

THE DIGITAL PERFORMER: PERFORMANCE ,  
TECHNOLOGY AND NEW PERFORMANCE  
PARADIGMS

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For Mum and Dad,  
who paved the way for me to live the life  
that I have had the privilege to choose  
and who are my daily inspiration

## **Abstract**

This thesis, portfolio of published original performances and texts examines the extent to which one can create an equitable and convincing 'live' performance presence when creating performances that incorporate mediatised performers. The experimental process forefronts the dialogic relationship of the onstage to the on-screen performer, as such the devising methodology has primarily been focused on experimentation with the scripted narrative. The research illustrates significant technological and formal transitions during the research period, which has also seen the development from analogue to digital formats. In a systematic series of test-bed performances the author has created work exploring the qualitative interface between the onstage and digitally produced performer. Each new undertaking has articulated a different sub-set of research questions, but these have all been explored within the overarching framework. The argument presented here is that this research has contributed new knowledge to interpretations of our understanding of liveness and performer presence in contemporary performance. The critical contextual analysis examines twelve selected outputs. These are a combination of original performances and selected publications, where the author has reflexively discussed the findings of her practice. The critical contextual study is presented in four sections: Liveness revisited; The impact of the digital performer on our understanding of performer presence; Experiments with narrative; The actor slave and the diabolical digital performer.

**PART I**  
**Critical Contextual Study**

## **Introduction**

Since the late 1990s I have undertaken practice as research in which the staged and mediatised meeting point of the actual and digital performer has become the central concern of the research. During this period I have explored the extent to which one can create an equitable and convincing 'live' performance presence when creating performances that incorporate mediatised performers. Issues around liveness, physical presence, actual / virtual performer discourses and performer / spectator relationships have dominated the activities to date. The experimental process has fore-fronted the dialogic relationship of the onstage to the on-screen performer, as such the devising methodology has primarily been focused on experimentation with the scripted narrative. My working process has undergone significant technological and formal transitions during this research period, which has also seen the development from analogue to digital formats. That profound technological shift alone has of course altered my practice.

I began working with my early version of the 'digital double' in 1998, almost ten years before Steve Dixon coined this phrase in 2007. When Philip Auslander was writing his now seminal work *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Society* (1999) I was undertaking Arts Council England-funded research and development on *Mother Tongue* (2001<sup>1</sup>), a computer driven performance in which I simultaneously performed as my mother and three sisters. I have worked consistently through this transitional period of technological

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<sup>1</sup> Here I cite my works by date of the first performance, though in fact, as is clear in the portfolio, many

development and have, through ‘the doing’ of it, highlighted a number of issues not critiqued by Auslander or by subsequent work on his ideas.

For the purpose of this examination I am presenting a coherent and substantial body of ten digital performance works performed or produced since 2002. The majority of these have been funded through national and international competitive and peer-reviewed award processes, by bodies such as Arts Council England, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, my then employer Manchester Metropolitan University, Kirklees Council, the Canadian Cultural Council, and my current employer the University of Salford. In addition to these public funding sources I have received national and international commissions and sponsorship from organisations including the Storyroom Project, Sumners Post-Production House, South Hill Park Arts Centre, and Banff New Media Institute, Canada.

I have raised over £60,000 for this research, which I have performed nationally at notable venues such as the Institute for Contemporary Arts, London; Royal Exchange Studio Theatre, Manchester; the Lowry Centre, Salford. I have performed several of the works internationally at the Rex Cramphorn Studio, Sydney; the Ashanti Dance Studio, Rhode Island; the Pratt Institute, New York; and Banff Theatre Arts, Canada. I have disseminated my understanding and findings from each of these performance outputs through peer-assessed papers, mostly at international conferences, in published articles in academic and trade journals and edited texts.

In a systematic series of test-bed performances I have created work exploring the qualitative interface between the onstage and digitally produced performer. Each new undertaking has articulated a different sub-set of research questions, but these have all been explored within my overarching framework. My argument here, for the purpose of this doctoral submission, is that the extended period of research concerning the design and construction of performances that incorporate digital performers, has contributed new knowledge to interpretations of our understanding of liveness and performer

presence in contemporary performance. This critical contextual analysis examines twelve selected outputs. These are a combination of original performances, written, directed and performed (mostly by myself), and selected publications, where I have reflexively discussed my practice. This critical contextual study is presented in four sections: Liveness revisited; The impact of the digital performer on our understanding of performer presence; Experiments with narrative; The actor slave and the diabolical digital performer.

Theoretically my analysis is cross-disciplinary, and draws on a number of critical voices from varying but cognate fields. I suggest that I produce a mutable genre of performance practice and as such, the critical context is still finding its own form.<sup>2</sup>

In this study I reflect on both the use of the 'digital performer' and the 'digital double' in my collection of works and performances that feature the digital double dominate this portfolio. Amongst the theoretical analyses of this particular mode of digital performer I have engaged with Steve Dixon's incorporative analysis of the wide spectrum of digital doubles as mutable entities that can be interpreted as possessing a range of qualities from the dark doppelganger to the ability to be 'indistinguishable from its human counterpart' (Dixon 2007, 268). I have examined the work of Matthew Causey who places the digital double largely within the concept of the uncanny, informed (in part) by a psychoanalytical Lacanian position, which proposes that the double represents a mutilation of the self through technology (1999, 394). I have also responded to Causey's provocative notion that when we are performing with our digital 'Other' we are in fact enacting our own death.<sup>3</sup> In each of the performances there is an attempt to illustrate that the presence of our digital double or indeed any digital performer who is in conversation with the actual performer onstage, allows both performer and audience to transcend our corporeally-based understanding of the 'live' and enter into the realm of some kind of 'magic.' Rather

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Causey (2006, 39) proposes that we should conceive of theatre as a medium that overlaps and is always subsumed by other media including television, film, radio, print and computer-aided hyper media. Such a process he proposes will considerably change our definition of the boundaries of the theatre and the ontology of performance.

<sup>3</sup> The concern with the inevitable death of the live performer, in what she calls 'an economy of reproduction' was posited by Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked* (1993, 3).



than highlighting death, I propose that the exchange between the performers has the ability to create a heightened sense of the self in the present.

Gilles Deleuze (via David Hume) offers both a philosophical and cognitive interpretation of the repeated self, which has assisted in explaining not just the uncanny interpretation of the digital double, but the magical properties that the repeated self can achieve. In *Repetition for Itself*, Deleuze writes that '[r]epetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it' (1994, 90). This proposition resonates quite clearly when applied to the mediatised human subject with its myriad of signifiers. Unlike the photographic still, the uncanny moving image of the double in proximity to the corporeal presence of the original appears to cloak the technology that delivers its presence through its ability to both confuse and entertain the mind of both performer and audience—also a common response to seeing a magic trick.<sup>4</sup> I have taken inspiration directly into the making of the work from Jean Baudrillard's notion of the malefice of the double on-screen, that bewitches and beguiles its audience into believing it is more real than the original (2008, 84). Certainly in my experience, the digital double has threatened to destabilize my authority as both actually present performer and author, through its ability to appear more natural and more real than me.<sup>5</sup>

In each of these digital performances in this portfolio I have consistently used technological innovations to bring impossible performers to the stage: a digital self; a cartoon self, a phenomenal animation who can do anything except leave the screen; and the world's smallest performer, viewed with the aid of opera glasses. Through this critical

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<sup>4</sup> The magical double and ghosting effects have been used since the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century with such technical innovations as the Magic Lantern, Pepper's Ghost and the Corsican Trap. In 'The Cinema Today - 1939' how to achieve the doubling effect on film is explained. Spencer, D.A. and Waley, H.D. OUP, Oxford 1939, 130-132.

<sup>5</sup> Re-visiting Walter Benjamin's *The Work Of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* I have been curious about his notion that the action of prising an object from its shell is to destroy its aura (1986 [1936] , 32). To extricate the unique object through its reproduction and represent it as "live" in its original state, is to pose the question, which is the original? If we assume that we are all already mediatised then the digital performer is the original and the performer onstage a lesser reproduction of the real performer on-screen which succumbs to 'Mediatization's displacement of the live within the cultural context' (Causey 2006, 51).

contextual study I summarise, reflect and interrogate whether I was successful in finding a method through which it is possible to create performances in which the actual and digital performer can take equal footing on stage.

## 1. Liveness revisited

*In my understanding, the whole art of theatre revolves entirely around cheating—knowing when to trick the audience, when to cheat and when not to cheat.*

Robert Lepage 1998, 141.

During the years of my creative practice there has been a major shift in society's relationship to technology with an exponential rise in the development of, and dependency on, personal digital devices. These new technologies have significantly altered our patterns of behaviour and we have moved to a world in which we are, in the words of Sherry Turkle 'always on' (2012, 151). Viewing the world through a screen has become a ubiquitous and even twenty-four-hour-round activity, and the camera lens has become the eye that watches almost every public space. Such shifts in behaviour need to be taken into consideration when contextualising my research, particularly how our understanding of connecting with 'performers' on screens, both as entertainment and as part of daily life, has changed.

In this section I discuss the first three performance works in the portfolio, *Mother Tongue* (2001), *Wednesday, Wednesday* (2005) and *Never Work With Animals, Children and Digital Characters* (2006). Prior to and concurrent with the development of these works, contemporary performers were increasingly incorporating recording, playback and live-

feed technologies into their devising and presentation methodologies.<sup>6</sup> However, the impact of these emergent digital technologies on performance methodology had not adequately been explored, in part due to the dearth of published outcomes on 'process' from an emic stance.<sup>7</sup> Where impact was discussed, it was almost entirely dominated by computation and engineering concerns (Laurel 1992, Turkle 1995, Balsamo 1995, Cubitt 1996, Murray 1998).<sup>8</sup> In addition, the complexities of discourse exploring the reliance on technology in contemporary society, I felt, had led to an over-theorisation of the subject, removing it from the very human qualities that make the 'live' performer essential, and which was presented as a growing body of theories on the disappearing body (Kroker and Kroker 1987, Foucault 1987, Haraway 1991, Kroker and Kroker 1996, Causey 1999, Hayles 1999). Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked* (1993) was highly influential for me at this time. Phelan's hypothesis that the ontology of live performance was bound to its non-reproducibility and disappearance, had great impact for me as a performer who had spent the first 15 years of her practice 'living in the moment' of performance and who had proudly not documented these works, created for what I would have thought of as the few privileged audiences who witnessed them. In 1998 I attended a talk by Philip Auslander in Manchester, who introduced his theories on the relationship between mediatisation and liveness and I disagreed with his proposal that 'live' performance could include 'recorded' elements.<sup>9</sup>

It is within this historical context, funded by an Arts Council research and development award, and on the cusp of the digital revolution, that I first began experimenting with

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Wooster Group (USA), Blast Theory (UK), Robert Lepage (Canada), The Builder's Association (USA), Station House Opera (UK), Gob Squad (UK/Germany), Rimini Protokoll (Germany/Netherlands), Toneelgroep, Netherlands.

<sup>7</sup> Emic : of, relating to, or involving analysis of cultural phenomena from the perspective of one who participates in the culture being studied. Reference Source Merriam-Webster (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emic>) (accessed February 2013).

<sup>8</sup> From the outset there was a separation between scientific research into the development of conversational agents and the theatre maker who was bringing affective artificial actors into their work. See Weizenbaum (1966), the Gesture and Narrative Language Group Embodiment in Conversational Interfaces: REA project, Cassell et al, (1999) and Semaine: The Sensitive Agent Project and is an interesting comparison to the Synthetic Interviews Project (<http://www.semaine-project.eu>) (2011).

<sup>9</sup> A record of the event 'Mediated Mind' can be seen at <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=artnet;efe219f4.98>

analogue video to record myself in the guise of several characters from distinctly different social classes, in conversation with one another. The embryonic plan was to present this conversational video-work as an installation, but my unhappiness with what appeared to be caricature performances curtailed this ambition. From this experiment I moved away from the idea of a gallery based installation towards the idea of creating a conversational performance with a single, repeated actor. This became *Mother Tongue*, a work written for five performers, a mother and four daughters, all played by the same person, and only one of them 'in the flesh'. My intention was not to create a work of technical wizardry, nor indeed to disprove Phelan's argument in favour of Auslander's, but simply to find a way of allowing one character to play several. Initially I chose to perform as my (female) family members because it is still a wonder to me that we all speak so differently. I wanted to emphasise the different ways in which we speak by using the same person, dressed exactly alike, to play all five actors and allow the voice to be read, not just as 'part' of an individual personality, or a signifier of birthplace and culture, but an extension of one's psyche.

The need to employ digital technology to create the doubling effect had an unexpected impact on the direction of my practice. The making of *Mother Tongue* was a truly inverted process, fixed in place at the point of scripting, with every attempt to deliver the recorded lines with a casual air, so that when the show was finally performed 18 months after inception, it would appear spontaneous, not systematic. Although the recording process was at the heart of this performance which consisted of —script to CD—to digital video—to edit—to Mpeg—to computer (via the internet; this show was networked to me before it could be performed)—what happened at the point of performance could not have been predicted. It was as if the technical nightmare had never existed. Presented on four televisions, the 'talking heads' appeared to be 'live'.<sup>10</sup> Not with one present person and four copies, but five seemingly live characters. It was a revelation to me, that in performance, I felt as though I was not alone on stage, I experienced being with four other

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<sup>10</sup> Early writers on the liveness of television, largely informed by theorist Jane Feuer, generally agreed that television's essential properties should be perceived as a medium of immediacy and intimacy (also cited in Cubitt 1991, 30-1).

cast members (who all happened to be line perfect) and even the technical crew, could not help but refer to the televisions by their character's names.

It was clear from the reception of the work the audience also experienced this sense of liveness. Some of my harshest critics, my own family members, saw the show and having once threatened to sue me if I cast them in a negative light, were physically moved by my attempt to regroup our fractured family. The review in the Manchester Evening News reported: 'you would almost think that it was spontaneous.'<sup>11</sup> The dramatic setting was not novel, just five women sitting around talking. It was the application of new digital technology that was transformational.<sup>12</sup>

The conclusions that I formed from this key work impacted directly on my practice and shifted the critical and theoretical framework that I used to create and analyse my performance work. *Mother Tongue* illustrated that the digital double in performance possessed 'live' qualities that could be exploited in the creation of other work that incorporated onstage and on-screen performers. I felt that this seminal work demonstrated that even though the machines that supported the artificial performers were completely visible, the liveness generated through their casual conversation could effectively overcome the artificial *mise-en-scène*. Realising Philip Auslander's hypothesis on Liveness in his now published text, David Saltz was one of the first performance studies theorists to write in support of Auslander's ideas, with his proposition that the incorporation of 'interactive technology into theatre opens up dynamic new possibilities for theatre artists, and ...compels us to re-examine some of our most basic assumptions about the nature of theatre and the meaning of liveness' (Saltz 2001, 107). Certainly the surprising impact of the computer driven *Mother Tongue* invited more investigation in this respect and the Liveness debate has since been continued and developed (see for example Causey 2006, Dixon 2007, Gieseckam 2007, Bay Cheng *et al* 2010) and also

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<sup>11</sup> Manchester Evening News, April 18 2002.

<sup>12</sup> In order to maintain complete synchrony between the recorded elements I used the newly released Realtime Video Player. This innovative piece of digital hardware could run up to four Mpeg3 video channels simultaneously. Prior to this time the only other way of running four outputs together was with DVD players linked to a synch-starter on computer, but these would drop out of time due to the differences in running speed of the players.

revisited by Philip Auslander in his second edition (2008). It is however Jennifer Parker-Starbuck who I feel accurately sums up current ideas on the Auslander versus Phelan debate when she declares that the argument:

simply fall[s] into a certain historical moment between the desire to use the term “live” as Peggy Phelan does, to mean a bodily present capable of resisting the onslaught of commercial capitalism, and a tacit acceptance of Auslander's argument that this “live” is also, in the contemporary moment of globalised technology, already ‘mediatised’ (2011,9).

While post-digital performance theory may be moving beyond Philip Auslander’s original ideas (Lehmann 2006, Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006, Causey 2006, Broadhurst 2007, Benford and Giannachi, 2011) and while I acknowledge that Auslander’s theory on liveness in ‘theatre’, is only part of the discussions in his text,<sup>13</sup> nonetheless, in its time, this seminal work offered an invaluable new conceptual and contextual framework for discussing the introduction of the digital performer into my practice, and I have returned to the author’s theorisations, throughout this period of research. The instigation to develop a series of works in the vein of *Mother Tongue* was in part prompted by Auslander who proposed that in comparison to the luminosity of the screen-based performer, the actual performer on stage has all the luminescence of a ‘50 watt light bulb’ (1999, 38<sup>14</sup>). I was concerned that my actual stage presence had suffered in this respect, but was fairly convinced that as the central protagonist in the performance both onstage and on-screen,

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<sup>13</sup> Auslander has often informally remarked that his ideas on liveness go beyond the relationship of the live to mediatised performer, that people cite his first two chapters and do not address the rest of the book. The latter part of the book delves into legal implications and intellectual property rights, as well as conceptual ideas around liveness that extend beyond the actual comparative experience of live versus screen to ‘being there’ in the moment when listening to live recordings. For me however the fundamental premise that he cites of a shift in consciousness to accept the screen-based presence as a live performer, is without question the most influential concept in relation to my own studies.

<sup>14</sup> I refer to Philip Auslander’s use of Robert Blossom’s article “On Filmstage” (1966) TDR: Tulane Drama Review, 11, 1:68-72 to suggest that in the presence of screen-based performance the live performer will always have the presence of a “fifty watt light bulb” Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Society*, Routledge, second edition 2008, 41 -42.

that this had not been the case and that in *Mother Tongue* I had perhaps found a way of producing an equivalence of presence through the conversational nature of the work.

In the early-mid 2000s, moving into middle age, my body seemed to be taking on a will of its own. Perhaps it is little wonder then that my writing took a turn towards the construction of a work in which my now imperfect, badly-behaved form, performed with my perfect televisual image. The hilarious grotesque-real stories of French Renaissance writer Francois Rabelais were inspirational; the 'real' body of the ageing female performer was central to my next performance narrative and became a source of humour. Performed by Mary Oliver and Mary Oliver, *Wednesday, Wednesday* was a metacomedy (Gieseckam 2007, 243) that interplayed on-screen L'Oreal perfection with the heightened presence of the grotesque vaudevillian stage performer. I used the now familiar theories of Auslander as my challenge, and offered an entertaining response to his work. Employing technically what I had learned from *Mother Tongue*, I developed a story of the imagined space of the 'living' television portal as a place that exists beyond the glass screen; where a woman sits both inside and outside real time and even has the ability to talk to God. The comedy monopolised the intimate knowledge of the 'other' that the onstage and on-screen doubles both share. Secrets that should never be told were revealed, but further embarrassment for both performer and audience was saved with the use of the handy remote control. The visual comedy heavily referenced the language of video technology alongside the gravity-bound corporeal presence of the grotesque musical performer. With this performance I found that there was laughter to be found at the meeting point of these two modes of performance and the person who laughed loudest when I performed *Wednesday, Wednesday* was Philip Auslander.

Following directly *Never Work with Animals, Children and Digital Characters* (2006) was a comedic performed 'paper' which used the format of the digital double to reveal the practical methodologies and theoretical influences that I had previously employed. I attempted to illustrate video artist Bill Viola's techno-culture desire from 1989 when he proposed "with each new step in the evolution of technology, we take a step closer to our ideal of higher and higher quality, which actually means creating things that look more



and more like nature itself" (1995, 224). I suggested through the making of this work that the 'digi-self' is a reminder that we are moments away from becoming the gods of our own universe in our continued desire to create and control life (Kurzweil 1999, 1-2)<sup>15</sup>.

Using the digital double both metaphorically and illustratively in *Never Work with Animals Children and Digital Characters*, I hypothesised that the performer, whether on or off screen, has the ability to transcend the physical and psychological gap of pretence to become live at the point of performance, through the power of their intention at the point of recording. <sup>16</sup> I proposed that even when creating impossible relationships, such as the performer onstage appearing alongside their recorded double, that the 'liveness' of the on-screen performer does not depend on his or her actual proximity to the spectator, but rather the ability to communicate liveness at the moment of performance, whenever and wherever this is taking place. From my perception as both the digital performer and the performer onstage, I was performing live at the point of recording and that my 'intention' to 'be live' affectively translated across the temporal and spatial distances between myself in the past and in the future-present. <sup>17</sup> The intention to be live on the part of the digital performer illustrates and extends Auslander's claim that "if the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been real to begin with" (1999, 43). <sup>18</sup> Just as Deleuze had proposed that the impact act of repetition has no impact on the object but

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<sup>15</sup> Amelia Jones proposes that the "Behind the development of advanced technologies is the age old desire to extend the body in space and time (through machinic, communications, and biotechnological tools) and thus to transcend it (to become "God")" Jones, A, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, (1998, 205)

<sup>16</sup> David Freedberg, and Vittorio Gallese offer an interesting set of results that support the idea of liveness as perceptual. In their 2007 paper 'Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience' Freedberg and Gallese explored cognitive responses to looking at art works. They found that the viewer produces empathetic somatic responses to the (abstract) marks made by the artist, particularly when there is a vigorous handling of the medium. 'We propose that even the artist's gestures in producing the art work induce the empathetic engagement of the observer, by activating simulation of the motor program that corresponds to the gesture implied by the trace. The marks on the painting or sculpture are the visible traces of goal-directed movements; hence, they are capable of activating the relevant motor areas in the observer's brain'. It is my proposal that when we watch the onscreen performer, we recognise their liveness at the point of performance and that this is most effectively communicated when the performance is recorded in real-time.

<sup>17</sup> The intention to be live on the part of the digital performer illustrates and extends Auslander's claim that "if the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been real to begin with" (1999, 43).

<sup>18</sup> Auslander is applying Jean Baudrillard's notion that the real consists of that which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction (1983, 146).

only on the mind that perceives it, so the digital double could be 'perceived' as having live qualities in the mind of the other actually present performers (in my case) and in the audience, who made the decision to enjoy the illusion.

It was my conclusion at this stage that liveness is not a physical but perceptual state and was dependent on its quality of believability. In this (now) post-digital age it is this very attribute of liveness that has been appropriated for the purposes of assessing the effectiveness of artificial intelligence and interactive communication systems. Computational researchers have begun to assess the quality of liveness in the human-to-machine interface through truthfulness (Newell, Edwards and Cairns 2011, 221-224<sup>19</sup>). Such a development suggests that the success of an artificially produced, engaging human, is dependent on whether the interactor believes that what they are interacting with, is human-like. From very early on in this process I have used believability as the primary test as to whether the artificial (human) performer is convincing, and this ability I considered might be attributed to the quality of their presence.

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher Newell, Alistair Edwards and Paul Cairns propose that human to machine interactions should be endowed with Liveness. They have undertaken experiments with synthetic speech in the construction of theatre performances where human and artificial voices were mixed. Their results suggest that liveness is possible, measurable and positive in 'synthetic' interactions.

## 2. The impact of the digital performer on our understanding of performer presence

*There is perhaps no art form better suited to making presence 'enigmatic' than the theatre, where the 'immediate' is represented, and where the character or stage world is in 'proximity', while being, in a very real sense, absent.*

Jacques Derrida (1974, 70)

We know we exist, only through the act of recognition. For Lacan it is the mirror that serves this function, for Hegel, it is through the eye of the other that we become self-conscious, for Merleau-Ponty it is through the body that we develop our self image: our realisation that when our left hand touches our right hand, when we simultaneously touch and are touched, we experience ourselves in the world because, as Merleau-Ponty states, 'my body is me' and 'I am it' (2004, 113). In relation to the performer-spectator relationship and in my efforts to introduce the digital performer as a believable presence, it has been important for me to understand how we recognise the 'presence' of performers (onstage) in relation to ourselves (as audience). Herbert Blau offers a seemingly simple coverall solution with his proposal that, 'aall living presence on stage is illusory and contains the appearance of spontaneity' (1987, 164-5). Cormac Power's narrower and potentially more constructive definition suggests that all theatrical presence is 'a *function* of theatrical signification.... a constant dynamic process of disclosure' (2006, 227).

Having considered that it was the nature and quality of the narrative in *Mother Tongue* that supported the illusion of presence in spite of the technical reveal, it was self-recognition and

empathy that I felt was key to creating not just a suspension of belief on the part of the audience, but the creation of a possible equivalent experience of performer presence of both kinds of performer. Self-recognition is one of the main narrative devices used to capture and maintaining the audience's imagination, and by recognising the audience with eye contact, as actors we create an immediate conscious exchange. I have often included moments when the digital performer speaks directly to the audience, in a deliberate act of returning the gaze. Elinor Fuchs describes this as 'a circle of heightened awareness in the theatre flowing from actor to spectator and back that sustains the dramatic world' (1996, 70). When the digital performer looks directly at the audience and speaks to them, she appears to be conscious and independent from the 'other' performer; a device used by the ventriloquist as an invitation to consider the possibility that this inanimate unconscious performer has a mind of their own. This performance ruse is one of the many ways in which I have encouraged an audience to suspend their disbelief, but as the artist Tony Oursler suggests, the spectator primarily 'wants' to believe and this desire takes them passed the technology, to the experience of other worldliness that is being presented to them. 'We love a story so much' he proposes "that we will breathe life into it no matter how much it is degraded' (quoted in Giannachi and Kaye 2011, 55). Hans-Thies Lehmann also suggests that our belief in (stage) presence is the effect not simply of perception but the *desire* to see (2006, 169) and Cormac Power states categorically that 'if *we* refused to be seduced by theatrical presence, we would be left not only without a play, but without theatre' (2006, 129-30). Sherry Turkle describes this as the 'Wizard of Oz' moment that happens in spite of the protesting cries of 'ignore the man behind the curtain Dorothy'. Even with the discovery that it is only a man who is controlling a machine, we want to believe that Oz is real and can create magic (Turkle 2012, 90). When discussing with a group of young students the technical infrastructure of *Mother Tongue*, one of the group said she thought that the computer (that was clearly the source of the recorded outputs) was only a prop. I asked her how she thought the effect was created, and she said 'Magic'. After performing *Wednesday, Wednesday*, an audience member came to ask how I created the fluid timing between my two selves and I said 'Magic' to which they replied, 'That's a good answer, I prefer to think of it as that'. These emotionally driven responses are important, because they indicate that even when it is obvious that the performer is neither present nor real, a symbiotic relationship between the digital performer and the actually present actor, can enable the transcendent qualities of the digital

performer to rise above what is actually possible, an experience that Steve Dixon cites as Artaudian in principle (2007, 241).<sup>20</sup>

The stage presence of the digital performer has been a relatively under-debated discussion in intermedial performance.<sup>21</sup> In a number of texts (Dixon 2007, Causey 2007, Giesekam 2006, Power 2006, and Parker-Starbuck 2011) the subject of the digital performer is discussed, but not to any great degree with regard to the direct relationship between the actors onstage and on-screen. Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye's *Performing Presence* project, (Exeter University 2008 to 2011), undertook the most comprehensive study to date of the impact of new media on our understanding of the subject.<sup>22</sup> Their investigation into the Latin etymology of the word 'presence' is itself helpful in our understanding of how the performer on-screen can be experienced as having presence. Presence as *prae* (before) and *sens* (past participle of *sum*, 'I am') suggests 'before I am' or that which is 'in front of' me or 'in view' of me. Presence can also be interpreted as part of a principle of unfolding, as something that is revealed to us, and therefore suggests 'alterity' (Giannachi and Kaye 2011, 4) which could explain why when someone is filmed in the past, the recorded performer has the ability to 'become' present in the future, unlike the static image of the photograph which invokes memory and a sense of a person, but not the experience of their actual presence at the moment of viewing. Although the *Performing Presence* project offers a comprehensive discussion on the changing perceptions of presence brought about by our growing engagement with new media technologies, few of the artists and performance companies selected for analysis incorporate the digital performer within a dialogic performance structure. The

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<sup>20</sup> Steve Dixon is referring to the Digital Double when he cites that this kind of 'transcendence' is Artaudian in principle, but I would also propose that such an idea applies to any digital performer who manages to convince the audience to believe in their presence.

<sup>21</sup> I am using the term 'intermedial' in reference to the term introduced by Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt. They describe intermedial performance as "a meeting point in-between the performers, the observers, and the confluence of media involved in the performance at a particular moment in time" (2006, 12). The change in terminology reflects a 21st Century approach to contemporary performance making and I am using it in preference to 'multimedia' whose roots can be traced back to early 20th Century avant-garde movements. For a further elaboration on this I refer to Steve Dixon (2007, 87).

<sup>22</sup> My work was however discussed by Claudia Georgi in her paper *Live and Mediatized Presence* in *Mary Oliver's Performance Art*, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen [http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/research/centres/intermedia/conference\\_abstracts2.shtml](http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/research/centres/intermedia/conference_abstracts2.shtml).

exception is the work of The Builder's Association whose artistic director Marianne Weems claims their work relates primarily to dislocated connectivity (2011, 179). The company does not attempt to represent the physically absent performer as seemingly present in the same space, but as someone linked, spatially and temporally through the science of technology, to the performers onstage.

Through studying the work of contemporary performance companies (among them Prototype, the Wooster Group, DV8, imitating the dog, Forkbeard Fantasy, The Builders Association, Toneelgroep, Station House Opera, Blast Theory, The Chameleon Group) and through creating my own body of work, I understand that, unlike performance with 'cinematic' or 'technologised' bodies, the simply filmed presence of the digital performer in one-take can appear to have the same sense of presence as the actual performer onstage.<sup>23</sup> This is a return to a historical period in which early film-makers, emulated stage-based plays with the camera fixed in one position and the action literally staged before the eye of the recording machine<sup>24</sup> (Spencer and Waley 1939, 131). Watching the cinematic body is a skill that we have acquired. We learn to make associations with one image and another and construct a sense of the whole person from these dislocated images<sup>25</sup> (Parker 1998, 107). It is my assertion that this different viewing experience is perceptually different from watching the constant actor onstage. I propose that these formal differences interrupt the conversation between the two kinds of performer. In my work I have chosen to embed the presence of the digital performer within a story that asserts that the digital performer is not separate but part of the stage-based ensemble at the point of performance.

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<sup>23</sup> Audiences have responded to my digital double work with such comments as "We know there can't be two of you, but there simply are" (Wednesday, Wednesday Reading University 2005) and "I know it's silly, but I keep waiting for you/her to come back out from the wings" (Falmouth College of Art 2007).

<sup>24</sup> It was the static nature of the filming process that led to the accidental discovery of trick film processes very early on in the process of development of what this new medium could do. George Méliès was the master craftsman of trick film and doubling techniques.

<sup>25</sup> The linking of images is known as the Kuleshov effect- The Russian film-maker discovered that people automatically think about images spatially.

In my previous works it had been a surprise that the formal differences between the performers could be enjoyed in spite of the technological 'reveal'. The encouragement to look beyond the machinery to the actor is different from other contemporary artists whose work makes a feature of the differences between the technologised or mediatised body in relation to the actor onstage. With reference to the Wooster Group's use of actual and screen-based modes of performance, Matthew Causey observes that the company creates 'a conflation of the mechanics and the products of their respective image manufacturing' (2006, 45). In my research, the intention was not that the onstage performer should take on the mantle of mediatisation, but conversely, that the mediatised performer, should appear to be present.<sup>26</sup>

It is with the benefit of this insight that I decided to test my ability to bring other kinds of digital performers to the stage and to see whether I could maintain a convincing and equitable presence in performance. I began formally with *scale* and introduced Doris, the world's smallest performer viewed with the aid of opera glasses. *Almost* is a story of a woman and her giant of a husband who are living in the last occupied house in a street, due for demolition. Aesthetically, this work expanded the *mise-en-scène* by embedding the television screen inside a bespoke model house. I employed professional actors to appear in the work, with the virtual Lisa Moore performing as the nine-inch-high character who occupied the house, and onstage actor Anthony Bessick as the giant.

Technically it was a complex work which was only possible with the skills of a greatly expanded industrial team that included, writer, director, professional actors, designer, composer, foley artist, film crew and composite video editor. By being outside of the work

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<sup>26</sup> In Martin Heidegger's notion of the essence of technology as that which functions to bring forth the concealed to the unconcealed I thought I had found a way to imbricate the presence of the digital performer into the space of theatre with her ability to present both immediacy and disclosure. However Heidegger later compounds this notion with his interpretation of 'modern technology' as that which no longer functions to bring forth or presence the human (or object) but acts as a 'challenging', demanding that nature supply energy that can be extracted and stored in a self-perpetuating cycle of unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing and switching - a process to which there is no foreseeable end and 'where the only accessible real in technoculture is technology' (Causey 2006, 34). Embedded within this technology for technology's sake economically determined system presides the cinematic, digitally produced simulacra with its perverse ability to appear more real than the real.

I was able to more easily project-manage and direct. Methodologically the new structure impacted greatly on the devising, rehearsing and production techniques employed, which were dislocated and undertaken over a period of six months. I conflated film, television and radio writing techniques in the construction and delivery of this performance; imposing challenging new performance methods on both actors (who never actually met). Although the digital performance was shot against blue screen over 15 scenes, it was compositely edited (with photomontage interiors added later) into one video project in order to maintain the illusion that the character was inside the house and performing in real time. When she could not be seen, i.e. cleaning in the kitchen or falling down the stairs, Foley and vocal effects were added to keep a sense of her presence at all times. An essential aspect of establishing the 'believable' presence of this miniature character was the quality of the onstage performer's interaction with her. The empathy that he emoted for 'Doris' through his own commitment to the performance, created a level of emotion that I propose had the ability to overcome the artificial *mise-en-scène* allowing the audience to enter this imaginary world, with its signifiers of fairy tales, contemporary urban decay and desperate aspiration.

During this period I was also working concurrently on *Fly Me To The Moon (2008)*, which was my attempt at performing with my cartoon self.<sup>27</sup> For the ageing female performance artist, the possibility of performing with one's phenomenal cartoon self—freed from the constraints of acceptable behaviour, limited physicality and gravity—brought with it new-found performative possibilities as well as new sources of comedy centred on the body. The aim of this project was to investigate how the introduction of a cartoon performer

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<sup>27</sup> I quickly discovered that cartoon animation within live performance was far from a recent performance technique. Pioneering animator Winsor McKay introduced his film technology in the most accessible public format available to him, Vaudeville in 1914, when he performed with a six minute hand drawn animation of *Gertie the Dinosaur*, talking to Gertie, asking her to do certain actions, which she appeared to do in response to his commands, then McKay then walked off stage to re-appear on-screen in animated form, amazing his audience by climbing onto Gertie's back and riding off together into the distance. McKay used the format of Vaudeville to present his drawing talents not necessarily because he was interested in developing the human-cartoon-interface per se, but because it was a platform from where he could publicly show his advanced animation techniques. McKay began presenting his drawings during 'Chalk and Talk' sessions made popular on the Vaudeville circuit. He was a very popular presenter and it was a natural place for him to therefore to air his new moving animation films, *Little Nemo* in 1911 and then *Gertie the Dinosaur* in 1914.



would impact on my devising methodology. Primarily, this was explored through comedy script-writing, narrative construction and character development. I also examined how the expanded industrial team's activities intersected with scenographic elements: drawing, puppetry, design, and digital presentation. For this project, I worked with a creative team of animators (both CGI and digital), character designer, scene-builder, video-editor, costume designer and soundscape artist.

The research for *Fly Me To The Moon* echoed activities being undertaken in the wider cultural forum. With its experimentation into and employment of, expanded interactive forms of communication between a human and an animated character, it linked into research in the media communication industry, notably digital storytelling, gaming, and information systems design (Laurel 1993, Murray 1997, Cassell et al 2000).<sup>28</sup> This bias towards computer-based, scientific (and therefore measurable) testing processes, rather than applying tacit, experiential or embodied knowledge, also seduced me initially into thinking that this was the direction that I should take this project. At the start of the process I attempted to work with a CGI animator but the character suffered from 'the Polar Express syndrome'<sup>29</sup>. Just as the gigantic smooth head of Tom Hanks had children quaking behind their knees in this early new form of hyperreal animation, so CGI Astro Mary was described as zombie-like and creepy; she lacked the imperfections that make us human. It soon became clear that I wanted to develop a piece that co-starred a cartoon. Not the 'animated self' but a 'toon' who comes with the ability to do anything, be any size,

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<sup>28</sup> One particular project carried out at Fujitsu into the use of empathetic animated 'agents' (actors) in the human-machine interface (Satoshi I, Takahiro M, Takashi M,1999) is a useful reference point. The Fujitsu project tested the effectiveness of using an animated character as a helpful empathetic agent in a ticket-dispensing machine, with the team focusing their attention primarily on the user-experience, rather than on developing the character of the 'man in the machine' who would help the purchaser. The results showed that the inter-'actors' liked receiving instructions delivered by an animated character in preference to just reading the text and the users imbued these characters with human qualities with ease, but the feedback suggested that they wanted the 'agent' to be more characterful. I realised that as performance makers, we had the potential to create highly affective animated characters, but that these skills were not being exploited in computational research.

<sup>29</sup> In a *New York Times* review of the digital animation film *Polar Express*, Manohla Dargis wrote of how 'most moviegoers will be more concerned by the eerie listlessness of those characters' faces' (November 10 2004) <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/286524/The-Polar-Express/overview> (last accessed June 2013).

be adorable, perverse, obscene, can never die, can commit murder and still get a laugh and whilst although now 'mostly' created on computer, a performer who still began her life as a 2D drawing. Esther Leslie offers an interesting insight in support of this when she proposes that 'when animation finds its own form, and not a borrowed form, when it concedes flatness not the fakery of depth, it really gets deep into actuality, its own and ours' (2002, 199). The decision to work with the cartoon double seemed a natural progression from the pre-recorded self, but although the animation functioned well there were irreconcilable differences between us as performers that could not be overcome within the timeframe of the project. When one introduces performers to the stage whose ontology is firmly situated in an 'other' cultural ideology (in this case the cartoon also comes with associations of low class popular entertainment) then these issues can impact on the reception of the work. In the case of *Fly Me To The Moon*, additionally I over-emphasised the base corporeal aspects of the effects of being in space. The reason for this I feel, is that as an ageing female performer with decreasing cultural agency, rather than finding emancipation from my cultural referents through the presence of my cartoon double, I became trapped in my actual body and in doing so, reinforced my position as Other by creating too great a perceptual gap between myself and the cartoon object.

In order to understand how *Astro Mary* was perceived differently and therefore how this had a negative impact on the reception of this particular performance, it has been helpful to refer to studies on performance and cognition. In her essay 'Essentialism and Comedy', Lisa Zumshine explores the cognitive ability to perceive the differences between the living entity and the object. Grounded in essentialist scientific research, Zumshine explains that 'the differences in our conceptualization of living kinds and artefacts are governed by cognitive architectures that *are at least on some level* functionally different from each other' (2006, 104).

