

This is a profoundly optimistic and energizing book – a collection or collective of fascinatingly diverse, attentive chapters working together to examine the many “expressions of positively differentiated life” and singing out for the vital part aesthetic practices play in producing relations between bodies and spaces, opening out newly affirmative ways of thinking, conversing, making, writing and living.

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Despite the importance of space, distance and the emergence of relations in Foucault’s original theory of biopolitics and in Agamben’s later theory of the entire Western tradition as marked by biopolitical thresholds, there has been far too little sustained work on the poetic dimensions of biopolitics, with even less attention paid to the original sense of poiesis as a bringing into being of an object distinct from praxis. In this wonderfully edited collection of essays from a wide range of scholars, the concept of biopolitics is enriched and intensified by exploring the ways in which various arts reconfigure life, the polity and its intimate but complex relations. This book will be valuable for scholars in architecture, cultural theory, contemporary aesthetics, and anyone with an interest in one of the most difficult but intriguing concepts of twenty-first-century thought.

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**POETIC
BIOPOLITICS**
Practices of Relation
in Architecture
and the
Arts

Edited by
**PEG RAWES,
STEPHEN LOO and
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colleagues in Kabul are at a loss, just as I am, as to how things will go in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, many people are trying to continue their work as well as they can and to influence social and political processes within the scope of their possibilities. In spring 2013, the first international women's film festival took place in Herat, organised and joined by the protagonists of the small and active film scene in Afghanistan.

NOTES

1. Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'The Totalizing Quest of Meaning', in *When the Moon Waxes Red* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 29.
2. Madeleine Bernstorff elaborates on the relation of reality and fiction in documentary films in 'Contested Documentary Values', in Sandra Schäfer (ed.), *Stagings: Kabul, Film and Production of Representation* (Berlin: b_books, 2009), pp. 39–41.
3. The film series *Etnografies Experimentals* was curated by Virginia Villaplana and Montse Romani and was shown in the context of the film festival *Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones de Barcelona*.
4. Nancy N. Chen, 'Speaking Nearby: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 8 (1) (1992): 82–91, p. 87.
5. Minh-ha, 'The Totalizing Quest of Meaning', p. 41.
6. We curated the festival in collaboration with the artists' group CACA–Kabul, the state-run film institute Afghan Film and the Berlin-based artist Zara Zandieh. The festival in Kabul was preceded by the film programme SPLICE IN in Kassel, Berlin and Hamburg (www.mazefilm.de).

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13

Mapping turbulent gestures
and liquid ground

DORITA HANNAH AND CAROL BROWN

Turbulent

... between the black widow and her white bachelors

Who is she, shrouded in the darkness of a stage, staring from one void into another?

The problem is to make space speak, to feed and furnish it; like mines laid in a wall of rock which all of a sudden turns into geysers and bouquets of stone.¹

In Shirin Neshat's 1998 video work *Turbulent*, two scenes of an auditorium viewed from a stage are projected on opposite walls of a small gallery. Their spatial relationship deliberately forecloses on the spectator's simultaneous apprehension of both images. Standing between, she must choose which scene to face.

In one projection, applause erupts in the auditorium filled with men who wear crisp white shirts like the male singer who enters, bows and turns to face the gallery viewer rather than his audience. Opposite, a darkly veiled woman stands with her back to us, confronting the empty seats. While he passionately sings a thirteenth-century mystic love song, she remains a silent, immobile and inscrutable form.

When the man's song is complete and he turns away from us to bow to his applauding male spectators, the camera on the other screen tracks towards the woman and begins to circle around her as she wails and gasps a wordless and discordant chant; her expressive and contorted features emerging from the shadows.²

The female performer's shuddering body hurls vocal variations – composed of yelps, breaths and screams – into the vacuous space before her, filling it with utterances both material and supernatural, as if howling from another world. Her turbulent performance echoes turbulent times as well as the inability to give words to such times. Yet this black widow, set in opposition to her white bachelors, resists silence and immobility and enacts her own discordant song of love, which is also an act of lamentation. Her ululations – the rhythmic undulations of the tongue that penetrate space – are ecstatic, sorrowful and scornful: a cadenced wail that is both 'fresh wound' and 'healing catharsis'.³

Turbulent was the first in a series of films in which Neshat explored gender with particular reference to the social structure of Islamic Iran, here focusing on the absence of women in the public sphere, especially in relation to music. It was conceived around the notion of 'opposites': white-clad men and a black-shrouded woman; a full house of spectators and an empty auditorium; the stationary, framed view and a kino-eye that swirls around the female performer. Yet it is the realm 'between' such opposites that we viewers occupy, both philosophically and physically. Rather than a boundary line demarcating one scene from another, we inhabit the threshold: a thick viscous zone of encounter with the other, and a truly productive space from which to work. As Neshat's *Turbulent* reveals, the stage – performance's proper place – is contested, gendered and highly regulated. It is also the platform from which to give embodied utterances to the realm of a spectral other.

