

Costume as an active component of performance

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Abstract

I examine the role of costume in performance and explore the notion of keeping the physical body *present yet absent* from the viewer. I analyse the practice of two pioneers of modern dance, Lōie Fuller and Martha Graham, to demonstrate that costume can become a performance in its own right. I undertake a comprehensive study of one particular work by Graham, *Lamentation*, and describe its impact upon my own practice. Drawing on both practical and theoretical research and in particular using Jung's theory of the active imagination and Freud's model of the psyche, I investigate the ways in which costume may be said to articulate our unconscious thoughts. I give an account of the development of my practical, exhibition work and put this into the context of the themes above but also in relation to practices involving stillness and slow, meditative movement and related use of space, derived from the characteristics of Japanese Noh theatre and Butoh dance. Bringing together all the key areas, theoretical and practical, of my research, I reflect on my exhibition piece and draw conclusions about the psychological and physical power of costume, surmising that the emotions expressed in the linked video installation, painting and performance feed off one another, mediated by costume and inexorably linked by the unconscious.

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Finally, I wish to thank my counsellor for truly 'hearing' me and allowing me to 'believe'.

Introduction

My initial proposal was to research the way in which the absence of a concept, person or act has the ability to create a feeling of presence, and address questions such as 'why does the absence of something affect us more profoundly than when it is present?' I needed to find a starting point and this came in the form of a book, aptly titled *Presence and Absence: The Performing Body* (2014), edited by Adele Anderson and Sophia Pantouvaki. I was particularly interested in Pantouvaki's chapter, *Costume in the absence of the body*. Her examination into the ways theatre and dance costumes might be exhibited in the absence of the body served as an initial area of interest to guide my practice.

In my early experiments, I found myself drawn to the presence of a narrative in the absence of the body, focusing my attention on shoes, particularly those of a dancer. In the story of *The Red Shoes* by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen the central character, a young girl named Karen becomes a slave to a pair of red shoes that continue to dance until she begs an executioner to cut off her feet. Unfortunately, the shoes persist in dancing before her, taking on a life of their own, a constant reminder of her past sins. I made some tentative monoprints incorporating the text *...and she danced...* (Figure 1)

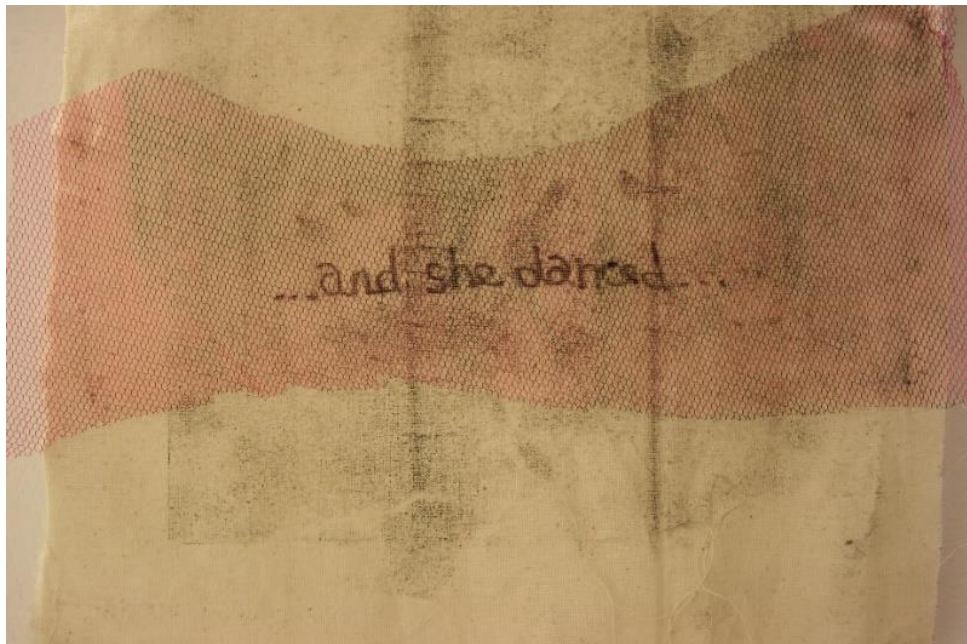


Figure 1. Paula Musgrove, *...and she danced...* 2017
Monoprint on fabric. 40 x 26cm

The red shoes reminded me of an exhibition of diary drawings by the performance artist, Bobby Baker, in 2009 in which she documented her personal experiences of the mental health system. One of the drawings that triggered a mixture of feelings for me, as a service user, was Baker's depiction of her therapist's shoes. Like her, I have experienced the difficulty of maintaining eye contact due to anxiety or shame and found myself observing my nurse or therapist's shoes to try and create a picture of them or perhaps gauge a measure of their mood at a given time. Coincidentally the two pairs of shoes that stick in my memory were both red! In his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935), the German philosopher Martin Heidegger examined Van Gogh's painting, *A Pair of Shoes* (Figure 2), creating a narrative for the discarded shoes, believing them to depict the life of a peasant.



Figure 2. Vincent van Gogh, *A Pair of Shoes*, 1886.
Oil on canvas. 38.1 x 45.3cm

Although disputed by the art historian Meyer Schapiro in his essay from 1968, *The Still Life as a Personal Object-A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh* (Schapiro, 1994: 135-151) the concept of giving a physicality to an uninhabited item of clothing prompted me to research further the idea of keeping the physical body present yet absent from the viewer within costume.

Löie Fuller and Martha Graham

Through my reading, I developed a particular interest in the dance and costume of Löie Fuller and Martha Graham, two pioneers of modern dance. Löie Fuller (Figure 3) was an American actor and dancer, known for her work with costumes made from vast swathes of fabric and her use of lighting. She used costume to express herself and would disappear into the voluminous folds. Fuller was probably best known for her *Serpentine* dance in the late nineteenth century where from beneath large plain dresses and holding short wands in her hands to add extension, she twisted her body in such a way that she was able to propel the fabric high into the air and create an abstract dance that conjured up an image of soaring waves.



Figure 3. Löie Fuller, 1902.

Photograph: Frederick Glasier. © Everett Collection Historical / Alamy

In her book *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the work of L  ie Fuller* (2007), the author, Ann Albright, writes that “by losing the materiality of her body she became the embodiment of an idea” and that pointed to “the absence of Fuller’s body and her presence as a force of motion.”

I made some drawings using expressive strokes to try and indicate the movement of fabric. (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2017.
Watercolour on paper. 29 x21cm

I was pleased with these but felt that I needed to experiment further and incorporate a performative element into my research. I made a long sleeve out of fabric that could be worn on the arm or leg. From the sleeve hung a long drape of material indicative of a wing that was intended to swirl in the air when the arm or leg was moved, creating its own dance. I filmed myself using the sleeve but found the result

quite limited and underwhelming. I tried draping swathes of fabric onto a plastic sheet that had been coated in printing ink and danced on them, creating monoprints (Figure 5) with a view to constructing costumes from them.



Figure 5. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled (Detail)*, 2017.
Monoprint on fabric. 161 x 110cm

By leaving traces of my performance it could be said that I was giving presence to the absent body. But after reflecting on the prints I felt rather detached from them and realised that I was revisiting one of my early performance pieces, *Mummy loves you* from 2015, created to explore feelings of insecurity and social anxiety through movement, song and print. (Figure 6)



Figure 6. Paula Musgrove, *Mummy loves you*, 2015.
Video still

I felt that there was a danger of taking a step backward in my practice, to a piece that needed to remain as a document of my early evolution as a performance artist. But despite my decision not to take the prints further, I didn't feel that the work was wasted as it served as a visual reminder that I needed to take a leap and make work that I could connect to emotionally. This was to come sooner rather than later when, during my research into L  ie Fuller, I became inspired by the work of Martha Graham.

Born in America In 1894, Martha Graham became known as one of the greatest pioneers of modern dance. As a dancer, choreographer and teacher her work drew on a wide range of artistic genres. Americans were getting tired of traditional European choreography and wanted dance that they could relate to. Although dancers like L  ie Fuller produced new ideas, what was different about Graham's work was her attitude to dance. She wanted to communicate a message to her audience and attempt to 'touch' them by creating dance that expressed inner emotion through physical form. In an effort to move away from the gracefulness of Ballet, Graham used more angular, violent movements including falling onto the floor, which she saw not only as a psychological act but as a physical one. (Giguere, 2014)

She developed her own technique of breathing which she called 'contraction and release'. When Graham exhaled or 'contracted' her chest curved inwards, suggesting sadness or fear and when she inhaled or 'released' her chest came out signifying happiness and confidence. These movements contributed to the angular appearance of her dances. She was interested in the shapes and angles of primitive modernist art and sculpture, drawing inspiration from pieces such as Picasso's *Grande Danseuse d'Avignon* (1907) (Figure 7) and paintings by Kandinsky.



Figure 7. Pablo Picasso, *Grande Danseuse d'Avignon*, 1907.
Oil on canvas. 149.8 x 99.7cm

There was one dance titled *Lamentation* (1930) by Graham (Figure 8) that particularly grabbed my attention and inspired me to make some of my own performance pieces.



Figure 8. Martha Graham, *Lamentation, No.1*, c.1930.
Photograph: Herta Moselsio

Based on the Old Testament book of Lamentations, the dance is a non-verbal expression of grief in which Graham represents a figure in mourning. I was especially interested in the costume worn for the piece which was basically a tube of purple, stretchy, jersey fabric known as Tricot. In her autobiography, *Blood Memory* (1991: 117), Graham said “*Lamentation*, my dance of 1930, is a solo piece in which I wear a long tube of material to indicate the tragedy that obsesses the body, the ability to stretch inside your own skin, to witness and test the perimeters and boundaries of grief, which is honourable and universal.” Seated

on a bench for the entire dance she twisted her body in different ways, creating angular, architectural shapes, contracting and relaxing and showing tension through her costume, allowing for her innermost feelings to be conveyed. I felt that much like L  ie Fuller’s costume, Graham’s dress draws attention to emotion from bodily movement rather than the bodily shape that classical dance is known for.

For my own response to Martha Graham’s work, I initially created a costume, machine stitching a large red Lycra sack, a little over body height that I would be able to climb into and be hidden from view. Unlike Graham’s costume which was open at both ends to reveal her face and limbs, I stitched one end with the intention of hiding my feet. It was important to make the sack big enough to fit my body but tight enough to push against the Lycra, accentuating shapes and forms generated by my movements. (Figures 9 & 10)



Figure 9. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2017.
Video still

I made a number of video recordings, running back and forth to the camera to ensure I had captured my improvised dances as my vision was extremely limited inside the Lycra. It was important to adjust the tripod to the right height so that my whole body would appear in the frame. I preferred being alone with the camera as I could relax and 'feel' my emotions, allowing them to come through in my movements.

