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PLAYING WITH POST-SECULAR PERFORMANCE

**Julia Lee Barclay, Ansuman Biswas,
Traci Kelly, and Kira O'Reilly
in conversation with Franc Chamberlain**

Bringing the concept of the post-secular together with contemporary performance might seem an odd thing to do, especially as the term is more generally associated with Catholic theologians. Mike King, of the Centre for Post-secular Studies in London, however, uses post-secularism in a way that may be more helpful in understanding some contemporary trends in art and the wider culture. King sees the post-secular as involving a renewed interest in questions of spirituality, combined with recognition of the importance of the rights and freedoms that resulted from the process of secularization in Europe. Post-secularism in this sense isn't an attempt to return to a pre-secular religious worldview, which would be a fundamentalist approach, but a relaxed and open approach to spiritual inquiry. In the spirit of such an inquiry I discussed questions of spiritual and artistic practice, individually, with four British artists: Julia Lee Barclay, Ansuman Biswas, Traci Kelly, and Kira O'Reilly.

ANSUMAN BISWAS

Ansuman Biswas has, over the last twenty years or so, worked as an actor, musician, installation artist, filmmaker, writer, composer, and live artist. His research has gradually focused on the riddle of consciousness and embodiment. He is interested in the present day application of principles grounded in ancient Indian philosophy, and in particular the practice of *vipassana* meditation as a bridge between the methodologies of the artist and the scientist. *CAT* was inspired by Schrödinger's cat and involved the artist being sealed in a lightproof and soundproof chamber for ten days attempting to remain mindful of all sensory phenomena. *Theatre*, a title that intentionally conjures both art and medicine, opened the *Body States: The Pilot Project* event in Coventry in June 2005. The following material is edited and collated from a series of e-mails June 16–July 2, 2008.



I'm interested in whether you have what you would call a spiritual practice that informs your work? Or whether the work itself can be considered a spiritual practice?

You've broached a subject that is indeed very close to my heart. I consider my practice to be primarily a spiritual practice. In fact I often remark that I'm only an artist because I don't have the guts to renounce everything and become a monk. My art practice is a cowardly second best. Living as an artist is the closest I can come to the breadth and precision of a wholehearted spiritual path. My core practice is grounded in *Theravada* Buddhism and in *Vedanta*. Any art has arisen as the fruits of that practice.

If your core practice is grounded in Theravada Buddhism and in Vedanta . . . what is it? Sitting practice? Walking?

The core of it is attention to the facts of experience. With this as a basis my practice might be called "art" one day, "science" on another, and "everyday life" on another. Precisely the same activity can be framed as art, science, everyday, or spiritual practice. Perhaps it's mostly a question of language and discourse. I'm particularly interested in the "essentiality" of this practice. The possibility of there being an essence or law from which all forms, practices, disciplines, and cultural instances arise; it is in this sense that I consider myself engaged in a spiritual inquiry whether I am teaching a workshop, giving a concert, painting a picture, or cooking dinner.

Would you call that essence or law, something like the "void" or the tao?

I'm slightly uncomfortable with terms like void, *tao*, nothingness, God. I prefer to put it in as mundane a way as possible in an attempt to discourage the titillation of intellectual entertainment or spiritual adventure. What is essentially an experience can then be described in terms of quantum mechanics, Christianity, ecology, or Islam. The language depends on the audience. I wouldn't speak Bengali to those who only understand English. Having said that, I do find *Theravada* Buddhist terminology to be extremely accurate and helpful. As far as conventionally labeled spiritual practices go, the most influential for me is *Theravada* sitting meditation. My Hindu experience is through ritual and through poetic narrative—*Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Gita*, and the *Brahmo Samaj* songs of Rabindranath Tagore. I have also skirted close to shamanic techniques, particularly through drumming and performance. I would even identify phenomenology as among the "spiritual" practices that have been key for me. It is particularly through *vipassana* meditation, however, that I come closest to the dividing line between "spiritual" and "creative" practices. The question of the nature of creativity itself is clearly presented: What is action? Is there any agency behind what is created? From where does the new arrive? What is the physical and emotional effect of it now? These questions are the stuff of meditation. Objects themselves are triggers, markers, by-products, and distractions.

