

***BOLL* (2014): CURATING AFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE IN/AS PERFORMANCE**

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As a performance-maker, affect is my material. Produced, transmitted and, experienced by bodies kinesthetically, affect in my work is sensed viscerally, subsisting and persisting at the level of the skeletal,

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Recent presentations include; FADO Performance Art Centre (Toronto, Canada), VIVA Art Action (Montréal, Canada), 5th Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (Greece), The Tetley Centre for Contemporary Art & Learning (Leeds), Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Wakefield), Baltic 39 (Newcastle Upon Tyne), Royal Museums Greenwich (London), Siobhan Davies Studios (London), 8th Biennial of Photography (Poznan, Poland), Grace Exhibition Space (New York), and, Centre de Cultura de Dones Francesca Bonnemaison (Barcelona).

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ligamentous, muscular, organ, endocrine, nervous, fluid and fascial systems. My performance works seek to activate these kinesthetic processes, and in so doing, the subcutaneous modalities through which '[a]ffect makes bodies even as it is made by bodies' (Manning, 2009, p.137), are brought to expression.

Conceptualisations of affect as nonconscious, autonomic, autonomous, pre-linguistic and non-representational (Manning, 2009; Massumi, 1995), have been widely interpreted, and indeed critiqued, as positing affect in excess of conscious experience and articulation in language. According to this understanding of affective excess, critics warn that the kinesthetic and subjective dynamics of affective experiences lack articulation, and, the discursive dimension of affective knowledge is silenced (Hemmings, 2005; Martin, 2013; Thrift, 2008; Wetherell, 2012).

Such binary understandings of affect theory, whereby affect is pitted in opposition to language and conscious experience, are perhaps, a consequence of misreadings of affect theory. In particular, concepts such as nonconscious and the non-representational, for example, have been read antagonistically as instigating such binary oppositions. Through clarification of such terms, contemporary affect theory literatures work to repair these acts of conceptual cleaving and misreading (McCormack, 2013; Manning, 2014, 2016; Massumi, 2015). Such reparative re-readings make clear that, to varying degrees, nonconscious



experience can be attuned to corporeally, affect can be made felt kinesthetically (Manning, 2014; 2016). Further, affect and language are not in fact in opposition. Affective registers of experience 'accompany linguistic expression' (Massumi, 2015, p.212), and therefore, are not impervious to discursive forms or meaning-making.

In dialogue with these more subtle understandings, rather than languish in the realm of the nonconscious or conscious, affect and affective experiences in my own practice are conceived at a threshold between conscious and nonconscious modes of experience. For example, through techniques of stillness, slowness, extended duration and working unsighted, my performance works activate a level of attention operational at the cusp of the conscious and nonconscious, so as to attune to and express such threshold affective knowledges.

However, as an embodied way of knowing, the status of affect as knowledge is a sensitive subject. Affect, as a processual, motile, and energetic phenomenon does not stay still. As such, affect is no easy object of knowledge. Similarly, affective experience conceived as a kinesthetic form of knowing is no easy subject for objective analysis. The status of affective experience as objective knowledge is problematised for being contingent on subjective coordinates and interpretations as the grounds for such claims to knowing. Affect therefore aggravates an already raw nerve in discourses on knowledge, whereby subjective and corporeal modes of knowing are nervously, if not cursorily, classed as knowledge at all. By implication, bodies have suffered the deepest wounds, and subjective experience has sustained the longest silence.

Therefore, the extent to which affective knowledges, as (a)live or living knowledges, can be considered stable objects of knowledge "as such", is a fallacy. Willfully refusing extrapolation to all bodies and subjects, affective knowledges are contingent and singular. In my own practice, one way to articulate and for that matter curate such singular, contingent knowledges, is to do so through performance. In the moment of performance, and only in the moment of performance, affects are

temporarily framed live, which is to say, affects are instantaneously curated and brought to expression via kinesthetic techniques, through the body-subject.

These processes can be exemplified through analysis of my performance-sculpture *Boll* (2014). *Boll* was performed at Passatge Del Crèdit, Gothic Quarter, Barcelona, as part of Fem Festival, 2014. Through performance action and the use of sculptural objects, this fifteen minute performed sculpture was sited as an intervention in public space, yet, brought internal (kinesthetic), and otherwise private (subjective) affective experience to relief.

Specifically, *Boll* was made in response to my affective experience of a cervical operation to remove severe grade abnormal cells from the left side of my cervix. In this process, an electrosurgical procedure is carried out, whereby an electrical current is used to cut away the affected area of cervical tissue, which is extracted for further biopsy. Following my procedure, I had an acute awareness of the area of removed tissue. Whilst the procedure had been carried out internally (therefore having no visual frame of reference), and under local anaesthetic (therefore inducing minimal pain), in the following weeks and months I developed a heightened consciousness of arguably phantom sensations, images and smells.

The procedure itself, I reflected, was a performance-sculpture with/in my body, one that had resonated affectively, which is to say, echoed kinesthetically, as a residue in my body. It was my experience, whilst walking and lying down for example, that I was carrying the left side of my body, as if significantly heavier than my right. Often, a gnawing sensation in my left side would invoke an image of blistering, which in the manner of synaesthetic perception, would coincide with a smell of burning. Like an affective feedback loop, this olfactory sense of burning would morph into a physical sensation of heat in my pelvis, which would then transform into a visual image of a small hollow space, black, charred and dry.