One of my early videos can be viewed on the memory card at the end of this text (Appendix 1) or at:

<https://vimeo.com/256796528>



Figure 10. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2017.
Video still

After looking through my recordings I used Adobe *Premiere Pro* to apply some simple editing. I tried to verbalise the thoughts that went through my mind in one of the pieces:

"I kneel centre stage. All I see is myself and the inside of the fabric. I stretch out my knees, pushing against the fabric. Grasping the top corners of the open end I lift the fabric up and raise my head before bringing my arms down in front of me, all the time making a conscious effort to stretch out my elbows and square my shoulders to create an angular form. Pushing out against the fabric I slowly bring it back up. I am aware that the opening is going to reveal my face so I allow it to. Pause. I stare through the material. What now? Gathering myself I bring the fabric around me, wrapping and clothing my body. Comforting. Softening. I am in a position to reach out, stretching my body to the right, pushing the fabric as far as I can. Relax. Draw back. Old hooded woman. The fabric softens before I stretch again to the left. I haven't allowed myself enough material to push against so quickly pull back to the central figure. I need to release and find my body extending and bending forward, arms spread rigidly in front of me. I clutch the fabric tight. Carpet in front of my eyes. Liberate. Relax. I withdraw the material into a sitting position again. This time I feel the need to move quickly. I don't want to stop. I throw my body down to the right then swing around. I find myself falling to the right so go with this move, lying on my side. It feels as though I have a lot of fabric to work with at this moment. I look down at my legs and see that there is a lot of room to move, the material slackened. I lift my left leg, stretching the fabric high into the air then quickly bring it down and drawing my feet together. I consciously point my toes into the corners of the fabric when I can. Where do I go now? I roll onto my front, stretching out, but knock one of the boards with my arms. This had been going well but I need to carry on. Interacting with the environment doesn't need to be negative. I stretch my legs to the left and propel my body into the centre of the space. Face shielded from sight. Feeling frustrated I launch forward onto the floor again, arms outstretched. Pull up to sit then reach high into the air. I twist to the right and draw myself into a kneeling position. Counter tension between outstretched arms and right leg. Stretch out. Contract. Release. Repeat. On final release, I swivel to face the front. I kneel, bringing the fabric up. Aware that the opening of the fabric is gaping, I am, for a moment, exposed. Losing my grip. Regain control. I stretch the fabric up again and draw it around me. In this moment I am able to regain my grip, stretching up without being seen, the fabric taut and arms, angular. So why then do I allow myself to stare briefly through a gap and expose my face again? I quickly hide, shrouded by the Lycra. Knees stretched outwards. Pause. In momentary abandonment, I throw my upper body forcefully to the floor. Tired, I slowly draw myself up, gathering the material towards me and allow my body to rest. Relax. Pause. End."

I made some studies from video stills. (Figures 11 & 12)

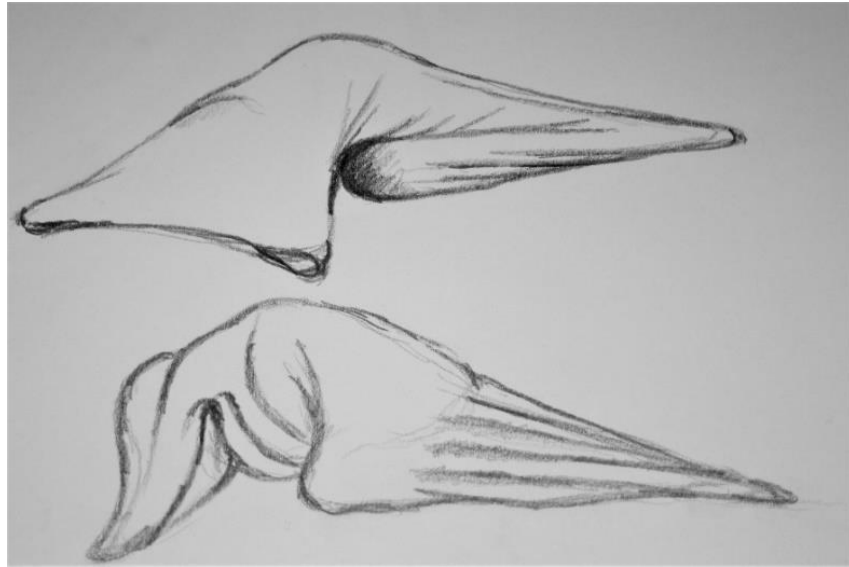


Figure 11. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled (Detail)*, 2017.
Pencil on paper. 28.5 x 19.5cm



Figure 12. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2017.
Acrylic on card. 89.5 x 49.5cm

I chose to randomly dance with a stepladder on one occasion and although not entirely successful, I felt that exploring the interaction with other objects, scenery and space could be something to take further in my research. (Figure 13)



Figure 13. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2017.
Pencil on paper. 25.5 x 17cm

Previous practice

The limitations placed on my body by the costume led me to reflect on work that I had made around the theme of restriction during my undergraduate degree. During the second year of my studies I was inspired by Hito Steyerl's essay *In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective* (2011), leading me to create a number of performance paintings in which I balanced precariously on a makeshift turntable then further restricting myself by attaching brushes to the ends of long sticks with the intent to paint in a state of disorientation. (Figure 14)

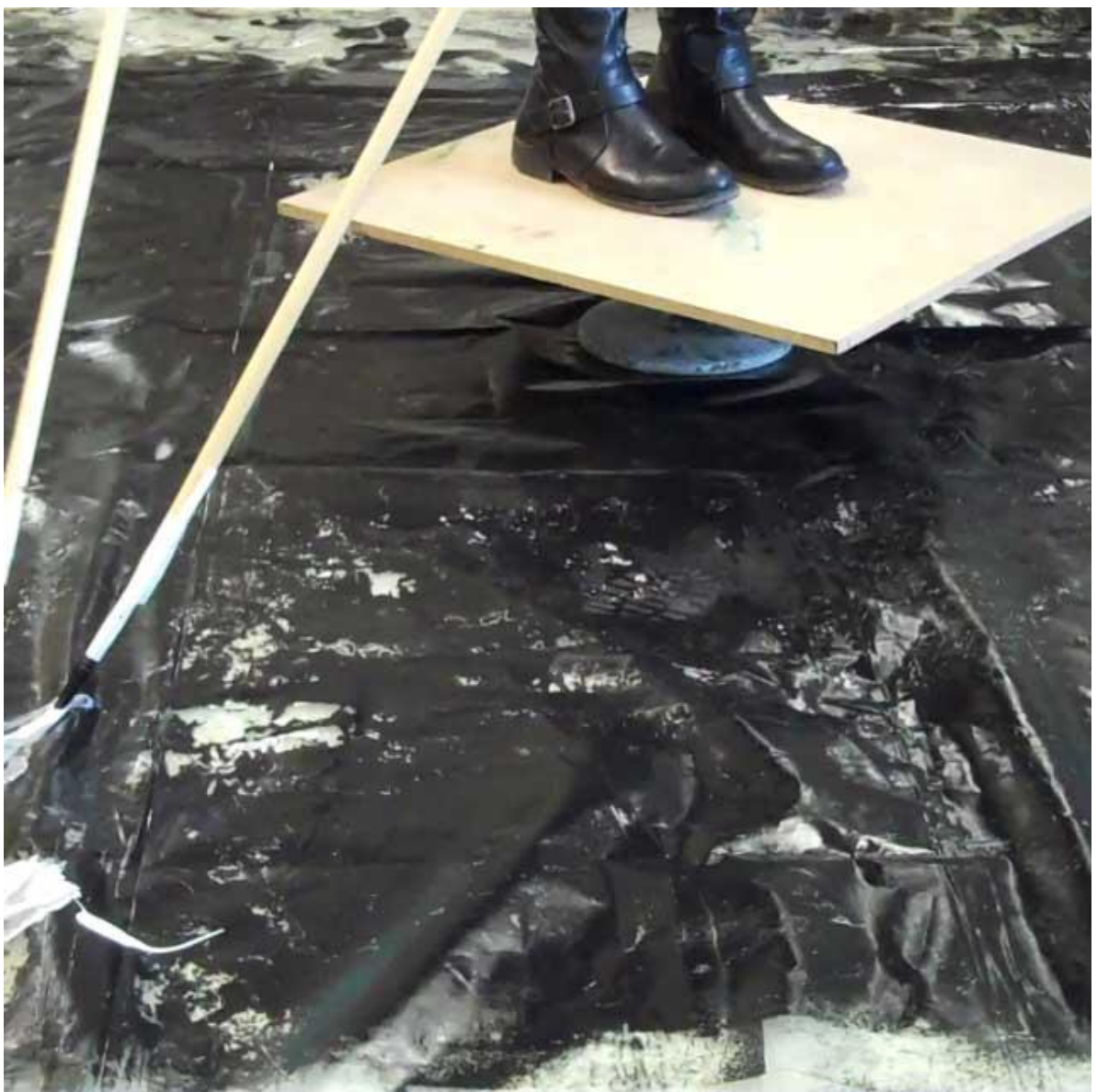


Figure 14. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2016.
Video still

The *Drawing Restraint* series by American artist Matthew Barney has been influential in my practice. I took inspiration from his exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 2007 which brought together drawings, performance, video, sculpture and photographic documentation of a project first realised in 1987 in which he attempted to make marks while being restrained, often wearing a harness, placing various obstacles such as trampolines in his way and performing in challenging spaces. (Figure 15)



Figure 15. Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 2*, 1988.
Documentation Still. Photograph: Michael Rees. © Matthew Barney

In the exhibition catalogue, Peyton-Jones, et al (2007: 12) state that Barney “investigates the relationship between resistance and creativity and explores parallels between artistic and athletic bodies working at the threshold of physical limitations.” Since its conception, the *Drawing Restraint* series has become considerably more elaborate, incorporating film and costumes, often interlaced with mythical and symbolic narrative. One such example is described by Scott (2007: 15) in which she focuses on the video installation *Drawing Restraint 7* (1993) where “two satyrs simultaneously wrestle in the back seat of a

limousine while attempting to draw with their horns in the condensation on the vehicle's moon roof. Barney, in character as underdeveloped kid satyr, chases his tail in the front seat." (Figure 16)



Figure 16. . Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 7*, 1993.
Production still. Photograph: Michael James O'Brien. © Matthew Barney

Intent on developing my own interpretation of restriction, I began to incorporate narrative into my practice and in a performance titled *Half a cup of water and a kettle full of tea* (Figure 17), I sought to explore the disorientation resulting from restrictions imposed upon me by post-surgical instructions following an operation. I was only able to do light dusting, lift nothing heavier than a kettle half filled with water, rest and practice my pelvic floor exercises.



Figure 17. Paula Musgrove, *Half a cup of water and a kettle full of tea*, 2015.
Performance still. Photograph: Michael Szpakowski

During the final year of my degree, much of my practice focused on ideas surrounding repetition and restriction in which I explored personal experiences of being restricted or trapped by anxiety. (Figure 18) Experiences of past events have imposed restrictions on my ability to break free and fully embrace life. I now realise that my anxieties are two-fold since fear causes me to feel trapped which in turn provokes further anxiety, becoming a repetitive cycle. Exploring my feelings of being trapped has enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of why this is happening. As a result of my performances I am beginning to feel a little freer and now realise that working through and thinking about my pre-occupation with repetition enabled me to make both a conscious and an unconscious connection between my performance and painting in my MA exhibition, an area that I will address later in this text.