Do you have a familiar process of making work?

I have seen a pattern emerging over the years. I regularly, usually once or twice a year, have "desk-clearing"—a purge—consisting of a ten-day silent meditation course. In hindsight I see that the period following each silent retreat is filled with

intense creativity. I have appreciated more and more the value of silence and inaction before any intense work.

Do you work with an assemblage of Theravada and Vedanta practices?

I use my training in spiritual traditions to constantly underpin and contextualize my present experience: it becomes sources of imagery, action, and inspiration. Or, to look at it the other way round, calling my activities an “art practice” allows me to fill my life with whatever techniques and images I believe are necessary and useful while maintaining a legitimate position in society. So, yes, in that sense it’s an assemblage. There is no suitable off-the-shelf ideology or manifesto. I don’t identify with any religion. Rather, I focus on the most useful parts of all the cultures I find myself immersed in. So what makes it spiritual? Perhaps a commitment to the most analytical and, simultaneously, the most holistic perspective. The best method I’ve discovered to train myself towards this ideal is *vipassana*.

How does art emerge in your practice?

It’s difficult to theorize or even taxonomize without biography. I remember thinking at school that when I grew up it would be a good idea to try to do no harm. This is what made me shun many of the ordinary career choices I saw around me. Then I became convinced that if one developed skill at some base level of the mind, surely every action must turn out to be beautiful. Others seemed to appreciate the outcomes of some of my actions. An important reminder at this stage was to constantly check that my motivation was generosity and compassion rather than self-aggrandizement. However, as I grew up, it became increasingly clear that some means of livelihood was necessary. It was not too much of a compromise to package some of my “products” for a market that seemed to be out there. Now I’m very happy to sell many of the by-products of my core activities—the bits people consider “art”—as a means of supporting my family. There is a tension between the spiritual work and the market-orientated, or dialogic, activities. Sometimes that can be fruitful though, as when engagement with a particular audience or discourse draws my attention.

My aim is still to do as little harm as possible. And perhaps even to do some good, for myself and others. An important aspect of my practice is to resist the identification of self that could go along with a highly-developed specialist discipline. So, in order to loosen the ego, which clings onto labels like sculptor, musician, writer, or even artist, I maintain a radically interdisciplinary portfolio. The art work itself is often an exploration of issues that have arisen in meditation, but will be framed in the language of whatever world I find myself at the time: performance, or music, or science, or politics. When making something with a particular “buyer” or “audience” in mind I will form it in a way that I hope will be comprehensible to them. In my own private meditation the greatest joy comes when I do not cling to any particular language, or any fixed understanding of what is being experienced. My trilogy of works—*CAT*, *self/portrait*, and *Array*—deals explicitly and centrally with meditation, but each piece engages with one particular area of science and social

reality. And of course the whole thing deals with science from the point of view of performance art.

What difference do you think it makes to an audience whether or not your work has emerged out of a spiritual practice?

Sometimes I have a clear didactic purpose in my relationship with an audience. But it's almost never important to me that anyone should identify with any particular spiritual tradition. It seems to me that truthfulness and beauty is inherent in the by-products of a skilful practice, or in the perceptions of a skilful perceiver. On the contrary, I am often at pains to subvert the attractiveness of the exotic and to bring the attention back to the very simple present. I am striving to enact and to promote a "spiritual" practice that is universally relevant—one that is independent of any particular language, iconography, or hagiography. Practices like yoga, meditation, music, drawing, physics, contact improvisation, politics can all be "spiritual" in my view, as long as there is a devotion to facts as they are experienced, and equanimity. But none of them is a necessary activity. More often than not, I actively discourage the labeling of my work as emerging from a spiritual practice because it leads to presumptions and misunderstanding. Central to my work is the practice of *vipassana*. Every project is related in one way or another with that practice. However, I rarely feel that it is useful to mention it explicitly.