If, as Irigaray claims, feminine space is concurrently internal and external, experienced simultaneously inside and outside and on multiple levels, how might *performing a threshold* evoke a material transformation of space, marking a passage within and between different spaces, between the cave-like auditorium as it looks to the stage and the illuminated stage as it gazes at the void of a darkened auditorium? Since 2002, we have been developing collaborative processes for the transmutation of the stage through consideration of location, situation and corporeal presence as performance event. Formulated and developed as *dance-architectures*, these spaces of encounter aim to shift

perception through entwinements of memory, mythology and place, disrupting the familiar ground of both theatrical and civic spaces. Through dynamic exchanges between bodies and places, our work endeavours 'to make space speak'.⁴

In our writing, as scenographer and choreographer, we recollect the affective traces of designed paths and choreographed passages that navigated sets of open relations between spaces and bodies of encounter within our collaborative events developed over the past decade: including performative architectural installation *Tower of Touch* (Prague, 2003); site-specific promenade performance *Her Topia* (Athens, 2005); more conventionally staged *Aarero Stone* (Wellington, 2006);⁵ sound-walk performance *Tongues of Stone* (Perth, 2011);⁶ performative exhibition installation *Mnemosyne* (Prague, 2011); and, recently, another sound-walk performance *1,000 Lovers* (Auckland, 2013).⁷

The spatio-corporeal thresholds we explore in these performances are multiple: ranging from the reconceived 'black box' stage of Soundings Theatre in Wellington's Te Papa Museum; to the central business district of Western Australia's boom-town; to the remodelled waterfront of Auckland City's Waitemata harbour with its industrial and civic installations.⁸ Our reference to inscription, seen in the suffix '-graphy' of both our disciplines, has its etymological roots in 'writing' or 'field of study', linked to art or science and a skill in inscribing or creating images. Yet such inscriptions, as they become disciplined to the representational, tend to write out the possibility of arrhythmic patterns and unpredictable effects. In focusing on the performance of veils, wigs and air, we draw attention to the aleatory elements of the staged event, decentring conventions of performance subjectivity and exposing the sexuate genealogy of their materialisation.

Dance-architecture events

... between choreography and scenography

In our site-responsive works, a remapping of place through the performing body is met by an emphasis upon thresholds that allow the audience to imagine the spatial coordinates of stage and city differently to those of its habitual occupation, particularly through reference to

mutable myths, genealogical threads and corporeal memories. Reframing the body in the city in unexpected ways, the resulting *dance-architectures* acknowledge the fractured narratives of place and the risky ground of representation. As a critical spatial practice, this work is premised upon the absence of a 'real enrootedness' stemming from the schism between nature and culture, active and passive, masculine and feminine subjectivity, the corporeal and spiritual, the non-European and the European, the pre-colonial and the post-colonial.⁹

While our overarching project is to rediscover space through dance and, reciprocally, to re-engage with movement through architecture, we are also searching for a means of giving voice to the unspeakable. In responding to historical and political events through theatrical encounter we take each performance iteration as a site of recovery, reconfiguring the project according to the specifics of location and our shifting theoretical concerns.

As related events, *Aarero Stone*, *Tongues of Stone* and *1,000 Lovers* explored the relationship between the fleeting events of performance and architecture's monumental stasis. Through veiled lamentation and ecstatic release as *jouissance*, the psychic and physical energies of performance evoked forgotten sources of women, matter and sexed spaces, challenging the 'death cave' of representational systems caught up in the apparatus of theatrical reproduction.¹⁰

Aarero Stone

... between mourning and *jouissance* ...

I stand on a black lacquer slab that extends from stage into auditorium. Behind me, the ashen walls of the theatre and its mechanics are revealed due to the removal of the ubiquitous black curtains, creating space for a steely grey wall and a dark pool of water with a black mirror suspended above a sarcophagus filled with pale stones. A dash line of red marks the horizon on the stage house walls, as well as the grey wall with its gaping hole, and small reflective crosses mark the floor. The materiality of the theatre is 'unveiled'. I am balancing on an edge.

Aarero Stone was initiated in response to turbulent times and catastrophic events on the world stage in the opening decade of this new century: in which bodies and buildings were transformed into bombs;

explosive objects that play into the global imaginary through spectacle, linking contemporary conditions with ancient mythological sites. The figures haunting 2002, the year when our partnership began, were the white bachelors – be-shirted politicians considering pre-emptive strikes and their techno-soldiers preparing to invade Baghdad – and the black widows – veiled mothers standing in the rubble, grieving the loss of progeny and patrimony or self-sacrificing in the name of war, both holy and profane.

The catalysing event occurred in Moscow on 23 October when the Dubrovka Theater was seized by about 40 armed Chechen rebels, including 'black widows', who infiltrated during the musical performance of *Nord-Ost*, interrupting and transforming the show into a prolonged international media spectacle of terror that ended after three days with Russia's Spetsnaz soldiers storming the building, having filled it with a narcotic gas that killed over 170 people.

We were particularly affected by the spectral figures of the black widows: female suicide bombers, veiled in black and strapped with bomb-belts, who were utilised as potent weapons by the Chechen rebels. Representing the ultimate spatial limit of self-annihilation, these women are present in the media images of the seemingly benign auditorium released immediately after the tragedy. They are the dark forms slumped in the seats, whose haunting presence deliberately provides a cautionary tale from the Russian authorities that prevented their detonation (while sacrificing over 120 audience members, absent in the image). The banality and passivity of the architecture is haunted by the spectre of explosive violence.¹¹ Like ancient Niobe, Queen of Thebes, the widows represent materiality, motherhood and mourning. And, like Niobe, whose 14 children were savagely slaughtered by the gods, they have turned to stone (dead hearts and deader bodies).