Figure 18. Paula Musgrove, *Caged*, 2017.
Video still

Authorship and re-performance

When presenting my initial videos at a research colloquium, I was asked if I had considered inserting a zip at one end of the costume so that I was completely enclosed since my face had inadvertently appeared while I was performing. I discovered the work of American choreographer, Alwin Nikolais who, in one of his best-known works, *Noumenon* (1953), placed his dancers in white Lycra bags that were sealed at both ends so that they couldn't be seen. (Figure 19)



Figure 19. Alwin Nikolais, *Noumenon Mobilus*, 1953.

I considered emulating this but later rejected the idea due to the practicalities of getting in and out of the costume and the risk of ripping open the fastening with the tension of my bodily movements. It was also important to note that Nikolais's reasoning for hiding his dancers was that he didn't feel that the audience needed to relate to the dancers and was uninterested in emotion in dance, something that I had no desire to echo in my practice. Instead, I decided just to stitch up the corners of the opening, creating pockets to secure my hands and give me more control. Noticing similarities between *Noumenon* and *Lamentation* I became aware of an affinity between my practice and Graham's iconic dance. Although my dance was unchoreographed and didn't restrict itself to a theme or to being in a seated position, there were similarities

in the costume. I had been interested in the way she manipulated fabric to evoke emotion and created a costume based on her design but my use of Lycra and the absence of my head and limbs differentiated my work from hers. It might be suggested that I developed an unconscious connection with Graham's practice. Ideas around authorship and remaking in dance and performance arose as an area of enquiry. In his essay, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (1936) Walter Benjamin explores ideas surrounding reactivation and looks at the way in which the reproduction of a piece of art can make it accessible to all. Auslander (2018: 97) examines Benjamin's text in the context of performance stating that we get a "secondhand experience of the thing reproduced" but furthermore reproduction "allows us to reproduce for ourselves the thing reproduced, to bring it to life, to reactivate it, so as to be able to experience it in the present moment."

The value in re-performance becomes evident in the work of the American dancer, Yvonne Rainer. Her most well-known piece, *Trio A* (Figure 20) was first performed in 1966 to extremely poor reviews, but despite this, it has been repeated and transformed again and again.



Figure 20. Yvonne Rainer, *Trio A*, 1978.
Photograph

The piece was initially conceived as a solo piece with fluid, meditative movements but has since been performed as a group dance and in a multitude of spaces. It could be argued that the frequent reformulation of the piece places it right on the border between being a repeated work and a succession of new works.

In 2005 the performance artist, Marina Abramović performed *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Over the course of seven nights, she re-performed not only her own work but that of works by artists' from the 1960s and 1970s, with each piece running for the duration of seven hours. With the exception of one new piece she chose to re-enact six iconic works; Vito Acconci's *Seedbed*, her own piece, *Rhythm 0*, Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure*, Gina Pane's *The Conditioning*, *First Action of Self-Portraits*, Valie Export's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* and Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. (Figure 21)



Figure 21. Marina Abramović, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, 2005.
Photograph

Abramović wanted to preserve often poorly documented twentieth-century performance art, although taking into account the insufficient quality of reliable source material it was difficult to imagine that true re-performance could be achieved. She argued that “the only real way to document a performance piece is to re-perform the piece itself” (Gershman, 2019). One main question that arises when analysing re-performances is whether repetition adds or detracts from the original work? However close Abramović’s poses were to the ones in the original photographs, difference would always exist. In his seminal text, *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Deleuze argued that it was impossible for any two things to be identical. No matter how many times something is repeated it will always be different since the existence of difference means that there will always be something new. Ironically, my references to the work of Yvonne Rainer, Marina Abramović and Deleuze in this chapter are taken from an essay that I wrote in the final year of my undergraduate degree, aptly titled *Repetition and Performance: Why do artists use repetition in their practice and what is its effect on the viewer?* (Musgrove, 2016)

Costume

What differentiates costume from everyday clothes? Scafidi (2015) believes the distinction can be a matter of context, dependent on how and when the garments are worn or by whom they adorn as well as the perception of the viewer. Costume enables the wearer to become someone different from their everyday self and adopt a new identity as well as allowing for the separation of groups or individuals from others. Once you get into a costume then your body has the ability to take on a new character or identity. This is particularly true of masks or the covering of the face in the way that I allowed my costume to conceal my features. I recently visited the Joan Jonas exhibition at Tate Modern. A founding figure of performance art in America during the 1960s and 1970s, Jonas' practice which includes Installation, video and performance spans over five decades. One of the aspects of her work that interested me was her use of masks and the way in which she describes feeling when wearing them. During a visit to Japan in 1970 Jonas was inspired by the masks worn in Noh theatre and Kabuki. (Figure 22)



Figure 22. Nagasawa Ujiharu, *Noh mask. Okina (old man)*, c.1981.
Painted wood and human hair. Height: 18.3 cm © The British Museum

Having had no formal training in acting she didn't believe she had the ability to create a character like a professional actor could, so Jonas welcomed the metamorphic effect that a mask gave her stating, "I liked the idea that I could cover my face and become another persona. The minute I started using masks I realized their transformative nature, as anybody would: that when you put a mask on, your body language is altered. The mask inspires me: if you put a mask on you can enter a different world." (Ayers, 2018: 164-165) (Figure 23)



Figure 23. Joan Jonas, *Art in the Twenty-First Century*. Season 7 episode, *Fiction*, 2014.
© Art21, Inc. 2014. Production still

Jonas' words led me to reflect on similarities within my own practice. As someone who struggles with anxiety, I find it hard to stand up in front of people to give a presentation, but at the start of the second year of my undergraduate degree, I made my first performance piece, *Self-Portrait* (Figure 24), in which I sat with a paper bag on my head. I immediately felt more confident, going into my own world and forgetting that the audience was there.



Figure 24. Paula Musgrove, *Self Portrait*, 2015.

They couldn't observe my nervousness and the feel of their eyes on my face instantly vanished. I became someone else. In the same way, immersing myself inside the Lycra costume allowed me to experience a sense of calm. Jonas has previously used Burqas in her performance and when asked in an interview how it felt to wear one she stated "It's like a mask. I use masks to hide my face and to achieve another identity. But you can move inside a Burqa and make beautiful shapes...the Burqa transformed me which is what I wanted." (Smith, 2018: 108). Inside the Lycra, I felt liberated and open to expressing myself in whichever way I desired. I could make facial expressions, sometimes expelling my inner

depths, but no one could see. The fabric allowed me to expose parts of my unconscious without the fear of being judged and in turn, my movements benefited from this freedom. I could create more interesting and beautiful shapes. I could hide and be myself.

Costume can be viewed as a second skin. “It provides a site of self-display, self-knowledge, and expression, in which skin colour and cultural power imbalances are also implicated.” (Barbieri, 2017: 95). Some might say that costume can detract from a performance and that it should blend in with the scenery, present yet absent, but in many instances, it can also ‘make or break’ a performance. The writer and fashion designer Jessica Bugg (2014: 36) is “interested in costume design that is clearly present, both visually and as an instigator of performance.” A costume might become a performance in its own right but this will be determined by the body within it and the way in which it interacts with the material. Bugg (ibid: 39) considers clothing as “a form of *body located scenography*”, in which the body, costume, set and audience all come together to communicate a message, perhaps triggering a memory or some form of sensory experience.

Dance costume

The invention of the leotard during the middle of the 19th century allowed the body greater flexibility and for women, in particular, it was a move away from the restraints and control of corsets affording them freedom for self-expression. Dancers such as Isadora Duncan wore loose clothes and danced with bare feet, contributing to the development of liberation of both movement and costume. From the 1870s the emergence of ‘skirt dancers’ as a more sophisticated version of the ‘Can-Can’ saw costumes constructed from great swathes of fabric in which the dancers would often disappear. Löie Fuller, whose practice I touched upon previously in this text, is one of the best examples of such a dancer, utilising her costume as an extension of the body. (Figure 25)



Figure 25. Lōie Fuller, *Lōie Fuller Dancing*, c. 1900.
 Photograph: Samuel J Beckett

Through the incorporation of lighting effects and careful manipulation of space, Fuller used her voluminous dresses to construct a style of dance and Sperling (1999, cited in Albright, 2007: 28) suggested that she had “created the first truly ‘Abstract dance’. An abstract art where visual effects are primary.” Her costumes were a contrast to those predominantly worn in contemporary dance, in which minimalism is utilised to bring attention to the dancer’s body and the choreography. Martha Graham’s costume in her dance, *Lamentation*, despite being minimal, acted as an extension of her body and the tube-like Tricot garment was a vital component of the work’s success. (Figure 26)



Figure 26. Martha Graham, *Lamentation*, No. 16, c.1930.
Photograph: Herta Moselsio

Costumes are in contact with the skin whether loosely, heavily or constrictively, “transforming the body both visually and physically when in motion” but Trimingham (2017: 137) believes that “sculpted costume is even more insistent” as it can alter the mind of the spectator in addition to the body and mind of the dancer. When I consider my somewhat sculpted Lycra tube, I am reminded of some words from Graham’s autobiography, *Blood Memory* (1991: 4), in which she states that “movement never lies. It is a barometer telling the state of the soul’s weather to all who can read it.” There was nowhere to hide in the Lycra with regards to movement and body shape yet at the same time it permitted me to hide my face, affording me increased confidence and the ability to concentrate on my inner feelings rather than be distracted by the eyes of the outside world.

The sound of silence

I began to experiment with simple props such as dowelling rods, tapping them against each other and consequently introducing minimal sound into my performance. Up to this point, the absence of sound had been questioned with one of my peers asking why I hadn't used music to accompany my dance. Iwana (2009) believes that the "body is a valuable instrument of dance." For me, dance can exist without music as the body's movement gives the work a voice although, if chosen carefully it can add to the impact of the piece. The pioneering American composer and music theorist, John Cage, is well known for his composition *4'33"* which first performed in 1952, consists of Cage sitting at a piano in silence for 4 minutes and 33 seconds. The audience is challenged to pay attention to sounds around them that they might otherwise not hear. After listening to works like *Seven2* (Cage, 1990) I was struck by the way in which Cage allows space for reflection by making silence part of the music in the same way that stillness has the ability to dance. In an interview published on YouTube in 2007, he states that despite liking the activity of sound "the sound experience that I prefer to all others is the experience of silence" and that for him "silence is a non-musical sound" (Cage, 1991). Sound was to be an area for experimentation in my creative development.

