

‘Revealing a Cover Star’

Reflections on *Becoming a Cover Star*

James Woolley

I revealed the social historian.

‘To enter that place where the past lives, where ink on parchment can be made to *speak*, still remains the social historian’s dream.’

Carolyn Steedman (2001)



Reinterpretation of Franko B's *I'm Not Your Babe*, memory donated by Kira O'Reilly

Abstract

Becoming a Cover Star was an MA Practice-as-Research dissertation performance, curated, created and performed by James Woolley, in September 2010. This critical reflection aims to interrogate Woolley's approach in the realisation of his task, his presentation of the live performance, his methods of creating material and his reflections on the future manifestation of the live performance.

Becoming a Cover Star allowed me to explore the notion of curatorship and archival practice, through the medium of performance. As a young scholar and performance maker I had identified specific areas that I wished to address through the making of performance. In my previous endeavours my practice has concerned itself with: the body in performance, performance documentation, autobiography, installation art and queer identities. However, I wanted this process to allow new interests to be explored and consolidated. Over the period of seventeen weeks I attempted to address issues of archival practice, participatory methods for making performance, and the abolishment of a linear dramaturgical structure. This culminated in the presentation of *Becoming a Cover Star*.

The performance drew on donations from practicing artists, academics and students of the performance discipline as I asked them for their most memorable moment of performance (please refer to appendix 1 for the original call for donations). From these donations I created a performance based on re-interpretations of the moments, and their manifestation in a living performance archive.

'In principle, the work of art has always been reproducible. What man has made, man has
always been able to make again.'

Walter Benjamin (1936)

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Revealing a Cover Star: Reflections on *Becoming a Cover Star*

This critical reflective dissertation aims to comment on the practical realisation of the project *Becoming a Cover Star*, performed in September 2010. The practical element was created through an intense laboratory period of five months. This piece of writing offers to reflect critically on the performance, the process, and the aftermath. This is by no means a definitive inclusion, due to the amount of reflections that could be possible. I do intend to focus this writing on one particular area of the practical dissertation. *Revealing a Cover Star* reveals numerous revelations that became apparent on the reflection of my performance and process.

The title of the performance was inspired by Marina Abramović's performance *7 Easy Pieces* (performed at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, 9th- 15th November 2005). In this performance Abramović re-enacted seminal performances of the 1960s and 1970s. Sandra Umathum states that 'the artist [Abramović] will interpret earlier performances by her colleagues "as one would a musical score."' In other words, Abramović will stage a sort of homage-like replay: six cover versions of classics from the performance art hit parade.' (2007: 47) The transcendence of the 'cover star' from popular culture into the performance discourse is particularly interesting, and it was my quest that through this project I would become a 'cover star'.

This reflective dissertation aims to discuss and interrogate these reflections, before quantifying the performance as practice-as-research in the scholarly discourse. Through the making process I found the contention between theoretical knowledge and artistic practice problematic. At times I found that the artistic practice was compromised by the theoretical

investment and legitimacy that the project had to contain. In hindsight what was apparent was the level of interrogation that had to be present in the manifestation of the work. I began the process questioning whether to incorporate theory and practice simultaneously, and equally throughout the making of the project. I decided to acknowledge the fact that these different categorisations could be more fluid, enabling them to influence each other at different points in the process. As I began to walk, with trepidation, across the tightrope of performance making, interesting possibilities began to present themselves; those which would shape the body of work, and those which would shape my future practice.

Reveal: To display, show, make clear or visible, exhibit.

To reference a seemingly unrelated word would seem somewhat unusual. Throughout the performance making process reveal did not make its presence be known. It is only upon reflection that this word has revealed itself.

I revealed.

I revealed the self.

I revealed the flesh.

I revealed the performance.

I revealed the archive.

I revealed the surprising site-specificity.

I revealed the representation, of the representation, of the representation.

I revealed the memories.

I revealed the authorship.

I revealed the artist.

I revealed the future.

The future may seem an odd place to critically reflect, as reflection itself is the act of looking to the past, to what has taken place. The future is inextricably linked to my reflections. Historian Carolyn Steedman says ‘[t]he Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation of the past.’ (2001: 68). It may appear unusual to refer to *Becoming a Cover Star* as an archive, as its primary focus was that of live performance. I intend to view *Becoming a Cover Star* through the metaphor of the archive, as the archive itself is concerned with the notion of origins, which was not at stake in the conception and execution of this performance.

In this case the documentations of the past were the scribed memories that were donated (please refer to appendix 3 for the donated memories). Jacques Derrida argues that ‘the archive should call into question the coming of the future.’ (1998: 33). But indeed, did *Becoming a Cover Star* call into question the coming of the future? Perhaps not *the* future, but it certainly called into question the future of my practice.

On the role of the archivist S. Muller, J.A. Feith and R. Fruin, in Posner, note that they deal ‘with a body of archives just as a palaeontologist deals with the bones of a prehistoric animal; he tries from these bones to flesh out the skeleton.’ (1972: 8) The palaeontologist was the role that I took in the making of this performance. I was donated the memories (the bones), and as curator, archivist, conceptualiser, dramaturg, scenographer and performer I was able to flesh out the skeleton into the live manifestation of *Becoming a Cover Star*.

Performativity is at stake in the archive, and a multi-faceted performativity was revealed through *Becoming a Cover Star*. Performativity has revealed itself to the academy through Judith Butler’s gender bending account of the performativity of gender, and J. L. Austin’s speech act theory. In understanding the notion of performativity, and applying it to

Becoming a Cover Star, it would be permissible to say that the performance was pre-determined. The live events that people donated had to have occurred in the past in order for them to enter into the archive. The final manifestation of *Becoming a Cover Star* was realised through the potentialities that these memories offered. As Butler indicates, performativity ‘consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer.’ (1993: 234) In *Becoming a Cover Star*, the ‘performer’, which Butler refers to, could relate to the body of work or my individual performance in the work, and it was this ‘performer’ that was preceded, constrained, and exceeded by the donated memories.