KIRA O'REILLY

Kira O'Reilly is a UK-based artist whose practice stems from a fine art background employing performance and, more recently, writing and biotechnical practices with which to consider the body as material and a site in which narrative threads of the personal, sexual, social, and political knot and unknot in shifting permutations. O'Reilly has been a Research Fellow at SymbioticA (University of Western Australia) where she explored the possibilities of combining biotechnology and lace-making to cultivate a living lace from her own skin (*Marsyas: Running out of Skin*). In pieces such as *Untitled (Syncope)*, *Inthewrongplaceness*, and *View (Nearer to the Time)* she invites the audience into intimate and sometimes disturbing engagements. The following material is edited and collated from a series of e-mails June 16–July 2, 2008.



I am a practicing Buddhist, it is my religion and therefore fundamental to my art practice, as well as everything else. I also practice the more physical aspects of yoga in the *Iyengar* style, but not as a spiritual discipline per se. Both come into my artistic making, including the psychophysical practices of the *Vajrayana* Buddhist tradition I am a student in—the *Aro* Lineage.

How does your Vajrayana practice inform your creative practice?

The formal practices that I engage in, silent sitting meditation practices, yogic song and *sKu-mNyé* (koom nyay)—a movement practice—all inform my experience



Kira O'Reilly, *Untitled Action*, 2003. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

and view in various ways that have had a subtle and consistent impact on my art practice. There is a directness and straightforwardness that I encounter in regard to my Lamas that I find extraordinary and inspirational. In *Vajrayana* Buddhism one's relationship with one's specific teachers is fundamental and central; everything else emerges from this crucial dynamic. Ngak'chang Rinpoche and Khandro Déchen are the lineage holders of the tradition and my teachers. They are both artists, including highly accomplished practitioners of the Tantric arts and crafts, for example *Thangka* painting, calligraphy and *Cham* (ritual dance). Ngak'chang Rinpoche went to art school, and studied illustration, and is also both a poet and a musician with a particular fondness for the blues, and frequently teaches through his discussion of the arts and horse riding.

Vajrayana is inherently creative and artistic in its methods and fruit; it appeals to the senses, form, color and sound. I have always been inclined to work across fields and forms of art practice—visual arts, performance, dance, biological medias, writing etc.—so the borders and boundaries of the fields I practice in terms of creativity are in constant renegotiation with this knowledge. This has encouraged me to expand my ideas of art practice and how and where I might think about making.

How do you make work? How does the Vajrayana discipline manifest itself in the making?

I make work in a number of ways. However, ideas around the body are central and using my own body in my work features in many of them. So methods of approaching the body are key. I frequently practice *Iyengar* Yoga as a physical discipline that I find helpful towards cultivating stamina, strength, and suppleness, and I frequently use it in the studio as a warm up.

I am very interested in the psychophysical practices of the *Aro* Tradition—specifically *sKu-mNyé*. I have begun to use *sKu-mNyé* when developing and devising movement work, especially this year at Chisenhale Dance Studio when I began a body of work [called] *Untitled (For You Beloved)*. I was and am still intrigued by the effect on the senses and the body, not just the physical effects, but also on the mind, as a compelling place to make work from. *sKu-mNyé* is a series of 111 movements of which I have been taught the first thirty-five. It is entirely different from any movement practice I have engaged in before. It is performed in sets of specific movements or exercises with periods of laying down in a meditation posture in between. The instructions for movements frequently give very specific details about the eye—namely, fixed and focused in space. In other words, they do not move or track as the head moves and the focus is on a plane in space rather than on actual reference points. Often movements are performed in opposite directions within one exercise, creating disorientation and disrupting defined notions of space and location. It works on the energetic body known as the *rTsa rLung* system, and it circumvents the conceptual, thinking mind and promotes experiences of the senses and sensation. This is a remarkable place to make [work] from and I'm very slowly positioning it as a central method in my making. I say slowly because it is demanding, requires consistent effort, and I'm always challenged by that kind of commitment.

