assertion of the gendered subject.

For Kristeva, the abject is that which is neither subject nor object, and as such becomes a “something” that is disturbing or repugnant to the subject. She suggests that

> The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *i*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject* on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (1980: 230)

Kristeva gives examples of the abject as certain foods, filth, waste or dung, one’s relation to which is characterised by “the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck” (*Ibid.*) Her explanation for this process of abjection is not simply of a ‘natural’ disgust for things that pose a biological threat to hygiene and by extension health (and life itself), but of a much deeper psychological process that destabilises the subject. Kristeva asserts that the abject arises from a dissolution of the borders of subjectivity, in which the subject fails to recognise the other as object and “finds the impossible within” (*Ibid.*: 232). Excrement, particularly human, is a prime example of this, as something which, when outside of the body (especially in our western culture) is regarded as abject and repugnant, but is of course something that is previously contained within it and is part of the constant and necessary process of digestion that all of our bodies perform. Bachelard refers
to the “digestive primitive essence” of the bourgeoisie, linking medical theories of excrement and digestion to civilization’s essential anality (Laporte: 81). For Kristeva, “excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death” (Ibid.: 260). This danger to identity is further experienced in the abjection of self, in the way that the abject simultaneously “beseeches and pulverises” the subject to the extent that the subject is unable to identify with something on the outside (an object), and finds the impossible within, realising that “the impossible constitutes its very being, that it is none other than abject” (Ibid. 232). “The impossible” is the self’s conciliation of the concept of a subjectivity with the ‘want’ on which any being, meaning, language or desire is founded and this want is like Lacan’s ‘lack’ - the non-object of desire (Ibid.).

This confrontation of the self with its own impossibility is something that we will encounter in Chapter Three, in the context of masochism in performance art. In the same way that we can see certain artists (the Viennese Actionists, Burden, Abramovic, et al) within this conceptualisation, we can also identify other artists more with an interest in abjection. Stuart Brisley, for example, is a British visual artist who has been making performance work since the 1970s, which has variously involved rotting food, meat and his own body, and who has more recently dedicated his practice to the curation of ordure (shit). One performance, Ten Days, is described as follows:

This was a performance by Brisley during 21-31 December 1978. A large dining table occupied the gallery space and over 10 days Brisley was served 3 meals a day. Rather than eating the prepared food, Brisley fasted, instead inviting gallery visitors to eat – which they often did with relish. Any leftovers were scraped from the plates onto the table, and at the end of the tenth day Brisley crawled naked through the decaying remains. (Kermode: 7)

In another, And for Today – Nothing (1972) Brisley “sat in a bath of cold water and rotting offal for two hours daily over a period of two weeks” (Ibid. 8). Such actions really confront us with the abject that Kristeva describes, and so with an intention that seems charged with political as well as personal intensity. In the film Arbeit Macht Frei (1973), made by Brisley and Ken McMullen, and based on the piece And for Today – Nothing, we see shots of Brisley in the meat-filled bath followed by (what was for me, watching it) a very disturbing shot of Brisley stood facing the camera repeatedly vomiting large volumes of liquid. Confronted thus with the abject, my own horror experienced as a viewer of this
action, even on video, was very visceral and strangely more affecting than other 
video documentation (or even live work that I’ve seen) involving blood-letting 
and actions of externally inflicted suffering on the body.

Brisley’s vomiting, and its confrontation of the viewer with their own 
interior possibility, brings to mind a video piece that accompanied the first 
performance of Becoming-snail at Cardiff School of Art and Design in 2003. 
Becoming-housefly was shot in close-up from a camera placed underneath a 
clear sheet of cling film, on which I repeatedly sucked up and regurgitated food. 
It was viewed from above on a monitor placed inside a bin bag that was also 
filled with rubbish and decomposing food. I mention this because I think it further 
highlights the strategies of abjection that are at play in Becoming-snail. What is 
abject is not only my own piss (and, in the original version of the performance, 
shit, vomit and semen) trickling over my body, and the presence of live snails 
over whose trails I trace my own tongue, but the dissolution of the boundaries of 
my own body and subjectivity, and my conscious embracing of the impossibility 
contained therein. Kristeva writes that

[...] the one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places (himself), 
separates (himself), situates (himself), and therefore strays instead of 
getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. [...] For the space that 
engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never one, nor homogeneous, nor 
totalizable, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. [...] the 
deject is in short a stray. (1997: 235)

For Kristeva, this conceptualisation of the subject as deject, as excluded and as 
a stray, is of a subject that is unsustainable. Psychoanalytically, the process of 
abjection is one that is aimed toward subject formation, toward identification and 
the regulation of boundaries and desires. But this same conceptualisation is one 
that has been positively and subversively embraced by certain queer theorists 
and artists. David Harradine, in an essay ‘Abject Identities and Fluid 
Performances: Theorizing the Leaking Body’ explains that:

This trope of the abject as a constitutive exclusion upon which subjectivity 
is predicated has been powerfully and seductively presented in and through 
the oppositional discourse of queer theory, which proposes that normatively 
sexed and gendered subjects are discursively produced, under the 
imperative of the consolidation of a heterosexual hegemony, through 
complex and repetitive processes of signification and identification – 
processes which produce a subject by virtue only of its becoming gendered 
and sexed. (2000: 74)

Harradine’s essay focuses on the work of Italian-born, London-based artist 
Franko B., famous for his performance work since the mid-1990s, which has 
involved blood-letting and the use of various other of his own bodily fluids.
Franko B. is associated with an identifiable movement in performance (along with the American artist Ron Athey) that has explored the queer subject in relation to abjection, in a similarly allegorical fashion to my own early becomings-invertebrate. This movement in art arose alongside the development of queer theory and activism, the opening out of what some saw as the restrictive and outmoded discourses of feminism and lesbian and gay studies towards more embracing theorisations of non-normative sexualities beyond the homo / hetero opposition. Suzanna Danuta Walters, in an essay entitled ‘From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Fag?)’, suggests that:

The growth of queer theory and queer politics must be placed in a social and political context. The most important pieces of this are, of course the AIDS crisis, the rise of postmodern / poststructural theory, the politics of academia, the sex debates, and recent critiques of feminism. (1996: 837)

An important influence in postmodern thought and a lot of queer theory is the work of Michel Foucault, notably his theorisations of power and knowledge and the regulation of sexuality and the body. In his History of Sexuality, Foucault asks

not, Why are we repressed? but rather, Why do we say, with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, that we are repressed? (1981: 8-9).

Foucault’s suggestion that discourses around historical repression are themselves part of the mechanisms of power that form (sexual) identities, inspired a critique of the regulatory discourses of identity politics and “an argument for the plurality and irreducibility (irreducible to gender, to the body, to social construction) of sexual desire and sexual play” (Walters: 836).

In this context of queer theory and in the wake of the AIDS crisis, we can see the emergence of certain performance practices that present a sexuality that is intentionally fluid, deviant or abject and that articulates aspects of the irreducibility described by Walters. These practices seem to foreground the body, in a similar way to which we will see in Chapter Three in examples of Viennese Actionism and 1970s body art, as the site of political and representational resistance. In the case of Franko B. and Ron Athey it is the “performance of the fluidity and interiority of the body” that enacts a “defiance of the very oppositional meanings of inside and outside” and proves “the terrifying proximity of the abject” (Harradine: 75). The discourse of inside and outside concerns not only the boundaries of the physical body, but also the distinctions
of sexual (and political) identity. Diana Fuss, in the introduction to her book *Inside / Out*, makes clear that

> [...] It has everything to do with the structures of alienation, splitting, and identification which together produce a self and an other, a subject and an object, an unconscious and a conscious, an interiority and an exteriority. [...] But the figure inside / outside, which encapsulates the structure of language, repression, and subjectivity, also designates the structure of exclusion, oppression, and repudiation (1991: 1-2).

Her interrogation of the position of “outsiderness” - a position that she identifies with certain lesbian and gay theorists of the time locating themselves in opposition to the “inside” of heterosexuality - is a useful one. A similar centrifugal impulse is clear in the figuration of inside / out within discourses around art, in which a Romantic notion still exists of the artist as outsider, marginalised socially (and often economically) but often willingly so, and afforded an privileged viewpoint of radicality from which to critique. Such a notion informs a common understanding of performance art as something subject to multiple marginalisations – culturally (as a ‘niche’ activity), economically (as dematerialised and counter-commercial) and representationally (as often produced by politicised minoritarian-identifying individuals). The work of Franko B. and Athey often references S & M and fetish, and - as previously mentioned – involve the use of their own gay male blood (which is, as Harradine notes, “the most metaphorically loaded body fluid”, particularly in the context of HIV / AIDS discourse (*Ibid.*: 80)). As such, they threaten to function as ‘shock art’, breaking social taboos through the exposure of the artist’s (or spectator’s) libidinal investment in art and the actions performed, which is ordinarily disavowed (Doyle: 123). Readings of performance that formulate a (re)presentation of the sexual subject as a foregrounding of the marginalised are thus necessarily restricted by Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis”:

> What sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervour of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights. (1976: 7)

> Although one could identify elements of such eagerness in the original conception of *Becoming-snail* - an eagerness bound up in my own internalised feelings of repression, of exclusion from, and rejection of, hetero mainstream culture - there are elements too which disrupt this. Conceptions of inside / outside are soon complexified by postmodern readings of culture and
representation. In terms of hetero- and homo-sexual identity, Fuss deconstructs the exclusivity of such boundaries by suggesting that “much like the feminine in relation to the masculine, [it] operates as an indispensible interior exclusion […] Each is haunted by the other” (Ibid.: 3). This ‘haunting’ of the inside by the outside, and vice versa, returns me to the abject, to the terrifying confrontation of the self (if that self is one founded on sexual identity) with its own impossibility. The use of bodily fluids in the work of Franko B., Ron Athey and myself, can be seen as

the performance of the destruction of the body’s boundaries, [which] becomes valuable in that these performances foreground the impossibility of maintaining those boundaries which attempt to separate the queer (those abjected others, like Franko, who might come to perform this performance) from a normatively heterosexual hegemony that produces them as excluded dirt. (Harradine: 73-4)

The suggestion that the queer performance of abjection exposes the impossibility of boundaries of the body as well as of identity is a sound one, and partly serves to answer Foucault’s repressive hypothesis, whilst at the same time could be argued to be (aesthetically) reaffirming marginalisation.

But here I would like to return to the subject of becoming-animal in relation to the processes of abjection. As Kristeva suggests, the abject confronts us “with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal”, territories marked, by primitive social order, as separate - “the threatening world of animals or animalism […] imagined as representatives of sex and murder” (1997: 238). But for Kristeva, the abject is more importantly associated with the separation of our own psychic development, the individual’s “violent, clumsy breaking away” from the maternal entity into language (Ibid.). What is key to both Deleuze and Guattari and Kristeva is the threat of indeterminacy, the risk to fixed and contained subjectivity. Kristeva writes that

it is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (Ibid.: 232).

For Kristeva, this indeterminacy is a temporary anomaly for psychoanalysis and exists as a step in the linear, cause-and-effect narrative of subject formation on which the discipline is founded. For Deleuze and Guattari, the in-between, the ambiguous and the composite are the possibilities of becoming, multiplicity and haecceity, which are precisely that which have the potential to liberate us from the regime of psychoanalysis (and depose what they call its General, Freud).
In the performance of *Becoming-snail*, both processes are at work. On the one hand, the audience is faced with the abject (as discussed above with regard to the snails, bodily fluids, etc.) and witness the abjection of my own self through an ordeal of defilement and debasement. On the other, my voluntary entry into this action - and the explicit framing of it in Deleuzo-Guttarian and political terms - opens up the interpretation for it as a willing and empowering act of catharsis and subjectification. For in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, it is not an entirely degenerative movement, but a temporary suspension of the organised body and subject that actuate “not regressions but creative involutions bearing witness to "an inhumanity immediately experienced in the body as such", unnatural nuptials “outside the programmed body”." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.273). Through the framing of such “unnatural nuptials” as my performance of becoming-snail within the discourse of abjection as well as Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming, such an action demonstrates the process of the decentring of the human subject and presents the micropolitical potential of this decentring as an affirmative argument for what Braidotti calls “post-anthropocentrism” (2007). This she describes as forcing a reconsideration of the concept of subjectivity in terms of “life force”. It dislocates but also redefines the relationship between self and other by shifting the traditional axes of difference - genderization, racialization and naturalization - away from a binary opposition into a more complex and less oppositional mode of interaction’ (ibid).

As such, it transcends the repressive hypothesis of Foucault and the structures of psychoanalytic theory that Deleuze and Guattari so fervently critique. As they suggest, “a schizophrenic going out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch” (1984: 2), and as Vergine writes of performance: “there is the possibility that the flow of revolutionary schizoid impulses could cause a great deal more than a simple confusion of superficial structures” (2000: 27).
Chapter Two

The performance of encounter and collaborative becomings: writing on The Public Love Project (with Kathe Izzo) and Collaborations #1 and #2 (with Manuel Vason)
The Public Love Project was a ten-day installation performance at the Shop at Bluebird, which involved Izzo and I living in an artificial 4m x 4m room (constructed of four temporary walls, without a ceiling) sited inside a concept fashion store on the Kings Road, London. Izzo and I slept and ate in the room, could walk around the rest of the shop and the building’s forecourt, but did not leave the premises at all during the course of the project’s duration. During the shop’s opening hours, we would have appointments with members of the public, lasting for between 30 and 90 minutes, in which we would ‘love’ them, through activities that usually involved sitting together, talking, eating and / or drinking, and occasionally the exchange of gifts. Apart from a formal procedure (of greeting the participant and leaving them alone in the room for a couple of minutes to read and sign a release form and “make themselves at home”) that would begin each appointment, and a closing ritual (of making a thumbprint in a notebook and artist(s) and participant taking a digital photograph of each other, which would later be posted on the project’s Weblog), each ‘performance’ that took place was improvised and undocumented.

Figure 2. Documentation of love appointment, The Public Love Project, The Shop at Bluebird, London. Photograph Rosie Cooper, Paul Hurley and Kathe Izzo.
Collaborations #1 and #2 were part of a project with Manuel Vason for Encounters, an exhibition and publication at Arnolfini, Bristol. Vason and I met a couple of times to devise a performance-for-camera, which took place at a converted Victorian laundry (now an artists’ studio) in Cardiff, and on the mudflats on the Severn estuary. Both of these photographs were ‘devised’ from a shared response to site and to material (household cling film), set up in situ and each taken very quickly in one or two exposures in the presence of no other audience. These two collaborations with Vason were part of a larger series of ongoing performance-for-camera collaborations that he has made with a number of other artists, 16 of which formed the exhibition of large format photographs in Arnolfini Gallery in 2007 (and 35 of which were published in the book Encounters). The exhibition was presented in a single white-walled gallery, the same space used for Becoming-snail in 2005. The large format photographs were mounted unframed on all four walls, with a carpeted walkway going around the gallery with sensors underneath that would activate spotlights onto each of the photographs as visitors approached them.

Figure 3. Collaboration #1, tactileBOSCH studios, Cardiff, 2006. Photograph Paul Hurley and Manuel Vason.

Figure 4. Collaboration #2, Severn Estuary, Cardiff, 2006. Photograph Paul Hurley and Manuel Vason.
Spring 2006 saw the creation of two very different projects for me, which although formally very different – one a durational performance involving a number of one-to-one interactions, and the other a collaborative performance-for-camera – undoubtedly share some conceptual concerns and raise certain similar questions. For the purposes of this study, they will be placed within a theoretical context that I hope will serve a deeper investigation into the nature of certain performance practices (body-based work developed after, but with reference to, Body Art of the 1960s and 1970s) and some of the issues at the core of my own. Beginning with a reflection on *The Public Love Project* and *Collaborations #1 and #2* and their contrast to *Becoming-snail* in the previous chapter, I hope to open up different perspectives from which to consider some of the same ideas, and of course to explore new ones. What I will argue is that foregrounded in the *Public Love Project* and *Collaborations #1 and #2* is the centrality of ‘the encounter’ – the encounter of the audience with the art work and the encounter of the collaborative process - as a constructive strategic move in the context of wider discourses about subjectivity and (self-) representation. This I will do through discussions of my own works as well as through contextualisations of other notable historical collaborations in performance art.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the performance of *Becoming-snail* was framed very much as a performance, in terms of visual and contextual presentation and audience relation. Despite being obviously different to conventional theatrical performance, the piece did follow conventions of static durational performance (in the vein of Marina Abramovic’s or Skip Arnold’s work, for instance), in its presentation as hermetically sealed entity in a white walled gallery, “untouched by time and its vicissitudes” (O’Doherty: 15). What I hope we will see is that the performances under examination in this chapter raise further questions about how we consider subjectivity in performance, in terms of the importance of relationality between collaborating artists, between artists and spectators, and between spectators and the work. I have touched upon in the previous chapter the potential of performance to disrupt boundaries, notably of the body and of the fixed subject, but what we see in *The Public Love Project* and *Collaborations #1 and #2*, are further disruptions, and more importantly *productions*, of subjectivity when considered in the light of Deleuzo-Guattarian theory.
I would first like to look at the subject of collaboration and its strategic use as a catalyst to these explorations and productions of subjectivity. Collaboration itself is obviously a practice that is widespread, across cultural disciplines and industries, and as such has a spectrum of manifestations. We could loosely define collaboration as a joint working on a common project, but the nature of collaboration - as process and as authorial structure - can vary greatly. There are instances in which collaborations occur between two (or more) distinct authors in the creation of a work that bears the name and mark of all (in some collaborations between theatre directors and designers, for instance), or those in which the authors’ contributions become indistinguishable (in musical collaborations within a band or between songwriters) or even anonymous (in artists collectives such as the Guerilla Girls, or in online, publicly-editable websites like Wikipedia). One collaboration of note here is that of Deleuze and Guattari, who wrote three books together and refer to their process in their introduction to the second, A Thousand Plateaus:

The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. [...] it's nice to] reach not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied. (1987: 3)

The historical emergence of their collaborations is, I think, significant, as a theoretical response to the events of May 1968 (Anti-Oedipus was first published in 1972); what is important in the context of the current discussion is not just the content of their collective writing, but the mode, which Braidotti has called “de-territorialising, or rhizomatic” (2002: 8). Deleuze remarked in an interview that “what was important for us was less our working together than this strange fact of working between the two of us” (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 17), and I would like to see this “between the two of us” as something key to my analysis of The Public Love Project and Collaborations #1 and #2, as performances of (collaborative) encounter and of becoming. Here I will be focussing on performance art practices that foreground collaboration both as concept and as strategy and that often highlight the contradictions therein – works that bring together divergent methodologies and explore the gaps between these and the collaborators that are using them. Such practices function on a level that one could call collaboration-as-performance, a subject about which I have found relatively little written.
The works that I am focussing on, within what I would define as performance art, are practices that have developed out of an experimental, dematerialised visual art tradition. Following this artistic avant garde, it could be argued that the world of performance art is one that has been dominated by the cult of the individual artist, by the values of individual authorship and by hierarchies of celebrity. But whilst visual art practice tends to operate almost exclusively through private, studio-based process, and public gallery-based presentation, performance art necessarily demands a level of collaboration in the cooperative presence of the audience at the moment of the work’s realisation (a fact that theatre has known some time). Thus collaboration in performance art has been both the exception and the rule, but in the case of certain practices has become a concept that artists have chosen to self-reflexively perform or enact. John Roberts and Stephen Wright, in their editorial introduction (written together) to a special edition of the journal Third Text, suggest that:

because collaboration defines art as a problem of cultural form – its use-values – it brings the category of art face to face with it most cherished expectations and ideals – individual authorship and autonomy – and thus addresses the very basis of art’s relationship to democracy, the artworld and capitalist relations of production. (532)

Although not a dominant form, such consciously political artistic collaborations are identifiable since the 1960s. Looking back, as much of my work does, to performance history, The Public Love Project consciously referenced such practices - most obviously John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s 1969 ‘Bed-in’ at the Amsterdam Hilton, and New York based artists Tehching Hsieh and Linda Montano’s Art / Life: One Year Performance 1983-1984. Hsieh is perhaps one of the most remarkable of contemporary performance artists in his dedication to the sort of durational works that Thomas McEvilley terms “Vow Art” (2005: 249), works which address notions of autonomy and democracy, and – if questionably - those of authorship. His one-year performances have been based on vows which included: living in solitary confinement in a 11’6” x 9’ x 8’ cell inside his studio (1979-1980); punching a time clock in his studio every hour (1980-1981); staying outdoors (1981-1982); not making, looking at, talking about or reading about art (1985-6) (Hsieh:2008). The one-year collaborative performance with Linda Montano was described, in a statement released by the artists, as follows:

We, Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh, plan to do a one year performance.
We will stay together for one year and never be alone.
We will be in the same room at the same time, when we are inside.
We will be tied together at waist with an 8 foot rope.
We will never touch each other during the year.
The performance will begin on July 4, 1983 at 6 P.M.
and continue until July 4, 1984 at 6 P.M. (Ibid.)