Learning from the mistakes of the previous project, *Blue* (2008) became the test-bed for exploring the impact that a more collaborative creative approach between performance maker and animation team has on the devising methodology and subsequent quality of performance. All the creative collaborators (performers, director, animator and sound-

scape artist) were involved from the very start of the process. Discussions, script meetings and practical workshops were held throughout the devising period, where drawing and physical improvisation took place in equal measure. The structure of these workshops was guided by how best to communicate a complex narrative effectively without the use of the spoken word, while still making the interactive communication process central. We focused on developing good eye contact, recognisable facial gestures and physical empathy through mirroring another's movements. The devising process was neither completely onstage nor on-screen, but a hybrid activity that stripped these two different elements back to their essence in an attempt to create a new performer-to-performer relationship. During the first workshop animator Rozi Fuller and myself observed that, just as was the case in *Almost*, the digital performer (in this case the animated line) has the ability to transcend into the human realm by virtue of the responsive presence of the onstage performer. We agreed that this countered Matthew Causey's idea (2006, 23) that it is our (human) bodies that are re-configured by technology. Conversely, it appeared to be the very presence of the actual body that re-configured the animated form, making 'it' appear more human and in consequence more present.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the previous works, the decision to favour an image-based narrative brought both a challenge and a freedom. Because there was to be no verbal exchange, there were concerns about the quality and weight of attention with regards to performer presence. There was a fear that the phenomenal animation (who could do anything, except leave the

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<sup>30</sup> I also noticed a strong desire to anthropomorphise the abstract image when observing the use of computer animated 'Sprites' and dancers in the work of Sita Popat and Scott Walker (2008). If the dancer performed without acknowledging the presence of the animation they appeared independent from each other. Whereas, if the dancer performed with the Sprite in a characterful way, a natural inclination was to anthropomorphise the line and imbue it, not just with human characteristics, but consciousness. If the dancer appeared to be running from it, or pressed down to the ground with the weight of it, then the imaginative and more delightful rationale was to think, that this would be what the Sprite intended. Sherry Turkle talks about such imaginings as a pre-conscious childlike state. When a child is asked why the stone rolls down the hill, she answers, because it wants to. Once the child enters a more deterministic conscious awareness, they will answer, because of the force of gravity. (Turkle, 27) In theatre, when we enter into a liminal state, it seems to free up the pre-conscious mind allowing us create a belief in the presence of these illusory images and performers that are appearing before us.

screen) would be privileged over and above the gravity bound human.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the reverse was true, if the actual onstage performer tried to show too much empathy with the animation by mirroring or responding to its versatility and transformative qualities, the direction of the story became too dominated by the human actor, whose response set the emotional tone of the piece and made the interaction too simplistic. The only recourse in the attempt to balance the presence of both performers was for the human actor to randomly respond, as one who has just met an unpredictable and uncomfortable stranger on a park bench. As an experimental project *Blue* illustrated that the lucid, abstract presence of the animated line accentuated the corporeal presence of the onstage performer, allowing her to do very little, in order to create a parity of presence between the two.

The formal presentation of the digital performer is essential to the way in which they are received. Whether the digital performer is presented on box or flat-screen television; back or front projected on screen; smaller or larger than life, all technical decisions impact on the reception of the performer. With our increasing observance of the world through a screen, it could be said that as educated spectators we make allowances for the cinematic body, with our understanding of how theatre and film works. Such a proposal counters Baudrillard's earlier, uncompromising view on the power of the image, when in 1987 he said that 'I do not believe in a dialectic between image and reality, nor therefore, in respect of images, in a pedagogy of message and meaning' (2008, 93). He was setting in place his rationale for defining the difference between the ways in which we perceive mediated images and claimed that the cold light of television should be placed in opposition to the mythical power of the luminous cinematic image that had infected reality 'For us there is an increasingly definitive lack of differentiation between image and reality which no longer leaves room for representation as such' (2008, 92). From the pragmatic viewpoint of the onstage performer, I understand this sentiment, for what can feel like a very genuine performance experience with a heightened sense of presence in

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<sup>31</sup> The screen for *Blue* was 12 x 8 feet and presented lengthwise in order to allow the animated performer to tower over the performer onstage. As a result of this technical requirement the project is presented on only two thirds of the screen, using composite editing to black out the remaining third.

the moment of interaction, can be easily undermined by the even more naturalistic and superior presence of the performer on-screen. The ironic *trompe l'oeil* effect of the mediatisation of everyday life that Jean Baudrillard links to the dangerous deception of the mediatised image (2008, 89) led to some interesting moments in the development of my portfolio of works. Nowhere was this more clearly illustrated than with *Almost*, where in spite of numerous attempts, we were unable to match the real steps of the house to those on-screen. The space-suit that was created for Mary O'Really in *Fly Me To The Moon* was a copy of the suit worn by cartoon Astro Mary. In an inversion of the normal process, the professional costume maker complained endlessly at the imposition, suggesting at one point that we should have started with the costume and drawn the cartoon character afterwards. The irritation of the costume-maker, is understandable from the point of view of someone who has entered the craft of theatre in order to create original, authentic objects.

I reflected at this stage that by placing more emphasis on creating strong empathy between the formally different characters, it might be possible to create a convincing and equitable stage presence, even when working with inhumanly possible performers. I also discovered that where one or more elements are missing or fail, then the work becomes subject to the same criticisms as any performance in which the script may have strong qualities but the performers are ill matched. I have found it necessary to explore how to guide the audience towards the liminal space of perception<sup>32</sup> (Duncan, 1995, 11), somewhere between the actual and the mediatised performance experience and I have attempted to achieve this end primarily through the narrative.

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<sup>32</sup> I apply the use of the term 'liminal' as interpreted by contemporary critic Carol Duncan who cites anthropologist Victor Turner's use of liminal as: a mode of consciousness 'betwixt and between' the normal 'day-to-day cultural and social states and processes' (or) 'the mode of receptivity we encounter when standing before works of art.' Turner's first rendering of the meaning, was drawn from communal experiences in non-western folk ritual, where a 'temporary suspension of the constraining of rules of normal social behaviour would take place' (Duncan 1990, 11). Duncan differs from Susan Broadhurst's interpretation of Turner's liminal as- a 'marginalised space which holds a possibility of potential forms'. Broadhurst is then quite specific about the kinds of forms that she associates with the notion of such a marginalised space in performance (1999, 12). Such narrowing of the definition seems rather at odds with Turner's all encompassing 'limin' with its 'storehouse of possibilities', 'fructile chaos' or 'fertile nothingness' which 'strives after' new forms (quoted in Duncan 1990, 11).

### 3. Experiments with Narrative

*The dramatist admires humanity and creates works that say, in essence: Under the worst of circumstances the human spirit is magnificent. Comedy points out that in the best of circumstances human beings find some way to screw it up.*

(Robert McKee 1999, 359)

Artificially replicating ourselves has been a desire for centuries<sup>33</sup> and the mechanics of storytelling have been the method of enchantment that has maintained such fanciful ideas throughout the ages. This evolutionary desire and universal model are both combined within the intermedial space of performance that engages with digital technology. The illusory space of theatre, has now embraced the transformative immediacy of digital formats and these have impacted stylistically and methodologically on the ways in which narratives can be formed and delivered. The immediacy of digital presentation and communication systems permit an uninterrupted engagement (physically and conceptually) with the digital image which has expanded the *mise-en-scène* of contemporary performance allowing it to be placed within a global context (Blast Theory

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<sup>33</sup> One of the first human automata recorded is in ancient Greek Myth, Homer's *The Iliad* Book 18. Hephaestus, God of all mechanical arts, created two female gold statues that walked with him (800 BC). The earliest records of 'actual' human automaton cite Jacques de Vaucanson (1709-1782) who created a flute playing automaton powered by air and watchmaker Pierre Jaquet-Droz (1721-1790) who built the *Writer*, the *Draughtsman* and the *Musician*, powered by a wind-up clockwork mechanism (<http://history-computer.com/Dreamers/Jaquet-Droz.html>) last accessed June 2013.

*Can You See Me Now?* 2003, Station House Opera, *Play on Earth* and the *Other is You*, 2006, Rimini Protokoll, *Call Cutta*, 2006, Second Front *Grand Theft Avatar*, 2008, The Builders Association *Connected Cities* 2011 – arguably each of these illustrates and develops this global expression).<sup>34</sup>

The greatest paradigm shifts have been brought about through the convergence of performance and computation. Although the historical development from passive spectator to active participant for the purposes of this study can be cited as having its roots in the removal of the fourth wall, since we entered the digital age the digital interface has afforded far greater interaction between performer and spectator. This has seen the widespread application of gaming methodology into performance, with the use of competitive elements, navigating through ‘other’ worlds, invitations to play through physical interaction, cause and effect decision-making, multiple choice selection processes and rewards for taking part, all becoming part of a twenty-first century contemporary performance vocabulary.<sup>35</sup> In my work I have attempted to fill what I feel is a gap in the construction of gamified performance narratives away from story-based structures.<sup>36</sup>

The narrative structure of *Mother Tongue* was defined by a combination of the script, which was inspired by autobiographical incidents and factual research into language, identity and phonetics. It was pragmatically designed around the need for the same person to play five different characters, and the technological method that enabled such a development was complex, dislocated and reminiscent of a large-scale media production process. It was a risky, experimental but successful ‘live’ performance, that set in place a

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<sup>34</sup> Matthew Causey supports my claim for the digital as having an immediacy that the analogue did not possess (2006, 32-34).

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Rancière describes theatre as one of the last places in which we find communion between people. (2009, 15) Jane McGonigal (2011) proposes that something like communion can also be found in online gaming, such as *World of Warcraft* on an exponential scale.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Lepage is of course the great storyteller of multimedia performance but within a gaming context an exception to my claim is Rimini Protokoll’s *Best Before* (2010) a ‘game of life’ for 250 audience / players which used the expertise of a games programmer, the ‘real’ life stories of a non-professional cast, and gaming mechanisms, to create a totally engaging event in which they successfully created a ‘community’ of participants. ([http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project\\_4397.html](http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project_4397.html)).

narrative framework for the subsequent performances that followed. I have worked with a conflation of theatre, film and television writing processes and reached a point where the performance devising methodology that I employ, is no longer one thing or the other, but the thing that is of itself. For Tadeusz Kantor this is the point when 'the idea shapes itself', (1993, 313) while Jacques Rancière describes the meeting of disparate forms well as the autonomous thing, between the 'idea of the artist and the sensation or comprehension of the spectator' (2009, 94) and with specific reference to intermedial performance Matthew Causey refers to the combined processes as nor only one or the other (2006, 45).

I have tried to create a sense of cohesion out of disparate forms, by committing to an exploration of the narrative as the mean thread that runs throughout this whole process. By doing this I have been able to construct a measurable methodological approach that has enabled me to qualitatively assess the ephemeral performance, within the framework of my research problem. By exploring the application of writing methods (particularly comedy) I have attempted to demonstrate ways in which real-time and spontaneous performance elements can create a symbiosis between the actual and virtual performer.

The speed of technological change that has come with the digital revolution has had an enormous impact on the way contemporary devised intermedial performance is conceived and executed. In my attempts to experiment with possible new approaches to narrative construction I began from the understanding that the 'narrative' is the totality of the process and physical structure of the work. I see this as distinct from Story and Dramatic Structure, which have their own specific form and are contained within the narrative (Parker 2006, 10). I have used storytelling as a recognised device to create the sense of another world (*Almost, Fly Me To The Moon* and *Nana's New Pet*) and I have employed a dramatic structural approach to the remaining works, where perhaps more emphasis has been placed on the conceptual relationship between the actual and artificial performer. Whereas story is reliant on a finite plot, and is a self-contained episodic journey within the framework of its own rationale, dramatic structure is the framework upon which the unfolding relationship between the performers has been built.



I have undertaken the research and development of each work as if undertaking a theatre production but have applied screenwriting techniques in order to control and contain the multifarious stages of production and ensure that the character's stories and not the mechanistic system of presentation would dominate the final outcome.<sup>37</sup> Both structural and story elements have been equally important throughout this research period and have required different but sometimes overlapping treatment in this hybrid activity. By using the application of narrative as my guiding structure, I have tapped into existing models and forms that are recognisable (Fiske 1987, 79) and which I feel have allowed me to create new modes from what would once have been described as a contamination of one artform with another (Giannachi and Kaye 2011, 152).

By consciously applying a screenwriting process to the construction of a theatrical work, I created a dramatic shift away from an existing performance-devising methodology. This had previously been a mostly collaborative activity, set within the physical space of the theatre workshop, with the physically present body as the material through which the ideas were developed. Instead, I moved to a solo activity, and developed the finished sense of the completed narrative before entering the performance space. My approach was influenced by the ability of the screenwriting system to create empathetic, dynamic characters set in affective story structures and which have the ability to create empathetic and emotional responses in the audience (for elaboration see Seger 1987, McKee 1999, Parker 2006).

By placing digital performers within a clear dramatic or story-based structure I thought it was 'perfectly possible to create a romance for a blue line in a white space, a piece of popcorn, any human being on the planet and any imaginative creature' that I chose to invent (Parker 2006, 18). In *Blue*, for example, I created a surreal dramatic encounter between a woman and an animated line drawing. The themes were confinement and

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<sup>37</sup> Philip Parker proposes that there is a specific formula to screenwriting and within his rule of thumb I have interpreted story as 'a motivational framework for narratives'. Drawing on structuralist approaches to narrative, he states that there are only ten story frameworks of which I have used 'The hero who can never be put down' (Parker 2008, 77).

solitude and the animated digital performer related to the onstage performer by observing, playing, posing, mimicking, attempting to escape the confinement of the screen and finally using its innate qualities as a mediated form, to disappear completely.

A range of themes has been explored including family values, class, envy, struggle, consumption, female body image, power and media control. For each of the projects I undertook extensive knowledge gathering. In the writing of *Fly Me To The Moon*, for example, I researched into the biological and psychological effects of living in a gravity-less environment (Holtzmann Kevles, 2006) and studied the major film and TV 'space story' scenarios from *Space Odyssey* (1968) to *Dark Star* (1974). For *Almost*, the research centred on factual documentaries, (Woolcock 1999) government reports,<sup>38</sup> real life stories (Guy Griffiths versus Salford Council)<sup>39</sup> and information gathered on the links between compulsory purchase, private property development and landownership (Cahill 2001). I researched dark fairy tale structures (Carter 1991) and set the performance within a situational comedy-drama (Neale and Krutnik 1990). For *Wednesday, Wednesday*, I looked at comedy double acts and ventriloquism (Connor 2000 and Thompson 2004 ), vaudeville and early cinema on stage (Ceram 1965, Barnouw 1981, Waltz, 2006) and the televisual talking head, associated with the straight-to-camera television presenter (Ellis 1992 and Auslander 1999). I have consciously explored a broad number of conventions and genres, and applied pre- and post-modern influences in the construction of the works (Lehmann 2006).

Each of these experimental stages has been guided by my desire to maintain a balance of presence between the actual and on-screen performer. I have investigated this aim primarily with the use of spoken dialogue between the actual and digital performer and this method has had degrees of success in creating a symbiotic connection between the onstage and on-screen performers. I have consciously tried to create good dialogue in

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<sup>38</sup> Revised Circular on compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) – consultation draft – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister <http://odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1147904>

<sup>39</sup> Guy Griffiths was evicted from the home he owned on September 5<sup>th</sup> 2005 to make way for Broughton Green private housing development in Upper Broughton (<http://www.salfordstar.com/article.asp?id=23>).

which 'the audience cannot predict precisely how the character will react in every situation' (Parker 2006, 116) by using existing models such as comedy writing structures and also in the more recent works, physical comedy (particularly slapstick), of a kind that permits repetition more effectively than the spoken gag. A particularly effective technique to overcome the obvious formal differences has been with the use of the naturalistic conversational dialogic exchange. The exquisite human traits of sophisticated non-verbal communication have been the most convincing elements in this artificial process. I write in interruptions, half-finished words, nods of agreement or concern and subtle facial gestures into the on-screen performance and I ensure that the digital performer will be able to make eye contact with the onstage performer when they 'perform' with them in the future.<sup>40</sup> The performance of the digital performer on-screen, needs to be performed with ease and precision with its illusion of human vulnerability and 'imperfection' in order to create the appearance of spontaneity when coming into contact with an 'other' imperfect human onstage.<sup>41</sup>

When consideration is given to the need to create an equitable performance presence between the onstage and the digital performer, this impacts on the aesthetic, scenographic and narrative considerations at 'all' stages of the devising process. The digital performer who is an Other kind of performer cannot rely purely on the seemingly magical power of the double as an invitation into the imaginary space where impossible performers live. The requirements are the same as for the production of any good theatre show; the characters have to appear to be authentic. In the case of Doris in *Almost*, Astro Mary, or the Chimera in *Blue*, the rationale had to be clear for the audience to understand why these performers were performing instead of real actors. By designing performers who could not be replaced by humans, I pre-empted this question and maintain that the only reason to involve a digital performer, is if the idea cannot be more successfully achieved by actual actors.

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<sup>40</sup>Which also echoes results undertaken by Cassells et al (1999, 1-27) in the 'Conversational Agents' project that took place at MIT.

<sup>41</sup>A master of the digital double fast paced comedy technique is the stand up comedian Evan O'Television. See <http://www.youtube.com/user/EvanOTV>.

Comedy dialogue has been a particularly useful vehicle through which to maintain a psychological connection between the two kinds of performer. With its structure of set up, development and punch line, comedy writing creates and anticipation in the audience, it offers, timing, pace and rhythm (Parker 1998, 134). (Some of these benefits are also of course acquired through a musical sound track, which I have also utilised). Comedy form offers a recognizable system and creates expectancy in the audience, which assists in overcoming the formal differences between the actual and the screen-based actor. Using comedy dialogue, neither performer can take precedence over the other and while the audience's eye may well be lured by the brightness of the screen image, the need to discover the full narrative, and get to the punch line, always keeps the two performers in a symbiotic relationship which the audience could perhaps believe will continue after the end of the performance. The speedy spoken dialogue can also act as a device to distract the audience from asking the disruptive question of 'How do they do that?'

Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik propose that comedy is hard to define as a single genre, but that it 'has the capacity to enter and subvert any genre' (Neale and Krutnik 1990, 101-102) which lends it well to the application of a hybrid performance form. Much of my work has engaged with comedic conflict-driven structures. These appear in the double act with the straight guy to funny guy relationship (*Wednesday, Wednesday* and *Nana's New Pet*), the sitcom, where there are irresolvable issues between family members (*Almost*) and slapstick; a visual comedy where laughter is induced by a person being safely hurt (*Swimmers* and *Fly Me To The Moon*). The comedy conflict structure that I have employed, denies the character what it most desires. In *Almost* the protagonist, nine-inch high *Doris*, needs to keep her house but she cannot have it. In *Swimmers* the onstage performer cannot possibly be a match for her malevolent perfect double on-screen but keeps performing in spite of this fact. In *Wednesday, Wednesday* the immortal televisual double longs for an escape into the corporeal world and freedom from the confines of her transcendent but sterile existence.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Sean Cubitt describes his concern about the 'culture of hygiene' that exists in the clean machine (1991,179). Katherine Hayles describes the bid for immortality as the thesis of unmournable death (1987, 80).

On paper, *Fly Me To The Moon* worked, it was funny, it used conflict, set-up, pay off techniques, but the exuberant weightless, four fingered funny *Astro Mary*, completely upstaged the gravity bound, depressed and ailing human on board a pretend spaceship. The primary lesson I took from this project was that the comedy does not have to be complicated. At the National Media Museum, the long standing multimedia theatre company Forkbeard Fantasy, have created a work to demonstrate the history of cinema and cinema-onstage. The most effective parts of the performance (performed not by the company but by a member of the museum staff) are the simple ‘magical’ exchanges between the actual and the on-screen digital double. An arm disappears behind a screen to be ‘replaced’ by a digital one that grows to a ridiculous length through the simultaneous action on and off screen of pushing and pulling. This simple trick is nothing more complex than the technology of a hall of mirrors, but it is the absurd transformation of the body through the technology that appeals to the universal imagination of the audience, allowing us to forget the overt presence of the highly technologised *mise-en-scène* through a simple moment of slapstick humour (Oliver 2012, 190-191). Philip Parker is correct with his warning that ‘No amount of funny dialogue, fast action, clever plotting or special effects will make a character believable if the emotional truth of the character is not revealed and developed’ (2008, 84). In the case of *Fly Me To The Moon* the formal differences were too great between the human and the animation and the natural spontaneous dialogue that I had managed to embed in earlier on-screen performances became lost in the over complex interface and qualitative differences, not only between the two performers, but particularly in the use of the audio. I made the wrong decision with regards to the voice of *Astro Mary* and put an extra layer of mediatisation on the voice, giving the impression that she was outside the ‘space ship’. The level of pretence without a strong rationale (good enough story) was disruptive and could only be overlooked by the younger members of the audience.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Musion with their invention of the Musion Eyeliner have managed to overcome the formal differences between human and animation with their twenty-first century *Pepper’s Ghost* which places both performers in the same spatial frame.

The narrative forms I have employed have touched upon taboo areas for the cultured artist. I have deliberately combined televisual comedy narratives, music hall, stand-up comedy and slapstick with hi-tech, satirical and critical contextual commentary. Esther Leslie aptly summarises the problematic of an eclectic hybridization of forms in this respect, through what she describes as ‘a phoney war between high culture and popular or low or mass culture’ (2008, 296) and my work may well be regarded as ‘the bastard offspring’ of mass culture’s ‘unnatural intercourse with High Culture.’<sup>44</sup>

An uncanny reaction to seeing a virtual performer is problematic when trying to create a realistic dialogue between these two different kinds of performer (Dixon, 2007, 242). When I witness the playful fast-moving interaction between digital and actual performer, I do not feel disturbance but surprise and wonder.<sup>45</sup> To therefore overcome the potential pitfalls of the unheimlich performer, the writer and deviser of intermedial dialogue has to maintain a fine balance of sameness and difference in the creation of their digital characters, in order for the audience to be able to suspend their disbelief and freely choose to enter into the illusory space, where both performers exist. When the story or dramatic structure fails to achieve this desire (for whatever reason) it appears that the audience are not able to ignore the history of the media (Cubitt 1991, 37). It is for this reason that I have approached the dramatic element of each work as a critical aspect of the devising process and I would maintain, a key to creating the desired equity between the stage and the screened performance elements. If one is to sustain the equilibrium between the real and the virtual performer, then it is essential to establish a rationale by which both can exist independently, but not to the exclusion of the other and the communication systems of: conversation, altercation and comedy dialogue have all been systems that have been employed successfully for this purpose.

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<sup>44</sup>Esther Leslie is referring to Dwight McDonald’s 1960 article ‘*Masscult and Midcult*’ which describes ‘a bastard offspring of masscult’s unnatural intercourse with High Culture’ (Leslie 2008, 296).

<sup>45</sup> Giannachi and Kaye propose that Tony Oursler’s work *Underwater (Blue/Green)* is as an attempt to act out an impossible step from the virtual to the real and uses Freud’s description of an uncanny effect as that which often arises when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolises (Freud 2003 p150).

Having succeeded in using the comedic text as a device with which to disguise the fact that there is really only one real performer onstage,<sup>46</sup> the stage illusion prompted me to ask whether the term 'interacting' with the digital double is appropriate, and to consider whether instead I should be using Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt's preferred term 'inter-medial' exchange (2006, 12) or Steve Dixon's suggestion that much of our engagement with the technical interface be called 'symbolic' or 're-active'(2007, 361). Such concerns over terminology belie the actual experience of it 'feeling like' a true interaction when performing with the digital performer and a good story can disguise the artificial nature of these relationships. Artist Tony Oursler also acknowledges the audience's ability to see beyond the artificial combination of separate worlds. In *Ooze*, he combines elements of abstract painting, with the intimacy of the 'close-up' eye of the camera and the animation of the abject body. With *Ooze* he has created a world that is both 'liminal and transformative' (Giannachi and Kaye 2011, 152) and he describes it as 'an attempt to reconcile two worlds that can't coexist'. While Giannachi and Kaye describe this attempt at the production of a hybrid artefact somewhat negatively as a 'trespass' into real space, I would describe this as a transcendent experience for the viewer. Our ability to receive these disparate narrative elements and combine them into one singular 'living' form can be linked to the human propensity to anthropomorphise the object that has perceivable human attributes. This ability to imagine a life where there is none, is both part of our human ability to empathise and is an essential element in the process of creating a suspension of disbelief in order to enjoy any performative experience, where the story that 'everyone desires' is unfolded and revealed in these unnatural meetings of the corporeal and the technological.

The relatively successful application of a linear narrative structure used in the first six works in the portfolio, affirmed my belief that equity of presence between the onstage and on-screen performer could be achieved using a dialogue-based structure. I was however becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of spontaneity at the actual point of performance. I began to explore more ways to expand the use of linear narrative towards

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<sup>46</sup> I refer to Robert Altman's description of the film-maker as impostor and conjurer (cited in Barnouw 1981, 112).

a multi-linear approach, in an effort to further expand the quality of interface with the digital performer. With the development of the final four works in this collection I set more challenges for myself and the audience. I returned to the thrill of the performance that 'had risk and variability' (Saltz 2001, 109) and finally towards a direct physical relationship with the audience.



#### **4. Actor Slave and the Diabolical Digital Double**

*It is precisely when it appears most truthful, most faithful and most in conformity to reality that the image is most diabolical-and our technical images, whether they be from photography, cinema or television, are in the overwhelming majority much more 'figurative', 'realist', than all the images from past cultures. It is in its resemblance, not only analogical but technological, that the image is most immoral and most perverse.*

Jean Baudrillard (2008, 84)

Just like watching the highly skilled physical performer who delivers their complex routine with ease, an audience member may perceive the interactions with the pre-recorded on-screen performer as a free flowing exchange, but for the onstage actor, this is far from natural or comfortable communication. As a symbolic interaction, the live actor must weave into the gaps left for them by their inflexible double. There is a certain agony in this kind of process, when one is constantly falling in and out of time. While there are occasions when the performance progresses with such ease it can 'feel like' a genuine exchange is taking place, by and large, the digital performer is always in the position of master and the onstage performer a slave to their power of authority. David Saltz warned of the disruptive impact of 'linear' video in live performance when he wrote that:

The medium forces the live actor to conform rigorously to it. Such a performance combines the worst of both theatre and media: it lends the live performance a canned quality without endowing it with any of film or video's advantages, such as the ability to select the best takes, edit out the mistakes, or apply camera movements or jump cuts to the live actor's performance (2001, 109).

In spite of cultural shifts that see an increasing use of digital presentation systems in performance the dialectic of the actual and digital performer continues to cause disruption. If we accept that the digital performer functions as a simulacrum of the live performer, the digital character has more authority than the real image and by association, the mediatised presence has more cultural value than the actually present actor. This imbalance creates a curious cultural phenomenon, where the onstage performer becomes Other and in the case of my own work, as a female performer, 'she' has an additional otherness to contend with. In this respect Jean Baudrillard's suggestion of the malefice of the (media) double that bewitches and beguiles the audience away from the (already) abject performer onstage, brings with it another set of connotations with regard to the dominance of the mediatised performer (1998, 84). Further complications can be added if we bring Walter Benjamin into the discussion and ask who is the authentic performer. Is the on-stage performer the object prised from its shell whose aura is destroyed by the presence through reproduction? (Benjamin 1983 [1936], 146) If we assume that we are all already mediatised then it is the digital performer who is the original and the performer onstage a lesser reproduction, a perfect example of mediatization's displacement of the live. Hans-Thies Lehmann acknowledges this convolution of reality in what he states are increasingly labyrinthine discussions on representation in contemporary performance. (Lehmann 2006, 169).<sup>47</sup> It would appear that I may have attempted to create an unachievable equity of presence between two

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<sup>47</sup> Lehmann is talking in relation to Helena Waldmann's *Vodka konkav*, who used a combination of mirrors to deceive the audience into thinking there are hundreds of performers on stage, when in fact there are only two and they are identical twins.

extreme opposites: the corporeally present abjectified ageing female body and the perfect diabolical digital performer.<sup>48</sup>

If there is an uneven match, it would seem to accentuate the differences between the two performers, however, by focussing on the dialogic process, I appear to have found the possibility of a balance by actively employing the inherent conflict between the two types of performer. Conflict is essential to move a story forward and also creates the possibility of a resolution (McKee 2000, 210). In *Wednesday, Wednesday*, the mediatised performer tricks her abject other, into the nothingness and nowhere space of the television (Causey 2006, 96) and escapes herself into to the real world in order to consume reality. As the performer on-screen, she exists in a sterile space that has endless possibilities for reproduction, but no ability to give birth. By entering the real world (as Mum also does in *Mother Tongue*) the mediatised performer becomes fertile but submits to the desire for an end – for inevitable death.

The digital performer, whose presence is delivered through the machine is a somewhat complex entity. Jean Baudrillard's notion of 'functional' transcendence, assists in understanding the problems that lie in trying to create a convincing relationship between the actual performer and one who is presented via a machine. Automatism, he proposes, embodies the 'risk of technical advance', whereas something that is automatic, has a 'functional self-sufficiency' which relegates the user to the role of inert spectator of the unalterable object. As an automatic performer, the digital character performs independently and this ultimately enslaves the stage performer who must conform to the will of the absolute automaton through its mechanistic triumphalism (Baudrillard 1996, 118). Viewed as an automaton the digital performer embodies not just technical advance but human principles. Rather than succumb to Baudrillard's nihilistic view and its suggestion of the inevitable obsolescence of the body taken up by post-human theorists (Broadhurst 2007, 86) I have preferred to feature the living (if slowly deteriorating) body

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<sup>48</sup> I am using the term abjection to mean the body that is outside the 'domain of the subject', (Butler 1993, 3) relegated to the outskirts and which Jennifer Parker-Starbuck suggests is in a process of 'working through' (2011, 52-53). I prefer to view female abjection as a mutable and unstable concept.

as an essential core element in the work, approached through the appearance of her presence combined thematically with stories about consumption, sex, home and the actual, rather than ideal body.

In spite of the general acceptance that theatre now includes mediatised elements from the perspective of the performance maker by attempting to conflate film and theatre writing techniques, both forms have been compromised in order to bring about a balanced unison. Over the years I have employed the (unfashionable) 'present' actor on-screen, seen from the single perspective view, in order to maintain a continuity of perceived presence. The compromise for the onstage actor has been the subjugation of their freedom to deliver their performance as 'part' of an exchange with the ensemble performer, to the 'appearance' of one. Physically, I have maintained a close relationship between the two kinds of performer, in order to create a sense of communion between them. This in turn has impacted on the limited view points for the audience (particularly with *Almost* and *Nana's New Pet*) but I have imposed these physical constraints in order to counteract the tennis-match watching experience that often happens in performances that are presented simultaneously on stage and screen. My works have been presented simply, in order to privilege the spoken or visual narrative over and above the trappings of digital splendour.<sup>49</sup>

Matthew Causey suggests that the digital body should be placed within the ontology of technology (2006, 39) claiming that it is technology that extends, challenges and reconfigures the body.<sup>50</sup> In her article 'The Performer and the Machine: Some Aspects of Laurie Anderson's Stage Work', Silvija Jestrovic also suggests that the body is altered by its association with technology and that in the case of Laurie Anderson the artist creates

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<sup>49</sup> Recently artists such as Laurie Anderson, have also abandoned the digital spectacle in favour of story centred performances, see for example her *The End of the Moon* ([http://www.laurieanderson.com/public/mov/eotm\\_video.html](http://www.laurieanderson.com/public/mov/eotm_video.html) Anderson 2011).

<sup>50</sup> The mediatisation of the voice, has been an essential technique in bringing the two performers into the same space, but the onstage performer is forced to wear the mantle of media space in order to match the dominant media image. If presented as an acoustic presence she must assume the role with less impact and draw attention to the physical differences between the two performers.

theatre 'where technology becomes an organic extension of voice, body, and space' giving the body its agency (Jestrovic 2000, 0.1/0.2). I propose that when the technologised performing body becomes inculcated into the technological, the body loses its agency; this is clearly illustrated when the performer on-screen is presented in cinematic form. If the emphasis is on the artificial dialogue between the 'live' linear present and the 'cinematic' absent and fractured body (often to be seen in the work of the Wooster Group and *Imitating the Dog*), the dislocation has the effect of pushing and pulling the audience's attention in between the luminous screen, which lures the magpie eye of the spectator and the dull (in comparison) performer onstage. This leads to diabolical consequences for the onstage performer who fades into insignificance, with no hope of creating empathy with the audience. This negative impact is somewhat countered by using the technical reveal, examples of which can be seen in Katie Mitchell's *...some trace of her* (2008) and Toneelgroep's *Antonioni* (2011) where live cameras are used to emphasise intimate moments of the actor's performance, and the cinematic close-up is used to deepen the dramatic effect, creating more intimacy between the audience and the actors by visually revealing the intensity of their emotional journey. I propose that the on-screen performer whose performance is driven by the trigger of technology, becomes more embedded in that technology, more cyborg and less connected to the actual performer in that moment, therefore less present and in consequence less human. This cyborgian effect can be seen in the work of Merce Cunningham who used sensing technologies on the body aligned with a choreography in which the performers have been described as machine-like. On the subject of Merce Cunningham's *'Crowds'* Dee Reynolds writes, "The impact of electronic technologies on the self-images of embodied human agents has produced both anxiety and fascination concerning the instability of the boundaries of the 'human'" (Reynolds 2000, 0.1/0.2).

In spite of my desire to maintain the emphasis on the corporeal (sense of) presence of both my performers in my works, it was the frustration with this unrequited relationship that led me to attempt to create more responsive performers. Deciding to embrace the association with gaming, my desire for greater spontaneity led me towards experiments with sensor-based technologies and the last four works in my portfolio. The *Screaming*

*Head*<sup>51</sup> (2009) began as a work in progress (*Unfinished Business*) at the Solo Performer's Forum (2008).<sup>52</sup> Frustrated by the static nature of the performance design and with my digital double's inability to respond in real time, I recorded my head upside down and played it back on a television that I suspended from the lighting rig. The script was improvised, and although onstage I still spoke into the gaps, I was able to push, pull and swing the television monitor, appearing to punish myself. This idea was progressed at the Liminal Screen Residency where, with the aid of an experienced computer programmer, I introduced Max MSP programming, with multiple selection paths triggered by a Nintendo Wii controller. The inclusion of random programming devices into the development and mechanisms of display successfully expanded my working methods by creating more spontaneity at the point of interaction with the digital double. The introduction of less in appearance, 'live' elements into the performance presentation; towards a more clearly pre-recorded non-linear presentation allowed the development of a responsive, motion reactive, object-based performer who interfaced directly with the audience. The resulting spontaneous 'abusive' performer was programmed to respond from a bank of pre-recorded phrases, which were catalogued in groups and assigned qualities dependent on the degree of motion and the aggression provided by the inter-actor. The script-writing process determined the quality of the responses; phrases were selected and assigned with increasing abusiveness to the different motion modalities that were programmed into a laptop computer, using Max MSP as the platform.<sup>53</sup> Secondary to this, and less successful, was the mobility of the object which ideally needed to be wireless. This could not be achieved at this point in the experimental process, but this work did influence the development of future interactive touch-screen art works.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> I was selected to be artist in residence at the Banff New Media Institute, Canada, in 2009, as part of the competitive peer selected international residency 'Liminal Screen'; a co-production residency between the selected artist and BNMI. The purpose of the programme was to examine ways to bring the screen into a closer relationship with reality.

<sup>52</sup> Curated by Misri Dey the Solo Performance Forum ran from 2004-2008 at Dartington College.

<sup>53</sup> Max MSP is a visualizing programme, using series of patches (groups of which are in effect a versatile authoring system. I employed (mostly) pre-assigned patches that were programmed to talk to each other. There is a facility within Max MSP patch systems that can be assigned to random programming. Such a patchwork was used to drive *Swimmers*.

<sup>54</sup> Created as an off shoot work from the *Screaming Head*, I have exhibited a programmed, multiple choice image, motion responsive television monitor in two exhibitions. *Offit*, Hub M3 Gallery, Salford, 2010 (July-August) and *At Play 2*, South Hill Park Art Gallery, 2011 (April-July).

During this same period I was exploring other possible multiple choice constructions and returned to working with the digital double for *Swimmers* (2009) which was an experiment with a chance based narrative, that aimed to free the onstage performer from the over-reliance on a linear narrative dialogue. In similar fashion to *Blue* I chose to test the connection between the onstage and on-screen performer with a movement-based score, rather than spoken dialogue, primarily in order to allow for more possibility of creating continuity between interrupted scenes than would be afforded with interrupted spoken dialogue. With the aid of the computer programmer, I employed a multiple choice selection process, again designed to run using a Max MSP patch system and physically tested the possibility of an audience selection process using the Nintendo Wii controller. However, in the test performance, the audience was reluctant to be in control of the performance and the time they took to decide on the next scene interrupted the flow and comic timing of the performance.<sup>55</sup> I made the decision to use the computer as the random selection device, freeing the audience from their required physical interaction (and responsibility) and the result was a performance in which the onstage performer has no idea which scene will come next, thus, it achieved a certain level of spontaneity. I was however totally unsuccessful at freeing the onstage performer from the diabolical presence of the digital double, choosing instead to present the screen-based performance as an ironic commentary on media control. The effect is a performance that both acknowledges developments in inter-modal performance and highlights the pathos and humour that can be found in our futile attempts, as stage-bound performers, to match cinematic perfection. In *Swimmers*, the overbearing 'automatic' performer can continue to out-perform her pathetic Other at infinitum. The only benefit for the stage-based performer is audience empathy and pathos, as she struggles to keep up with, what is perceived to be an increasingly malevolent performer on-screen. In the *Screaming Head*

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<sup>55</sup> The reluctance of the test audience to take on the role of active participant suggests that the shift to the emancipated spectator that Jacques Rancière speaks of, needs the introduction of new codes of behaviour 'There is the distance between artist and spectator, but there is also the distance inherent in the performance itself, in so far as it subsists, as a spectacle, and autonomous thing, between the idea of the artist and the sensation or comprehension of the spectator' (2009, 14).

the multiple-choice motion triggered system was activated by the (now) interactive spectator, which impacted significantly on my ideas, leading me away from the traditional theatrical separation of audience and performer, towards closer physical proximity in the presentation of the work.

Influenced by *The Screaming Head* and returning briefly to a linear format, *Nana's New Pet* (2010) was a digital double performance, commissioned by the Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays for its family festival. I performed as both the actual performer and as the 'pet', applying comedy writing techniques, and employed mobile technology to deliver the performance. Methodologically it developed the use of technology that was discretely hidden, in the same vein as *Almost*. The wireless TV monitor was disguised in a bespoke pet carrier, allowing me as the performer to roam freely. I used black-comedy story-telling techniques and performed to small groups of children from two years to eight years old. The work continued my search for a successful methodological approach that would achieve both a suspension of disbelief and parity of performer presence through the quality of the story, performance and technological interface. I achieved a measure of success in this case. Certainly the children were suitably frightened by the idea that the 'thing' inside the basket was real and dangerous; every time 'it' moved towards them, they swiftly retreated in one communal action. As a storyteller I had a good idea that a digital 'monster' would engage children, for all intents and purposes, my monstrous severed head, functioned as a grotesque animation; not a real person, nor a real monster. I presented the experience of something dark and fearful, which could not really come out to eat the audience, but suggested the potential of it; an age-old storytelling device, delivered with the aid of digital technology.

Having become accustomed to talking to artificial performers and enjoying this immersive artificial relationship, I had become increasingly aware of the possible applications for interacting with other kinds of performers in different settings. Already aware of Auslander's proposal for Talking Bots, (Auslander 2008, 70) the Eliza Bot, (Weizenbaum 1966) the Entertainment Technology Centre's Synthetic Interviews Project (Stevens and Marinelli 1999) and the Gesture and Narrative Language Group at MIT in the late 1990s:



REA project (Cassell et al 1999) I became curious as to why such research had not resulted in more characterful computer interfaces that can be self-programmed to give the user the kind of experience of the interface that they would like. Knowing that the capability exists to respond with more precision and less generic 'beeps', my curiosity led me to the *Talk To Me* perceptive media research project (2011). I am applying the experience of developing artificial interactions between live and screen-based performers, to create a computer based performance that will respond to the mood of the inter-actor (audience). Just as recognition has been key to the success of my symbolic interactions, so this is the case in human-computer-interface design that employs conversational agents. Developments in interactive gaming, notably the Nintendo Wii, Mii and Kinect, are allowing the player to receive direct responses from the computer programme in a seemingly two-way dialogue, but this interaction is still offered using limited user-data and narrow gender interpretations of the potential user (Lee 2010, 191-214). Where the inter-actor is permitted to interpret and 'own' the interface we see a much more wide-ranging and often perverse set of choices. In Second Life, for example, avatars are employed to re-gender and re-present the self in a myriad of ways unachievable in first life, but communication with the digital performer in Second Life is still a relatively unrequited relationship. In the *Talk to Me* project I have begun to explore the possible use of technologies designed primarily for research in bio-science. This next wave of innovative digital products are in their infancy in the generic computer-user interface, and nano-technology combined with wireless communication systems has led to the development of mobile, intelligent, pervasive media forms of bio-sensor that can be programmed relatively easily to provide data responses in any form that can be digitally programmed (Oliver 2011,148-150).