Does the Vajrayana practice affect the relationships between you, the audience, and the work?

A relationship with the audience, viewer, spectator, or sometimes participant has been really key in my work since I first began making performances; after all, they are the people whose presence is so crucial and who complete the work with their being. I am not certain specifically how being a *Vajrayana* Buddhist changes this, except that I have tended to work with tenderness and an appreciation towards the audience. I always begin to prepare to meet the audience as a body of people who are making gestures of generosity by being there, and I attempt to return that generosity with my work.

How does the Vajrayana practice affect the way in which you relate to your material? Does it impart a particular flavor to your work?

I am not certain that it does, not more than it gives any activity in my life an increase in appreciation, joy, and delight. *Vajrayana* Buddhism works through the senses and is remarkable in how it allows me to work with my approach to the material and the non-material. I'm much more aware these days of play and movement between emptiness and form, or disappearance and reemergence, when making.

How long have you been practicing in the Aro lineage? Did you have a regular spiritual practice before that?

I formally became a student at the end of 2005; I had attended retreats and teachings in the tradition for about three years previous to that. Before practicing in the *Aro* tradition I was looking around and reading a lot. I was strongly drawn to Buddhism and, in particular, Tibetan Buddhism, and practicing meditation erratically. I have always had an active interest in notions of consciousness, and my research both reading and experientially did include investigation of many spiritual traditions and methods. I'd also been intrigued by Tibetan Buddhism through the spiritual and cultural legacy of the *Vidyadhara* Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who founded Naropa University. The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics is a Naropa initiative, which began in 1974 and hosted many of the American literary avant-garde, including Beat writers Ginsberg and Burroughs, who were of immense significance to me—particularly Burroughs.

Has your work changed as a result of your Vajrayana practice?

Certainly my subjective experiences within making work, and, for that matter, any of my activities are altered as a consequence of this practice, which undermines subjectivity as being solid, permanent, separate, continuous, defined. So I could definitely say that my view as an artist and performance-maker has changed remarkably but is equally infused with my neuroses: aggressions, fears, compulsions, insecurities, and depressions.

I think when beginning to make the dances, *Untitled (Syncope)* in 2007 and the newer material, *Untitled (For You Beloved)* in 2008, there was a clear opening up of new ground for me as a maker, moving into performative strategies that were on a continuum with the earlier works, but appropriating dance histories and traditions in a highly undisciplined and inexperienced way, working with movement, using *sKumNyé* as a way into the body, including awareness, and that becoming enhanced in the presence of an audience. There is an expanded sense of playfulness and being much more open and willing to work across more divergent fields and disciplines. That has always been my inclination as an artist, but it has been infused with more of a sense of richness and the actions and expressions having a potential to become something more.

JULIA LEE BARCLAY

Julia Lee Barclay is a writer/director/performer of experimental theatre and the artistic director of Apocryphal Theatre in London, founded in 2004 from a theatre laboratory. The work she does now stems from work begun in NYC in 1997 when she started a lab in search of tools to create events that made visible the usually hidden political and theatrical rules of the room. Her written texts have been the basis of Apocryphal's *Heart Oven Falling: Gotcha!* (2004), *The Jesus Guy* (2006), and *Besides You Lose Your Soul or The History of Western Civilization* (2007). The following material is edited and collated from a series of e-mails June 8–July 2, 2008.