Commissioned for Wellington's 2006 International Arts Festival, *Aarero Stone* was billed as 'a solo in a performance landscape' and sited within Soundings Theatre at Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand. Referring to the project as 'a lament for the living inscribed with love' we asked the question, 'How do we care for the strangely familiar and mourn the distant dead?'¹² *Aarero* (or *arero*) translates as

'tongue' in Māori and, as hard talk, the stone tongue is the speaking landscape. Talking in forgotten languages with their remote rites, *Aarero Stone* performed an archaeology of buried voices. The solo began with Carol motioning in the darkness of a tomb-like aperture in the wall, her body literally sited on the horizon line and at the perspectival vanishing point (are we looking across at her or down upon her?), and concluded with her moving ecstatically in the water: an image suspended, doubled and dissolving in the overhanging black mirror.

Rather than approach the stage as a space without gravity or materiality, we took it as the primary landscape for the performance: a site preceding the production as an active zone. The design treated the stage-house as a site-specific space by exposing the conventionally hidden walls and technology as well as referencing the timber panelling of the auditorium. Disclosed as a machine for transformation, the stage is folded in with the new design interventions: deconstructed monumental forms inspired by memorial architecture, including Wellington's polished-granite Tomb for the Unknown Warrior. Stage-house and architectonic setting merged into a single performance landscape, stitched together by the red dash of a horizon line.

Black window/black widow

... between communities and their fears ...

Shrouded in darkness, the black of the black box theatre and conventional stage house aligns with the black of the mourner. Black, as the darkest of colours, connotes mourning and bereavement in Western cultures. Within Aotearoa New Zealand, black is also closely associated with a sense of national identity through the wearing of black by our national athletes, especially the All Blacks rugby team. Much has been written on the colour's pre-eminence in twentieth-century New Zealand's visual arts, poetry, cinema and architecture – linked to a dark obsession in the country's cultural psyche.

*Out the black window
Into reflections, a rosary*¹³

'Going to black' is a term in theatre production that signals when the stage lights are turned out. The border between the darkened

auditorium and the stage, a fourth wall, has historically marked a limit that, though transgressed within many contemporary performance practices, persists as a spatial apparatus dividing the prescribed place and roles of performer and audience – in the light and in the dark – through the illusion of spectacle and the sociality of a community of spectators. This negotiable threshold operates between the gathered assembly and the phantasm of absent presences, where loss is rehearsed and we can be in communion with the dead.¹⁴ Performance is organised around the ever-occurring acts of disappearance – around what is missing, what cannot be shown or witnessed; it ghosts appearances and haunts the edges of the visible. As Peggy Phelan states, 'I want less to describe and preserve performances than to enact and mimic the losses that beat away within them.'¹⁵

The black curtain shrouding the proscenium opening, which forms both representational window and mirror, recalls Duchamp's 1953 readymade, *Fresh Widow*: a miniature set of French doors with their glass panes covered in black leather. Authored by Duchamp's transsexual alter ego, Rose Sélavy, this architectural object is transformed into an artefact of grief: not only referring to a lost European tradition of shrouding windows and mirrors during periods of bereavement but an embodiment of the veiled bride's counterpart: the widow in mourning. Duchamp's contrapuntal play of words and objects renders the French window a fresh widow, which, like his pseudonym, riffs on 'Eros, c'est la vie', making present the erotic charge of difference. The black widow is therefore located within the theatre's shrouded frame of representation as a figure in mourning; rendering the stage a space of loss. The darkened stage negotiates between the gathered community and its deepest held fears, acknowledging Phelan's contention that theatre is 'a kind of mausoleum, a space designed to summon the phantasmatical charge of the immaterial'.¹⁶

Theatre's black box, whether as studio or proscenium stage, is a constructed void that represents a desire to create an 'absolute space', theorised by Henri Lefebvre as embodying 'an antagonism between full and empty'.¹⁷ Associated with the natural world and the ancient sanctuary, it is a realm that 'consecrates' and 'concentrates', presenting

an empty space to be filled up and activated. However, as the Black Widow reveals, such a realm can never be without materiality.

In standing on this 'plinth' I mark a moment in the choreography of pause when speaking substitutes moving. I pay attention to my upright stance and alignment with the walls of the auditorium and extrusion from the stage. In the early stages of pregnancy, I am also aware of my changing outline, a definitive curve of my belly beneath the folds of Philippe Starck's 'fatal dress'; a plum-dark sheath that, along with a blood-red chiffon veil, allows me to shape-shift throughout the performance.

*The/A woman is never closed/shut (up) in one volume.*¹⁸

By creating a scenography that included both existing architecture and architectonic interventions, *Aarero Stone* aimed to weaken the literal and psychological frames of the theatre in order to confound definitions of inclusion and exclusion. Dis-easing the body (that of performer and spectator) in the theatre exposes the stage and auditorium's corporeal and spatial limits. This dis-easy site, with its thick fleshy walls, is neither inside nor outside. Like Bracha Ettinger's shared *Matrixial Borderspace*, it represents a site before language: a partial object for partial subjects, its limits appearing and disappearing, always becoming.¹⁹

Veiling

... between a doing and a thing done ...