My first experiments with bio-sensors in performance began with the use of a galvanic skin reader. This was a one-to-one performance where I used a secreted GSR to give me information about how the participant was feeling. This information was gathered by holding their hand. As I undertook this action I simultaneously touched the GSR which triggered a sonic response. As the participant's mood changed this altered the pitch of

output.<sup>56</sup> I then responded to the information that the participant revealed by simply choosing to take part.

At this stage of the process I am considering the possibility that I am playing the role of what will be the digital performer, and by assuming this role I have illuminated a number of ideas and directions that this research could take in the development of a new communication system that allows the computer to interface directly and spontaneously with the user by talking directly to them in response to their current mood.<sup>57</sup> I am developing scripts that are heavily influenced by cold reading techniques<sup>58</sup> and consulting with a magician and media psychologist on the construction of the digital performer. Once again in trying to look forward, I have found inspiration from old theatrical practices, in this case magic and mediumship. It is in this meeting of the future-past and present-absent body that I am currently working and it seems a fitting place to reflect on a decade of experiments with the digital performer who now, it appears may well be consumed by the machine after all. If I follow this path and remove the body altogether we arrive at the possibility of a new performance paradigm: a media of disembodied performance in a different location: cyberspace. Although I acknowledge these futuristic developments as influential I see such ideas as a distraction not just from the real concerns within my practice, but from maintaining a sense of humanity in this digital era. As an ageing woman, such concepts come hard for me to fully embrace within

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<sup>56</sup> More information about the *Talk To Me* project is included in the portfolio that accompanies the hard copy of this submission (p 217).

<sup>57</sup> There are precedents for the role of artist performing as machine, in particular one described by Sherry Turkle, where artist Pia Lindman worked at the MIT CSAIL Humanoid Robotics Lab with robotics expert Aaron Edsinger and his robot Domo, trying to become the robot in order to 'know their mind'. The project took an interesting turn when in enacting Domo and Edsinger's relationship there were mixed interpretations, 'within minutes, I saw two humans. And then, figure turned to ground, and I saw two machines, two very fond machines. Or was it two machines that were perhaps too fond? I was with a colleague who saw it the other way, first two machines and then two humans. Either way, Lindman had made her point: the boundaries between people and things are shifting (2012, 122).

<sup>58</sup> Cold reading is the practice of suggestion, used most often by magicians to give the illusion that they can read people's minds, can tell fortunes or have contact with the dead. The phrases used often use sentences which could apply to any individual but within the context of the narrative created by the magician susceptible audience members believe that the magician has a magical knowledge of them. Sometimes the use of Cold Reading is combined with prior knowledge of the audience member gathered before the performance.

the work, I am very much tied to my body as a physical performer. My identity as a woman is important in the work that I make, and as this has changed, rather than succumb to the security of an alto-ego or hide behind the artificially constructed avatar, I have chosen to remain within the work and I have tried to use humour; the irruptive power of Rabelaisian laughter to liberate both the human actor and the virtual character from their (earthbound) cultural referents.<sup>59</sup> Apart from a dangerous moment of vanity when making my cartoon self in *Fly Me To The Moon*, I have not desired an escape into hyperreality or cyberspace. These environments are still in their infancy, they do not contain the finesse nor the control of the material that I have as a performer / maker, even when compared to the decreasing amount of agency that I have in the real world. I have yet to complete this particular research project, and have entered this latest conflict between the actual and digital performer with a desire to use the accumulation of knowledge gathered over the last decade to create a more human – human to machine relationship. I have been trying to maintain the understanding of performance as something that takes place within a neutral hybrid space where the imaginary communication with virtual ‘others’ can exist and where the ‘power of performance can maintain its unique effectiveness’ (Causey 2006, 34). If I achieve this desired end I can foresee the possibility of the formation of a new performance paradigm but one that is as yet impossible to describe.

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<sup>59</sup> I refer to the need to have the possibility for more feminine attributes in the human-digital interface in ‘Talk to Me’ (p 217).

## **Summary**

My aim through this body of work has been to locate a practice-based methodology for creating a parity of presence between the actual and digital performer. In undertaking this research I have developed a range of new working methods that will benefit the creative performance practitioner and I have also highlighted a number of issues that invite different approaches to thinking about the critical and cultural roles of intermedial performance, specifically with regard to the subjects of liveness and performer presence. Although this journey did not begin with a single research problem it has become a more than a decade long experimental journey that has systematically reflected on the same issue and sought numerous ways in which find a solution to this problem.

Beginning at a point in critical history where the oppositional views of Philip Auslander and Peggy Phelan dominated performance discourse, it was not my intention to prove or disprove either theory but simply to find a way in which to create a performance that utilised digital technology to bring about a symbiotic relationship between on-stage and onscreen performers. Having realised Auslander's theories without attempting to illustrate them, it was clear to me that I was only at the start of a journey through which I wished to gain more control of this medium. Achieving this goal meant primarily experimenting with the craft of scriptwriting on a range of dialogue-based experiments with different kinds of performers.

Informed by the positive experience of *Mother Tongue*, it has always been my belief that it was the story-based structure and conversational style of presentation that overcame the artificial structure of the work. By pursuing such an idea I have undertaken performance research that has been at odds with zeitgeist trends of emancipation from the discrete separate roles of performer and audience.<sup>60</sup>I have deliberately resisted such urges in order to test the idea within a format that I knew had qualities that I wanted to explore and exploit. This forced a path that has not always been comfortable but I have had to walk it in order to fulfil the needs of the research problem as I saw it.

By asserting liveness and presence within the works, I have attempted to rid the digital performer of the mantle of mediatisation. In trying to shift the perception of the digital performer from the machine to the stage, I have placed my idea directly in opposition to the hegemonic belief that we are all already mediatised. Although this may unquestionably be the case, it does not mean as artists that we cannot imagine living otherwise and to express these imaginings in our work. I for one am deeply concerned for the next generations for whom mediated communication is normal human behaviour. I have taken inspiration and umbrage in equal measure at ideas that suggest that as humans we should be limited by the systems that we have created. I have therefore risked my modesty and aesthetic sensibilities in order to follow the idea rather than the acknowledged discourse.

I have tried to combat cinematic perfection by being deliberately transgressive, attempting to overcome David Saltz's foreboding fears that the live performer who does not possess the ability to select the best takes, edit out the mistakes, or apply camera movements or jump cuts to the live actor's performance is limited to a canned quality. I tried to tackle this real issue through the writing, by giving the digital (televisual) performer the same human imperfections as the performer on-stage. In the first work in the collection *Mother Tongue* I did not consciously apply these attributes but by *Unfinished*

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<sup>60</sup> Jacques Rancière suggests that 'Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting' (2009,13) and that 'Even if the playwright or director does not know what she wants the spectator to do, she at least knows one thing: she knows that she must do one thing-overcome the gulf separating activity from passivity' (2009, 12).

*Business* I felt that I had mastered the craft of the half finished, interrupted form of casual conversation. It is ironic that this particular work was made largely out of frustration at the artificial nature of such exchanges, that I felt I had taken as far as it was possible to go using my current methodology.

It has only been through the writing process that I have had control of this ability to humanise the digital performer, but trying to achieve a balance between the actual and the mediated performer, has impacted on all aspects of the making process. I have had most success with the achieving a desired outcome I feel when working in collaboration with the expanded team of experts from an early stage in the process and the need to work collaboratively was particularly important when working with the construction of the animated performer.

Technologically this period of research has been highly experimental. The presentation methods that I have used have drawn inspiration from historical sources developed at the birth of moving image technology, combined with new, sometimes untested digital technologies. This imbrication has not always been successful but where it has (*Mother Tongue, Almost*) it has created the potential for new applications of the digital in performance. Aesthetically and thematically I have walked a difficult line in trying to merge high and low artforms, and I feel that often my attempt at irony has not been successful. There is potential in all the performances that I have created and as practice as research they have illustrated my aims well, but as performance products, each of them failed to completely satisfy for different reasons.

Thematically I have touched on a number of subject areas that I feel can be summed up by two particular themes: emancipation and enslavement. I have sought refuge in pre-cultural (pre-gendered) imagery of the body in all its corporeal pleasure and disgrace in order to escape the restricting cultural referents that I am bound by. I have sought inspiration from the carnivalesque body, celebrated it in all its manifestations, while also being aware that emancipation can perhaps only be achieved through the digital body

within a cyborgian subjectivity (Parker-Starbuck 2011, 54). I have not lost sight of this utopian ideal.

As part of the continued discussions on the mutable ontological provenance of the digital performer, I have attempted to place these artificial performers within the ontology of the stage performer. Here again I have set myself at odds with theorists who maintain that new performance paradigms will be found within mediatisation. Matthew Causey proposes that 'What the mediated technologies afford performance theory is the opportunity to think against the grain of traditional performance ontology' (2006, 51). If we step away from the fundamental relationship between performer and spectator, however then we enter into the ontology of technology (Causey 2006, 39) this then denies the opportunity to imbricate the ontology of performance into the technical interface. I have primarily focused on the one-to-one relationship between actual and digital performer in trying to find a method of working that is fundamentally about the performance experience and it is here that I agree with Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, that live performance, needs live performers (2011, 9).

Within the context of the live performance, it seems ironic that I have found confluences with research into the construction of conversational human-machine interfaces. I have been reluctant to embrace the language of computation within the narratives explored in the work, choosing to maintain the vulnerable, imperfect human being as the central protagonist. However, with the development of perceptive media resources and the possibility to work towards embodiment, working with the human-computer interface seems to be a logical next-step for the script-writer interested in creating effective artificial relationships. It is through exploring aspects of cognition studies I have discovered that there is every possibility that the intention of the performer to be live, transcends the artificial divide between the performer in the past and the future present and that it is the human ability to empathise with other humans at a deep intuitive level that allows us to recognise the performer's sense of presence at the point of performing to camera. I have discovered that when the animated performer (who has no consciousness)

is the performance subject, another set of cognitive activities take place and it is through the presence of the actual performer onstage that we judge the quality of their presence.

Just as the good story-teller can transport the listener to a liminal plain of experience, so the performer, whether on or off screen, has the ability to transcend the physical and psychological gap of pretence. This is still true when a live performer appears alongside their recorded double. Logically we know they cannot both exist, but transformed by the use of story, dialogue (particularly comedy) and a developing plot line - they simply do. Through this body of research I have proposed that the “liveness” of a performer does not depend on their actual physical proximity to the spectator but rather the ability to communicate their presence.

Ultimately even in the most successful interaction there is inevitable failure because the digital characters never age. As actual living performers, with every breath we are moving forwards in time away from our memento mori onscreen; something both the dead and the digitised will never experience. What this work highlighted is that it is the quality of the interrelationship between the performer and their audience that is the primary concern, whether the performer, performed 2 seconds or fifty years ago. If the work, performed in the present, engages with its audience, they do not stop to question whether they are actually experiencing something ‘live’, they simply are. The liminal performance experience transcends time and space allowing different kinds of performers, performing in different locations, to meet in this imaginary space of magical verisimilitude.

I have acknowledged influences in the work from both contemporary and historical sources and by working across a number of forms and genre I have both struggled to reconcile differences and to innovate I feel, in equal measure. In the ‘Theatre of Death’ Tadeusz Kantor articulated his desire to abandon a theatre grounded in physical reality for a theatre of the mind that embraced as instant double of the Self, the Other, or the ‘Unthought’ as a new subject constituted by the mental gaze of the self (1993, 325). Kantor’s ambitions I feel can be experienced in the performance that incorporates digital



performers at a period in history where it has been possible to embrace the conceptual and magical properties afforded by the immediacy of this new technological form.

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## **PART II Portfolio of Works**



## **LIST OF PUBLISHED WORKS**

### **1. *Mother Tongue* (Script) Portfolio: 59-110 & Performance documentation DVD 1 & 2**

UK national tour: ICA, London; Royal Exchange Studio, Manchester; Alsager Arts; Hull University; Sensitive Skin Festival, Nottingham. (2001-2002). Production team Directors Teresa Brayshaw and Mark Whitelaw (R & D) Mem Morrison (Performance), Technologist Adele Myers and Designer Kathrine Sandys. It received £25,000.00 in support, including a lottery touring fund award for £12,500.00 from the Arts Council of England.

Other dissemination:

“Digital Mothers: The interface of the live and the digital”, Political Futures International Conference, Reading University (September 2002).

Appearance on Woman’s Hour, April 2002

Manchester Evening News March 2002

Review in Performance Magazine Feb 2001

### **2. *Wednesday, Wednesday* (Script) Portfolio 111-138 & Performance documentation DVD 3**

Digital Double Comedy, Production team Director Rob Thirtle, (Jerry Springer the Opera and Thunderbirds), Sound and video editor Sara Robinson, Camera Rohan May. “Wednesday, Wednesday” received £5000.00 in support, including £3500.00 from Arts Council England (Yorkshire). Performed at Banff Theatre Arts, Banff Arts Centre, Alberta, Canada. (March 2009) Rex Cramphorn Studio, Sydney, ADSA, Being There: Before, During and After, University of Sydney (May 2006), Transversalities Conference, University of Reading, (September 2005), Ashanti Dance Studio, Brown University ‘Becoming Uncomfortable’ Performance Studies International Conference, Providence, RI: USA. (April 2005).

### **3. *Never work with animals, children and digital characters* (Script) Portfolio: 139-155**

Mary Oliver solo production. Performances at 2nd international conference for Digital Technologies and Performance Arts, Doncaster (May 2007). ATHE Conference, Chicago, (August 2007) Telling Stories: Countering Narrative in Art, Theory and Film International Symposium, Loughborough University (April 2009).

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#### **4. *Almost* (Script) Portfolio: 156-188 & Performance documentation DVD 3**

Production Team: Writer and director Mary Oliver, Actors Lisa Moore and Tony Bessick, Blue-Screen Camera and Sound Sara Robinson, Post-production Michael Clements, House design and construction Steve Gumbley, Composer Matthew Wood, Performance technical support Alice Lister.

Performances at the Story Rooms multi-media event, Mint Lounge, Manchester (April 2007) and at the Contact Theatre, Manchester (2008). ACE Funding 10,000.

#### **5. *Fly Me to the Moon* (Script) Portfolio: 189-203 & Performance documentation DVD 3**

Digital Performance combining on-stage and animated performers.

Production Team: Writer and director Mary Oliver, Animators Stage 1. Mick Lockwood, Stage 2 Rozi Fuller, Editor Matthew Robson, Sound-scape Christian Weaver, Performance technical support Dave Dewsnip and Mark Creamer.

Performance outputs 'Fly Me to the Moon', Contact Theatre, Manchester (July 2008). International symposium 'Still Luminous Legacies'. Digital Resources Humanities and Arts conference, Dartington. (<http://www.dartington.ac.uk/drha06/>) (2006) Funded by ACE and AHRC PAR Award 14,395.00

#### **6. *Blue* Portfolio Performance documentation DVD 3**

Digital Performance created in collaboration with animator Rozi Fuller and performer Niki Woods. Writer, Director, Performer Mary Oliver, Editor Matthew Robson, Sound-scape Christian Weaver. Technical Support David Dewsnip, Mark Creamer and Ian Currie.

Performances at The Contact Theatre Manchester (July 2008) and Judith E Wilson Studio, University of Cambridge (Sep 2008). Robert Powell Theatre, Salford (2013). Funded by ACE and AHRC PAR award 12,000.00.

#### **7. *The Screaming Head* (Work in Progress Performance documentation)**

YouTube [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_6N572gM1\\_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6N572gM1_I)

Installation: Banff New Media Institute. Interactive motion-triggered talking head, interactive installation. Alberta, Canada. A co-production between Mary Oliver and the BNMI. (27 and 28 March 2009). Writer, director, performer Mary Oliver, Camera and computer programmer Kenny Lozowski.

#### **8. *Swimmers* Live Performance Documentation YouTube**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxJyaouYR8I>

An interactive computer generated digital comedy performance double act.

Writer, performer and director Mary Oliver, Camera and film direction Edwin Hasler, Editor Mary Oliver, Computer Programmer, Kenny Lozowski. Banff New Media Institute, Alberta, Canada, co-production. (27 and 28 March 2009).

Oliver, M (2009) 'From the Liminal to the Visceral', Blue Pages, Vol 3 09, Journal of the Society of British Designers.

<http://www.theatredesign.org.uk/publications/blue-pages/from-the-liminal-to-the-visceral/>

**9. Nana's New Pet** (Script) Portfolio: 208-215

Mobile Digital Performance Mary Oliver and disembodied head in pet carrier. Writer, director, performer Mary Oliver, Video editor Christian Weaver.

Lowry Theatre, Salford Quays, July 2010 and Haringey Children's Centre, Barbican Education Department. (October 2009).

**10. Talk to me!** (Publication and Performance) Portfolio: 217-223

One-to-one, interactive performance using bio-sensor. Writer, performer, director Mary Oliver, Bio-sensor technician Rob Bendall.

Oliver, M (2010) 'Talk to me!'. *Making Reality Really Real, Consciousness Reframed*, Conference Proceedings. Trondheim: TEKS Publishing,

148-151. Ascott, R & Gangvik, E & Jahrman, M (eds.)

ISBN: 9788299821124 8299821126 OCLC Number 791288014

**11. 'The emancipating possibilities of performing with cartoons'**. (Publication) Portfolio: 224-233

Oliver, M, (2008) *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*. 4:1 (May 2008) 59-67. Intellect Publishing, Bristol, UK.

**12. 'Me-but-not-me: Teaching the digital double'**, (Publication) Portfolio:234-250

*International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 8: 2, pp. 185-200. Intellect Publishing, Bristol, UK.

Performance Scripts  
and  
Visual Documentation

## **Introduction**

This collection of performance scripts, articles and selected DVD documentation represents the supporting documentation for the examination of PhD by Published Works.

As a practice as research study I have explored the importance of narrative structure and in particular, the use of conversational dialogue in my attempt to create and maintain of equity of presence between the on-stage and digital performer. The scriptwriting and narrative devising process has been the mean thread that has run throughout this period of research and has been the key methodological process through which the success or failure of my attempts to create parity of presence between the two different kinds of performer, have been assessed.

The performance scripts trace the practical process of performance research and creation from Mother Tongue in 2001 to Nana's New Pet which was performed in 2010. The documentation illustrates the change from linear to multi-linear narrative processes. The three copies of published texts at the end of the document support and expand on the practice elements.

The DVD footage is from six of the ten works that I have undertaken, and each illustrates, in some way, how it is impossible to capture the authentic experience of witnessing the performance first hand. The 'live' scrolling band waves of the television screen are particularly hard to capture. I did not begin this process as a film-maker but a performance maker and working from within the performance means that I have not always had the opportunity to record the process adequately. There are also additional copies of recordings on YouTube. Please refer to Swimmers (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxJyaouYR8I>) and also Unfinished Business, the work in progress precursor to The Screaming Head and Nana's New Pet.( [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_6N572gM1\\_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6N572gM1_I))

I have undertaken a range of research methodologies both qualitative and quantitative. Working critically and from an emic stance I have attempted to engage with my

research problem from both inside and outside the process of performance making. As I have gathered information I have applied it and attempted to test it further by setting myself further challenges.

The scriptwriting process has been the primary focus for the majority of the research period and I have combined film, radio and television writing processes during this time.

This supporting material is only a small part of the research that has been produced during this period. What is not present are the notes books, drawings, studies, experiments with word, performance on tape, both analogue and digitally recorded and in particular the vast virtual reels of edited out material which once would have filled the cutting room floor but now, simply remains invisibly and neatly inside plastic cases, perhaps waiting for the creation of another work called 'Cut!'

Mother Tongue

2001



Figure 1: *Mother Tongue* whole cast



Figure 2: *Mother Tongue* Mary and Kate



Mother Tongue

The audience enter to a soundtrack of voices: a Scottish woman talks about her love for her family and her husband and how she always felt like a foreigner in the country that he took her to live in. There is the sound of children playing, they squeal and laugh, there are faint echoes of a Scottish folk song and someone trying to remember how it goes.

Lights Fade.

Lights fade up upon four large television monitors on video stands curved in an arc across the stage. Beneath each monitor is a green bowl of red cherry tomatoes. Stage left, there is an office chair and desk, on which sits a computer monitor, a mouse, a green mouse pad and a photo frame. From the computer dozens of leads spiral across the floor to each of the televisions.

SCENE 1

Mary, 40s, dressed in kilt, black T-shirt, aran knitted cardigan and black brogues, walks onto the stage. She sits down briefly at the desk. Her hand stretches for the mouse and she clicks. Blackout. Mary exits.

The television screens flicker into life, to show a repeated image on each screen. They are all 'Mary' and the images are chanting in unison.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
(together)  
un -yar - drie - cayher - coark - sheer -  
shark - oak - mouw - jaich.

There is a pause and the uniform performers begin to look at each other.

'Mag' stage left, raises her eyes to the ceiling.

'Joss' centre stage right, looks at 'Mum' stage right.

'Kate' centre stage left looks embarrassed.

'Mum' shakes her head in disappointment.

Joss  
Isn't she supposed to be already here?

Mum  
WISHHH!

Mag  
Oh this is ridiculous, she's always bloody late, let's  
just get on without her.

There is a brief embarrassed silence.

Mum  
(to audience)  
Well, thank you for coming and you know I remember a  
similar situation once when my mother took me to for  
my first job when I was fifteen.

Mag looks bored and yawns.

Kate breaths a sigh of relief.

Joss looks at Mum interested in her story.

Mum (CONT'D)

I was going to be a maid at a very grand house, this wasnee what I wanted of course but my father had died a few months before and in those days you had no choice, there was no social security or income support. I was to work for six days for ten shillings, that would be just enough to by a loaf of bread now, and well, the first mistake we made was to go tay the front door.

Mag tries to take the attention away from Mum by looking directly at different sections of the audience.

Kate looks down nodding occasionally in recognition.

Joss watches attentively, as if this is the first time she has heard this story.

Mum (CONT'D)

We went up the steps and rang the bell, I was so afraid I thought I was going to wet my knickers.

Mag snorts, Joss laughs and Kate smiles.

Mum (CONT'D)

This very snooty man answered the door and looked at us as if we were dog muck. I knew he was snooty because when he spoke it was in an English accent. He sent us round to the back of the house and my mammy squeezed my hand and said that "he must be from Edinburgh". When we got to the 'servants' entrance my mother was told to go away "unless of course she wanted a job there too". We were poor, my mother didnee even have a coat, but she pulled her shawl tightly round her shoulders and said that she hoped that this 'proud establishment' was good enough for her daughter and that she would be back at five o'clock on the dot to make sure that I had been treated properly. She later told me that she always wished right there and then, that she had taken me away, because you see, I wanted tay be a nurse.

Mag

Oh get to the point woman.

Mum

(to Mag)

I'm almost there and you've no need to be so cheeky to your mother in front of all these people.

Mag sneers and Mum pulls her cardigan tighter together.

Mum (CONT'D)  
(to audience)

So anyway I was taken inside and led through a kitchen, I was still quite small for my age and the tables and cupboards looked so high. I was taken to a hall way and sat down and left for what seemed like an eternity while all these servants tood and frode past me. No one spoke. A girl not much older than me went past with a tray and I smiled and she kicked my ankle so hard it brought tears tay ma eyes.

Kate and Joss look at Mum, Mag rather halfheartedly.

Mum (CONT'D)

Not long after I was taken tay a cupboard and given a uniform. The housekeeper commented that they didnae have any small enough for me and was told to take off my dress right there and then. I was so embarrassed, my vest had a hole in it and I was starting to get, you know, a bust. I put the uniform dress on and it was so huge round my waist that when I walked I made a huge rustling sound and I was forever having to pull it up so as to not trip over it. I took it hame tae wash and my mother spent the night taking it in by hand. When I went back the next day I thought they'd be pleased I didnae look like a complete peely wally, but the housekeeper went berserk and told me that the money would have tae come out of my first week's wages.

Mary reenters stage left carrying a script. Each of the characters look towards her and together they follow her movement across the stage to the centre.

Mary

Right, sorry I'm late could you turn to page three of your scripts.

Mag looks at the rest of the family.

Mag

Isn't she even going to apologise.

Mum

She knows what she's doing.

Kate raises her eyes to the sky.

Kate

We hope.

All turn their scripts over to page four.

Mum

(Reading)

You were such a funny we thing, you spoke really early and I'd find you sitting in your pram practicing words over and over again until you got them right.

Mag

And she's never shut up since.

Mary turns fiercely to Mag.

Mary

(reading, to Mum)

Well if I was talkative it was only because I had such a good teacher. It was impossible to get from one end of the street to the other without you stopping to talk to half the neighbourhood and their dogs.

Mum

(to audience)

I cannee help having so many friends.

Joss

(to Mum)

Oh mum! Half the time we'd be standing at a bus stop and you'd be in deep conversation with somebody and I'd say 'who was that?' and you'd say 'I've no idea'.

Mum

(breaking off from script)

Ach well that may be the case, but I still couldnee match you screechin banshees when you all get going. You've forgotten how loud you all were together.

Kate

I was never noisy.

There is all round consternation.

Mary

You may not have done it to be noticed but you can make as much sound as the rest of us. It's just more terrifying when you do it.

Mag

Yeh like the sound you get from a rat when it's cornered.

Mum

Like you would know.

Kate

I do not, I'm the picture of self control, perfectly demure, I was always well behaved.

Mary

Why is being quiet, being well behaved? You're not

telling me you had angelic thoughts the whole time, you just never let them spill out of your mouth.

Kate

And you lean too much in the other direction, when you visit my house it's like a natural disaster striking, usually only with about ten minutes warning. I'm just round the corner, can I pop in for a chat cos I'm really depressed, my next show's fallen through and I need somewhere to stay for a while and coincidentally (beat) I've got no money! You then proceed to eat me out of house and home, drink my next months supply of booze in a night, kick my cats and expect me to listen to all your complaints about your latest disastrous affair, your wings about the state of the arts (which I am not in the least bit interested in) and expect unconditional concern and in depth consultations about the state of your tonsils.

Mag

(Nods to Mary )

You asked for that.

Mary

Look you're forgetting why we're here.

Joss

Why are we here?

Kate

I have no idea how you talked me into this.

Mum tutts and shakes her head.

Mag

It's all self-obsession, me, me, me, me, me.

Mary

We're here to discuss how the way we speak affects our present situation, to explore the mutability of language and whether we can alter our own destinies by changing the way we speak.

Mum

That's not what you told me.

Mag

Nor me.

Kate

You said that you simply wanted us to answer a few questions.

Joss

(to family)

She's done a Jerry Springer on us.

Mag  
I think this is just about therapy for Mary to cope  
with her middle class insecurities,  
(sings)  
boring, boring, boring.

Mary  
(shouting)  
Look you lot, you just prove my point, having the real  
'you' here would have been a complete nightmare, you  
can't even behave when it's me playing you.

Mag  
So why were you late?

Mary  
Don't change the subject.

Mag  
Don't you speak to me like that, come on why were you  
late? You've always thought it was okay to keep people  
waiting, it's rude.

Mary comes out from behind desk to centre stage.

Mary  
It's in the script.

Mary shows them and then turns to the audience.

Mary (CONT'D)  
Page..

She flicks through the pages

Mary (CONT'D)  
Seven..look.  
(shows Mag)  
But if you don't want to stay, you don't have to, I  
can do this perfectly well on my own.

Mag  
Oh yeh? Well let's see you try shall we?

Mag gets up and leaves the screen.

Joss half stands up and then sees that Kate and mum are still sitting and  
sits down again.

Mum picks up her script, puts on her half glasses, and glares at Mary with  
her 'Mary you are being a complete arsehole' look.

Kate is checking her script, head down.

Mary facing the audience.

Mary  
Page eight, when did you decide on how you would speak?

Kate  
(reading)  
You decided for me, I would come home from school and you would correct my grammar. I'd say I ate Mr. Sales and you'd say. We are not a cannibal Kate HHH Kate pronounce your HHHHH's. You hate Mr. Sales.

Joss  
(reading badly )  
I was always too busy doing things to think about it, it wasn't important, I was just the same as everyone else around me and that's what I wanted to be.  
(whispering to Kate)  
That's not right, I never thought that.

Mum  
My brogue has never been under question, it is what makes me Scottish and that was more important than anythi.. you've written 'more' important, I would say mare (beat) mare important.

Mary  
Okay thanks I'll change that then, but we're in the middle of the performance now mum so if you could just read the lines that are there and I'll do the changes afterwards.

Mum sighs.

Joss  
Oh we can't do the next bit because we need Mag.

Mag  
(off camera repeats sarcastically)  
Oh we can't do that bit because we need Mag.

Mary  
So you're still here then.

Mag  
Course you silly cow.

Mary  
Temper, temper.

Mag  
Show off.

Mary  
(to Mum whining)  
Mum!

Mary walks towards Mum then swiftly changes direction.

Mary (CONT'D)  
Look are you coming out or not?  
(under breath)  
This is pathetic!

Mag  
Say please and I'll think about it.

Mary crosses her arms in defiance.

Mum  
Mary!

Mary  
Please.

Mag sits down again.

Mary (CONT'D)  
(forced)  
Thank you.

Mary walks back to the desk and sits down.

Mag forces a smile and picks up the script.

Mag  
(clears her throat)  
I had an interview for the grammar school and before I went mum said, make sure you say your words properly say yesss not yeh and here take my handkerchief in case your nose runs. She shoved it up the sleeve of my cardigan. I knew this was important cos it was her best hanky.

During the telling of the story Kate, Mary and Joss sit with chins on hands, heads slightly bent down listening watches and Mum wipes her eyes with her hanky.

Mag (CONT'D)  
There was a whole panel of them all looking at me like over the top of this great big table and they were asking me questions like about a story they had given me to read, most of which I didn't understand and every time like I'd ave to say yesss it would come out yehssssss yehssssss and one of them started to laugh and my nose started to run like and I was very red by this time and I was pulling at the sleeve of my cardigan trying to find my anky but it wasn't there, and I started to sniff but the snot was running down me face by this time and one of them lent over the table and gave me a tissue and I blew my nose and they said 'thank you that will be all' and as I walked out I saw mum's best handkerchief lying on the floor and I was too frightened to pick it up. And when I didn't get into the grammar school I was more upset by the fact that I couldn't go and get mum's hanky back.



Mary  
And how do you feel about that now?

Mag

Well?

Joss

(to Mum)

You can get tissues much more easily now than you could then can't you? All the shops sell them in those little packets. I remember....

Mag

(to Joss )

Was she speaking to you?

Joss

(turning to Mag)

Sorry?

Mag

(slow and deliberate )

Was-she-speaking-to-you?

Joss

No, it's just...

Mum

(to audience )

No one gives hankies for presents anyone more do they, I've had some lovely ones over the years.

Mary

(stands up )

Look we're going off at a tangent, do you think we could keep to the subject for just five minutes without someone going off on their own little mind trip. Look at her.

(points to Kate. )

Brain the size of a small planet and do we hear her waffling on about the benefits of hankies versus tissues?

Kate

They were more environmentally friendly though weren't they?

Mary sits down again.

Mary

Oh God.

Mag, Mum and Joss

What?

Kate

Hankies (beat) Well if we ignore the germ problem, shaking them out every time you get them out of your pocket, but in terms of conservation of our woodlands.

Mary

That's it, let's take a break.

Mary ends the scene.

Mary (CONT'D)

As you can see, the problems inherent in conversation is that it is uncontrollable; meanders this way and that and does not make. (beat) Well having my real mother and my siblings here would have.(beat)Let me just explain a bit to you.

Mary walks to TV screen stage left and puts her hand on top of the TV.

Mary (CONT'D)

On this screen we have my eldest sister the first born who paved the way for the rest of us, who made life easier for all of us by being the guinea pig for my parents to learn to be parents on. Understandably there are some 'little tiny' resentments here.

Mary moves to the other side of the screen and points to herself.

Mary (CONT'D)

Next(beat)me.

Points stage right.

Mary (CONT'D)

Then brain box here. We know she had the biggest brain because from an early age she learned to keep her mouth shut, and in so doing was thought of as a model pupil, daughter and eventual wife.

Mary moves on to Joss' screen and pats it on the top.

Mary (CONT'D)

Then the baby. Like I said, they practiced on us so that the youngest could get away with absolute blue murder on the assumption that she was as white as the driven snow, but she was never allowed to grow up in any of our eyes and all our babies have been called by her name.

Mary moves round to the side of 'Mum' and puts her arms around the monitor.

Mary (CONT'D)

Then lastly, my mother. The alien from a distant planet we were led to believe from an early age. We were dressed differently, spoke differently and fed differently to everyone else on our street. My mother saw it as her soul purpose to keep the flag flying for

her nation by having the loudest, thickest and most unshakable dialect known to woman. I, in my wisdom, (of which I have a limited stock and that only pops out when I'm least expecting it, and of course every time I drink gin) I, from an early age, learned to associate wealth with 'Prop-per' speaking.

Mary walks back to the desk

Mary (CONT'D)

It wasn't my mother's strange religious beliefs, or her dated way of doing her hair, or the jobs as field labourer, cleaner or seamstress that defined us as working class.

Mary starts the next scene. The screens activate and the characters fade up into presence.

Mary (CONT'D)

But the way in which she, and we, all spoke.

## SCENE 2

Characters fade in.

Mum

(to audience)

I remember the first time I spoke out. I was late fer school because I had tae take the jam jars back tae the shop, tae get the penny fer ma dinner, and the shop keeper kept me waiting, so I ran tae school with the jars and arriving late shoved them so quickly into ma desk that they fell through the hole at the back and luckily didn't break, but one of them rolled out from under my desk up tae the front of the class. Baldy Blackie, was his name and we hated him, turned around from the board and shouted, "Whose is this? .....Whose is this?" and I stood up, "It's mine sir, but I can explain". "Come here gel. Hold out yer hand", and out of his desk he pulled the strop, leather strips we metal bits on the end o' them. I held my hand out and waited fer what seemed like for ever for him tae hit me and while I was waitin I was thinking, "This isn't ma fault, ma daddies deed and ma mother has no money tae pay fer ma dinner" and just as he lunged at me, I moved ma hand away. He used so much force that when he missed me he nearly fell on his face. Even mare furious now, he grabbed my hand and held it there and hit me. I was so hurt and angry I grabbed those evil things out of his hand and screamed "Don't you hit me ya big bully, take yer bloody strop and there, there, there, you see what it feels like hitting a poor we gel who's late because of some bloody jam jars" (I didnee go tae church then, so you'll have tae forgive ma tongue) but of course it meant that I couldnee go tae school anymare.

Joss  
(to mum )  
Is that when you went to the big house?

Mary  
(to Joss)  
Thanks Mum but can we continue please?

Mum  
(to Joss)  
Aha.

Mary  
(talking over Mum and Joss)  
Was there a time when you spoke that you realised you were different, or that the way in which you spoke.

Joss  
(whispering )  
So what happened?

Mum  
(whispering )  
When?

Looking around and glaring at them but not telling them to be quiet.

Joss  
At the big house.

Mary  
Or the way in which you spoke, made you.

Kate  
Ssshhh.

Mary  
That the way in which you spoke made you aware of yourself?

Mum  
Och I got into a fight with that girl and she put the silver tea pot on the stove and melted the legs off and blamed me.

Joss laughs

Mary  
(loudly)  
As someone who was in the 'wrong' place?

Joss

Sorry.

Mary sits down at the desk.

Mag

I went for an interview for the Civil Service.

Kate

I went to the grammar school.

Joss

I had to do spoken English lessons at school, it was a nightmare.

Mum

Och yes you were sick before every class.

Joss

But I got a job as a telephone receptionist from it.

Mag

(fingers on nose )

Hello this is Kentish Life, just trying to connect you, just one moment please.

Joss

I wasn't that bad.

Mag, Mary and mum

(laugh )

You were.

Kate

I don't remember any time between how I did speak, to how I speak now, it was just a gradual transition. I learned to listen.

Mag

That was because you had a mouth full of metal though wasn't it, and you were too embarrassed to speak.

Kate

And that was Mary's fault.

Mary

What!

Kate

(to audience )

First there was the extraction of the abscessed front tooth. I remember the mask being held down on me and struggling, waking with my head over a sink and vomiting and bleeding and crying at the same time and a woman's voice saying "don't be such a crybaby".

Overlap with the end of Mag's section.

Mag

(To audience)

I remember the dentist drilling on and on, all my back teeth, over and over and the girls at school taking the piss because they thought I had rotten teeth and me havin no idea why my teeth were being drilled, until I broke down and mum said I didn't have to go back, and being taken to another dentist and him looking in my mouth and saying my god what has someone done to your teeth, and then finding out the school dentist made money for every tooth she drilled.

Mum

(To front )

I was told I had a gum disease and of course in those days we had no money for treatment and the dentist said that all my teeth had to be extracted and he took them all out over the course of a week. I had tae miss work for another week because I was ill with the pain and of course I couldnee bare to be seen like it. He didnee have my gums molded he just guessed at the size of teeth that I would need, my gums continued tae bleed for years, I was fifteen years old.

Mary is counting her teeth.

Kate

(to family)

Isn't it funny how good teeth have become synonymous with success?

Mum

If you look back at all those old films most of the actors and actresses had odd or false teeth, but then again in most of them hardly moved their mouths did they?

Mag

(with stiff upper lip)

'Oh Richard I do love you so much'.

Mary

(sitting forward)

Thirty six. But it's strange don't you think, this need for perfectly symmetrical mouths?

Joss

Yeh how actors and singers start off with crooked and discoloured teeth and then when they get successful their teeth have miraculously changed. But have you ever wondered why we never see it happening, like baby birds you never see em, you never see any pictures of film stars with braces on do you? Do you think there's a special film star tooth island where they all fly off to on a secret plane

and stay there until their teeth are perfect.

Joss picks up a hand mirror and practices smiling.

Mag

(to Joss)

No stupid they're rich, the dentist would come to them.

Kate

They wouldn't be licensed would they?

Mum

(to Kate then front )

You'd be surprised what they give licences for in America.

Mum (CONT'D)

Mary has my teeth. Listen, you just be glad you have yer ain teeth.

Mag

I remember that time you had a new set and we all laughed because for the first time the dentist gave you a set molded on your own mouth shape and you came home and they were so enormous, you could hardly shut your mouth.

Mag (CONT'D)

You got so cross you screamed and shouted at us so hard that they shot out across the sitting room. You wouldn't wear them for a week until you couldn't put it off any longer, haaa haaa haaa.

All look at Mag.

Mum

It's true what they say isn't it? The only weapon that gets sharper we constant use is 'your' tongue.

Mary goes over to mum's monitor and hugs it.

Kate

I remember to this day losing my front teeth.

Slight pause Mag, mum and Joss turn to look at Kate then Mary like a tennis match.

Mary and Kate

(to audience)

We were playing chase.

Mary

Kate was chasing me.

Kate

Mary was chasing me.

Mary

I ran out of the house.

Kate  
There was a road right outside.

Mary  
I turned to see her bearing down on me.

Kate  
I ran as fast as I could.

Mary  
I heard her scream.

Kate  
She pushed me.

Mary moves steadily closer to Kate

Mary  
I saw her behind me with her hand over her mouth and blood running down her chin, she had hit her face on the road.