Isamu Noguchi

I tried hanging strips of silver fabric from dowelling rods as a backdrop for my performance in order to divide the space but this added very little with the positioning of the fabric giving the appearance of curtains which in turn gave the set a somewhat literal appearance of a theatre. (Figure 27) Through its presence, the shimmery material could potentially divert the spectator's eye from the focal point of my performance and subtract from its impact.



Figure 27. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2018.
Silver fabric and doweling

I discovered another way of utilising the fabric by turning them into long flags attached to sticks which I was able to wave, grasping them from within my costume. This action felt like a dance of victory, an ascension to a higher level. (Figure 28)



Figure 28. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2018.
Video still

While looking at examples of set design I became interested in the work of Isamu Noguchi, a Japanese American sculptor who had a lifelong collaboration with Martha Graham, creating sets and sculptural spaces for her dance. One such set included *Frontier* (1935) where the scenery was minimal and stark yet seemed to fill the stage, a case of being absent yet present perhaps? Noguchi suggested a western landscape by using just a bench, simple fence and two lengths of rope stretched out in a 'V' shape. (Figure 29)



Figure 29. Isamu Noguchi, *Frontier*, 1935.
© The Noguchi Museum

He wanted “to split the air of the stage in a sculptural way” (Ashton, 1992: 54) but said, “It’s not the rope that is the sculpture, but it is the space which it creates that is the sculpture.” (Kaufman, 2017). After collaborating with Noguchi on *Frontier*, Graham felt that “space became a volume to be dealt with sculpturally.” (Lille, 2005).

Isamu Noguchi and Noh theatre

Noguchi was interested in Japanese Noh theatre which in turn influenced his practice. Originating in Japan during the 14th century Noh theatre is an extremely complex, mysterious, yet beautiful combination of song, dance, poetry, myths and legends, rich in symbolism. Performers wearing masks and ornate costumes slide very slowly across the stage to indicate the passing of time. (Figure 30)



Figure 30. *Noh 'Lady Aoi'*, 2018.
Photograph. ©Yoshihiro Maejima

In a short video documentary exploring the world of Noh theatre, Sato (2017) explains that “Noh actors often enact supernatural scenes, so they frequently wear masks known as ‘Noh-men’.” He states that “because the facial expression of the actor disappears behind the Noh mask, it is possible for the actor to fully become the part. The mask is also capable of conveying many nuances of expression, a technique known as ‘Saishiki’, or ‘coloration’. Slightly hanging the head in shame can express sadness whereas raising the face slightly can indicate a brightening of mood.” Sato concludes that “it is through such subtle movements that the simple expression of the Noh mask comes alive, and conveys feelings or conditions of the actor to the audience.” Previously in this text, I have addressed the way in which the performance artist, Joan Jonas was inspired by Noh masks but it was the visual structure of Noh theatre that Noguchi found most important. The contemporary architect Arata Isozaki (1979, cited in Ashton, 1992: 57) described the structure of the Noh stage: “At the back of the stage, a wooden wall called *kagami-ita* (mirror wall) harbors the divinity, *kami*; an aged pine tree painted on this wall symbolized the residence of the kami. The stage represents the world of the present, and backstage the world of the dead. The *kagami-no-ma* (*ma* of mirror) is placed just at the stage entrance. The bridge connecting the stage to the

backstage symbolizes the space between the world of the present (stage) and the world of the dead (backstage).” Once performed in the open air, today Noh is usually watched indoors but the bridge, painted tree, and the addition of a roof covering the stage all serve to preserve tradition and effectively bring the outside in. (Figure 31)



Figure 31. The National Noh Theatre, 2014.
Photograph: Jerome Lee

My primary research has revealed that despite a wealth of complexities and symbolism in Noh theatre, visually it is unelaborate, leading the audience to use their imagination. With little scenery or props, the simplicity of space and slow movement allows the performers, along with their costumes and masks, to have more impact, an area that Noguchi has embraced in his set design and something which I wanted to carry forward in my work. I was interested in exploring the combination of dance and scenery in space,

keeping the props as few as possible, merely suggesting their purpose so that the viewer's eye would be drawn to the sculptural form and emotion of the dancer.

I assembled a minimal set inspired by Noguchi with just four lengths of rope stretching from the studio walls and meeting in the centre. Encased in the Lycra costume, my aim was to move between and engage with the rope but it came detached from the wall. I tried to work with it but wasn't satisfied with the final outcome on film as the rope appeared to hinder me, causing me to create forced movements to incorporate the rope rather than allow it to shape my performance. What did interest me was the way in which the Lycra could still exist in the absence of the body (Figure 32), an idea that I would later incorporate into my final exhibition piece.



Figure 32. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2017.
Rope and Lycra

Considering the practice of artists like Isamu Noguchi and Robert Irwin, an American artist who works with space and light to challenge perception, and by studying the unadorned structure and symbolism of Japanese Noh theatre, I continued to explore ways in which I could create a pared back architectural space in which realism was merely suggested. The scenographer, Pamela Howard (2009: 1) states that “space is described by its dynamics - the geometry, and its characteristics - the atmosphere. Geometry is a way of measuring space and describing it so that someone else can visualise it.” Noguchi’s belief, however, was that “there is a difference between the actual cubic feet of space and the additional space that the imagination supplies. One is measure, the other an awareness of the void.” (Ashton, 1992: 231). Despite the small amount of space I had to work with it was important for me to use this to the best of my ability.

Windows of the psyche

I deconstructed a stretched canvas, stripping back the material so that what was left resembled a window.

I moved within the frame, stretching my body through the spaces, trying to feel my way around a single window that effectively multiplied into several. (Figure 33)



Figure 33. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2018.
Video still

I found the piece both physically and visually beautiful to make, identifying it as an area to evolve. Although I liked the concept of the window I felt that the crossbar in the centre of the frame might be too literal so I began making my own frames in varying sizes out of lightweight wood. While thinking about windows I recalled some of my very early research in which I looked at the connections between a house and the body. In his text *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard explores the idea of the body as a metaphor for a house and how from the cellar to the loft it can shape our psyche. After reading Freud I came to understand about the superego, ego and id (Khan, 2002: 26-27). Bachelard draws on Freud's model of the psyche, proposing that the attic of a house may be seen as the superego, our conscience, parental voice and ideal self; the main structure representing the ego, the conscious mind and the cellar may signify the id, our passions, and both conscious but pre-dominantly unconscious parts. In order to add some form of structure to my otherwise improvised dance, I experimented with the idea of using the frames to represent the windows to each level of the psyche.

Our dreams are an interesting way of getting to our unconscious as Carl Jung showed with his dream:

The psychoanalyst, Carl Jung had a dream about a house which "led him to develop the concept of the collective unconscious" (Chodorow, 1951: 49):

"I was in a house I did not know, which had two storeys. It was "my house." I found myself in the upper storey, where there was a kind of salon furnished with fine old pieces in Rococo style. On the walls hung a number of precious old paintings. I wondered that this should be my house, and thought, "not bad." But then it occurred to me that I did not know what the lower floor looked like. Descending the stairs, I reached the ground floor. There everything was much older, and I realised that this part of the house must date from about the fifteenth or sixteenth century. The furnishings were medieval; the floors were of red brick. Everywhere it was rather dark. I went from one room to another thinking, "Now I really must explore the whole house." I came upon a heavy door, and opened it. Beyond it, I discovered a stone stairway that led down into the cellar. Descending again, I found myself in a beautifully vaulted room which looked exceedingly ancient. Examining the walls, I discovered layers of brick among the ordinary stone blocks,

and chips of brick in the mortar. As soon as I saw this I knew that the walls dated from Roman times. My interest was now intense. I looked more closely at the floor. It was of stone slabs, and in one of these I discovered a ring. When I pulled it, the stone slab lifted, and again I saw a stairway of narrow stone steps leading into the depths. These, too, I descended, and entered a low cave cut into the rock. Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like remains of a primitive culture. I discovered two human skulls, obviously very old and half disintegrated. Then I awoke.” (Jung, 1961: 182-183)

Upon reflection, Jung viewed the house as a representation of the human psyche with the upper floor symbolising his childhood home, his consciousness, then descending down the stairs, deep into the unconscious. Jung proposed that our unconscious is comprised of both personal and collective history. Part of the unconscious brain, the ‘collective unconscious’ is shared by all humans, containing information that has been inherited, in contrast to the personal unconscious which is developed by individual experiences. Jung entered a difficult period in his life after severing ties with Sigmund Freud due to irreconcilable opinions on the nature of the unconscious and Chodorow (1991: 51) writes that “he went through a process of psychological development and while confronting his unconscious at this time he developed the method of active imagination”.

Dance movement therapy

In 1916 Jung wrote a paper examining the way in which expressive body movements could help to bring unconscious thoughts to the surface and Chodorow (1991) states that he referred to this technique as the ‘active imagination’, believing that it could also be communicated through art and music and could be utilised both diagnostically and therapeutically, offering a “method of experiencing one’s own unconscious while awake.” (Hart, 2008: 99). It could be said then that the origins of dance movement therapy arose from Jung’s idea of the ‘active imagination’ and drawing on his theories, was developed in America between the 1940s and 1960s by figures such as Marian Chace and Mary Starks Whitehouse, a

dancer and Jungian psychotherapist who trained under Martha Graham. Chodorow (1991: 27) believes that Whitehouse's "greatest contribution to understanding body movement as a form of active imagination, was her ability to differentiate between the experience of *letting it happen* in contrast to *doing it*." She felt that when dancing, if we 'try' too hard then the feel of movement may be inhibited and that we should allow ourselves to 'let go' and really experience the way in which our body moves, allowing our unconscious to 'speak.' Whitehouse questioned, "Where does movement come from? It originates in ... a specific inner impulse having the quality of a sensation. This impulse leads outwards into space so that movement becomes visible as physical action. Following the inner sensation, allowing the impulse to take the form of a physical action is active imagination in movement, just as following the visual image is active imagination in phantasy. It is here that the most dramatic psycho-physical connections are made to consciousness." (Whitehouse, 1963, cited in Chodorow, 1991: 28). I believe that this an excellent example of the id speaking.

I recalled my own experience of a movement therapy session:

"I would sit in the circle at the start of the session. We would talk about our feelings. Most of us were in a dark place, after all that's why we were there. Some were crying, withdrawn, heads down and anxious. I wasn't feeling too bad at this point. I was in a dance therapy group. My favourite place. The best session was when I was the only person who turned up. Just myself and the teacher. That day we just danced. I didn't want her to watch me. I felt self-conscious so she said we could dance alone. Occasionally I would look to see if she was watching me but she seemed to be in her own 'world' so I felt free to dance as if no one else was there. We often danced with chiffon scarves or ribbons on sticks. Sometimes I disliked the music but one piece I will always remember was a song with the lyrics 'I think I'd better leave right now' which spoke to me of not allowing oneself to get too close to someone in case they might leave. A risk not worth taking. A fear of attachment. A fear of abandonment and rejection. We would sit back in a circle at the end of the session and talk about how we felt. Most were

happy and far more positive. I was sad and sometimes cried. For me it was the end, time to return to reality. I had been allowed to let out my emotions through dance and this came out in my tears. Maybe they were tears of relief. Dance therapy had far more impact on me than any other therapeutic intervention at the day hospital. I was in my own world – taken away – just for a while.”

