Dubiously Wholesome: Performing Gender

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Acknowledgements

To my husband Scott for letting me know I had already won.

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Statement of Authentication

This work has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment has been given in the text.
Abstract

This studio-based research project explores ideas of gender performance through the digital manipulation of aerial acrobatics, resulting in a series of video works and installations. This paper explains the processes, artworks and conceptual developments of this project. Dubiously Wholesome’s focus on gender performance began as an interrogation of what it means to identify as female in contemporary society and how manifestations of gender are used to create an identity that interacts with the complexities of everyday life. An investigation into Judith Butler’s ideas of gender as a social performance instigated the project’s conceptual framework. This resulted in artworks that explore gender scripted from social repetition and then performed by the individual, whereupon the repetition works to validate gender signifiers and “instate” sex as naturalistic. The integration of aerial acrobatics into the project’s studio practice acted as both an aesthetic tool and a research methodology where my experience as a professional aerial performer informed my conceptual framework. The images created through this digital manipulation of aerial acrobatics were interspersed with fairytale imagery from Little Red Riding Hood and Rapunzel, drawing from the tales’ positions as social commentator and manipulator to subvert accepted views on gender roles. In my work, I used the idea of gender as performative and interpreted it, not through a text-based idea of script, but through an analogy of aerial performance. In this analogy, the red fabric I am suspended from came to represent the gender signifiers through which the body is bound by social constructions. The manipulation of the fabric around the body suggests the performativity of gender and that, like an aerial performance, gender is learned, rehearsed and performed.
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Introduction

0.1 Aerial Acrobatics and Gender Identities

In preparation for an aerial performance at a high profile fundraiser with a burlesque theme, I laid out my costume, cosmetics and various other accessories. First I blurred away the imperfections on my face with foundation, applied copious amounts of eye make-up including an outrageous set of false eyelashes and ensured everyone in the audience would be able to see my lips by coating them in a fire engine shade of red. I stacked my hair high on top of my head and secured it with a thick layer of hairspray, added sparkles to every surface of my body possible and finally donned the skimpy leotard provided for me to wear. I studied my appearance in the mirror: I would pass as femininely beautiful. Just as I was jumping up to see the lower half of my body in the mirror (I am rather short, and the mirror was just that little bit too high) in walked four of the dancers who were due to perform after the act I would be in. They were the epitome of the feminine ideal: legs that ran up almost to my shoulders, hourglass figures fitted into alluring burlesque costumes adorned with feathers and sequins, and perfect hair and perfect make-up that made my rendition of the guise look like I was in drag. So there I was; contemplating my inadequacies while being dwarfed by four perfect examples of the very feminine ideal I was trying to achieve.

All I could see in the mirror was an undersized, boyish body that at best could be described as short and stocky compared to the “glamazons” that surrounded me. Even my costume fell short of the mark; it had to be constrained in its lavishness so as not to be impractical during my performance. As they filed out, the last remaining
dancer took one last look at her reflection and said to it, “you’re gorgeous” as she glided out the door. As I walked awkwardly into the limelight on my way out to the aerial apparatus, I hoped no-one would notice my lack of feminine perfection. Once in the air, this could easily be made up for in the practiced feminine movements of my performance. But at this moment I was faced with the irony that something I loved and made me feel powerful and strong could, for the sake of an audience, also cause feelings of gendered inadequacies. As Hey Big Spender, my cue, started to play over the sound system, I turned to my co-performer with a crooked smile and said, “I’m gorgeous”, then tried to glide gracefully onto the stage.