Kate  
I stood up and ran indoors screaming.

Mary  
Her front teeth were broken she blamed me.

Kate  
It was your fault.

Mary  
You tripped up.

Kate  
You pushed me over.

Mary  
You were always chasing me.

Kate  
You were older than me.

Mary  
You were taller than me.

Kate  
It was your fault.

Mary  
(Pleading with audience )  
Look there's nothing wrong with them now.

Kate  
( To audience )  
No not now, but it took twenty years to mend them.

Mary



( To Kate )  
That's not my fault.

Kate  
Well you didn't pay for it.

Mary  
Why should I, it wasn't my fault.

Mary storms back to the desk.

Joss  
I never had anything wrong with my teeth.

All  
Oh shut-up!

Mary stops the scene.

Mary  
(To audience)  
Do any of us ever really feel comfortable anywhere?  
Comfortable enough to speak publicly that is. You go to the  
States and it's like everyone is walking down the street  
shouting, having a conversation with someone standing in  
such close proximity you think they must have a hearing  
problem, shouting "So I went to see the Optometrist" and in  
England there are two sorts of people who do this, the very  
drunk "You know what, I really fancy you" and the upper  
classes "Do you know Samantha's got into Roedean? Yes we had  
the confirmation last week. It was touch and go of course.

Mary sits forward and begins to type on the keyboard,

Mary (CONT'D)  
Speaking, speaking loudly, speaking hrrrm typing error,  
typing with impediments, speaking in tongues  
wrwwwhllllbrrrrr! Not that one, speakers, speaker's corner,  
opinion, house of commons, house of lords, upper upper case,  
upper classes, BBC, Ahhhh! Public Speaking, public speaking.  
My role in life became to teach my family to speak properly.

Mary starts the scene.

Mary (CONT'D)  
Prop er ly, pr pr pr ppp, llll yyy

### Scene three

Characters fade up.

Mary  
I'm just going to run a little experiment I'd like you to  
speak the phrases that are on your sheets in front of you.

They each pick up a sheet of paper and begin speaking at the same time.

Mum  
How now brown cow.

Mary walks over to Mum.

Mary  
(correcting )  
How - How.

Mum  
(trying but getting it wrong)  
Ha ooh Ha ooh.

Joss  
(to Kate, in perfect imitation of Mary)  
Apparently the representative is appealing for support.

Kate looks impressed and they do it together.

Kate and Joss  
Apparently the representative is appealing for support.

Joss  
(in Yorkshire accent)  
Apparently the representative is appealing for support.

Kate  
Apparently the representative is appealing for support

Mag  
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper where's the peck of pickled pepper peter piper picked..... If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper where's the peck of pickled pepper peter piper picked..... If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper where's the peck of pickled pepper peter piper picked. If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper where's the bleedin peck of pickled pepper peter piper bleedin picked - aye?

Mary  
(to Mag)  
Thank you.  
(to audience)  
It may surprise you to know that the most important vocal organ is the tongue.  
(Shows tongue)  
When the tongue is at rest in the mouth it lies under the palate, which is hard at the front and soft at the back.

Mary uses her finger to demonstrate which makes her hard to understand.

Mary (CONT'D)

Pass your thumb along the roof of your mouth.

Joss

(to Mum)

Did she say thumb or tongue?

Mum

I think she said tongue?

Kate puts her thumb down the throat she gags. Realising she has made a mistake she is embarrassed.

Mary

From front to back and feel the difference. The part of the tongue that lies under the hard palate is called 'the front' and the bit that lies under the soft palate is called 'the back'.

Mag has tickled her palate and is scratching it.

Mary (CONT'D)

When the tongue makes a pointed shape we call it's tip the point.

Mag

I wish she'd get to the bloody point.

Mary

Behind this is the blade, the edge of the tongue is the rim and the imaginary line along its middle is called the ridge.

Kate turns to Joss and they look at each others tongues.

Kate

Oooh yours is all scummy.

Joss

Oh thank you, tell the world why don't you.

Mary

The part of the soft palate which hangs down at the back, look in your mirror, is called the uvula. I love that word oooo....vula. Open your mouth and take a look.

The others pick up hand mirrors and look at their own uvulas.

MAG, Kate, Joss and Mum

Aaaaah.

Mary takes centre stage.

Mary

Now, in front of each of you is a small bowl of cherry tomatoes.

Joss  
But I don't like them.

Mary  
I know you don't like them but you don't have to eat them they are just a device to help exercise your mouths. Take as many as you can and place them in your mouths

Mum  
(to Mary )  
Och really!

Mary  
Now come on just do it, it's an experiment you'll be helping me with my career development.

Kate puts three tomatoes in her mouth and nearly chokes and spits them out.

Mag squashes them all in and makes real mess.

Mum puts one into each cheek sits looking cross.

Joss does as requested by the book.

Mag  
Have you heard the one about the wide-mouthed frog?

Kate continues to try to put them in but to no avail, it's as if she's afraid of showing the true size of her mouth.

Mary  
Now I know this should be done using marbles but didn't want any of you to choke

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
(trying to complain but can't)  
MMMMM.

Mary  
No really I didn't.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
(Still trying to complain)  
MWWMMM.

Mary  
Everybody ready?

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
Mmmmmmm.

Mary  
Repeat after me. Packing-Pickles-Poses -Problems

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
(as best they can) )

Packing pickles poses problems.

Mary  
Apparently the representative is appealing for support.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
Apparently the representative is appealing for support.

Mary  
Try the following eeee

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
eeee.

Mary  
ooooh.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
ooooh.

Mary  
oh.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
oh.

Mary  
www.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
www.

Mary  
bbbbbb.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
bbbbbb.

Mary  
(up and down a musical scale)  
bbbbbbbbb.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
bbbbbbbbb.

Mary  
(up and down a musical scale)  
wwww.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum  
wwww.

Mary gestures towards Joss.

Mary

Could you sit up straight please your posture's gone again.

Joss straightens up, Kate raises eye-brows, Mum and Mag shake heads in unison.

Mary (CONT'D)

Now if you just practice that in your own time (beat) that means now, not tomorrow.

Mum, Mag, Kate and Joss continue randomly creating a vocal medley of strange sounds.

Mary (CONT'D)

(to audience)

Now the reason we are doing this is to work the muscles at the front of the mouth as you may have noticed, each of them has a tendency to talk from the back of the throat with a slightly nasal bent, bringing about the Kentish wine and the aggressive tones of the Scottish speaker.

Mum spits her tomatoes out.

Mum

I'll give you aggressive tones in a minute, just wait till I get you hame.

Mag, Joss and Kate all spit their tomatoes out and wipe up the mess, There is consternation all round, everyone moans and groans. Mary backs away from Mum and back towards her desk.

Mary

I think we should move on to the function of the lips, if we tightly suck together and release them we get what they call the bilabial stops ppp or if you engage the vocal chords b b b and shifting this up to the nose, which shouldn't be hard for this little group we get mmmm mmmm the bilabial nasal consonant. Notice the different tensions in the lips make a p then b sound and put the palm of the hand in front of the mouth, can you notice the difference? As the breath passes in a stream through the lips when they are open we get a w this may be the voiceless [M] or the voiced [w] you may notice that the tongue lifts when you produce these sounds but if it doesn't you get what they call the bilabial voiceless [F] or the voiced [V] found in words like hopeful and obvious.

Kate

The former which she is and the latter which she definitely ain't.

Joss

Isn't!

Mum

(to audience )

There's a Scottish ring tae that word Bilabial, bilab  
bilab bilab bilabbilabbilabbilabbilabbilab,

(to Mary )

Okay you've had your turn, now it's ma go. Let me  
teach you a little something that will tax your  
tongues, it's a rhyme that ma mother taught me and it  
goes

(speaks very fast)

Says he to me is that you? says I who? says he you?  
says I me ?says he I, says I no, says he it's awful  
like you.

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mary, murmours of confusion.

Mum (CONT'D)

Again? Says he to me is that you? says I who? says  
he you? says I me ?says he I, says I no, says he  
it's awful like you.  
Right now it's your turn.

Mag

It was too fast.

Joss

Way too fast.

Kate

Could you slow it down a bit.

Mary

Do it in sections mum.

Mum

Said he to me is that you?

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss

Said he to me is that you?

Mum

Says I who?

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss

Says I who?

Mum

Says he you?

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss

Says he you?

Mum

Says I me ?

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss  
Says I me ?

Mum  
Says he I.

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss  
Says he I.

Mum  
Says I no.

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss  
Says I no.

Mum  
Says he it's awful like you.

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss  
Says he it's awful like you.

Mum  
All together now.

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss  
Said he to me is that you? Says I who? Says he  
you? Says I me? Said he (beat) Yes. Said he  
(beat) yes. Said he yeh....ssssssss.

Mum  
(to audience)  
You see the difficulty I have with these girls,  
it's the same with trying to teach them Gaelic,  
they have no ear fer it and it's such a bootiful  
language.

Mary  
Beautiful.

Mum  
ravi! ackhin aahgee monia, hallerver mach ist  
pooer aroch.

Mag  
But how long did it take you to learn that, go  
on..... tell them, I don't have forty years to  
learn an obsolete language. What's the point?

Mum  
The point is that these are my roots.

Mary  
They stopped speaking Gaelic in Grennock hundreds  
of years ago.

Mum  
Greenock, now I know you're deliberately trying to



annoy me. You're forgettin the reason it took me so long tae learn, I had all of you tae bring up, and none of you have any idea what that was like in those days, we no automatic washing machines and dishwashers you lot don't know you're born half the time.

Mag

I thought it took you so long because when you bought the teach yourself Gaelic set from that jumble sale there was no explanatory book with it.

Kate

(to audience )

Oh yes and all the tape cassettes had the wrong labels on them so she started at part two with absolutely no idea of what she was saying for three weeks until she turned the cassette over and it said welcome to the Archnoch's guide to teaching yourself Gaelic, turn to exercise one of your text book and repeat after me.

Mum

How was I tae know the book was missing, cassette players had only just been invented and we were the first people on our street tae get one, thanks tae your aunt Nan, I thought it was normal.

Mary

I mean mum who do you actually have the opportunity to speak this language with anyway?

Mum

You're missing the point, this is your inheritance, when you can speak it we can all talk together, and you can pass it on tae your daughters in that way you can remember where you've come from and that none of you are really English, just English speakers.

Joss

I'm confused.

Mary Stops the Scene.

Mary

(to audience)

It's simple really, I brought us all here today, to try to find out whether the way we speak tells us where we belong, to see whether this is fixed or whether like language we constantly change. In the small village where I live I am an oftcumner. Because I was not born there or happen to be inbred with anyone who was born in a five mile radius. When NATO was bombing the hell out of the Serbs and Kosovans were being killed and killing their neighbours I thought for the grace of God go us, most, all, any of us.

Mary begins the next scene.

Mary (CONT'D)  
At least we haven't reached the point where having the  
wrong dialect is a matter of life and death, (beat) have we?

Scene 4

Characters fade in.

Mum  
(to Mary)  
I always thought you would be the one to emigrate

Mary  
Why?

Mum  
You were never satisfied with anything. You moaned about  
your teachers, your friends, the food. I had tae shop in  
a foreign delicatessen for your wants from about the age  
of ten. I blame that on your friendship with that  
professor's daughter, you spent mare time there than at  
hame.

Mary  
Did that hurt your feelings?

Mum  
Well you would come hame and look around  
as if there was a nasty smell, and I  
objected tae that, our house was always  
clean.

Mag  
No it wasn't you always ated cleaning up.

Mum  
Shut up you, you have a warped sense of reality. Let she  
who hast not sinned cast the first stone eh?

Mag  
(Under breath )  
Cow.

Mary  
I think that was more to do with not feeling like I  
belonged anywhere in particular. I didn't know what it  
felt like to be English because our house was so  
fiercely Scottish. I had no desire to be from anywhere.

Kate  
I wanted to be Marie Osmond.

Mag  
I wanted to be away.

Mary

I just remember wanting to be black and you relished watching 'Guess who's coming to dinner' with me, so that you could point out how difficult that was, we never discussed the fact that being black just wasn't an issue for me, you were just concerned that being black meant having a hard time, you were just concerned that I didn't want to be white.

Mum

No, that you didnee want to be who you were.

Joss and Kate rub their eyes in desperation.

Mary

(to Mum )

And you didn't want to be where you were.

Mum

I wanted to be hame.

Mag

I wanted to be on top of the pops.

Joss

I wanted to be ..um who did I want to be?

Mary

I wanted to be on the stage.

Mag

I wanted to be a midwife.

Kate

I wanted to be in a bigger house so I didn't have to listen to you lot.

Mum

Well you all got what you wanted.

Kate

(to Joss)

Except you - you never knew.

Joss

(remembers and mouths it silently to the audience)  
'a makeup artist'.

Mum

But you all changed so much I tried tae keep up but lost site of you on the way all I could do was be there for when you came hame.

Mag

And what romantic image is that, that you harbour, I'd come home and there would be nowhere to sleep.

Mum

Once you were eighteen you were no longer my responsibility it was up tae you tae make a hame fer yoursell, anyway I thought that once you'd gone tae college you would make your ain lives, you got what ah never got.

Kate

Yes, after education there's no going back from where you arrive is there. You can't deny the knowledge you have.

Mary

I found it very difficult to reconcile the past with the present.

Mag

I suppose that's your way of saying that you were ashamed of where you came from.

Mary

That's rubbish, you're such a stirrer.

Mum

When you were studying you'd bring hame all those books on psychology and sociology and I'd read them. The sociologists just talked rubbish, they said that in working class hames there were no books, that was entirely wrong, we always had books.

Kate

But you always kept them hidden in cupboards.

Mum

Och that was to keep them safe and clean, some of the houses I cleaned had hundreds of books on show and they were always covered in dust.

Mary

To mum And what about you, what did you want?

Mum

I never wanted anything else.

Mary

Didn't you?

Mum

I wanted tae sing (beat) for a while.

Mary ends the scene.

Mary

(to audience)

I was at my daughter's school prize-giving the other week and the girls stood up to sing and the

unexplainable magic was rekindled. I remembered why I am here. I heard the voices of the singers who sang in a dead language and I wanted to weep. I remembered those same harmonies that I heard as a 5 year old in the school hall at Christmas that made the shiver that travelled from the nape of my neck to my ankles and forced an uncontainable smile across my face.

Mary begin the next scene

Mary (CONT'D)

From that day on I had an absolute desire to be part of that sound and Christmas Carols make me weep.

Scene 5

Characters fade up.

Mag

(to audience)

I remember.... listening endlessly to Shirley Bassey records, writing the words down by moving the needle over and over again, and then when finished finally singing along to a really scratched record with words that didn't make sense but were in my eight year old vocabulary. The minute you walked with a joint I could see you were a man of this thing son, a real bick's bender, good lookin oh be mine well wouldn't you like t'know what's go one onin my mine.

Joss

I really liked

(sings)

If you go away on a summers day well you might as well take the sun away. All the birds that flew in the open sky when the day was new and the sun was high. If you go away, if you go away if you go away..... Sorry.

Kate

Oh yeh that Diana Durbin one Spring grows the rhododendrons and sweet hibiscus I thought was Spring grows the road of Endrons and sweetly biscuits.

Mary

I remember you were in the kitchen.

Kate

You were in the garden.

Joss

You were up a fruit tree.

Mag

You were in church.

Mary

And I asked you if you could teach me how to do that kind of singing which is in bits.

Mum  
Harmonies.

Mary  
And you taught me Kumbaya.

Joss  
Ding dong dell.

Mag  
Jesus wants me for a sun beam.

Kate  
(sings)  
You in your small corner and..

All Together  
(in harmony )  
I in mine.

Mum  
Simple things at first with..

Mag  
Two parts.

Mary  
Then three.

Kate  
Then four.

Joss  
Then five?

Kate  
No never five you always doubled up, you were too young.

Joss looks annoyed but says nothing.

Mum  
I remember the first performance at the Women's Meeting and we sang Amazing Grace and..

Mag, Kate and Mary  
(together)  
Just a closer walk with thee.

Joss  
(to mum)  
was I there?

Mum  
(to Joss)

Och you were just a baby. And then Janet Sothern's friend who worked for Doctor Barnardo's asked us to go to sing at their tea-party in Herne Bay and from there it was rally after fete after conference meeting.

Kate  
(to all)

And when was that really important one when Mary lost her voice because their was a storm.

Mum  
Oh that was years later and  
(to Joss)  
you were singing we us by then and Mary had tae mime all the tunes wi you taking her part as the lead.

Mag  
(to audience)  
Oh yeh and Cliff Richard was there and Mary really fancied him.

Mary  
I never did.

Mag  
And he came over to talk to us and Mary couldn't even croak a word to him because it would have given the game away that she hadn't really been singing.

Mum  
(to Mary)  
There you see you missed your chance there Mary, and he's still never married.

Mary  
(to audience)  
I did not fancy him, God I was only about fourteen anyway.

Joss  
(to Kate)  
See I did sing lead

Kate  
Once.

Mum  
(hums Amazing Grace)

Mag, Kate, Mary and Joss  
(heads down)  
Oh not that one please.

Mum  
Do you remember?  
(to audience)

We almost got a record deal and then that pipe band released it and just pipped us to the post and then the Osmond's and that agent said that there were too many religious songs and bands in the charts and he dropped us saying that we weren't commercial enough, so we learnt some other tunes

Mary

The thing is mum still no one wants to listen to the likes of Diana Durbin, Micky and Griff, and The Alexander Brothers Accordion band. For heavens sake we were teenagers in the seventies!

Joss

Speak for yourself.

Kate

Except you

Mum

(sings)

I'm nobody's child, I'm nobody's child

Mag, Kate, Joss and Mum

Nobody wants me I'm just running wild

Mary Runs between Mag and Kate and sways at first the wrong way then realises and changes direction

All

I 've ....no mothers kisses and no daddy's smile, nobody wants me, I'm nobody's child.....Aaaah.

Mag

And then the bloody Nolan Sisters came along and we lost out again.

Mum

Just as well, you all wanted your ain things anyway it would never has worked out.

Mag

I don't know, if we'd actually made some money from it I wouldn't have had to get a job.

Mary

Well you could never have kept up the pretence of the clean living type anyway, it would have just been harder and harder for you to cover up your smoking.

Mum

(to Mag)

Did you smoke?

Mag



(to Mary)  
Oh thanks a lot,  
(To audience)  
As a matter of fact we all have

Joss  
(to mum)  
I never did

Kate  
No you were into far more serious stuff

Joss  
(to Kate)  
No I wasn't!

Mum  
I don't think I want tae hear anymore of this airing  
our dirty laundry in public.  
(to Joss )  
You wait till I get you hame.

Joss slumps and sighs.

Joss  
(stage whisper)  
God I'm forty years old I'm not a child anymore.

Mary moves forward from between the monitors and takes centre stage.

Mary  
We could have done Motown or Soul or been the first all  
white gospel group.

Mary attempts a Jackson Five style dance routine, Mag and Joss laugh, Kate  
covers her face with embarrassment. Mum shakes her head.

Mary (CONT'D)  
(hums )  
Love lets stay together.  
(Sings)  
Love let's stay together, loving you forever is all I  
need, nee nee  
(trying to find the note)  
I can never get that note.

Mag  
Oh Yeh then we'd have really been popular wouldn't we.  
The Klu Klux Clan would have shot at us from one angle,  
the Baptist's would have thrown us out as radicals and  
the Pentecostal congregations around the entire world  
would have just rolled around in the church aisles  
laughing their heads off.

Mum

(To Mary )  
Ach stop making a show of yourself hen.

Mary  
How come singing's all right but singing and dancing  
is out of the question.

Mag  
(to Mary)  
Because you're no good at it.

Kate  
Because you're too old and fat now and you look  
ridiculous.

Mary storms back to the desk

Joss  
(to audience)  
Because mum can't dance

Mum  
Hey!

Mary stops the scene.

Mary  
When the group finally broke up none of us really  
realised the affect it had on mum, looking back, the  
year I left home, we were all so self obsessed that  
when mum lost her voice we didn't put it down to  
anything serious, just age. It was quite convenient  
really, meant that she had no excuse to make us carry  
on singing together. Meant I was free to leave.

## SCENE 6

Characters fade up

Mag  
The last time we all sang together was when?

Kate and Joss  
Mum's service.

Mary  
That doesn't count. No before that.

Mum  
(hand over mouth)  
Och it was terrible we don't have to remind ourselves  
of that do we?

Mary  
We're not here to relive the past we're here to  
explore issues of class and language, how it is that

our culture, our upbringing and education has affected our prospects and choices? How is it that as a family we all speak so differently?

Mum

That's not what you told me.

Mag

Nor me.

Kate

You said that you simply wanted us to answer a few questions.

Joss

She's done a Jerry Springer on us.

Mag

I think this is just about therapy for Mary to cope with her middle class insecurities

(sings)

boring, boring, boring

Mary

(shouting )

Look you lot you (beat) haven't we done this bit?

Mag

Well you should know, you wrote it.

Mary

God even when I do you're still a bitch.

Joss

Scr.... ip.... t.... b.....it.....ch hey they almost rhyme.

Mum

Och get on we it, these people havnee got all night.

Mary

Well that's not.

Mum

Mary!

Mary

Well as I was saying, I brought you/us/them/us! Here tonight.

Kate

God you're so self obsessed,

Mary

well that assumes that you think all of this is about me.. and it isn't.

Mum

What's it about then hen?

Mary

It's about how we all speak differently. It's about why that is how incredible that is considering we all had exactly the same upbringing. It's about opportunities that arrive whether by fate or design or how just one little bit of chance, or brain node that is different, or good luck, or year that we were born into can bring about the most enormous differences in the directions that we go in. It's about the way our choice of speaking voice affects all the rest of our movements, the way we think and feel, and how that affects our opportunities in life and how we are.....

Mag

Woah slow down there girl you'll bust a bleedin blood vessel, like anyone's interested.

Mary

Oh come on behave I'm trying to make a serious point here.

Kate

But that's not what I think.

Mag

That's not what I'd say.

Mum

I would never have thought that in a million years.

Joss

It's just you Mary you're.....

(mouths)

weird

Kate

You think that everyone thinks the same way and they don't.

Mag

I don't care about the way I speak, it's what makes me who I am, if I were to speak posh then half of my patients would be too frightened to open their legs, but I would never say that either.

Mary

What would you say then? Go on, you write it, you think it, you say whatever you want, I give up.

Mary (CONT'D)

You can't can you?

All

Oh shut up!

They are not talking to each other.

There's a pause with awkward moments, each turning away, looking for a way to get out of the screen. Mum who has put her spectacles on to look at the script whispers.

Mum

Mary!

Mary continues to be angry

Mum (CONT'D)

Mary!

Mary looks over to mum and sees her signalling to come over. Mary walks to her.

Mum (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Should I have ma turn no.

Mary

Yeh well now's as good as any. I'll just come round.

Mary walks round the back of the monitors and Mum leaves the screen. As Mary walks round she puts on her cardigan and walks to centre stage as Mum.

'Mary' appears on screen. The others wake up to what's happening Mag is cross that Mary has let mum out, Kate wipes her eyes she is tired, Joss straightens up.

Mary (CONT'D)

It's small in here, how did they get you in here mum?

Kate

You can talk you're hardly sylph like

Mag

Whatever you do don't fart or you'll pass out.

Joss

She's so crude in't she?

Mum

Now now hens.

Mag

(Chicken noises)

Whark, cluck cluck cluck.

Mum

(to audience)

I don't want to hark back on things.

Mag

Wow that'd be a first.

Mum

40 years I've lived in another country, 40 years, and I've never lost ma accent. It has always been important, I couldnee call masell Scottish if I lost the way ah speak. Ah miss hearing scots folk but now I do have a few scots friends down here but none of them come from the same region, in fact there's quite a rivalry between us if the truth be known. I've always felt superior tae east coast folk they sold out tae the English and you can hear it in their accents, especially Edinburgh, they may as well be part of England for the way they've lost the brogue. Ma favourite accent though comes frae the highlands, ah always wanted tae visit Lewis, it sort of symbolised old Scots far me and Aran. I wanted two things tae knit aran and tae speak Gaelic, both of which I did. There are other things that will always take me hame instantly, scots bread and pies, heather on hills, the way we make tea with the milk second, the English don't know howe tae make tea properly and of course the hymns. When ah first came tae England I was horrified that in church people mumbled out the hymns and they'd give me dirty looks when I sang, but it was about this time that several new people arrived and low and behold they were Scots and of course sang at the tops of their voices as well. Now I'm not saying that Scottish people are the best singers, the Welsh are very good of course but I think it's something about being brought up in sight of those hills that people want tae sing we all their might tae be heard, or tae celebrate gods work, you canee feel the same in the midst of a fog covered midden now can you. I'll cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it some day for a crown such lovely sentiments, even today. Och, I had a good life, and you're wrong Mary

(to Mary)

I know what you're thinking, when you ask me whether I wanted anything else, you forget I've known you all your life and I might not know what your up tae or what work your doing but I know what your expressions mean, and no, I didnee want anything else.

(to daughters)

I lived ma life fer you all and didnee expect anything back. I know that's hard fer you to believe in this day and age where women expect tae be equal tae men but I wasnee brought up tae think that and I wasnee unhappy we ma life in our hame. I just wanted the best fer you all and if that meant giving you all up tae your ain paths then so be it. I only thing I regret it that our singing lives ended so soon. You had such lovely voices together. Go on, now, lets do one mare, just feh old times sake, fer auld lang sine, fer me?

Mag shrugs, Kate sighs and nods, Mary bites lip.

Mum walks to the edge of the desk

Mum (CONT'D)  
(sings the first two notes from Amazing Grace)

AH AAH

Mary, Mag, Joss and Kate cover their mouths and look at each other with concern.

Mum (CONT'D)  
Sit up straight

They all shift in their seats.

Mary, Mag, Kate and Joss  
(sing)  
Is tigthnooch liumh  
Der grasz raw voar  
Se micher va vo heech  
Ol va me kylte s loragh me  
Va dowl se nich erchi.

Mum  
(To daughters)  
ah that was lovely thank you.  
(To audience)  
I'm going now but I remember, och it doesnee matter.  
Ma mother was always on at me fer never knowing when  
tae shut up so fer once I'll take notice and be off.

Mary Swings round in chair and goes to leave pauses when Mum speaks again.

Mum (CONT'D)  
(to audience)  
och yes just one mare thing before I go

Mag, Mary, Joss and Kate take in breath

Kate  
Oh god.

Mum  
Okay I'm going I'm going  
Well I've got tae go now, it's been lovely talking tae  
you.

'Mum' walks across the stage and takes off her cardigan and ties it backs around her waste. As 'Mary' she sits down at the desk.

Mary ends the scene.

#### SCENE 7

Mag, Kate and Joss Fade Up, Mum's screen is empty

Joss  
That was nice wasn't it?

Mag  
(Shrugs shoulders)

Joss  
Do you think we could? You know?

Kate  
Don't be ridiculous!

Mag  
If you think she's looking bad  
(looking at Mary )  
You should see the state of my arse.

Joss  
But we could just make records, we wouldn't have to  
perform live.

Mag  
Like the Spice Sisters.

Kate  
Girls.

Mary  
We couldn't even agree on what to sing, I think we  
should leave well alone.

Kate  
What is it they say memory is the greatest muse.

Mary  
We don't need it, just think about it, the line.  
Speaking fast one after the other.

Mag  
Washing line?

Joss  
Road line?

Mag  
Sky line?

Joss  
Um (beat) Time line, your turn.

Mary  
Umbilical.

Joss and Kate  
That's not a line.



Mag  
It's a chord that 'should' get cut at birth.

Kate  
Are we talking biogenetics or something more ephemeral?

Mag  
(Mimics)  
Are we talking?

Mary  
Will you stop denying your intelligence, it's really boring.

Mag  
Are you talking to me, are you talking to me?

Joss  
She could be talking to me.

Mag, Kate and Joss  
(over each other)  
No she's talking to me, she definitely talking to me.

Mary  
Look just shut up.

Mag  
One minute you're telling us to think for ourselves and then you tell us to shut up which is it?

Mary  
Just stick to the subject..... and don't pretend you don't know what it is.

Mag, Joss and Kate  
(all together with sarcasm )  
Ooooooooooh!

Kate  
Okay, If we're talking physical inheritance here, it's an issue of pure genetics surely.

Mag  
(pointing )  
Listen it's simple (beat)  
(to Mary)  
You've got her teeth.  
(to Joss )  
She's got her lips

Joss sucks in her lips.

Mag (CONT'D)  
(to self)  
I've got her tongue,

(sticks out briefly)  
(To Kate)  
She's got her nasal passage.

Kate looks offended and covers her nose.

Mag (CONT'D)  
(to all)  
And we've all got her vocal chords right? End of story. That's why we all speak differently.

Kate  
I don't think there's anything else to say on the subject.

Mary  
Please just indulge me a little longer Yeh? It's obvious that if we are born with different physical attributes that we are all going to develop different ways of walking, moving, speaking etc. What I suppose I am really interested in is what is my real voice.

Mag  
(under Kate)  
On and on with the same record, over and over again.

Kate  
Does it matter?

Mary  
Listen, when you were young and you imagined which sense you would least like to lose what was yours?

Kate  
Hearing.

Joss  
Seeing.

Mag  
Yeh seeing.

Mary  
Mine was speaking.

Mag  
And this is news to us.

Joss  
(laughing)  
You're just like mum.

Mary  
No I'm not, Maybe, a bit.

Mag, Kate and Joss  
Aaah haa!

Mary

I suppose I just managed to do the things she couldn't that's all.

Kate

No she would never have done anything like this. Talk to strangers, work with the homeless, stand on a box at Speaker's Corner but never do something as trivial as a piece of theatre.

Mag

Oh so that's what this is then is it?

Mary

I just miss hearing her, makes me feel more English now.

Mag

(in mum's voice)

'But you're not Mary, your just an English speaker'.

Joss

God that's so spooky, you sounded just like er then.

Mag

I don't, miss hearing her that is, she couldn't say anything once it had to be at least fifty times. I could tell you her life story off by heart.

Kate

I must admit I feel freer now.

Mary

To do what?

Kate

To say whatever I like in the way that I want to.

Mary

And what would you say, what would you all say?

Slight pause while they consider the question.

Mag

Bugger, bugger, bugger bollocks, bloody bloody.....bloody.

(looks around waiting for telling off)

Joss looks around for mum, laughing.

Kate smirks.

Mag (CONT'D)

(imitating mum in ghoully voice)

Profanities are the well of the devil, you be careful or he'll trap you there.

Joss  
Oh bugger off.  
(covers her mouth)

Mary  
(head down thinking)  
Is that all? Just a series of swear words, don't any of you have anything meaningful that you would like to say on the subject.

Mag  
I want to go home I've got more important things to do.

Kate  
Yes, me too I'm afraid.

Joss  
It'll be all right Mary, go on, get on wiv it.

Mary  
This is it then, you're all leaving me.

They all look at Mary and nod.

Mary walks to each TV monitor in turn.

Mag  
See ya tart.

Mary  
See ya pump face.

Mary switches Mag's TV off and walks to Kate.

Kate  
Ring me next week.

Mary  
Yeh okay.

Mary switches Kate off.

Joss  
We'll go out dancing just you and me aye?

Mary  
Okay, that would be nice.

Mary switches Joss's monitor off.

Mary walks to Mum's empty screen and hovers for a moment over the off button, the lights begin to fade slowly. Fade up soundtrack of A Capella version of "For these are my Mountains" sung by the real sisters.

"For these are my Mountains

For these are my mountains and this is my glen,  
The place of my childhood will know me again.  
No lands ever claimed me, though far I did roam  
For these are my mountains and I'm going home".

Mary switches Mum's monitor off and walks back to her desk.

"For fame and for fortune, I wandered the earth, and  
now I've come back to, this land of my birth.  
I brought back my treasures, but only to find,  
They're less than the pleasures, I first left behind".

Mary sits at the computer and begins to search for a document. Lights fade to black, Mary's face is illuminated just by the computer monitor.

"Ken faces will meet me,  
And welcome me in,  
And how they will great me,  
My ain kith and kin.  
This nech ruch dee ingle,  
Auld sangs will be sung,  
At last I'll be hearing,  
My ain mother tongue".

On 'Tongue' Mary switches the computer monitor off and exits the stage in the blackout.

END

Wednesday, Wednesday  
2005



Figure 3: *Wednesday, Wednesday* - Ying and Yang



Figure 4: *Wednesday, Wednesday* - L'Oreal Hair

WEDNESDAY, WEDNESDAY.

On stage is a TV monitor on a two-legged video stand, a small table and chair.

O.S. Music begins and Mary, bright red hair, dressed in sequin trimmed puce yellow tight fitting top, red sparkly mini-skirt and red platform shoes, enters with a picnic basket.

She surveys the audience excitedly, theatrically she drops a napkin behind her then moves up stage left and puts the basket down. She swoops off to the left in dramatic style.

On the TV screen Mary's swoop is echoed by her onscreen double (MM) who appears and disappears briefly.

Mary repeats her swoop stage right and M.M. repeats the echo onscreen.

Mary sees the napkin (that no one has picked up for her) and with an exaggerated expression of disappointment she bends to pick it up. As she stands up notices the monitor and moves towards it.

As Mary comes closer to the screen M.M. appears and mirrors her head actions.

Their heads move towards each other, then away, then in closer, then they lift a finger tip and touch.

Their fingers drop they study each other's expression for an instant.

M.M.

Boo!

MARY

Aaah! Bleedin ell you frightened the life out of me.

M.M.

Why's that? You're the more terrifying sight.

MARY

Only because they can see more of me?

M.M.

(aside to audience)

And what a lot more there is.

MARY

Ladies and gentlemen I would like to present to you the other half of the act.

M.M.

And I would like to also present the other half of the act.

MARY



I thank you.

M.M.

I thank you.

MARY AND M.M.

(in unison)  
We thank you.

MARY

We've come together today for a one off special event.

M.M.

Never to be repeated.

MARY

Unique.

M.M.

Delightful.

MARY

Delicious.

M.M.

Delectable.

MARY

Dumb-founding.

M.M.

Perspicacious.

Mary gives M.M. An "ooh get her look".

MARY

I say.

M.M.

I say.

MARY

I say, people often ask who's the other one?

Mary blocks TV, M.M. Looks over should both sides.

M.M.

It's.

MARY

Is it your alto-ego?

M.M.

I'm.

MARY

Is it your evil twin?

Mary stands to side.

M.M.  
(scoffs)

MARY  
And I just tell em how it is, it's me?

M.M.  
I am not.

MARY  
You are.

M.M.  
Not.

MARY  
Are.

M.M.  
Not not not!

MARY  
Who are you then?

M.M.  
'I' am Mary practically perfect in every way.

L'Oreal slow motion hair swing with a twinkle and a smile at the end.

MARY  
I really should change my shampoo.

Mary moves to picnic and starts to unpack.

M.M.  
I transcend the mundane, I am outside of time, yet always  
in time, I exist beyond the mortal realm, always line  
perfect, never a hair out of place, never a word spoken  
out of turn, I am.

MARY  
Un-real.

M.M.  
And, if you tried very hard you could be like me as well.

M.M. gives an extra little real time hair flick.

Mary looks incredulous and eats something.

MARY

Haaa!

M.M.

You could, it just takes a lot of practice.

MARY  
(to audience)

And takes!

M.M.

I think it's a fine aim in life to become better than we are, to strive to become transcendent beings.

MARY  
And how do I do that?

M.M.  
Well you could start with a simple mantra.

MARY  
A what?

M.M.  
A mantra.

MARY  
Will it help me lose weight?

M.M.  
Perhaps, now close your eyes,

Mary puts her food down.

M.M. (CONT'D)  
Close them.. and repeat after me  
Chuk toy coy ma hummmmm.

MARY  
Chuk toy coy ma hummmmmmm.

M.M.  
Keep going.

MARY  
Chuk toy coy ma hummmmmmm.

M.M.  
Pat you head at the same time.

MARY  
Chuk toy coy ma hummmmmmm.

M.M.  
Now rub your belly.

MARY  
Chuk toy coy ma hummmmmmm.

M.M.

Now stand on one leg.

Mary wobbles

MARY

Chuk tt..what Does it mean?

M.M.

It means, you are completely gullible and several light years away from perfection.

Humiliated Mary lifts her arm to grab the remote M.M. flinches and Mary picks up the remote control.

M.M. (CONT'D)

Don't you hit me..

MARY

Hit you, hit you, how could you suggest such a thing?

M.M.

What are you gonna do with that?

MARY

Oh, yes, afraid of this are you?

Mary pokes and pretends to button press.

M.M. squirms and looks terrified.

M.M.

Alright, alright you've made your point

MARY

See not so bloody transistent now are we?

Mary puts the remote down again and plays out to audience.

M.M.

Trans...ooh never mind.

MARY

What do you call a woman who supports Tony Blair?

M.M.

I don't know.

MARY

Brain dead. What do you call a woman who still has sex with her husband even though she finds him grossly unattractive?

M.M.

I don't know.

MARY

Clinically dead. What do you call a woman who stops

shopping?

Mary turns back to M.M.

M.M. AND MARY

Dead?

Both giggle.

M.M.

(to Mary)

You see, the differences between us aren't just physical they're mental.

MARY

Are you suggesting I am deranged?

M.M.

Well now you come to mention it, you did think this up.

MARY

(pleased)

Yes, I did didn't I.

Mary looks pleased, then confused.

Mary continues to unpack the picnic hamper.

M.M.

(to audience)

You see my mind has clarity, it's not muddled by the same neurotic concerns that the average human being has to cope with, what to eat, what to where, when to expurgate my bowels.

MARY

Don't forget sex.

Mary holds up a sausage and M.M. glares disapprovingly.

M.M.

Oh really!

MARY

So what you're really saying is that you're not alive.

M.M.

No.

Mary takes out a long sausage and chews on it.

MARY

You can't have it both ways, you're either a living, heaving, humping human being or not.

Mary tries to sound intelligent.

M.M.

(to audience)

Why do I get an image of a hippopotamus when she says that?

MARY

And if you're not alive then it follows that you have no soul.

M.M.

NO SOUL! Of course I have a soul, I'm in touch with heavenly being beings I have to have a soul.

MARY

You could just be delusional.

M.M.

Let's get one thing straight, I am never delusional.

MARY

(gently)

Being alive isn't just about heavenly pursuits it's about hugging and touching and...

Intro Music.

MARY (CONT'D)

It's about.

M.M.

Oh dear Goh.. tell me you're not going to sing.

MARY

It's about.

M.M.

Oh my goodness she's going to sing.

MARY

It's about.

Mary sings.

M.M. squirming.

MARY (CONT'D)

Some one to hold you too close.

M.M.

She's singing!

MARY

Some one to hurt you too deep, Some one to sit in your chair, to ruin your sleep, to make you aware of being alive...being alive.

M.M.

Some one to need you too much, Some one to know  
you too well, Some one to pull you up short, to  
put you through hell.

MARY

And give you support, is being alive

M.M. AND MARY

Being alive.

M.M.

Someone you have to let in.

M.M. turns away.

MARY

Someone whose feelings you spare.

M.M.

Someone who like it or not, will want you to  
share.

MARY

A little.

M.M.

A lot!

MARY

Is being alive.

M.M.

Being alive.

M.M. AND MARY

Being alive.

Mary hugs the TV.

M.M.

Someone to crowd you with love.

MARY

Someone to force you to care.

M.M.

Some one to make you come through.

Mary strokes TV.

MARY

Who'll always be there, as frightened as you, of  
being alive.

M.M. AND MARY

Being alive, being alive, being a live.

Music ends.

M.M.

(over enthusiastically)

Oh now I get it!

MARY

Do you?

M.M.

No, but I wouldn't mind swapping over, just as an experiment, you know someone to sit in my chair.