Our critical practice is negotiated through the in(ter)vention of performance objects as costumes and 'props' that, responding to architecture, open thresholds within the staged event. Veils perform varying functions within our work, as mutable objects, as markers of difference and as forms of concealment and curtaining: encapsulated in the veiled bride, widow and woman of mystery as well as in the dark gauze that conceals the stage. Signifying the colonial bride in *Tongues of Stone* and *1,000 Lovers*, a mourner hiding the tears of Niobe in *Her Topia*, and the caul-like gauze curtaining the cave of Sibyl in *Aarero Stone*, veils recur in our works as motifs through which feminine sexual difference is explored as an indeterminate process, always in flux.

Often widow and bride confront each other in a duet. In Perth, a gagged bride with red seeping up her pale skirt circles a blindfolded bride whose hems are blackened; in Auckland, the dark silhouette of a

widow is confronted across the street by a reluctant bride in sunglasses and gym shoes, both their veils fastened over red wigs that glint in the harbour sunlight. On Wellington's *Soundings* stage, a simple square of gauzy fabric allows the soloist to become a shape-shifter, taking on multiple characters that refer to images from myth and media.

I hold the blood-red chiffon scarf out from my body and towards the audience as a screen or curtain. I divide it into two triangles and place it over my hair, tying it under my chin as a headscarf. I undo. Placed over my head and tied tightly at the back of my neck, I grip my index finger with both teeth. I undo. Rolled up and wrapped around my eyes I am blindfolded. I undo. Extruded from between my legs I squat over pooling red folds. I undo.

'Veil' is a word, like 'design' and 'dance', which operates as verb and noun: that, in the words of Elin Diamond, represents 'a risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing ... and a thing done'.²⁰ As cover, mask, cloak and shroud, it covers, masks, cloaks and shrouds: not only faces, heads and bodies but also objects and space. A concealing



Carol Brown in *Aarero Stone*, Wellington, 2006 (photographer: Robert Catto).
STRUT dancers in *Tongues of Stone*, Perth, 2011 (photographer: Christophe Canato).

membrane, it protects and enhances, while obscuring, separating and dissimulating: creating an air of secrecy and other-worldliness. An inherently theatrical garment and socio-sexual signifier, the veil has become a contested garment in contemporary Western culture, intrinsically associated with women who wear it to distinguish themselves as bride, widow or religious observer. A sign of modesty (and virginity), it simultaneously suggests a more sexual counterpart, creating a visual and physical distance. As a conspicuous and performative body-object, the veil therefore enacts multiple cultural, historical, mythological and personal associations.

For Irigaray, veils function as a linkage between language and the material. She describes the placenta, which enables the inter-corporeal relation between mother and foetus, as 'the first veil'.²¹ Her use of the term 'veil' is, of course, a reappropriation of that which has for centuries been a signifier of the control of women's sexual desire in Jewish, Christian and Islamic cultures. Veils figured prominently in both our girlhoods through Catholic rituals of communion and mourning as well as tutoring by nuns whose covered hair constituted a sense of their otherness. Veiling has a strong association with wearing a wig, a further costume-design element in our work, which serves to heighten the sexuate subjectivity of the performer.

Tongues of Stone

... between a hard and soft city ...

*These seemingly sleepy, old-fashioned things ...
the debris of shipwrecked histories still today raise up the ruins of an
unknown, strange city. They burst forth within the modernist, massive,
homogeneous city like slips of the tongue from an unknown, perhaps
unconscious language. They surprise.*²²

Through an invitation to work with STRUT Dance in Western Australia, we took the concept of the stone tongue developed in solo performance for *Aarero Stone* and translated it for the specific conditions – physical and cultural – of the city of Perth. The research began from the premise that underlying the contemporary city of Perth – built on sand, stone and histories shaped by the surrounding mining

industry – run rivers of song, blood and memories. The resulting multi-site performance *Tongues of Stone* mined these stories, expressed and embodied through moments of theatrical transformation.

*Was there a river Here
In tongues of this land*²³

Perth, formerly composed of wetlands that ran from the river westward to the sea, once provided fluid gathering grounds for the Noongar people. However, with colonisation and ensuing immigration, the land was reclaimed and eventually sedimented into the sand, stone and concrete of a modern metropolis, covering over diverse and numerous histories. In paying attention to the resonances of these histories, *Tongues of Stone* reconceived the city as a series of choreographed flows and counter-flows, energised by currents, undercurrents and countercurrents.

Staged within Perth's urban environment, *Tongues of Stone* was created for a diverse mobile audience who either happened upon performance moments, embedded in the folds of the city, or followed an itinerary guided by a soundscape and the fleeting appearance of performers.²⁴ Sound and choreography led the public from the underground station (once Lake Kingsford) to the Convention Centre overlooking the Swan River, connecting ancient wetlands to the major waterway of this settler city.