The piece was documented with a photograph taken daily by the artists of
themselves or of their situation, and audio tapes of all their conversations,
recorded daily, which were consequently sealed by the artists (McEvilley: 325).
It was undoubtedly a very brave and committed act of "vow art" that was both an
investigation into the blurring (and / or separation) of art and life and an
examination of human relationships "under unusually focussed circumstances"
(McEvilley: 326) (unusually focussed circumstances that we could also
understand as the Duchampian frame of art).

Hsieh and Montano present themselves as co-authors and equals in the
piece, emphasising their correspondence and parity in their statement of intent
and by beginning the performance with identically shaved heads. The relation
presented by Hsieh and Montano, however, is one that becomes quite
bifurcated – tied together (it appears, in photographic documentation, often
resentfully) by the rope, but unable have any physical contact with each other
(although McEvilley reports that “about 60 brush-bys and one brief hug by
Montano occurred during the year” (325)) the dynamic between them seems
one of enshacklement rather than dialogue. Hsieh and Montano had met several
months before doing the piece and had worked together in planning it, but once
the parameters of it had been set, all that remained was the execution of the
piece (as “life”) and the documentation, as outlined above. McEvilley presents a
picture of deep and constant disagreement between the artists over the course
of the piece, a lack of respect for each other's work, and the understandable
strain of complete lack of privacy and constant co-dependence for fulfilment of
needs and impulses (326-7). Here the nature of the collaboration complexifies,
depending on whether we see the site of its occurrence as the creative
conception of the piece, its execution, or its (re-)presentation. There is, of
course, no easy answer. The piece's execution as “art / life” highlights the
element of human relation between the two, and that the artists' cohabitation
and imposed intimacy has parallels to non-art collaborative relationships,
between lovers or partners. That this model of connection and codependency
developed into a relationship that was far from one of domestic bliss (Montano
allegedly estimates that they spent 80 percent of the time fighting (McEvilley:
326)) may show a disintegration of co-operation and constructive

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communication between the two, but does not invalidate the project as collaborative. On the contrary, as a collaborative and conceptual piece of vow art, as authored and executed jointly by Hsieh and Montano, we could say that the piece was all the more strengthened by it.

Two other artists working together around the same time, albeit in a very different way, were Marina Abramovic and Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen), who were also lovers and partners for a number of years (and, like Hsieh and Montano, had both previously had and have since had successful solo careers). They collaborated between 1976 and 1988 on a series of performances which they called Relation Works. Early works in this series involved often violent, compulsive or masochistic actions, such as slapping each other around the face for twenty minutes (Light-Dark, Cologne, 1977), repeatedly running into each other (Relation in space, Venice, 1976) or breathing the same air between their clasped mouths until they passed out (Breathing in / Breathing out, Belgrade, 1977) (Michalak:15). Later performances were focused much more on durational pieces of mid-movement stillness and static poses (such as the pietà in Anima Mundi, Bangkok, 1983) or of long periods of silent meditation gazing at each other across a table (Nightsea Crossings, 22 performances, various locations, 1981-6) (Ulay, 2008). All of these relation works explored elements of the physical and spiritual relationship between Abramovic and Ulay and were characterized by an intensity of concentration and self absorption that Charles Green calls “the presentation of a space that permitted, even demanded, mental travel but insisted on the subject's inaccessibility” (158).

In his book The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism, Green writes about the way in which Abramovic and Ulay “recreated itself as a third identity”, in part thanks to the “spectacular, even sensational character of the actions and the eccentricity of the artists”, which served to blur the boundaries between them as authors (157-8). The authorship of their work is commonly signified “Abramovic / Ulay” or “Ulay / Abramovic”, the slash a signifier of the interchangeability and inextricability of their convergent identities in the creation of their works. More than just through the creation of a ‘brand’ (of which one arguably existed) for their synergetic art production, Green argues that this third identity, Abramovic / Ulay / Ulay / Abramovic, also came into being because of the nature of the actions that they performed. The presentation of the inaccessible subject as a strategy of withdrawal from
‘everyday life’ is notable in relation to a historical shift that had begun to take place with the expanded practices of performance art. Green writes:

This clarifies why these artists’ actions ignored the viewer: Silence and unknowability, in combination with the complexities of double authorship, denied the expected economies of representation (specifically the binary terms through which we habitually describe gender, pain, and experience). The works are complicated by this series of doublings, so much so that an understanding of the limits of identity as an index of the self becomes apparent (Green: xii)

This indexing of self through identity is something that has obvious links to questions of subjectivity and (self-)representation, with the “expected economies of representation” (notably of the artist) in performance; it is something that we have already encountered in relation to queer identity in Chapter One, and that will engage with further in Chapter Four. Very few of Abramovic / Ulay’s works (especially their later relation works) involve language, and this I think is crucial to their relationship to representation and the production of a ‘third identity’. Whilst the stillness, duration and anti-theatricality of collaborative works such as Nightsea Crossings (1981-6) function to strip away systems of representation for ascetic rather than political ends, their effect as works of art is significant. To quote Green again:

The work of art became, quite literally, the artist himself and herself; the result, given that [Abramovic and Ulay] were not foregrounding social or sexual codings but rather withdrawing the self from view, was an almost unprecedented breakdown of the borders of self and thus (again deliberately taking Fried’s terminology) of the borders between the inside and outside of the work of art. (158)

Green is referring to the work of American art critic Michael Fried, most famous for his 1967 essay Art and Objecthood. The issues surrounding this essay and some of Fried’s other criticism are too great to be given justice to here. What is important I think, is Green’s accounting for the breakdown of borders of self (of the artists) through what I would identify as a process of becoming – a process similar to that which we have previously seen in discussions of Becoming-snail, but one that takes place within a collaborative relationality.

Although Green suggests that the “borders between the inside and outside” of the work are broken, one has to question whether or not this is as true for the audience as for the critic. For the audience is witness to a dialogue between Abramovic and Ulay that they can neither hear nor otherwise cognitively perceive, which denies them their position as third person spectator (as the one who sees and knows what they are seeing / hearing) and leaves
them displaced. Rather than providing opportunity for direct empathy between artists and audience, the effacement of the artists’ selves in works such as *Nightsea Crossings*, could be seen as alienating. Green suggests that the works operate on two levels of energy transfer: one the hermetic non-verbal communication between Abramovic and Ulay; the other the artists’ wavering strength and concentration over the duration and the resultant tension produced within the audience (Green: 173). The experience for the audience then is not one of spectating but of experiencing, of relating to an other ( / two others) that is ( / are) a ‘third identity’ in a way that resists ordinary processes of identification. The Lacanian formulation of identification and the mirror seems to be bypassed when the equation contains three elements or subject positions. Processes of identification are replaced with those of what Deleuze called affection (“the additive processes, forces, powers and expressions of change”) (Parr: 11) and, perhaps, with empathy. But the empathy I am talking of is not of the emotionally identifying individual but of “possibilities that Deleuze wants to think of impersonally” (Colebrook: 25), of the experience of ‘energy transfer’ that Green, and Abramovic herself, talk of. The relationship between the work and the audience is not, then, one that foregrounds social relationality, but one that effects internalised and depersonalised becomings. Abramovic / Ulay’s work is perhaps most interesting as an example of intense and evolving collaboration-as-performance and of the (sometimes violent and disruptive) reconfigurations of self that can result in a ‘third identity’ that blurs the boundary between art and life to occupy for themselves - and to open for the audience to experience - a ‘third space’ of the “space in-between” (Abramovic, 1998: 50).

We can see then, an apparent contrast between the collaborations of Abramovic and Ulay and Hsieh and Montano. For whilst what is remarkable in the former is the retreat from ‘everyday life’ through acts of collaborative absorption and non-verbal communication that form “part of a radical redefinition of the edges of the self” (Green: 157), the performance of the latter is remarkable for its rootedness in (and the artists’ endurance of) everyday life, governed by the physical and durational constraints of the piece and its relation to its audience (what Montano calls “living art”). Throughout the year of the performance, Hsieh and Montano had almost no choice but to engage with each other and with the public, be that an invited art audience at one of the pair’s “appearances” or the many incidental spectators that the artists would encounter as they went about their daily life in New York City. It is the inescapability of this
- and the obvious strain of the performance on the two artists – that seems to highlight their dichotomous identities rather than blurring them. Whilst the collaboration of Abramovic / Ulay can be signified by the abstracting and depersonalising “ / ” of interchangeability, Art / Life: One Year Performance could be said to be instead a performance by Tehching Hsieh and (or even “+”) Linda Montano (who interestingly writes of it on her own website that she “[p]articipated In Tehching Hsieh’s, One Year Performance, Tied With A Rope, 1983, 1984” (2008)).

Looking again at The Public Love Project and Collaborations #1 and #2, we can recognise how questions of authorship, autonomy and subjectivity are complicated in relation to artistic collaboration. As a relational and vow work, The Public Love Project seems to show parallels with Hsieh and Montano’s “living art”: Izzo and I created a set of parameters and a statement of intent by which to live for the 10 day duration; authorship was partially shared, but by us as two separate artists (and Izzo as primary author of the overarching project - The Public Love Project had six other planned incarnations in which Izzo would collaborate with other artists - as well as of the three-year True Love Project that had preceded it); engagements with the audience (in appointments, in incidental encounters in the shop and via the Weblog) were often carried out separately and with open reference to the other artist and reflections on our collaborative relationship. But these encounters, specifically the love appointments, also operated, like some of Abramovic / Ulay’s performances, on the level of empathy, through conscious attempts at energy transfer in moments of meditation, attentiveness and what we called the process of ‘actively loving’. Indeed, the concept of ‘loving’ the audience was very much (and very sincerely) at the centre of the project and whilst it had been a driving force (and consistent methodology) within Izzo’s practice, it was a relatively new one to my own, if a familiar theoretical subject. Thus my approach to ‘loving’ participants was marked by a conscious openness, a mindfulness and attentiveness both towards Izzo and the participants, and towards the experimental and creative nature of the appointments themselves.

What took place within the love appointments was actually talked about by Izzo and I (both privately and with participants) in terms of energy transfer. What was different in our energy transfers was that we were making them with participants, and instead of presenting ourselves as inaccessible subjects, were
attempting to be as accessible, open and responsive as possible and attending
to singular audience members individually. We could think of the subjective
relations between the artist(s) and the spectator(s) as being what R.D. Laing
(whose anti-psychiatry work in the 1950s and 60s was no doubt a precursor to
some of Deleuze and Guattari’s) would call “interpersonal”, as developing
through an awareness of the actions and perceptions of the other, rather than
resting on a predetermined or universalising approach. Crystallising the dialogic
nature of performance thus, The Public Love Project sought to foreground the
notion of a becoming subject, through making the performance / art itself the
bringing into being of the spectator-as-collaborator and the transitory
assemblage that constituted the love appointment (and, beyond that, the project
itself and the temporary community that formed around it).

As such, we could consider The Public Love Project in the terms of
curator and theorist Nicholas Bourriaud’s influential Relational Aesthetics,
published in French in 1998 and in English in 2002. Bourriaud’s text attempts to
identify tendencies within visual art in the 1990s, and sees a defining feature as
relationality as a formal and political strategy. It instances the work of artists
such as Liam Gillick, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Carsten Höller, Douglas Gordon and
Pierre Huyghe to illustrate what Bourriaud coins relational art,

an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and
its social contexts, rather than the assertion of an independent and private
symbolic space (2002: 14)

The notion of collaboration-as-performance might seem to fit well into this
paradigm, and in many ways it does. Its focus on the formal relation between
the (physically dematerialised) art work and the spectator as the site of the
(social) materialisation of the artwork itself is concurrent with works cited by
Bourriaud. But the specifically one-to-one nature of the collaborative and
intersubjective encounter of The Public Love Project complicates Bourriaud’s
model of relational art. As Claire Bishop writes in an article ‘Antagonism and
Relational Aesthetics’:

[r]ather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer,
relational art sets up situations in which viewers are not just addressed as a
collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a
community, however temporary or utopian that may be. (54)

There are obviously elements of community-building present in The Public Love
Project, but that community is one that is either questionably small (made up of
the two, three or occasionally four people in the love appointment) or dispersed
(made up of the staff and customers of the shop), and which I would say falls short of the auto-productive collective about which Bourriaud writes (or which we’ve encountered in a different form under Turner’s *communitas*). Although there was a micropolitical element to the work, this was not foregounded in the way that Bourriaud suggests the social and political intent of relational art is. And whilst one could probably develop an expanded theory of relational aesthetics that addresses some of these deviations and contradictions in one-to-one performance, my focus here (as in my and Kathe’s making of *The Public Love Project*) is on the individualised level of intersubjectivity in the reception of the performance of the work. Thus, my use of the word “relational” is as a word that suggests the exploration or expression of relationships, rather than in any sense that refers directly to Bourriaud’s paradigm.

*Collaborations #1 and #2* worked quite differently to *The Public Love Project*. Although some creative decisions within the collaborative process - about materials, location, the action of the performance-for-camera - that took place were shared, we each had distinct roles (Vason as photographer, myself as subject / model) that were to dictate the parameters of our working (who took the photograph, who was in the photograph). Technical decisions - which camera and film to use, the shutter speed, composition, etc. - were made by Vason, who thus had a certain degree of control over the production of image, and to an extent its ‘look’. Vason trained as a fashion photographer and still works in the field alongside working with artists as a collaborator and documentor of work, publishing photographs in art journals as well as artists monographs. As Kate Random Love writes in her article ‘Stories Masquerading as Objects: Manuel Vason’s Photographic Collaborations’ in the book that accompanied the *Encounters* exhibition:

The stylised composition and glossy appearance of the images bear the trace of Vason’s training in fashion photography, a genre that frequently draws on the logic of fetishism in its composition. (31)

Love argues that Vason’s images for *Encounters*, as photographic documents that are “asked to take the place of a live event”, present a confrontation with the play of presence and absence, with the Freudian logic of the fetish (30). She goes on to talk about the “amplification of the performing portrait” and the performative nature of portraiture itself (32). This could certainly be said of a number of the photographs, as stylised portraits that are consciously theatrical
in their creation of performances-for-camera with varying degrees of narrative. 

Love continues:

Vason’s images are populated with stars of a relatively underground, subcultural art form whose extreme and often disturbing bodily performances are positioned at a tangent to the workings of the mainstream. Vason’s choice of photographic subjects, perhaps like those of [Nan] Goldin or [Larry] Clark, confirm the photographer’s status as privileged spectator, as an ‘insider’, promising us virtual access to normally unseen sights. (31)

But Vason’s photographs, unlike Goldin’s or Clark’s, are not snapshot portraits taken within a subcultural underground. They are staged compositions constructed in collaboration with the photographed subject and presented in explicit relation to performance, thus entailing a different set of concerns.

In his essay ‘The Performativity of Performance Documentation’, Philip Auslander proposes that performance documentation has been understood to encompass two categories, which he calls the **documentary** and the **theatrical** (1). The first he characterises as the traditional way in which documentation is conceived of as a record through which performance can be reconstructed and as evidence that it occurred. In this category he places “most of the documentation of classic performance and body art of the 1960s and 1970s” ([Ibid.](#)). In the category of the theatrical, he places “a host of art works of the kind sometimes called “performed photography,” ranging from Marcel Duchamp’s photos of himself as Rrose Sélavy to Cindy Sherman’s photographs of herself in various guises, to Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster* films” (2). In this model we can certainly see Vason’s collaborations as theatrical, collaborations in which “the space of the document (whether visual or audiovisual) thus becomes the only space in which the performance occurs” ([Ibid.](#)). But Auslander’s categorisations are not mutually exclusive. If we think back to documentation of Abramovic / Ulay, or Hsieh and Montano’s collaborations, the documentation seems to operate on the level of both, as evidence (the monochrome sparseness of much documentation of this time seems to index a certain authenticity in a way that is not incidental) of the event, and as images in which there is an awareness on the part of both the artist and photographer of the composition and performativity of the image itself. Auslander attributes this to the growing recognition of the importance of documentation for performance artists, who from the 1960s onwards became aware of what Amelia Jones called performance’s “dependence on documentation to attain symbolic status within the realm of culture” (13). Thus the work of many performance artists became
not just the production of events for an immediate, live audience, but of events that could also be documented for use in catalogues, exhibitions, publicity and archives. This is certainly true, if not to an even greater extent, for performance artists today, working within an increasingly visual, technological and mediatised culture.

Manuel Vason’s work seems to have responded to this impulse and expanded the collaborative process that takes place in the documentation of performance to the extent that the live audience becomes redundant. That many of the images he makes combine performance with the seductive visual language of fashion photography could be construed as problematic. Interestingly, in the majority of Vason’s works with other artists, the subjectivity of the collaborating artist is privileged over his own. The voyeuristic gaze of Goldin, Clark or Knight towards a passive subject is to an extent displaced, as Vason’s camera is confronted with a performing subject who is actively and consciously constructing a representational self for the consuming viewer of the final photographs.