MARY

What me come in there and you out here?

M.M.

Yes.

MARY

You mean come out here and me go in there?

M.M.

Mmmm.

MARY

You out here, with all my.. things.

M.M.

Ah ha.

MARY

With my.... chocolates?

M.M. Nods her head.

MARY (CONT'D)

No chance.

M.M.

Why not?

MARY

Because I don't trust you that's why.

M.M.

Why on earth not, I am incapable of lying.

MARY

In there maybe, but once out here, you could succumb to all sorts of temptations and pleasures of the flesh and then you'd never want to go back in.

M.M.

From the affect it's had on you, I don't think so.



MARY

God, it's hard to believe that we are the same person.

M.M.

I know because even though I resemble you in a lot of ways, I am infinitely more gorgeous.

M.M. moves in slow motion, her hair swinging slowly in the air.

Mary sits and tucks into the food and drink.

M.M. (CONT'D)

'You' are what nature, with the addition of two thousand bottles of wine, 15 gallons of double cream, forty-five thousand, five hundred and three cups of tea, 27 salamis and thirty six bottles of ant-acid has left us with.

MARY

(mouth full)

Oh no! Oh why did you have to tell me that?

M.M.

Whereas I never need to eat and therefore always remain a constant size ten.

MARY

No you don't!

M.M.

Well you know the camera does add a few pounds.

M.M. puts her fingers in her ears and sings the mantras.

MARY

A few? Listen, I'd rather be an odorous, farting, shitting, bleeding, burping, emotional human being (that didn't quite come out how I meant it) than the anally retentive, never put a step wrong, oxford dictionary up the arse specimen that is you.

Mary moves closer.

M.M.

Your words can't hurt me, I feel no pain.

MARY

What not even this?

Mary bangs on the TV.

M.M.

(expletives are edited out)

You fff, bbbb, shhhh, at.!

MARY

Oh take the censors off and say what you really mean for a change.

M.M.

I'm considered that's all, I think that one shouldn't resort to base words, when we have so many at our disposal.

Over sound track of ethereal music, M.M makes a speech directly aimed at the audience, while Mary eats and drinks grossly with bodily SFX dotted rhythmically throughout.

M.M. (CONT'D)

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, lesbian and gay, black and white, fat and thin, tall and short, clever and thick as two short planks, I would like to tell you about the virtues of the life beyond, the life in me-dia.

Mary burps

M.M. (CONT'D)

Imagine, all the people living for today, no more wars, no more hunger, trust in me, trust in me, when you're weary feeling old, I will comfort you, all you need is the air that I breath..

Mary does a little fart

M.M. (CONT'D)

and to love, love all you need is love, in January, sick and tired of paper roses, paper roses April in Paris, don't wait until September, what a difference a day makes, I have a feeling deep down inside..

Mary burps

M.M. (CONT'D)

Love, here is my song here is a song to serenade in the wee small hours of the morning, I hear ringing and there's no one there, people all over the world, join in, join in! with a life in Media.

Ending on long comedy fart from Mary.

Mary is drinking a glass of wine and a cake, sips and eats, with M.M. Looking on longingly but pretending not to care.

MARY

Mmmmm, delicious.....the texture of this cake is superb, it melts in the mouth, with a delicate buttery, creamy taste with a hint of orange.

Visual Cue M.M. licks her lips.

MARY (CONT'D)

And it's beautifully complimented by the wine which has an odour of berries, vanilla, orange blossom, with a dry tangy twist.

M.M.

(relieved)

Tangy.

MARY

But not bitter, no smooth, washes the cake down beautifully.

M.M. salivates.

M.M.

Alright, alright you've made your point.

They pause to assess each other, Mary pats her mouth with the napkin.

M.M. wipes the saliva from the corner of her mouth.

Mary moves stage right.

MARY

I think it's a balance, you know the Ying and the Yang.

M.M. follows Mary with her eyes.

M.M.

At last! Reason is setting in, I knew you could get it if I stuck around long enough.

MARY

Which one are you?

M.M.

What d'you mean?

MARY

I think I'm more of a Ying, bright sparky with a bit of a Ying!! whereas you're more of a Yang, Yaangg.

Mary moves stage left.

M.M.

It's Yin.

MARY

What?

M.M.

It's Yin not ying

MARY

Oh never mind, by the way what happened on Wednesday?

M.M.  
Wednesday?

MARY  
Wednesday

M.M.  
Wednesday?

MARY  
It's like living with a bleedin echo, what happened when you saw, what's his name.

Mary moves back to the table, M.M. follows her with her eyes.

M.M.  
God?

MARY  
Yeh.

M.M.  
Nothing really.

MARY  
Don't be daft, how can you see God and nothin really happened.

M.M.  
Like I said, we met, he told me his troubles, and boy did they put my life in perspective.

MARY  
And?

M.M.  
So I offered him a chair  
and I apologised for having nothing to offer him  
and he said it didn't matter because he's a on a  
diet.

MARY  
On a diet!

M.M.  
Yes, he's having trouble finding things to fit.

MARY  
I can't get into any of my clothes anymore.

Mary has a semi-private moment.

M.M.  
(sarcastically)

Ha I wonder why?

MARY  
They've all shrunk.

M.M.  
(scoffs)  
Shrunk.

MARY  
Yeh, I got up one morning and found that all my knickers had suddenly got smaller, I put it down to the new washing machine.

M.M.  
Just your knickers?

MARY  
For a while, and then I couldn't do up my trousers and after that my shirts.

M.M.  
You've always had trouble with shirts.

MARY  
So have you.

M.M.  
I have not, now there you see a prime example of the differences between us, you see everything in the negative whereas I see everything as a blessing, I am well endowed.

MARY  
My tits are big enough to knock out Mike Tyson if I turn too fast.

M.M.  
I have the ability to breast feed a small country.

MARY  
My cleavage runs from the middle of me neck to me navel.

M.M.  
You can take the girl out of the council estate....

MARY  
And don't get me started on uneven nipples. At least mine get felt up occasionally.

M.M.  
Ooh you are so crude.

MARY  
Prude.

Sl... M.M.

Spinster. MARY

Ta.... M.M.

Frigid Bitch. MARY

Your belly has the elasticity of an old flannel. M.M.

Pubic Alopecia really isn't that common it is? MARY

M.M. Covers her face in embarrassment

MARY (CONT'D)  
You see I can share my 'feelings' spontaneously,  
do you know that word Spon-tan-e-ous.

Mood swings. M.M.

What? MARY

You're an emotional pendulum, one minute. M.M.

Mary picks up the cake and scoffs it.

M.M. (CONT'D)  
(confident)  
Oh I'm so beautiful, I'm so strong,  
(snivelling)  
Look at me, oh my god there's another wrinkle,  
(neurotic)  
Should I have Botox?  
I wonder if I'd be allergic to it?  
(angry)  
Oh who needs Botox, it's a poison, I am so furious  
that I almost that I succumbed to media pressure,  
(confident)  
I am a strong beautiful woman,  
(exasperated)  
god it's exhausting

MARY  
But you see what 'I'm' doing is really communicating the emotions, the sheer energy of being alive, "touch me do I not bleed".

M.M.

There's a lot to be said for not bleeding.

MARY

But the wonderful thing about being alive is that every second is different, can't be repeated, can't be repeated.

M.M.

I think it's overrated.

Mary stands and drops the cake.

MARY

Whoops!

Mary bends over to pick it up.

MARY (CONT'D)

See mistakes, mistakes are part of the risk

M.M. Flinches at the sight of Mary's behind.

M.M.

It was a mistake to wear that skirt.

Mary stands suddenly and pulls her skirt down.

MARY

At least I'm not one dimensional.

Mary waves her hand in front of the TV and M.M. Flinches

MARY (CONT'D)

Flat!

M.M.

That depends what you mean by dimension. I can surpass the time space continuum in all sorts of ways.

MARY

What like this?

Mary presses the remote, M.M. Talks in speeded up time. Mary stops.

M.M.

Stop it!

Mary laughs using the remote like a gunslinger showing off, she lifts the remote.

M.M. (CONT'D)

Stop it!

Mary points the remote up backwards between her legs and M.M. Speeds up again. Then stops.

M.M. (CONT'D)  
Stop it!!!! Don't be so childish,

MARY  
(mimics)  
Don't be so childish.

M.M.  
You can't see that there are levels of existence  
and experience that are beyond the mere corporeal.

MARY  
Mere, mere, I think we're talking a lot more than  
mere darlin, anyway you didn't finish telling me  
what happened on Wednesday?

M.M.  
Oh yes Wednesday, well he said that since there  
were people who could now meet with him on a daily  
basis, namely "moi", then he would have to re-  
assess his methods of communication.

MARY  
God said that?

M.M.  
Those words exactly, because as you know I have  
perfect memory recall.

MARY  
(to audience)  
Yes you always seem to get your timing right.

M.M.  
It also helps that I'm telepathic.

MARY AND M.M. TOGETHER  
(to audience)  
Oh no you're not.

They look at each other.

M.M.  
Oh yes I am.

MARY  
Ok What am I thinking now?

M.M.  
You're thinking that I look like my mother.

MARY AND M.M. TOGETHER  
(to audience)  
Yeh when did that happen?

MARY  
Alright I'll try again.



M.M.

A blue cat.

Mary looks to the audience excited.

MARY

And now?

M.M.

A yellow dog.

MARY

And now?

M.M.

Ooooh that's gross

MARY

I couldn't help it, sorry, it just slipped past the bad taste censors, only for a mili-second, look it's gone now. I'll think of something nice.

Mary shakes her head and closes her eyes to think up another image

M.M. and Mary Together

Ahh! Summer 1990.

MARY

That was great wasn't it.

M.M.

So much music.

MARY

So many men!

M.M.

So much alcohol.

MARY

Aaah those were the days when I never got a hangover.

M.M.

Except that one time.

MARY

Oooh dear god don't say that out loud.

M.M.

No I wasn't going to.

MARY

No.

M.M.

No.

MARY

Never.

M.M.

No never.

They are both blushing and sighing with relief at the other's discretion they look at each other and look away quickly, Mary and M.M. whistling.

Mary rushes back to the TV.

M.M. (CONT'D)

I can't get it out of my head now.

MARY

Nor can I.

M.M.

I've gotta tell them.

MARY

No.

M.M.

Just a...

MARY

NO!

M.M.

There was one night and I'd had quite a lot drink and there was this bloke.

Mary picks up the remote fast forwards with the remote.

M.M. Begins to tell story then Mary takes her fast forward through the story.

M.M. (CONT'D)

And I vowed I'd never do that again.

MARY

Aaaah those were the days weren't they?

MM looks at Mary suspiciously.

M.M.

You just cut it out didn't you?

MARY

No.

Pause M.M. Narrows eyes.

M.M.

I know you did.

MARY

No I didn't.

M.M.

The trouble with you is that you want to be liked too much.

MARY

Rubbish, I just want to share the sheer joy and exuberance at being ...well me!

Intro sound track.

M.M.

Here we go again.

MARY

I got my hair, I got my head, I got my brains, I got my ears, I got my eyes, I got my nose I got my mouth, I got my smile.

Mary (CONT'D)

I got my tongue, I got my chin, I got my neck, I got my tits I got my heart, I got my soul, I got my back, I got my sex.

M.M. Leaves the screen and rushes back and forth, arms legs and hair in picture from all directions.

M.M.

I got my arms, I got my hands, I got my fingers, got my legs, I got my feet, I got my toes, I got my liver, got my blood.

M.M. AND MARY

I got life, life, life, life , life, life, life.

Mary is upstaged by M.M.

M.M. comes back on screen stroking the hair back in place.

M.M.

Oh that was quite refreshing.

MARY

I thought you said you didn't feel things.

M.M.

Well not in the same way as you.

MARY

I've been thinking.

M.M. Expresses her surprise to the audience.

MARY (CONT'D)

You do know you ain't really here

M.M.  
Aren't, aren't really here.

MARY  
Ah so you do realise it.

M.M.  
What?

MARY  
That you're not here.

M.M.  
No.

MARY  
Aren't.

M.M.  
Am.

MARY  
Aren't.

M.M.  
Are not.

MARY  
See.

M.M.  
I are not!

MARY  
That's right you aren't really here.

M.M. opens her mouth in protest and Mary walks up to the TV holding her hand over the off switch.

M.M.  
No no stop it, look right now I am definitely absolutely one hundred per cent here.

MARY  
But if I am 'here' you can't also be 'here'.

M.M.  
Oh I see what you mean.

MARY  
And therefore.

M.M.  
And therefore.

MARY  
Not actually...

Not actually M.M.

Live. MARY

Li..No! M.M.

Mary moves closer.

MARY  
That's right, not live, and it's my show, isn't it?

M.M. Opens her mouth to protest.

MARY (CONT'D)  
So I think it would be better if you let me finish on my own.

M.M. gets up slowly, she hesitates and tries to come back at Mary.

Mary (CONT'D)  
Ahh, no! I've warned you before, don't upstage me, you should never upstage me. Get off!

M.M. slowly exits the screen, still hopefully looking back.

MARY (CONT'D)  
(to audience)  
Great, now she's gone we can get down to some real intimate stuff, just you- me-.

Mary bends down to the picnic hamper and pulls out one at a time .

MARY (CONT'D)  
Some frothy cream and a flippin gigantic salami.

Mary walks to towards the audience brandishing her cream and salami. She is almost on top of someone on the first row and stops dead in her tracks.

Voice-over 'distant' voice

Mary! M.M.

What? MARY

I can still hear you? M.M.

How? MARY

M.M.

I'm still here.

Mary changes direction and walks back to the TV.

MARY  
Why?

M.M.  
(o.s. crying)  
I can't get out

MARY  
Oh for goodness sake.

Mary tries to look inside the TV screen. She gesticulates with the salami.

MARY (CONT'D)  
Use the door handle, it's down, on the left, the left.

Mary turns looks at her left and right hands.

MARY (CONT'D)  
The right, right!

M.M.  
Hello, can anybody hear me?

MARY  
Oh come on. This is pathetic.

M.M.  
Is that you Mary? Your voice is very faint.  
(high little person's voice)  
I can't find the way out.

MARY  
Oh for goodness sake.

Mary exits off stage.

SFX door opens.

MARY (CONT'D)  
(o.s.)  
Look (beat) over here.

MARY (CONT'D)  
I thought you being a supreme being could manage to do a simple thing like opening a door handle.

M.M.  
Well yes but when it's shut it's impossible to see because everything's so (beat) white. Look I'll show you, it's impossible to see it.

SFX door closing.

MARY

Oh right, that is odd, I never knew that before,  
okay you can open the door now....

SFX banging.

MARY (CONT'D)

Mary! Let me out, come on, joke over, look I'm  
getting annoyed now. Mary, open the door!

SFX door banging.

M.M. Comes on stage, tentatively, without a skirt. Her comedy tights are  
too small and the gusset is approaching her knees.

O.S. banging interspersed with Mary complaining.

M.M. Is embarrassed when she sees the audience and tries to pull her top  
down to cover her bum, she sees the picnic and runs to it.

Mary comes on screen furious snarling and biting at the inside of the  
screen.

MARY (CONT'D)

(o.s. shouting)

Let me out! Let me out, you Bi...fff... Tw...Look!  
I'm in control of this show, let-me- out!

M.M. gauges herself on the leftover food and wine.

M.M.

(to Mary sings to the tune of 'I've got life')

I got your wine, I got your cake, I got your plates,  
and these little dinky cups, I got your salami and  
I've got- your-chocolates.

M.M. picks up the chocolates and stands close to the  
screen eating them.

Mary looks on in pain.

MARY

No please, please, not the chocolates.

Fade up music.

M.M. Packs up the picnic basket.

MARY (CONT'D)

Where are you going, where are you going with my  
things, what am I going to do? Don't leave me.

M.M.

Oh, by the way, God's coming round next Wednesday.

MARY

Wednesday?

M.M.

He wants to discuss free will.

MARY

Free Will, but I've only seen it once, I can't remember how it ends.

M.M.

You'll cope.

M.M. approaches the TV her finger points towards the off switch.

MARY

Oh please, please don't, no, no d....

M.M. Switches the TV off.

M.M. Picks up the picnic hamper. She looks around, looks long into the distance takes a deep breath and exits.



Never Work With Animals, Children  
or Digital Characters  
2006



Figure 4: Never Work With Animals Children and Digital Characters



Fig 5: Never Work With Animals Children and Digital Characters

NEVER WORK WITH ANIMALS CHILDREN OR DIGITAL CHARACTERS

INT.

Two office chairs are situation on either side of a screen which sits near floor level. One of them is real, the other is projected onto the screen.

MARY

(off stage)

Three, two, one.

Two identical performers appear, one from the wings, one to the right onscreen. The digital performer gets caught in her leads.

MARY OS

Oh sorry I'm caught, can we do that again?

They both exit

MARY

Ready?

Both performers enter again and sit down at the same time.

Mary Onscreen (OS) clears her throat tries to get comfortable.

Mary on-stage, leans forward and smiles at the audience.

MARY (CONT'D)

A good audience experience is one in which we are lifted out of the mundane experience of our everyday existence, and forget, even for a short time the reality that we have left behind. The good actor's presence allows us to empathise, to connect with our audience cousins across the physical and psychological gap of pretence.

Mary OS tries to sit quietly, she fidgets a bit.

MARY (CONT'D)

A bad performance is a dead one. I corpsed, I simply died out there, he froze, darling it's like performing with a bleedin cadaver. As a performer I am naturally fearful of becoming dislocated from this alternate live reality, by my lack of presence. Obvious case scenario, forgetting my lines, actually its just forgetting, which I seem to do more and more these days. Too much to do. Could be early menopause. I don't know.

Mary OS is looking around at the audience.

MARY (CONT'D)

But saying that, it's often this loss of memory, the freeze, the dislocation from the task at hand, that makes us appear human, like one of them, like

the audience, and has been the driver that has encouraged us to work in ways that bring us closer to the audience's sense of reality, to rewarding affects.

Mary OS sees someone in particular on the stage left hand side of the audience. She stares at them, looks away and behind her, as if looking behind to see if they are looking past her.

MARY (CONT'D)

Certainly my own background in improvisation and site specific theatre made me feel that I was achieving something akin to this.

Mary keeps looking at the same person and looking away and back again.

MARY (CONT'D)

So why when we've barely touched the surface of reality theatre, do we then choose to pit ourselves against mediatized perfection. We have introduced characters onto the live stage who are line perfect, never miss a beat, their sense of timing is acute, their reactions solid.

Mary OS is annoyed and silently begins to challenge the member of the audience.

MARY (CONT'D)

Why do we do this to ourselves, when we know the audience loves Tommy Cooper more than David Blaine? Why has the product of the blooper section at the end of the DVD and "It'll be alright on the night" with its animal and children videos being? Well animals and children, become prime time viewing. If as audiences we embrace media perfection, why are these products so popular?

Mary OS is now picking a fight with the member of the audience

MARY OS

Oh Yeh!

MARY

What are you doing?

MARY OS

Nothing.

MARY

You must have been doing something?

MARY OS

Well they asked for it.

MARY

Asked for what? Just behave.

Mary resumes her lecture.

MARY (CONT'D)

And why, when we know that the presence of the vulnerable..

Mary OS

(makes loud popping sound)

Looks at Mary OS.

MARY

All engaging, audience responsive..

Mary OS

(makes another loud popping sound)

Mary

Actor still draws audiences, do we want to go and..

Mary OS

(makes loud popping sound)

MARY

(extremely fast)

Supplant them with a digital one stop it!

MARY OS

I'm bored and it's difficult to sit here with all of them looking at me.

MARY

Stop doing things to draw attention to yourself.

MARY OS

(mimics)

Draw attention to yourself.

MARY

Just try to be in the background.

MARY OS

I'll just go off if you like.

Mary

What? No.

MARY OS

It'd be better if I wasn't here cos you don't actually need me.

MARY

Please, just sit there. And wait for your turn.

MARY OS

(burps)

Pardon me.

MARY

In recent years my memory has become a bit dodgy to say the least, I said that already (beat) yet somewhere inside all of these failings is the need to continue to strive for perfection.

Mary OS turns around on her chair.

MARY (CONT'D)

Only the other night after the premiere of my latest work, a show which came so close to technical failure, I was convinced I was going to die.

I lay down on my bed after the show and punched the pillow and my partner asked "what's the matter now?" I said I was disappointed because just for once I wanted to make something perfect and it wasn't. And he said, "but that's why we keep doing it, isn't it?"

Mary OS leans back and looks at the ceiling.

Mary looks at Mary OS.

MARY (CONT'D)

He did, didn't he.

Mary waits for a response, Mary OS looks at her.

MARY (CONT'D)

That's what he said didn't he?

Mary OS nods then shakes head.

MARY OS

What? Oh yes, he did, that's what he said.

MARY

(Deep sigh)

The digital character is in a cryogenic state. In a sort of liminal space all of its own.

MARY OS

(with more gravitas)

He did, that's what he said.

MARY

In her own time and forcibly brought into ours. She lives only in reference to her live counterpart.

MARY OS

(firmly)

He did that's what he said.

MARY

Whereas I, we, you, me, us we can do very well without them. But we will never be perfect, never reliable, never the same twice.

MARY OS

(with empathy)

He did that's what he said! That was the best one wasn't it?

MARY

In my show Wednesday, Wednes..

MARY OS

Wasn't it?

MARY

What?

MARY OS

That last one, it was the best one?

MARY

Yeh, yeh, fine, we'll use that. Um, right in Wednesday, Wednesday, my attempt at a comedy double act, I posed the question that the mediatized character, although convincing will never be truly live. We'll do a small excerpt from that show now.

MARY OS

Which bit?

MARY

Anything.

MARY OS

(clears throat)

You can't have it both ways, you're either a living breathing humping, heaving.

MARY

That's my line.

MARY OS

You said anything.

MARY

Anything from my-your-her-your oh flippin eck....(clears throat). You can't have it both ways, you're either a living, heaving, humping, human being or not.

MARY OS

Oh you are so crude.

MARY

And if that is the case then it follows...you have no soul.

MARY OS

No soul, of course I have a soul,

MARY

Thank you, you see try as she might..

MARY OS

S'that it?

MARY

(nodding)

Try as she might to prove it, the suggestion that the recorded image. The digital character has the same human qualities as us, is ridiculous

MARY OS

It is?

MARY

Yes, because you are not a real human, you are my creation of one.

MARY OS

Goog, goog? Good god woman, this has gone to your head, you're scaring me now.

MARY

Look you'll see what I mean. Bill Viola "in the future of technology is the future of what is real" said "that with each new step in the evolution of technology, we take a step closer to our ideal of higher and higher quality, which actually means creating things that look more and more like nature itself" you see.

MARY OS

Oh that's alright then.

MARY

But even though we get closer and closer to our ability to present the life like three dimensional hologram, the clone or the cyborg, for now, the real experience only lies in the mind of the audience who choose to suspend their disbelief.

MARY OS

Hang on, if I haven't got one, you haven't got one.

MARY

No, I have one, you had one, but right now you have none.



Mary OS begins to cry.

MARY (CONT'D)

She has evolved from my imaginary landscape of perception, to this real one, but still she must remain, an ephemeral, intangible presence. She can never be more than this.

Mary OS sniffs.

MARY (CONT'D)

Oh what's the matter?

Mary OS whispers inaudibly

MARY OS

(whispers)

I do have a soul.

MARY

What did you say?

MARY OS

I do have a soul.

MARY

Oh, sorry, I was a bit tactless that must be rather hard to come to terms with.

MARY OS

Yes, God.....you've really upset me now.

Mary OS hides her face.

MARY

Such a responsibility we have, you're right, maybe you should take a break, it's alright,  
(to an imaginary camera man)

I'm sorry, stop, please stop recording. Stop.

Mary OS looks up there are no tears in her eyes.

MARY OS

Acting!

MARY

Idiot!

Are these digital characters a mirror image of ourselves all be it, the one where we look in a particular way, approvingly, not the face caught by the happy snapper, but posed, in the correct light, with just the right expression. As one of my sister's said, we all have a certain attraction about us, but we only look beautiful in a certain light.

Mary OS

A low one.

MARY

Tadeusz Kantor in a journey through other spaces said that we exist in real space. He talks of the mirror image as the ghost of ourselves living in an imaginary space.

MARY OS

Aaaahhhh!

MARY

What the hell!

Mary OS

I've got no feet.

MARY

Lift them up.

MARY OS

So what does that make me then? Memory, apparition, cyborg?

MARY

No there's nothing organic about you.

MARY OS

That's not what my bowels are telling me right now.

Mary OS shakes head three times after yet

MARY

There's no name for you yet, you're not my alto-ego, nor my doppelganger, not my mirror image, right now you're not me, we're back to Auslander again, You're my mediatized self but..?

MARY OS

Oooh attractive? Well if I'm allowed to have an opinion since I'm a soulless shadow of my former self. I think I'm your digi-self, because, I'm myself which is yourself, but digital, digi for short, like me and you.

MARY

Yeh, that sort of works.

MARY OS

Oh come on you've got to do it, US theorists make up names for things all the time, mediatization, quantificational renderization, ampometrical thermo blasting thingamabobbyzation.

MARY

Yeh and they always spell them with a Z!

MARY (CONT'D)

Yeh. Alright then, from now on I will refer to you as my digi-self.

MARY OS

Thank you, I now exist in the reality of the field of practice as research.

MARY

Excellent, I feel better now, sort of like balanced, whole.

MARY OS

Mmmmmmm, so do I, I exist.

MARY

Yes, this feels right. A new term.

There is a short pause.

MARY OS

Well get on with it then.

MARY

Sorry. When I am writing digital characters I am always trying to attain a sort of spontaneity. Not to fool the audience, per se, or confuse, but to allow a behavioural balance between the real and the digi-self.

Smile at Mary OS who smiles back.

MARY (CONT'D)

Although at times this may appear to be incompetence, this makes her more vulnerable and more human, something we have in common with those who strive to create artificial intelligence no less. I must build in these eccentricities and yet am always reassured that I know she will perform accurately. Like now for instance, I know exactly what she's going to say.

Mary OS puts one hand up to her ear.

MARY OS

Wait!

MARY

Well that wasn't it.

MARY OS

Hang on a bit.

MARY

What's up?

MARY OS

I'll...hang... sorry, wait a bit, until I get to the right part.(beat) Bloody Technology, hopeless. Right here we go.

MARY

Are you ready now?

MARY OS

Yep there.. you.. go, go, go quick!

MARY

(speaks very quickly)

What began with the separation of the voice from the body, which we have come to accept through media invasion and overload. Has now entered practice as a Cartesian split. The body itself in transit, in it's virtual plain of existence.

MARY OS puts her thumb up.

MARY (CONT'D)

(speaks slowly)

The resurrection from the dead of Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, my Mum.

Mary OS signals to speed up.

MARY (CONT'D)

All enjoyed as a result of Auslander's suggested collapse between live and mediated forms of presentation.

Mary OS gives her the thumbs up.

MARY (CONT'D)

We are now in a three way relationship. Of the performer, audience, and virtual performer.

MARY OS

Digi-self.

They smile at each other and nod in agreement.

MARY

Digi-self, yes. And it's the consideration for this ménage a trois which is at the heart of this form of writing. I've found however I do fall into patterns of behaviour. (beat) This may seem a little extreme but it is rather like working with dogs who only have a vocabulary of woof, pant, whine and possibly if you're very unlucky snarl and bite, once scripted and recorded, the character is limited.

MARY OS

Now steady on.

MARY

In addition we cannot control the machines on which we present these characters. When I last performed Wednesday, Wednesday, in rehearsal everything worked fine.

MARY OS

It did.

MARY

Right up to the point when the technician left the room and we started and 'she' jumped right from the intro to half way through the show.

MARY (CONT'D)

It wasn't my fault and who's she the cat's mother? It was that cheap DVD player they were using.

MARY (CONT'D)

Yes, I want to put that show back onto digital tape, it's more reliable, remind me to do that won't you.

MARY OS

Put it back onto tape....

Mary glares.

MARY OS (CONT'D)

What? I thought it was a prompt. Ah Yes, because feeding these supposed spontaneous lines is very important. You don't mind if I lead this bit do you?

MARY

No, in fact, I did contemplate giving you the whole script to relieve the stress, but then the process would be more cinematic and I'd be accused of....

MARY OS

Have you finished moaning? ....All this you, me, she, we, us thing is doing my head in.

(to audience)

When I'm writing for a pre-recorded character it's always important to think about the process of production. Like how does the character keep in time, what kind of dialogue is it? What pace? Now for instance, in this particular piece...

(to Mary)

Can I.... can I tell them about this?

MARY

Yeh? Why not?

MARY OS

At the moment all my lines are being fed, through this little ear piece here.

Mary OS pulls her ear piece out.

MARY

Oh not ooh, anything but that, have you completely lost.. I knew it was a mistake expecting you to take this seriously.

Mary sulks.

MARY OS

(speaking as if Mary is hard of hearing)

What? I can't hear you, no, nothing, not a word, how lovely.

(to audience)

Timing, is absolutely central to the process. From the initial idea to the point of live performance.

(leans forward)

I remember one time I talked to a group of students who'd seen a piece I did, where I played five characters at once, which had a computer running it, and when the discussion about how it was made came up, one of them said 'ooh I didn't know the computer was real, I thought it was a prop' so I said well how did you think I did it then? And she said "magic" bless.

Mary smiles and nods.

Mary OS (CONT'D)

But that's the point at the end of the day isn't it? We want to deliver something that will take the audience out of the mundane into a plain in which they stop asking, how do they do that? And simply believe it. With that in mind, it would be interesting to know for the future is the way I'm talking to you now, significantly different than when she's bellowing the instructions in my ear?

Mary points to her wrist and mouths for her to put the ear-piece back in.

MARY OS (CONT'D)

Oh alright, even if just to stop you sulking.

Mary waits for Mary OS to put her earpiece back in and give her the thumbs up.

MARY

(shouting)

What's left if you reveal everything.

MARY OS

Alright, alright Professor Higgins, afraid of being stripped naked in public?

MARY

I had enough of that of that in the 80s

MARY OS

Don't worry it'll come back into fashion.

MARY

God help us! One leading light in the digital technology world, who shall remain nameless, suggested that this is a form of digital ventriloquism, but one in which I appear to have my own hand up my arse.

MARY OS

Oh, that's it. Oooh, you've put the thought there now, my bowels were feeling funny before, and now, yeuw. oh god the thought of it.

MARY

I didn't think it was a very nice thing to say either. Sorry, remember it's not real, none of this is real.

MARY OS

Well it feels real, I can tell you, it's agony, and they aren't even aware that this is the twelfth take and I've got a five o'clock shadow under my arms, while you're all fresh and just showered and I have been slogging away at trying to get this right since early this morning, and what's more it's a Sunday!

MARY

Alright, we're almost finished.

MARY OS

Thank god.

MARY

So to summarise, are you ready?

Mary OS nods.

MARY (CONT'D)

A good performance is one in which the audience can immerse themselves in the magic of the presence of the live performer.

MARY OS

In the full knowledge that they are performing for them.

MARY

I think that this conviction of the performer transcends time and space to allow us to connect with them.

MARY OS  
Whether they are on-screen

MARY  
Or on the other side of the world.

MARY OS  
The magic lies in the combination of intent, the  
ability of the writer to imagine and predict.

MARY and MARY OS  
And for the performer to believe what she is  
presenting is real.

MARY  
The rest is up to you.

Mary OS looks back to the same audience member as before.

MARY OS  
(to all audience)  
And you  
(To the earlier audience member she  
points)  
And especially you.

Mary OS stands and Mary walks up to her.

MARY  
Whew thank god, that seemed to work, you never  
know with this kind of audience what they're  
thinking. Bit coals to Newcastle perhaps.

MARY OS  
That audience member that was giving me the eye,  
do you think they fancy me.

MARY  
Don't be ridiculous.

MARY OS  
Oh yee of little faith,

Mary O.S. Waves to the person in the audience

MARY OS (CONT'D)  
Bye.

MARY  
Oh go on get off.

Mary OS appears to be pushed off-stage.

Mary follows her off into the wings still making small talk about the  
audience.



Almost

2007



Figure 6: *Almost* Lisa Moore as Doris and Anthony Bessick as the Giant



Figure 7: Doris, arguably the smallest human performer in the world

Almost

On a low rostrum is a badly painted, four foot-six model house. Stage left of the house is a high backed chair, which has tent pole extensions and upon them is stretched an old tarpaulin, like a badly customised caravan awning.

The 'GIANT' sits next to the house, which is in darkness. He's sleeping, snoring softly and we can hear a recorded sound track. He is surrounded by discarded furniture in in scale with the house.

The music fades to reveal the sound of an alarm clock going off inside the house, The Giant sleeps through it.

Int bedroom.

A light goes on in the top right hand window and we hear the sound of someone who's just woken up, stretching, sliding out of bed, groaning.

The curtains are thrown open and a nine inch high half naked Doris, screams at the top of her voice (which is big for her size) and ducks down. The scream wakes the Giant who jumps up and begins to look for intruders.

GIANT

What? Right, I've warned you lot if I see you round here again I'll trample you to death.

He realises his mistake and acknowledges the audience by staring awkwardly at them.

Doris' head appears above the window frame before disappearing again.

GIANT (CONT'D)

Ah.

DORIS

Who are they?

GIANT

It's those artisticks, looking for a site pacific something or other.

DORIS

Are they paying?

GIANT

They don't look like it, are you paying?

Slight pause.

GIANT (CONT'D)

No.

DORIS

Giants, what use are flipping giants, we don't

need anymore of them gawping at us, tell them to go away.

GIANT  
I don't think I can.

DORIS  
Why not?

GIANT  
There's too many of em.

DORIS  
Mmm.

GIANT  
Yeh.

DORIS  
Right, well then we'd better show them what we've got hadn't we?

GIANT  
Yeh.

DORIS  
Now.

GIANT  
Mmmm.

DORIS  
Hadn't we?

The giant snaps out of awkward pose and tries to unsuccessfully close the curtain from below the window. We can catch glimpses of her trying to get dressed without being seen.

GIANT  
Yes! Yes, well, here's the house as you can see, it's Georgian, and we know it was built around 1830..

DORIS  
(shouting)  
Tell them what we've done to it.

GIANT  
It has four large bedrooms two at the front and two at the back and two sitting rooms, kitchen and dining room.

DORIS  
Where are me slippers?  
(shouting)  
We've done a lot of work.

GIANT  
I'm getting to that, let me do my introduction.

DORIS  
No need to be so overbearing.

GIANT  
I'm not.

Doris' head is just above the above window.

DORIS  
Throwing your weight around as usual, when do I get the chance to have a say, and do the...In fact, I'd like to do the introduction, actually, if you'll just wait a minute, just a little bit of patience that's all it takes.

Doris dips down again to put on top.

GIANT  
I really don't mind.

DORIS  
You don't mind, what exactly do you not mind?

GIANT  
Who goes first.

Doris walks from one side of the room to the other stopping briefly on 'going'.

DORIS  
Going, I'm not going anywhere, they'll have to tear me limb from limb before I leave this house.

GIANT  
Have you finished yet?

DORIS  
Finished what?

GIANT  
Getting the wrong end of the stick.

DORIS  
What end, this isn't the end, I told you, and then I'm not going anywhere.

GIANT  
Obviously not. As you can see, we've done a lot to the property since we moved in fifteen years ago.

She comes to the window putting her pinafore on.

DORIS  
We've spent our life savings on it, that's what he

means, we've emptied the bank of all my hard earned cash.

GIANT

It's been almost impossible for me to get any work round here.

DORIS

Almost but not actually impossible, you, you could have taken something that befitted your natural skills.

GIANT

I tried that if you remember, nearly got us into a right bother, and that was your doing.

DORIS

I really don't know what you mean?

GIANT

She loaned me out as a minder to Binky Baker, protectionist racket Supremo.

Doris looks in a mirror off screen, to do hair and make-up.

DORIS

Loaned you out? You make me sound like some sort of pimp.

GIANT

Put me in some very compromising situations, his nick name's not Binky Snow Flake Baker for nowt.

DORIS

Well..I didn't know that did I? Just thought it would get you out of the house.

GIANT

It was stomach churning watching him with a different lass every night, some of them barely out of school.

DORIS

Slight exaggeration.

GIANT

Oh come on, if he wasn't so rich none of them would have given him a second glance, goblins are ugly, but bloody hell.

DORIS

(to audience feigning poshness)

Their property used to back onto ours, that's how we came to know them so well.

GIANT

Our back garden was a dump for his club you mean.

Bottles, tyres, needles, (beat) Terry Moynahan.

DORIS

But he didn't complain though did he?

GIANT

Only cos he was already dead!

He must have lain there for months. We only found out cos number 17's dog was burying his bones under my chair. You know I never knew Dwarves' skulls were that big?

DORIS

Oi! Just goes to show how big our back garden is doesn't it? But he's done a beautiful job of landscaping since then, haven't you? Haven't you? No signs, no signs at all. And since we put up the pergola, well, it really has made a huge difference.

(to GIANT)

Anyway, I thought it would keep us from being a target, and I was right wasn't I, I was right, they left us alone didn't they?

GIANT

Only because I agreed to let them use our cellar for storage.

DORIS

Well there's no need to talk about it in front of guests. Binky Baker's long gone, the neighbourhood's very quiet these days.

GIANT

(under-breath)

Course it bleedin is.

DORIS

You know I wonder whether they actually took everything with them when they went.

GIANT

(on edge)

Why d'you say that?

DORIS

Well, sometimes I hear sounds from down there. And a sort of mysterious aroma that wafts up occasionally, I'm surprised you haven't smelt it with that great conk of yours.

GIANT

Do you want to do this guided tour or shall I?

DORIS

No, no, I'll do it.

Doris takes a deep breath ready to present the house

Doris (CONT'D)

We've been slowly doing it up, because of course it's not like the television, it all takes a lot longer than you think especially when you're on a tight budget.

The Giant sits down, his aches and pains showing.

GIANT

(aside to audience)

And when you inherit a pile of shite.

Doris tidies up as she's speaking, and dusts the chest of drawers.

DORIS

In here, which is the master bedroom, fabulous high ceilings, large windows, south facing. I've used my favourite colour scheme in here, Happy Meadow, and you'll have to take me word for it but the floors are beautifully polished.

GIANT

Thank you.

DORIS

And the ceiling.

GIANT

Which originally fell down due to the dry rot.

DORIS

Has been completely renovated and I've painted it like the sky, with very delicate clouds.

GIANT

To cover the botched plaster job.

DORIS

Always remember to have a theme in mind if you really want to transform a room and make it your own. Have a plan, make it your own, that's my motto.

Doris exits bedroom.

Int landing (OS Audio).

DORIS

(voice echoes)

Then we have a large landing area, we're not short of space here as you can hear "When I'm calling you who who who who who who whooooo". (beat) and here's the bathroom, on a scale to die for as they say.



Doris opens the door to the bathroom and puts her head in, her voice changes quality.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Of course, ideally I wanted a wet room and a separate bathroom with a roll top bath.

GIANT

But Damo the apprentice plumber from Skillset, he said he'd only been shown how to do a standard flushing cistern and electric shower so that's what we got.

OS SFX Sound of toilet flushing badly and knocking plumbing.

DORIS

A white one would be better of course but we've got plans though haven't we? Haven't we?

GIANT

Oh yes we've always got plans.

Doris returns to the landing.

DORIS

(voice echoes)

That's another one of my mottos, always have a plan. And along here's the guest room. This is last winter's palette but I'll show you it's not always necessary to paint the walls white because as lovely media pixie Lawrence Lapwing Hyphen Bowlering says, and I'm gonna shock you, no colour is wrong.

Int guest bedroom.

The lights come on in the front left bedroom and reveals a brightly coloured purple, lilac and pink room.

The top left hand corner of the window has a board over it, like someone's thrown a stone through it.

