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touching their bodies and rubbing up against them. She wears the signs of sado-masochism on her body — chains and nipple clamps — and her feet are tied together with a plait of hair, indicating that her body is a fetish for the viewer. She performs the body movements of the stripper suspended from a rope and then she returns to the personal space of the audience and hands out small funeral cards which say: 'words cannot express' and 'ever remembered', suggesting perhaps the death of stereotypes.

Sproul's performance works, like those of Karen Finley, reconsider the sexual representations of the body. However, Sproul does not engage in the type of cathartic ritual associated with Finley. Despite the erotic 'signing' in *Which side do you dress?* the performance stays quite clearly within a contemporary socio-political discourse which attempts to address the erotic and pornographic. There is no nostalgia for the abject body. The explosions of 'filth' that one associates with earlier performance and the desire for a cathartic experience, evident in Finley's work, are absent. Sproul speaks around and about these issues, creating a semiotic analysis which retains some distance from the corporeal body.

In 1991 Barbara Campbell used a pornographic text *La godmiche royale* (The royal dildo) as the basis for a performance sound-track. In part it read:

Qu'ils paraissent soudain, ma motte bien lavée,  
ma chemise et mes jupes hautement retroussés,  
et le foutre coulant de mon con à plein seau,  
sera cru des mortels un déluge nouveau.<sup>65</sup>

The diamond necklace affair<sup>66</sup> was inspired by the life of Marie-Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI, and 'focussed on changing attitudes towards the Queen's sexuality from "child bride" to "Austrian whore"'.<sup>67</sup> The title of the performance was taken from a scandalous episode in which members of the court used an expensive piece of jewellery, a gift from a lover, to win higher status for themselves. It became a commodity with which they could bargain, a form of blackmail. Shortly after the infamous affair many pornographic libels were published against the Queen.

Campbell used a computer-generated image of the jewelled necklace which was filmed and projected on a screen and she skipped continuously for ten minutes as the pornographic sound-track in the original French seduced the audience. Campbell was interested in the way in which particular movement traces could be understood as contributing to the mythologization of certain female figures.<sup>68</sup> In this performance skipping was used as a metaphor for the Queen's lightness of step which had become a legend. The artist notes that this myth was so powerful that, 'As legend has it, she sprang lightly from the cart that carried her to the guillotine'.<sup>69</sup>

Campbell is interested in aspects of translation and the interpretation of history. She argues that it is impossible to comprehend history as truth and says she used the pornographic text in French so that it would be indecipherable for most Australians in the audience.<sup>70</sup> It was a way of thwarting the audience's desire to understand. Although the text was extremely libellous, the listener was captivated by the French language which provided the rhythm during the skipping performance.

*Cries from the tower* (The Tower, Queen's College, University of Melbourne as part of *Experimenta*, 1992)<sup>71</sup> looked at the mythology associated with Mary Queen of Scots. A video projection of the artist's body, dressed in an elaborate period costume, was relayed live from the tower upstairs into the room below. A super-8 film was projected onto a small circular screen above the video, the sort of frame used for petit-point needlework. The film flashed on and off randomly and showed a close-up of the artist's hand as she carefully sewed along her heart line, head line and line of fate as designated by palm readers. Initially the video showed the silhouette of the artist's body complete with neck ruffle and full skirt, but the camera moved quite quickly into a close-up image of the dress. On the skirt the artist had painstakingly embroidered a controversial letter supposedly penned by Mary. The letter (casket letter no. 8 or 3, depending on the historical source) was presented as part of the evidence to implicate Mary in the murder of her second husband in collusion with her third husband.<sup>72</sup> Although it was a trumped-up charge, it meant that Mary Queen of Scots spent the next nineteen years of her life locked up in a tower.

The letter in its original French, in its old Gallic translation (used in the trial), and in a modern English translation was sewn around and around the large skirt. The video projection of the artist's actions showed her gradually undoing the skirt by pulling out the tacking which held it together. The image on the screen showed the viewer close-ups of the letters and phrases on the skirt. The fabric thus unravelled fell gradually into the space below. Throughout the performance the artist's physical body was absent, it was kept out of reach, in the tower, as a way of pointing to the fetishization of that which is kept secret.<sup>73</sup> The action, the undoing of the skirt and the occasional glimpse of flesh, was also seductive for the audience.