I’ve already mentioned Love’s use of a Freudian logic of fetish - of presence and absence, of loss and its substitution –, a logic that has constituted a common discourse in Performance Studies. In her influential *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan writes that

> performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance. (146)

Fashion photography, on the other hand, is necessarily a medium of representation - its function is primarily an economic one, in the representation of objects of desire (bodies, products, lifestyles, etc.) valued for their monetary as much as aesthetic worth. Performance, Phelan goes on to say, “in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive” (148), but what we see in images like those of Vason’s collaborations is the production of performance solely for the purpose of representation and reproduction – images to be exhibited, sold, printed in books or used as promotional material.
Looking at the 16 photographs (out of the 35 reproduced in the book) which were exhibited at Arnolfini, we might be able to further understand some of the issues of documentation, theatricality and representation at play. The images each show the body of the collaborating artist, to a greater or lesser extent: all except three (close ups of head and shoulders, or just head), show full bodies; all except two show the body fully or (in two cases) partially naked. The primary locations of the photographs are interior – artists’ studios, galleries, theatres, rehearsal rooms and what appears to be a burnt out house – although two are exterior – one a landfill site, the other the mudflats of my Collaboration #2. Some of the photographs - Collaboration #7 by Anne Seagrave and Manuel Vason, and Collaboration #1 by Alex Bradley and Manuel Vason, for example – portray a theatricality in which the subject is in movement, positioned in a way in which they are clearly separate to their surroundings, in a ‘frozen moment’ that makes us aware of the camera’s shutter and of the simultaneity of the moment’s liveness and its subsequent representation (and would follow Phelan’s notion of performance and its inevitable disappearance). Others - Collaboration #8 by Franko B and Manuel Vason, and Collaboration #1 by Marcela Levi and Manuel Vason – look like classic portraits, head and shoulders compositions in which the subject is looking directly at the camera, and is visually ‘made up’ or ‘accessorised’ (with white paint and blood, or pearl necklaces and hair clips, respectively).

Indeed, within the psychoanalytic theorisations of Phelan, Love, et al., the ‘performance-for-camera’ collaborations between Vason and other artists could well be understood as portraits. As (primarily) solo performances created for the production of singular static images, the performances that take place for camera are exchanges between the artist and Vason, but are also processes of representation and “imitative reproduction of the self-image [which] always involves a detour through the eye of the other” (Phelan: 36). Phelan writes that

portrait photography is the record of the model’s self-inquiry, an inquiry framed and directed by the photographer’s attempt to discover what he sees. Models imitate the image they believe photographers see through the camera lens. Photographers develop the image as they touch the shutter; models perform what they believe that image looks like. And spectators see again what they do and do not look like. (Ibid.)

I would argue that certain of the images from Encounters work in this way, the process of collaboration facilitating an attempt by the artist at self-representation. Amelia Jones writes of the “culture of narcissism” that has often
been aligned with body art, through its “fixation of performing the self” (1998: 46). But Jones resists the negative connotations commonly associated with the term, arguing that “narcissism – the exploration of and fixation on the self – inexorably leads to an exploration of and implication in the other: the self turns itself inside out, as it were, projecting its internal structures of identification and desire outward.” (Ibid.)

We can thus see what Love calls the “shift from the dynamic of subject / object that structures the active artist [ / photographer] and passive model scenario, towards a subject / subjects(s) dynamic in which both parties are actively, creatively engaged” (33). For whilst the gaze of Vason might normally be taken as the privileged point of subjectivity (capturing the object of the photograph), what we see in the majority of these collaborative works (including those with Franko B. and Levi) is the foregrounding of the performative nature of the portrait and the intersubjective relation between the photographer and the photographed, between the subject and the other. Jones writes of the “insistently intersubjective dimension” (1998: 36) of body art and its effect on understandings of the body and the subject.

The presentation of the self – in performance, in the photograph, film, or video – calls out to the mutual supplementarity of the body and the subject (the body, as material “object” in the world, seems to confirm the “presence” of the subject; the subject gives the body its significance as “human”), as well as of performance or body art and the photographic document. (37)

But Jones’ focus is “a particular moment in which the body emerged into the visual artwork in a particularly charged and dramatically sexualized and gendered way” (13), between the 1960s and the mid-1970s. The performances-for-camera in the Encounters collaborations are created in a different set of circumstances and, I would say unfortunately, are less charged and politically challenging than some of those that Jones writes about (by Carolee Schneeman, Yayoi Kusama, Vito Acconci, Yves Klein, Hannah Wilke, amongst others). Certain aspects of the politicisation of the body are no longer relevant, others no longer de rigeur or efficacious. For whilst Jones asserts that “body art does not strive toward a utopian redemption but, rather, places the body / self within the realm of the aesthetic as a political domain (articulated through the aestheticization of a particularized body / self, itself embedded in the social)” (13), such aestheticisation of the body has become, within live art, appropriated as almost standard practice and thus – it could be argued – has lost its political
dimension. The further appropriation of live art and its documentation by popular culture as well as its institutionalisation by galleries, arts organisations and the academe, makes a fetish of the aestheticised body, which itself ironically reduces its radically individualised potential. One could argue that the representational appropriation of documentation has in certain ways overtaken the presentational impulse of artists and performance art.

Thus, the exhibition and publication of a series of works like Encounters risks reproducing the fetishised body before it even produces it, both on the level of the artists and works curated, and in the creation of the collaborations themselves, aware as they are of what have become conventions of the medium. Whilst such conventions are discernible on an aesthetic level, these also indicate ‘trends’ in working practices - choices of locations, selection of film stock, lighting, cameras; decisions about colour, composition, focus; etc. – that all inform processes of representation which foreground the performance document as a particular kind of portrait. I would argue that the subjective relations in Collaborations #1 and #2 operate slightly differently – the former in the presentation of an architectural becoming, and the latter as an environmental one. For as much as they (perhaps necessarily) function as presentations of the self and documentation of the intersubjectivity between Vason and I (as ‘photographer’ and ‘model’) there is also an extent to which the images resist such representation. In their use of architectural space and exterior location, and their lack of signifying “props”, the images present themselves in relation to the body in a way that is not of the theatrical, as some of the others images in the exhibition could be construed. Neither though, do they operate on the level of documentary, in a presumed relation to the real. I would like to now focus on Collaboration #2, the image that was presented in the Arnolfini exhibition, Collaboration #1 being reproduced only in the book.

One of the most significant factors that differentiates Collaboration #2 is the obscuring of the face and body, and thus the partial overcoming of what Deleuze and Guattari have called the “abstract machine of faciality” (1987: 168). This abstract machine they describe as the white wall of signification and the black hole of subjectivity, a model that serves not just for the definition of faces, but for the social production of the idea of the face (which is “not even that of the
white man; it is White Man") (1987: 168, 176). Deleuze and Guattari write, in A Thousand Plateaus:

The white wall / black hole system is constructed, or rather the abstract machine is triggered that must allow and ensure the almightiness of the signifier as well as the autonomy of the subject. You will be pinned to the white wall and stuffed in the black hole. This machine is called the faciality machine because it is the social production of face, because it performs the facialization of the entire body and its surroundings and objects, and the landscapification of all worlds and milieus. (Ibid. 181)

In Collaboration #2’s rejection of the face, through the rejection of the facialising portrait and its privileging of representational subjectivity, it attempts to perform a becoming-other of the self that has philosophical and political ramifications as well as aesthetic ones. It problematises the Lacanian model of the mirror of identification, which it does not avoid (the relation between Vason and me is still a closed one between two selves / others, and is one witnessed in the photograph after the event) in the way that The Public Love Project does, but certainly attempts to break down. In the same chapter of A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that

if human beings have a destiny, it is rather to escape the face, to dismantle the face and facializations, to become imperceptible, to become clandestine, not by returning to animality, nor even by returning to the head, but by spiritual and special becomings-animal, by strange and true becomings that get past the wall and get out of the holes (Ibid. 171)

One could say that in its performance (as opposed to its representation) of becoming-imperceptible, Collaboration #2 offers the possibility of a radical reconfiguration of spatial subjectivity, of a dislocated self (both of the artist and of the viewer).

I am here reminded of Roger Caillois, a French theorist whose work crossed sociology, philosophy, literary theory and ethology, and his essay ‘Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia’. Originally published in the Surrealist-oriented journal Minotaure in 1935, the essay details mimicry in insects - particularly praying mantises – and argues that it is a process neither of need nor of adaptation (for self-preservation, for example) and relates it to aspects of psychological conditions, specifically schizophrenia and psychasthenia. Caillois describes his experience of

the invariable response of schizophrenics to the question: where are you? I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I’m at the spot where I find myself. To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies
On the one hand a terrifying notion (psychasthenia denotes a neurosis of phobia, anxiety or obsessiveness), Caillois’ description of mimicry, which Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois have called “insectoid psychosis” (40), could also be read as a radical strategy for the dissolution of boundaries of subject / object, self / other. The depersonalisation of the body in Collaboration #2 involves an obfuscation or withdrawal of the self through physical immobility (not dissimilar to the way Abramovic / Ulay conducted some of the relation works) that is situated in a landscape that is expansive, engulfing and elemental. As a description of the trance-like state into which an individual can enter (in performance or in a psychotic episode), Caillois’ notion of mimicry is interesting in his assertion that it is experienced by the individual as similarity in itself, not in relation to something. In drawing so strongly from ethological sources, Caillois manages to theorise outside of the subject / object model by proposing what has come to be known much later as the posthuman. He goes on to suggest that

alongside the instinct of self-preservation, which in some way orients the creature toward life, there is generally speaking a sort of instinct of renunciation that orients it toward a mode of reduced existence, which in the end would no longer know either consciousness or feeling - the inertia of the élan vital, so to speak. (1984: 32)

This “mode of reduced existence” and “inertia of the élan vital” seem to me fitting terms to describe the action of Collaboration #2. But the image seems also to suggest and relate to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming, both the becoming-imperceptible mentioned above, but also with the very concept of becoming itself:

Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, “appearing,” “being,” “equalling,” or “producing”. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 239)

The action performed for Collaboration #2 was certainly created as a becoming of sorts (although, unlike any of my other becoming-animal works, wasn’t a becoming of a particular species) but more than that, attempted to demonstrate the notion of becoming as an alternative model of subjectivity. Presented alongside other photographs in the Encounters exhibition, which performed the concept of collaboration as an intensification of the narcissistic performance-as-
portrait, Collaboration #2 attempted to overcome the psychoanalytic schema of fetish and loss through a renunciation of the self, and of proposing the collaborative process as one of becoming, as “depersonalization by assimilation” (Cailliois, 1984: 30) within a modelisation of the subjective economy as one that is essentially schizoid.

Whilst Amelia Jones suggests that subjectivity “as we understand it in the postmodern condition – is performed in relation to another yet is paradoxically entirely narcissistic” (1997: 46), her formulation relies heavily on psychoanalytic theories that privilege the visual (and thus representational), and what Deleuze and Guattari critique as the “universal essence of desire as libido” (1972: 301) (even if this desire is one that is often, in Vason’s collaborations, perverted). In Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari use the terms paranoia and schizophrenia to designate the “effects of the fundamental organizing principles and dynamics of capitalist society” (Holland: 3), seeing the latter term as “the preferable objective tendency [of capitalism], in its opposition to the paranoia of tradition and in its potential for radical freedom” (Ibid.). Rethinking the image of Collaboration #2 in this way, we see the performance of an objectivity in which the desire of the subjects (myself and Vason) are not directed toward a distinct object (the other or the self-image), but are depersonalised, decentred and asignifying.

It is here that we can see a similarity in the conceptual economies in which Collaboration #2 and The Public Love Project operated. The latter was explicitly framed within discourses about love in an intentionally provocative expansion of the term. It did this with a certain amount of reference to psychoanalytic practices, notably in the love appointments, which bore similarities to the structure of an analysis session in its fixed duration and in the employment of techniques such as free association, interference and clarification (as well as bureaucratic procedures of booking the appointment, signing the release / consent form and waiting for the appointment to begin). But the love appointments of The Public Love Project were not psychoanalysis or counselling sessions, nor did they claim to be. They did quote from the conventions of such practices but did so with a critical, aesthetic and ironical reframing. In his book on Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and
Schizophrenia, Eugene Holland describes their basic criticism of
psychoanalysis:

In effect, when the familial subjection of desire falters, psychoanalysis steps
in to offer a partially axiomatized variant, aligned upon and supportive of
the familial Oedipus, but now based on exchanging correct beliefs and
behavior for money rather than for parental love. To the (very considerable)
extent then, that its therapeutic practice and its theory are organized
around transference, the nuclear family, and the Oedipus complex, Deleuze
and Guattari insist that psychoanalysis must be understood as a strictly
capitalist institution. (Holland: 87)

I would argue that The Public Love Project operates in a similar way to Deleuze
and Guattari’s critique, but does so in a way – perhaps by its very nature of
practiced performance, rather than as theory - that is even more constructive
and opening up of alternative possibility. The object of Deleuze and Guattari’s
critique – transference, the nuclear family, the Oedipus complex and its
capitalist institutionalisation – are to a certain extent removed from the love
appointments carried out by Izzo and me. Participation was free and usually
involved participants being offered free food and drink – from coffee and
chocolate to oysters and champagne. Although there was some ambiguity in the
pre-publicity (“two artists / in bed / in public / in love / with each other & the
world”) (http://fana.typepad.com/public_love_project_londo/), when people came
to visit the project the companionable nature of our relationship was stressed -
we weren’t newlyweds, but a 26-year-old gay man and a 47-year-old mother of
three who happened to be sharing a bed and living together as nonphysical
‘lovers’, for the purposes of artistic collaboration. Izzo and my relationship, albeit
a temporary one, was an ideological challenge to the notion of the nuclear family
and to heteronormative, Oedipalised conceptions of love and desire. It was also,
however, a challenge to the critical reception of art through discourses about its
ontology, autonomy and representational economy.

By focussing the love appointments on an intersubjective and collective
experience between Izzo and / or me and the participants, The Public Love
Project worked in a direction of openness to facilitate the creative production of
subjectivity in the experience of the participant. In his book Chaosmosis: An
Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm, which was published in 1992, Guattari writes about
the potential of radical and progressive psychoanalysis (of which he was, of
course, a proponent) to enable the reinvention and resingularisation of
subjectivity.

One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way that an artist
creates new forms from the palette. In such a context, the most
heterogeneous components may work towards a patient’s positive evolution: relations with architectural space; economic relations; the co-management by patient and carer of the different vectors of treatment; taking advantage of all occasions opening onto the outside world; a processual exploitation of event-centred “singularities” – everything which can contribute to the creation of an authentic relation with the other. [...] We are not confronted with a subjectivity given as in-itself, but with processes of the realisation of autonomy, or of autopoiesis. (1995: 7)

The autopoiesis (the ‘self production’) that Guattari calls for rests on a “polyphonic and heterogenic comprehension of subjectivity” (Ibid.: 6). His description of “event-centred “singularities”” (Ibid. 7) reminds us of the haecceity that he and Deleuze write about in A Thousand Plateaus and which I’ve already explored in relation to Becoming-snail. I would argue that the love appointments of The Public Love Project were conceived in a similar way, as transitory events defined by their singularity and as assemblages of experiential affect. As conscious exercises in ‘loving people’, they enacted Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of schizo love, which John Proveti describes as “a material process, a factory, not a theatre” (6). Proveti defines the “three major points in the Anti-Oedipus treatment of schizo love [as]: love as material (not representational), as social (not familial), and as multiple (not personal).” (Ibid.) Framing the concept of love as one of becoming, and facilitating its experience by both Izzo and me and the project’s participants, The Public Love Project goes some way to reconfiguring the intersubjective encounter of love and art. Replacing the Oedipalised desire (for the Other or for the image) with what Deleuze and Guattari call “revolutionary desire”, that is to say “ desire as material process of nature […] in itself not a desire to love, but a force to love, a virtue that gives and produces, that engineers” (1972: 333), The Public Love Project foregrounded the social, relational and productive function of love and art. As such it was partly inspired by Hocquenghem’s (himself a contemporary of Deleuze and Guattari) model of the “scattering of love-energy”, the polyvocality of (homosexual) desire as an acentred system of non-exclusivity in action (131).

As Deleuze and Guattari write in A Thousand Plateaus,

What does it mean to love somebody? It is always to seize that person in a mass, extract him or her from a group, however small, in which he or she participates, whether it be through the family only or through something else; then to find that person's own packs, the multiplicities he or she encloses within himself or herself which may be of an entirely different nature. (35)

The explicit multiplicity of love appointments that we had with participants, the expressly polyvocal nature of these (often involving three, or sometime four, people) and the encouragement that we gave for openness (and inferred fluidity)
of identity, dismantled the dualistic model of identification and the Lacanian mirror phase (as mentioned above), in encounters that were experimental and generative.

In their treatment of art in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari go on to write that within their formulation

the value of art is no longer measured except in terms of decoded and deterritorialized flows ... It is here that art accedes to its authentic modernity, which simply consists in liberating what was present in art from its beginnings, but was hidden underneath aims and objectives, even aesthetic, and underneath recodings or axiomatics: the pure process that never ceases to reach fulfilment as it proceeds – art as 'experimentation'

(370-71)

I would argue that in this sense, both *The Public Love Project* and *Collaborations #1 and #2* operate as ‘experimentation’ and should be understood in terms of “decoded and deterritorialized flows”, or what Deleuze and Guattari have later called affects: “precisely these nonhuman becomings of man” (1994: 169). In the beginning of her book *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz talks of exploring the “conditions of art’s emergence, what makes art possible, what concepts art entails, assumes, and elaborates”. In an insightful comparison of the role of art and philosophy, she writes that

Art, according to Deleuze, does not produce concepts, though it does address problems and provocations. It produces sensations, affects, intensities as its mode of addressing problems, which sometimes align with and link to concepts, the object of philosophical production, which are how philosophy deals with or addresses problems. Thus philosophy may have a place not so much in assessing art (as aesthetics has attempted to do) but in addressing the same provocations or incitements in creation as art faces – through different means and with different effects and consequences.

(2008: 1-2)

We can see then, that although the artworks in question here do align with certain concepts of philosophy (such as the Deleuzo-Guattarian ones I have identified), they do not produce them in the same way that philosophy does. Instead, beyond the level of concept and that of percept – the world as perceived by the senses of sight, hearing, smell, etc. - they operate on the level of sensation and affect – the subject’s experience of distress, empathy, desire, etc. One could say that affect is the level of what they do rather than what they mean. Grosz goes on to say:

Artworks are not so much to be read, interpreted, deciphered, as responded to, touched, engaged, intensified. Artworks don’t signify (or, if they signify, they signify only themselves); instead they make sensation
real: “The monument does not actualize the virtual but incorporates or embodies it: it gives it a body, a life, a universe. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 177, in Grosz: 79-80)

In this light we can see both The Public Love Project and Collaborations #1 and #2 as attempts to embody this virtual, through “the production of other possible worlds” (O’Sullivan: 55). Whilst the former produces these other possible worlds as worlds that manifest intersubjectively, the latter does so through the imaging of a depersonalised, defacialised becoming. As collaborative works, they explicitly renounce the primacy of the unified subject, both the subject of the artist and that of the viewer, and in so doing, defer readings of the intelligible, of the coherent and the singularly located. In The Public Love Project’s questioning of the concept of love (but its simultaneous performance of its affect) and Collaboration #2’s reduction of the (re)presentational subject to the posthuman, we can see how performance can work alongside, but also across, philosophical ideas. They take philosophy as a point of departure and of inspiration, but what they perform is something other – other to the self, other to philosophy, other even to the very concepts of ‘the other’ and ‘the self’. As embodied practice, art works like those in question can take from philosophy, but go on to do what philosophy can’t – operate on the level of affect and sensation, which when framed within conceptual parameters can actively perform the production of new worlds: “[t]he monument’s action is not memory but fabulation” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 168).
Chapter Three

Shamanism, ritual and the politics of the anomalous: writing on *Becoming-goat*
Three days after Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, I (belatedly) make a scapegoat of myself as part of the exhibition Paradise, at tactileBOSCH studios, Cardiff. In front of an audience of 40, maybe 50, maybe more, inside the old Victorian glassworks in Llandaff North, I talk about the history of the scapegoat ritual, its recording in the Old Testament, and I draw analogies with the human sacrifice of the Pharmakoi at the ancient Greek festival of Thargelia. I talk about Erich Fromm’s 1956 treatise on love, on the human condition of separateness, and his citing of the Talmudic statement “whosoever saves a single life is as if he had saved the whole world; whosoever destroys a single life is as if he has destroyed the whole world” (1995: 12). I talk about the elimination and the recognition of difference and I talk about divine substance. I say I am about to quote from Deleuze and Guattari and someone laughs. I don’t know why this is funny, but there’s something unexpectedly comforting about the stranger’s chuckle. I cite Deleuze and Guattari on the becoming-animal that is the scapegoat, on the “goat’s anus [that] stands opposite the face of the despot or god” and the fact that “anything that threatens to put the system to flight will be killed or put to flight itself” (1987: 116).