Doris enters snapping off pink rubber gloves whilst speaking.

DORIS

You just have to be careful about the way you choose them. Take purple for example. On its own in a dark room it can be depressing but used in combination with silver, lilac and a touch of pink. Just a touch mind, then it can make something really classy I think you'll agree.

Doris looks up at the ceiling.

DORIS (CONT'D)

I got a really good idea from a magazine to make

your own chandelier out of coat hangers and aluminum foil. You see, if you're creative like me then you don't have to spend a fortune on designer things. And don't worry if it doesn't work out the first time, just try again, that's my motto, keep trying. That's what I keep saying isn't it?

GIANT

Mmmm?

DORIS

Isn't it. Go on, show them the chase long-gue you're working on.

The Giant looks around, and under his chair, he opens his mouth to speak but is interrupted.

DORIS (CONT'D)

You see what I've done in here is I've painted all the furniture the same colour, that way they look like they're meant to belong together, even though they're very different.

GIANT

Sounds like us.

Doris walks to the window and fires a glare in the Giant's direction. She gets out a large feather duster and begins to dust the windowsill and curtains.

DORIS

Oh look, more bloody glass. How could I have missed that, I was down on my hands and knees for hours picking all those pieces out of the shag pile.

Her annoyance is directed at the Giant, as if it's his fault.

GIANT

If there's one tiny little bit of glass left after a smash she'll always find it.

DORIS

Yes usually in my bloody knees. I've been to casualty more times than I care to remember.

GIANT

That's only because you won't let me give you a hand.

DORIS

I'm not going to even try to dignify that with a reply, you do say the most stupid things sometimes you really do.

Doris sees something down the street.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Oh look, Mrs. Starkey's had a break in by the look of it, I don't know why. Her boys cleared out every scrap of furniture when she went.

GIANT

Fixtures and fittings.

DORIS

What you on about?

GIANT

Developers will have had em out, worth a small fortune these days.

DORIS

Vultures, not content with stealing our houses, they want to take the shirts from our bloody backs as well. You keep a look out, if you see anymore I'll call the police.

GIANT

I think it was the police who had them off em.

DORIS

Oh it's so dis..

Doris takes her anger out on the windowsill and dusts it ferociously. She sees the police squad car driving by.

DORIS (CONT'D)

There he is, oi you, you're supposed to be watching our house not watching kids through bricks through our bloody windows.

GIANT

I'll ave a word next time I see them.

DORIS

Ave a word. You've been aving a word for the last two years, and where's it got us.

She looks at the room.

DORIS (CONT'D)

I'd rather burn this place down than let that lot ransack it. Oooh it makes me feel quite sick the thought of it.(beat) And there's another piece look.

She bends down and picks up more glass disappearing completely from view.

GIANT

Shall I go on with it, I don't think they want to hang around all day?

Doris stands up suddenly.

DORIS

No! I'll do it. Right, at the back of the upstairs we've done quite a lot of work over the years.

Doris exits onto landing, OS voice echoes.

Int landing, stairs and hallway (sound only).

DORIS

Two more large rooms, he's not finished sanding the floors so best not to look in there.

Foley FX Doris coming downstairs.

DORIS (CONT'D)

The hallway I must say is my biggest disappointment, the ceiling's are so high, and I've never trusted our step ladders to do the job.

Doris pauses.

Doris (CONT'D)

But we've got the paper, show them....are you showing them?

GIANT

Yes!

He doesn't. Doris continues walking down the stairs.

DORIS

When are you going to fix that loose floor board? It'll be the death of me one day.

GIANT

Soon.

DORIS

And back here we have the dining room.

GIANT

I wouldn't bother with in there.

DORIS

Oh what's in the way, I can't open it, I can't oh dear.

SFX step ladders fall over with a large crash.

GIANT

I told you not to bother.

DORIS

(shouting)

When ARE you going to do something about that room? How can we get them to think this house is

worth something, if you leave it in such a mess all the time.

GIANT

I haven't got round to it yet that's all.

Doris walks back along the hallway towards the front door.

DORIS

Not yet, not yet, that's your motto, that's his motto.

SFX Doris comes to the front door and picks up some letters.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Oh! You didn't tell me, why didn't you tell me the postman had been?

Int sitting room

Putting the light on, she enters the front right hand room, to reveal an early Changing Rooms disaster, with zebra skin wallpaper and red furniture that we can just see the top of. There's a real cabinet that has a messy pile of magazines on it, and bottles of spirits.

GIANT

I didn't see him, must have come early. Why what's there?

DORIS

It's the letter from the council and oh the cheek.

GIANT

What is it?

DORIS

That property development company have sent us a fancy and I bet bloody expensive, brochure, on their 'new builds'. Damn cheek. I bet the council put them up to it.

Doris throws the brochure down, looks at the letter with shaking hands then stuffs it in her apron.

GIANT

What does the letter say?

DORIS

(shaking voice)

Oh, it can wait, I'm not ready to face it yet. Anyway. We've got guests.

A bit shaken, she sorts her hair out and comes to the window to talk to the

audience.

DORIS (CONT'D)

(to audience)

This room, was the first one we did, and it's this side of the house that we want to extend so that he doesn't have to camp out anymore.

GIANT

Getting on a bit, feeling the cold more these days.

DORIS

And that's another thing.

Doris picks up the brochure again.

DORIS (CONT'D)

These new builds are far too small for him.

(to audience)

We need space, more than the average couple, and up till now they haven't offered us enough to put down a decent deposit on anything.

She throws the brochure away and picks up a cushion, and fluffs it up, then punches it repeatedly.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Let alone buy outright. This house is ours, every brick, but that doesn't seem to count for anything these days.

GIANT

Careful, careful, it's not the dwarf from the council you know.

She strangles the cushion.

DORIS

I swear he's half Goblin. In fact when it comes down to it, they've probably all got some Goblin blood in them, it's all a swindle.

She throws the cushion down and walks towards the booze. Then remembers she's got people watching her and starts to tidy the magazines.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Oh, I'm running out of space to keep my magazines, look they're all over he place.

GIANT

We could get a cheap set of shelves, I'd have them up in no time.

DORIS

The trouble is with you is you're part of the flat pack generation, you want the easiest, cheapest

solution.

Doris outstretches her arms to indicate where the alcoves are.

The Giant picks up a small magazine and starts to read, holding it very close to his eyes.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Take this room, where the alcove might be 76 centimetres at the bottom it's 73 at the top and shelving unit only comes in 45, 60 and 75, we'd have to spend time shaving ever decreasing little bits off the shelves, or buying smaller and then trying to fill the gaps with like.. CD holders, when we haven't had one since we were burgled two years back. So I'd have to go and buy one, and an amp, and speakers, then before you know it, it's cost a fortune. (beat) it's cheap for a reason and it don't work in old houses like this one.

GIANT

Sorry.

DORIS

Take the kitchen.

GIANT

It's too small.

Doris comes to window, looks up at the Giant.

DORIS

Well you would say that wouldn't lard ass.

GIANT

No 'you' keep saying, it's too small.

DORIS

It's the same problem.

GIANT

You could knock through.

DORIS

Knock through? Knock through? Just like that.

GIANT

I could do it, take me about...

The giant puts the magazine down in his lap. He makes a fist and punches his other hand.

GIANT (CONT'D)

..a minute.

He picks up the magazine again.

DORIS

And do you know where the load bearing joists are in this house?

GIANT

Well they're always going on about it on the tele and there's a kitchen here I think you'd like.

Doris comes to the window and the Giant leans forward to show her the magazine.

GIANT (CONT'D)

Look.

DORIS

Whew! Breath darling, did you rinse this morning?

GIANT

I haven't had a chance to yet have I?

The embarrassed giant moves back to his seat

DORIS

Go on, what's it say?...Go On.

With magnifier.

GIANT

There's a couple here.

DORIS

What do they do?

GIANT

Um, he's a w..banker and she, it... doesn't.. say what she does. They worked with Architect Michael Angel to transform their 'Leeds'.

DORIS

Ooh!

GIANT

'Georgian' house from grotty old flats to a stylish family friendly residence for them and their six children.

DORIS

Wait a minute how can they afford six children and an architect?  
Who are these people where do they keep on finding them?

GIANT

He's a banker and..

DORIS

No, who ARE they? Where do they get all their



money from?

The Giant scours for the answer to her question

DORIS (CONT'D)

Well go on.

GIANT

They've created a modern feel, with the unifying use of shades of .....white.

DORIS

White, white always bloody white. Good God, how do they keep it clean? Then again we're not all as messy as you. In fact, if you were just tidier I bet they would have valued this house higher.

GIANT

They don't do the valuation on how tidy a house is.

DORIS

Look I'm not stupid, it seems to me if you've got two houses, one which is spotless and the other which is full of dirt and crap, which one are you going to buy?

GIANT

You're confusing the two things again. This house hasn't been undervalued because it was filthy.

DORIS

It's not filthy, you know how hard I work, day and night on my hands and knees.

GIANT

No, listen love what I'm saying is that it wouldn't have made one scrap of difference if we had completely renovated it, and it made it to the front page of House and Garden, they still would've only offered us a pittance.

DORIS

But Mavis Renshaw's house three hundred yards away is a quarter the size of this one, and hers has been valued at twice as much.

GIANT

(shouts)

They don't want to demolish Mavis's house though do they?

DORIS

Oh you're upsetting me again, you always do this, why do you always do this?

GIANT

Look why don't you go and put the kettle on, and make a nice cup of tea. You'll feel better.

Doris reluctantly exits, her voice becoming more faint as she moves to the back of the house.

DORIS

Yes, well really that's all to see from this side anyway..

Int hallway (sound only).

DORIS

Because the back of the house is in such a state, we can't possibly show them in there. When are you going to get on to it? And look at the hallway, it's a disgrace and you know you really must get down to the cellar and check out what's going on, it might not be Binky Baker's doing at all, we might have rats and I need to get someone in if we have, it wouldn't surprise me you know.

Doris rattles on until she gets to the back of the house.

Ext house.

GIANT

(to audience)

Wouldn't it be wonderful to feel small, well you know what I mean, when you're a giant in a world full of dwarves, you're always made to feel clumsy, stupid and in the way. Some nights I sit awake looking up at the orange sky, and think somewhere it's black and pitted with stars and I could lie under it and my size wouldn't matter, because out there is bigger than anything we could ever imagine.

Int Guest room.

Doris vacuums.

GIANT

I think she'd like one of them new builds. They look nice, clean, white walls. They've got neighbours. "Updated the old", s'whats she's been trying to do here for years, apart from the white walls, they wouldn't last five minutes. But she'll not get one, not we me hanging round. They're just too small.

When the council put a compulsory purchase order on your house, it's like a death sentence with no

way to appeal? Wonder what they've offered this time? D'you know, they give you compensation for the loss of 'land', not the house, I've tried to explain it to her over and over again, but she'll not budge. This was her mother's house, it's her home. They say, that the owner should be paid neither less nor more than his loss. Neither less nor more than his loss. How do they work out the cost of the loss of someone's home?

Doris exits guest room with the vacuum, SFX Doris Hoovering the landing.

GIANT (CONT'D)

Is my loss less than yours because I live in a street full of ruffians. I think I should be paid more for putting up with it all these years. But because I'm a giant, we're seen as undesirable and they want to force us into living with all the other undesirables over yonder in some outback hovel surrounded by the likes of Binkie Baker and other Goblin-shites.

When she wrote and asked them to explain how they came to their figure, they said that "there is no precise means of working out the value of the land, and what they offered was the same as everyone else in the street and the rest of them had accepted it and so should she".

Giant looks at house.

GIANT (CONT'D)

I thought we should arrange for some sort of 'accident' for it, so we could claim the full cost from the insurance company, but apparently our policy doesn't cover being crushed by a clumsy giant.

Doris can be heard coming along the corridor humming a tune.

GIANT (CONT'D)

And anyway, she's said it herself, the only way she'll leave this house is in a box.

Giant (CONT'D)

Ooops better do my own bit tidying before she gets nosy.

The Giant bends down and reaches his hand into the cellar. He pulls out a black bin bag.

Int hallway.

Doris throws the front door open and stands holding a mop and bucket, she catches the Giant half way through taking the bin bag out.

DORIS

Oh that's good, make the garden look its best. Did you know a study found that in areas where people took part in the 'Britain in Bloom campaign', house prices were 23% higher.

GIANT

(awkwardly)

Fascinating.

DORIS

I think that where we've gone wrong is not showing them this house's full potential.

The Giant retreats and tries to find a secure place for the bin bag, moving it from place to place as if none will do.

DORIS (CONT'D)

So I've put together some top tips of all the things that you can do to keep your house spotless, ready for that last minute viewer or valuation..

The Giant tries to protest, she puts her hand up to stop him.

DORIS (CONT'D)

No listen, leaving you time to concentrate on the more important things like brushing up the paintwork, or giving the pergola a new coat of Creosote. Have you done that yet?

The Giant is still distracted.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Tidy round before you go to bed, late night snackers, should be told to put the jars back on the shelf and wipe those telltale bread crumbs away. Are you listening to this?

GIANT

Hard not to.

DORIS

Upon waking make the bed straight away and open the windows to let the fresh air in, giving the room a good douse of air freshener in vanilla or orange blossom.

The giant finally gives up trying to find somewhere secure for the bag and puts it in his pocket.

GIANT

The other week I thought she'd died in her sleep she was so still. Turns out she didn't want to turn over in case she disturbed the covers.

DORIS

(ignoring him)

Place candles on clean and clutter free surfaces, ready to light. But don't forget to blow them out as soon as the visit is over.

GIANT

She bought a lily of the valley swan from the pound shop so long ago everything cost fifty pence. I've never seen wax melt so slowly.

DORIS

Put the washing machine on at night then when you get up in the morning you have freshly spun clothes to hang out to dry.

GIANT

Did you know the most common cause of house fires is faulty washing machines. You should be careful, could be burned in your bed.

DORIS

Oh that's typical isn't it. Here am I trying to be positive and all you can do is think of reasons not to do something.

GIANT

But it's alright I'd save yer

DORIS

What?

GIANT

I'd save yer from the fire, don't worry.

DORIS

(with sarcasm)

Would you now?

GIANT

As long as you didn't mind me ruffling the sheets.

DORIS

Oh you great heap of lard, this is the reason we're still in this mess, because you can't take anything seriously.

GIANT

Actually I do have an idea. I heard something recently.

DORIS

Wonders will never cease.

GIANT

That a person makes up their mind about a house in the first ten seconds of arriving, so that means that your hallway, is the most important part of

the house because first impressions count.

DORIS

Grrrrrr!

GIANT

We...could.. Get..

DORIS

Grrrrrrr!

GIANT

Oh dear.

DORIS

Grrrrrrrrrrrr!

GIANT

You've talked about this before haven't you?

Doris has a stomping fit.

GIANT (CONT'D)

Saying this for years, haven't you?

GIANT (CONT'D)

And I've been useless again haven't I?

She stands red faced and panting. He talks her down.

GIANT (CONT'D)

Look if it will help, I'll call the council again and get them to come and see what this house has got. Forget the wallpaper, we'll paint the hallway, I'll get some of those rollers with extra long handles and we'll have it done in no time.

Doris shrugs.

GIANT (CONT'D)

Come on Mrs. Misery pants, you're right we should be positive. We just need to get them over the threshold and in to see the best bits of the house, like what you've done upstairs.

DORIS

Yes if we could just get them upstairs, they could see this house's potential.

GIANT

Tidy the garden.

DORIS

Light the candles.

GIANT

Make coffee.

DORIS

And make the whole experience classy. Have little things on trays. You're right.

GIANT

I am?

Doris is taking off her apron as she speaks.

DORIS

Yes and drinks, loads of drink, and I'll put on that little slinky outfit. We'll make this house look like it's sophisticated, fun, full of well connected party people. Wait there.

She drops the apron on the floor. Picks up the mop and bucket and shuts the front door, we hear her run up the stairs.

Int bedroom.

In speeded up time Doris changes her outfit, she opens an unseen wardrobe and throws clothes out over her head before changing from dowdy day wear to cat-suit and feather boa.

The Giant is also sprucing himself up at the same time. He licks his hands and wipes his hair back, does up the buttons on his shirt and tucks it into his trousers.

Doris exits the bedroom.

Int stairs.

We hear foley FX or Doris running down the stairs, tripping on the loose board and bumps down several steps.

DORIS

Aaaaaaahh! It's alright, I'm alright.

The Giant winces.

Int sitting room.

Doris enters running across the sitting room to the bar and pours out a large glass of whiskey, knocks it back then exits again.

Int hallway.

Doris opens the door, she stands ready for a party in 70's cat suit, big cleavage, bright accessories and feather boa. Kicking the apron to one side.

DORIS

(to Giant)

Ta da! Oh it'll be great, I really think it'll work you know, we just have to be positive.

Intro song music.

GIANT

Ahh, how could they resist you and your lovely (beat) eyes.

DORIS

Oh thank you so much. Because I know we could do it.

(intro song)

With a pair of sparkling eyes.  
And a massive glass of whiskey.  
Then you have the best remedy.  
To get them up inside.

DORIS (CONT'D)

With just a pair of sparkling eyes.

GIANT

Just a pair of sparkling eyes.

DORIS

And someone who's very frisky.

GIANT

Don't you think that friendly's better?

DORIS

A colour scheme that's slightly risky.

GIANT

With that low cut sweater?

DORIS

You could get them up in side.

DORIS and GIANT together

Because there's something, in the way we've decorated.

That'll make them, forget where we're situated.

DORIS

With a pair of sparkling eyes.

GIANT

With a pair of sparkling eyes.

DORIS

We could show them our interior.



GIANT  
Just you be careful.

DORIS  
Which is really quite superior.

GIANT  
It's just quite an eyeful.

DORIS  
To anywhere around.

DORIS and GIANT together  
Because there's something, in the way we've  
decorated.  
That'll make them, forget where we're situated.

DORIS  
With a pair of sparkling eyes.

GIANT  
Just with a pair of sparkling eyes.

DORIS  
And some quite delicious décor.

GIANT  
So beautiful and airy.

DORIS  
We could get them past the front door.

GIANT  
With just a touch of fair-E dust

DORIS  
And we could get them up inside.

DORIS (CONT'D)  
We could sell them more beside

GIANT  
You can't say we never tried.

DORIS  
And show our decollage with pride

GIANT  
For all the days and nights she's cried

DORIS  
Our talents cannot be denied

DORIS (CONT'D)  
If we could get them up inside

GIANT

If we could them up

DORIS

If we could get them up

DORIS and GIANT Together

If we could get..  
them..  
up..  
in..  
side.

DORIS

Please don't jump.

GIANT

Sorry.

DORIS

I can just see it now, they'd let us stay, and build new houses all around us, we'd have nice quiet neighbours with children who go to school instead of hanging out at street corners. Why do they do that?

DORIS (CONT'D)

So they can see that there's nothing to do in both directions at once?

DORIS (CONT'D)

Oooh, there was something in last weeks 'Moving on up' Magazine.

Doris dances across the room picks up a magazine from the pile in the sitting room.

DORIS (CONT'D)

(Sings)

We're moving on up, moving on up.

She dances back across the room.

DORIS (CONT'D)

Nothing can stop us.

Int hallway.

Doris re-enters hallway from the direction of sitting room.

DORIS

Here it is, listen to this article by property guru Kirstie Flower hyphen Bloom "Spotting an area on the up. You can tell a lot about your neighbours from their gardens", see I was right. "Wisteria" wisteria "artfully draped up Victorian brickwork is synonymous with really upwardly mobile areas" ha! "And particularly if well-turned

out 40 somethings are seen to be pruning theirs on Sunday evenings". Note to diary, prune on Sunday evenings.

Doris looks at the shabby front door.

DORIS (CONT'D)

And paint the front door as well, because she says "sturdy, traditional wooden ones with highly polished brass fittings are a joy to behold".

GIANT

So's re-enforced steel with the sun glinting on it at sunset.

DORIS

And "see if the grocers are pesto friendly".

GIANT

What's a grocer?

DORIS

Lastly "look out for coffee shops and deli's they suggest an upward shift".

GIANT

Does the one-stop blob shop count?

They laugh together.

Doris throws the magazine down and picks up her discarded apron and takes the letter out of the pocket.

DORIS

Right, I'm going to tear this up, we don't need to know what pathetic offer they've given us this time, because we're not going anywhere.

GIANT

Ah, don't you think you'd better check it first? You never know what it might be saying. What if they're thinking the same thing, then we've no need to worry any more have we?

DORIS

Oh alright.

GIANT

Just remember we're still negotiating, nothing's final.

Doris rips open the letter and reads it. Her head drops.

GIANT (CONT'D)

What is it?

DORIS

I can't believe it, they're just, for God's sake,

GIANT

What, what?

DORIS

Oh bloody hell.

GIANT

(shouting)

What?

DORIS

It says that the land tribunal decided that this will be their final offer.

GIANT

They've said that before.

DORIS

No and that if we don't accept this one, the bailiffs will be.. oh god.

GIANT

The bailiffs will what?

DORIS

They're sending the bailiffs in at the end of the month.

GIANT

(angrily)

Well I'd like to see them try to get passed me. I'll go to precinct right now and get the razor wire off the medical centre and wrap the house in it.

DORIS

Oh, it's no good, we're just living in 'kin-fairy land. I've, we've tried everything, they don't listen, nobody listens.

Doris closes the door.

Int bedroom.

Doris enters the bedroom and sits down on the end of the bed.

DORIS

We almost did it didn't we?

Almost had our lovely house in a lovely neighbourhood, with friends who pop over for a cappuccino and a dry biscuit at the little cafe come book shop on the corner where the betting shop used to be. Opened by some slip of a young girl with an inheritance from great aunt Agnes. She couldn't have done it before, because of the

likes of Binky Baker, who would have punched her lights out. But he's not interested now because she sells really expensive Belgian beer made by drunken monks, so expensive that the old locals can't afford it. Ugh peeh! they say. Four pounds fifty for this little glass of strange tasting beer, you can ave it, these people are weird, they bore me with their talk of the tinternet and canvasses.

Doris comes to the window.

I can see our new neighbours Tom and Ellie walking past with little seven pound Jacasta in one of those enormous armour plated buggies, clutching the Sunday paper, bought from the supermarket express shop round the corner, and there goes Jason the Web designer on his Lambretta, wearing his designer glasses and polo neck. Oh look, there's a little bit of a squeeze as two Estate agents in Chelsea Tanks have rude words over who has right of way. It's so real, I can almost touch it.

Doris lies down across the end of the bed, with her face turned away from the audience.

DORIS (CONT'D)

If we go, d'you think they'll brick up our windows? I don't want them to brick up our windows. I should have painted the walls white, should have done that, should have.. Oh I'm so stupid.

Doris sobs quietly.

The Giant has been listening sorrowfully. He pulls out the bin bag that he collected earlier from the cellar well. Opening it, he pours out some small bags full of white powder. He pulls out a tiny phone from his shirt pocket that he dials with a little stick.

GIANT

Binky, yeh, long time. Look I've got something that I think you left behind. But... I need a favour....Is Sparky Brown still working for you.. Yeh.

Music crescendos then drops to background. (Sparkling Eyes song plays in melancholy fashion).

He leans down to Doris' bedroom window.

GIANT (CONT'D)

Hey sleepy head, wake up.

Doris struggles to get up.

DORIS

What what is it, they're not here, they've not come early?

GIANT

No, I've spoken to the council and they've said they'll send someone round tomorrow to have another look.

DORIS

Really? Did you ask them about letting us stay?

GIANT

Well they didn't say no, so let's go and get that paint for the hallway and I'll do it this afternoon.

DORIS

But.

GIANT

Ah, I said I'd sort it, and I will. Come on love, let's get there before they shut.

Doris gets off the bed slowly gets her coat from unseen wardrobe.

She exits the bedroom.

Int hallway.

The door opens and the bedraggled Doris stands in the doorway.

Doris walks forward and the Giant bends down in front of door.

GIANT

Come on love.

He stands up and still with his back to the audience, cradling Doris in his hands he walks back passed the house.

DORIS

Have you got the colour card?

GIANT

Yes

DORIS

Did you tell them how much we've done to the house?

GIANT

Yes

DORIS

I knew it, I knew if we just hung on they'd let us

stay, we're just the kind of people they want to attract to this area.

GIANT

That's right.

As they exit, smoke appears in the front sitting room, it curls up through the rooms. The smoke is followed by flames, small at first and then engulfing the interior. SFX of crackling flames and exploding light bulbs.

The lights fade to black leaving just the burning house.

Music and house fade to black.

END

Fly Me To The Moon  
2008



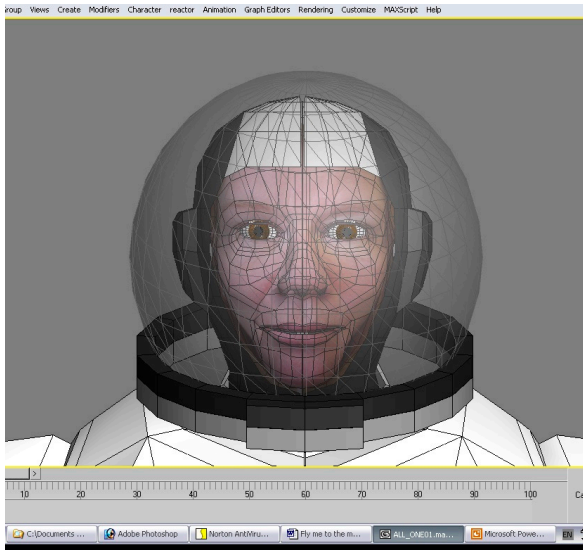


Figure 8: Astro Mary  
Stage 1



Figure 9: Astro Mary  
Stage 2



Figure 10: Fly Me To The Moon in performance, Contact Theatre 2008

FLY ME TO THE MOON

INTERIOR SPACE STATION

On an oval window shaped screen is a projection of 'space'. Stars, white ones, blue, the odd pink, twinkle in the distance.

On stage, a small pin point light is fixed upon a hand on a pain killer discharger. We can hear bleeps, the kind you find on a life support machine, sampled electric surges, the kind you get from a defibrillator.

As the lights fade up we can see 'Astronaut' Mary O'Really peering intently at a bunch of wires that are wrapped around her, there are sounds of 'electrics' shorting followed by a cat's painful meow.

MARY O'REALLY

Off, get off the bridge. How many times have I told, you stupid animal.

Mary O holds a bunch of wires in one hand with the other she signals to the cat to get away. Sound of cat's bell tinkling off stage. Mary presses buttons randomly on the control desk. Mary O speaks into a receiver.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

This is Space Station ER1 calling over.  
This is Space Station ER 1 calling over.  
Can anyone hear me? Over.  
Losing the will to live.. Over.

From the bottom of the screen a wrench floats up into view

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

Any requests? Over.  
I just called to say I love you.  
(deep sigh )  
Over.

The arm of cartoon Astro Mary appears as she reaches up to grab the wrench. Bobbing slightly Astro Mary looks in at depressed Mary O' singing. She floats swiftly out of view

Astro Mary floats back holding the wrench.

ASTRO MARY

You're sad, very very sad.

MARY O'REALLY

Haven't you finished that yet?

ASTRO MARY

It's stuck.

Mary O'REALLY  
Try giving it a good whack?

Mary O hits the life support unit, it shorts again.

Astro Mary shrugs shoulders and raises hands in a "what can I do" gesture.

ASTRO MARY  
Think the external release mechanism's about to roll over and die.

Astro Mary points at Mary O.

MARY O'REALLY  
Yees, like me, lubricate it then. I saw a can somewhere round here.

Astro Mary face on to window frowning, her head nodding forward with authority.

ASTRO MARY  
And risk it being inhaled into the F.A.D.

MARY O'REALLY  
As if that's going to make a difference to the crap I've already inhaled, by rights I should have more of your DNA than my own the amount of your dead skin that's made it's way up my nostrils.

Astro Mary raises her hands in despair and moves towards the window.

ASTRO MARY  
After all this time, I'm still bewildered at why they chose you for this trip.

Her face comes close to the window.

MARY O'REALLY  
After all this time it still amazes me you call it a trip.

Astro Mary Points to Mary O's desk.

ASTRO MARY  
Try the O.R.M, but wait for my signal, I need to secure myself in case this thing blows.

Mary O's hand hovers over some buttons.

Astro Mary's finger points repeatedly to the other side of the panel.

ASTRO MARY (CONT'D)  
Three down.

Mary's looking on the left. Her hands hover indecisively.

ASTRO MARY (CONT'D)

Not that one. The other side! Dyslexic, stupid and ugly, just my luck.

Astro Mary shakes her head in despair.

Mary finds the button, then notices the milometre.

MARY O'REALLY

Ooh look, we've just passed the 500 million mile mark.

Mary O does a little silly dance.

MARY O'REALLY

Five hundred million miles in space, come on Neil join in. Five hundred million miles in space, 5 hundred million miles, pssshhhh!

Astro Mary shakes her head in despair. Mary O ends with something vaguely resembling a salute.

ASTRO MARY

Waiting.

MARY O'REALLY

I'm pushing it!!

SFX of release mechanism motor trying to work but failing.

Astro Mary signals for Mary O to stop. She pulls out an enormous hammer and floats to the left side of the window.

SFX of hammering on the outside of the ship.

Mary O flinches from the noise, shouts over the top.

Mary O'REALLY

What's up, you used to enjoy our somewhat pathetic but distracting routines. Does nothing get your juices going?

ASTRO MARY

No mention of liquids please, I've been out here for hours.

MARY O'REALLY

Ooh does baby need a nappy change? What about a bath, now I know you'd get excited about a bath.

Astro Mary crosses her legs.

ASTRO MARY

Ooh yes what I'd give to feel the sensation of warm water all over my body, just once more before

I die.

Astro Mary leaves the hammer to float away and takes up a bathing posture. Arms behind the back of her head, floating on invisible water.

Mary O lifts her arms pit up and sniffs, several times.

MARY O'REALLY

Hey do you think we still smell?

Mary O' lies back on her chair and pushes her self along the ground.

Astro Mary is pretending to wash herself with bit of passing meteor. An old bit of satellite antenna floats passed looking like a duck, and stars pop in the background (planets dying) like bubbles floating and bursting.

Mary O smells herself.

Mary O'REALLY (CONT'D)

BBQ'd steak.

She sniffs again.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

Sweaty feet, my brother's to be precise, but not as cheesy, more like sulphur.

Mary smells her arm pit.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

Mmm the lovely aroma of hot metal, makes you irresistible to men and ooh there's that whiff of rum, God I really want a drink. Let's face it we stink, we are stinky. I swear I've been rolling around in my space stench for so long that I have developed a several layers of sweat incrustated skin on the inside.

She breaths on her palm

MARY O'REALLY

Phew, if I had this breath on earth, they'd launch me into space.

Mary gets back to trying to fix the control desk. She picks up her leads and tries each of them in turn in a main control panel. Unplugging and plugging.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

The smell's not the problem though, I can cope with the smell. It's the anal suction, it's playing havoc with my IBS.

The tranquility of the bath image destroyed like a bubble bursting. Astro Mary looks disdainful and shakes her head in disgust.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

Which reminds me. Is that transmogrified prune paste doing it's job yet or are you still constipated?

ASTRO MARY

Oooh I've got so much wind I think I could power our return to earth if I came into contact with a naked flame at the right trajectory.

Astro Mary puts her nose in the air and revolves, as she does we see the bottom of her space suit inflate and deflate as a fart then works its way up into her helmet.

She spins out of view.

Mary O gets a tickly cough.

MARY O'REALLY

Well you'll be pleased to know I'm not going to prescribe a suppository this time. I've just managed to clean the last remnants of your desiccated poo poo from the drive shaft.

ASTRO MARY

That was your fault, your damned obsession with my motions.

Mary O'REALLY

As the ship's doctor it's my job to make sure the crew are functioning at their best.

The cat is meowing to get out.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

Stupid animal get to your basket. As if it understands a word I say. Right where was I?

She's tried and rejected all the leads except one red one.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

Flat pack furniture, electronic circuits, there's always one bit left over.

Mary O looks at a large lead with yellow and black warning tape on it.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

In for a penny in for a pound.

She pulls the yellow and black lead out and puts the red one in. She speaks into the comms system.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

This is Doctor Mary O'Really, are you reading me,  
day eight thousand and sixty one, lunar orbit  
mission 1984.

Astro Mary starts to suffocate.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

(coughs)

Deterioration of mind....deterioration of body.  
With the additional loss of sense of humour from  
my colleague cosmonaut...

(coughs)

ASTRO MARY

Help!

Astro Mary is blue in the face and about to suffocate.

Mary O'REALLY

(clears throat)

Physically I can no longer undertake space walks  
as my bone mass and muscle tone have deteriorated  
so much that I can no longer fulfill the  
recommended guidelines on health and safety. I  
wonder if I've shrunk again?

Mary O replaces the old lead.

Air floods back into Astro Mary's suit. Mary O measures herself.

The rush of oxygen into Astro Mary's suit makes her expand. The sudden intake  
of gas makes her light headed.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

(coughs)

Five feet one....and a half! When I came on board  
I was five feet eight.

Mary O's coughs up phlegm.

MARY O'REALLY

Oh my god it's a fur ball, damn cat! Who on God's  
earth would think of sending a cat into space?

Astro Mary's eyes are rolling around her sockets in opposite directions, she  
hallucinates for a few seconds. Shaking her head to clear the scene.

MARY O'REALLY

What's up with you? You're uncharacteristically  
quiet(beat). Sulking, great, that's all I need. Oh  
come on Yuri let's do the awful deed.

Mary O picks up her clipboard.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

Celestial coordinates?

Astro Mary lifts her arms to gesture out at the emptiness of space.

ASTRO MARY

(giggles)

Lost in space.

MARY O'REALLY

On the other hand your attempts at humour are just embarrassing.

Mary O' checks switches on the control desk

ASTRO MARY

Your attempts at hmer are umbersing.

MARY O'REALLY

EGOS - Check.

ASTRO MARY

Check (giggles).

MARY O'REALLY

(to Astro Mary)

EXTET?

ASTRO MARY

Check-ka ka.

MARY O'REALLY

G.P.S? Still knackered

ASTRO MARY

Checky check check.

Astro Mary bumps into the side of the ship.

Mary O watches her out of the window.

ASTRO MARY (CONT'D)

Weeeee!

MARY O'REALLY

Have you been on that gas and air again?

Astro Mary shakes her head and giggles.

ASTRO MARY

No!

Mary O holds up her hand with outstretched fingers.

MARY O'REALLY

How many fingers am I holding up?



ASTRO MARY  
How many fingers am I holding up 'over'.

MARY O'REALLY  
How many?

ASTRO MARY  
Four.

MARY O'REALLY  
Look again.

Astro Mary holds her own hand up, counts the three fingers and her thumb.

ASTRO MARY  
Four!

Astro Mary shakes her head to clear it. She looks at her hand.

ASTRO Mary (CONT'D)  
AAAAAH!

MARY O'REALLY  
What?

Astro Mary shakes her hand furiously, when it stops she's got five fingers.

ASTRO MARY  
Oh phew, you know the funniest thing I thought I had...

MARY O'REALLY  
Oh come on let's get on with it, what about the B  
D U R 9 F 846?

ASTRO MARY  
Did you say D B U R F 846 or  
BDU R9 F8 46 over?

MARY O'REALLY  
Uh?...Pardon

ASTRO MARY  
I 'said' did you say D B U R F 8 46 or BDU R9 F8  
46? Over.

MARY O'REALLY  
The first one, I think, look you should be  
concentrating.

ASTRO MARY  
Well that depends, because did you say it, .. or  
was it a slip of the tongue? Over.

MARY O'REALLY  
I..Just check them both...

ASTRO MARY  
Well I can't actually do that. Over.

Astro Mary continues the arm movement to a gesture of resignation.

MARY O'REALLY  
Oh don't go all protocol on me not after the day  
I've had?

Astro Mary lowers her arms and shakes her head slightly

ASTRO MARY  
We don't actually have any DBURF846. Oh..

MARY O'REALLY  
What do we have then?

Astro Mary tilts her head to one side as she says

ASTRO MARY  
The other one. Ver

MARY O'REALLY  
And is it OK?

Astro Mary nods on ..

ASTRO MARY  
Yes. Oh....

Astro M turns head quickly to the left, eyes widen and mouth drops open in surprise.

MARY O'REALLY  
Right then. Good God, you'd think this should be  
easier by now.  
Well if you've finished out there I'd like you to  
come in because I really could do with some help  
to....

Astro Mary points left, her legs tread water quickly going no where.

ASTRO MARY  
(shocked expression)  
CAT!

Astro M stares left in dismay with mouth open

MARY O'REALLY  
Coronal auxiliary.... transmitter?

ASTRO MARY  
No Cat! Cat!

The Cat floats struggling into view, wearing a space suit but no helmet. In slow motion, its cries are silent.

Astro Mary reaches for it but can't touch it.

The cat floats to the window its eyes bulge forward, followed by the rest of its head.

In slow motion to the music from Space Odyssey 2001, Strauss's Blue Danube, Astro Mary tries to reach for the cat.

Its body fills the window-frame and beyond.

The cat explodes into pieces.

Some of the pieces slide down the glass of the window, some congeal into ice particles and float away.

SFX Bits of cat splattering.

Shocked Astro Mary, looks down at her white suit dotted with cat remnants. She watches as they bounce off her, freezing into ice particles and floating away.

SFX tinkling cats bell and disintegrating cat.

Mary O stands motionless, with open mouth.

Normal time resumes.

MARY O'REALLY

I told you, how many times have I told you, stop nagging you say, I'm the captain you say, don't tell me my job, you say, and I have said it till I'm blue in the face, DON'T LEAVE THE CAT FLAP OPEN!

Astro Mary looks upset, shoulders stooped arms down by her side, ashamed.

ASTRO MARY

(sad but defiant)

Well maybe it wasn't me, maybe you did it with all your random button pressing, and ooh we've passed the five zillion mile mark, ooh let's bake a cake.

Mary O moves to the window and Astro M comes up close to the glass

MARY O'REALLY

Don't you turn this one on me Colonel "I'm not doing what any civilian tells me" Blimp.

ASTRO MARY

Twenty-two years in space and you still don't even know how to get the waste disposal unit door to open, let alone fly this thing. If anything happened to me you'd be screwed.

MARY O'REALLY

That's rich coming from you, 'Miss' cryogenic 1986, 'Miss' sorry I haven't got time to play

scrabble because I'm cleaning the cat's teeth,  
d'you know what kind of hell this has been.

ASTRO MARY

At least I've kept this vessel going you don't  
even know the difference between the button to  
control the O.R.M and the one to self destruct and  
don't call me MISSSSSS!

Mary O paces up and down, Astro M following her from side to side.

MARY O'REALLY

Buttons, I'll show you if I know which buttons are  
which.

Mary O rushes to the control desk and hits the buttons on the waste disposal  
unit.

ASTRO MARY

Stop it, now don't you, I'm giving you an order  
now step away from the control panel.

MARY O'REALLY

Open, open, bloody open.

Mary continues to hit buttons.

SFX sound of a door releasing and a whoosh.

MARY O'REALLY

Ha!

Astro Mary looks horrified. She lifts her hands up in an oh my God expression  
of terror.

The ships biological waste flies out in one big block which hits Astro Mary  
square on and takes her away with it far into the distance.

ASTRO MARY and Mary O'REALLY together

Oh shit, shit, shiiit!

SFX defibrillator and an engine trying to start. The heart beeps start and  
stop.

ASTRO MARY

Aaaaaahh!!

Astro Mary zooms away out into space, until her air supply tube is  
stretched to breaking then it pings and breaks off, She's a dot, then a  
twinkle then nothing.

MARY O'REALLY

Oh god, I'm coming I'm coming.

SFX cat's bell tinkling.