Jacques Derrida defines the archons (the guards and governors of the archive) as those who ‘ensure the physical security of what is deposited [...] they have the right to interpret the archives.’ (1998: 2) With reference to *Becoming a Cover Star*, it was me who had the power of the archive, who had the control, who had the right to interpret the memories that were offered. This responsibility was not only as performer, but as curator, and this was the role that I, as a performer, developed in the live execution of the event.

As an aside it would be fruitful for me to discuss how I translated the shards of donated memories into their manifestation into the live event of *Becoming a Cover Star*. Using the written donations I attempted to explore the potentialities of the proposed memory. Jill Greenhalgh’s donation focused on Pina Bausch’s *Palermo Palermo* (1989). I took the small detail at the end of the memory ‘High heels and all’ to become the focus of the reinterpretation. In the laboratory of Rehearsal Room 3, the reinterpretation of the event manifested itself as follows:



Figure 1: Experimental reinterpretation of Pina Bausch's *Pallermo Pallermo*, memory donated by Jill Greenhalgh

The final manifestation of this reinterpretation in the live performance of *Becoming a Cover Star* was very different:



Figure 2: Reinterpretation of Pina Bausch's *Pallermo Pallermo*, memory donated by Jill Greenhalgh

The contrast between the two images highlights the stages and rigorous experimentation that the donated memories went through (please refer to appendix 2 for further photographic documentation). In some cases there was only one sentence of the donation that I would focus on, and the realisation of the material could only be explored, refined and consolidated through this experimental process. This translation, or transmuting, of the shards of the donated texts meant that they were transformed into something other, bearing traces of the original event.

In reference to performance and documentation discourse Philip Auslander offers interesting observations regarding the performativity of performance documentation. Auslander argues that '[t]he connection between performance and documentation is thus thought to be ontological, with the event preceding and authorizing its documentation.' (2006:1) Auslander notes that the performance documentation cannot exist without the performance having taken place. The relationship between performance and performance documentation is performative. This is because the performance precedes, constrains, and exceeds the performance of documenting. On reflection, it is interesting to note that *Becoming a Cover Star* interrupts this ontological relationship, as the written memories were the documentations of original performances, as seen by those who donated. Ernst Posner acknowledges the important role that writing has played in the creation of the archive as he states that 'writing was invented to make past experiences available for future reference.' (1972: vii) and this is what occurred in the case of *Becoming a Cover Star*: the written memories of past experience had become available for future reference, and it was experiences of the original performance that became manifested in the future; the future to them was *Becoming a Cover Star*. The merit of using the written documentations for this specific project is justified by Christopher Balme, as he acknowledges that 'archiving the

performance through words [...] can result in artistic products in their own right.’ (2006: 124).

Early in the process I made the decision to ignore the performance documentation of the original event that people had donated. I would rely on only using the written documentations that the donators had scribed. This allowed for more interesting pieces of material to occur in my re-interpretation of the works. The selected words of the donator imposed themselves on the material that I devised. If I had relied on pre-existing performance documentation the donated words would be redundant.

The performance ruptured my practice, and challenged my clichéd modes of performance. The structure and decision to include many different memories presented me with endless problems. Throughout the process, up to the final week, I struggled and searched, I experimented, and I still couldn’t find a solution to my problem. I was lost in the large conceptual potentialities of the work. I began to panic. I was struggling to contend with the lack of linkage between each of the separate memories. I knew that there was no way each memory could relate to another, and I found this uncomfortable. The reinterpretations existed, in the amount of time that it took for me to encounter them in the live performance. In my previous performance work, there was always some form of linear dramaturgical structure at work. The pieces of material in my previous endeavours related to one another, whereas in *Becoming a Cover Star* the eclecticism of the fragments of material meant that they did not relate. My body knew that it wasn’t right, or at least my body wasn’t used to this style of working. I felt like the architect deconstructing the concept of postmodernism. I found a comfort in their struggle, as it was reflected in mine. Philip Auslander argues ‘[s]ome critics use “postmodern” [...] as a stylistic term to identify new developments in aesthetic genres with well-established conventions.’ (2004:98). I believe that *Becoming a Cover Star*

complies with Auslander's observation of postmodernism and indicates why I struggled with the fragmentary nature of the performance. The separate reinterpretations of the memories fitted the rubric of the well-established conventions that Auslander discusses. They were pre-existing performances, which in their original form were part of a more linear temporal dramaturgical structure. The decision to tackle multiple memories, with very specific ontologies in their original performance contexts, means that they are removed from their origin and placed in a new present. This present was *Becoming a Cover Star*. The re-placement of the memories in a new dramaturgical structure produced a postmodernism that went against my innate intuitive approach to performance making.

I had to make some decisions over the performance's fragmentary nature. Was it enough that each memory was housed by the same locale, the same temporality, the same concept, the same performer? Did these factors unify the different fragments? As the performance presentation day approached I was running the performance. The fragmentary material hindered and inhibited my functioning in the piece. The material stopped and started, stopped and started, stopped and started. I took off my trousers only to put them on again. I needed a repeatable motif to distinguish the end of each reinterpretation. I felt that if there was no distinction between each memory the performance would confuse, and would result in a search for a linear dramaturgical structure that wasn't present. After much experimentation I settled on the simple action of turning the written memories over. I felt this would signify the individual memory had been reinterpreted, and I could move onto the next memory. This simple action helped to address the issue of the unusual and fragmentary performance nature.

Turning over the written memories meant the words could be encountered by the audience in the final part of the performance. This encounter prompted a shift from the theatrical conventions of the first part of the performance.

My decision to allow the audience entry into the archive was particularly difficult. I had already created the material for the reinterpretations of the memories. As I created the fragmented dramaturgy I realised that the piece seemed nonsensical without the knowledge of the memories it was referencing. I needed a theatrical rupture that permitted the spectators to encounter the texts of memory. I concluded that the audience should enter the archive. The shift in forms from the theatrical convention of allowing the spectators to sit and observe before permitting them into the archive was problematic. I experimented with various possibilities in order to allow the audience to enter.