What follows is then something quite other. I hand out small slips of paper – each around eight by one-and-a-half inches, laid – to about thirty members of the audience, along with a number of ballpoint pens that I purchased from the local corner shop a couple of hours prior. I ask people to write on the paper the worst thing they’ve ever done in their life. We’ve all done wrongs: against the law, against people we love, against strangers, against ourselves. I assure people that neither I nor anyone else will read or hear these wrongs.

I then open up a suitcase that I have with me; it is full of rocks. I tell people to take a rock and to attach their folded sin to it with some Micropore surgical tape that I pass around. As the thirty or so people do this with the thirty or so rocks that are in the suitcase, I strip down to my underwear and wrap bandages around my knees. Then using a leather belt I strap a large wicker basket to my back.
and I kneel down, placing a further three rolls of bandage and two sweetcorns on the floor in front of me. I place my head on the ground and bandage the sweetcorns to my head as crude, improvised horns. I then bind my hands with the remaining bandages, and on all fours I brace myself. I tell the audience to place their rocks in the basket that is on my back and ask them to “come walk with me”.

I crawl through the space, through the front gallery of the building, out across the street and begin down the asphalt path that leads through the park to the riverbank. It is a cold October night, it is windy, it is dark and it is wet. I feel there is something of a holy energy amongst this crowd of people, some armed with cameras, others with videos, all of them following this strange figure of an almost-naked man, on his hands and knees, now barely inching his way along the path. Apparently there are dog walkers. My knees at this point are bleeding. One spectator is walking right beside me. “You don’t have to do this,” she says, reassuringly. “I know” I whisper, “I’m ok”. Despite there being moments in which I fear I won’t make it, we get to the bottom of the path. There is an iron gate in the fence that separates the park from the river. I crawl through it, between the brambles and the nettles, and finally I unstrap the leather belt and remove the basket of rocks. I stand, look around at some of the faces that surround me in the dark. “Let’s throw them in river”, I say. We do so, and hear the satisfying splashes through the trees and the undergrowth. I think some people hug me, others say thank you. Despite the wind and the rain I’m not cold. We walk slowly back to the gallery, I am carrying the empty wicker basket. Torn bandages hang uselessly from my grazed and bleeding knees.
Figure 5. *Becoming-goat* performance, Arnolfini, Bristol, 2007. Photograph Kim Fielding.
It is my intention in this chapter to explore certain elements notable in body based performance art practices, through an examination of an action of my own, *Becoming-goat*, performed at tactileBOSCH studios, Cardiff in October 2006 and at Arnolfini, Bristol in 2007. For the purposes of this writing I will focus on the original performance of the work, as described above, and look at it alongside historical examples of other artists' work from the 1960s and 1970s as well as more recently. We have seen, in the previous chapter, discussions of relationality and audience subjectivity and some of the ways in which performance can attempt to transform these. *Becoming-goat*, based as it was on historical elimination rites (the scapegoat ritual), takes this transformative function of performance in a different way, notably in terms of its potentially therapeutic element and the direct appropriation of this from religious practices. I will begin by looking at this in relation to ritual, shamanism and catharsis, before going on to explore elements of masochism in performance. I hope to make links between the individual and social body in performance, in discussions of power relations, the liminal and performative positionality.

I would like to pick up, from Chapter one, the discussion of ritual in performance, in order to further understand the function of the former within the latter. I have already identified certain tropes that we could identify as the key characteristics of body-based performance art: the artist’s attempt to transgress physical or psychological boundaries, often violently; the use of the self as subject and the body as object (or an attempted blurring of subject / object formations); the appropriation of philosophy, religion and (shamanic) ritual in performance; the embodiment of the phrase that ‘the personal is political’. As already mentioned in the introduction, Thomas McEvilley, in an interview with Marina Abramovic in 1998, proposes an interesting historiography of Body art that is especially pertinent here. Rather than originating - as other prominent art historians like Goldberg and Schimmel have suggested - from a tradition of experimental theatre (Dada, the Futurists, etc.) or action painting (Gutai Group, Pollock, etc.), McEvilley argues that performance art arose out of a neo-pre-modernist attempt “to establish channels of both cultural and spiritual connection with earlier forms of society” (1998: 24). In particular, a strategy used by artists was “rooting the performance in ancient ritual forms which preceded the formulation of Enlightenment ideas and the beginnings of the Modernist view of history” (*Ibid.*) One instance of this is artists’ performance of acts of Vow Art (a term that, of course, also has religious implications) such as those of Tehching
Hsieh (already discussed in Chapter Two), or Chris Burden, also working with endurance and Vow Art, albeit with different intentions. Thomas McEvilley (2005) suggests that:

For some artists (for example, Burden), work of this type has functioned as a personal initiation or catharsis, as well as an investigation of the limits of one’s will; others (including Nitsch) are convinced of that their performance work is cathartic for the audience as well in that sense serves a social and therapeutic purpose. (250)

Burden is a Californian artist who has worked across media and decades, but is of most interest here for his performances of the early 1970s. The most famous of these include Locker Piece (1971) in which he was locked inside a 2' x 2' x 3' locker for 5 days with a 5 gallon bottle of water in the locker above him and an empty 5 gallon bottle below him, and Shoot (1971), described by Burden in characteristic matter-of-fact style:

At 7.45 p.m. I was shot in the left arm by a friend. The bullet was a copper jacket 22 long rifle. My friend was standing about fifteen feet from me. (Burden, quoted in Ward, 2001: 115)

Such works of Burden are characteristic of some of the extreme and ritualised acts of endurance that artists were making with their bodies and with the limits of their (and their audience’s) wills around this time, acts that I want to further contextualise and reflect upon the ways in which they might now be understood. Kristine Stiles writes that

Burden's ability to summon, endure and check intense experience, as well as to harness explosive and evocative materials and respond to and manage unpredictable audiences, unites his art with both mythic and actual powers of sexual energy and spiritual renewal. (2007: 34)

The simultaneous presence of sexual and spiritual energies and processes is something that can be identified with a lot of cultural practices and can be traced back millenia. As Richard Schechner suggests,


The relevance of these elements to the present discussion of Becoming-goat will, I hope, become clear.

A decade before artists like Burden and Tom Marioni (who incidentally did a performance with Linda Montano in 1973, in which the two were handcuffed together for three days, cf. Stiles and Selz: 691) were making their mark on the burgeoning US West Coast performance scene of the early 1970s, a group of artists – including Hermann Nitsch, Otto Mühl, Günter Brus and
Rudolf Schwarzkogler – started making intense body-based performance in Vienna that was to become known as Viennese Actionism (after the group’s formal constitution as the ‘Wiener Aktionsgruppe’ in 1965) (Berghaus, 2005: 152). Drawing on philosophy, psychoanalysis and traditions of ritual and religion, they created art that attempted to effect social change and the release of suppressed unconscious desires (Stiles and Selz: 687). As Berghaus writes,

[[They linked Freud’s psychological existentialism with the political psychology of the Frankfurt School and suggested that perversion was a rebellion of pleasure principle against reality principle, a protest against the functional use of sexuality in the service of procreation. (Ibid.: 157)]]

The performances of the Actionists were intentionally confrontational, often referencing sadomasochism and ritualistic sacrifice, and followed conviction in the use of pain as a means of catharsis and healing – both of the individual and of the wider social (Stiles and Selz: 687). Berghaus says of Nitsch’s Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries that “[t]he generic name Nitsch gave to these actions was Abreaktionsspiel (abreaction play), derived from the Freudian concept of catharsis” (2005: 153). In a 1964 manifesto, Mühl expressed work as “self therapy made visible” that “works like a psychosis” (Mühl in Stiles and Selz: 750), making clear connections between the experience of trauma and the consequent release or transformation of suppressed desires. Many of the masochistic acts played out by the Actionists could be seen themselves as manifestations of such cathartic impulses, with the aim of emancipation from the repressions of society, church and history. Between 1965 and 1966, Schwarzkogler famously made a number of private photographed performances in which his body (or, it is alleged, the body of a substitute model, Heinz Cibulka) was cut, mutilated, bandaged and combined with materials such as glass, dead fish, and surgical paraphernalia in acts referring to wounding and castration (Miglietti: 24). Around the same time, Hermann Nitsch developed the Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries, orchestrating consciously Dionysian events often involving loud music and a number of performers engaged in rituals of animal disembowelment and the covering of naked bodies with the blood and entrails of slaughtered animals. These performances would last for up to several hours or even days at a time and continued to be restaged until the late 1990s (Goldberg: 163-4; Warr and Jones: 93).

Whilst some of the performances of the Viennese Actionists (particularly Nitsch’s Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries) are clearly rooted in Dionysian rituals of excess - of the participatory, communitas-inspiring kind that would fall into
Turner’s definition of the liminal – others (such as those of Mühl or Schwarzkogler) were incorporating ritual in much more individualised actions that we could perhaps identify as liminoid, defined by a relation of difference between performer and spectator rather than similarity. Both were marked by the acts of endurance and often pain that artists would undergo, albeit for different ends - functioning as an exploration of atavistic ritual and religious techniques, as well as an active politicisation of the body. *Becoming-goat* did this also, containing elements of both the liminal and the liminoid, through the participatory elements of the ritual that was re-enacted, the individual rite through which I passed, and through the presentation of both as performance. Kathy O’Dell, in her book *Contract with the skin: masochism, performance art and the 1970s* (1998), uses the term “masochistic performance” to describe a strain of performance made by artists in that decade who had a shared set of concerns that included:

- the mechanics of alienation in art and everyday life; the psychological influences of the domestic site on art and everyday life; the sensation of being both a human subject and an object; the function of metaphor in art; and, especially, the relationship between artist and audience. (2)

The exemplars of this practice she names as Abramovic and Ulay, Chris Burden, Vito Acconci and Gina Pane. O’Dell’s study rests heavily on psychoanalytic theory, suggesting that

in numerous masochistic performances from the 1970s, the artists focused specifically on what elsewhere would be called the oral, mirror and oedipal stages of psychic development. [...] Of course there is much more at stake in the rituals enacted by these artists than a vague textbook reminder of the stages in one’s own development. Rather, what is signified is the relation between that growth and the institutional structures of the everyday world (Ibid: 9-10).

There are clear links - but also tensions - between O’Dell’s formulations of resistant, individualistic performance and some of Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas with which we’ve been dealing in previous chapters. Certainly, the institutional structures of the everyday world (be they structures of the social or governmental State or of the symbolic order) that O’Dell writes about in her Lacanian formulations are not dissimilar to those that Deleuze and Guattari – and myself - are trying to overcome. The site of this contestation is necessarily the body, but in the context of performance it is exemplified in the relation of that body to the body of the other – the viewer, spectator or participant.

Such elements are key to an understanding of ritualistic performance art: a form that involves the mechanisms of both performance and ritual, and can
alter our everyday relation to ourselves and to each other. For Becoming-goat not only took direct inspiration from the ancient scapegoat ritual but also followed its (generic) tripartite ritual structure – what van Gennep called separation, transition and incorporation and Turner developed into separation, margin and reaggregation (Turner, 1969: 168) – in the three parts of the performance: the direct address to the audience; the journey from the gallery to the river; the audience’s throwing of the stones into the river. At the same time however, the event was clearly framed within an art context, bringing into question - as we have already touched upon in Chapter One - the degree to which permanent transformations can occur, or to which the event is rather an opportunity for what Schechner calls “temporary transportations" (2002: 63).

I would argue that Becoming-goat was created with the intention of being a transformative experience (a rite of atonement) for myself, and structured in such a way that there was also the potential to affect a transformative or transportative experience for the witnessing audience (as a ritual, as well as as a performance). This transformative function of art can be traced from early religious art through ideas of the transcendent in Romanticism and Modernism, but what we see developing in the latter part of the twentieth century is an interest in practices of transformation (of spiritual as well as political consciousness) that we could relate to a notion of the artist as shaman. It is on this that I would now like to focus. McEvilley, in an article entitled ‘Art in the Dark’, originally published in Artforum, Summer 1983, writes of a “category shift” in appropriation

from the zone of religion to that of art […, which] represents the residual influence of Romanticism: the artist is seen as a kind of extramural initiation priest, a healer or guide who points the alienated soul back toward the depths of the psyche (2005: 240).

This is a development that seems key to the history of the type of performance art practices with which I have been dealing here, as well as to an understanding of my own performance, Becoming-goat. Shamanism is a term used to designate a multitude of spiritual and social practices across cultures and across times. It is not my intention to offer an historical or ethnographic account of shamanism, but I think it important to offer an overview, to define the parameters of that which we are discussing. Mircea Eliade, in his seminal and extensive study, Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy (published originally in French in 1951 and in English in 1964), attempts to define shamanism “in its strict and proper sense”, differentiating between it and other
“magico-religious phenomena”, stating that “[g]enerally, shamanism coexists with other forms of magic and religion” (1964: 5). Eliade proposes that

[although the shaman is, among other things, a magician, not every magician can properly be termed a shaman. The same distinction must be applied in regard to shamanic healing; every medicine man is a healer, but the shaman employs a method that is his and his alone. As for the shamanic techniques of ecstasy, they do not exhaust all the varieties of ecstatic experience documented in the history of religions and religious ethnology. Hence any ecstatic cannot be considered a shaman; the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld. (Ibid.)

Much as aspects of his study are useful, in its attempted documentation of a vast range of shamanic practices across the world, Eliade’s distinction between shamanic and other magico-religious phenomena risks being universalising (and is not altogether useful in the context of this discussion of performance art). It corrals a large number of historically and geographically diverse phenomena under a single term, and validates them (or, one could cynically say, his own project) with an “-ism”. Daniel Noel, in his much more recent The Soul of Shamanism, criticises Eliade’s text as “an authoritative imagining more than a factual account of what traditional indigenous shamanisms had been or might still be outside of Western culture" (1997: 42). The practices that Eliade writes about are presented as what we might understand as ‘authentic’ shamanic practices - authentic in that they are linked to primitive, specific, local traditions – but the very terms of this definition present obvious issues in a contemporary reading of them. There has been much debate within poststructuralist and postcolonial theory about the very notion of cultural authenticity, and the power relations that exist within the “historical sovereignty – always restrained, but always present – of European thought and the relation that can bring it face to face with all other cultures as well as with itself” (Foucault, 1989: 376-7). Such sovereignty is certainly present in Eliade’s project, and in readings of cultural practices in which notions of ‘authenticity’ are often mixed with exoticism, otherness and claims to ethnographic objectivity.

Eliade’s text, although not without its problems, was “the great prototype and scholarly authority for the neoshamanism movement to follow” (Noel: Ibid), its publication coinciding with “postwar quests for alternative and instant experiences” (Harvey: 22). As well as the academic interest that shamanism attracted at this time, so too a popular enthusiasm began to develop, through the influence of writers such as Aldous Huxley, Carlos Castaneda and Joan
Halifax, and counter-cultural trends in the 1960s and 70s - including experimental performance art practices - which sought alternatives to the western cultural and spiritual world-view (Ibid.: 16). In 1980, the anthropologist Michael Harner published The Way of the Shaman, a "pioneering resource book for new Shamans", which led to his establishment of a Foundation for Shamanic Studies in 1985, an organisation that continues to teach ‘core shamanism’ through workshops and classes internationally (Ibid.). Harner’s organisation is by no means the only one to offer such inductions into shamanism, one might say that it is part of a prospering industry in the New Age sector. But Harvey points out that

Some academic observers continue to deride this popularization and distinguish between ‘real’, ‘traditional’ Shamans and their deluded imitators. Essentially, the former live in small-scale, pre-literate societies, the latter in western suburbia. (Ibid.: 22)

Such distinctions seem to rest on a binarisation of ‘real’ and ‘imitatory’, of ‘shaman’ and ‘sham’, which as I will show is not entirely productive to the discussion in hand. I would like to use a more open definition of the shamanistic (that one could think of instead, following Turner’s neologism, as shamanoid), and look to the role not as one that need be qualified, but at the elements of it relevant to a discussion of performance art. These might include: the use of ‘primitive’ materials with atavistic or metonymic associations; a belief in the transcendent and curative powers of the artist or shaman and their achievement through a process of initiation and ritualistic practice; the employment of embodied techniques such as trance, fasting and physical endurance to bring about changes in consciousness.

McEvilley suggests that with the industrialisation of western society, the multiple role of the shaman was broken up into distinct professions (doctor, poet, artist, etc.), but that an attempt within art to reconstitute the fullness of the shamanic role began as early as the Romantic period (he cites certain poets’ attribution of both healing and transcendental powers to art) and has continued through the twentieth century (2005.: 245). McEvilley’s article examines the work of a number of twentieth century performance artists (including Joseph Beuys, Günter Brus, Chris Burden, Kim Jones, Paul McCarthy, Linda Montano, Hermann Nitsch and Gina Pane, some of whom we find also in O’Dell’s study of masochistic performance) that he identifies with this reconstitutive urge towards the figure of the shaman. He writes that
Many of the artists discussed here feel that shamanic material and primitive initiation rites are the most relevant cultural parallels to their work. [...] It is important in terms of any theory of the function of art that these artists have introduced into the art realm materials found elsewhere only in the psychiatry records of disturbed children and in the shamanic thread of the history of religion (Ibid.: 244)

Whilst McEvilley also argues that in some cases the shamanic tone of these artists’ work came before their knowledge of shamanism, he contends that these discourses did become formative to both the works and their reception, within contemporarily expanded understandings of art. In the context of experimentation (aesthetic, political and personal) of the 1960s and 70s, McEvilley sees such performances as “attempts to break up the standard weave of everyday motivations and create openings through which new options may make their way to the light” (Ibid. 251). Anthony Kubiak, in an article entitled ‘Theatre and the Technologies of Appearances: The spirit of apprehensions’ writes of a “particular and critical mode of performative consciousness”, which is precisely unlocatable, and before we ascribe this ‘unlocability’ to some poststructural mode of thought, I would insist that this critical performative mode, this visionary impulse of mind embodies the best hope of curative, redemptive political life. I will, moreover, call this mode of consciousness variously visionary, shamanic, or pharmakeic. (2008: 83)

Kubiak demonstrates that shamanistic modalities may certainly be found in examples of contemporary performance, but also, he argues, in examples from canonical literature, like the visionary writings of William Blake. Suggesting that “both theatre and shamanic practice can be understood as elaborations of a more primal (though not primitive) visionary impulse to reformulate the world” (Ibid.: 85-6) Kubiak’s is a useful contextualisation of some of the theoretical debates around performance and shamanism. His use of the term pharmakeic is taken from Plato and Derrida, the former’s use of term pharmakeus meaning “many things and all of the following: wizard, sorcerer, magician, physician, and finally scapegoat (more literally, the pharmakos)” (Ibid.: 83).