MARY O'REALLY (CONT'D)

Cat!

Mary O turns quickly to look out the window, and the cat's head floats passed.

MARY O'REALLY

No oh no oh oh.

Mary O tries the comms system.

MARY O'REALLY

Mayday, mayday, somebody help me.

Please. This is Doctor...This is Captain Mary O'...

SFX faint sound of a high pitched squeak.

A small dot appears on screen, it gets bigger very fast.

Astro Mary, legs and arms outstretched with a look of surprise rushes into view.

SFX loud fart.

Astro Mary splats into the window of the space ship, her face crumples on impact

ASTRO MARY

Ouch.

Mary O jumps to her feet excitedly.

MARY O'REALLY

Report physical conditions captain

ASTRO MARY

Let's just say, I'm no longer constipated...over.

Blackout

END

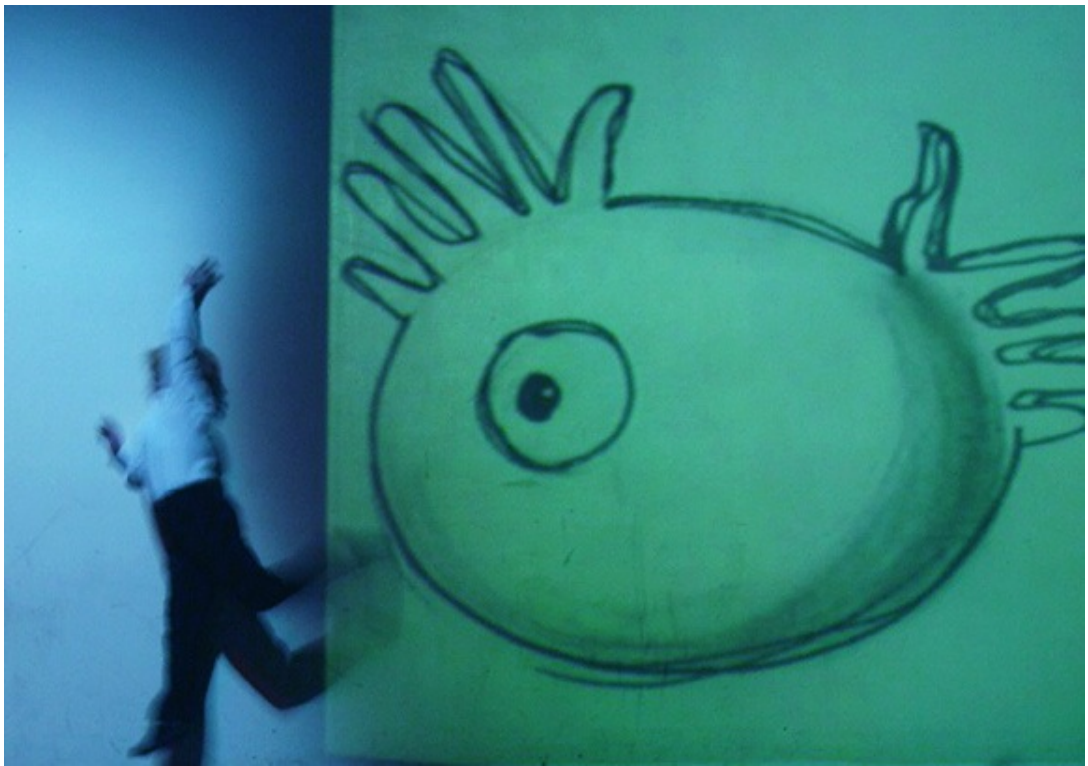


Figure: 11 Blue work in progress, 2008, animator Rozi fuller



Figure 12: Blue from live performance, Contact Theatre, 2008 with Niki Woods



Figure 13: *Unfinished Business* – Work in Progress for the Screaming Head



Figure 14: *Unfinished Business*





Figure 15: The Screaming Head Computer Controlled Motion Responsive Interactive Performer. BNMI, Liminal Screen Residency.



Figure 16: The Screaming Head Close-up





Figure 17: *Swimmers* Scene 8 – Eat a whole apple in one.



Figure 18: *Swimmers* Scene 4 - Synchronised swimming on land.



Figure 19: *Talk to Me* live performance Salford Media City Summit 2011



Figure 20: A secreted bio-sensor records and reveals the participant's mood

Nana's New Pet  
2010





Figure 21: Nana's New Pet

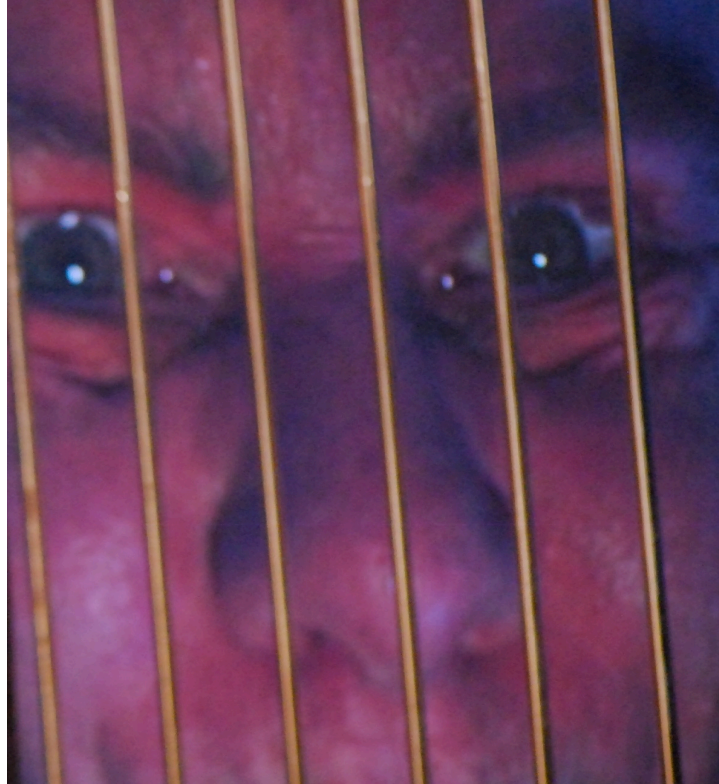


Figure 22: The Pet

Nana's New Pet

This performance takes place at two sites.

Part 1: A roaming performance. Nana, carrying hand-bag and large pet carrier is looking for the bus. She asks people for directions and makes casual conversation as she goes. From the pet carrier SFX snuffling, little squeaks, a body moving in straw. Through the bars can be seen hair and an eye can occasionally be glimpsed.

Part 2: Performance

The audience are seated on the floor enter a shortsighted old lady carrying the large pet carrier, she bumps into a couple of people and things and catches sight of one of the adults in the audience.

From inside the pet carrier there are sounds of snuffles, growls, miewing, monkey cries.

NANA

Oh hello Gerald it's nice to see you after all these years, and I thought you were dead. Are these all your children? My you have been busy haven't you? Can't stop long I'm just on my way to tea with....

There is a long howl.

NANA (CONT'D)

Oh I'm sorry about the noise, shhh Petunia, it's my new puppy I bought it from a very nice man in the high street, I've been a bit lonely you see after Alf, and I wanted a little friend to keep me company. Would you like to see my new puppy?

Nana turns the carrier to the audience the creature goes wild.

Creature

(panting)

Grrr grrr grrr Let me out, let me out, let me out!

Through the bars of the pet carrier there is the face of what appears to be some sort of grotesque creature.

NANA

Now Petunia.

The creature spits.

It stops when it Sees the children.

CREATURE

mmmm... I'm hungry, yum yum yum yum.

It looks at the children and salivates.

NANA

It's not tea time yet you naughty thing, you just had your lunch. I've never known a puppy to be so hungry and so picky about its food.

CREATURE

Mmmm yummy yes yes I love a little roasty leg with a soupson of garlic and a smattering of sel et poivre. yum yum yum bpp bpp bpp bpp!

It licks its lips.

CREATURE (CONT'D)

Ooh look at those cheeks lightly sautéed in olive oil oh yes drizzled with tomato ketchup just before serving, oh heaven!

The creature looks and licks its lips, it eyes up the children in the audience making approving noises when it sees one it likes.

CREATURE (CONT'D)

Mmmm lovely, yes, tasty.

Licks and smacks its lips.

It sticks out tongue tries to reach child in audience, but it can't.

The creature pouts and starts to whine.

NANA

Jason, the little boy from next door came round with some bones,

The creature stops and listens.

NANA (CONT'D)

which was thoughtful, and Petunia loved them didn't you?

The creature smiles and nods.

NANA (CONT'D)

She didn't leave a scrap which I thought quite peculiar, I think I'll call you that from now on, peculiar Petunia, did you bury them in the back garden aye aye?

Creature

MMMMMMM

The creature looks at the children hungrily.

NANA

Little Jason didn't come back to take you for a walk though like he'd promised though did he?

Creature  
(whines)

NANA  
Alright, alright now ssshhhh.

CREATURE  
(to Nana)  
Oh pleeeese let me out, pleeeese  
( growls and barks)

NANA  
Now you know what we agreed, you can't come out  
until you learn to behave in company.

CREATURE  
I will I will I will I will I will, I promise  
whimper, whimper, whimper.

NANA  
Ahh bless her, but we don't want a repeat of your  
little accident in this nice place do we?

CREATURE  
What?

NANA  
Accident.

CREATURE  
When?

NANA  
Yesterday.

CREATURE  
Yesterday?

NANA  
When you,  
(whispers)  
You know.

CREATURE  
What?

NANA  
When you weed all over the floor in the kitchen  
and then in my best shoes.

CREATURE  
(aghast)  
I did not!  
(to Nana)  
That was you.  
(to audience)  
That was her.

NANA  
And you remember last week when I tried to wipe

your nose and you bit the tip clean off my little finger.

Nana shows her red tipped heavily bandaged finger.

CREATURE

Eyuch old lady finger, disgusting, I like them when they're earlier in the season.

(eyes scan audience)

Little baby fingers, yes yes.

NANA

It's almost healed now. But we've had some lovely evenings though haven't we, sitting with our lightly toasted crumpets dripping with butter.

CREATURE

And some lightly buttered toes on the side, yum yum.

Creature licks its lips.

NANA

Yes toast is nice, she likes her toast.

Creature whines persistently.

NANA (CONT'D)

Ooh do stop Petunia, I can't stand it when she cries.

CREATURE

Let me out, pleeeeee, I promise, I promise I'll behave.

Creature whines.

NANA

Oh?

Creature looks pitifully at Nana.

NANA (CONT'D)

Well?

CREATURE

(Whines)

I'm sure they would like to see me... properly, (whines and pleads)

NANA

Well I'm not sure.

CREATURE

I'll sing them a little song,  
(to the tune of half a pound of tupenny rice)



dum tee dum tee,tum,tee,tum.

NANA

Oh alright, but you behave mind.

Creature pants very fast.

As Nana reaches for the door of the carrier the creature throws itself forward and growls, snarls and barks.

NANA (CONT'D)

Aah! No what am I thinking.

Creature starts suddenly in confusion.

Nana (CONT'D)

I'll forget my head one of these days won't I?  
We're on our way to tea aren't we silly.

Nana pulls away from the basket.

CREATURE

Oh!  
(blows raspberry)

NANA

(to audience)

Yes Genna and Rupert my lovely grandchildren are  
always pleased to see their dear old Nana and  
especially now I've got a new pet.

Creature smiles and pants, licks its lips.

CREATURE

MMMMMM Grand - children Yummy yum yum

Nana picks up her bags and the pet carrier and exits.

NANA

Goodbye, it's been lovely talking to you, but we  
must go or we'll be late.

(sings)

Marta, rambling rose of the wild wood

CREATURE

Howls

Nana exits, walking slowly out of sight with the pet still howling and growling

Nana

Oh don't make such a fuss, we'll be there in no  
time.

## Published Texts

## Talk to me!

'Talk to me' is the latest development in a decade of practice of creating performances involving the presentation of impossible performance relationships; such as a series of work in which actually present performers, perform with on screen cast members. More recently these works have included the introduction of animated performers in order to test whether it was possible to create the appearance of a convincing live relationship between a real and an animated performer.

For some while now I have become dissatisfied with this false, as Steve Dixon calls it, largely "Re-active" or "Symbolic" <sup>61</sup>interactive method of performing with screen based actors, and have been slowly moving towards the development of more spontaneous methods of delivery. In collaboration with the Banff New Media Institute, I developed "The Screaming Head" (2009) a movement responsive grotesque head that abuses the inter-actor. A motion sensor, in this case, the Nintendo Wii, triggered multiple abusive responses dependent on the quality of interaction. A bank of responses was pre-recorded and stored, once again giving the "appearance" of spontaneity. This was followed by a motion responsive video work <sup>62</sup> that required the audience to swing a suspended screen in order to trigger a random selection of moving images that formed a non-linear narrative. Developments in the digital interface have been combined with audience centred works <sup>63</sup> and although seemingly very different, each of these performance interfaces, confirmed that above all I was working towards a greater understanding and expertise in developing and controlling interactions; whether

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<sup>61</sup> Dixon, S, (2007), *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* Chpt 23, 561. MIT Press.

<sup>62</sup> Oliver, M and Klassen L, (2010) *Interactive Video*, part of *Offit*, Installation at HubM3, Salford. Artist in residence programme in collaboration with Canadian artist, Lois Klassen.

<sup>63</sup> Oliver, M, (2009) *Babble*, created as part of *Rules and Regs Live Art Residency 2009*, Bracknell Gallery, curated by Outi Remes.

they be Human-to-human, human-to-on-screen performer, Human-to-animation or human-to-machine.

I have been engaged in trying to answer several questions:-

- Why, when I am performing with myself, do I not recognize the other as me i.e. it is not like looking at a photo of oneself, but a real other performer?
- If it is so easy to convince my brain that this other me is another real performer, surely it is possible to convince anyone that a meaningful dialogue can be achieved with an equally real but virtual presence and if this is the case, why aren't we doing more of it, what's preventing this from happening?
- As performance makers do we need to impact on the development of the technology in order to get the ease and style of communication that we would ideally like as performers.
- Why doesn't my computer talk to me?

Empathy is the key word that ties all of these together; already standard in the development of good screenwriting and a necessary element in successful audience to performer experience, it has become an increasingly important focus in interactive studies and recently of paramount importance to neuroscientific research and our growing understanding the function of mirror neurons. A successful empathetic interaction in HCI terms; to firstly acknowledge the presence of the user and secondly to recognise them, is a bottom line description of empathy between humans.

Stanford based Clifford Nass in his Computers as Social Actors (CASA) research programme has confirmed that people who use computers:-

- Anthropomorphise the systems that they use and that this response is more less automatically activated.
- Think that gender is an important factor in the delivery of computer based support systems.
- That people like their computers more if they are flattered by them.<sup>64</sup>

The research that he has undertaken over the last 15 years has not only showed that people prefer computer interactions where flattery is a major component in the language of the system but that one could take any model of good communication and it would work equally well such as consultation, giving

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<sup>64</sup> Summarised in Lee, E-J, (2009) What Triggers Social Responses to Flattering Computers? Experimental Tests of Anthropomorphism and Mindlessness Explanations, *Communication Research* 37, 191-214.

feedback, asking questions.<sup>65</sup> I am considering ways in which the HCI could give me a more satisfying and essentially performative interactive experience.

As a woman involved in working with media technologies I am acutely aware of the lack of women designers and programmers. As a customer I am aware that very few of the products on the market appeal to me. As an inter-actor I am dissatisfied with the one-sided relationship I have with my computer when I know it can do so more and that I am capable of telling the computer so much more than through just using the quertie keyboard.

Technologies designed primarily for research in bio-science have to this point not been applied to developments in the generic computer interface; there are obvious reasons of cost and the expertise needed to interpret the data. However looking at how developments in the HCI have been driven we find a different story, one that tells of little interest in feminised human-to-human communication and is largely dominated by the limitations of the technology itself which have in turn been designed without such consideration. Literally technology led; we have reached a position where computer manufacturers are only just coming round to the idea that computers would sell better if they communicated better with a broader demographic.

Taking this challenge on as an essentially performance led project, with possible other applications, I am now working towards the development of new two-way communication systems that allows the computer to interface directly and spontaneously with the inter-actor by talking directly to her in response to her current physical state. I am not alone in exploring such capabilities but what I am hoping sets this programme apart from other experiments in interactive HCI developments is that it is led by a theatre maker; someone experienced in making the imaginary appear real through the development of good character design, working in collaboration with cognitive-psychologist Dr. Adam Galpin, an expert in the psychology of human behaviour, Rob Bendall, bio-sign technician and Joe Brindle, computer programmer, this project will primarily explore the importance of characterful spoken narrative in the construction of real and affective empathetic interactions and points to the potential of this development for wider applications in health, well-being and entertainment.

Developments in interactive gaming, notably the Nintendo wii and mii allow the player to receive direct responses from the computer programme in a seemingly two way dialogue, but this interaction functions using limited user-data and a narrow interpretation of gender preferences in its choice of applications. Where the user is permitted to interpret and 'own' the interface we see a much more interesting and often perverse set of choices. In Second Life the wide-ranging approach to the construction of avatars suggests that as individuals we enjoy

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<sup>65</sup> Nass, C, Yen, C, (2010), *The man who lied to his laptop: What Machines Teach Us About Human Relationships*. Penguin, NY, USA.

challenging the norms of identity as online users re-gender, recreate and redesign themselves, but SL is still a relatively unrequited relationship.

The dissatisfaction that I am feeling is not unusual. In her now seminal old publication *Computers as Theatre* (1991) Brenda Laurel called for more considered product design that would appeal to a broader demographic, utilize more intelligent navigation systems. Twenty years later and her ongoing efforts to 'humanise' the computer interface led to the research and development of games for girls which she claims, embraced the knowledge that girls have a love of social complexity and enjoy the narrative of social behaviour. This is still barely acknowledged in the interactive media design and construction industry.

There are still too many examples of the triumph of style over substance in new media products and for the most part I think that we can ascribe these to:

- The over use of largely conflict based narratives
- Over complex navigational tools
- Poor use of empathy
- Poor use of language patterns
- Poor levels of recognition of the user

I know I am not alone in wanting my computer to do more, and not more aps, I want to have conversations with it; to recognise me; I want my computer to talk to me.

The intention of 'Talk to me' is to explore the use of scriptwriting in conjunction with the technological interface in order to try to achieve a point where:

- The audience or inter-actor can bring their own personality, creativity and empathy to the relationship.
- To offer recognition of the user through both a reactive and predictive methods.

This new project aims to bring the experience that I have had with using the casual nature of the conversational script as a device to transcend the divide between the real and the virtual, in effect I am trying to feminise the interface.

To feminise the interface does not mean to simply ascribe a female voice to a computerized system but to give it 'traditionally' feminine qualities, such as attributes of caring, nurturing, enjoying complex sociable relationships, having good (often long) conversations. With this aim in mind, along with Adam Galpin, I held a workshop with Media Psychology undergrads to ask them if they had the choice what would they like their computer to do for them. This group was 75% female.

- Tell me how to get a first
- Give me a massage
- Read my mind

- Tell me when I've stopped working at my best
- Tell me how my biology is affecting my performance i.e. – dehydration, high blood pressure, heart rate
- Talk to me
- Don't just beep when I've done something wrong tell me what I've done

I have begun to explore the bio-sign technology available to see whether any existing equipment could be used to develop a performative interface without re-programming the devices but simply changing the use and application. In order to create not just an illusion but a physical bond between inter-actor and computer performer I am constructing a series of bio-sensor based interactions. The first used galvanic sweat palm reading equipment to literally read the palm of the inter-actor and reveal as if by magic how they are feeling.

In the first stage experimental performance, I secreted a Galvanic Skin Reader into a hidden pocket in my shirt. The GSR was linked to a hidden laptop computer and used Calm Link software programmed to trigger a range of different sonic responses, dependent on the emotional state of the performer. As I held the hand of the audience member I simultaneously touched the GSR, triggering a response. My character role was a Thermal Dynamic Therapist who was trained to make people feel better by hold their hand. The script was developed from hypnotherapy training manuals, cold reading i.e. the power of suggestion to create the illusion of mind-reading and sudden changes of subject and tone, to distract the audience away from the technological interface and sound. The Calm Link software was set to tonal responses; the more the participant relaxed the lower the pitch of the note that accompanied our session. It was as a result of this script-led performance process that the bio-science laboratory who lent me the equipment learned that when we hold hands, we exchange bio-signs. The discovery of this information led onto research into the importance of haptic devices in the interface.



Figure 1: *Talk to Me* live performance Media City Summit 2011



Figure 2: A secreted bio-sensor records and reveals the participant's mood.

Subsequent works will bring the inter-actor into direct contact with the computer interface and the actor within the machine who will respond through an expansive library of reactions to their physical state. The aim of the bio-sign reading HCI is to create a physical bond between the inter-actor and the computer and will act as the device through which I will deliver a series of acts of empathy, talking and kindness. This physical rather than purely intellectual bond between the two will allow a more personalised and intimate relationship allowing the computer to respond with quite specific information and actions. This work proposes that it is not just the psychology of empathy that is important in the development of new interactive processes but the enduring importance of human-to-human communication whether they be real or just in the mind of the inter-actor.

I will be empirically testing what as actors and good communicators we already know:-

- The importance of imitation in signalling that we like someone and whether this action is an extension of mirror neuron activity.
- The importance of empathetic actions (envelope – nods and shakes, head tilts) involved in a good conversation.
- The importance of suggestive language (i.e. the magic in the script).
- The importance of playfulness in order to de-limit the process from purely exploring commercial or therapeutic results but the as yet unknown.
- The Importance of human-to-human rather than human to animation communication.
- The importance of physical liveness in the creation of a genuine bond between the computer and the inter-actor.

These performances, for the present, use Mary Oliver human computer in direct contact with the audience member through our hands. My role is to guide the conversation to try to activate physical responses from the participant that will be



revealed in various ways. The first will use the simple grid mechanism that is already part of the software; the more the participant gets aroused the higher in pitch the sound levels go. Through various questions, confessions and acts of love and kindness, the work will focus on the audience member and give them direct feedback about how they are feeling – (i.e. reading their mind) or as the student in the workshop said ‘tell me what I am thinking’.

The use of bio-sign data in performance is the start of a new branch of audience centred performance work that connects them to the performance itself. There are of course ethical issues that need to be overcome in that the collection of bio-sign data, even temporary collection needs ethical approval and a rigorously composed and signed contract between performer and inter-actor.

The information gathered and generation of scripted material produced by ‘Talk to me’, will then be transferred to the machine supported by pre-existing studies that have already been carried out by scientists that visual face to face communication, even with virtual actors, arouses more successful reactions than with purely language centred, text and audio, feedback. Which brings me back to my starting point and to what I already know from the performances that I have made.

This HCI performance between audience participant and digital actor signals a new step in the relationship of audience to virtual actor. It reinforces that performativity is part of everyday life and that as performance makers our relationship with technology is not something that we should be passive recipients of. As experts in human to human communication we should be at the forefront of new human to technology relationship systems and as educators we need to embrace a broader interdisciplinary spectrum of expertise in our performing arts courses, to include computer programming, behavioural science and magic.

Citation: Oliver, M (2010) Talk to Me in Making Reality Really Real, Ascott, Gangvik, Jarhmann (eds.) *Making Reality Really Real: Consciousness Reframed*, Teks Publishing, Norway, 148-150.

*Talk to me!* was delivered at the Making Reality Really Real Conference, Trondheim, Norway in 2010.

## The Emancipating Possibilities of Performing with Cartoons.

Mary O'Really

All this anal suction is playing  
havoc with my IBS, by the way  
have you tried that transmogrified  
prune paste yet?

Astro Mary

God no!!

*From Fly me to the moon, a digital comedy set in outer space*

### **'Insubordination in a world of lively things'<sup>66</sup>**

A casual remark in 2005, that I wished to perform with my cartoon self, has become the focus of a research and development project which is the latest in a series of work that explores the humour that can be found at the meeting point between the actual and pre-recorded digital performer. This seemingly simple idea has had a ridiculous impact both pragmatically and conceptually upon my practice and this article is an attempt to bludgeon what began as an aptly irreverent presentation at the 'Bad Girls' (re)Actor conference (2007), into a

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<sup>66</sup>I am borrowing Esther Leslie's description "Early Mickey Mouse cartoons feature a pesky, ratty creature creating mischief, indulging in vaudeville and low-life" "He was a spirited insubordinate animal living in a world of lively things" Leslie, E, Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde, Verso 2004 . p8.

document that still resonates with the insubordinate intentions of a badly behaved performance artist.

The arrival at this current working process has not been instantaneous. In 1998 I began developing a solo practice that involved performing with digital performers. These have included *'Mother Tongue'* (2000-2002) in which I performed as all the female members of my family simultaneously using the newly available Realtime M.Peg 3 player. This once state of the art hardware allowed complete synchrony between four on-screen characters and although no attempt was made to hide the technology in this visually sparse performance, it provoked an emotional response from audiences. L'Oreal perfection met Vaudeville in *"Wednesday, Wednesday"* (2005) a comedy double act played by Mary Oliver and Mary Oliver that was directly influenced by Auslander's theories on liveness<sup>67</sup> and is, as Giesekam describes, a 'metacommentary' between a wide-mouthed grotesque actor and her on-screen double.<sup>68</sup> *'Almost'* (2006) introduced the world's smallest performer, in a performance which used the 'scale' of the characters as a metaphor for the unseen and undesirable; performer Lisa Moore is only nine inches high and is viewed through opera glasses, while her companion, Anthony Bessick, is by contrast, a giant. For this latest project, *'Fly Me to the Moon'*, I am working in collaboration with musician and sound artist Christian Weaver and *'Liquid Studios Animation'* led by animator Rozi Fuller. There are two overarching aims, firstly, the desire to create an equitable relationship between two very different kinds of performers and secondly, to explore the inherent characteristics of the "Cartoon" in the development of a new comedy script.



Fig 1 *Mother Tongue*

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<sup>67</sup> In particular when Auslander states that "all performance modes, live or mediatized, are now equal" p50. Auslander, P. "Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture" Routledge.,1999, p 10-60.

<sup>68</sup> "sometimes playing different genres off against one another and sometimes insinuating a metacommentary on theatre and media through how they handle genres." Giesekam, G, *Staging the Screen: The use of film and video in theatre*, Palgrave, 2007 p248.

In attempting to find a critical oeuvre with which to critique the developments so far, Auslander's now largely accepted claims that the mediated elements of performance are as valid a live medium, remain unchallenged, but the cultural dominance of screen based imagery means that we have become 'more' accustomed and perhaps more comfortable seeing the performer on screen than in our presence. This has created an unequal relationship between actual and virtual performer. The creator of digital performance now needs to forecast the level of screen seduction that will take place and counter it where necessary or else suffer from the 'fifty-watt light bulb syndrome'.<sup>69</sup> I do seem to be testing out Causey's assertion that "The material body and its subjectivity are extended, challenged and reconfigured through technology"<sup>70</sup> but I have issues with his preoccupations with 'death'; it is a state that as performers we need to avoid at all costs whether actually or analogously. His reference to the inability of our ego to believe in the possibility of our own death is however interesting within this respect. It goes some way to explain why when I am performing with my recorded self I cannot recognise the other performer as 'me', this only happens in reflection and even at some distance from the performance I still have difficulty in calling the digi-self 'my'-self.<sup>71</sup> To test Causey's theory out further, in this latest work I accidentally kill off my digital cartoon double, but of course being a cartoon she returns, much to my gratitude and to alleviate my guilt.

For this particular project Rabelais via Bakhtin resonates<sup>72</sup> but I simply cannot resolve my relationship to my abject cartoon double in Lacanian terms. Far from a narcissistic fascination with the duplicate self, this work is about a destruction of the ego, a self-effacement by degrading one's self image through the conduit of the 'cartoon' to expose the grotesque reality of ageing (but not death, quite yet). I also find myself at odds with current hypotheses on the virtual interface and the disappearing body as it is in fact a growing awareness of my badly behaved body which was the inspiration for this new work.

I believe that the struggles I am having to find a conceptual home for this work lie in developments in the hierarchy of practice forms that happened early in the last century and have been informed by a constant stream of artificial divides that appear to have their roots in the pseudo anti-bourgeois movements of Dada and Surrealism<sup>73</sup> and that were ratified by Greenberg in his severing of modernism from mass culture when "he gave modernism the qualification 'high' ".<sup>74</sup> One of

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<sup>69</sup> I am referring to Auslander's observation of a performance in which dancers performed on and off screen "My eye was drawn to the screen, compared to which the live dancers indeed had all the brilliance of fifty-watt bulbs". Auslander, op cit p38.

<sup>70</sup> Causey, M, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture*, Routledge, 2007, p23.

<sup>71</sup> Comedian Barry Humphries never refers to his alter ego 'Edna Everage' as himself but always in conversation refers to her as 'Edna'.

<sup>72</sup> Bakhtin, M, *Rabelais and his world*, Indiana University Press, 1984, Chpt 6.

<sup>73</sup> "The bourgeois were one of our targets, I sought to find out what it meant and found out that we were in fact bourgeois ourselves". Richard Huelsenbeck interview 1959. *'Voices if Dada'*, ITCM 2424, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> Leslie, op cit p296

the challenges for me is how to discuss the comedy grotesque entering contemporary performance practice in the guise of a cute cartoon character, without offending the pure modernists who still walk amongst us cunningly disguised as postmodern theorists.<sup>75</sup> In *'Hollywood Flatlands'*, Esther Leslie aptly summarises the problematic of an eclectic hybridization of forms in this respect, through what she describes as "a phoney war between high culture and popular or low or mass culture"<sup>76</sup>. My new work may well be regarded as 'the bastard offspring' of mass culture's 'unnatural intercourse with High Culture.'<sup>77</sup> Rather than apologise for this I propose that it was only a matter of time for the performance artist to explore the disruptive quality of cartoon animation with its own temporal, spatial and cultural concerns<sup>78</sup> and it is largely developments in digital processes and the cultural expansion formed within the Human-Computer-Interface which have made this possible.

### ***'And that's not all folks'***

Like almost everything we think of as innovative, there are inevitably precedents. In this case, I quickly discovered that cartoon animation within live performance is not a recent performance technique. Pioneering animator Winsor McKay introduced his film technology in the most accessible public format available to him, Vaudeville in 1914, when he performed with a six minute hand drawn animation of "*Gertie the Dinosaur*"; talking to her, asking her to do certain actions, which she appeared to do in response to his commands, then McKay walked off stage to re-appear on-screen in animated form, amazing his audience by climbing onto Gertie's back and riding off together into the distance. McKay used the format of Vaudeville to present his drawing talents not because he was interested in developing the human-cartoon-interface per se, but because it was a platform from where he could publicly show his advanced animation techniques.<sup>79</sup> It is useful to remember that the 'magic of film' and the performance interface had been introduced into live theatre almost as soon as the medium had been

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<sup>75</sup> "Is there an irony in using modernism to articulate postmodernism, or a testament to the fact that the theoretical borders between modern and postmodern are riddled with gaps?" Gieseckam, op cit p23

<sup>76</sup> Leslie op cit p296

<sup>77</sup> Leslie is referring to Dwight McDonald's article *'Masscult and Midcult'* in *Partisan Review* 1960 quote "a bastard offspring of masscult's unnatural intercourse with High Culture" Ibid p296

<sup>78</sup> Other examples include Cathy Weis's *'Electric Haiku'*, Phelim McDermott's *'Alex'* Forkbeard Fantasy, *'The Barbers of Surreal'*, *'The Fall of the House of Usherettes'*, *'Invisible Bonfires'* although strictly speaking they often combine celluloid with digital.

<sup>79</sup> McKay began presenting his drawings during 'Chalk and Talk' sessions made popular on the vaudeville circuit. He was a very popular presenter and it was a natural place for him to therefore to air his new moving animation films, *'Little Nemo'* in 1911 and *'Gertie the Dinosaur'* in 1914. Emile Kohl's animations pre-dated McKay's but the quality of McKay's images are far more sophisticated.

invented.<sup>80</sup> The theatrical stage was where on-screen to on-stage visual dialogues and doubling effects were mastered by the prolific magician and film-maker George Méliès and the 'screen' was added to the magic act repertoire.<sup>81</sup> With numerous theatrical aficionados from the Schuberts, Lew Field, Florenz Ziegfeld and Cohan and Harris all using the new moving picture technology to add another layer of spectacle to their already spectacular shows, it wasn't at first obvious that film would separate from theatre<sup>82</sup>. The relationship was not to last however, and various suppositions have been made as to why theatre and film took separate paths, largely centred around audience expectation<sup>83</sup> and profit margins.<sup>84</sup> We only have to look at another of Winsor McKay's films and his own ironic use of real and animated footage to tell the story of the labour involved in the making of "*Little Nemo*" (1911) to see that creating extended animated sequences for the live stage was impractical and unprofitable for both the animator and theatre producer.<sup>85</sup>

With the consignment of animation to the purely filmic mode, developments in the language of the cartoon rapidly became associated with mass entertainment and what began with the potential avant-garde use of a cartoon as a transforming medium was siphoned off by film makers, most notably Disney, who through their popular fairy tale narratives formed the association of the cartoon with 'children's' entertainment.

Thereafter, the human-cartoon-interface moved wholesale into celluloid, and throughout the twentieth century became a well established form of fantasy and humour.<sup>86</sup> It is only recently that the digitally animated performer has re-entered live performance, Gorillaz being the most obvious example, and Damon Albarn's

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<sup>80</sup>The possibilities of the moving image in theatre was cited by an associate of Edison, George Parsons Laphrop, in his article in September 1896, *The North American Review*, "the vitascope may soon take an important role in heightening theatrical verisimilitude" Gwendolyn Waltz - '*Filmed Scenery on the Live Stage*' - *Theatre Journal* 58:4 *Theatre Journal* 58.4 (2006) 547-573 This whole issue of *Theatre Journal* has been most helpful.

<sup>81</sup>Magician Horace Goldin, 1907 at the Palace Theatre London integrated a film into his act when on screen the audience saw him arrive in a taxi at the stage door, break through the screen and continue to argue with the taxi driver about the fare, cited in '*Up-to-Date Magic: Theatrical Conjuring and the Trick Film*' *Ibid* p. 595-615

<sup>82</sup> "At the turn of the century "film was not predestined to become its own medium or to adopt a predominantly narrative form" *ibid* p547

<sup>83</sup> Removed from its first 'spectacular' context by film developments and the rise of picture houses with the narrative driven, all embracing experience of cinema, it is proposed that audiences became dissatisfied with the 'simple' use of film to extend the theatrical *Mise en scène*.

<sup>84</sup>In 1896 the Mark Brothers opened their Vitascope Hall on Ellicott Square, Buffalo, USA. In the first year of operation this 72-seat cinema had seen 200,000 visitors, it was open 13 hours a day, seven days a week.

<sup>85</sup> There is an excellent copy of an extended *Little Nemo* on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcSp2ej2S00>

<sup>86</sup> Gene Kelly and Jerry the Mouse in MGM's '*Anchor's Away*' 1945, Walt Disney's (now banned) '*Song of the South* 1949, '*Mary Poppins* 1964 and Touchstone's '*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*' 1988.

epic show *'Monkey'*, which premiered at the 2007 Manchester Festival, an example of the expanding spectacular multimedia theatre market which we are seeing since the digital revolution.<sup>87</sup> Albarn's hybrid affair of circus, opera, magic, hi-tech projection and pop music, is emblematic of the visual excess that we have become accustomed to in our media saturated world but is more associated with pop music's on going relationship with stadium performances, graphic design and illustration, than with the desire to explore the interface of the live and virtual performer.<sup>88</sup>

### **'Suffering Succotash!'**

Far from spectacular, the work I make has been described as a new form of digital ventriloquism, although after seeing me perform with my digi-self, digital technologist Simon Robertshaw remarked that it looked like I had my *'hand up my own arse'*. The memory of this declaration never fails to invoke a deep sigh and not just because it produces such graphic visual images, it re-enforces the divisions between what is assumed as a serious engagement with technology driven practice and those of us who are attempting to humanize our involvement with it by keeping the body alive; countering Causey's thesis that we are "enacting its annihilation, its nothingness".<sup>89</sup>



Fig 2 *Wednesday, Wednesday*

At the start of the process I had a short but failed attempt to develop the work as a 3D CGI project but the character suffered from 'the Polar Express syndrome'<sup>90</sup>. Just as the gigantic smooth head of Tom Hanks had children quaking behind their knees, so perfect CGI Mary Oliver was described as creepy. She lacked the imperfections that make us human, a quality that I have had to exploit in all my

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<sup>87</sup> Which has brought about the raising of the dead in the case of a virtual *'Sinatra'* 2006.

<sup>88</sup> That could be said to have started with psychedelic pop subculture and particularly the works of Abdul Mati Klarwein, Wes Wilson, Bob Masse, Simon Posthuma, Roger Dean, Stanley Mouse.

<sup>89</sup> Giesekam op cit, p21

<sup>90</sup> Dargis, M, New York Times, Film Review *'Polar Express'*, November 10, 2004 "most moviegoers will be more concerned by the eerie listlessness of those character's faces".

digital personae in order to create a convincing equitable relationship in performance. It soon became clear that I wanted to develop a piece that co-starred a cartoon. Not the 'animated self' but a 'toon' who comes with the ability to do anything, be any size, be adorable, perverse, obscene, can never die, can commit murder and still get a laugh and whilst although now 'mostly' created on computer, a performer who still began her life as a 2D drawing.



Fig 3 Astro Mary

Again Leslie offers an interesting insight in support of this when she writes that “when animation finds its own form, and not a borrowed form, when it concedes flatness not the fakery of depth, it really gets deep into actuality, its own and ours.”<sup>91</sup> Rather than accepting the invisibility of old age (or death) as an option, the possibility of performing with one’s phenomenal cartoon self brings with it new found performative possibilities, as well as new sources of comedy centred on the body. Having developed a keen interest on the comedic potential of my own corps étranger, the intrinsic cartoon characteristic of most relevance seemed to be ‘weightlessness’ and I began by researching the effects on the body of living in a gravity-less environment.<sup>92</sup> The results are far from the heroic image of the astronaut supplied by NASA; it is really quite disgusting by our everyday standards of hygiene<sup>93</sup>.

With the combination of a cartoon performance partner and the desire to forefront the abject body, I was afforded permission to explore some hilarious and taboo subject matter.<sup>94</sup> Just as ‘Itchy and Scratchy’ on the Simpsons can commit mass murder, decapitate, die with the death of a thousand knives, all witnessed before the watershed, the cartoon character has the ability to transgress normal cultured behaviour. So along with the gags about only having four fingers, the

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<sup>91</sup> Leslie, op cit p199.

<sup>92</sup> Astronaut Michael Collins, member of the Apollo 11 crew wrote after fantasizing about women in space “The possibilities of weightlessness are there for the ingenious to exploit. No need to carry bras into space that’s for sure” He continues “with a crew of a thousand ladies, off with Alpha Centauri, with two thousand breasts bobbing beautifully and quivering delightfully in response to their every weightless movement”. Holtzmann Kevles, B, *Almost Heaven: The Story of Women in Space*, MIT, 2006 p45.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid For a detailed description of on board conditions on MIR.

<sup>94</sup> There are hundreds of thousands of questions in the NASA archive, but surprisingly there is no record of anyone asking “How do astronauts pooh?” <http://science.hq.nasa.gov/info/faq.html>.



stretch and ping, and the ability to become any shape and size in a split second, so too do I introduce such subjects as the affects of space travel on the astronaut's bowel movements, what happens if you constantly inhale skin debris and how one smells after years in space with only a baby wipe and an ear-bud with which to stay clean. The long term affects of zero gravity mean that astronauts have to contend with weakened bone matter, muscle tone and gastric wind. They are prone to irritability and after drinking alcohol, can get extremely randy then fall asleep. A lesser known fact in the list of 'un-heroic' things that the promoters of space travel do not want us to obsess on, is that disposable nappy technology was first invented for use by astronauts. Also apparently something that as ageing women we have to look forward to and yet another fact that needs to come under the heading of "more things our grandmother's didn't tell us". During my research I alarmingly found out that there is such a condition as a 'fecal stack'! Armed with a wealth of potentially funny information, the decision was made to set the work in space with my cartoon alter-ego taking the form of 'Astro Mary'.