My experiences as a professional aerial performer and the contrasting standards of gendered ideals in this area raised personal questions of what it means to identify as female in contemporary society, and how manifestations of gender are used to create an identity that interacts with the complexities of everyday life. In considering these questions, Judith Butler’s ideas of gender as a scripted social performance appealed to me, and my project centred itself on the question of how I could explore ideas of gender performance through my artist practice. To research this question, my work revolved around a process of working with aerial acrobatics and digital media, which resulted in a series of video works. This process acted as both an aesthetic tool and a research methodology, where my experience as a female aerial performer informed my conceptual framework alongside the project’s engagement with literature on gender identity. In combination with the aesthetics of my aerial/video works, I integrated suggestions of perverted fairytales, using the tales as social commentaries and manipulators to subvert accepted views on gender roles. The title, Dubiously Wholesome, represents the complexity of exploring gender in
both its socially accepted application and in subverting its ideals. The oxymoron sets up the topic as complex, without desrenable absolutes and that asks the question, is performing gender dubious and its subversion wholesome (or vice versa), or is the whole experience of gendering the self (exercising agency or executing the performance correctly) dubiously wholesome?

0.2 Mapping the Terrain – Video Art, Gender, Aerial Acrobatics

The core elements of my research project can be divided into three major areas: an exploration of constructing gendered identities, video art and aerial acrobatics. It is the combination of these elements through my studio practice that defines where my work is unique in my field of study. To begin with, I will give a brief overview of where my artistic practice is located by examining where crossovers have occurred before in recent artistic practice. These crossovers are performative video artists dealing with gendered identities; hybrid forms of aerial acrobatics and video techniques; and the exploration of gender issues through aerial acrobatics.

Gender in Contemporary Art

Art that deals with gendered identities is prolific and varied. In contextualising my project in this vast domain in contemporary art, I will be looking briefly at how other artists have explored gender issues using methods that have either influenced or relate directly to my studio practice. These are drag and costume,
video art, performance, hybrid bodies and fairytales. The most prevalent method of exploring concepts of gender identity in artistic practice is via artists producing photographic images of themselves in drag and costume. Prominent artists in this area include Claude Cahun, Cindy Sherman, Tracy Rose, Yasumasa Morimure and Mathew Barney. Two of the more influential exhibitions of relevance to my project, *Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography* (1997), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and *Masquerade* (2006), Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, dealt exclusively with artists who work/ed in this area. For example Cindy Sherman (whose work appeared in *Masquerade*) explores representations of the feminine identity through a myriad of costumed selves.

Exploring gender issues through video art was of the most relevance to locating my work in the contemporary art world. This area will be looked at in detail in Part 3: Gender Bending, Three Examples in Contemporary Art, where I will explore the work of the Kingpins, Liam Benson and Monica Tichacek. Performance is another medium through which artists have chosen to explore gender. Artists such as Eleanor Antin, Adrian Piper, Mike Parr, Sari Kivinen, and George Tillianakis are some examples of artists working in this area. Jill Orr, a multimedia performance artist, explored gender through her performances in the 1990s with *Lovesongs* (1991), *Marriage of the Bride to Art* (1994), *Raising the Spirits* (1994) and *Myer Windows* (1997). In *Lovesongs*, Orr worked with a layering of video projection and live performance to create male and female reflections of herself. These characters longingly reached out to the other yet were never able to truly connect, resulting in a metaphorical burning of the self. In an artist statement, Orr explains:
The reality of this work is that the connection between the male and female aspects of the self is purely psychological and in reality merging the two within technology is an illusion. Identities are multiple and fractured morphing between the mediated and the psychological interior.¹

*Raising the Spirits* explored the limitations of the absolutes of gendered categories, by exploring the grey areas in between, again presenting masculine and feminine selves. This time her characters were derived from past artworks such as Marcel Duchamp’s *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915 -1923) where Orr performed both the bride and the bachelor. In her work *Myer Windows*, Orr looked at fashion and the idealised visions of femininity it creates that can never be achieved. The performance took place over seventeen days in a Melbourne Myer department store’s display windows, where Orr performed characters titled *Anorexia, the Ice Queen, Cracked Divas, Nocturna and the Panther, Doll, Cats, and Mad Alice.*

The creation of hybrid bodies, whether through photography, sculpture, video or costume is another area of gender exploration in contemporary art, and a method I have utilised in my own studio practice. Artists that have used hybrid bodies to explore gender include Hannah Hoch, Christian Marclay, Kiki Smith, The Kingpins and The Chapman Brothers. Christian Marclay fashions hybrid bodies from images of popular culture in his series *Body Mix* (1991-92). In this work the mix of celebrities with masculine and feminine body parts creates a tension between the recognisably gendered celebrities, and the androgyny of the conglomerate whole.