Whether in an “authentic” shamanic role (in the performance of traditional rites in agrarian societies, for example) or in the shamanoid role of the artist (in some of the actions of contemporary performance artists that are the subject of this thesis), the assumption and fulfilment of that subject position is defined by a particular social relation of difference. Existing between the parties involved – priest / shaman and community, or performer / artist and audience – this relation is central and is symbolic of the historical conventions it follows as
well as of wider relations within the society in which it is formed. My own performance of *Becoming-goat* rested on the exploitation and complexification of this relation in contemporary performance art practice, but explicitly linked it to the ancient Jewish scapegoat ritual, in which one goat is sacrificed as a burnt offering and a second (the scapegoat) has the sins of the people of Israel confessed upon it and is led away and “taken to the wilderness and suffered to escape” (Brewer, 1993: 967). This bears strong similarities to the ritual of the *pharmakos* in ancient Greece, (to which Plato, Derrida and Kubiak refer) in which human victims were sacrificed or expelled from the city, to the same ends of catharsis and communal moral purification. I think it less important at this juncture to explore the historical details and differences of these two traditions (accounts of which are inconsistent) than it is to look at the common structures and social mechanisms that contextualise them as events, and the ways in which *Becoming-goat* also appropriates some of these.

If we look at the scapegoat and *Pharmakos* as elimination rites, we can relate them quite clearly to the cathartic function of theatre, as has been written about since Aristotle (and explored by a number of performance artists, as indicated above). But whereas a theory of cathartic ritual is centred on a symbolic purification (through fear, pity and symbolic violence), anthropologist René Girard (1977) emphasises that ritual is essentially “the imitation and re-enactment of spontaneous, unanimous violence” (99). He suggests that ritualistic sacrifice functions as a social mechanism of “violent unanimity” (97) enacted upon a surrogate victim, and that the nature of that victim – whether human or animal – is unimportant. What is important is the collective violence of the ‘mob’ and the transformative process through which it goes in its acting upon a victim. For Girard, ritual sacrifice (of both humans and animals alike) is a symbolic and socially motivated victimisation, a point that may seem obvious but is worth stressing. For although the original scapegoat and *pharmakos* rituals involved real sacrifice and my *Becoming-goat* performance did not, they could still be regarded as operating in similar ways, through the substitution that takes place in their symbolic enactment of violence. Girard writes of a double substitution:

The first, which passes unperceived, is the substitution of one member of the community for all, brought about through the operation of the surrogate victim. The second, the only truly “ritualistic” substitution, is superimposed on the first. It is the substitution of a victim belonging to a predetermined sacrificial category for the original victim. The surrogate victim comes from
inside the community, and the ritual victim must come from outside; otherwise the community might find it difficult to unite against it. (1977:102)

Theatre anthropology inserts a third substitution into the equation: that the substitution for the ritual victim is in fact the actor (classically in Greek tragedy) who is only symbolically sacrificed in the course of the drama. This is a victim who is at once from within the community but posits himself outside of it (and remembering Turner’s theorisations of tripartite ritual structure, will be reintegrated). Such is evident and necessary in the way in which Becoming-goat clearly operated as a performance. In terms of ritualistic violence, I was not sacrificed but did endure a considerable amount of pain and discomfort that the audience was both implicated in and absolved of (under the terms of the performance and my willingness to undertake the action). We could say that these very terms shifted through the tripartite structure of Becoming-goat: the piece began as a (verbal) presentation of the scapegoat ritual, developed into a physical demonstration of it, but then became an individualised ‘life crisis rite’ (Turner, 1969) that was performed for, and witnessed by, the audience. Within this, the action of carrying the rocks – supposedly metonyms of the audience’s sins – was presented initially as part of the process of the audience’s atonement, but then became an action of my own responsibility (I wasn’t led like the original scapegoat or pharmakos, but did the leading of the audience myself). The Christian aspect of such a conceptualisation is perhaps striking and is something about which I was very wary when creating the piece, not wanting to fall into naïvely earnest or overly cynical messianic stereotypes. Whether we are, as individuals, religious or not, it could be argued that a lot of our western cultural understandings of the subjects of sacrifice and atonement are heavily formed by Judaeo-Christian traditions and belief structures; the performance of Becoming-goat in an urban, secular art environment was not immune to this. Albert Baumgarten writes of the “holistic Christological’ exegesis”, of “Christ being simultaneously sacrificial goat and scapegoat” (213), a simplification that Girard makes in his figuring of Christ as a scapegoat (when he is in fact human) and that I too make, in my performance of a self-sacrificing, atoning figure that also takes the position of the animal scapegoat.

My multiple embodiment was not just of the figures of the sacrificed and banished goats, but was also that of the officiant of the ceremony. As such, my voluntary taking on of this figure and my desire to endure the self-inflicted violence in carrying the rocks could be understood in terms of masochism.
Following O'Dell, I don't wish to view masochism in its commonly understood sense - as a practice usually conducted in private, for the attainment of sexual pleasure - but rather with “a broader, less clinical approach” (1998: 3): as a ritualised, public and symbolic performance of pain, conceptualised within an aesthetic and political context. O’Dell refers to Theodor Reik, whose *Masochism in Modern Man* (1941) (republished in 1962 as *Masochism in Sex and Society*) was a seminal in-depth clinical study, the chief focus of which was moral - or in Reik's terms “social” - masochism (Silverman: 195). Kaja Silverman, in her book *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992) suggest that “[l]ike Freud, Reik stresses that in moral or social masochism the subject functions both as the victim and as the victimizer” (196). Reik theorised the four main components of masochism as fantasy, suspense, provocation and demonstration, the latter of which Silverman elaborates in relation to what Reik called Christian masochism:

To begin with, an external audience is a structural necessity, although it may be either earthly or heavenly. Second, the body is centrally on display, whether it is being consumed by ants or roasting over a fire. Finally, behind all these “scenes” or “exhibits” is the master tableau or group fantasy – Christ nailed to the cross, head wreathed in thorns and blood dripping from his impaled sides. (197)

But Silverman identifies what might be a surprising aspect to Reik’s formulation:

What is being beaten here is not so much the body as the “flesh”, and beyond that sin itself, and the whole fallen world. This last target pits the Christian masochist against the society in which he or she lives, makes of that figure a rebel, or even a revolutionary of sorts. In this particular subspecies of moral masochism, there would thus seem to be a strong heterocosmic impulse – the desire to remake the world in another image altogether, to forge a different cultural order. (197-198)

Reik’s study of masochism seems very influential to Deleuze’s own ideas on the subject, most notably theorised in a text originally written in 1967 (published as “Le Froid et le Cruel” in *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, translated as *Masoichism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* in 1971, and republished as *Masoichism, Coldness and Cruelty* in 1989) and in a number of later texts including *A Thousand Plateaus*. Deleuze makes two very important observations about masochism: first, that it is not, as commonly assumed, complementary to sadism; second, that central to masochism is the need of contractual relations (1989: 20). Deleuze’s theory differs from Reik’s in its extraction of masochism from its specifically Christian referent (without losing its rebellious or revolutionary character) to a broader sense of ‘the law’ and the subject’s relation of power to it. He writes that “[s]adism is speculative-demonstrative, masochism dialectical-imaginative” (134) that “sadism is
institutional, masochism is contractual" (Ibid.), bringing to mind the terms of \textit{pouvoir} and \textit{puissance} that we have encountered previously, as well as the associated productive possibilities of intersubjective experimentation.

There is a sense in which \textit{Becoming-goat}'s direct appropriation of the scapegoat figure in an act of (potentially Christian) masochism does so with a critical and performed attitude that operates on a demonstrative level. Through its framing by the prologue at the beginning, the piece presents the structures and processes of the ritual in illustrative terms, siting them in another historical realm and as other to the speaking and responsible subject that I have positioned myself as. My subsequent execution of the physical action of the rock-carrying and the associated pain endured could be seen as unnecessary, but it is in its precise unnecessariness, or excess, that the pertinence of Deleuze's conception of masochism becomes more apparent. He writes:

The element of contempt in the submission of the masochist has often been emphasized: his apparent obedience conceals a criticism and a provocation. He simply attacks the law on another flank. What we call humor – in contradistinction to the upward movement of irony towards a transcendent higher principle – is a downward movement from the law to its consequences. [...] By scrupulously applying the law we are able to demonstrate its absurdity and provoke the very disorder that it is intended to prevent or conjure. (1989: 88)

My willing endurance of pain, on the supposed behalf of the spectators, involved a determination that was an excessive extension of the power relation between the audience and myself, and in ways a manipulation of it. But this manipulation, rather than forcing the audience to confront its ethical responsibility by drawing attention to social contract (as in Chris Burden's \textit{Shoot}, for example), is performed as part of a more complex series of shifts in the relationship between spectators and myself, which serves to undermine the law of subjectification on which such ethics would rest. The performance of what Deleuze calls "masochistic humor" (Ibid.) is heightened by the insistence of the speaking subject in the prologue and the gravity of the audience's confession.

Michel Foucault argues that confession is a ritual of discourse and one of the "'truth games' related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves" (1988:18). Foucault's argument is that such techniques, far from being a natural and essential element of our humanness, are socially constructed, historically contingent and exist within a context of power, prohibition and surveillance (Gill: 4). The discursive structure of confession then
is bound by a power relation, between the confessant and the confessor, the latter being the authority that "requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (1981:61-2). For Foucault, confession is a fundamental aspect of Christianity, but beyond a practice of the church, is a discursive model operative throughout western culture that we can recognise in judicial structures, educational discipline, psychotherapeutic practices and personal relationships. It permeates structures and processes of subjectification, in its internalisation in the individual’s relation to themselves and the world. Foucault writes that

[c]onfession requires another form of truth obligation different to faith. Each person has the duty to know who he is, that is to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognize temptations, to locate desires, and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community and bear public or private witness against oneself. (1988:40)

The act of confession is ritualized, involving a process of self-examination, judgement and public disclosure, disclosure, which, as Heddon points out, carries with it an assumption of sin or guilt and accordingly shame, followed by contrition and ultimately absolution (148). It is a discourse that we can also easily identify within cultural production, in literature (in the case of much twentieth-century poetry, for instance), in popular culture (in reality TV and blog culture, for instance) and in performance art (in both explicit rituals of confession like Becoming-goat but also in elements of autobiographical performance).

Appropriating some of the mechanisms of confession - in the same way that The Public Love Project appropriated those of psychoanalysis and counselling (practices that are also, of course, not disconnected from confession) – Becoming-goat excessively applies its law of truth, witness and ritual transformation (by the priest, by the confession, by the structural functions of performance) but does so with a masochistic humor that creates the potential for the subversion of this law. In the masochistic obedience to the law of atonement and the subsequent release from it – in the audience’s throwing away of the rocks and the reversal that then occurred as they relieved me of the weight of sin (and stone) – we could see an ambiguous provocation to the very notion of a fixed subject as it is implied in the act and discourse of confession. Thus, my position within the performance was necessarily manifold - being priest and victim, martyr and confessor, guide and exile, educator and saboteur - and the spectators’ subjectivities, formed in relation to me, were similarly
multiple. This ambiguous role-playing and metamorphosis reminds us of some of the Deleuzo-Guattarian ideas we have encountered in previous chapters, of a “person’s own packs, the multiplicities he or she encloses within himself or herself which may be of an entirely different nature” (1987: 35) and the exemplification of these multiplicities within performance.

By carrying out actions that exist on a level that is similar to, but different from, both ritual and (theatrical) performance, Becoming-goat attempted to place into ambiguity the nature of what was taking place, operating in a mode that was, to use Amelia Jones’ terms, “not-real” and “not-fake” (2006). This brings me to an artist who is perhaps most well known among those working with the shamanistic impulse, an analysis of whom I hope will illuminate reflections on Becoming-goat. As well as having a prolific career as a sculptor, educator and all-round conceptual art star, the German artist Joseph Beuys undertook a number of performances - most famously How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare (1965) and Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me (1974) – that are representative of some of the motifs of his wider work as well as its social-therapeutic intent. The former took place at Galeria Alfred Schmela in Düsseldorf and involved Beuys covering his head in honey and gold leaf and walking around the gallery wearing iron- and felt- soled shoes and carrying in his arms a dead hare, which he would hold up to (his own) paintings on the walls and to whom he would deliver a spoken commentary (Berghaus: 161; Stachelhaus: 135). The work of Beuys’ that I would like to focus on, however, is Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me, described by RoseLee Goldberg as

[a] dramatic one-week event which began on the journey from Düsseldorf to New York in May 1974. Beuys arrived at Kennedy Airport wrapped from head to toe in felt, the material which was for him an insulator, both physically and metaphorically. Loaded into an ambulance, he was driven to the space which he would share with a wild coyote for seven days. During that time, he conversed privately with the animal, only a chainlink fence separating them from the visitors to the gallery. His daily rituals included a series of interactions with the coyote, introducing it to objects – felt, walking stick, gloves, electric torch, and the Wall Street Journal (delivered daily) - which it pawed and urinated on, as if acknowledging in its own way the man's presence. (150-1)

Although details of the performance vary in different reports (Beuys' cohabitation with the coyote is described by Goldberg and by Caroline Tisdall as one week, by David Levi Strauss as three days, and by Tracey Warr as five days), the key elements of the ambulance, the felt, the coyote and the materials / objects in the

Beuys recurrently used materials like felt, fat and copper in his work, choosing “animal, mineral, and vegetal substances as metonyms signifying their own transformative properties” (Stiles: 583). Such materials also held autobiographical significance for Beuys, who was reportedly, as a Luftwaffe pilot during WWII, shot down over the Crimea and looked after by semi-primitive tribespeople who restored him to health [...] by covering his body with animal fat, and wrapping him mummy-like in felt material [...] making of him a kind of human battery which could generate, contain and reuse its own heat and energy. (McEvilley, 'Beuys and Warhol: The Poseur's Mantel', 2005: 269).

Whilst some of Beuys’ associations with his materials related to his own personal experiences of primitive healing practices, his appropriation and (universalising) application of them in the contemporary art setting are perhaps here more significant. They signify what McEvilley has called “Beuys’s orientation towards pre-Modernism and his sense that a close identification with nature might be redemptive in terms of the overwhelming problems of history and civilization” (*Ibid.*: 268). Such an orientation is also present in my own work: in my very development of a *becoming-animal* series; in my regular use of organic materials; in the occasional siting of my work in exterior and rural locations; in the direct exploration, in much more recent works, of the shamanoid. Beuys’ performative (or some have argued fabricated – see Buchloh and Krauss, in Mesch) persona of the healer – a little like my own - is one that seems to manifest on the levels of the political and the sacred as well on a synergetic level of both.

*Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* was Beuys’ first and only performance in the USA. In an essay about the piece, ‘American Beuys’ (1999), David Levi Strauss suggests that

Beuys's intentions in the Coyote action were primarily therapeutic. Using shamanic techniques appropriate to the coyote, his own characteristic tools, and a widely syncretic symbolic language, he engaged the coyote in a dialogue to get to “the psychological trauma point of the United States' energy constellation”; namely the schism between native intelligence and European mechanistic, materialistic, and positivistic values. (42)

The seemingly bizarre and dramatic beginning of the action (Beuys being wrapped like a human battery in felt and transported from JFK in an ambulance
emblazoned with “Emergency”) is significant not only as the ritualistic phase of symbolic separation, but as a signifier of the schism in the USA that Beuys perceived, and of the role of healer that he was proclaiming for himself. The figure of the coyote functions on a number of metaphorical levels. It is widely associated with Native American shamanism, representing “one of man’s earliest attempts to make articulate the movement of the Spirit” (Callaghan, cited in Levi Strauss: 38) and functioning often as a trickster figure. But as well as a being multifarious cultural archetype, the coyote is also an antithesis to modern colonial America. It is not by coincidence that the animal chosen by Beuys for his action existed not only in symbolic conflict with the USA, but also in a real conflict – the US government has been ‘at war’ with the coyote, seeing it as a threat to husbandry, domesticity and law and order since the mid nineteenth century (whilst Native American people had lived alongside coyotes for millennia). A prime scapegoat for the US, the coyote became the “other in our midst” that needed to be eradicated (not unlike the Native American) (Levi Strauss: 39-41). Thus it functioned as a signifier of what Erika Fischer-Lichte calls “the “traumatic moment” of American history” (1997: 248) at which Beuys’ piece was aimed, with the intention of creating “an “energy dialogue” between man and animal, aimed at triggering the spiritual forces necessary for “healing this wound”” (Beuys in Tisdall, 1988, quoted in Fischer-Lichte, Ibid.).

That Beuys chose the Native American figure of the coyote, as outsider to modern colonial America, and identified with the figure of the shaman - itself an outsider figure able to “reveal something essential about a culture while at the same time appearing quite eccentric” (Harvey: 22) - is significant both to an understanding of the work in this context and as a parallel to my own use of the animal-other in performance. Numerous works have been made by artists that reference Beuys’ Coyote piece, including André Stitt’s Dingo (performed with a dingo at Artspace, Sydney, 2007) and Andy Savage’s What do you want from me (with a Jack Russell and a Belgian Shepherd, at Arnolfini, Bristol, 2009). Perhaps most obvious is Oleg Kulik’s (in collaboration with Mila Bredikhina) I Bite America and America Bites Me (Deitch Projects, New York, 1997), in which [f]or two weeks Kulik lived in a specially built box without leaving it. Gallery visitors could watch him through the windows of the box or go inside it wearing a protective suit. If Beuys’ performance I Love America and America Loves Me was a symbolic domestication of America, this domestication of Kulik was a diagnosis of the state of contemporary American society (Kulik, 2007: 147)
Kulik became well known in the 1990s for his provocative and often aggressive performances and public interventions, in which - usually naked - he would behave like dog, growling, barking and often snapping at spectators, and rushing on his chain (either tethered to the ground or held by one of his collaborators). Perhaps most famous of these was Dog House at Farf Fabrikken, Stockholm, 1996, in which he attacked and bit spectators, destroyed other artists’ works in the Interpol exhibition of which his performance was a part, and was subsequently arrested by the police (Watkins and Kermode, 2001: 75). Kulik’s, like Beuys’, performance of separation from the human world is redolent of some practices of initiation rites that both Turner and van Gennep write about. The former writes that

[a]ccording to van Gennep, an extended liminal phase in the initiation rites of tribal societies is frequently marked by the physical separation of the ritual subjects from the rest of society. [...] liminal initiants] are stripped of names and clothing, smeared with the common earth [and] rendered indistinguishable from animals. (1982: 26)

Turner goes on to quote directly from van Gennep:

During the entire novitiate, the usual economic and legal ties are modified, sometimes broken altogether. The novices are outside society and society has no power over them, especially since they are actually [in terms of indigenous beliefs] sacred and holy, and therefore untouchable and dangerous, just as gods would be. (1960:114) (Ibid: 26-7)

One can see quite clear parallels here with Kulik’s performance, as well as with Beuys’ and some of my own. The practice of ritualised separation, public nakedness and debasement and ordeal / endurance are a pattern throughout my work, from my own Becoming-dog performance in 2002 (that was, in hindsight, largely derivative of Kulik’s) and Matter (a static durational performance in which I lay in a glass case with snails for several hours), to those that are subject of this thesis - Becoming-snail, Collaborations #1 and #2, Becoming-locust and The Public Love Project (which, although seemingly removed from body art practices was nonetheless a two week endurance undertaken in relative isolation from the outside world).