Astro Mary

I've got so much trapped wind  
I could power our return to earth  
if I came into contact with a  
naked flame at the right trajectory!

If one is to create equilibrium between the real and the virtual performer, then it is essential to establish a rationale by which both can exist independently but not to the exclusion of the other. Comedy dialogue forms such a vehicle. Neither performer can take precedence over the other and whilst the audience's eye may well be lured by the screen image, the need to discover the full narrative, complete the gag and get the punch line, always keeps the two performers in a symbiotic relationship. The speedy spoken dialogue can also act as a device to distract the audience from asking the disruptive question of "How do they do that?"<sup>95</sup> It was this combination of factors that led me to believe that I could bring a different kind of self to the stage and it/she still be received by the audience as a convincing presence. If this particular relationship is successful, we can enjoy the possibility of a new array of performance interfaces.

The introduction of the cartoon character within contemporary live performance requires both creators and spectators to bring a new reading of performer to performer relationship to the work, after all, animation within the context of performance art is both a marginal and displaced practice. Liberated from the process of writing for the gravity bound actor to the possibilities of writing for a character than can visually do anything, (except of course leave the screen upon which she's projected) has been both a freedom and a challenge. By using such a recognisably transgressive device we are able to redefine acceptable performer

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<sup>95</sup> See also the work of Howard Read (UK) and Evan O'Television (US).

behaviour.<sup>96</sup> 'Astro Mary' is both transcendent and debased, but through the mechanisms of the cartoon these binary opposites cancel each other out, in so doing she becomes more human, for would it not be true to say that we are all a combination of the two.<sup>97</sup>

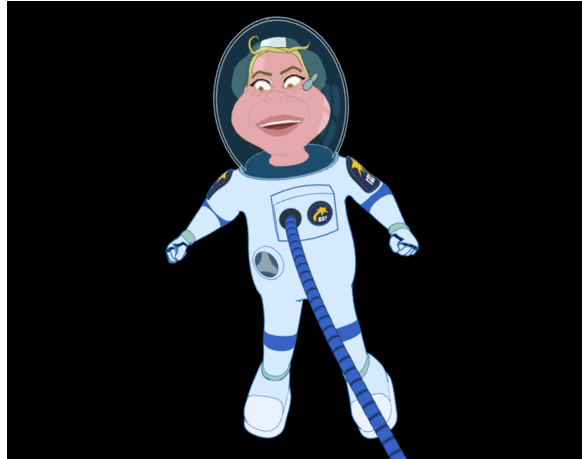


Fig 3 Animation Still from *Fly me to the Moon*, *Liquid Studios*



Fig 4 Animation Still from *Fly me to the Moon*, *Liquid Studios*

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<sup>96</sup> "This downward movement is also inherent in all forms of popular-festive merriment and grotesque realism. Down, inside out, vice versa, upside down, such is the direction of all these movements. All of them thrust down, turn over, push headfirst, transfer top to bottom, and bottom to top, both in the literal sense of space, and in the metaphorical meaning of the image." Bakhtin, op cit p370

<sup>97</sup> "Finally, debasement is the fundamental artistic principle of grotesque realism; all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images. We spoke of the grotesque swing which brings together heaven and earth. But the accent is placed not on the upward movement but on the descent" Ibid p370-371

On reflection, I feel that my decision to venture into this work came out of my desire to buck the trend within much cerebral techno-driven art to explore the doom ridden predictions of an Armageddon obsessed surveillance society. With my intention being to explore the phenomenal abilities of technology to reproduce myself lighter; taller; younger; funnier, I hope to use the creation of my own anti-Galatea to act as a counterpoint to my ageing, weighty, unreliable mind and body. Not to play God but to counteract the lack of control over my changing body and the personal daily terror that this has produced.<sup>98</sup> In short I use the cartoon as an emancipation from my own social, physical and cultural signifiers.

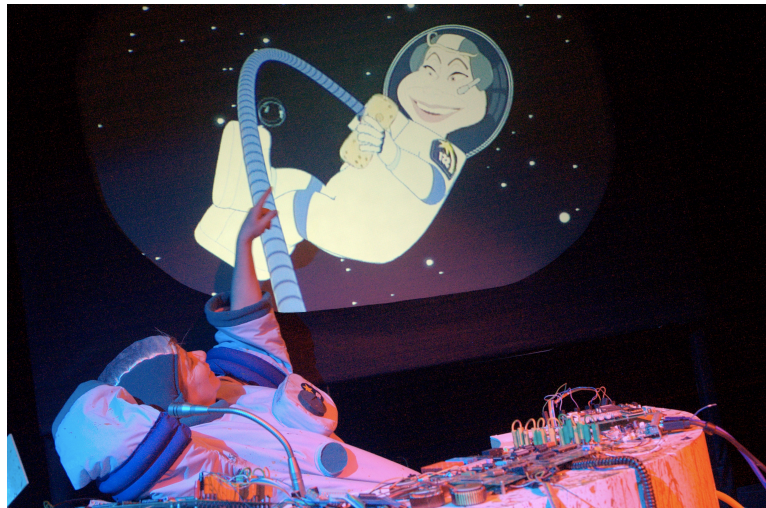


Fig 5 *Fly Me To the Moon*

The research and development process has taken a journey that began and finishes with the deviser/performer and since this has been a personal project driven largely from a very personal perspective, considerations for the body of the performer in relation to the cartoon double have constantly been fore-fronted. What has become clear through this process of discovery was that I had unwittingly chosen to develop a phenomenal virtual character who has, for all intents and purposes, many similarities to the ageing terrestrial body. Maybe it is here that I have found my balance - my equitable performance double; an astronaut who can float, shrink, have an instant face-lift, but who in the end suffers from the same indignities as the ageing human, namely: fibrosis, flatulence and flab.

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<sup>98</sup> “Behind the development of advanced technologies is the age old desire to extend the body in space and time (through machinic, communications, and biotechnological tools) and thus to transcend it (to become “God”)” Jones, *A Body Art: Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, 1998 p205

Citation: Oliver, M. (2008), 'The emancipating possibilities of performing with cartoons', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, Intellect Publishing, Bristol, UK. 4:1, 59–67.

## **ME-BUT-NOT-ME: Teaching the Digital Double**

**'Sister, best friend, evil twin, me-but-not-me'** are just some of the descriptions of the digital double from the perspective of the performer. The exercises that I describe in this article primarily incorporate the use of the 'live' recorded performer in dialogue with their onstage double. Unlike performance with other 'cinematic' bodies, the simply filmed presence of the digital double can appear to have the same human qualities as the actual live performer, and is therefore a highly effective pedagogic process addressing continuing discussions on liveness. This particular application of multimedia performance is a powerful physical, philosophical and metaphorical tool that is relevant to discussions around the impact of technology and performer presence, as well as to developments in human cognition studies impacting upon the creation of new performance paradigms. I have investigated the digital double largely as a practice-led study, which has been informed by both practice as research over the last decade and by pedagogic processes gathered from my experience of teaching multimedia performance to students in their second and final years of undergraduate study.

Exercises using the digital double can be a powerful entry into the expansive possibilities of recorded media in performance. The immediacy and array of digital recording technologies available in many classrooms mean that the ability to learn through practical application has never been easier, but as these technologies become more commonplace within performance practice, it has also become clear that we must consider the longer-term impact on teaching, and I attempt to offer a future view of multimedia performance pedagogy that has wider implications for the subject.

## **The concept**

As a conceit, performing with the digital double affords the possibility to enact the age-old desire to create and control life. In 1989, video artist Bill Viola predicted a future in which technology will afford us such magical properties when he proposed in his essay 'The visionary landscape of perception: The future of technology is the future of what is real' that 'With each new step in the evolution of technology, we take a step closer to our ideal of higher and higher quality, which actually means creating things that look more and more like nature itself' (Viola 1995: 224). Even though technological developments are bringing us closer to self-replication through the three-dimensional hologram or the cyborg, the 'real' experience of these replica selves must remain (for now) in the mind of audiences who choose to suspend their disbelief. These transient performers evolve from our imaginary landscape of perception to the real one only at the point of a live performance, and it is in this dichotomous, fragile space that I have discovered that the digital double can be used to address a great range of highly pertinent and emotionally charged issues facing the young performance maker. As a teaching methodology, this technique addresses a wide variety of issues, including traditional versus multi-narrative scriptwriting techniques; the creation of linear and non-linear storylines; creating effective inter-medial dialogues; notions of mediatized and non-mediatized presence; visual communication processes; the screen-versus-the-live acting techniques; the importance of creating empathy and equity between the actual and screen-based performer; and last but not least magic.

Before entering the creative process it is useful to pose the question 'What are these mediatized performers?' In order to gain an understanding of how they function formally, it is often more helpful to explore what they are not. Neither memory nor apparition, they are not the alter ego, or doppelganger, or indeed the reflection that Tadeusz Kantor talks of when he suggests that the mirror reveals 'the ghost of ourselves living in an imaginary space' (1993: 313). Although a powerful poetic image, the concept of the digital double as reflection does not adequately serve to define our apparently living, independent counterpart. 'As' the performer, they are not the performer; and yet they are. As yet, there is no agreed term for them, and thus, for the purposes of teaching and to counter confusion in performance, I refer to the digital double as the 'digi-self'. Teaching this technique is always an enjoyable, life-affirming process from my perspective, although some student practitioners often find it harder than expected to acquire the necessary performance techniques to create an effective duet. The three R's in multimedia performance 'Rigour, Rehearsal and Repetition', are skills that do not come easily to a student group who are used to instant gratification from an increasingly easy-to-use set of screen-based interfaces. However, once they realize the relationship between the need for the kind of repetition that they assign to gaming techniques and the acquisition of precision in performance, their understanding of the need to develop expertise through practice becomes apparent. 'I had no idea how hard it would be to appear normal when faced with my line perfect other self' was how one student described her first attempts. Working with the digital double is a

challenging yet instantly rewarding aspect of teaching multimedia performance. It can be introduced simply through the workshop process or, when studied in more depth, can act as a catalyst for breaching the gap between disciplines, leading to the possibility of collaborative and mutual learning processes between the performance maker and computer scientist.

Workshop task: to reveal an interior emotion and to manifest it on the physical body of the performer. In preparation I ask the students to bring a light item of clothing to class.

Sample of results:

The dieting student who projected her mouth onto her belly and had a conversation with herself about how hungry and miserable she was.

The student who put a pair of white undergarments on his head and projected his face onto them, and then enacted a dialogue in which he berated himself for being such a 'tart', sleeping around too much and not respecting his body.

The student who projected her 'foetal' self onto her belly and revealed that her two mothers made her with the help of sperm donor number 357.

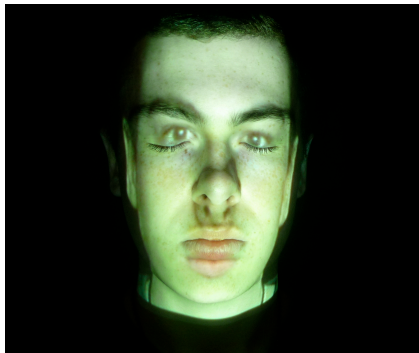


Figure 1: The student who projected his face onto his face and spoke of his fear of never satisfying his father.

### **The context**

I address this subject area largely through the practice of exploring the actual performer's relation to their digital 'other' through a series of workshops that are always contextualized within an accompanying lecture. In the lecture I explore the history of the use of the double in myth, superstition and magic, and address the various attempts to offer critical analyses of the role of the digital double in performance. These are often quite contradictory hypotheses. Steve Dixon offers an incorporative analysis of the wide spectrum of digital doubles as mutable entities that can be interpreted as possessing a range of qualities from the dark doppelganger to its ability to be 'indistinguishable from its human counterpart' (2007: 268), Matthew Causey places the digital double largely within the concept of the uncanny, informed (in part) by a psychoanalytical Lacanian position that proposes that the double represents a mutilation of the self through technology

(1999: 394). Jean Baudrillard explores the notion of the malefice of the double on-screen, which bewitches and beguiles its audience into believing it is more real than the original ([1987] 2008: 84). These different approaches to analysing the on-screen double can confuse the young practitioner in their efforts to create work that addresses the impact of technology upon, and in relation to, the body of the live performer. Additionally, the work of Philip Auslander, Susan Broadhurst and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck offers effective support in the teaching of this particular oeuvre, which has deep historical connections, yet also acts as a useful vehicle for discussions on the creation of new performance paradigms.

I find that the most useful theoretical starting point remains with Auslander's theories on the perceived conflict between the live and recorded presence, addressed in his first edition of *Liveness* and then readdressed in his second edition. Only ever part of the complex narrative Auslander weaves in his publication, the conceit of 'Liveness' that he introduces here is something that students easily grasp within the framework of the digital double in performance. Rather than choosing to entertain the binary oppositional views of Auslander versus Phelan, students are very accepting of the inclusion of the mediatized presence as a live element in performance. Having grown up in an age where the screen dominates their very existence, I would suggest that for students the issue is not one of whether or not a screen-based performer is 'live'; they simply are. Their focus is on how to create work that effectively interweaves both the screen-based and onstage performer in a seamless narrative. One of the pragmatic concerns that Auslander introduces, within a practice-based context, is the constant conflict of attention between the screen and the stage that one can experience when watching multimedia performance, where the seductive luminosity of the screen-based performer can draw the audience's eye away from the onstage actor (Auslander 2008: 41–42). Digital double performance work can be used to both illustrate this issue and counteract this problem through the use of techniques that I address later, which create an equitable and symbiotic relationship between the two types of performer. Causey offers a further counter-argument that challenges this possibility when (Causey 2008: 24) he asserts that when we are performing with our digital other we are in fact enacting our own death. Although I believe that Causey is referring primarily to the digital avatar, there is a level of truth in his conceit, for with each living breath, the onstage performer is moving forward in time away from their beautifully preserved memento mori on-screen. In the teaching process, however, I find it helpful not to dwell on this interpretation, but rather emphasize that the performance with our digital double allows both performer and audience to transcend our corporeally based understanding of the 'live' and enter into the realms of 'magic'. Therefore, rather than highlighting death, the engagement creates a heightened sense of one's own self in the present. Instead of mourning the loss of the old self, the challenge for both performers is to keep this relationship essential and seamless, or the equity will be lost and the pretence shattered.



It is Gilles Deleuze (via David Hume) who offers both philosophical and cognitive interpretation of the repeated self, which can assist in explaining not just the uncanny interpretation of the digital double, but the magical properties that the repeated self can achieve. In the opening of his exploration on Repetition for Itself, Deleuze writes that 'Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it' (1994: 90). This proposition resonates quite strongly when applied to the replica human subject with its myriad of signifiers. Unlike the photographic still, the uncanny moving image of the double in proximity to the corporeal presence of the original can cloak the technology that delivers its presence, through its ability to both confuse and entertain the mind of both performer and audience – also a common response to seeing a magic trick. When discussing with a group of young students the technical infrastructure of my work *Mother Tongue* in which I performed as all the female members of my family simultaneously with the use of a (then) newly released piece of hardware, the Real-time video player, one of the group said she thought that the computer (which was clearly the source of the recorded outputs) was only a prop. I asked her how she thought the effect was created, and she said, 'Magic'. Recently, after performing my comedy double act *Wednesday, Wednesday*, a student came to ask how I created the fluid timing between my two selves and I said, 'Magic', to which the student replied, 'That's a good answer, I prefer to think of it as that'. These emotionally driven responses are important, because for an audience, even when the technology is visible, a symbiotic relationship between the digital double and the actually present self can make it disappear, enabling the transcendent qualities of the double that Dixon cites as Artaudian in principle (2007: 241).

#### Example of work:

A student who chose to research death for his final-year performance project played both himself in the denial stage of his death and as the already-dead voice of reason on-screen, and gradually talked himself into accepting his fate.



Figure 2: The student who performed as her dead Polish grandmother on-screen, conversing in both Polish and English. Her 'grandmother' told her to be good, to eat well, and to remember the songs and the dances she taught her. She proceeded to sing a song as her grandmother and to dance as herself.

### **The process**

Although students are often initially nervous about their lack of technical ability, their camera and video editing skills are less important at the beginning of the learning process than the ability to create good dialogue and an understanding of strong performer presence. It is good scriptwriting, so often missing as a core element in interactive media design and production, that holds the key to a strong digital double performance. It is helpful to understand good story structure and apply elements such as an inciting incident, turning points and moments of conflict, and to see each performer as a protagonist who is on a journey. Such devices keep the focus on character and narrative development and away from the artificial *mise-en-scène*. It is important for the student to understand very early on in the process that the success of their project does not rely purely on technical capability, but on the quality of the content, whether this is verbally or visually driven. A strong narrative will draw the audience's attention away from the artifice, and both 'conflict' and 'comedy' dialogue between the performer and his or her *digi-self* are effective in creating an equitable 'live' inter-medial performance. This process of working therefore benefits from some prior experience of devising or scriptwriting on the part of the maker.

Comedy in particular can be used to create an essential relationship with the digital other, and can help achieve the sense of equity between the performers. Good timing, pace and rhythm (also acquired through a musical soundtrack) can be achieved with the use of comedy writing techniques that rely on the creation of fast-moving dialogue, repetition and delivery of punch lines. This form of writing uses a recognizable system and creates an expectancy in the audience that assists in overcoming the formal differences between the actual and the screen-based actor. In order to be successful, the performance requires the audience's suspension of disbelief, the essential desire to be fooled, in short, a desire to enter a liminal experience somewhere between the cinematic and the theatrical. After a group of students were taken to see a multimedia performance work intended for children at the National Media Museum, produced by Forkbeard Fantasy (themselves pioneers of stage-and-screen performance), their unanimous view was that the most effective parts of the performance (performed not by the company but by a member of the museum staff) were the simple 'magical' exchanges between the actual and the on-screen digital double. An arm disappears behind a screen to be 'replaced' by a digital one that grows to a ridiculous length through the simultaneous action on- and off-screen of pushing and pulling. This simple trick was nothing more complex than the technology of a hall of mirrors, but it was the absurd transformation of the body through the technology that appealed to the universal imagination of the audience, allowing us to forget the overt presence of the highly technologized *mise-en-scène* through a simple moment of slapstick humour.

Digital double dialogues need to conflate both stage and screen methodology, and cinematic production techniques are highly useful skills to add to the multimedia

performance toolkit, both as an aid to develop a story structure that can be used to drive a performance and, practically, to plan the multifaceted process. Unlike the purely studio-based devising process, the creation of a work that is developed at separate stages and in different locations can be logistically challenging for the young practitioner. A screenwriting approach that demands that the deviser visualize the performance before it is made can assist the practitioner to think in a predictive mode about the different performance elements. Although I have found that the most effective technique to ensure a sense of liveness in both performers is to shoot the dialogue in one take. The carefully crafted script can be used to construct a sense of the finished work, whilst also breaking down the preparation of the work into manageable composite parts to include the shooting script, storyboard and production schedule.

A particularly effective technique to overcome the obvious formal differences between the two performers is the use of the naturalistic conversational exchange. Students learn very quickly that it is the exquisite human traits of sophisticated non-verbal communication that are the most convincing elements in this artificial process. It is important to script interruptions, nods of agreement or concern and subtle facial gestures into the on-screen performance and, as well, to try to ensure that the digi-self will be able to make eye contact by putting markers in place to replicate the presence of the onstage performer. These are all important natural elements of communication to replicate in order that the finished duet has a quality of ease and fidelity. The performance of the digital double on-screen that I work with needs to be exquisitely precise with its performance of human vulnerability and 'imperfection' in order to create the appearance of spontaneity when coming into contact with an 'other' imperfect human in the future.<sup>99</sup>

Timing is absolutely central to the effectiveness of the process. Students are encouraged to consider how the recorded character keeps in time during the recording process. The student actor is extremely good at learning quite lengthy texts, but when performing with an invisible, silent partner it can be difficult to keep a naturalistic pace when the voice of the other actor is absent. I have seen students problem-solve this issue in a number of different ways. Some prefer to be filmed with a colleague who feeds the dialogue silently; others work with an auto-cue approach. The most impressive production mode I witnessed was a quartet who created a twenty-minute performance using the one continuous shot approach for each of the performers. They rehearsed the piece in real time, logging each entrance and exit, and then used a stopwatch to cue-in each of the performers. Another member of the group conducted the intricate responsive glances and delicate nuances of pretending to listen, while the last member of the group mouthed the lines of the 'other' performers. It was fascinating to watch the process unfurl and even more impressive in performance, as four DVD 'play' buttons were pressed simultaneously and the precision of the process was

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<sup>99</sup> A master of this technique is the comedy performer Evan O'Television (<http://www.youtube.com/user/EvanOTV>)

combined with their ensemble of onstage doubles to wondrous effect. I have also worked with several forms of line feeding, including walkie-talkies when I had the resource of a television studio with soundproof control room, but when working solo, the pre-recorded soundtrack delivered through an earpiece remains the most reliable technique. Once on-screen, the pre-recorded performance becomes a test for the actual performer to match; the performer has to be as present and spontaneous as the pre-recorded self who has the benefit of several takes with which to perfect their performance. Such performance behaviours are useful for the student to analyse, and students often comment that what they thought was a very genuine performance with a heightened sense of presence in the moment of interaction was undermined by the even more natural performance of the on-screen self.

The dynamic of the duet between the onstage and mediatized performer from the initial concept to the point of live performance is crucial, and the student needs to understand the necessity of 'testing' the interface between the performer and their digi-self. I have noticed a general tendency to accept the first outcome and to predict how it will work in performance rather than to rehearse it; curiously, I have only observed this reluctance to rehearse when students are working with technology, which seems completely counter-intuitive. While I was working under the direction of Rob Thirtle, physical comedy specialist on Wednesday, Wednesday, he observed that there were similarities with performing with the on-screen pre-recorded performer and rehearsing a 'trick'. He encouraged me to rehearse the script in sections with numerous repeats, until the dialogue, pace and movement were perfectly fluid. Just like watching the highly skilled physical performer who delivers a complex performance with ease, an audience may perceive the actor's interactions with the on-screen performer as a free-flowing exchange, but for the on-stage actor, this is far from natural or comfortable communication. The live actor must weave into the gaps left for them by their inflexible double. There is a certain agony in this kind of process, when one is constantly falling in and out of time; this is a clear challenge for the less engaged student. It is this technique that shifts this mode of multimedia performance into the realms of choreography, and students need to fully engage the mind and body in what becomes a highly charged somatic experience. The rewards are great when this is achieved; working in true harmony with the on-screen performer is like performing a beautiful dance, whose twists and turns are so intricate and precise that it has the appearance of natural comfortable dialogue between two present performers, who are both the same person.

There are clear limitations to this process. Once scripted and recorded, these performers are rigid, and, in addition, we cannot control the machines on which we present these characters. Although more immediate than tape, digital recording systems, such as card, or even DVD-based footage, are not as reliable as tape; it is hard to cue a DVD (pause mechanisms are time limited), and therefore how to begin such a performance is an extremely important consideration. It is difficult to avoid certain patterns of behaviour because of these constraints. I

describe this relationship as something akin to working with a performing animal – while it may have the innate ability to upstage you, its skills are limited. It is this performance ‘cheat’ that has prompted me to ask whether the term ‘interacting’ with the digital double is appropriate, and to consider whether instead we should be using Gieseckam’s preferred term ‘inter-medial’ exchange (Gieseckam 2007: 8), or Dixon’s suggestion that much of our engagement with the technical interface be called ‘symbolic’ or ‘re-active’ (2007: 361). However, such concerns over nomenclature belie the actual experience of it ‘feeling like’ a true interaction when performing with the digi-self. In order to create a convincing performance at all stages of the performance process, the actor needs to believe totally in their performance, whether taking place in the future or the present. The conviction that one brings to any performance needs to be maintained in this process, whether the performer is being recorded and ‘imagining’ performing with another performer in the future, or onstage performing with the ‘impossibly present’ double.

Digital technologies are endemic in society, and in some ways this makes the teaching of multimedia performance more difficult, as there is an assumption that there is a piece of ‘kit’ or an ‘app’ that can deliver any idea. I advise my students that the key to avoid producing technically proficient but content-less work is to only develop the idea if it cannot be done more effectively using live performers. By creating work with the digital double one fulfils this aim, and this pragmatic rule in working in multimedia performance combats a number of pitfalls that the inexperienced performance practitioner can fall into. Over the years I have observed repeated patterns of behaviour between the best and least capable students, and these are often contrary to what one would expect. At the most advanced end of the scale, students will undertake work that has strong narrative and which can be delivered within their technical capability. This often means the very able student will prefer to work within a very simplistic technological framework, requiring minimal skills but maximum emphasis on performance quality. At the other end of the spectrum the least capable student will often suggest overly complex ideas that are quite beyond the reach of the novice multimedia performance maker. There are clearly a number of factors that relate to the acquisition of any skill-based activity here, but within this particular context it can cause high anxiety in the performance student who realizes that the idea that has given them so much excitement cannot actually be achieved. Working with oneself as the primary subject matter of the work, however, allows even the least imaginative student a platform to say something of note.

In analysing the impact of performing with their digital double, students have often commented on this process as a way of seeing themselves in a different light: ‘I am able to look at myself for the first time in a way that I can’t do when I look in the mirror’, ‘I quite like “her”’, ‘I like who I become on-screen’, ‘I look more confident than I feel’ and ‘It’s weird but in a good way’ are common responses to working with the digi-self, and indicate that, as an exercise in self-awareness, it is a positive therapeutic technique that could be applied beyond the teaching of

multimedia performance. Those who perform with their digital double talk of experiencing a clear, but confusing, separation from their digital 'other'. Performers are consciously aware that it cannot be 'me' because 'she' (the other performer) is very much alive, as am I, and therefore, this is either a physical impossibility that I am witnessing or 'they' must be an 'other', because I am unique. Such reactions create the opportunity to discuss the increasing impact of the cognitive and computer sciences in entertainment. In particular, students see the potential of working with the concept of the digital double to develop work that crosses different technological platforms that look to both the future and the past for inspiration. The most innovative works that I have seen recently include a student who combined digital and live shadow play, animation and a combination of live and recorded soundtrack to explore his own fragile identity, and a duo who used a 'Pepper's Ghost' with a digital projection of themselves in place of the 'ghost' to present a narrative on the science of time-travel.

Students are becoming more impatient to utilize player recognition gaming technology in performance as a standard part of the toolkit. Moving towards the development of more spontaneous and more correctly termed 'interactive' engagements between the actual and on-screen performer brings with it a number of new issues that impact on both the construction and reception of digital double performances. If we remove the interaction 'in appearance', towards the development of a virtual performer who can respond to sensor-driven triggers such as weight, motion, sound or voice recognition, we can more accurately call this exchange interactive, but a move to such non-linear narrative forms is risky. The 'liveness' that we embed into the on-screen counterpart in 'one take' is compromised. The sense of presence for both actor and audience is challenged not just by the interruptions to the delivery of dialogue, but also by formal differences that become much more noticeable. If the performance emphasis is on the artificial dialogue between the 'live' present and the 'cinematic' absent body, it has the effect of pushing and pulling the audience's attention towards and away from the luminous screen as Auslander has observed, luring the magpie eye of the spectator (hard-wired to respond to light sources) and abjectifying the body of the actual performer in comparison, from the audience's point of view. This can have diabolical (Baudrillard [1987] 2008: 85) consequences for the onstage performer, who fades into insignificance, playing out Baudrillard's fears for the overwhelming dominance of the cinematic image. The on-screen performer whose performance is driven by the trigger of technology becomes more embedded in that technology, more cyborg and less connected to the actual performer in that moment, and therefore less human. Despite reservations that we will lose the effective acting-based performance of the simply filmed digital double when we move towards more interactive performance processes, if we are to achieve something more than a symbolic interactive process, I would propose that we have to look more closely at the technical and communication skills that we teach our multimedia performance practitioners.

### **The future of performance pedagogy**

The live and screen-based interfaces that were limited by analogue processes are now in a process of continuous development, and, for the first time in centuries, we are in a genuine renaissance in theatre where science and art need to work as partners in order to successfully develop new performance paradigms. At the James MacTaggart lecture at the 2011 Edinburgh Television Festival, keynote speaker Google's Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt was asked where he thought the next new wave of digital innovations was going to come from. In reply, he spoke of the unhelpful divisions in education between the sciences and the arts, and proposed that 'if the UK's creative industries want to thrive in our joint digital future you need people who understand all facets of it integrated from the very beginning' (<http://www.youtube.com/mgeitf>). Schmidt went on to propose that if we are to create new technological innovations, then it is essential that the 'Luvvy' (theatre practitioner) and the 'Boffin' (scientist) begin to work more closely together. Collaborations between professional artists and computer scientists have long been established, but we have yet to embrace such collaborations as a normal part of our traditional pedagogic framework.

At first investigation it seems we are trailing behind scientific research that began exploring the development of conversational interfaces over 40 years ago (Weizenbaum 1966). It was not until the late 1980s that the importance of good 'story' was seen as an essential element in the construction of interactive games and good acting qualities were considered as part of the construction of effective robots. Brenda Laurel was the first to realize the specific overlap between computer-based interaction design and theatre, when she published her still useful text *Computers as Theatre*, which has resonance for both the multimedia performance maker and computer scientist. Knowledge of good acting skills, strong narrative, good vocal quality, effective naturalistic dialogue and attention to the aesthetic of the *mise-en-scène* are all essential elements necessary in the construction of popular interactive games, and research into the design and construction of virtual 'agents' (or as we would call them, machine based 'performers') remains at the heart of AI and HCI design. At the Gesture and Narrative Language Group at MIT in the late 1990s, the Embodiment in Conversational Interfaces: REA project focused on artificial conversational processes and summarized that with the artificial agent 'embodiment needs to be based on an understanding of conversational function' (Cassell et al. 1999). During the same period, the 'Synthetic Interviews' project was being created at the Entertainment Technology Centre, Carnegie Mellon University by Scott Stevens and Michael Christel, along with computer researchers at CMU's School of Computer Science and Software Engineering. This conversational interface used 'talking head' actors who were then digitized and animated, with efforts made to keep the image close to the original human in order that the interview experience had the qualities of conversing with a real human being. This 'dyad', so named for its claim to being a significant interactive relationship, was a highly successful

interactive experience for the users, many of whom were convinced that they were having a genuine conversation. The research team claim that this was due to the onus of the interaction on the person asking the questions (audience) and that they endowed the 'CG persona' 'with both commentary possibilities, and the ability to initiate his/her own questioning' (Marinelli and Stevens 1998). I think it is of great significance that this was a collaborative research project driven by performance specialists who have expertise in performing 'as' humans, as well as knowledge and understanding of the importance of the suspension of disbelief on the part of the questioner.<sup>100</sup>

Currently, there are further interesting overlaps taking place between the artist and scientist. For example, performance researcher Lorna Moore from the University of Wolverhampton, UK, is using visual illusion processes in performance to displace the audience from their embodied sense of self. In her work, Moore is replacing the audience's body with that of the artist with the use of two interconnected live camera feeds to two VR headsets. Instead of their own body, the audience 'see' the body of the artist, tricking the mind into undergoing an out-of-body experience. Similar techniques are currently being used by neuroscientists such as Henrick Ehrsson at the Karolinka Institute, Stockholm, where he is manipulating self-perception to assist patients who suffer from displaced physical sensations such as phantom limb disorder (2012).

Innovative digital double performance applications are being developed by visual artists, exemplified by the work of the UK art collective Brass Art and US artist Daniel Rozin, as seen in the exhibition 'Dark Matters: Shadow, Technology, Art'.<sup>101</sup> In Brass Art's still life, the artists' bodies are turned into shadowy forms with the use of three-dimensional body scanning data and their digital doubles are transported into a dark shadowy landscape, reminiscent of nineteenth-century phantasmagoria. In Rozin's work Snow Mirror the audience is transformed into their spectral image recreated with pixels that constantly fall like snow upon a translucent screen. This creative manipulation of new technologies sees the artists working in collaboration with a wide range of engineers and computer programmers in order to achieve technically complex performative works that have magical properties.

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<sup>100</sup> Semaine: The sensitive agent project' is an interesting comparison to the Synthetic Interviews Project (<http://www.semaine-project.eu>)

<sup>101</sup> 'The Dark Matters: Shadow, Technology, Art' exhibition took place at the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester, UK, 24 September 2011–15 January 2012 (<http://darkmattersart.com/>).



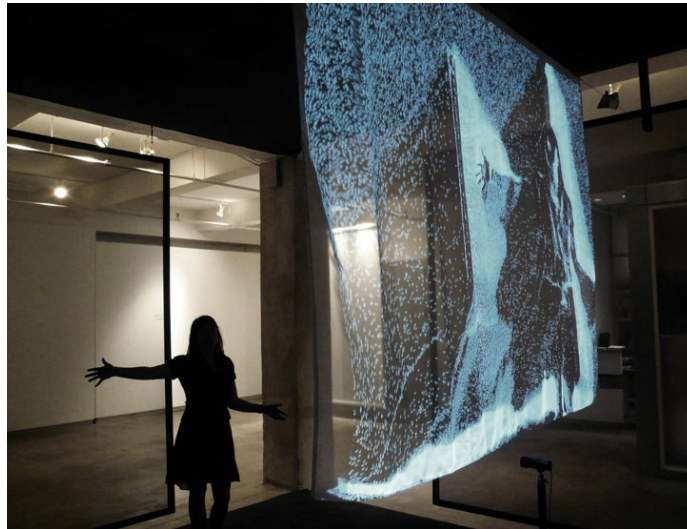


Figure 3: Daniel Rozin Snow Mirror 2006, Courtesy of Bitforms Gallery.

Although the collaborations between performance and computer science that I have described are well practised at research laboratories globally, we have not managed to step beyond the traditional dramatic disciplinary boundary in order to seed the development of new performance paradigms directly within our pedagogic frameworks. In 1993, Brenda Laurel spoke to the computer science community when she said, 'there is much we can learn from theatre' (1993: xiii). Two decades later, I propose that in performance there is much we can learn from computer science.

As experts in human communication processes, we as performance makers can both capitalize upon and influence future developments in these fields if we work more collaboratively. It will only be through a combination of empathy-based script development, an improved use of facial recognition tools, and advanced computer programming or the ability to adapt pre-existing games-based platforms that we as performers can expect to create responsive and spontaneous digital performers. I look forward to a time when we can incorporate such techniques into the performance curriculum and converse with our digi-selves using an expanded set of performance technology tools.

The broad range of expertise represented in the construction of this type of work gives a clear indication that, at a pedagogic level, performance students perhaps need to have the opportunity to work beyond the discipline. Some of the most innovative new performance modes coming out of our universities are being developed in computer science and engineering departments. However, when content is seen as less important than the technical form, the outcome will never reach its full potential. Actors, writers and directors are experts in human communication, and yet this expertise is not being utilized enough in the search for new innovative communication forms. New science-based universities and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects are a priority

for the UK government at this time, but such divisive approaches to curriculum design will not bring about new innovation if we simply continue to repeat old pedagogic patterns. Are we, as performance specialists, at fault for continuing to keep our disciplines discrete, or is it now time to create more and different opportunities for our students to expand their options, not just for creating new performance paradigms but for generating new forms of employment? Whatever the future holds for the study of this art form, it is important that as the practice employs the full range of digital technologies, we should give serious thought to expanding our teaching teams to include cognitive psychologists, computer scientists and last but not least magicians.

### **The do's and don'ts of teaching the digital double**

#### **• Do**

- Prepare the workshop well in advance, book the basic kit that you need, and ensure that the camera batteries are charged, the playback leads have the right plugs and adaptors are available, and use powered speakers (basic digital projectors have very poor sound quality).
- Educate your technical support workers to understand the needs of this format of performance; invite them to see the work; involve them in problem solving; and if possible bring them into the practical workshop to witness the process and assist if possible.
- Offer a range of inspirational sources in your contextual introduction.
- Set the task with the whole group, and then ensure that they have understood what is being asked of them.
- Encourage the student to be narrative rather than technology led.
- Ask the student to consider whether the technology-based interaction is necessary to convey their idea and once they have assessed that the digital double is necessary, consider what meanings will be conveyed: through the inter-medial exchange; through the choice of technology; through the narrative form.
- Ask the students to declare their skillsets; this can often reveal hidden technical capability.
- Encourage all students to learn how to use the technology.
- Ensure that the student is aware that the process needs different preparation stages and methods and that they may need to learn new forms of language in order to communicate their ideas to collaborators who have different skillsets.
- Ask the student to think about the signs and signifiers of the technology that they are using, e.g., 'If you use a mobile phone in your performance what does it signify to an audience?'
- Ask for a consideration of how the audience will view the work.
- When planning larger-scale projects ask the student to:
  - Plan well in advance and have a game plan for technology failure, mistakes and time for retakes
  - Remember to consider the sound quality, the direction and source of the sound for both recorded and live performer/s

- Suggest more editing and set-up time than one thinks is necessary
- Engage with the 3 R's of digital double performance making,
- 'Rigour, Rehearse, Repeat', and if the first idea does not work then
- 'Rethink, Retake and Retest'.

- **Don't**

- Assume that technical collaborators and those in charge of resources understand the language of theatre.
- Encourage the students to be technology led—unless this is a theme of the work.
- Be too prescriptive about the kind of outcome; younger students have a different relationship to technology.
- Allow any student to sit back and let someone else work out how to use the equipment.
- Allow students to assume that the interface will work because it appears logical; always test it.
- Leave the students unsupervised during the early devising period; often they will have questions about structure and form.
- Allow students to consider that their idea is original because they have never seen it done before.
- Encourage students to undertake the development of an idea unless they have assessed whether it is practically possible and considered the resource implications: technical, physical and financial.

- **Workshop exercise:** Use the digital double to bring something that you find difficult to express alone into your performance.

Response: An all-women student group used their on-screen doubles to present their naked bodies in juxtaposition with their clothed ones. Filmed in a secure and private setting, the on-screen reveal was received with quiet contemplation. Then everyone discovered something about 'presence' when one of the group appeared naked in person and the response was uproar.

Another student projected her image onto a tablecloth and argued with herself about why she always gives up. She tried to stamp her digi-self out, but in cartoon fashion, her indestructible persona would not be destroyed.

### **The summary**

At the point of the digital double performance, the body itself is in transit, in two places at once. It is simultaneously in a virtual plane of existence somewhere in the past but also in the present. It is this dualistic conundrum that appears to be the main source of pleasure for performers and audience alike. For contemporary performance makers we are now in a three-way relationship of the performer, audience and digital performer, and it is the consideration of this ménage à trois that is at the heart of this new form of devising theatre. I have only centred on one particular aspect of teaching the digital double, from the perspective of stage-

based presentation forms. This is a starting point and a process that offers entry into more complex technologically driven modes of performance. By beginning with this technique the performance maker can begin to realize that it is the strength of the idea that is at the heart of effective and impactful theatre, and not technical innovation or application alone. What the digital double technique has revealed is that the full conviction of a performer to their role, transcends time and space and allows them to make a connection with the audience, whether they are actually present or in another time and space completely. The success of the digital double lies in the combination of intent, the ability of the deviser to both imagine and predict the impact of their future performance, and the ability for 'both' performers to believe that what they are presenting is real at the moment of performance. It is this conviction that is at the heart of all good acting that overcomes the obvious differences between the two actors and creates the impossible onstage: moments when the technology disappears and we are just left with the magic.

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