Kiki Smith created a sculptural work titled *Daughter* that depicted the hybrid offspring of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. The sculpture was of a little girl, cloaked in a red hood with an expression of innocent bewilderment. Sprouting from

her face was wolf fur, giving the figure a disturbingly ambiguous gendered appearance.

Smith’s work brings me to another way in which gender is explored through art practice; through the manipulation of fairytales. This use of fairytales as a conceptual tool in exploring gender identity is one of the most important elements in my studio practice next to aerial acrobatics. Other artists that have used this tool to explore gender include Sherman, Marnie Weber and Tichacek. Although aspects of fairytale imagery seeps into the majority of her costumes, performances and video works, it is one of Weber’s earlier exhibitions, *Lost in the Woods* (1997), that is of particular relevance in contextualising my art practice. The exhibition followed the journey of self discovery of a central character, Happy, through a series of videos, photo-collages and installation bound together by the exhibition’s own personal sound track. The holistic approach to the presentation of the works and common central character is similar to the way I have presented my own work. The photo-collages in this exhibition depicted nude women cut out of men’s magazines and placed in the context of fairytale landscapes. An example of this is *Little Red Riding Hood* (1997), the cut-out nude woman a giant surrounded by forest, wolves and Little Red Riding Hood. Weber, in an interview with Heather Catalinich, states her aim in recontextualising soft pornographic images of women into fairytale landscapes was “…an attempt to empower women and give them new life…”

In exploring issues of gender identity and performance, my studio practice contributes to the field in two major ways; the first and primary way is its use of

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aerial acrobatics to inform and create aesthetics for the exploration of gender issues and the second being the way the works are used to explore and reinterpret Judith Butler’s theories on gender as a social performance. The work created as part of my candidature moves away from exploring gender through dress-ups and drag, as in the work of Sherman, The Kingpins, Barney, Benson and numerous other artists who use masquerade as medium. Although my work is still performative in quality, the work is as much about my internal experience with the gendered body in aerial acrobatics as it is about an external presentation of a gendered self. It is about how muscularity, body movement and costume are categorised and restrained within gendered boundaries and ultimately how these boundaries can be rendered invalid or benign. The work presents a minimal performing body, where the aerial apparatus and digital manipulation of the body represent the gender signifiers and expression. It is the combination of personal experiences, aerial acrobatics, video art (digital manipulations), performativity, fairytale imagery and the application of my theoretical framework that my work contributes innovatively to the field of gender exploration in contemporary art.

**Aerial Acrobatics, video and gender exploration**

As my studio practice hinges on manipulation of aerial acrobatics through video art, it is important to locate my work, not only within contemporary video art, but also in the contemporary circus industry. The combination of video techniques and aerial acrobatics is used most prolifically with emerging and experimental aerialists. It was in emerging artist programmes, tertiary level arts institutions and
experimental performance nights run by Performance Space and The Carriage Works that I found people working in a similar vein to my own artistic practice.

In the crossover between gendered themes or gendered subversions in aerial performances, there is an interest in the topic within my professional practice, just as there is in contemporary art. The aerialists I have selected to discuss briefly are contemporary Sydney-based artists that have either had an impact on my acrobatic career or who I have had the opportunity to work with. In the crossover between video and aerial acrobatics, I will be discussing aerialists Shelalgh McGovern, Meiwah Williams and Kylie Hogan. In looking at how other circus performers have dealt with gender issues, I will consider productions by circus companies Acrobat, Aerialize and Electric Doll House.