Whilst Beuys’ performance was with the coyote, and Kulik’s was as the dog, (and mine have been both – a number of performances with live snails, rabbits, a dog, a goldfish and a canary, and in some fifteen becoming-animal performances), what links them all together is an identification with the animal-other. It is no coincidence that I, for my Becoming-invertebrate works, chose marginalised and abject pests, and that Kulik chose the dog, a figure that Renata Salecl parallels the “trauma of the West in regard to Russia in the last
few years, [...] that the West regards Russia as a superpower, but only on condition that it does not act as one" (in Watson and Kermode: 12). The scapegoat then functions not only as an historical archetype but as part of a process of othering that is utilised by artists (as well as by others) for aesthetic and political ends. Whilst on face value my appropriation of the scapegoat was quite explicit, there was a deeper, more implicit exploitation of it that we can also detect in Beuys' and Kulik's performances. Derrida, in an analysis of the pharmakos ritual, describes the sacrificial victim as

[b]eneficial insofar as he cures – and for that, venerated and cared for – harmful insofar as he incarnates the powers of evil – and for that, feared and treated with caution. Alarming and calming. Sacred and accursed.

(1981: 134)

This ambiguous role of the pharmakos bestows upon the performer certain aspects of immunity, similar to that which we have seen in Turner and van Gennep's account of liminal initiands above, and similar – to an extent – to that which can occur in performance, in the relative licence that artists can have in making transgressions (sometimes of the law) which would be otherwise unacceptable. Beyond the perhaps understandable wariness towards Kulik for his sometimes physically aggressive behaviour, exists a further ambivalence that one could attribute to his intentionally playful performance of transgression, of political boundaries of East and West, and of philosophical and cultural boundaries of the human and the animal. Many of the artists involved in the Interpol exhibition signed ‘An Open Letter to the Art World’ denouncing Kulik's actions in Stockholm (published in Watson and Kermode: 40-2), which was circulated to international art magazines, institutions and prominent individuals. Like Kulik's actions, Beuys' were met with ambivalent responses, not only in the mainstream press but in specialist art reviews, such as an article that appeared after Beuys’ Guggenheim retrospective in 1979 entitled ‘Joseph Beuys: Shaman, sham, or one of the most brilliant artists of our time?’ (Larson, 1980, cited in Levi Strauss: 35). David Levi Strauss concludes that

[t]he modern Western world is extremely distrustful of the vatic role of artists, and is more likely to characterise their actions as autistic rather than vatic. In his role as Trickster / Transformer [...] Beuys often played a similar role. (50)

Beuys’ “assumed persona of showman-spiritualist” (Thistlewood: 4), his outwardly performative and career-long aggrandisement as shamanistic healer and guide, put him in a position that was both outside of (and other to) the art world, whilst still very much within it. Kulik in his early performances cultivated a
performed persona of the “clown of the catastrophe” (Misiano in Watkins and Kermode 2001:63), through what David Williams calls “his disruptive conduct [that] is perhaps best understood as an uncompromising, transgressive hostility toward the inertia of conventional aesthetic and political gestures” (107). It seems not coincidental that Kulik has also taken a more quasi-spiritual turn in his recent work, producing in 2009 a multisensory version of Monteverdi’s *Vespers for the Blessed Virgin* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, albeit to mixed reviews (see Gibbons). In both we can see the persona of the artist as an extension of the artwork and as the embodying of the *pharmakeia*, roles and functions that are multiple and at times contradictory.

_Becoming-goat_ operated in a similar way: my attempted transformation of the audiences’ sins was sincere, as - it seems - was Beuys’ attempted engagement with America through his communication with the coyote (his fellow Other) and Kulik’s in his becoming-other of the Russian dog. But my sincerity was based on an underlying scepticism: I was not imagining myself or the action to actuate a real shamanic transformation, but rather invested in the social and psychological affectivity of the action as a performance. Both mine, Beuys’ and Kulik’s actions operated as committed endeavours to the matter in hand, that of healing a perceived societal trauma: in Beuys’ case the spiritual and political imbalance of the USA, specifically the relation between Native and European Americans; in mine challenging the apathetic and morally and spiritually disengaged contemporary art world with a proposition of secular spirituality. In _Becoming-goat_, the gravity of the mood that I had attempted to create (asking participants to reflect upon the “worst thing that they’ve ever done in their life”) and the (physically painful and distressing) action that I then undertook were established with earnestness, but simultaneously punctuated by a provocative and humour that is present throughout my work. The choice of materials that I used - the rocks, wicker basket, bandages and vegetables - referenced classic body art (as well as some of its associated medical ephemera) and atavistic ritual, which - along with the overtly sacrificial nature of the ritual described in the spoken preamble - suggested a potentiality of physical violence that was far greater than that which actually took place. As I began the action, my body, not completely unclothed but stripped to Calvin Klein underpants and with two leeks bandaged absurdly to my head, seemed to undermine this aesthetic as I was creating it. My taking on of the roles of both officiant and scapegoat was both sincere and self-ridiculing, a gesture towards the sacred and a profanation.
We can identify such ambiguity in performance as being produced through the strategy of literalisation, which we have encountered in previous chapters (in relation to psychoanalysis, to the theory of becoming-animal and to the aesthetics of body art). We see in Becoming-goat a queering of ritual practices, in a dynamic and relational performance strategy that bears similarities to that employed by Marcus Coates. As well as his animal works, already discussed in Chapter One, Coates has made a number of performances that explore the practice of shamanism. Most notable among these are the video pieces Journey to the Lower World (2004), in which Coates performs a shamanic ritual of animal spirit voyage for a community inside a tower block in Liverpool, and The Plover’s Wing (2009), in which he performs a similar ritual in a Mayoral office in Israel. Both employ techniques apparently learnt by Coates during a shamanic training weekend in West London (Coates, 2005) and seek to sincerely answer a question or concern of the live audience / community of the piece: “Who is our protector for this site, and what is it?” (Ibid.) and issues around the Israeli / Palestinian conflict, respectively (Coates, 2009). Coates attempts to make current and relevant the rituals that he performs: in Journey to the Lower World, he performs pre-ritual purification with a vacuum cleaner and ties his keys to his shoes in lieu of a shaman’s rattle; in The Plover’s Wing he wears a badger skin upon his head, but with it an incongruous blue tracksuit and silver aviator sunglasses. And although the strategy does serve to bring such rituals out of their ‘authentic’, atavistic, or re-enactment mode, it also makes them incredibly comic. Coates says of Journey to the Lower World,

I took the ritual and occasion very seriously but I didn’t want to take myself seriously, because I wasn’t in a position to. It was up to the audience how serious the event was. They laughed all the way through, which made the film very comical. I was also sceptical of an over sincerity and earnestness that can come with spirituality. New Age rituals can seem trite and irrelevant, based on an unknown culture with essential ethnic accessories and merchandising. It’s an odd thing to enact versions of ancient rituals that have no basis in our ordinary lives. I know they were supposed to be separate and extraordinary, but rituals have always been rooted in some aspect of familiar culture even if it’s humour. (2005)

The self-ridiculing that Coates employs, to make the rituals he performs more accessible whilst simultaneously questioning their authenticity, is a strategy that I myself openly use. It is one that we may also recall in discussions of the ‘queerness’ of Deleuze and Guattari, in their relation to their predecessors in philosophy and psychoanalysis, and one to which I will come back in Chapter Four. And whilst useful here – and perhaps more so in reflections on more recent works of mine that have been more explicitly exploring the shamanoid – I
wish to return to consideration of *Becoming-goat* as based on a specifically sacrificial elimination ritual.

The scapegoat is a figure that is touched upon by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they write of it as "something like a counterbody [to the face or body of the despot or god]: the body of the tortured, or better, of the excluded" (1988: 115). We can see Beuys’ *Coyote* piece and Kulik’s *I Bite America* action operating directly as such - Adrian Heathfield writes that "[w]hat Kulik stages is a sensate opening to another way of being: abject, liminal, without identity" (2004: 13) - and may recall discussions of abjection in Chapter One, in the performance of marginality and debasement in *Becoming-snail*. For Deleuze and Guattari, the scapegoat is presented as a symbolic and political model rather than as an historical one; for them, the becoming-animal of the scapegoat is part of (but an anomaly to) a wider signifying system of power, and the figure of the scapegoat is akin to that of the sorcerer. They write:

> Your only choice will be between a goat’s ass and the face of the god, between sorcerers and priests. The complete system, then, consists of the paranoid face or body of the despot-god in the signifier centre of the temple; the interpreting priests who continually recharge the signified in the temple, transforming it into signifier; the hysterical crowd of people outside, clumped in tight circles, who jump from one circle to another; the faceless, depressive scapegoat emanating from the center, chosen, treated and adorned by the priests, cutting across the circles in its headlong flight into the desert. (*Ibid.* 116)

As a becoming-animal of the becoming-scapegoat kind, *Becoming-goat* referred to - but departed from - the original ritual, as it did from conventions of the lecture and of performance. Within this context, the “complete system” and the “paranoid face of the despot-god in the signifier centre of the temple” could be seen as analogous to either the wider structures of a technocratic capitalist society, to the more localised institutions and hierarchies of the (performance) art world and its temple of signification, the gallery, or to the even more microcosmic power structures of the audience-artist relations within the performance. The “line of flight” in *Becoming-goat* could be thought of as both the literal flight of the performance from the interior of the gallery to the outside and unknown space of the exterior (and the associated flight from signification to sensation), or could be thought of as the line of flight present in all becomings-animal, the deterritorialising movement of the rhizome that imagines and escapes beyond known boundaries and arborescent modes. Rather than being made of points, like a binary structure, Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome is made
up of lines, lines of “segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialisation as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes a metamorphosis, changes in nature.” (Ibid.: 21). Or, as Claire Colebrook puts it, lines “where mutations and differences produce not just the progression of history but disruptions, breaks, new beginnings and ‘monstrous’ births.” (57) **Becoming-goat** was certainly disruptive in this way, in its deterritorialisation of the performance and the audience, as well as of my own self and constituted subjectivity.

Deleuze and Guattari’s mention of “sorcerers and priests” (we later find three sections of *A Thousand Plateaus* entitled ‘Memories of a Sorcerer’) may seem at first slightly out of place within their text, but as has also been indicated elsewhere, in his very early work Deleuze had written about Eliade in his formation of ideas around ritual and repetition (Kerslake: 31). Moreover, the radical and experimental urge of theorists like Deleuze and Guattari, developed contemporaneously with the shift towards a “neo-pre-modernism” that McEvilley writes about (1998) and the rise in counter cultures and renewed popular interest in non-western or non-modern cultural and spiritual forms. Kubiak proposes that

poststructuralism represented, among other things, the last possible insinuation of other modes of thought into Western, materialist analysis: poststructuralism, in the work of Deleuze, Lacan, Derrida and others […], but also tantric, Vedantic, shamanic, and kabalistic thought. (Ibid. 83-4).

It In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that:

[t]here is an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the State. Instead, they express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions, groups all the more secret for being extrinsic, in other words anomic. (1987: 247)

A performance like *Becoming-goat* could be viewed as an example of such an assemblage, “an event of becoming [that] escapes or detaches from its original territory” (Colebrooke: 59), and actuates deterritorialisations of the audience as well as of myself. In a Deleuzo-Guattarian sense there exists a becoming-minoritarian that is the process by which the pouvoir of the minor (an individual or a group) can materialise in relation to the major. As Rosi Braidotti writes of it, “‘[b]ecoming-minoritarian’ is the code name for overturning the dialectical logic that legitimates a central norm through hierarchically organized binary oppositions.” (2006: 133). The becoming-minoritarian of the shaman / sorcerer,
in his or her separation from the community in a “critical performative mode” (Kubiak, ibid.) is quite clear and could be related to the ‘outside’ position of Turner’s liminoid. But whilst Turner’s is a singular extrinsic position affording a privileged objectivity, Deleuze and Guattari use the notion of the anomalous, as a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity. Sorcerers therefore use the old adjective “anomalous” to situate the positions of the exceptional individual in the pack (1987: 244)

The anomalous is, perhaps, a more useful model to use to discussions of “marginality” and “the outside” such as we’ve seen in Chapter One (in relation to sexual politics), but that we could also relate to the presentation of my own figure, both in Becoming-snail (in relation to the “pack” of snails in the greenhouse) and in Becoming-goat (in relation to the “pack” that is the audience). What we see in Becoming-goat is a more explicit appropriation of the shamanic role for politically disruptive and critical ends: this was not a performance that took place solely within the confines of a gallery, but which took the performance into the street, bringing its invited audience into a position of anomalousness in their relation to the general public.

My performance of self-abjection in Becoming-goat differs from that in Becoming-snail both in its publicness and in its explicitly demonstrative mode of the transformational process of the shaman / performer. During the first spoken section of the performance, I take on the elevated role of priest (I have sometimes considered such addresses in my performances as sermons, rather than lectures) and situate myself within what Deleuze and Guattari would call the despotic regime of language and of representation. The second part of the performance is created (and enacted) as an explicit becoming-animal, on an enfleshed ‘line of flight’ that temporarily deposes the speaking subject and the relation of audience to performer that direct address implies. Deleuze and Guattari write about the Body without Organs (BwO), a term taken from Artaud, who writes:

When you have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatisms and restored him to his true liberty. (Artaud, OC XIII: 104) (Scheer: 42)

For Artaud, the body as conceived of in terms of organs is a body that is defined by its (biological) functions, functions that are organised and controlled by internalised processes, as we have seen with reference to Kristeva and Bachelard in Chapter One. Scheer goes on to write that
Artaud’s image of the body without organs therefore contests not only the way that bodies are structured, but the way in which they perform, biologically and socially. This is why the theatre was the key site for Artaud’s vision: it permits the imaginative reconfiguration of these bodily forms, comportments and behaviours and allows the body to act in ways that are profoundly anti-social” (Scheer; in Cull: 42)

These profoundly anti-social ways we can see in the performance of abjection in *Becoming-snail*, but also in *Becoming-goat*, in the reconfiguration of the social relations between myself and the audience and the unnecessary performance of the masochistic body (a body which, Deleuze and Guattari write, is “poorly misunderstood in terms of pain; it is fundamentally a question of the BwO”, 1987: 150).

In fact, as Scheer suggests, theatre and performance have an inherent potential for anti-sociality - or perhaps asociality - in ways that communitas-inspiring rituals don’t, but that more individualistic shamanistic practices do. The link here between transformations or possessions, which are commonly associated with shamanism, and the BwO and the notion of becoming-animal is perhaps an obvious one, but is not one of simple equivalence. One might say that transformations or possessions are expressions of the BwO and of becoming(-other, -imperceptible), but that the reverse is not always true. Simon O’Sullivan describes Deleuze and Guattari’s BwO as

a strategy for accessing that which is normally ‘outside’ yourself (that is, outside your signifying self), your ‘experimental milieu’ which everywhere accompanies your sense of identity. Sadomasochistic practices, meditation, drugs, and so on, all in different ways open up these molecular worlds. It goes without saying that this is very much a pragmatic project: you do not just read about the Body without Organs, you make yourself one. (2006: 47-8)

Such strategies that attempt to access the ‘experimental milieu’ can be identified in the use of trance in the work of Abramovic and Ulay for instance, as discussed in Chapter Two. They are also strategies employed in my own performances – perhaps most obviously in *Becoming-snail* but also in *Becoming-goat* and *Becoming-locust*, in intense actions during which I overcome my signifying self and make myself a BwO that “causes intensities to pass; it produces and distributes them in a *spatium* that is itself intensive” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 153). As well as the suspension of the organised and speaking subject, the BwO involves an attempt at the overcoming of the “abstract machine of faciality” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 168) that we have already encountered in Chapter Two. Although the works discussed in that context, *Collaborations #1 and #2*, involve a literal obfuscation of the face, we
see in *Becoming-goat* an altering of the physical relation between the audience and myself that disprivileges facialisation both literally (as also occurs in *Becoming-snail* and *Becoming-locust*, which involve more extreme contortions of the face) and more abstractly. As Deleuze and Guattari write:

> [W]hen the face is effaced, when the faciality traits disappear, we can be sure that we have entered another regime, other zones infinitely muter and more imperceptible where subterranean becomings-animal occur, becomings-molecular, nocturnal deterritorializations overspilling the limits of the signifying system. (*Ibid*: 115)

Such becomings of “nocturnal deterritorializations” going beyond “the limits of the signifying system” are also identifiable within shamanic transformations and spirit voyages, most obviously those that make use of defacialising techniques such as masks and trance. But what such transformations do is something similar to what performance can do. David George argues against historical originist theories of the relation of ritual to theatre, writing that they “are like all causal arguments: post-hoc reconstructions of hypothetical sequences”, instead proposing “a network of interlocking, mutually influencing conditions” (2). As such, we can consider certain ritualistic, shamanistic and performance art practices as being parallel processes that work in similar ways. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, the other worlds that shamanistic transformations and spirit voyages may access could be thought of as the “experimental milieu’ which everywhere accompanies your sense of identity” (O’Sullivan, 2006: 47). This milieu is accessed by making the BwO, in a process that privileges and is actualised by sensations, and specifically affects. The latter, Grosz writes,

> are man’s becomings-other, the creation of zones of proximity between the human and those animal and microscopic / cosmic becomings the human can pass through. (2008: 77)

O’Sullivan mentions Bergson’s idea that “art utilises the mundane to produce something extra mundane” (O’Sullivan, 2006: 48). He goes on to suggest that

> [t]his is to understand art as ritual or rather to understand all art as having a ritualistic component. In some cases it is also a return to pre-modern notions of magical causality. Magic is to be understood here as a specific technique of connecting with the world” (*Ibid*. 48)

This notion of extra mundane-ness, of utilising the techniques of magic - of which the Deleuzo-Guattarian sorcery of becoming could be considered as one – to go beyond the limits of everyday reality, brings us to the question of what might be beyond the mundane, beyond the immediacy of the world as experienced by the
subjective organism. For Grosz, following Deleuze and Guattari, this exteriority is chaos:

The real, the outside, nature, matter, force, the cosmos, geography – all terms we can understand as more or less stable expressions of chaos – are that which incites, from the outside, the productive proliferation of resources that reveal or envision an element, fragment, or section of the chaotic in the form of sensation. (2008: 15)