I was adamant that I did not want to tell the audience what to do; I did not want to dictate that they *must* encounter the archive. Contradicting my desired lack of dictatorship I wanted the audience to know that they were to encounter the archive, as the main performance would not function without knowing the origin of the donated memories. I settled on saying ‘welcome to the archive’, but with the test audience in the final week of process this didn’t work. They didn’t feel compelled to enter the archive and my fear of the misunderstanding of the performance began to creep into my consciousness. I needed something that accompanied my spoken text, something that would remain constant throughout the transition period into the archive. I decided to use one of the projector screens, placing the text: ‘Please feel free to encounter the archive’ onto the screen. I felt that I had to be careful over the wording of this text in order to prevent the risk of dictating to the audience that they were to enter the archive. In the live performance I was fortunate to have people there who knew that now was the time to enter the archive. When I am a spectator I find comfort in sitting in the dark auditorium, observing, knowing that I don’t have to perform. I was asking my audience to take a leap of faith into the performance space, with fear that they themselves may be required to perform.

Experimental performance maker Katherine Adamenko discusses the Postmodern Spectator. She asks ‘this new postmodern spectator for three things: investment, to engage in an interaction the performer is asking you to do; complicity, to act without self-consciousness in that activity; and discipline, to commit to opening yourself to new forms of audience interaction.’ (2003:15) This particular definition suggests that *Becoming a Cover Star* required a postmodern spectator.

This immersive postmodern interaction that Adamenko suggests is contradicted by Arnold Aronson’s definition of postmodern scenographic aesthetic. He suggests that postmodern scenography ‘keeps a certain distance; it requires a viewer, not a participant.’ (2005: 26) This definition of postmodern theatre design contradicts my argument that all aspects of the performance were postmodern. I am still adamant, and disagree with Aronson, as the participation of the spectators, in entering into the archive, was paramount to the success and communication of the performance, and therefore they needed to become the participant, and not simply the viewer. Furthermore, the exchange of knowledge needed occur, and this exchange happened in the reveal of the archive. Jacques Rancière notes in his critique of spectatorship that ‘[b]eing a spectator means looking at a spectacle. And looking is a bad thing [...] looking is deemed the opposite of knowing.’ (2007: 272) The passive spectator would not have achieved the knowledge exchange that Rancière desires. It was integral to the communication of the performance that the spectators actively participated.

Becoming a Cover Star allowed me to address issues of site-specific theatre. Nick Kaye offers a definition of site-specific art as ‘exchanges between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are defined.’ (2000: 1) Reflecting on the performance I would argue that *Becoming a Cover Star* had site-specific tendencies. This site-specificity surprised me, as I often consider a space with a theatrical purpose to not have this attribute. Mike

Pearson states that ‘[a]t site, social, cultural, political, geographical, architectural and linguistics aspects of *context* may inform or prescribe the structure and content of performance.’ (2010: 143) This was the case in using the Castle Theatre; I was adamant that I had to embrace the architectural potentialities that were offered up by the space in which the performance occurred. With this space, seeped in historical context, its scruffy nature, and its failed attempts to disguise itself as a black-box theatre, appear blatantly obvious. In my opinion, one needed to use the lack of finesse of the space as a stimulus for making. To readdress the archive as metaphor, in *Becoming a Cover Star*, Antoinette Burton notes that ‘the archive has neither status nor power without an architectural dimension – that is, a material presence which structures access, imposes its own meanings on the evidence contained therein, and watches over users both literally and figuratively.’ (2005: 9) I believe that the Castle Theatre played its part in containing and imposing its own means onto the performance, and adheres to the relationship between archive and architecture that Burton highlights.

I entered the vast space of the Castle Theatre armed with the scribed memories, and the muscle memory of material that I had been working with in my makeshift laboratory. I began to explore the space by translating the material that I had already created onto the space, adapting to the increase in size. The architecture of the space offered interesting devising possibilities, as I knew that I could not possibly embody such a large space working on one horizontal level, so I exploited what the space had given to me. I worked on three different horizontals: the floor, the platform, and the technical box windows, which were used for projection. *Becoming a Cover Star* could not be performed in another space, without altering the semiotics that the space allowed.

The semiotics of the performance space was integral to the functioning of the performance. The dilapidated nature of the venue and its history as a former chapel was an unaware archive. The technical box housed original sound tracks from performances by the University of Wales, Aberystwyth's Theatre department, dating back to the mid-1970s. The amalgamation of dust served to give the idea of a space seeped in history that complimented my conceptual idea of performing an archive. Marvin Carlson states that 'where it [the performance] takes place within the community, what sort of structure houses it, and how that structure is organized and decorated – all contribute in important ways to the cultural processing of the event.' (1989: 204) This occurred in *Becoming a Cover Star*. The exposed beams, visible former sets, lack of tiles on the floor, dirt, electrical failure and lack of lighting grid all contributed to the semiotics of the performance, thus making the performance site-specific.

Becoming a Cover Star allowed me to address issues of participation in the creation of material and the ethical implications of ownership of the project. The methodology I employed for generating the performance material contributed to the ethical, authorial issues. Claire Bishop notes that participatory event 'concerns the desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation.' (2006: 12) I aimed to give the spectators who encountered the work post-reveal to experience this sense of empowerment that Bishop discusses. Their ability to enter the archive, should they wish to, prompted a very different relationship to occur. They departed the safety of the seating bank, which Victor Turner notes as 'communitas', which he defines as 'the implicit law of wholeness arising out of relations between totalities.' (1986: 84) This notion of totality, in my opinion, is the totality of the audience as a group, which was then juxtaposed when they embarked on a journey to enter the archive. The entry into the archive forced the

spectators to encounter the relationships between those of other's memories, object, their own memories, and my conceptual work. The entry into the archive, in my opinion, promoted a spectator who would be found in solitude, wondering round the white box space of an art gallery, which is aptly supported by Bishop. She states that '[a]n aesthetic of participation therefore derives legitimacy from a (desired) causal relationship between the experience of a work of art and individual/collective agency.' (2006: 12) It was the transition of the spectators' agencies that altered in their encounter of the performance, departing from the collective into their individual encounter of the archive.