It is hard to imagine dance and emotion as separate entities for while emotions are expressed through dance, our emotions are also affected by dance. Emotions that we never knew existed can emerge and allow us to communicate feelings that we are unable to put into words. Martha Graham viewed dance psychoanalytically, stating that for her “the purpose of dance is to illuminate the life and struggles of the human experience, paying particular attention to humans’ inner nature.” (Giguere, 2014).

Video projection tests

I was able to interact with the frames by physically holding them but this meant that my movement was further restricted to the point that it lost its 'voice'. I painted the frames black and tried suspending them from the ceiling with fishing wire. They had a striking minimalist feel to them when hung against a white backdrop and by creating them in varied sizes, strung from different heights, attention was drawn to the spaces between them. I videoed my interaction within the space but even though I was careful the frames would sway and distracted from the movement. I tried anchoring them to floor with fishing wire but this made little difference and restricted me to performing at floor level. Having collated quite an amount of footage the concept of the frames as windows drew me to the idea of creating a split screen video in Adobe *Premiere Pro* with three separate videos running simultaneously. I had gathered an array of fabrics and tried stretching them on suspended frames with the aim of using them as a material on which to project my video. Muslin seemed to create the best effect as not only did it give the work an ethereal feel but also allowed a second image to filter through onto the rear wall. Technically, presenting the piece proved challenging as it was quite difficult to scale the images to fit exactly within each frame (Figure 34), but I was happy with the concept and could visualise it working well with refinement for my final piece.



Figure 34. Paula Musgrove, *Test*, 2018.

Photograph

The size of the space placed a restriction on the size of the frames. It also meant that front projection would be preferable to rear and that viewers wouldn't be able to walk around the work as shadows would be cast, although I quite liked the idea of physically interacting with the piece. When presenting my idea to my peers, I explained that each frame represented a part of the house and the human psyche but I was questioned as to whether there was a need for an explanation. Reflecting on this, I considered the potential danger of distracting the viewer from the aesthetics of the work as a whole by making them consider the purpose of each movement made in the separate windows. On a personal level, I felt a strong connection to the contents of each frame and was able to understand the reason behind many of the shapes, angles and gestures made from within the depths of my costume. I now come to the conclusion that the majority of the movements had emerged unconsciously and for this reason defied explanation. Once again, the idea of using sound arose in discussion. The use of a separate sound piece or perhaps a subtle tapping of the sticks which I had utilised as a prop in my video could be worth exploring. I experimented with different weights of muslin and considered other fabric like Tulle as well looking at different wood and metal for the frames but found myself returning to my original materials as they were the most effective and practical. I also tried projecting onto loosely draped muslin but the movement and wrinkling of the fabric subtracted something from the image, maintaining its ethereality but making it less distinct.

Paintings



Figure 35. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2018.
166x104cm. Acrylic, emulsion paint, charcoal, ink, Lycra and thread on fabric

I had amassed a selection of frames and fabrics that were surplus to my requirements but wanted to use them in some way. The largest of the frames measuring 166x 104cm was painted black and stretched with a white cotton sheet. Grabbing any materials that came to hand I began working unconsciously with no preconception of the final outcome. Working quickly with expressive, gestural movements I began to see a faceless figure emerge. Utilising charcoal, acrylic, ink, household emulsion, PVA, thread and purple Lycra I drew, painted, poured and stitched an abstracted form (Figure 35) that took on a somewhat spiritual manifestation which I felt might represent my internal spirituality.

I took the decision to make some further paintings, stretching calico over two smaller frames and primed them with gesso. Once again I found myself painting faceless figures (Figure 36) but this time re-visiting a style that I had developed many years ago after visiting an exhibition of twentieth-century Italian art at the Royal Academy where I was drawn to the mannequins of the artist, Giorgio de Chirico.



Figure 36. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2018.
65.5x54.5cm. Acrylic, charcoal, thread and fabric on canvas

I have a long-standing belief that my tendency to avoid painting faces, often merely hinting at features, is in response to being an adoptee, unable to put a face to my relatives but I now recognise that it has much

more to do with an inability to make tangible links with my own identity. The painting, despite its personal symbolism, felt too considered in its execution, lacking the unconscious expression of my first painting and consequently disconnecting it from my performance. I made a third painting (Figure 37) in which I attempted to capture the shapes and angles of dance creating a futurist style piece and, despite the absence of faces was a divergence from the previous paintings.



Figure 37. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2018.
100x100cm. Acrylic, emulsion, charcoal and thread on canvas

As well as using acrylic and emulsion paint, the addition of thread gave the suggestion of puppet strings, drawing links with Japanese Butoh dance where the body allows itself to be controlled by an external force.

Butoh

Leading on from my earlier research into Japanese Noh theatre, I became aware of the contemporary Japanese dance performance, Butoh. Also known as 'dance of darkness', Butoh arose about 50 years ago in post-atomic Japan. Performers usually wear white make-up and costumes are often designed to have a metamorphic effect although a varying degree nudity is commonplace. (Figure 38) Stylistically it possesses many similarities to Noh theatre particularly in its slowness although sudden, fast movements known as 'Kabe' can occasionally materialise in Butoh.

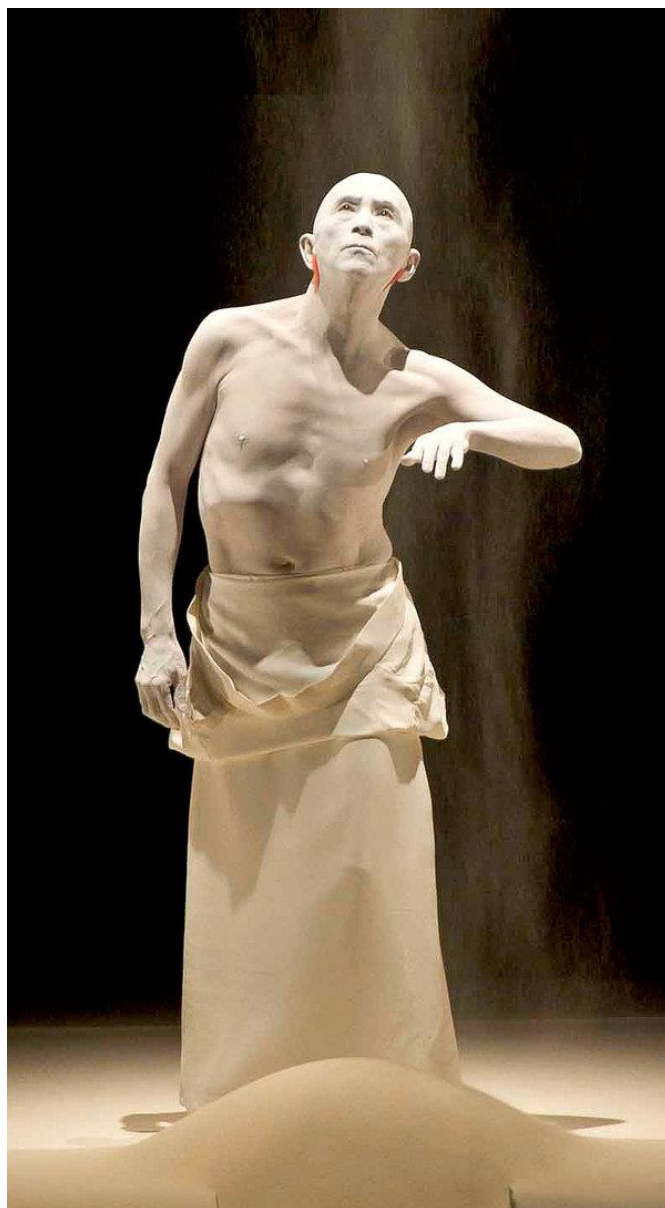


Figure 38. Ushio Amagatsu of the Butoh dance troupe Sankai Juku, 2015.
Photograph © Sankai Juku

“Movement alone does not become dance – the requirement for the dance is that one feeds such things as one’s own dreams, memories, and desires into the movement. For this reason, sometimes, not to move (to be in stillness) becomes also dance.” (Iwana, 2009). In Butoh, a performance will often begin in silence or with very soft use of sound so that the performers can focus their thoughts. This reminded me of John Cage’s inclusion of silent interludes in his music as a channel for contemplation and I hoped that silence and stillness was something I could utilise in my videos.

Slow movements offer an opportunity to delve deep into one’s self but by doing so can potentially lead one to encounter difficult thoughts and experiences that may have been repressed either consciously or unconsciously. It could be said that in order to reach the light we have to find our way through the darkness first. Butoh calls for the dancer to empty the mind and become free by allowing themselves to work their way into a meditative, trance-like state, enabling inner feelings and memories to be expressed in their movements. The Butoh dancer, Satiji, formerly known as Gio Dust said: “Our body has a lot of memories and it wants to perform them” (Kapoor, 2016). She tries to dissociate herself from her surroundings and go into herself stating “Butoh, for me, is an alternative way of communication. I communicate those emotions for which I’m short of words.” It could be said that Butoh is a form of movement therapy although one might not be able to fully experience their unconscious thoughts if in a trance-like state. With no specific choreography, Butoh dance can be hard to define. Movements can be grotesque in comparison to the beauty of most dance styles. For me, there is much beauty to it and this thought is shared by the dance teacher and writer, Susanne Daeppen (2009) who believes that “All dancers can be described as ‘beautiful’ when body, soul and mind move together in resonance.”

Further video experimentation

Inspired by Butoh dance I wanted to draw on some of its ideas and incorporate them into my practice. With this in mind, I focused on filming a new selection of videos that could be dissected and restructured to form a final piece for the exhibition. I created some more costumes experimenting with size and stitching. The stretch of the Lycra warranted a secure fastening like a zig-zag stitch but this reinforcement proved a hindrance, making it difficult to point the toes. I tried constructing a larger sized costume but the fabric was too slack and didn't allow the body's angles to be accentuated leading me to revert to my initial design. While working with the Lycra I was struck by my inclination towards the colour purple. Was there a reason for my choice and did my decision affect the costume's aesthetics? On a literal level, I considered other colours as either being too garish, cold, light or dark. White fabric might disappear into the background and black might diminish the shapes and movements of the body in motion. I had initially used red which despite being dramatic was perhaps too harsh or stimulating. Purple brings together the energy of red and the calm of blue to create a spiritually balanced colour. Edith Anderson Feisner (2006: 123) states that the colour "was originally made from rare Mediterranean snail, hence cloth dyed purple was expensive and could only be afforded by priests and the aristocracy." In addition to its links with luxury and royalty, it is said to symbolise spirituality, mystery, creativity and offers a calming influence on the mind. Negatively, purple is associated with death and mourning and when reflecting on my work I realised that Martha Graham had worn purple in her dance, *Lamentation*, perhaps consciously using the colour to convey grief. On my part, the colour choice made me aware of another unconscious connection between mine and Graham's practice.