Art, like ritual, utilises techniques of magic to reveal or envision fragments of chaos. Inherent in both is a theatricality and a performativity that acts to frame the production of sensation, that is not only experienced by a perceptive or affective subject, but serves to productively depersonalise it. The production of sensation and the BwO, “made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 153), and its critical demonstration in a performance like Becoming-goat proposes the potentiality of such reconfigurations of subjectivity. Becoming-goat does this not only on the individual level (of my own body and that of the spectator) but, by framing the act of becoming within philosophical, historical and consciously self-referential terms, it also focuses attention on the contingency of fixed subject positions and processes within performance, within art, and within religious, ritualistic and social structures. As Elizabeth Grosz writes:

[A]rt is not simply the expression of an animal past, a prehistorical allegiance with the evolutionary forces that make one; it is not memorialization, the celebration of a shared past, but above all the transformation of the materials from the past into resources for the future, the sensations unavailable now but to be unleashed in the future on a people ready to perceive and be affected by them. (Grosz, 2008: 103)

Shamanoid performance can thus offer a conceptual frame through which productive, transformative and affective potentiality can pass and be magnified by the experience of intensity. “As well as looking to the future then, art might strategically also have one eye on the past.” (O’Sullivan, 2006: 40)
Chapter Four

When the body becomes too much: writing on *Becoming-locust* and the spectacle of theory
Almost the entire floor of the performance space is covered with a diagonal grid of 45 iceberg lettuces, approximately 6 feet apart from each other. I am already in the space, dressed in a smart casual shirt, jeans and boots, and invite the audience to come and sit around three edges of the space. I read a couple of short texts – extracts from Deleuze and Guattari and Rosi Braidotti – about becoming-animal, sexuality and the human. I then place a large brown paper shopping bag in front of me, take off and place in it my glasses, wristwatch and the printed texts that I have been reading. I remove my boots and socks and place them at the back of the space. I take off my clothes, tossing them casually to the back of the space, and I am stood only in a white jockstrap. Out of the bag I take a pair of wings constructed out of coat hangers and silver stockings, two wrapped rolls of bandage, a small pair of scissors, a cardboard poster tube and a pair of silver glitter and diamante-studded stiletto, and place them all purposefully on the floor in front of me. I put on the stiletto, wrap one roll of bandage around my torso, under my arms and behind my neck, before hooking the coat-hanger wings onto it. I wrap the other roll of bandage around my head three times, tie it at the back and cut the excess off with the scissors. I put the off-cut bandage, the scissors and the bag to the side of the performance space. I then crouch down in the centre of the space and take from the cardboard tube a pair of white, two-foot long ostrich feathers. I toss the tube to the back of the space and slide the ostrich feathers into the bandage on my head, as antennae. Stood in the centre of the space, surrounded by the iceberg lettuces, I then ask the technician to start the music – Shirley Bassey’s (Where Do I Begin) Love Story – which plays very loudly on repeat for the rest of the performance. After standing poised for the first few bars of the song, I step back and drop to my hands and knees in front of one of the lettuce heads and begin to bite, chew and spit out the leaves. Hopping around the space on my knees and inadvertently exposing my bare anus to the audience, I do this to all of the lettuces, smashing some of them violently with my forehead to destroy them. When all the lettuces are thus annihilated and the floor of the space covered in smashed salad, I stand, thank the audience and leave.
Figure 6. *Becoming-locust*, New Dance Horizons, Regina, 2008. Photograph Gary Varro.
Becoming-locust was commissioned for The Animal Love Project, a year long research group of five interdisciplinary artists from Wales, Luxembourg, Peru and Japan. The piece was performed as part of the project’s presentation in October 2007 at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, and at the Centre for Performance Research, Aberystwyth. It has also been performed independently at: tactileBOSCH Studios, Cardiff; Art Nomade International Performance Meeting, Chicoutimi, Québec; BONE Festival, Bern, Switzerland (all in 2007); and at Queer City Cinema, New Dance Horizons, Regina, Canada. It is this final incarnation of the performance (in June 2008) on which I will focus. As the last of some fifteen becoming-animal performances (becoming-dog, -sparrow, -rabbit x 2, -snail, -cockroach, -fly, -spider, -marine sponge, -earthworm x 3, -slug, -goat, and -locust) which developed over a period of almost five years (2002-7), Becoming-locust was created as something of an epilogue, a finale to the series that I had decided was coming to an end. This chapter will function similarly, as an afterword to the becomings that have formed the subject of this thesis. As such, I will look at the ways in which Becoming-locust consolidates some of the ideas that have been developed both in the practice of making the body of works undertaken and in the reflective and theoretical processes that have been explored in writing about them retrospectively.

Like Becoming-goat, Becoming-locust contains elements of the performance lecture followed by an intense - and to some provocative - physical action. But whilst there is a certain solemnity to Becoming-goat (as to Becoming-snail), Becoming-locust seems to play with itself much more openly in the realm of kitsch and the erotic, presenting a becoming that speaks more of the human than of the animal and exists knowingly - and to ironic or, following Deleuze, masochistic excess - in the realm of the theatrical. Furthering some of the ideas touched upon in previous chapters, I will explore Becoming-locust in the context of identity, sexuality and the politics of representation, as well as the relation of text to action and language to the body. I will also be positing it in light of the liminal and aspects of the carnivalesque - in particular its centrality of the grotesque body and subversive laughter - and making links between this, spectacle, camp and the performance of subjectivity.

As I hope has become clear through this thesis, the way in which we are dealing with performance is as an expanded subject, restricted neither by the spatial or temporal boundaries of “the performance”, nor by the limits of its
localised discipline. In a Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, the performed action of performance art can be seen as only an element in the assemblage of what we see as the event. *Becoming-locust* is no different: the performance space itself is constructed as an installation, making the boundaries of performance / audience space unclear; my presence in the space before the audience’s arrival signifies something already-begun; the readings from texts that signify another beginning are both part of the performance and a preamble; the lettuce-smashing action of becoming-locust is a different type of performance (one might say *the* performance?); after the locust action and my exit, the space remains as an installation, somewhat transformed from the installation it was 30 minutes previously. Although each of these elements (and my delineation of them is in no way exhaustive) can be viewed alone, their significance is co-dependent on their relation to other aspects of the piece.

The use of spoken word in the prologue suggests the primacy of language and the symbolic, as we have seen in *Becoming-goat*, but the texts that are read speak of becomings and sexualities that are “of another power” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 279) and as such beyond the realm of language. The rationality of theory and the didactic convention of the lecture form that I suggest are somewhat in contradiction to the subject about which they speak. Instead, they form the subject that speaks about them – a rooted, erect, speaking subject that identifies as one (“tonight I will be becoming-locust”) and is legitimised as / through an academic and institutional authority. Although definitions are hard to agree upon, performance art tends to differ from other art forms (in theatre or visual art, for instance) in the autonomy of the individual artist and the centrality of his / her presence in the reception of the work. But this presence is often a contradictory one - as we have seen in discussions of Beuys and the persona of the shaman in the previous chapter - for the autonomous subject that we encounter as the creator of a work sometimes also uses his or her self and body as the object of that work. This is true not only of body-based performance that intentionally objectifies the body but also of the autobiographical tendency, in which we can “end up with the individual who is nothing more than an individual” (Vergine: 15-16). In *Becoming-locust*, my autonomy and authority as “the artist” (and a particular type of theoretically engaged artist at that), are emphasised by my dress, my manner, my address to the audience, the nature of the texts that I am reading, etc. The structure and rationality of language is reflected in the installation of the space with a
geometric and linear arrangement of lettuces as the sole objects in the white walled performance space. The visual reference to minimalism and the foregrounding of concept (in the content of the texts that I present) is not incidental, intimating a deconstruction of visual as well as linguistic meaning.

In his study of installation art, Nicholas de Oliveira suggests that “[relevant] to the parameters defining contemporary installation is the notion of ‘détournement’, the appropriation of previously existing aesthetic artefacts in order to divert their meaning or intent” (27). Détournement is a term borrowed from the Situationist International, a loose association of European artists and poets formed in 1957, with ties to surrealism, the Lettrists and Cobra, that “offered a sustained critique of imperialism, colonialism, and all forms of domination, the political division and control of urban space, and the general International: Definitions’, published in the group’s International Situationisme 1 (June 1958), as:

[s]hort for: détournement of preexisting aesthetic elements. The integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationist use of these means. In a more primitive sense, détournement within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres. (reprinted in Knabb, 1981, quoted in Stiles and Selz: 702)

The importance of Situationist ideas extends beyond détournement to the disruptive interactivity (in both a literal and subjective sense) of installation and performance art in the context of Guy Debord’s analysis of the ‘society of spectacle’. Debord’s thesis of the same name, written in 1967 and considered by some a catalyst to the events of May 1968, is a political and cultural theoretical analysis of the conditions of modern capitalism and their effects on the individual. Whether seen as being of direct influence on Deleuze and Guattari’s work, or as theoretical developments emerging contemporaneously with them, links between the two can certainly be drawn, for instance between the field of psychogeography (with which Debord and the Situationists were heavily involved) and the cartographic turn in theory (of which Deleuze and Guattari’s work was a part). In an essay entitled ‘From Text to Territory: Félix Guattari’s Cartographies of the Unconscious’ (1998), Bruno Bosteels writes of a “shift from textuality to territoriality” (147) within poststructuralist thought:

This is what Deleuze in a breathtaking study about his colleague [Foucault] translates as the passage from the “archive” (the forms and strata of discursive knowledge, which variously define both what is visible and what is expressible in a specific domain and at a precise moment in history) to
Territoriality is something that we see throughout Deleuze and Guattari's work and have encountered in earlier chapters of this thesis, from their concepts of de- and re-territorialisation to the structure of A Thousand Plateaus and their notion of the rhizome, "a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (1987:21). The relation of the map to the rhizome and to lines of flight could be linked to the Situationists' dérive - "the practice of a passional journey out of the ordinary through rapid changing of ambiances, as well as a means of study of psychogeography and of situationist psychology" (Debord, 1957, in Stiles and Selz: 705) – the context of which precedes Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the assemblage of the event that we have encountered in previous chapters. Thinking back to the performances that have been the subject of this thesis, we could identify a passional journey of my own around the interior surface of the greenhouse in Becoming-snail, as well as in the libidinous frenzy of destruction across the horizontal terrain of the performance space of Becoming-locust – a terrain that, in the version of the performance on which this chapter focuses, extends across the whole space and includes the audience.

I refer to the Situationists not only for the significance of their ideas about movement and cartography, relevant to a Deleuzo-Guattarian discussion of elements of Becoming-locust, but also for Debord's 1967 manifesto The Society of the Spectacle. In a proposition that seems as relevant today as it would have forty years ago, Debord suggests that:

[The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.] (1995: 12)

Debord sees the problem of false consciousness mediated as “society's real unreality” (Ibid.: 13), an unreality that exists almost imperceptibly as an insidious appropriation of the individual into the system of representation. “The spectacle” Debord suggests “is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image” (Ibid.: 24), and we can easily observe this relation of capital to image through the intensification of advertising, mass media, consumerism, etc. as a clear symptom of postmodernity as it has since become defined. What is important about Debord's analysis of image and capital is his understanding that spectacle
“is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Ibid.: 12). Whilst Debord’s is a useful critique on the broader level of social production and capitalism, it is somewhat complexified when brought into discourses of art and subjectivity, where social relationships are knowingly mediated by images and where situations are intentionally created in which for this to occur. The question of what constitutes spectacle is an interesting one in this context: immediate thoughts are of impressive, unusual and / or entertaining events, of which Becoming-locust could certainly be said to be one. The costume used - evocative of showgirls and drag – and the installation of lettuces are certainly visually arresting, as is the rigorous physical feat of destroying them with my head. I myself take on an absorbed and extra-ordinary persona in the lettuce-smashing action that is quite different from that of my everyday self or that of the performance-lecture section of the piece. But the “social relationship between people that is mediated by images” also has a deep resonance with discussions of relationality and representation that we have discussed in Chapter Two. The anti-portraits of Collaborations #1 and #2, and the primacy awarded to intersubjective energy exchange in The Public Love Project are examples of attempts to create relations between subjects based on economies other than consumption and representation.

Becoming-locust may appear to run counter to this impulse then, and in many ways it does. Of all of the works discussed in this thesis it is perhaps the most consciously spectacular, relying on production elements of recorded music, lighting, costume and set, far more overtly than any of the others. My performance within the piece is also more centralised, more ‘showy', and more removed from a relation of intimacy with the audience than some of the other works. The “acting out” of the performance action could be seen in the context of Debord’s thoughts on the individual as “the star” in spectacle:

The individual who in the service of the spectacle is placed in stardom’s spotlight is in fact the opposite of an individual, and as clearly the enemy of the individual in himself as of the individual in others. In entering the spectacle as a model to be identified with, he renounces all autonomy in order himself to identify with the general law of obedience to the course of things. (1995: 39)

Although it would be presumptive to assume for myself to the status of stardom, there is an elevation of the artist in performance that should be noted. We have already looked at, in Chapter Three, the idea of the artist as shaman and the ambiguities that can be played out therein. In his essay on Beuys and Warhol,
McEvilley points out that both artists had “somewhat outlandish faked appearances and personas which mimicked the outrageous behavior of shamans – the profession which the historian Mircea Eliade has called an essentially psychotic role” (270). This notion of the ‘faked’ appearance or persona would follow Debord’s argument that “everything arising in the spectacle assumes its characteristics: interventions will always be forced to assume the equivalence and vacuity of the commodity” (Plant, in McEvilley, 2005: 338) - let us not forget that the success of Beuys and Warhol can be measured not only in their prominence and influence in recent art history but in their commercial success as well. But their taking on of the shamanic persona - Beuys, in his atavistic alliances with animals and raw materials such as felt, fat and metals, and Warhol in his self-constructed and self-appointed role as tribal leader of the New York underground (“a stoned, spaced-out Dionysus”, cf. McEvilley, 2005: 271) - is at once a relation of knowing immersion in the spectacle, and ironical distance from it. We return perhaps to Kubiak’s notion of the pharmakeic, the particular “critical performative mode” of unlocability (83), to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the anomalous and to the aesthetic strategies of Marcus Coates. This critical ambiguity is also identifiable in my own relation to spectacle and to my role as an artist within Becoming-locust, making a détournement not only of minimalist installation, but of the aesthetics of body art and practices of self-performance that accompany it. Amelia Jones writes of male body artists of the 1960s and 1970s, that

by displaying and performing their own bodies, these ‘body artists’ shift to varying degrees away from the transcendental and singularly masculine conception of artistic authority put into place within Modernism (1994: 266)

She argues that the work of certain artists (she names Klein, Burden, Acconci and Morris) served to critically deconstruct the fixed, phallic and masculine authority of the Modernist artist, and explored rather a “performative relationship with subjectivity and identity in general” (Ibid.). I see elements of my own work carrying on the exploration of this critical relationship, not as a loyal linear continuation but rather as a deviating extension (informed by a further few decades of theorisations about subjectivity, gender, etc.). Becoming-locust quite explicitly employs a strategy of détournement, a term which, in the Situationists’ words, is short “for détournement of preexisting aesthetic elements” (1958, reprinted in Knabb, 1981, quoted in Stiles and Selz: 702). The performance integrates aesthetic elements and approaches of historic (masculinist) body art
practices, to create an assemblage that is critical of them and that frames the discourses about such work within alternative discourses of gender, sexuality and queerness. In its attempt to enact the performative relationship about which Jones writes, *Becoming-locust* does so self-reflexively, exposing some of the contradictions that exist therein, particularly as regards the desire to escape the singularity of self-representation. Instead of identity politics-driven representations of marginal or unrepresented subjectivities (as in some of the work that Jones writes about, but also in more recent queer theory and performance work as discussed in Chapter One), the performance presents complicated, playful ambiguities and anomalous representations of subjectivities that seek to dismantle the very notion of identity.

As such, Debord’s analysis could be said in part to apply: the star (in this case the individual artist, myself) as “the opposite of an individual, and as clearly the enemy of the individual in himself as of the individual in others” (1995: 39). In relation to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a nomadic subject - as discussed in earlier chapters - the performance of becoming(-animal) could indeed be seen in opposition to “the individual” in its renunciation of the autonomous and unitary subject. For Deleuze, as for Braidotti, who argues for a “dispersed form of affectivity, a flowing type of coherence and for the necessity of reconfiguring the subject” (2002: 268), such a conception of the subject is desirable and sustainable: a depersonalised subject that “however much in process and in becoming, is still there” (*Ibid.*). And as importantly, whereas Debord’s individual renounces autonomy in order to “identify with the general law of obedience to the course of things” (1995: 39.) there is something in the conscious transposition to a nomadic subjectivity of becoming that Braidotti proposes that is in opposition to this law.

In the challenge that they pose to the unitary subject there is a sense – both in Deleuze and Guattari’s and Braidotti’s formulations – in which such reconfigurations are productive of a subjectivity that is necessarily enfleshed and constituted through the body. The explicit body of my *Becoming-locust* action is one that is produced within a specifically queer strategic paradigm, that we may relate to discussions of abjection in Chapter One and to those of the anomalous in Chapter Three. Here though, I would like to turn to the idea of the carnivalesque and the grotesque body, something that has developed in both theory and in body based performance in the twentieth and twenty-first
centuries. As we have already encountered, the emergence of a particular style of body art in the late 1960s coincided with a particular cultural moment in political philosophy, the mobilisation of protest and liberation movements and what Amelia Jones calls the “sex-celebratory, drug-inflected Euro-American counterculture” of the time (1998: 27). 1965 saw the publication of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s text Rabelais and His World, originally written in the 1930s, and widely considered one of the most significant and influential texts on the subject of carnival and the grotesque. A treatise on the popular and folk culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance through the writings of François Rabelais, the book has been influential in the fields of cultural theory as well as in literary studies, exploring revolutionary possibility through the material body of the people in celebratory opposition to the official forces of the church and the state. Central to Bakhtin’s ideas about folk culture is the phenomenon of carnival as “an embodiment of the liberated communality of the people in perennially renewed rebellion against the social and spiritual restrictions of the official order” (Lindley: 17). And although Rabelais’ writing evokes the carnival traditions of his own time (traditions which, it could be argued, no longer exist), Bakhtin’s, and those after him, are more concerned with the carnivalesque – a concept of literary theory rather than social history (Ibid.: 22). As Lindley points out, “whatever the historicity of carnival, the carnivalesque is undoubtedly real” (24), abstracting elements of the phenomenon of collective rebellion into a theoretical notion that can be applied usefully to the discussion of body art and its resistant performative relation to the status quo, to the “general law of obedience to the course of things” (Debord, 1995: 39). Although the performance space at New Dance Horizons in which this version of Becoming-locust was performed was arranged in such a way that the grid of lettuces covered the whole floor, the audience (predictably) almost entirely stood or sat at the edges of the room. There is a certain sense then in which the spatial configurations were more immersive than one would expect in a theatrical space, but I think that to claim that Becoming-locust was able to actuate an experience of participatory communitas would be misguided. So leaving the social and collective structure of carnival behind, I draw from elements of the carnivalesque that have been theorised and reinterpreted in relation to the individual body.