This performance bore traces of other participatory artistic and performance practices, most notably the Fluxus movement. The structure of the Fluxus event uses the artist to create instructions or scores, which the participants then encounter. The participants then use these prescribed instructions to carry out tasks, which results in the piece of art being created. *Becoming a Cover Star* ruptured the ontological relationships that the Fluxus movement relied heavily upon. As the performance maker I was aware of the relationship between this piece of work and the Fluxus movement. Anna Dezeuze notes that Fluxus is '[a]n anthology of chance operations, concept art, anti-art, improvisation, indeterminacy, meaningless work, natural disasters, stories, diagrams, poetry, essays, compositions, dance constructions, music, plans of action, mathematics.' (2002: 79) It is with difficulty that I attempt to locate the Fluxus movement, as Dezeuze defines, to a specific point in the process. Perhaps it was present throughout, however using Dezeuze's definition, it would be apparent that it was in the early stages of the process, once I had collected sufficient memories from the donators and I began to assemble a dramaturgical structure from the memories, or in Fluxus terms, from the scores that were provided. The performance project ruptured the relationships that occur in Fluxus, between spectator and artist. In Fluxus events the artist provides the

instructions and the spectators encounter them. In *Becoming a Cover Star* the donors provided the instructions for me (the artist) to assemble the performance. It is somewhat apparent that the theoretical roots of the performance can be located in the discourse of the Fluxus movement; however it would be appropriate for me to acknowledge that the project also identified a new relationship within the Fluxus construct. The instructions and scores of the Fluxus movement were integral to the realisation of the live manifestation. I used the concept of making scores in the earlier stages of the process, as I attempted to envisage the potentialities of the project. This provided a focusing tool in the rehearsal process; from the numerous donations many possible performances could have been made. I divided the memories into different sections: text, choreography, action, object, and scenography. I began to create numerous improvisations using the scores that I created, and from a 'trial and error' technique the performance began to take shape. To some degree, there was a randomness that I could attribute to the performance making process. This randomness was through the ordering of the memories, something that troubled me slightly because I do not want to consider the final performance of *Becoming a Cover Star*, and attribute its successful dramaturgy as chance. As performance makers we are constantly relying on our innate intuition in the functioning of our work. The use of scores provided a new way of working, that at first I found cold and scientific, as in the past I am used to entering a space and not knowing what material would be created. The lack of knowledge in the case of this project was through the participation of the memories that people donated. The scores allowed me to order, and control a potentially large project, one in which the concept could take over, and result in the live performance becoming redundant, on my quest to become a cover star.

The Fluxus movement questioned issues of authorship. This questioning of authorship and ownership played a heavy role in the wider discussion surrounding *Becoming a Cover*

Star because the project questioned and interrogated the normative relationship in the devising of work. There are many different identities, within this project, that I could attribute the term ‘authorship’. The author, foremost, could be myself, as conceptualiser, dramaturg, scenographer, choreographer, and student, however the political and ethical implications that surrounded this relationship to the work were vast. The donators could have been the secondary owners, as the work could not be conceived, or indeed exist, without the donations of the donators. The donators wrote about their own experiences of the live events. These experiences became present in the live manifestation of the project. A tertiary author could be attributed to the original artist whose work the donator saw. These donated memories could not exist without the original work that they reference.

The memories that were donated went through various stages of dilution. Walter Benjamin notes that ‘we can say: what shrinks in an age where the work of art can be reproduced by technological means is its aura’ (2008: 7) In Benjamin’s case the possibility to reproduce a work of art is through technological advances (the birth of photography, the moving image, etc.) *Becoming a Cover Star* was not reliant on the technological advances that Benjamin discusses, as the works were reproducible because of the donator’s live experience of the original work. In the case of *Becoming a Cover Star* the original works’ ‘decay of aura’ occurred because of the various stages and processes that the original work had to go through in order to manifest in *Becoming a Cover Star*.

The donated memories were diluted, first and foremost through the spectator experience. *Becoming a Cover Star* asked the donators for a ‘most memorable moment’, that was their own choosing. This meant that the choices of the experience, and the words they chose in the documentation of the original event, were deeply imbedded with the donator’s personal agency and subjectivity.

The performance was then subjected to the decay of temporality, as they existed only in the donator's minds (the second stage of decay). Some of the memories that were donated happened 40 years ago, some were more recent. This is not to say that the moments of the older memories weren't correct, but as David Gross notes 'contemporary explanations assume that memories are preserved through elaborate mental mappings or schemata which evolve and change over time.' (2000: 4) The progression in distance from the original work encountered by the donator, as Gross suggests, alters its relationships with other memories, as one's memories are constantly shifting, and altering. The evolving memories, over increased temporality provided another layer of decay.

The experiential nature of the original performances then had to enter a further stage of dilution. For the requirement of this project they had to be notated and articulated through the written word. Roland Barthes notes that '[w]riting is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.' (1977: 142) This loss of identity occurred in this performance, as the identity of the original performance had lost its subject, as had the identity of the donator, as their memories, experiences, and agencies were facilitated through my own agency, through the agency of making the performance. This is problematic because of the ethical implications that were at stake in this project. As the conceptualiser for the project I had a responsibility, like the archon in the Greek house of the archive, to care for the words that were donated. This had ramifications on the outcome of the project because, as a rule, and out of respect I decided to handle the memories in a discreet fashion, and adhere strictly to the words that were donated, as they appeared on the page. There is no doubt, as Peggy Phelan notes, that in the case of the memories donated to *Becoming a Cover Star* '[p]erformance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded,

documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representation *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. [...] Performance's being [...] becomes itself through disappearance.' (1993: 146) The live experience of the original performances that were donated cannot be articulated in 100 words. The rule that I set, as curator, meant the final manifestation of *Becoming a Cover Star*, is a representation (of the written word), of a representation (of the spectator experience), of a representation (of the original performance the donations are referencing). This multi-faceted representation allowed *Becoming a Cover Star* to echo other works, and through the various stages of representation and decay, become something else entirely: an original piece of work. Through Phelan, I am able to justify the reason why I could not re-enact the work that was donated, and why the failure of memory to preserve became particularly interesting, and provided legitimacy for the project to exist through the rules of making that I evoked. To re-enact the work would make redundant the task that I set for my donors (the task being that of describing the most memorable moment in 100 words).