I started meditating in 1996, not to experience spiritual transcendence, simply as an act of desperation to stop myself one morning from acting like a workaholic maniac from the moment I woke up until I went to bed. What I did was this: I sat there, on the sofa, coffee to my right, probably having smoked a cigarette, and closed my eyes and didn't move. I had no idea "how to meditate" other than things I had heard and maybe worked with once or twice about not holding onto or pushing away thoughts and focusing on the breath and such. I did this for twenty minutes, and for some moments within those twenty minutes experienced peace. For some reason I do not understand and still cannot explain, I have done this every day since. I have expanded the practice to twenty-five minutes. Sometimes I don't do it the moment I wake up. I can count on one hand the times I have forgotten, and those days usually go very badly, unless I remember I have forgotten and find some time to meditate during the day. I have since learned some more formal practices, which some days I use and some days I don't. The main reason I believe I still do it is the simplicity, which is in simply noticing: my breath, my thoughts, whatever.

A couple years into this practice, I encountered Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and his statement that "the true knight of faith is a witness, never a teacher." I was quite moved by this, though didn't make the connection at the time between the idea of "witness" and my ongoing meditation practice. What I became interested in, and [have] developed since, is the idea of how a performer can witness herself and the actions around herself whilst performing. I have since extended this to my own

practice as a writer/director and, more recently, as a performer. The notion of witness expanded in 2000 when I started practicing *Kripalu* yoga and read Stephen Cope's *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*, in which he discusses "witness consciousness." He refers to this as a way to witness oneself in the world, as a way to hold one's own emotions and thoughts without becoming a slave to them or repressing them. This made the idea of the witness concrete in terms of my own life, but again I did not make the connection between that and the work I was doing with actors in labs. The idea of the witness has expanded in my theatre practice in the last four years, as it has become more of a merger between the abstract and concrete ideas.

There is something we work on in Apocryphal now that we refer to as creating sacred and/or secular space. It's a way of addressing issues of spirituality in practice by using the words as ways of thinking about and creating a space in which we act, and how we then share that space with an audience. I am most interested in the sacred-secular or the secular-sacred, and to look at these terms as frameworks in and of themselves can help us as performer-artist-creators to find out what we do consider sacred, what hurts if it is broken, what can more easily be shared, and where we have boundaries we do not want crossed.

On levels of witnessing, right now we are looking at reaction and response and the possible differences between these two things, and in the moment of reacting or responding, naming that action as a reaction or response . . . so the witnessing is rendered visible. When we do this, I find as an observer it becomes necessary to say "reaction" or "response" when I laugh or have any involuntary reaction, which shifts my relationship considerably to the performers. However, and significantly, when we tried out some of these ideas in front of an audience, I became mute again, as if I had to sit back and "be the invisible director." In retrospect I think that was a big cop-out, and an example of a fear and/or habitual reaction. It is the level of witnessing, which is built into the way we evaluate our performances and rehearsal processes, which helps me see this.

The way we evaluate things is based on a number of spiritual traditions, one example being the Quaker meeting tradition, and involves allowing everyone to speak without being interrupted before we launch into discussion. In this way everyone's voice gets heard and people can take the time they need to formulate thoughts, and when we are listening, we are listening, not just waiting our turn to speak, which we all know will come. This is particularly important for me as the director, as I then have to listen to what everyone is saying without feeling compelled to somehow answer or justify. When I feel that impulse the strongest, I try very hard to still my mind and listen instead. This action feels like a spiritual practice, though it has a lot of purely artistic benefits, as we end up with a process with integrity, which includes all voices and then leads—usually—to better work and/or working process the next time.

The level of improvisation in Apocryphal's work relates to spiritual practice as well, because it involves of necessity a level of listening and awareness which I associate with meditation and yoga. *Kripalu* yoga has as its goal "meditation in motion," and



Rachel Ellis rehearsing Apocryphal's *The Jesus Guy*. © Birthe Jorgensen.
Photo: Courtesy Franc Chamberlain.