Aerial performances exploring gender issues have been prevalent in the last half century, with gender subversion occurring through drag, the inversion of traditionally gender specific circus acts and confrontational presentations of the body which upset the idealised gender signifiers previously expected at a circus show. In *Circus Bodies; Cultural Identity In Aerial Performance*, Peta Tate explains that new circuses, which aimed to subvert social stereotypes, deliver gender reversals and grotesque aesthetics that contort and sexualise the circus spectacle. She gives examples of circus and physical theatre troupes such as Archaos, Club Swing and Circus Oz who have created works in this vein. An example of a recent circus troupe who used a confrontational presentation of the body to re-contextualise the gender body was Acrobat. In their latest production *Smaller, Poorer, Cheaper* (2007) the presentation of naked flesh acted to celebrate prowess of the body.

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3 Tait, Peta *Circus Bodies; Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2005, p121.
regardless of sex/gender, forcing the audience to re-evaluate their preconceptions of limitations usually explained through biological difference. Another example is Aerialize Sydney Aerial Theatre, a group that works in many areas of the circus industry creating juxtapositions in the delivery of aerial performance. On the one hand they reinforce the ultra feminine, traditional forms of female aerial performance for corporate shows, but on the other hand such shows for corporate companies allow for experimental aerial performance that often play with gendered stereotypes. In their 2007 annual production *Off the Rails*, stereotypical presentations of female aerial bodies were flipped on their head in a celebration of feminine prowess, often to the detriment of positive masculine representation. The production starts out with a traditional, silent movie-esque damsel being attacked by a male aggressor. As the action unfolds, a female aerialist, half the size of the villain, proceeds to beat him up in a duo tissu routine (a tissu routine is an aerial performance in which the performer hands, wraps and drops from fabric suspended from a height). In another scene, men become the objects of objectification when a team of topless construction workers vie for the attention of the female protagonist in a sexualised display of aerial masculinity. The female protagonist treats the scene with disinterest. Then there’s Electric Doll House, a small, all female aerial company which uses drag, humour and displays of feminine prowess to parody the confines of socially acceptable gendered behaviour. In their act *A Suspended Love Story*, Felix, a drag king character, performs a tango-like love scene within a giant aerial love heart. Felix’s masculine bravado ends with humorously tragic consequences, with his love interest having to save him.
Shelalgh McGovern combined video and aerial acrobatics in the work *Running for the Train* (2007). This piece was a multimedia installation that was presented as part of Performance Space’s event *Night Time #2: Sites*, where McGovern combined the film *When the Devil Rides* (1902), by her great grandfather Walter Booth, with an endurance aerial performance. *When the Devil Rides* is a silent, black and white film that used animation, live footage and time manipulation of this footage to depict the devil taking over a train. The audience was drawn into the installation via the sounds of flautist Kirsten Wally accompanying the track 29 *Poison* by Inga Liljestrom. On entering the corridor where the installation was housed, a single aerialist, McGovern, clothed in a white body suit, slowly wrapped and manipulated the white fabric around her body. Walter Booth’s film was projected onto the aerial performer illuminating the performance with a silvery light and transforming McGovern’s costume into a living thing. A piece of fabric located at the back of the performance picked up the projected film when it could not be seen on the aerial performance. As the aerialist moved and manipulated the fabric, the projected film was stolen from the screen at the back of the performance, giving the aerialist the power to direct how the audience viewed the film. McGovern alternately wrapped her body in new positions and spread the fabric that suspended her to more clearly reveal the projection. This power to direct the viewer’s experience of the film was the most interesting aspect of this performative installation. The changes between focus on the aerialist’s performing body and her great grandfather’s film worked to integrate the two mediums; the only thing that spoilt this play between the

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4 Walter Booth was an English film maker in the 1900s  
5 *Night Time #2: Sites* asked artists to respond to the performance/exhibition space The Carriage Works in a site specific way. *Running for the Train* drew inspiration from the exhibition site’s previous history as a repair workshop for Sydney’s trains and led McGovern to integrate her great grandfather’s, film, *When the Devil Rides*, into her work.
performance and projection, was the screen at the back of the performance. It drew focus away from the performance, and as the artist’s agency over the presentation of the film became one of the more interesting aspects of the work, the screen at the back undermined this relationship between performer, film and audience.