The masochistic act of sewing into her own skin presented the audience with something that was difficult to watch and it set up a contrast between the pleasure of looking, associated with the dress fabric, and an image of pain. Campbell says that she was aware that she was dealing with a figure with whom the audience would feel sympathy and that she wanted to turn this around by presenting another image, one difficult to watch.<sup>74</sup> However, such a juxtaposition also points to the self-obsession of the masochistic act: the female myth (Mary Queen of Scots) is framed within the context of

masochism. Campbell presents a deconstruction of the myth of the feminine hero for her audience. This is not the simple celebration of the myth, rather it is an analysis which tries to tease apart the complexities associated with the historical figure. The Queen is both heroic and self-obsessed.

In the 1980s and 1990s many artists have abandoned the use of the body as an authenticating site of experience and started to concentrate on the social construction of the body and sexuality. The body and desire have been re-analysed, and there is evidence of a renewed interest in the corporeal body, but this is positioned against a background of theory which stresses the social construction of the subject.

In Karen Finley's performances there is evidence of a return to a cathartic practice characteristic of earlier body art. Critics have read these works in a theoretical framework which speaks about transgression and the scatological body. It appears as if performance art has returned to the issues of the 1970s where the abject body encounters the museum. Although this is apparent, artists are also performing in clubs outside the artworld and so their message reaches another public. In these venues audiences are not shocked by the content of the work; they see the performances as critical assaults on society.<sup>75</sup> The new body performance uses many of the strategies associated with body art, and the historical link should not be forgotten, but the self-obsessive acts of earlier works are not encountered. Finley is reacting against oppression, she is not engaging in any masochistic activities.

Linda Sproul wears the cultural signs of sado-masochism, and in readings (of scripts yet to be designed as performance) the artist refers directly to her own experiences of sexual abuse as a child and makes links between this and sado-masochism in her adult life. Sproul talks about female masochism as a result of female experiences, but the infliction of pain is not the primary message in these works. The performances cannot be read as the violent reaction of Oedipal revolt familiar to an earlier avant-garde; the artist speaks loudly about abuse and situates her works within contemporary political issues. In some ways both Sproul and Finley present experiential works which speak about a personalized body, but they also address a social phenomenon in patriarchy.

Some feminist theorists have reconsidered sexuality and reassessed their position in relation to issues of pornography. This type of criticism reassesses transgression as a possible site of resistance and tries to manoeuvre theory out of a structuralist cul-de-sac where subjectivity is already written. The 'sex war' debates have created lively discussion in feminist circles as sex workers and porn stars assert their right to choose. Sex has come back on the feminist agenda, both in art and in theory. The position of the speaking subject is at the centre of these debates. In relation to performance art it is important to note the ways in which this discourse has been presented. The

artists discussed in the final part of this chapter speak about sexual abuse (Finley, Sproul), erotic coding (Sproul, Campbell) and feminine mythology (Campbell). Finley is undoubtedly the angriest voice and she is joined by other American artists such as the writer Kathy Acker, who also uses pornographic language, and the performance artist Holly Hughes who speaks openly about her homosexuality. The American artists have had their grants revoked as a result of the content of their works, but this type of censorship must be seen within a specifically political situation which has developed in the USA over the last decade. The rise of the New Right and Christian fundamentalist groups has created a particularly conservative situation against which artists must battle. In Australia there has not yet been any censorship. It is important to stress the historical context: body art in the 1970s was not censored in this way. Artists returning to an analysis of the body in the 1990s are facing a different audience in the artworld (one more aware of social theory), but in the USA, they are also encountering a conservative backlash, hence the censorship.

In Australia it is apparent that performance artists are analysing issues in the 1990s similar to those they were analysing in the 1970s: ecological and environmental issues persist and a return to the body is evident. However, it must be stressed that the notion of instinctual revolt has been reassessed and artists are turning their attention to the way in which subjectivity is constructed.

33 In Australia the magazine *Art & text* was the first journal to publish a substantial amount of material submitted by artists. Imants Tillers, Juan Davila, Julie Brown-Rrap, and members of the 'new music' scene associated with the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre (Philip Brophy, David Chesworth in particular) all wrote for *Art & text* at various stages of their careers.

34 A. Kaprow, 'Non-theatrical performance', *Artforum* (May 1976), pp. 45–51.

35 Taped interview with Jude Walton, May 1992.

36 The performance was advertised as 'a reading rewriting of *L'Amante Anglaise* by Marguerite Duras'.

37 Taped interview with Jude Walton, May 1992.

38 Taped interview, Jude Walton.

39 Taped interview, Jude Walton.

40 P. Brophy, 'Asphyxiation: What is this thing called "Disco"?' *Art & text* 3, spring, 1981, pp. 59–66.

41 R. Rooney, *Age*, 16 July 1980.

42 Gilbert and George visited Australia in 1973 and performed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria. They were a 'camp act' and played on the ridiculous whilst underpinning their works with a political message. See C. Hector 'They keep stiff for hours', *Nation review*, 31 August–6 September 1973, p. 1457 and D. Brook, 'Blur between art and life', in the same issue, p. 1456.