Hancock & Kelly Live, *Iconographia* at Granary Theatre, Cork, Ireland, 2007.
Photo: Courtesy Franc Chamberlain.



I think this is a good description of improvisation when it's working well. What I mean by "working well" is that people are listening to themselves, each other, whatever structure may be involved, and the room and responding to that. Not that every level of this is conscious, but all of those elements are embodied in the performers, but work fluidly in the moment. To get to the place where this is possible takes practice, which I would call both artistic and spiritual.

A note on the word "spiritual": it's a weird word as it connotes, I am afraid, some kind of transcendent activity, whereas for me it is about concrete actions that are taken not so much to control events to one's own liking, but instead to allow for openings in this world, right here, right now to connect with the very real people in the room—resonances, voices, ideas perhaps not yet heard or formed . . . something new perhaps, or perhaps something ancient which strikes us as new . . . not a set idea in any case. This kind of work involves risk on every level, and, as one of my favorite Robert Rauschenberg quotes goes, "You can't have risk without risk," which means at times it can fail, and badly.

In terms of this "working" and "not working" thing, I love what one of the performers in *The Jesus Guy*, Theron Schmidt, said which relates to this. At first he is talking about why we improvise and the difference between "prepared resonant moments" and what we do: "They [prepared moments] serve to transport, as part of a planned itinerary, to an emotional destination. Whereas these moments that we stumble across transport you *to the place you already are*, only more attentively so." This seems like a good description of meditation, too. . . .

It is important to remember that no matter how integral the spiritual practice, there needs to also be an awareness of an audience and what they will need to go along this journey with us for it to have integrity as an artistic process. On the other hand, if there is no spiritual practice, the artistic process can devolve into a "planned itinerary, to an emotional destination," which is of no interest to me as an artist or as an audience.

TRACI KELLY

Traci Kelly is an artist whose visceral and poetic works revolve around contingent bodies and processes of collaboration. Her practice investigates skin as a material and cultural signifier and as a site that (dis)contains and facilitates her own social body. In addition to her solo practice, she has had a collaborative practice with Richard Hancock as Hancock & Kelly Live since 2001. *Iconographia* was performed at The Granary Theatre, Cork as part of Bodily Functions 2007. The following material is edited and collated from a series of e-mails April 22–July 2, 2008, and expresses a personal viewpoint rather than a company one.



I used the term post-secular earlier and said that I was uncomfortable with it—I want to say something like "beyond sacred and profane" or "beyond spiritual and material"

or “beyond religious and secular,” in an echo of Nietzsche. In U.S. work, for example, I think that there has been an ongoing influence since the 1950s, from advaita, zen, and Tibetan Buddhism, that concerns awareness, openness, participation, emptiness, form, and connection. Buddhism has a religious dimension, but in the context I’m thinking of it’s more a way of doing, an attitude. The work I’ve seen of yours doesn’t seem to have that kind of approach and also seems more in tune with say Caravaggio than Raphael.

Richard and I do not have a spiritual practice, one that is framed and contextualized. I have had a spiritual awareness around humanity that I can locate probably to around the age of five. But our work is not wrapped up with this—just background info.

Though I do not have a Catholic background, I have always been drawn to religious iconography such as Renaissance painters and, yes, Caravaggio. So I guess that my relation to spirituality on a visual level at least is very much tied up with monotheistic traditions. In turn this very much places me in dialogue with the terms of what does it mean to be woman. To be constructed and shaped; to have my voice to speak back to the machinery that makes woman. This leads me to psychoanalytical discourse, phallocentrism, and its reworkings through Butler, Irigaray, and Kristeva. In the past that level is where ritual has often stemmed from for me. However, my practice is a phenomenological inquiry into how I may exist in this world and on what terms, and that is why the term “intersubjectivity” is key to my current research. I tend to frame things now via Deleuze and the shifting vibrating energy that contingent bodies/spaces emit. Performance provides me with the space to tune in, to have a different awareness played out in a communal context. In this sense my artistic practice could logically be viewed as my spiritual practice. Rather than having a spiritual practice that informs the work, it is my work that informs my inner sensibilities. In performance I am deeply human, vulnerable, and flawed, yet on display.