Aerial artist Meiwah Williams is another who has used multimedia as part of her creative process. Williams experimented with video in Legs On the Wall’s emerging artist programme with her work *Feet First* (2007). Video was used to enhance the aesthetics of the aerial performance and to cement the narrative. Williams also used video as a backdrop and a device to alter the atmosphere of the space her performance *Frida Kahlo* was staged in. The work interwove aerial silks, ground work and video to create a performance that reflected the thematic and aesthetics of Frida Kahlo’s paintings. The artist filmed subjects that related to Kahlo’s paintings such as South American parrots, colourful butterflies, and foliage, and edited them into images of Mexico’s *Day of the Dead* festivities, played as an introduction to set the scene of the performance. Other images of skycrapers and buildings falling down framed the action of the performance, with Williams often reacting in response to the projected images. One of the most interesting interactions between the video projection and the performance was when Williams left the aerial silks to place her skull mask on an easel; just as she hung the mask in the frame, an image of a skull appeared on the waiting canvas.

One of the events I participated in as part of my candidature was *Walking on Air*, an aerial club night where live music, aerial acrobatics and video art were combined to create a live show at The Studio at the Sydney Opera House. In addition
to creating two video works of my own to accompany one of the bands, I also participated as an aerialist in artist Kylie Hogan’s hybrid, aerial video work. The way Hogan combined video editing techniques and aerial acrobatics in her work was similar to my own hybrid methods. Hogan costumed me in a white tutu and filmed my body from underneath as I spun on a Spanish Web. The artist then took this footage and overlayed images of running water over the top, creating patterns that resembled a kaleidoscope. Although this work could be considered a stand alone piece, it was made with the intention of being integrated with a live Spanish Web Performance and was therefore viewed as a projection in the background of an aerialist spinning at the top of a rope.

The above aerial artists used video within the context of live performance, whereas the work I have produced for this research takes the documentation or the essence of this live aerial action, and places it into the context of video. The video works I have created from this process have no live component, only a sense of documented performativity, which is then digitally edited to create the finished video works.

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6 A Spanish Web is a piece of aerial equipment that involves the aerialist spinning by one hand in a loop at the top of a rope.
0.3 Tackling Gender Performance

The relevant material I engaged with during the course of this research project was made up of literature related to gendered identities, personal experiences as an aerialist and the critical process of creating artworks. In coming to terms with realising this conceptual framework, my work took on the medium and method of digitally manipulating aerial acrobatics into video art. It is a medium that not only provided an interesting visual stimulus for my themes, but has also been instrumental in the construction of my conceptual framework. This way of working integrates the process, research and realisation into a methodology where everything leads into the other. As well as working with aerial acrobatics, my video works have been strongly influenced by fairytales in both their use as a conceptual tool and as part my research into the process of gendering the self. This integration and manipulation of aerial acrobatics into video works to explore gender performance has never, to the best of my knowledge, been done before and establishes a platform through which to investigate new insights into the gendered self.

This exegesis will be broken up into three parts: the first will discuss the theoretical frameworks that became the basis of this project, looking at gender, performance and the conceptual and aesthetic tools I employed in my studio practice, aerial acrobatics and fairytales. The second part will explore the art practice of The Kingpins, Liam Benson and Monica Tichacek, giving a more detailed account of work being created in my field of study. The third section will explain my studio practice, critically discussing the developments of the project and the concluding works that realised my conceptual framework.
Part 1: Theoretical Framework; Performing Gender

1.1 Introduction

This project explores gender as performance using my personal experience as a professional aerialist. The aerial body became a launching point through which an exploration of gender as performance took shape and influenced my own perceptions of gender. This project will outline what can be revealed about gender using the aerial body as a conceptual tool, as well as the ambiguity of gender revealed in circus history. More generally, when looking at gender as a performance, I will interrogate what it reveals about gender and how such a presentation of gender can be subverted through the work of various theorists including Judith Butler, Moira Gatens, Peggy Phelan, Richard Schechner, Bert O States and Michel Foucault. Finally I will look at the integration of fairytales into the project’s theoretical framework and aesthetics.