Affective attunement in this experience was enlivening, for it produced a heightened awareness of internal, nonconscious processes. However, the synaesthetic nature of this experience was

also distracting. The assailment of these confusing sensations, and, the often-unexpected assault of unpleasant images and smells would jar in the everyday. Paradoxically then, the heightened, specifically synaesthetic sense of affective awareness that the procedure had produced, simultaneously effected a disorganisation of sensory systems.

Given the internalised nature of the above experience, communication of such affective experience to an attendant audience was problematised. For example, given that the kinesthetic sense was my primary locus of experience, such affective knowledge risked being illegible for being invisible to the outside eye. Indeed, it had been a concern, or at least an ongoing question in my performance practice more broadly, that the kinesthetic and subjective dimensions of my affective experience did not translate to audiences, or more problematically, potentially excluded audiences from this internal process.

As the following artists' pages reveal, in addition to my body, Boll deployed devices external to the body, such as a shell, cotton wool, and fire, as a strategy for "turning the body inside out," explicating the cervical and electrosurgical experience through the use of objects. Further, as an expanded form of practice, the following artists' pages perform a similar explicating function. Through the curation of visual documentation and exposition through descriptive text, my intention is to make the subject matter of the performance and the experience of the performance itself explicit, rather than implicit. Whilst these pages are not equivalences for the affect of the performance, in their own right, image and text are conceived as effective and indeed affective devices for framing kinesthetic and subjective knowledges, those that might elude audiences in the moment of performance.

As such, both the performance and the following artists' pages are conceived as 'affective-discursive practices,' (Wetherell, 2014) inviting audiences (whether of the performance, documentation, or both) into a closer kinesthetic and affective relationship with the work. In combination, these strategies constitute an expanded form of practice that facilitates 'complex acts of *meaning-making*'

(Wetherell, 2014, p.16), eliciting and unpicking a tangle of affective knowledges, embodied (and all too often hidden) within the work.

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Boll, to mean “bowl” (Old English), “round object” (Middle Dutch), and, “to blow, inflate and swell” (Proto-Germanic). Definitional use to mean the dry, rounded, seed-bearing capsule of the cotton plant, and, a bowl-like shape.

Standing in the Gothic, Passatge Del Crèdit arcade, I rest a large volute shell on my pelvis, and place my left hand inside of its curled recess.

Taken from the sea, although intended for commercial sale, the shell had undergone unnatural processes to dispose of animal life. As opposed to the animal naturally dying, rotting, and being eaten by other life, through burning, cooking, burying or freezing, residual tissue is artificially killed and extracted.

Prior to the performance, the innards of the shell are stuffed with a wad of white cotton wool, and the external surface is painted with a matte black paint. These sculptural processes alter the otherwise flesh toned object, and effect a dulling, muting mutation.

Holding this now “dead” shell to my soft middle I stand in stillness, sending a cellular awareness into my cervical tissues.

After a duration, I take a lighter from my pocket, and ignite the cotton wool that is stuffed inside the shell. The wool flames orange and burns, and as it does so, the white wool gradually turns black. Each time the flame diminishes, I blow on the fire to stoke and prolong it. In turn, dense smoke is produced, and tiny embers float upwards from the shell, carried by the air.

As I continue to blow the flames, my face and mouth hover close to the fire. My face becomes hot, and risks being burned. As a result, I inhale smoke through my nose and mouth. My throat becomes dry, my breathing becomes choked.



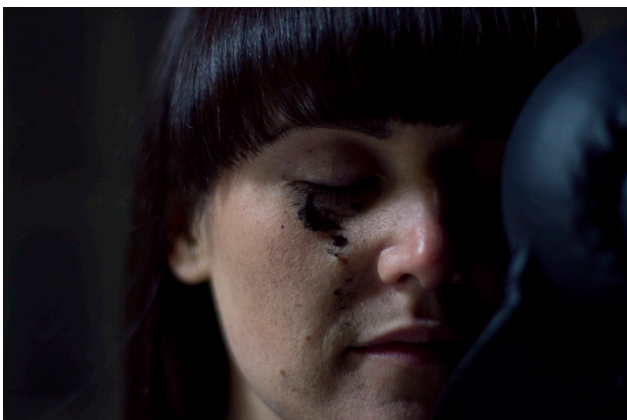
Simultaneously, the smoke stings my eyes, causing them to fill with water and stream. The mascara on my eyelashes, deliberately worn, runs in black lines down my cheeks, producing (artificial) tears.

As the flame and smoke die down, I remain still. As I hold the black shell, now dangerously hot, the wool, now almost entirely black, ripples orange with the last strains of heat.



Once the heat has died, and the shell and wool have cooled, I place the shell on the ground beside my feet. Carefully, I remove the blackened cotton from the shell, and standing, I slowly and deliberately begin to press the cotton wool to my face.

The wool absorbs the wet lines down my cheeks and in the process, parts of the charred cotton stick to my damp skin. The cotton leaves dry black traces of fibre that form matted clumps, running from eye to chin. After the moisture has been absorbed, I place the cotton back inside the shell.



Taking the shell from the ground, I stand and hold the shell to my left eye. In stillness, my left eye is open, so as to look inside of the shell, a hollow black space. My right eye is closed, reorienting somatic attention to my pelvis, a pierced hole in the cervix.

After a long-duration of stillness, I place the shell on the ground. Leaving the shell, I walk out of the otherwise secluded Passatge Del Crèdit, into the heaving city. Internally, my body carries the kinesthetic shape and texture of the performance. My nose and hands carry the smell of burning.