I filmed over a number of sessions, experiencing difficulties with costume size, lighting and accurate placement of my body within the camera frame. It was also necessary to spend a number of hours preparing the studio space so that the final film would have a clean, unobtrusive backdrop. Despite wanting much of my movement to evolve unconsciously, I was also mindful that in the absence of choreography there was a need to question how I wanted my dance to be and for this reason, it was useful to compile a set of guidelines incorporating elements of my research:

- Acknowledgement of space.
- Slow movements with periods of stillness.
- Occasional sudden movements.
- Swaying, meditative rocking to encourage a trance-like state. Vibrations.
- Puppet with arms on hinges and springy joints. Head up.
- Movements can be ugly and unconventional.
- Expression of deepest emotions.

Editing

I had accumulated a large amount of video footage so my next step was to select the clips that I wanted to incorporate into my final film and piece them together using the video editing software, Adobe *Premiere Pro*. In order to select the clips I wanted to use I drew up a shortlist giving consideration to:

- The connection between the clip and the superego, ego and id. Allocation of the selected clips to their appropriate frame.
- The incorporation of props. Use of the flag for the superego. Windows for the Id.
- Size of frames and orientation.
- Static image at intervals to draw attention to 'stillness' in dance.

I have previously discussed the way in which I chose to use the frames in my earlier experiments to represent windows, an idea I derived from Bachelard's exploration into the body as a metaphor for a house where he likened the attic to our superego, the main structure to our ego and the cellar to our id (Bachelard, 1958). By allocating a different part of the psyche to each frame, or window, I was then able to sort through my video footage and decide which parts of my dance best depicted each of the three parts. Ideally, the frames would have been aligned in a vertical arrangement from the superego down to

the id but limited space in which to project the video meant that they would have to be quite small in order to meet my requirements so I decided to lay them out in the same way as I had previously. On the right-hand side, I chose to have two frames of similar size, the upper depicting the superego and the lower, the id. To the left, as before, was a single but larger frame, vertical in orientation, on which to project my portrayal of the ego. When looking through all my videos it was necessary to select clips with suitable aspect ratios but the personal connection between my movements and each part of the psyche was my prime concern. (Figure 39)



Figure 39. Paula Musgrove, *Within.Out*, 2018.
Video still

I have attempted to describe some of my selected clips:

Superego: Conscience, the parental voice and our ideal self

In this frame I begin by kneeling tall then stretching back, straining against the costume to make beautiful shapes, perhaps seeking perfection, craving the imaginary picture of how I believe I should be. On a personal level, it is this parental voice and a need to be the best that keeps me restricted in my everyday

life. In another clip I am waving a flag, an action that I previously described as feeling like a dance of victory or the act of reaching the top of a mountain, the place where I would, or maybe feel I should be. Finally, the clip in which I am tapping two sticks together speaks to me of order, of the ideals that we are taught.

(Figure 40)



Figure 40. Paula Musgrove, *Superego*, 2018.
Video still

Ego: Our conscious mind

I both sit and stand in this frame, hovering between the superego and the id, taking time to pause and consider where I am. I have included periods of stillness, allowing me space to get in touch with my unconscious. The static image also affords the viewer an opportunity to focus on the aesthetics of the costume. (Figure 41)



Figure 41. Paula Musgrove, *Ego*, 2018.
Video still

Id: Our passions and both conscious but predominantly unconscious parts

Remaining in a seated position I navigate my way around a window frame, attempting to find a way through, unconscious thoughts bubbling up. Another clip finds me holding a stick and reaching up before it comes down, perhaps symbolising a suppression of feelings. In this frame, there is a clip where my arms flop like a puppet, reminiscent of being controlled, maybe a stifling of the unconscious mind. (Figure 42)



Figure 42. Paula Musgrove, *Id*, 2018.
Video still

Having formerly addressed the fact that much of my dance emerged from the unconscious, it proved difficult to understand or categorize all of my movements. They could be interpreted in a number of ways and what might be comprehensible to me may not be apparent to the viewer. One might argue whether it is actually necessary for the viewer to decipher the individual movements as if attempting to understand a new language, or should the piece be comprehended and appreciated simply for its sense of common embodiment? I then spent a number of hours editing and refining my chosen clips in order to produce

Within.Out (Figure 43), the final video that would be used in the end of year exhibition. With this complete, my next step was to consider the integration of sound.



Figure 43. Paula Musgrove, *Within.Out*, 2018.
Video still

The full video can be viewed on the memory card at the end of this text (Appendix 1) or at:
<https://vimeo.com/281433931>

Sound

If I was going to incorporate sound into my piece, then I would want it to be minimalist and work with my dance, not against it. I began recording sounds and inspired by the work of John Cage such as *Water Walk* (1960), I looked for household and unconventional objects like a printing press and the ‘ping’ of blue tack on a tin lid in addition to maintaining experimentation with my props while dancing. Unfortunately, I think that the spiritual feel of my costume and dance warranted a more ambient sound, something that my disjointed ‘found’ sounds were unable to offer the piece. I began to explore avant-garde sound and was

drawn to the practice of the Wandelweiser collective, a group of composers founded in 1992. Working on the edge of audibility they have an “interest in slow music, quiet music, spare music, fragile music.” (Ross, 2016) Inspired by John Cage’s groundbreaking piece, *4’33”* (1952), and the soft dynamic compositions of the American composer Morton Feldman, sound artists and composers including Jurg Frey, Laurence Crane, and Manfred Werder create an ambient sound that could be described as both beautiful yet dark.

I recorded myself while performing, placing a digital voice recorder both within and outside of my costume. The sound inside the Lycra produced a discordant mix due to the microphone’s interaction with the fabric whereas when placed externally the recorder was able to capture the sounds of the performance, in particular, my breathing. By focusing on the breath I was able to draw parallels with Martha Graham’s technique of contraction and release in addition to the meditative nature of Butoh dance. I used the audio editor, *Audacity* to process my sound and add effects, applying ‘*Paulstretch*’, a time stretch tool named after its creator Paul Nasca, to slow down and stretch out the audio. In addition to this, I added ‘*Reverb*’ which gave the piece a slight echo. Despite being happy with the atmospheric tone of the edited recording I began to question the need for an additional element and it was while wrangling with this idea that the words ‘I am beautiful’ unconsciously came into my head. Unable to erase the words from my mind I decided to add them sparingly to my piece and applied an echo. Reflecting on my use of repetitive, minimal text I was reminded of how repetition is often a feature of music in Butoh dance. The ethnomusicologist, Judith Becker states that repeatable music helps to “instigate, accompany and/or maintain the trance state and ritual performance process” (Becker, 2004, cited in Sakamoto, 2009). The words, ‘I am beautiful’ were very personal. I speak of being beautiful although this feeling is absent in reality, at least on the exterior. I want to be seen as beautiful yet I am hiding away within the costume so as to be invisible. I am reaching up towards the light from the basement- the id, to the attic -the superego, in an attempt to be beautiful, perfect and acceptable. The sound was added to the 6 minute 20 second video (Figure 43) and together they would be played on continuous loop for the duration of the exhibition.

Exhibition space

I had begun to consider the logistics of performing live at the degree show to enable viewers to fully appreciate the powerful performative qualities of the costume. If space allowed my ideal scenario would be to perform at a low level, perhaps seated to the side of my video installation so as not to mask the images on the frames with my body but at the same time allow the viewer room to acknowledge the interrelationship between the performance and the video. My initial idea was to hang a single lightbulb from the ceiling and move beneath its beam. This would take up very little room and could be used as little or as often as required. The initial draft of the exhibition layout granted me a suitable space alongside my work so I began experimenting with lighting, discovering a battery operated pendant bulb that could be switched on and off simply by pulling on the cord. Unfortunately, the light was far too dim to illuminate my figure and after much testing, I rejected the idea for a small torch with an adjustable beam that could be suspended with invisible thread. I also considered the idea of leaving my costume on the floor or hanging it on a hook after performing to act as a form of documentation. I requested an open fronted space for the exhibition measuring 2.4m cubed. Although I was in a dark room, it was important for me to mask off as much light pollution as possible in order for my projection to be clear. To do this, I stretched a black fabric sheet over the top of the space and taped down all window and door blinds that were in close proximity. I chose to stand my projector on a plinth, covering it with an open-fronted box for concealment and protection from knocks. Cutting a section out of the bottom of the plinth I was able to hide the sub-woofer and volume controller from my speaker system and keep the cables tidy as I wanted the viewers' attention to be drawn to the frames. Initially, I projected the video onto the rear wall, measuring the images and their relative positions. Using these measurements I was able to build three frames and stretch them with muslin before suspending them from a wooden beam above my space to align with the positions projected onto them. Precision was crucial and it took approximately three hours to suspend the frames.

It had been suggested that I might consider showing one or more of my paintings in addition to my video although space restrictions initially deemed this unlikely, but due to a late change in the exhibition layout

plan in which my peer's adjacent space was moved back, a space became available to both perform within and hang a painting. I felt quite attached to my large abstracted piece, sensing a correlation between the faceless figure and myself. Measuring 166cm x 104cm the painting took up much of a 243cm x 122cm display board but was lightweight and easy to hang. I chose to illuminate it with a single bright white LED spotlight. A warmer white bulb would have a detrimental effect on the colours, particularly the purple, and it was important for me to retain its spirituality. My decision to hang the painting provoked some debate and it was suggested that the painting felt detached from my video but for me the unconsciously executed figure was a continuation of my performance practice, tying in with ideas that I had been exploring. I also hoped that by performing alongside the painting it would enable both myself and the audience to experience a connection. It was becoming increasingly apparent to me that the video installation, painting and live performance fed off each other's emotional energy, and by exhibiting them together I could try to convey this process.

Performing at the Private View

In 2016, I performed a piece titled *Running to catch a train* at the private view of the Writtle Art and Design degree show. (Figure 44)

The full performance can be viewed at <http://www.dvblog.org/>



Figure 44. Paula Musgrove, *Running to catch a train*, 2016.
Video still. Video: Yasmin Cox

Sound dominated the performance with my recollection of a recurring dream in which I am frequently late and running to catch a train but while the audio played, I painted images and text related to my feelings then took unpredictable monoprints from them. This was the first time I had performed in front of a large audience and the incalculable nature of the piece exposed me to potential ridicule. I was very nervous and had to 'gather myself' for half an hour to get my mind and body 'in the zone'. In stark contrast I felt quite relaxed and excited prior to performing at the MA show. I wondered if this was due to being hidden in the costume which was quite likely when I acknowledged that the only aspect of the performance that concerned me was the point at which I would have to emerge from the fabric and be

‘seen’! Despite my initial plan to dance for long unannounced periods, it soon became apparent that people wanted to see a ‘performance’ and know the time at which it would be happening. I was conscious of the crowd watching me, able to see their shadows through the Lycra, and sensed that they were awaiting an ending to the performance. They needed a point at which they could leave without feeling uncomfortable to depart and they wanted a cue to applaud. On reflection, the piece felt more dramatic when performed for shorter periods with a sense of tension in the room. From a negative viewpoint, the reduction in performance time meant that I was unable to get myself into a meditative state as I had initially planned. Despite an absence of pre-planning or practice, I still found myself creating shapes and movements that I had made when filming. There were moments when I wondered how I would get into a position based on the situation I currently found myself. I didn’t want to slip or for my movements to appear awkward. I aimed to make the most out of the costume, to express myself. At some points I heard myself exhaling, expelling my innermost energy and straining my body against the stretch of the fabric.