This decay of aura that Benjamin questions, through mechanical technological advances, was questioned by my reinterpretation of Ron Athey's *Self Obliteration Trilogy*. I had encountered this memory live and the donated memory of this performance was muddled with my agency and subjectivity. This meant that the reinterpretation of this memory was more accurate than the other performances that I had not encountered, and in the live performance allowed me to question the notion of embodying the original event. The performance was not a re-enactment because I did not insert needles in my head, like Athey did. Richard Schechner argues that artists, in the current re-enactment discourse, 'do not reinterpret, they replicate.' (2010: 12) It would be a replication of the original performance if I had made the decision to encounter the documentation of the performances that the

memories proposed. The dilution through the scribed documentation, imbedded with the donator's memory, meant that I could not replicate the original, but only reinterpret the potentialities that the donators had offered. Reinterpretation is embedded in the tradition of the dramatic text, yet controversially I consider this term to be applicable to *Becoming a Cover Star*, as I took directorial decisions with the words that were donated. I had to overrule some of the donators, where there was some ambiguity in the scribed memories. This was to ensure that the performance functioned as a whole dramaturgical exposition. The fact that I allowed my spectator experience to intertwine with the donated words broke the rules that I had imposed on my devising strategies. This resulted in a renaissance of Athey's *Self Obliteration Trilogy* as the actions and aesthetics were similar to those that Athey chose himself. There were physical differences (the needles), but the contexts of the piece had changed. The reinterpretation of Athey's work was part of a larger conceptual performance, one where there could be no replication, but only reinterpretation.

Revealing a Cover Stars is by no means an inclusive reflection of *Becoming a Cover Star*. There are still many other reflections to be made, which due to length constraints could not make an appearance in this critical reflection. What I have presented here are, what I consider to be, the most important reflections of process and performance, within the category of reveal.

The ambivalence of the term 'practice-as-research' resulted in many contentious situations over the devising period of the project. I tried to articulate the artistry and dramaturgy that I was creating in order to justify its inclusion in the performance research discourse. It is now, that I am writing this, that I realise I have justified its applicability to this field.

The reflections that I have made, here, have meant adapting theories in order for them to be applicable to *Becoming a Cover Star*. The term ‘rupture’ has been mentioned numerous times, and the fact that I consider *Becoming a Cover Star* to have ruptured various performance discourses, justifies its place as academic research.

Becoming a Cover Star:

Reassessed the documentation debate.

Disrupted a linear temporal dramaturgy.

Rearticulated the notion of Fluxus.

Questioned issues of ownership.

Queried participatory methods of devising material.

Contradicted notions of postmodernism across audience and scenographic discourses.

Surprised notions of site-specificity.

Theorised through the metaphor of the archive.

But above all it ruptured my future...

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Appendix 1: Call for donations

Dear ...

My name is James Woolley, and I'm a current MA student studying 'Practising Performance' at Aberystwyth University.

Over the course of the summer I will be undertaking a Practice-as-Research dissertation project culminating in a 60 minute performance.

I am looking to have your input into this project.

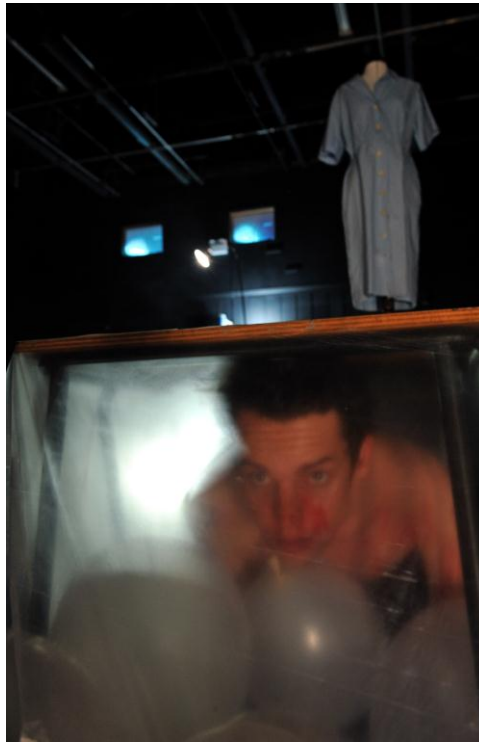
I was wondering if it would be possible for you to describe your most memorable moment in performance that you've seen. This description must be no longer than 100 words. Please could you also include the name of the performance, the year and the creator.

I appreciate your time with aiding me with this research. If you have any questions please don't hesitate in contacting me on this email address.