Maps, movement memories (the dancers' own as well as those of the urban public), oral histories, ancient and contemporary texts, were translated into site-specific performance propositions. A further Ovidian myth of revenge and transformation – *Tereus, Procne and Philomela* – provided the underlying narrative to shape the dramaturgy. The bride Procne searches for her sister, Philomela, who was raped and made dumb by her husband Tereus. Bride and widow cohere in their blinded and gagged figures, appearing and disappearing on platforms, in laneways and at windows. A severed tongue, Philomela's trailing red gown becomes a way-finding clue as it threads towards the river. The lamentation of earlier productions turns to rage as cloaked furies, veiled by their hair, storm the streets like avenging crows. Poetic and

disciplinary messages are revealed in the architecture (through regulatory signage and artwork texts) and written onto white headscarves that bleed when washed by a chorus of river-runners who move through the streets, carrying buckets of water that slop a trail for the public to follow. A woman staggers in water-filled rubber boots beneath the weight of heavy bladders that swing like externalised body organs from her neck and between her legs. Transformational moments unfold from the cracks and crevices of forgotten sites, temporarily theatricalising the city into a four-dimensional matrix of multiple events.

Five 'furies' are seen hunkering, squatting, watching on the edges of the performance journey, hovering on pedestrian walkways, balconies and street corners as well as peering into drains and at convex traffic mirrors on laneways. With wigs of red hair concealing their faces they are both hostile and defensive. The most elusive and ambiguous of performers in the production, these women drew extensive comment from passers-by and audience: 'Who are you?' 'Why are you here?' Performing a threshold state between tense, staccato and erratic movements and bound stillnesses inside and outside civic and corporate buildings, these women formed a post-punk chorus of ecstatic movers. Behind their veils of hair they could watch without being fully seen, under cover of a dark material history.

Wigs allow us to play with the notion of transformation and with artificiality and fakeness. We are not asked to believe that the wig is 'real hair', but we engage with it as if it were real all the same. As Irigaray writes, 'one must assume the feminine role deliberately'.²⁵ Mimesis defines Irigaray's strategy of reappropriation as opposed to 'just playing the game'.²⁶ Like repetition within dance, mimesis creates an excess of energy that allows a new way of being or a new state to emerge. However, this transformation is caught between the promise and failure of the movement. The exhaustion of a tired discourse (woman-in-veil or the fake femininity of a wig) is acted out in our work for its metamorphic potential. The dynamic actions of spinning, of balancing, of gesturing, of running, of reaching, leaping and hunkering down are movements that unsettle the ability of a veil or a wig to stay on. In mixing metaphors of feminine difference, we play with the synthetic red

wig masking the faces of the 'furies' (*Tongues of Stone*), and transform the veil into a semaphore that signals danger (*1,000 Lovers*).

As in all of our works, what is on the outside surface, as appearance, is juxtaposed with what is beneath as potential disruption. A sense of unease is indicated by writing that bleeds off walls and onto the ground, by the sloshing of water escaping from steel buckets, by the rhythmic swing of a chorus of river-runners and by the shedding of clothes that hang like dead skins from ghost gum trees. In our work, bodies extrude, leak, pant and make strange, creating spasms in the architecture. Beyond the gridded laneways and corporate interiors explored in Perth's *Tongues of Stone*, our next collaboration, *1,000 Lovers*, took place in a much more porous site, where the limits of the body and the contingent edge of the land meet and are negotiated by the shifting volume of the sea.

Inside Out

... from dead air to *plein air*...

If theatrical space is a concentrated realm, focusing inwards from an outside, site-responsive dance is concerned with a more open relational space. In her countering of Heidegger's metaphysical privileging of the ground of a dwelling as a dense solid plane, Irigaray proposes the spreading, nourishing, infinite substance of air as that which is neglected: 'Is there a dwelling more vast, more spacious, or even more generally peaceful than that of air?'²⁷

Steven Connor explains that what Irigaray intends by her reproof is not so much the forgetting of air as the forgetting of 'the air', which is to say, the 'open air', or the French *plein air*; not so much that which lies between things as that dimension of exteriority that lies beyond or outside them.²⁸

In *Aarero Stone*, the dead air of the hermetically sealed theatre is moved through the use of industrial fans that blow the black gauze curtain as the audience enter and Carol's red veil as she stands stage left. Taking our project away from the disciplinary confines of the conventional stage and its playhouse, we enter an aleatory zone open to fluctuations of temperature, light, shadows and draughts.

Tongues of Stone and its recreation as *1,000 Lovers* utilised the motility of air as a much stronger element in the choreography and design. This time, the movement is unpredictable through flickering wigs and billowing capes: sudden gusts lift the monstrous red silk skirt in danger of catching on steel fire escapes or being swept under a car wheel. While this crimson garment renders the body spectacular, it also places the performer at risk. Running through the city of Perth, her undulating train becomes a red seam plotting the performance path and leaving in its wake bloody messages that drip from the architecture. Referencing Ted Hughes's retelling of Ovid, the dress – a grotesque tongue brutally severed from the mouth that writhes like a serpent in the dust – is a form of defiant speech, figuring the monstrous feminine within the city, as well as the skin of the mythical snake-like Wagyl said to have shaped the land and wetlands through its movement.