Theoretical links have been made, particularly in feminism, queer and gender studies, between the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and the grotesque body, a body that is both very much aware and celebratory of its own materiality.
Bakhtin writes about the body of ‘grotesque realism’ and the ‘material bodily lower stratum’, through which the body is imagined (to the point of exaggeration) in all its carnality of sex, death, consumption and excretion. (Indeed the very word ‘carnival’ comes from the Latin carmen levare or carne vale, the ascetic farewell to the meat / flesh in the pre-Lenten feast of Mardi Gras) (Hyman and Malbert: 9). Caryl Flinn, in an essay entitled ‘The deaths of camp’ writes of the grotesque body as the site of contestation of signification and subjectivity:

Just as Bakhtin connects the carnivalesque to the idea of collectivity and the subversive effects of the same (a connection whose romantic politics have not gone unchallenged), the grotesque body is also constructed as flying in the face of the unified, singular, classical body and its subtending humanist ideology, namely, the concept of uncontradictory, autonomous, ‘individual’ subjectivity. In fact, the contrast between grotesque and classical is usually articulated on or by the body itself. (447)

For whilst the carnivalesque refers to social transformation through collective participation (in a way that relates to Turner’s concept of communitas, mentioned in Chapter Three), Bakhtin’s idea of grotesque realism presents a subversive potential that is played out on the site of the body itself. This is an idea that has been appropriated in theory, in art and in activism, that resists normative conceptions of the gendered body, and explores otherness and difference as potentially empowering political territories. Bradiotti writes that

[...]this is how the freak or the monstrous comes to overlap with the grotesque in the political imaginary today. The nineties’ re-appropriation of these categories is a deconstructivist turn that ‘parallels the powerful, historic detours of words like “black” or, more recently “queer”, away from their stigmatizing function in the hands of dominant culture, a trajectory that is often described as moving from shame to pride.’ (Braidotti, 2002: 181, citing Russo 1994: 76)

Such a trajectory is certainly identifiable in the queer abjection of Becoming-snail as discussed in Chapter One, but is crystallised in Becoming-locust in the performance of a body on which the contrast between the classical body of signification and its grotesque other is articulated. The ambiguous self-spectacle of my own body in carnivalesque abandon - a body at once celebratory and debased, submissive and defiant, present in all its fleshiness but transcendent in its desire - detours the prime significance of the self-image. As Jones suggests, in The Artist’s Body:

[...]the sexually charged, excreting body [of body art] is necessarily a collective one, refuting both the modern (‘closed, private, psychologized and singular’) body and the Cartesian pure mind that leaves the body behind through a masculine transcendence. The everyday meets the desiring, sexualized, carnivalesque body (a body extraordinary in its excess, and yet mundane in its daily insistence) in the sense that everyday experience, both singularly and collectively, has the potential to thwart the rationalism and spectacular thrust of pancapitalist society. (27-8)
As such, *Becoming-locust* explores a manifestation of the carnivalesque in which the structure against which it is played out is not the hierarchical society of Rabelais’ time, but the internalised phallogocentric systems of identity and signification that constitute contemporary subjectivity.

One way in which *Becoming-locust* does this is through the presentation and deconstruction of binary oppositions that is more complex than it initially appears to be. The locust is a figure of destruction, and my own attempted destruction of the lettuces is at once an excessive and feeble gesture (in comparison to the devastation of a plague). My physical deportment is changed from being formal and composed to ridiculous and obscene; my language goes from being eloquent and rational to becoming a series of grunts and breaths that articulate not only the exertion and discomfort of the action that I am performing but suggest an erotic and libidinous pleasure derived from doing so. My action then is a performance of the boundaries of these oppositions and – following Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, of the intextuality of words and meaning - their permeability. As in *Becoming-goat*, however, the presence of this permeability comes from a paradoxical performance of the law that patrols such boundaries. For the performance is a performance that repeats the supposedly categorical boundaries of identity and representation, in this case of gay stereotypes including drag, kitsch, narcissism and promiscuity. But as we have seen in the discussion of masochistic humour in Chapter Three, there exists in the excessive submission to the law a simultaneous revealing of its absurdity.

Cleto writes of a convergence between the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and the camp scene, suggesting that the two share “a complex and multilayered power relationship between the dominant and subordinate (or deviant)” (32). The multilayered power relationship is contextualised on the wider political level of the construction of identity (in the enacted sham of gender performance through gay clichés of camp, drag and homoeroticism) but articulated on the localised level of my own body and performed in the depersonalised affective relationship that is created between myself and the audience. This relationship, like that in *Becoming-goat*, is one that is intentionally ambiguous and shifting, and is appropriative in a way that reminds one of Sontag’s claim that “Camp sees everything in quotation marks” (1964, in Cleto: 56). The sincerity of the formal and theoretical address of the prologue is at once “ironic” and “not-ironic”:
a theoretical framing of the action whose purpose it is to both demonstrate and subvert it. The action involves a physical intensity and struggle that is perhaps comparable to the intellectual intensity of Deleuze and Guattari *et al*, as well as to the types of masochistic actions of performance artists that we have encountered throughout this thesis (and with which specialist performance art audiences would also be familiar).

But *Becoming-locust* involves an element of humour that is not always present in poststructuralist theory or in masochistic body art practices, and in its intertextual juxtaposition and reference to these other forms, it produces a laughter that Bakhtin calls carnival laughter, which “degrades and materializes”, “bring[s] down to earth, turn[s] its subject into flesh” (20). It is a humour that is not only that of the carnival, but is a queer humour that one can identify, as Flinn does, with the grotesque body and the “unruly bodies of camp”, which are associated with laughter and the sadistic, exuberant, seditious power emerging from this laughter. [...] There is a laughter emitting from these unbridled bodies; there is also the laughter that such ‘irregular’, unwhole-some’ flesh actually provokes. In other words, the grotesque body in camp is a wild arid laughing body, but it is also one laughed at. (448)

Such a humour we have of course seen before, albeit more subtly, in my other performances discussed in this thesis: the incongruous white socks and jockstrap that I sport in *Becoming-snail*; the kitschiness of the décor of the love palace of *The Public Love Project*; my ineffective attempts at self-concealment in *Collaborations #1* and #2; the sweetcorns bandaged to my head in *Becoming-goat*. The jockstrap, as mentioned in Chapter One, was chosen partly for its associations with both macho sports culture and with the aesthetics of gay pornography. In *Becoming-locust* the jockstrap served further function, in its exposure and visual framing of my anus for the audience. The presentation of the anus in this way is not only a reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the “goat’s anus” that “stands opposite the face of the despot or god” (1987: 116) and a celebration of Bakhtin’s “lower bodily stratum”, but was also partly inspired (as have other performances of mine been) by Leo Bersani’s 1987 essay ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’. Writing in response to Watney’s cry that “AIDS offers a new sign for the symbolic machinery of repression, making the rectum a grave”, Bersani suggests that

if the rectum is a grave in which the masculine ideal (an ideal shared – differently – by men and women) of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential of death. [...] It may, finally, be in the gay man’s rectum that he demolishes his perhaps otherwise
uncontrollable identification with a murderous judgement against him.
(1988: 222)

This celebration of death could refers not only to the symbolic death of a repressive ideal, but its death in the *petite mort* of orgasm, specifically – in the context of Bersani’s essay as well as in my own sexualised performance in *Becoming-locust* – the gay male anal orgasm, the ecstasy of going outside of oneself.

Julia Kristeva, in a text written the year after *Rabelais and His World* was published, warns against reducing the carnivalesque to parody, reminding us of “carnival’s dramatic (murderous, cynical and revolutionary in the sense of *dialectical transformation*) aspects, which Bakhtin emphasized” (50). She suggest that the laughter of carnival

is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is serious. This is the only way that it can avoid becoming either the scene of law or the scene of its parody, in order to become the scene of its *other*. Modern writing offers several striking examples of this omnified scene that is both *law* and *others* – where *laughter* is silenced because it is not parody but *murder* and *revolution* (Ibid.)

As the space for a revolutionary, murderous, subversion of the law, and not simply its reproduction or parody (which Kristeva argues strengthens it), carnival laughter presents serious and radical possibilities for the subversion of law and the intersubjective relations that it presupposes. We could consider the carnival laughter of *Becoming-locust* - a laughter that is both *at* and *with* the self - as internalised and contributing to a (consensual) rebellion of the subject. At the same time, a real murderous and revolutionary rebellion against the self is being enacted upon the body by my repeated act of physical self-violence in the destruction of the lettuces (whose similarity to the shape and size of the human head was one of my reasons for choosing them). The murderous destructiveness of this action is not just directed at the fixed subject, but at the body as organism, in the making (as we have, of course, seen in Chapter Three) of the Body without Organs. In an essay ‘Performance as the Distribution of Life: From Aeschylus to Chekhov to VJing via Deleuze and Guattari’, Andrew Murphie writes of Deleuze’s (following Artaud’s) theorisations of cruelty, specifically – in *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1997) – the way in which ‘combat’ replaces ‘judgement’:

There is a combat ‘against the Other’ (132), to ‘repel a force’ of transcendent hierarchies. This is also what Deleuze […] calls a ‘combat between’. The ‘combat between’ occurs as a ‘combat between oneself’, when one ‘tries to take hold of a force in order to make it one’s own’ or
'through which a force enriches itsel by seizing hold of other forces and joining itself to them in a new ensemble: a becoming' (132) (226)

* Becoming-locust's physicalised performance of this combatative becoming demonstrates the possibility - to use Ted Hiebert's words - to "think the self carnivally" (113). In a call for a recontextualisation of the carnivalesque in the twenty-first century, Hiebert proposes that we chart [the self's] transformation from a static state of identity (constructed or otherwise) to a fluctuating state of its perpetual becomings. *The carnival, not as a license to be free, but rather now as a free licence to become.* (113)

* Becoming-locust* performs its own carnivalesque transformation of the self both with reference to its theoretical precedents (the texts by Deleuze and Guattari and Braidotti that are read in the prologue) and to my own experiences of becoming (within the series of becoming-animal performances, and within sexuality and everyday life, as inferred in the prologue). It presents a specific becoming that is (openly) framed as possibly the last in my series of becoming-animal performances. My decision to end the series arose partly out of a consideration that the works were becoming formulaic and risked defining my artistic practice. It also arose out of a sense in which I had outgrown the conceptual and formal framework of the *Becoming-animal* series, that shifts in my approach to work - informed by much of the work of this project, as well as by changes in my personal life – needed to mark a radical transition into a new body of work. Although ending a series may seem contradictory to Deleuzo-Guattarian ideas of becoming and casusality, this ending functioned to make way for a new beginning (albeit one that inevitably contained come similar concerns and strategies), in a way that has parallels to the cyclical endings and beginnings of the calendar (including, for instance, the annual indulgent excess of carnival and the beginning of Lenten ascesis).

Whilst *The Public Love Project* attempted to explore new configurations of subjectivity in performance through intersubjective relations and the multiplicity of shifting subject positions in intimate relational encounters, *Becoming-locust* presented itself as a self-relexive (some might say self-indulgent) act of radical narcissism in which my own processes of subjectification were performed to ironical excess. Such excess – along with excesses of signifiers, nakedness, energy, waste - was integral to *Becoming-locust* as an uncontained, and uncontainable becoming. There is a sense in which in its excess and
immediacy, the intensity of the performed action explodes the frameworks (philosophical, discursive, autobiographical) to which it refers. As Elizabeth Grosz writes:

Art is the consequence of that excess, that energy or force, that puts life at risk for the sake of intensification, for the sake of sensation itself – not simply for pleasure or for sexuality, as psychoanalysis suggests – but for what can be magnified, intensified, for what is more, through which creation, risk, innovation are undertaken for their own sake, for how and what they may intensify. (2008: 63)

Such processes undoubtedly constitute becomings, specifically - in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms - becomings-imperceptible, a concept that I have related to Collaborations #1 and #2 in Chapter Two and which has become a key element of the new body of work that I have begun to develop since 2008. Braidotti describes becoming-imperceptible as part of her own project of nomadic ethics:

Becoming-imperceptible is about reversing the subject to face the outside: a sensory and spiritual stretching of our boundaries. It is a way of living more intensely and of increasing one’s potentia with it, but in a manner which aims at framing, sustaining and continuing these processes by pushing them to the limit of endurance. (2006: 262)

Such limits of endurance include, of course, those undergone not only by myself but also by the audience in the piece. Their relation to me, in part because of my internalised and enfleshed process of becoming that the action entails, but also the disruptions made to their own processes of subjectification, was one that was problematized and shifting. If we think back to Becoming-goat and to Deleuze and Guattari’s statement that “[y]our only choice will be between a goat’s ass and the face of the god, between sorcerers and priests” (1987: 116) we see the audience in Becoming-locust confronted with an even more literal manifestation of the goat’s anus. They are certainly confronted with a similar performance of boundaries, of the presentation of a critical and performative modality that shifts and intensifies their relation to the other through the creation of affects and sensations. Marking the “death of the self to any notion of identity” (Braidotti, 2006: 262), the performance of becoming-imperceptible, the “radical displacement that traces patterns of estrangement and deterritorialization” (Ibid.) effects a destabilisation of the relationship between self and other and as such offers an enfleshed example of an experimental nomadic subjectivity that aims not only towards aesthetic ends, but political and spiritual ones too, a “post-secular spirituality, redefined as a topology of affects”. (Braidotti, 2006: 257).

Key to the success of such an experimental project is a symbiosis of theory and practice, of intellectual endurance as well as embodied and intersubjective action, of a recognition of puissance and the exercise of pouvoir.
This is something that I believe has been a motivation of my own project and a recognisable constant within it. The process of research has been an organic one of both academic theoretical and artistic production, the two elements at times indistinguishable, inextricable and thoroughly interdependent; it has been guided and shaped by personal and theoretical reflection, by relations with the self and with other(s). My readings of Deleuze and Guattari and Braidotti have been most formative - although are, of course, not exhaustive - and have been a rich focus to have within the wider landscape of Performance Studies as influenced by poststructuralist theory. Learning about practice (my own as well as others) from theorisation and further understanding theorisation through the experience of practice (my own as well as others), has informed my methodological approach and has embraced the rhizomatic and sometimes unpredictable connections that have occurred. I have attempted in this thesis to reflect upon and imagine some of the ways in which performance and philosophy might interact and collaborate, to work creatively towards the wider embodied practice of more ethical and sustainable modes of subjectivity. During this journey, the ways in which I think about art have altered - sometimes quite radically -, which has greatly expanded my approach to making, viewing, studying and writing about performance. This questioning (through thought and through practice) of my conceptions of art and subjectivity has opened up possibilities to imagine and produce reconfigurations of both, in a way that is framed and facilitated by philosophical and political ideas, but which is actualised in affective and embodied action.

Another aspect of this pursuit of a wider embodied practice has involved a move away from psychoanalytic theory. Whilst I do not deny the importance and positive contribution of psychoanalysis to the broader development of much western twentieth century thought, including poststructuralism, as theory it rests on universalisms that I believe are less productive to the realm of Performance Studies. We are much better, I would argue, to work with theories of subjectivity that locate the subject politically and historically, and within a materialist micropolitical context. Only then can we really recognise performance’s full potential as a productive force not just of individual subjectivity, but of social relations and (micro)political change. This is a position I have come to not only through my scholarly study of performance but through my practice of it, and my awareness of the dimensions of affect that performance can produce that are
not sufficiently accounted for by psychoanalytic theory. Rather, they are part of a much more expanded and open field of experience for which we need a much more expanded and open approach (to what Deleuze and Guattari call the despotic regime of "General Freud", cf. 1987: 18), both as theorists and as writers. To quote Elizabeth Grosz:

Art is intensely political not in the sense that it is a collective or community activity (which it may be, but usually is not) but in the sense that it elaborates the possibilities of new, more, different sensations than those we know. Art is where the becomings of the earth couple with the becomings of life to produce intensities and sensations that in themselves summon up a new kind of life (2008: 79).

The shift in my theoretical interests - from identity-centred politics to strategies based more open and affirmative bio-philosophy and non-representational-theory - is echoed in my art practice – from explicitly queer work based on a relation of closed otherness, to a practice focussed on the production of sensation and affect. This new departure in my work has involved an approach to the composition of performance much more along the lines of Deleuzo-Guattarian assemblage, building blocks of actions that are performed with an element of critical and performative détournement of action art aesthetics and shamanistic performance. It has also involved a revisitation of durational performance and states of becoming of the BwO in temporal endurance, and the exploration of empathic relations between myself and spectators through energetic transfer and affective communication.

The impact of this research not just on myself, but on peers, audiences, other artists, producers and collaborators, is something that I am only now beginning to appreciate. I believe that it represents a valuable contribution both to the academe and to the performance art sphere. It offers ways in which we might think about, talk about and learn from performance, ways in which performance might think about, talk about and learn from philosophy, and ways in which philosophy might think about, talk about and learn from performance. I hope that it will serve as a challenge to the continued dominance of psychoanalytic theory in Performance Studies and that – as has happened in Feminist Film Theory – it might be part of a larger turn towards opening up possible new lines of politically engaged aesthetic and philosophical enquiry. I see it also as a challenge to some of the influence of psychoanalysis on the practice of performance and live art, in the reproductive effect of autobiography and identity politics, an effect that I believe quells much of performance's
political and affective potential. My research will of course continue: in the further dissemination of some of the existing work; in the ongoing (and sustainable) exploration of some of the theoretical problems that remain unresolved; in the creation and presentation of new performances; in the continuing dialogue with audiences, other artists and producers about the potential of theoretically engaged and ethically motivated performance today and in the future. Within the wider ongoing project with which I am engaged, there are many possible lines of connection and proliferation; those I have been able to present here constitute only a tiny number in a vast sea of potential allegiances and becomings. Grosz describes philosophy and art as “[t]win rafts over chaos” (2008: 9) and it is on these rafts that I, and this voyage, continue.
Bibliography:


Birmingham: Ikon Gallery.


Contents of DVD ROM:

The contents of this DVD ROM are intended to accompany the main body of this thesis. As outlined in the introduction, it is my intention that the reader refers at the beginning of each chapter of the thesis to the contents of the relevant folder of the DVD ROM. Most of the Chapter folders contain video documentations of performances, as well as photographs, texts and other material. The following list details the contents of the DVD ROM and folders within it. All files should be readable on standard PC / Mac computers; video files have been created in QuickTime, which I would suggest is used for viewing them.

Chapter One:


Chapter Two:

- Manuel Vason:


  - Installation view, Arnolfini (JPEG) View of the *Encounters* exhibition at Arnolfini gallery, Bristol, 2007. (Photograph courtesy Arnolfini).
- The Public Love Project:

  • Public Love Diary (HTML Document) [NB do not open “public love diary_files” folder]

Chapter Three:

  • Becoming-goat (MPEG-4 file), 44 minutes. Unedited video of Becoming-goat performance at Arnolfini, Bristol, 2007. (Video courtesy Mark Hume / Arnolfini)
  • Photographs (10 x JPEG), images of Becoming-goat performance at Arnolfini, Bristol, 2007. (Photographs courtesy Kim Fielding).

Chapter Four:

  • Becoming-locust prologue (Microsoft Word document / .pdf file). Text that was read at the beginning of the performance of Becoming-locust at New Dance Horizons, Regina.