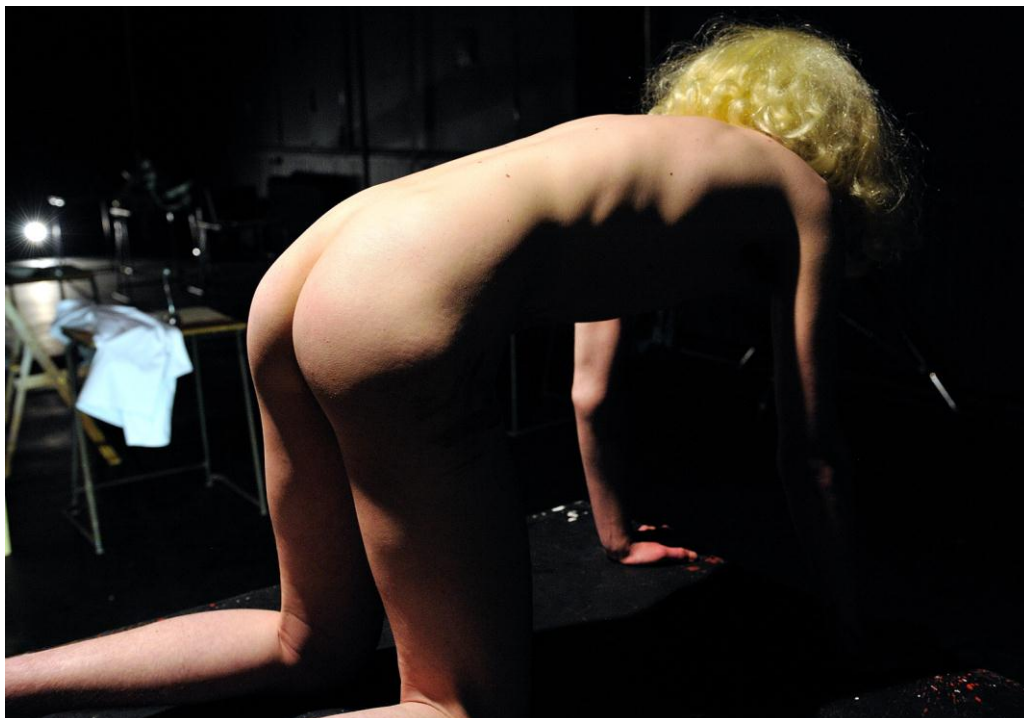
Best Wishes,

James Woolley

Appendix 2: Photographic Documentation



Reinterpretation of Alastair MacLennan's *Ink Ash*, memory donated by Joshua Chin



Reinterpretation of Ron Athey's *Self Obliteration Trilogy*, memory donated by Melissa Donaldson and Karolina Gruschka



Reinterpretation of Jerzy Grotowski's *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, memory donated by Professor Mike Pearson



Reinterpretation of Franko B's *Don't Leave Me This Way*, memory donated by Dr. Karoline Gritzner

Appendix 3: Donated Memories: Although there were 67 memories donated to the performance project, I decided to use 21. Below is a list of the memories that were donated, and attached are the actual memories that were donated.

Rich Allen, based on the work of Mercury Rev's *Goddess on a Highway*

Cara Brostrom, based on the work of Theatre Objektiv *The Old Quarter*

Joshua Chin, based on the work of Alastair MacLennan's *Ink Ash*

Jane Dawson, based on the work of Boris Nieslony's *A Feather Fell Down on the United Kingdom of Great Britain*

Melissa Donaldson, based on the work of Ron Athey's *Self Obliterations Trilogy*

Dr. Andrew Filmer, based on the work of Tess de Quincey, Nayoyuki Oguri, Peter Fraser and Alan Schacher's *The Stirring*

Jill Greenhalgh, based on the work of Pina Bausch's *Palermo Palermo*

Dr. Karoline Gritzner, based on the work of Franko B's *Don't Leave Me This Way*

Karolina Anna Gruschka, based on the work of Ron Athey's *Self Obliterations Trilogy*

Ollie Hale, based on the work of Jill Greenhalgh's *The Acts of Vigia*

Alec Hughes, based on the work of Marie Chouinard's *Chorale*

Naomi Jalil, based on the work of Victoria's *Bernadetje*

Dr. Carl Lavery, based on the work of Félix González-Torres' *Candy*

Georgina Leggate, based on the work of Marie Chouinard's *Chorale*

Gareth Llyr, based on the work of Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's *Sunday in the Park with George*

Martin O'Brien, based on the work of Derevo's *Ketzal*

Kira O'Reilly, based on the work of Franko B's *I'm not your Babe*

Dave Parry, based on the work of Ontoerendgoed *Smile Off Your Face*

Professor Mike Pearson, based on the work of Jerzy Grotowski's *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*

Ant Stones, based on the work of Michael Boyd's *History Cycle: Henry VI Part 2*

Ashley Wallington, based on the work of De La Guarda's *Villa Villa*

This memory was supplied by

Rich Allen

Based on the work of

Mercury Rev *Goddess on a Highway*

Reading Festival, Reading, 2001

One of my most memorable moments of performance came from circumstance: the chance meeting of people, song, and that state of mind you occupy as a teenager. It was the final night of the festival and my friend Will and I were sat at the back of a large tent to watch Mercury Rev. We could not see the band over the crowds of people, just a stream of light coming from the stage. In front of us, amongst the patches of people sat down, we saw a boy and girl looking across at each other. Just as *Goddess on a Highway* started to play, the boy plucked up the courage to walk across.

This memory was supplied by

Cara Brostrom

Based on the work of

Theatre Objektiv *The Old Quarter*

Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 2006

There was a man and a woman onstage. There was this part of the performance where they were standing, facing each other and he held his hand perpendicular to the floor, fingertips pointing toward her and slowly glided his hand until it reached her torso, where it crumpled and then he slid his hand off to the side. Then she did the same to him, and he to her, and she to him and him to her and she to he and this went on and on and faster and faster until it got kind of violent but not really and then I guess they just stopped. And I don't remember why they did this, I just remember that they did.

This memory was supplied by

Joshua Chin

Based on the work of

Alastair MacLennan *Ink Ash*

March 2010, National Review of Live Art, Glasgow

Being at the NRLA itself was a great experience for me as it was the first time I was getting exposed to such a big platform. Watching performances one after the other and walking with artists on the same corridor was amazing. Alastair MacLennan's *Ink Ash* was one performance that I can never forget. The experience of watching this piece was something similar to the feeling you get when you are looking at a photograph. It was a mix of emotions and everything was trapped. The balloons inside the box caught my senses for some reason. It was a piece with rhythm that created and captured intensity.

This memory was supplied by

Jane Dawson

Based on the work of

Boris Nieslony *A Feather Fell Down on the United
Kingdom of Great Britain*

March 2010, The National Review of Live Art,
Glasgow

A performance dedicated to people killed by other people. First there was a ritual performed by a grave. Then came a list of countries, read from within the audience. The list was accompanied by a repeated action; a pane of thin glass smashed over his forehead for each individual country, no emotion was shown, no theatricals, just the action. Eventually there was his blood, trickling down his head.