Two short extracts of the performance can be viewed on the memory card at the end of this text (Appendix 1) or at:

<https://vimeo.com/320814472>

<https://vimeo.com/326155466>

I was unconsciously drawn to the spotlight above my painting, reaching up to the beam and effectively ‘coming out of the darkness’. (Figure 45)

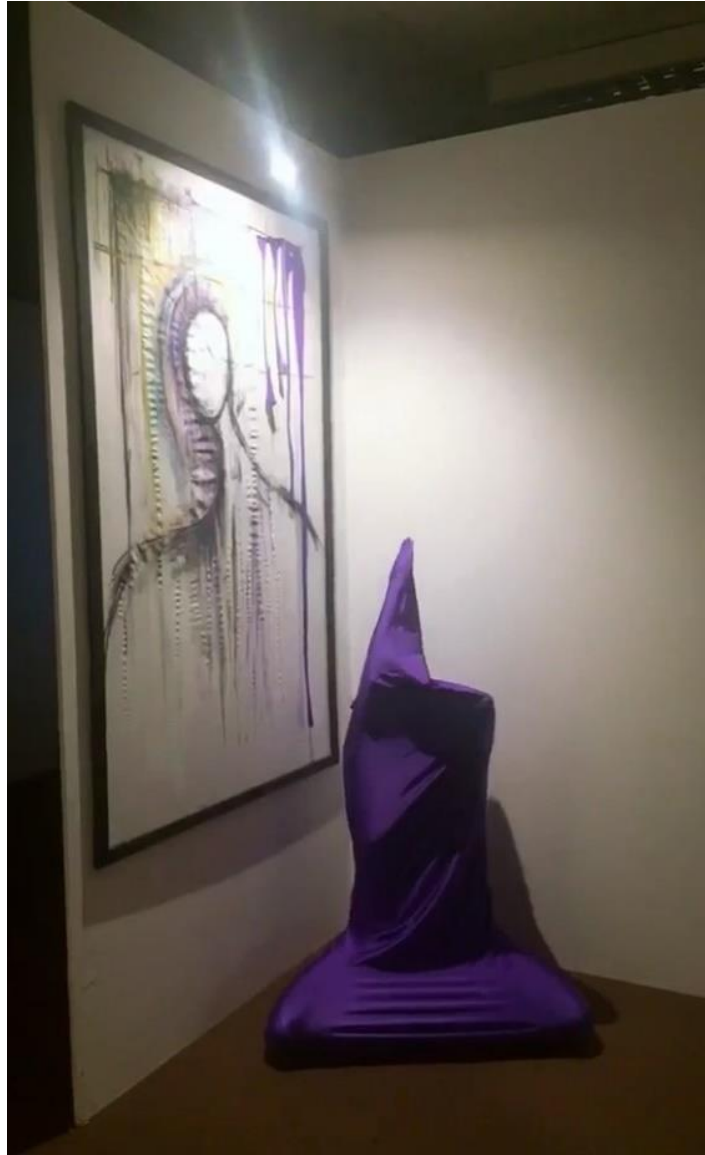


Figure 45. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2018.
Performance still.
Video: Suyeon Joung

I felt a strong connection between myself and the painting, perhaps an extension of the image or a mirroring of its expressive emotion? The ambient recorded sound of breathing from my video also aided my ability to stretch out and give a part of my inner self. Climbing out of the costume was difficult to execute seamlessly but once out I was unable to make eye contact with the audience. In my mind I was still inside my costume, continuing to perform. Slowly standing up I allowed the fabric to slip to the floor before walking across the room and disappearing behind the exhibition space to change. My costume was

left on the floor for the duration of the exhibition as documentation of my dance, and despite the bodily absence, I hoped that it would offer a sense that a performance had taken place. (Figure 46)



Figure 46. Paula Musgrove, *Untitled*, 2018.
Photograph

Barthes (2013: 153) stated “It is not possible to conceive a garment without the body” but the scenographer and costume designer Sofia Pantouvaki believes that costume is all about the body and relates physically to the performer's body. She explores ways in which costume can be exhibited after a performance and still convey performativity. Setting herself a curatorial challenge she views “the exhibition as another type of performance: as a new performance in which the body of the performer does not participate in a conventional way.”(Pantouvaki, 2014: 103)

Reflections on the exhibition

My overriding concern was that I wouldn't be able to execute the technicalities of my piece and that I would have difficulty aligning the videos with the suspended frames. Another worry was that the frames were too small but due to the restricted exhibition space, I was unable to make them any bigger. They needed to have space between them, allowing them to be seen as windows and on reflection they worked well. (Figures 47 & 48) I had hoped for flawless alignment but had to allow for some imperfection otherwise the projection would have bled over the frame rather than sitting within it. Ideally, the video would have been more defined if the room had been darker but light pollution from peers' work and space limitations prevented this.

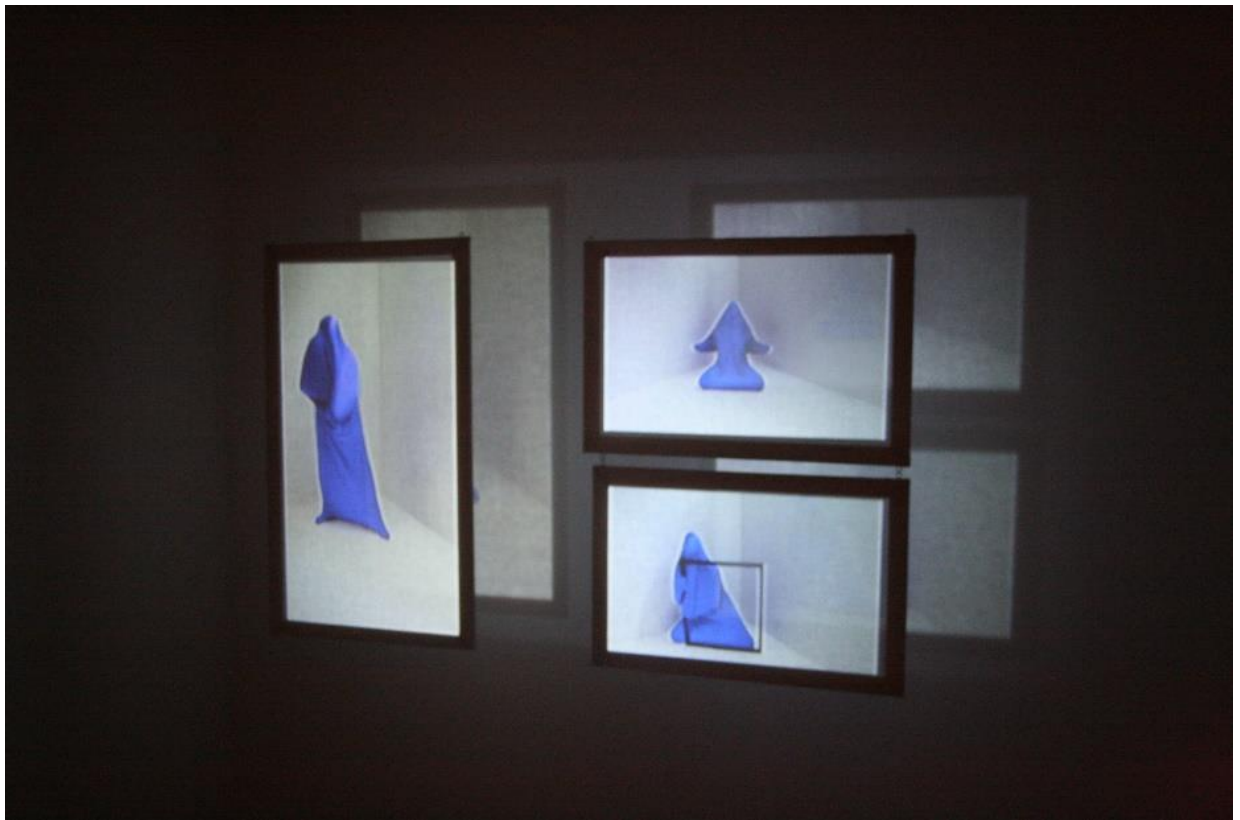


Figure 47. Paula Musgrove, *Within.Out*, 2018.
Video installation. Photograph

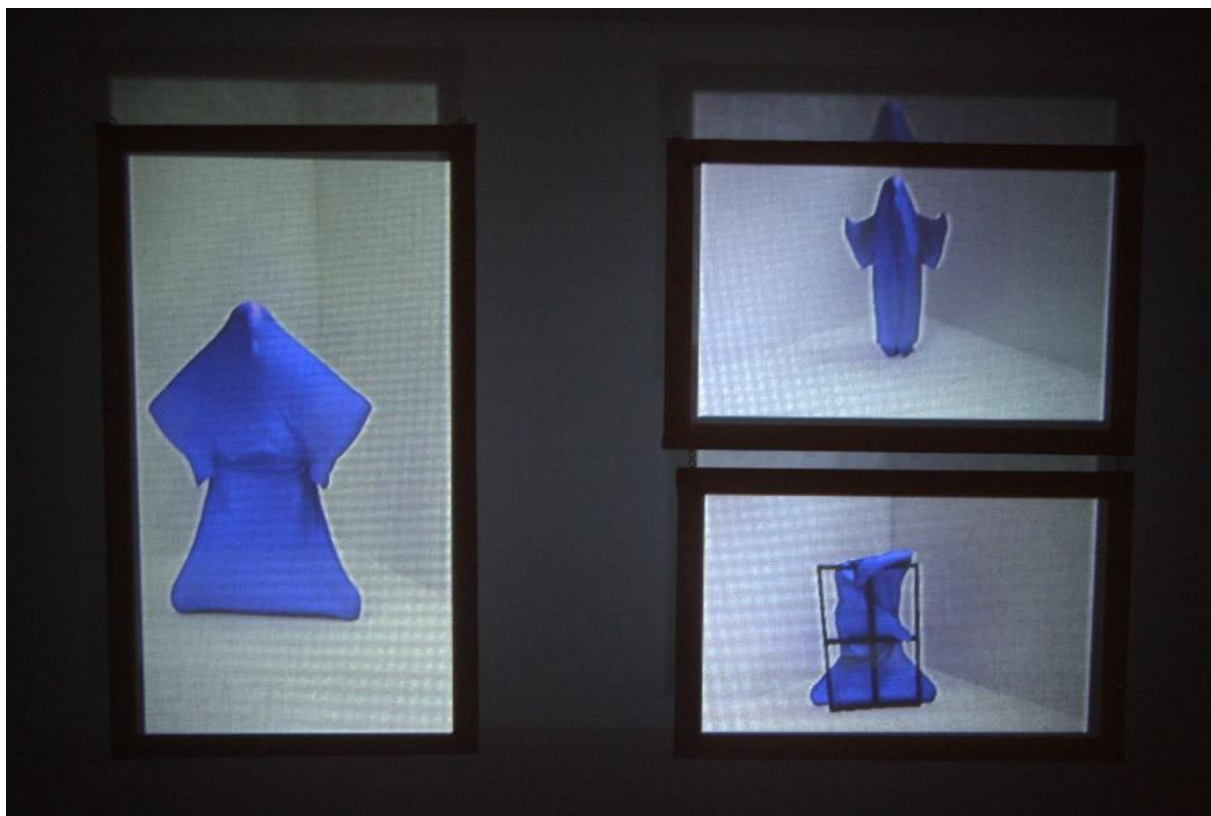


Figure 48. Paula Musgrove, *Within.Out*, 2018.
Video installation. Photograph

A short extract of the video installation can be viewed on the memory card at the end of this text (Appendix 1) or at:

