

Abstracts

The Cabinet of Curiosities: Objects as Compositions

Bernadette Cronin (University of Exeter)

The Cabinet of Curiosities is a performance piece I have created with the two other members of GAITKRASH, a small company based in the South of Ireland. The piece is a dialogue between the sound artist and the performers who manipulate objects with their hands from behind the backless cabinet. The 10ft x 5ft cabinet, mounted on a platform, contains 12 compartments or 'mini-stages,' six on either side, that are complete with individual pairs of red velour curtains and dimmer switches, which are controlled by the performers. What emerge from the dialogue are compositional objects made up of aural and visual elements. The objects presented to the spectator are never the same from one moment to the next as some part of the composition is always shifting, whether it be the sound, the intensity of illumination, or the position of the object in relation to the performer's hands or something else in the cabinet. In this article I investigate the journey things make on being lifted from their quotidian context, transformed into a 'curious object' in performance and culminating in the mind of the spectator. In the context of theories and artistic sources that have informed our work, I question the perception of objects as stable, bounded entities.

The Fan of Noh Theatre: Object of Encounter

Diego Pellecchia (Royal Holloway)

Japanese Noh theatre is characterized by the minimalism of its scenography, since the pine tree and bamboo painted on the back and side walls are the only most prominent fixed set-design. The spare properties, usually reduced in size, have a synecdochal function more than a realistic one. The fan (*ōgi*) carried by the actors is the most important property: painted with motives that allude to the status of the character, the fan is a multipurpose object, focus of the dance and catalyst of the attention of the audience. Through the fan, the character expresses actions, thoughts, feelings with movements that have different degrees of realism; at the same time the fan is the medium through which the character conveys and materializes his inner feelings, or the magic stick that blurs the edges of the bodily presence of the actor and the extraordinary universe of the character. The actor manipulates the fan through patterns of set movements called *kata*, which are usually multipurpose: the same *kata* can achieve different meanings depending on the context in which it is used and on the gaze that the spectator casts on it. Not having a fixed vocabulary through which the audience can read and translate the actor's symbolic system, the reading and interpretation of the *kata* is left to the audience. The undefined and the blanks of the text are regarded as opportunities for the spectator to encounter the character on stage. Being a Noh student and practitioner, I have the opportunity to closely study the use of the fan with Master-Actor Udaka Michishige of the Kongoh School and the International Noh Institute. The paper draws from this experience to explore how the fan of Noh theatre can engage a communication between the character, the performer and the audience. Taking on Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theories, this paper aims at highlighting the 'structures of indeterminacy' which make possible the encounter of audience and actors.

The Interactive Object: Undermining the Artist and Empowering the Audience.

Mark Flisher (University of Northampton)

This paper explores the object's relationship with the audience and performer. By examining the relationships in orthodox and non-orthodox performance constructs, I explore how the object undermines and de-centres the artist, and as a result, reconfigures the audience into the role of *participant*. The interactive performances used to frame the role of the object are primarily *Opportunity Costs* (2008), an interactive performance that uses an object to initiate performer and audience interaction, and Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (2007). Within this framework I will focus my discussion on two elements: how the object initiates a shift between artist and facilitator, and audience and *participant*; and how 'choice,' initiated by the object, can develop a conceptual performance space for the audience. This paper offers an alternative approach to the traditional performance constructs of performer, audience and object relationships. It identifies the need for the *participant* to engage with the object and develop personal narratives that undermine the role of the performer. This process of de-centralisation lifts the audience member out of passivity and invisibility, whilst simultaneously reconfiguring the artist into the role of facilitator; the creator of concept and not the creator of content.

Seeing through the Wall: Objectification between Resistance and Acceptance

Nesreen Hussein (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Through a recent example from performance art practice, the paper raises questions about the limits of objectification and the connection between representation and seeing when the live body is placed at the centre of a work of art. Yael Davids is a Jerusalem-born visual artist, whose performance installations create moments of engagement between the human body and physical objects, negotiating a shifting subject-object boundary. The paper explores Davids' work as an example of a representational economy that disrupts the conventional viewing experience and the stability of projection and identification. Her work constructs a mode of representation that resists the reduction of the apparently available body into a site of pleasure and fetishization, thus the utilization of objectification *empowers* the subject. Exploring such paradoxical dynamic is the main concern of this analysis. Drawing on my corporeal experience as a participant in one of Davids' pieces, I will try to argue through Lacan's theorization of 'the gaze,' Hegel's notion of 'negativity,' and Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh,' that the dynamic of representation in Davids' work occurs within a 'reversible' mode of objectification that affirms rather than denies subjective experience.

Disturbing Objects: Making, Eating and Watching Food in Popular Culture and Performance Practice

Jenny Lawson (University of Leeds)

Journeying through cookbooks, the dinner table, a cake stand and a cake; as objects of fantasy, secrets and gifts, which can unsettle, oppress and *disturb*, this paper examines

how performance practice can intervene and *disturb* the objects of the everyday. The food we eat and the cooking and dining objects that we encounter are materials through which we construct identities, relationships and learn socially and culturally accepted norms of behaviour. Through the increasing saturation of the media by food, in television programmes, the rise in celebrity cooks, new concerns with 'eating well', and the growing fashion of gastronomy as recreational activity, food is now firmly embedded within popular culture. As a result, food and related objects are framed as if they are able to produce desirable lifestyles and consequently become convention. As a female practitioner-researcher with a love of food, my practice attempts to articulate the impact that popular cultural performances of food may have upon women and their relationship to food and the domestic. With particular reference to British female food figures such as Mrs Beeton and Nigella Lawson and two of my solo performance works *I Wish I had a Kitchen* (2007) and *Dinner with Jenny* (2008), this paper offers a performative reflection on food, cooking objects and my performance practice.

Gentlemen Still Prefer Blondes: The Persistent Presence of Marilyn Monroe Impersonators

Amanda Sue Konkle (University of Kentucky)

Hundreds of women in America earn their livings as Marilyn Monroe impersonators, performing not only at men's clubs or stage shows, but also (and in some cases, more often) at family and corporate functions. This paper explores what the image of Marilyn Monroe represents for these audiences through a discussion of Diana Taylor's categories of 'archive' and 'repertoire.' Making use of interviews with current Marilyn Monroe impersonators, I explore a number of reasons why audiences desire the image of Monroe brought out of the archive through the embodied performance of an impersonator. The paper proposes that impersonators of Marilyn Monroe serve as 'objects of engagement' by making present *the* representative body of non-threatening female sexuality, a body that is certain to go home alone at the end of the evening.