This memory was supplied by

Melissa Donaldson

Based on the work of

Ron Athey *Self Obliterations Trilogy*

National Review of Live Art, Glasgow, March 2010

Never before had I witnessed gushing blood live. It was so real it looked fake! The music was a constant drone, to me this emphasised the atmosphere. Hundreds of people crowded in a hot dark room with Ron Athey performing on a high pedestal!

This memory was supplied by

Dr. Andrew Filmer

Based on the work of

Tess de Quincey, Naoyuki Oguri, Peter Fraser and Alan
Schacher *The Stirring*

2007

A large pile of gravel – a whale – steam emanating from within, and damp from the mist descending from the ceiling, is traversed by a figure in a yellow plastic rain coat. His arms are extended, denuded branches, his face is set as if a mask. Spectre. I can't recall if he was, in fact, hooded. Outside, silver commuter trains belt past in the dark. Their lighted interiors are glimpsed through holes in the doors. Fellow shadows circulate. Hiss.

This memory was supplied by

Jill Greenhalgh

Based on the work of

Pina Bausch *Palermo Palermo*

1989

I was in the front row of the theatre. From floor to ceiling just inside the apron of the proscenium stage was a breeze block wall. I remember thinking 'how disappointing -will we only be seeing a performance on this small amount of stage'. I had come a long way. The lights went down, there was a loud explosion and the whole wall - perhaps 5 meters high, 15 meters long. crashed backwards onto the stage. It was terrifying. I thought we had been bombed. Then as the dust began to settle and the lights came up through the lingering dust the debris and wreckage was made visible the performance with 18 dancers began. High heels and all.

This memory was supplied by
Dr. Karoline Gritzner

Based on the work of

Franko B. *Don't Leave Me This Way*

December 2007, The Arnolfini, Bristol

First of all, it was one of the most 'experiential' theatre events that I have ever encountered. It was a 'theatre of cruelty' quite literally because I felt I was being attacked by incredibly loud electronic sound/noise and harsh, blinding light. The visual and sound attacks were so extreme, I actually can't recall having seen very much because I was crouching in my seat with my knees pushed against my chest and my ears and eyes tightly closed for most of the 15-minute performance (which felt as if it lasted much longer because the whole experience was just so painful for me – I am extremely sensitive to loud sound and too bright light, so it was practically unbearable for me). I broke out in a sweat and thought I am living through a nightmare. I could just about make out a rhythm at first (the sound and light alternating) but that rhythm was then broken so unexpectedly so that all the sound and light effects became totally unpredictable. Suddenly there was a pause, a silence and cooling darkness, and a split second later the attack resumed; I felt totally disorientated and wouldn't trust the 'pauses' anymore because I was scared of what might come next. I felt like a prisoner undergoing some kind of torture, aesthetic, theatrical torture. Honestly, for me it was a painful experience. Only afterwards was I able to reflect on it and I wondered what the whole event was meant to say. He just sat there on his chair, looking at the audience throughout the performance, the spotlight being turned on us, observing our pain, the pain of being a spectator presumably. It struck me that he wanted to turn the tables, put us in an uncomfortable situation, make us 'bleed' metaphorically the way he had been bleeding for us in his earlier work. When I finally was able to open my eyes at the end of the piece, the chair was empty, he was gone.

This memory was supplied by

Karolina Anna Gruschka

Based on the work of

Ron Athey *Self Obliterations Trilogy*

National Review of Live Art, Glasgow, March 2010

My most memorable moment in a performance would be probably during the Ron Athey performance I saw at the Glasgow performance festival this year. Athey pulls the wig off that is attached by needles to his head and the blood just splatters out. He had been already bleeding for a bit and looked a bit weaker. A person had fainted. The atmosphere was very heavy and tense.

This memory was supplied by

Ollie Hale

Based on the work of

Jill Greenhalgh *The Acts of Vigia*

Department of Theatre, Film and Television, Aberystwyth,
September 2007

A slender female performer locked my gaze from across the space. She was standing with a light bulb directly next to her head suspended from the ceiling; casting one half of her body in pure light and the other in deepest shadow. She was staring right into my eyes with such intent I couldn't look away. She slowly hitched up her skirt, pulled down some white panties and left them there on the floor, never breaking eye contact until she slowly moved away.

This memory was supplied by

Alec Hughes

Based on the work of

Marie Chouinard *Chorale*

Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth, 2006

For the simple reason it was the first dance show had seen- It gripped me hard. Steel balls and bodies writhing in saturnalia across a steel floor. Uncomfortable and filthy in two parts; A solo first, hard, angular and metallic, The second, a thousand gestures happening at once, a randy Jackson Pollock, So much movement. A fantastic spectacle. memorable moment- I had the feeling of waking up after being so lost in the performance that my critical brain switched off and gave way to pure enjoyment. a rare joy.

This memory was supplied by

Naomi Jalil

Based on the work of

Victoria Bernadetje

1998, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth

It was a night at a fair ground particularly the dodgem park and they had set that up on the stage. For me the most memorable moment was a little girl dressed as the virgin Mary walking very slowly diagonally across the stage while two people stood on a podium singing 'Like a Prayer' in a karaoke style and then spinning around the stage were the dodgems with people sort of draped on them. It was utterly beautiful and for me changed my concept of what theatre should be. That evening was an experience - something that I could eat and breath - it made me laugh and cry and feel very alive.