In adapting *Tongues of Stone* to Auckland's harbour for *1,000 Lovers*, we looked to the pan-Pacific story of Hine and Tuna, and the metamorphic transformation of the long-finned indigenous eel that inhabited nearby Tuna Mau, a lost pre-European stream, once well known for its plentiful supply of eels, which were both a major food source and *taonga* (treasure) for Māori. The myth tells of how Hine, the wife of Maui (demigod hero in Polynesian myth), seduces the eel-man, Tuna. After learning of her seduction, the avenging demigod mutilates and dismembers Tuna's body, which forms different species of fish, eel and grass as well as the blood-red stain of the rimu flower. In our story, an eel man and five elvers (young eel women), unable to find their streams, emerge from the sea and intersect with parallel narratives of a colonial bride and widow before leaving the harbour to take on new roles in the city.

Myths are transferred and transposed from city to city: Philomela's serpentine skin is now Hine's long red dress that funnels wind, becoming airborne on the more gusty waterfront; the black capes of Perth's furies are transmuted into the shiny hoodies of elvers that billow from their bodies; they hold fluttering yellow scarves above their heads, testing the movement of air on an industrial gantry. In Perth and

Auckland, the elemental is shared between performers and audience in these site-embedded events, where the fluctuations of air and light vary, as does the gathering crowd of each performance: both planned spectators listening through headphones and accidental audience are made aware of nature's unpredictable variations alongside the timed and untimed urban rhythms they inhabit.

1,000 Lovers

... between the sea and the city ...

Aarero Stone was a negotiation between the virtuality of sublime terror and the materiality of volatile flesh, explored through an interrogation of the black widow as a condition of absolute disruption within theatrical space. *Tongues of Stone* extended this research by considering the traumatised ground of colonialism through the mutilated tongue of Philomela/Wagyl, her 'rescue' by her sister Procne/Bride, supported by a pack of furies and the ministrations of a chorus of river-runners, as well as the leaky woman attempting to control the unruly swing of her black bladders that burst in her hands. Moving from the dead air of the stage-house to the *plein air* of the city, *Tongues of Stone* reimaged the urban through a spatial dramaturgy composed of multiple pathways with many different rhythms, energies and breaths (including the panting of the furies). Our subsequent collaboration, *1,000 Lovers*, transformed our practice again as we returned 'home' to the waterfront of Auckland, Tāmaki Makaurau in Aotearoa New Zealand, and entered into a dialogue between indigenous ways of knowing place and a *pakeha*, or European New Zealand's, understanding of history.

*Places are made after their stories*²⁹

Created for White Night, part of Auckland Arts Festival in March 2013, *1,000 Lovers* was a performance walk that moved from sea to city through Auckland's Wynyard Quarter, a recently constructed public zone bordering the sea. This new precinct includes the Tank Farm, which once housed the city's petro-chemical, bulk liquid, fish and marine industries, and has been redeveloped as Silo Park. It comprises marine activities, shops and apartments as well as reed beds (designed



Sophie Williams in *1,000 Lovers*, Auckland, 2013 (photographer: Isabel Shore).

to polish storm water), a playground, restaurants and bars. The Event Centre faces Karanga Plaza, its terraces stepping into the sea, leading to Te Wero Bridge, which crosses to the city. The title, *1,000 Lovers*, was drawn from Auckland's Māori name Tāmaki Makaurau, which translates not only as 'Isthmus of one thousand lovers', or 'the bride sought by many lovers', but may also be understood as 'the place of many lovers'.³⁰ Following more than 160 years of ecological imperialism, this 'despoiled shore' suggested to us a series of restless mythopoetic figures.³¹ Drawing on the contemporary and ancient history of Auckland's shoreline, we paid attention to the hidden, the neglected and the lost, inviting new sensations and feelings for place through music, design and dance. Mythical, historical and

contemporary figures – Tuna, Hine, a colonial widow, a reluctant bride and an urban dance crew representing elvers – were performed by an intergenerational cast of 11 dancers, including Carol as the Widow.

*Under the silo I glide between columns,
the circumference of my hooped skirt echoing the cylindrical forms above
Beneath a black veil and behind dark glasses I can look without being
fully seen
I play on the edge of visibility with the gathering audience*

*Hands gesture frantically as I carve a pathway zigzagging between
reed beds
Hauling my luggage, a wheelie cabin bag, to the other side of the harbour
Waiting for Tuna to emerge, I watch Hine pull him from the water,
and dress him for the city*

1,000 Lovers plays on the idea of return through a performative re-mem-bering of the relation between the city and the sea: one that does not rely on mastery, control or discipline but on desire, recovery and survival.

Following a walkable route that begins at Silo Park and ends on the steps of Karanga Plaza, with the performers travelling across the bridge and out of view into the city, the performance moves from an imagined primordial landscape, through the industrial waterfront with its many silos and on into the contemporary urban fabric. The sound score provided an additional and immersive sensory layer to enhance the experience and included the sound of an eel's fin carving through water. As a central motif for this performance event, eels and Tuna reference both ancestral stories and the ecological threat these creatures face today.

Hine's longing to find Tuna involves her confronting many obstacles along the performance path, including an encounter with the Bride, before hauling her lover out of the sea, re-dressing him in city clothes and sending him – a contemporary techno entrepreneur in hoodie, cap and shiny black suit – across the bridge and into the urbanscape. This central duet is supported by the Widow, who watches, clears the path for them and secures his metamorphosis or rebirth by carrying his clothes on her own journey across the harbour. The relation between

Hine and Tuna suggests a reciprocity, a relation between two and an ecological connectedness between the saltwater of the sea and the land or *whenua* (placenta).