<https://vimeo.com/273201265>

In my view the ambient sound was effective and although the piece could have worked without it I feel that it drew spectators in and added a dark, richer level to the piece. As a whole I feel the piece was beautiful in its conception, stillness, movement and minimalism. It had been suggested that I paint the rear wall black to avoid the video being projected through the muslin but I preferred the echoed, ethereal image. The plinth worked well, withstanding any knocks and the box covering the projector was effective in hiding all the technical equipment whilst being unobtrusive.

My work was well received but at times it was hard to explain some of the concepts conveyed in the dance as much of its content came from the unconscious and wasn't choreographed. Previously in this paper, I questioned the need for an explanation and although on a personal level I can make sense of many of my movements, the depths from which they emerge transcends translation into words. During one dialogue I was asked, as I had been prior to the exhibition if the painting was required, but in this case, the viewer was interested in how it worked together with the performance. I explained that the painting came from the unconscious, 'out of the darkness'. The presence of the spotlight above the piece created a desire to reach up towards the light during my performance, forging a connection with the painting. I described the way in which the painting functioned as an extension of the dance, acting as part of the set, not only during the performance but also as a backdrop for the empty costume afterwards. While writing this I think there is a progression from not being seen at all in the costume and the struggle within the costume to the painting, of beginning to be seen but not wholly.

Conclusion

“Dance is a realization of one’s dream through the body” (Iwana, 2009).

I began this text with the intention of exploring the way in which a performer’s body can exude a presence from within a costume despite being invisible to the viewer. The role of costume has been central to my research, and my enquiries into both Lōie Fuller and Martha Graham’s use of costume, have enabled me to gain an understanding of both its physical and psychological potential, and carry over this understanding into my practice. I have come to appreciate the metamorphic power of costume in which one has the opportunity to adopt a new identity. When performing I was able to be seen without my face being visible, affording me a greater degree of confidence, although the somewhat unforgiving texture of the Lycra meant that I could never truly hide. While it might be thought that costume generally supports performance and indeed can make or break one, I have come to the conclusion through my practical and theoretical enquiry that it can, in fact, become a *performance in its own right*. It was important for me to try and articulate my feelings from within the costume, although, from the outset, it was clear that much came from my unconscious, a theme that was to become increasingly apparent throughout my research. This enabled me to develop both personally and, consequentially, as an artist. While being aware of the movements I was making, as I was able to recall and document my feelings, I was also unsure where these movements came from. The dancer and choreographer Akram Khan states “the body is a sponge. It absorbs any information that you give it and has a way of making decisions for itself, not necessarily consciously.” (Ellis, 2004). Despite taking dancing lessons in the past, I had until now, considered myself to be a non-dancer but Khan believes that “the mind and body are completely connected” and for the undisciplined dancer who isn’t aware of this, a greater level of honesty is conveyed in their movements. Through my studies, I am now of the opinion that everyone is a dancer, for movement comes from deep within us. One of the most important things I discovered, from both my investigation into Japanese Butoh dance and from viewing the video footage of my own practice, is that the most awkward of movements, or even complete stillness can be perceived as beautiful when emerging from the psyche. It was my unconscious decision to make the costume in the size that I did and by pushing against the fabric I was

able to use the costume as a way of freeing myself from an internal prison. Upon reflection of both my past practice and recent work within the restraints of the costume, I have come to the conclusion that restriction can be both beneficial and debilitating. Although personal experiences have restricted me from living life to the full, they have also helped to fuel my practice. Through working within the confinements of the tension of the Lycra costume, I have had to challenge myself both physically and mentally which in turn has led me to reflect on the conscious and unconscious parts of my mind.

I have addressed ideas around authorship and re-performance after my research threw up similarities between my costume and dance experimentation and that of Martha Graham's iconic dance, *Lamentation*, although I have now come to the realisation that in addition to a number of differences between our work, and my belief that re-performance has its value, I had formed an unconscious relationship with Graham's practice.

It can take many years to understand the intricacies of Japanese Noh theatre but through my reading, I have been able to form some appreciation of its main elements and translate them into my work. By researching the unadorned set of Noh with its mere suggestion of realism, I have been able to address the impact of utilising space modestly. Additionally, I am now able to recognize that slow movements like those used in Noh to carry a narrative, combined with the minimal use of space and props, invite the viewer to apply their imagination and pay attention. Based upon the positive feedback I received, I believe that I successfully incorporated these into my video installation and performance.

I have been able to build upon my previously limited knowledge of video editing, and although I found it technically demanding, was able to create a video installation that drew the viewer in, aiming to challenge their perceptions and interpretations of the work. If I was afforded the opportunity to show the work again I would exhibit it in a larger, darker space, making the frames bigger and allowing the images to be clearer. To bring another layer to my video I investigated the use of sound and while I am still of the belief that dance can exist without its presence and that silence has the ability to generate its own music, I was able to create an ambient piece that incorporated several elements of my research such as Martha

Graham's use of the breath and the slow, meditative nature of Butoh and Noh theatre. On reflection I now believe that the sound's success was due largely to the inclusion of my own voice, acting as a vehicle through which to express my innermost thoughts.

When I initially began to explore the physical and psychological potential of costume I was unaware of how deeply I could become connected to it. I have addressed the way in which I translated my unconscious feelings into an abstracted painting of a figure, and how the painting's presence in the exhibition sparked some debate. I maintain that the painting acted as a logical and necessary continuation of the work, emerging from the emotions that the costume had aroused. Similarly, I believe that by performing alongside the painting I was able to establish a connection which, although difficult to verbalise, allowed the image to become an extension of my performance. It has become clear to me through my research that the emotions expressed in the video installation, painting and performance fed off one another, inexorably linked by the unconscious. I am now able to recognise that it is not always possible to describe or understand one's actions when they come from the unconscious and attempting to explain my practice has been a challenge, leading me to question the level of justification required when entering into a dialogue surrounding my work.

My practice has given light to a nexus between video, performance, painting and sound, opening up possibilities for deeper enquiry. Since the exhibition, I have maintained a connection with the faceless figure through drawings and preliminary paintings which I plan to develop further. Moving forward I hope to engage in further study as there is so much more I want to research. I am particularly interested in investigating the possibilities of forging both conscious and unconscious connections between paintings and performance. It is my belief that through both the practical and theoretical outcomes of my research I have matured as an artist, learning to trust in my practice and develop the confidence to exhibit work that I can tangibly connect with. The fabric of my costume is slowly loosening.

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Figure 23. artnet, 2018. Joan Jonas. *Art in the Twenty-First Century*. Season 7 episode, *Fiction*, 2014. © Art21, Inc. 2014. [Online] Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/joan-jonas-art21-1323164> [Accessed 26th February 2019]

Figure 25. Beckett, S.J, c.1900. Löie Fuller. *Löie Fuller Dancing*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/287807> [Accessed 26th February 2019]

Figure 26. Moselsio, H., c.1930. Martha Graham. *Lamentation, No. 16*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200154236.0> [Accessed 26th February 2019]

Figure 27. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Untitled*. Silver fabric and doweling.

Figure 28. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Untitled*. Video still.

Figure 29. Isamu Noguchi, 1935. *Frontier*. © The Noguchi Museum. [Online] Available at: <https://www.noguchi.org/comment/reply/538> [Accessed 26th February 2019]

Figure 30. MATCHA, 2018. *Noh Theatre – Stories About How To Stay Human In Times Of War. Noh 'Lady Aoi'*. Photograph ©Yoshihiro Maejima. MATCHA [Online] Available at: <https://matcha-jp.com/en/5524> [Accessed 26th February 2019]

Figure 31. Lee, J., 2014. The National Noh Theatre. Photograph. [Online] Available at: <https://fr.japantravel.com/tokyo/a-day-at-the-national-noh-theater/13205> [Accessed 26th February 2019]

Figure 32. Musgrove, P., 2017. *Untitled*. Rope and Lycra.

Figure 33. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Untitled*. Video still.

Figure 34. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Test*.

Figure 35. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Untitled*.

Figure 36. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Untitled*.

Figure 37. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Untitled*.

Figure 38. The New York Times, 2015. Bringing Butoh to New York. Ushio Amagatsu of the Butoh dance troupe Sankai Juku. © Sankai Juku. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/arts/dance/bringing-butoh-to-new-york.html> [Accessed 26th February 2019]

Figure 39. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Within.Out*. Video still.

Figure 40. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Superego*. Video still.

Figure 41. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Ego*. Video still.

Figure 42. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Id*. Video still.

Figure 43. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Within.Out*. Video still.

Figure 44. Musgrove, P., 2016. *Running to catch a train*. Video still. Video: Yasmin Cox.

Figure 45. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Untitled*. Performance still. Video: Suyeon Joung.

Figure 46. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Untitled*.

Figure 47. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Within.Out*.

Figure 48. Musgrove, P., 2018. *Within.Out*.

Appendices

Appendix 1. List of video files on attached memory card

Located inside rear cover

1-Within.Out.mp4

Within.Out - Full video with audio (6min 20sec)

Video: Paula Musgrove

2-InstallationExtract-Within.Out.mp4

Short (55sec) video extract of exhibition installation. May 2018

Video: Paula Musgrove

3-PrivateView1.mp4

Short (20 sec) video extract (with audio) of performance at exhibition private view. May 2018

Video: Suyeon Joung

4-PrivateView2.mp4

Short (1min 7sec) video extract (without audio) of performance at exhibition private view. May 2018

Video: Liam McGuinness

5-Untitled-EarlyVideo.mp4

Video (1min 39sec) *Untitled* - Early experimental video (without audio)

Video: Paula Musgrove