This memory was supplied by

Dr. Carl Lavery

Based on the work of

Félix González-Torres *Candy*

Chicago Museum of Modern Art, Chicago, 2005

Ultimately, my abiding memory of something approaching performance is Felix Gonzalez Torres' amazing soluble monument to his lover who died of Aids. The monument was multi-coloured and plastic; it was made made out of sweets, or what in the US goes by the name of 'hard candy'. To take something away is of course to deplete the 'monument' but also to consume, in a way, part of Torres' lost love. I encountered this artwork at the Chicago Museum of Modern Art on the shores of Lake Michigan in 2005. It was close to Easter, the sun was shining and I was with my wife. I was touched by the artwork; it affected me - it was like a Mass in a way: the sweet as communal wafer; the sick lover an infected Christ. And as Jean Genet said, 'there is nothing more theatrical than the Catholic Mass'.

This memory was supplied by

Georgina Leggate

Based on the work of

Marie Chouinard *Chorale*

Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth, 2006

Young, immature and possibly, no definitely- inexperienced, this performance made me excited, cringe, switch off and switch back on again. It made me giggle like a 15 year old school girl singing 'I was hungry, I was naked, were you there, were you there?!' It made me smile at the people to my left and to my right. It made me worry about the scope my degree had...It made me worry that I wasn't enough for performance. Performance.... I learnt that everything I had been taught previously didn't matter much. It made me wonder why the tall thin dark haired performer had to take her clothes off and reveal her ridiculously hairy pubes, and why did she look so unhappy, did she want to take her clothes off, and was she the centre of the piece or just the one who everyone saw the most of-literally.

This memory was supplied by

Gareth Llyr

Based on the work of

Stephen Sondheim and Kames Lapine *Sunday in the Park with
George*

1986

“By the cool blue triangular water.”

Single dots of pure colour arranged in a pattern forming an image.

“On the soft green elliptical grass.”

Single staccato notes arranged in a pattern forming a melody.

“As we pass through arrangements of shadow.”

Content and form intertwined.

“Towards the verticals of trees.”

Arranged to form a whole.

“Forever.

This memory was supplied by

Martin O'Brien

Based on the work of

Derevo Ketzal

St. Stephens, Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 2006

The performance took place in an old church, a packed audience of hundreds if not more were sat on the original church pugs. The stage marked off by sand bags all the way along the front. The back of the stage had a giant metal scaffold built, around the edge of the space were large barrels. It was near the end of the performance, all the performers were on stage (maybe 10) and had finished a long sequence climbing up and jumping from the scaffold. They all looked identical- shaved heads, like monks. I couldn't tell who was a man and who was a woman, despite them all being topless because they all had such defined muscles. Some of the performers were wearing bird head masks. The next part of the performance consisted of them running between the barrels and knocking them over, each barrel was full of water, until the entire stage was flooded. The performers started to emerge in black hooded cloaks and during the movement sequence that followed the cloaks soaked up water and became heavier, climaxing in the cloaks being used to make water fly over the audience's head, the audience were half screaming half cheering as the water fell on them. The exhausted performers then processed out through the audience, leaving a red lit flooded stage. The final image of the lights reflecting in the still water brought the audience to a contemplative silence and was a beautiful contrast to the excessive bodies that had been bounding around in the water moments earlier.

This memory was supplied by

Kira O'Reilly

Based on the work of

Franko B. *I'm Not Your Babe*

1997, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff

Deep thud of industrial noisecape

White light shining on

Pristine white square on floor that we're lined around

Dry ice thickening

Franko: Bleeding

From both elbow crevices

Unrelenting leaking of claret

Floor puddles with blood flow

More dry ice. More pooling

More dry ice

Parts to frame

Orlan revealed watching

White to blackout to white

Prone Franko in blood puddle

White to blackout to white

Another prone Franko in blood pool

White to blackout to white

Proneness again

I cannot remember how it ended

I just remember how I felt

Fresh, energetic grief flowing in my gut

This memory was supplied by

Dave Parry

Based on the work of

Ontoerendgoed *Smile Off Your Face*

Edinburgh Fringe Festival, 2007

I was sat in a wheel chair having been blindfolded for the majority of the performance when suddenly the blindfold was taken off me and a man was sat in front of me. Behind him were loads of photos of different people blindfolded and he showed me where my picture was. He then asked me to smile and began to cry (actual tears) focusing on the beauty of a simple smile.

This memory was supplied by

Professor Mike Pearson

Based on the work of

Jerzy Grotowski *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*

1969, Teatr Laboratorium, Wroclaw

This was Grotowski's final theatre production. I saw at the Teatr Laboratorium at the festival in Wroclaw in 1969. It was staged simply in an empty studio with the audience sitting on the floor. It took the form of a passion play, performed by a group of villagers. Ryszard Cieslak played the village idiot – selected to play Christ. He wore a black overcoat, no trousers and was in bare feet. I remember him doing a wild stamping, singing dance – his voice rattling the windows behind the wooden shutters. And then doing it again with Anton Jaholkowski on his shoulders!

This memory was supplied by

Ant Stones

Based on the work of

Michael Boyd *History Cycle: Henry VI Part 2*

2006, Courtyard Theatre, London

In Henry VI Part 2, after near on 5 hours of historical rhetoric, with a multitude of characters arguing (and fighting) over complicated claims to the throne there came a moment where it all descended into madness. Literally. Two actors emerged from the trapdoor with giant fish-head masks, a new villain was lowered from the ceiling and we were straight into hell. All kinds of bizarre creatures swarmed onto the stage taking an otherwise straightforward historical play into a whole new level. Unpredictable and totally fantastic.

This memory was supplied by

Ashley Wallington

Based on the work of

De La Guarda *Villa Villa*

New York, March 2005

A blur of aerial choreography, primitive drumming and visceral chanting set in an aerial playground above our heads. At the outset we are contained by an expansive paper ceiling over which performers sprint frantically. A performer plunges through and grabs an audience member and takes them on a breathtaking ride above. The synchronised beauty of two performers on independent lines running in great circles against a wall of seemingly huge proportions covered with billowing silk. A group of ten or so performers clasped together in a great human knot swinging just above the audiences heads, reaching out to us, we reach back. Frantically trying to make physical connection as if our lives depend on it. It is raining. Lost in the moment I find myself being passionately kissed by an Argentinian performer. Leaving the performance and walking out into the New York spring night feeling that something had changed.