What would a rhythmic geography look like – one that annotated the journeys that underwrite the map? It would be a history as much as a geography?

As a cut in nature, the coastline becomes the favoured site of scientific enquiry, but it is also the place where Western and non-Western people are suddenly exposed to one another. As an imaginary place, quarantined off from the normal comings and goings of social life, it incubates strange, and often fatal, performances.³²

Between 2006 and 2013, our performances moved from the static and transformative space of the stage to a labyrinthine journey through the city, to a coastal space of longing. As a body of works, each is connected through an itinerary of loss and recovery. Such a pattern is premised on the idea of performance as a form of return. The returns of performance are the offers made in these works for a renewed connection to the natural world and a freeing up of the frozen archetypes of our cultural inheritances through the re-mything of place. In these contexts, an expanded stage becomes a place for renewal, repair and transformation.

For Irigaray, nostalgia for a return is significant in that it marks the desire to go home to the self within the self. As mentioned earlier, she views Western culture as one of 'uprootedness' distanced from natural origin and belonging, and as a culture of the outside, not of the inside.³³ The journey of Ulysses exemplifies this projection outward and a certain failure within to return to the intimacy of self-affection: 'The hero goes back home, but does he return to his self?'³⁴ Within the double epic of Ulysses, his waging war and his return home, love is already becoming an institution and lovers obey external public rules. 'They are moving away from nature, from the body, from the economy of affects, and are becoming subjected to external laws.'³⁵ Nonetheless, Irigaray notes that the hero Ulysses is moved by emotion; he cries, he worries, and the language that expresses this is in the 'middle voice'. Neither active nor passive, the middle voice is a morphological form that expresses how he is affected in himself through self-affection – in other words

– recalling the gasps and howls of Neshat's lone performer in *Turbulent* – how 'to affect' is 'to be affecting'. However, without reciprocity, the middle voice does not lead to an autonomous self-affection, a necessary precondition for relations between two. If Ulysses' return marks the beginning of Western metaphysics' supplanting of the middle voice with the active–passive binary, its insistence as a mythical story of return within our culture suggests a longing for something we have lost. In turning back to Greek culture, what is at stake? For Irigaray, 'we are trying to find the crossroads at which we have taken the wrong path'.³⁶

Irigaray's writing on the middle voice is 'a critique that produces events, or, rather the undecidable and indeterminate possibility of the event, in all its contingency and openness'.³⁷

In crossing the once fluid ground of Auckland's reclaimed harbour land, we imagined a movement from a primordial past through the encounters of colonialism towards an unknown future. This sense of not knowing was palpable for our audiences for whom the event invited seeing differently, without the perspectival orientation and fixed positions of conventional theatre. One critic found this absence of fixed directions particularly disorientating. She described a 'feeling of dislocation' that was 'enhanced by the uncertainty of not knowing which direction we should be focusing on, or moving in'; as she noted, 'we were not moving in a straight line'.³⁸

Indeed, the work, with its multiple layers and registers, sought to invite participation on a journey of co-presence, being with rather than looking at. In the images of the performance, the audience (with and without headphones) are seen to lean into the performers and to be attentive to the intended images within the choreography as well as the chance encounters of the everyday that folded spontaneously into the event. The 'spectacle' of the performance met and negotiated the scale of the harbour and its industrial as well as contemporary architectures, inviting audiences in, to inhabit the site, to discover moments of surprise and the unexpected and to have a sense of being both inside and outside the work, complicit and connected.

Like Irigaray, we have in past works (*Her Topia*, *Aarero Stone* and *Tongues of Stone*) appropriated Greek mythology to perform a mimetic

deconstruction of its feminine genealogies, in particular through the figures of Niobe, Arachne, Ariadne, Sibyl, Mnemosyne, Procne, Philomela and the Furies. More recently, and with a return to Aotearoa, New Zealand, we have continued the exploration of the fugitive and the abject through a dialogue with pan-Pacific stories of inter-species love and *utu* (revenge) for forbidden pleasure. The idea of myth, as a desire to retrieve and return to origins, is interrupted in our process of *re-mything* through 'material thinking'.³⁹ Fragments of mythology are appropriated, recontextualised and reinvented. We remix familiar, even exhausted signifiers of feminine difference – veils, wigs, cloaks, monstrous dresses – disrupting their significance and deploying them as transitional objects that activate threshold states. Jean-Luc Nancy has observed:

Thus once myth is interrupted, writing recounts our history to us again. But it is no longer a narrative – neither grand nor small – but rather an offering: a history is offered to us. Which is to say that an event – and an advent – is proposed to us, without its unfolding being imposed on us.⁴⁰

Through *turbulent* dancing on *liquid* ground – whether in a pool on the proscenium stage, over forgotten wetlands in a sandy city or across a reclaimed urban foreshore – our collaborative practices re-shape body-ground awareness, re-membling traumatic stories that lie dormant as repressed or forgotten histories. To re-member like this is to think otherwise, to think as an active process of making in the moment, rather than focusing on a future supposedly already known.