Iconographia operated differently in Cork because of the seating. It is usually performed in a space without seating in which the audience can roam, come and leave as they choose. Many of the audience members in Cork lingered longer with the comfort of seating and the sense of removal that can sometimes give. Many of our works are for a roaming audience. In Richard’s works and some of mine they come across a ritual already played out ahead of their access, or played out for them, but in many of my works the audience performs a ritual with me or upon me. Though *Iconographia* is a dialogue across the sacred and profane in its own right, when it was first performed at the Greenroom in Manchester, it was in dialogue with another piece of work. We ran two four-hour durational pieces in two different spaces there. Richard performed *Postures A-M*, which is a sleazy and slowly degrading work in terms of the soundtrack and physical exhaustion. The audience was at liberty to roam between the two spaces. With these two works in dialogue *Iconographia* was read on a more sacred/spiritual level; the audience didn’t have to tease out the flitting subtleties in it because they were occupied with what they were placing as its binary other in *Postures*. People came into *Iconographia* first, and one audience member who then went into *Postures* later said that he felt as if he had been punched in the stomach.

Though in the past ritual has played a part as a process that is less so now, it seems that ritual is often developed from a desire to see how an action/body relates to repetition/time/endurance. We often interfere with one of our senses during performance to sculpt another sense of being. Vision in particular. We also frequently wrap the mouth as an insistence upon silence but also of pleasure.

Can you say a little about your workshop on the sacred and the profane?

Sacred and profane—I do not distinguish between the spiritual and the carnal—for me they are the same thing. It is just a binary that starts a process in order to collapse it. The workshop is about the two terms troubling each other and collapsing the notional difference. There is often a process of realization for students as they start to critique their responses. The workshop really isn't rocket science, but it goes through a simple process in a hurry! After a warm up and lead-in, the participants go through some exercises to produce some personally/culturally sacred images; this is repeated with the idea of the profane. When they start and introduce movement/action/architectural context/lighting to the sacred it often tips over the border to the profane; likewise with the profane to the sacred. Some images retain their original intention, but if several snaps of the work are placed together in proximity, or are actually incorporated into each other's work, then again the waters become muddy. The process is a slow revelation that these terms are to a large extent operating on the same level. On a making level there is an element of corruption as images are altered, tweaked, dispossessed, and scavenged.

Would you say that you go into an altered state of consciousness when performing . . . and, if so, would you understand this in terms of spirituality? Psychology? Phenomenology? Or what?

This changes radically from work to work and performance to performance, and to be honest I would place it more in phenomenological terms—particularly in solo works such as *In Season*, which, like *The Mirror Pool*, creates a space for exchange through physical and intimate contact with the performer. It's for an audience of one where I lie on a table with the body of a pig and the audience is given an invitation to prepare the flesh. There is salt, wine, virgin oil, and a tenderizer/mallet at their disposal. The audience is unsupervised, as I think they too are being asked to risk something that would be compromised by another presence. Again in terms of *In Season*, my state of consciousness and awareness is heightened, not diminished. Second by second I am aware of my own limits and perhaps pushing beyond them if that is possible, seeing that limits are limits. I am also constantly monitoring through the surface of my skin when the moment might arrive that I break the performance.

I think that I would only frame my practice within a spiritual context in terms of function. It is my way of being in and relating to the world and my humanity and the humanity of others, of feeling deeply and being open to the realm of possibilities.

But this definition could also apply to a purely philosophical and phenomenological tradition. In this case my body moving through temporal space and time is enough to be regarded as a spiritual presence/act, as well as an act of theatre with a small “t.”

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