43 Notes supplied by the artists.

44 Performance notes supplied by Michele Luke, August 1988.

45 Taped interview with Michele Luke, August 1988.

46 Performance notes supplied by Michele Luke.

47 Taped interview with Mark Rogers, 1988.

48 E. Fuchs, 'Staging the obscene body', *The drama review*, 33, 1, spring, 1989, pp. 33.

49 Fuchs, *The drama review*, p. 33.

50 K. Finley, 'A constant state of becoming', an interview with Richard Schechner, *The drama review*, 32, spring 1988, p. 154.

51 For further analysis of these artists see Tsiakma, 'Hermann Nitsch', July–August, 1976, *Studio international*; C. Tisdall, 'Stuart Brisley and Marc Chaimowicz', pp. 16–18. Works by these artists have been considered in Chapters 2 and 3 of this book.

52 See Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio*, p. 25.

53 K. Finley, 'The Constant State of Desire', *The drama review*, 32, 1988, p. 148.

54 For an analysis of the shifting positions in sexual fantasy see J. Laplanche, and J-B. Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the origins of sexuality', *The international journal of psychoanalysis*, 49, 1968, pp. 1–18.

55 Indeed some feminists have argued that Freud's theory of sexuality is a theory of perversion, see L. Williams, 'Pornographies on/scene or Different Strokes for Different Folks' in L. Segal and M. McIntosh (eds), *Sex exposed: sexuality and the pornography debate*, Virago, London, 1992, p. 237.

56 S. Freud, 'A child is being beaten: a contribution to

the study of the origin of sexual perversion' (1919), *Standard Edition*, 17, pp. 179–204. See L. Williams's discussion of Adams's paper, 'Pornographies on/scene', pp. 249–50 and P. Adams, 'Of female bondage', in T. Brennan (ed.), *Between feminism and psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, pp. 247–65. For an extended psychoanalytic interpretation of performance and pornography by women artists see my article 'Wicked women in performance', *Agenda: contemporary art*, special issue, 28, summer 1992–3, pp. 45–52.

57 P. Adams, 'Of female bondage', p. 247.

58 G. P-Orridge, and P. Christopherson, 'Annihilating reality', pp. 44–8.

59 The performance was reported as a 'real' event resulting in the death of the artist in the international press. For an Australian response see D. Brook, 'Reaching the fatal zenith of body art', *Nation review*, 29 December 1972–4 January 1973, p. 345 and 'Dividing the single skin of color into two', *Nation review*, 8–14 1973, p. 1056.

60 Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 48.

61 E. Cowie, 'Pornography and fantasy: psychoanalytic perspectives' in Segal and McIntosh (eds), *Sex exposed*.

62 For an analysis of the neutralization of difference in relation to style see Hebdige, *Subculture*.

63 E. Cowie, 'Pornography and fantasy: psychoanalytic perspectives', p. 134.

64 Fuchs documents events by the artist where she has periodically emptied her 'diarrhetic guts into a bucket on stage'. Fuchs, 'Staging the Obscene Body', p. 48.

65 Translated: May they [the lovers] come immediately, my twat well-washed, my shirt and my skirts lifted high, and the come running out of my cunt in buckets full, will be believed by morals to be a new deluge. From notes provided by the artist. 66 Artspace at Pier 4/5, Sydney; The Greater Western, Melbourne; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Sound composition, Jamie Fielding; sound engineering, Shane Fahey; voice, Selene Alcock; costume, Annemaree Dalziel; film assistance, Gary Warner, Virginia Hillyard and Nick Meyers; translations, Christopher Allen.

67 Programme notes provided by Barbara Campbell.

68 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell, November 1992.

69 Programme notes.

70 Taped interview, Barbara Campbell.

71 Also shown at the ABC Ultimo Centre for the Third International Symposium on Electronic Arts.

72 Taped interview, Barbara Campbell.

73 Taped interview, Barbara Campbell.

74 Taped interview, Barbara Campbell.

75 Karen Finley's performance *Constant state of desire* is included on the video *Mondo New York*, available at many video stores. In this version of the performance the artist is performing in a club. On other occasions she has performed in sex clubs where men have shouted abuse at her.