The performance threshold is no longer the singular framed event that lies between stage and auditorium but an unfolding of multiplicitous spaces. In leaving the safe, sound and controlled confines of the theatre's stage-house and auditorium and returning to *whenua*, or placental, land in Auckland, we perform a history of the turbulent present whilst opening the conditions of possibility for newness to emerge. We maintain that such radical defamiliarising of the monumental stage, as well as the urban landscape and archetypal imagery of women, is crucial to any attempt to perform critically with the injured, exploded and colonised subject. This work seeks to open the

transformative potentials of the event and the possibilities of return as reconfiguration. As Foucault proposes, 'The new is not found in what is said, but in the event of its return.'⁴¹

NOTES

1. Antonin Artaud, 'The Theatre and Its Double', in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), p. 250.
2. The performer is US-based Iranian composer Sussan Deyhim, who has collaborated with Neshat on a number of video projects. *Turbulent*, Sussan Deyhim, Construct Music (1998).
3. Aubrey Reeves, 'Ululations: The Aural Dimension in Shirin Neshat's Video Installations', *Museo Magazine*, 6 (Spring 2003).
4. Carol Brown and Dorita Hannah, 'Tongues of Stone: Making Space Speak ... Again and Again', in J. Listengarten, M. Van Duyn and M. Alrutz (eds), *Playing with Theory in Theatre Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 261–80.
5. *Aarero Stone* (2006), conceived and co-directed by choreographer Carol Brown and designer Dorita Hannah, with music by Russell Scoones, was performed by Carol Brown at Soundings Theatre, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, as part of the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts.
6. *Tongues of Stone* (2011), conceived and directed by choreographer Carol Brown and designer Dorita Hannah with composer Russell Scoones, was performed by Gabrielle van der Elst, Jacqui Claus, Emma Fishwick, Nicole Ward, Rebecca Taylor, Serena Chalker, Tarryn Runkel, Ashleigh Berry, Floeur Alder, Hayley Schmidt, Sacha Lee Flanagan, Sally Blatchford, Kathryn Puie, Nina Svraka and Trish Wood. It was produced by Agnes Michelet for STRUT Dance, Perth, Western Australia.
7. *1,000 Lovers* (2013) was conceived and directed by MAP (Music_Architecture_Performance): choreographer Carol Brown, designer Dorita Hannah and composer Russell Scoones, with dramaturgy by Fiona Graham. It was performed by Moana Nepia, Carol Brown, Georgie Goater, Sophie Williams, Pauline Hiroti, Nicole Pereira, Santana Schmidt, Kimberley Young, Nita Latu and produced by Maximus Smitheram for White Night, Auckland Arts Festival, March 2013.
8. Soundings stage-house is a grey concrete shell, although habitually shrouded in black curtains, legs and borders to present a darkened void. Our first gesture was to remove all 'blacks' and expose the stage walls that matched the colour of the auditorium walls.
9. Luce Irigaray, *In the Beginning She Was* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 89.
10. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 252.
11. Such photographs could be found on the internet in the aftermath of the siege. Staged for the camera by the Russian authorities, who emptied the auditorium of the dead bodies of its citizens, the unexploded bodies simultaneously represent a threat and a cautionary tale.
12. Programme notes.
13. Cilla McQueen, 'Out the Black Window', in Gregory O'Brien (ed.), *Hotere:*

- Out the Black Window* (Auckland: Godwit 1997), back cover.
14. Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 2–3.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 17. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 49.
 18. Luce Irigaray, *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 65.
 19. Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
 20. Elin Diamond, *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 5.
 21. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
 22. Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, 'Ghosts in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendell (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 133.
 23. Audrey Fernandes-Satar, 'Was There a River Here?' Unpublished poem used in the production *Tongues of Stone* with permission of the author.
 24. The audience who booked for the event were issued with MP4 players and earphones in order to listen to a soundscape composed by Russell Scoones created through sound harvested from the city.
 25. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 76.
 26. Lisa Baraister, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 64.
 27. Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air: In Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin, TX and London: University of Texas Press and Continuum, 1999), p. 40.
 28. Steven Connor, 'Building Breathing Space', lecture given at the Bartlett School of Architecture, 3 March 2004. Available at www.stevenconnor.com/bbs (accessed 22 March 2013).
 29. Paul Carter, *Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), p. 27.
 30. Carol Brown's personal communication with Moana Nepia in discussion with Māori artist Selwyn Muru.
 31. Bonnie Marranca, 'Despoiled Shores: Heiner Müller's Natural History Lessons', *Performing Arts Journal*, 11 (2) (1988): 17–24.
 32. Carter, *Dark Writing*, pp. 11 and 9.
 33. Luce Irigaray, *In the Beginning She Was* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 139.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
 37. Elena Tzelepis and Athena Athanasiou, *Rewriting Difference: Luce Irigaray and 'the Greeks'* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), p. 13.
 38. Jesse Quaid, 'Mythology in Migration', Theatre review of *1,000 Lovers*, 17 March 2013. Available at www.theatreview.org.nz/reviews/review.php?id=5713 (accessed 30 November 2014).
 39. Paul Carter, *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004).

40. Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Myth Interrupted', in Peter Connor (ed.), *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 69.
41. Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 28.

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