1.2 Aerial Acrobatics - How Aerial Acrobatics Inform my Research

Before explaining how aerial acrobatics has informed my research I will explain what I mean by the terms 'aerial acrobatics', 'aerial bodie's, 'trapeze' and 'aerial tissu'. The term aerial acrobatics as used in this exegesis refers to the circus and physical theatre acts performed above ground using the assistance of apparatus such as ropes, trapezes and aerial tissu. The specific aerial apparatus used in this research project is a static trapeze and the aerial tissu. A static trapeze consists of a metal bar with ropes spliced onto each end and is used without a swing. The aerial...
performer moves his or her body around the ropes and bar to create static shapes and
dynamic rolls and drops. Aerial tissu is the name given to fabric that is rigged from a
single point from which an aerial performer will suspend themselves. The aerial
performer wraps the fabric around their body to perform static shapes and drops.
When using the term 'aerial body', I am referring to the body of an aerial performer
that has been conditioned through training and rehearsal to perform physically
demanding tricks on an aerial apparatus.

Aerial performance often blurs the lines of gender stereotypes through
contradictions in the presentation of gender signifiers and the performer’s body
image and capabilities. The reflections on my experience as a female aerial
performer yielded instances of gender anomalies and examples of ritualised
gendering of the body. As a professional circus performer, I am hired to perform at
mainstream events that require an adherence to the ideals of gendered categories.
This expectation to conform to stereotypical gendered behaviour requires an “ultra
feminine” costume and the execution of learned movements which are graceful,
beautiful and alluring. Such a feminine costume disguises the boyish, muscular body
created by the training required to execute such a graceful, beautiful and alluring
performance. This contradiction between the body formed by the activity of aerial
acrobatics and the mainstream costuming and performances aesthetics creates a
mixed message in the representation of gender by the aerialist. Such an anomaly in
gendering the self is created when the application of stereotypical and exaggerated
signifiers of femineity contradicts the individual’s celebration of their muscular
bodies.
The presentation and representation of gender in aerial performance over the last few centuries has varied and it is this history that has added extra depth to the use of aerial acrobatics as a conceptual tool to explore gender performance through my studio practice. A key text in exploring the gendered history of aerial acrobatics is the Australian theatre studies academic Peta Tait’s book ‘Circus Bodies; Cultural identity in aerial performance’\(^7\). Tait looks at the history of aerial performance (trapeze) in terms of the socially changing ideas of gender and body image. The history she presents suggests that, initially, muscular female performers were accepted and even more highly respected than their male counterparts, with male aerialists taking on female identities to compete.\(^8\) Through the twentieth century, although there were greater numbers of female aerialists who demonstrated skills equal to the males, it was the male aerialists who were regarded as the elite performers. Women had been relegated to ‘shapely’ ornaments that added to the overall spectacle, but didn’t participate in the more prestigious tricks. Tait states that much of this was due to the change in the perception of beauty (fuller, softer figures were most desirable at the time) and the way female circus performers were depicted in film.\(^9\) Either way, the female aerial performers had to disguise their muscularity with ultra feminine garb to keep up with the expectation of their audiences. Tait explains:

> Historically, a female aerialist who imitated male action, and thereby also developed a muscular body, upset the accustomed cultural seeing of bodies. A resulting visceral disturbance of seen identity might be considered a disruption of an ideological process. In the nineteenth century seeing femininity made aerial action more visible. Conversely,

\(^7\) Tait, Peta Circus Bodies; Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2005.
\(^8\) Ibid, p67.
\(^9\) Ibid, p90.
by the mid-twentieth century a feminized body that was not expected to do difficult tricks made its athleticism harder to see.\textsuperscript{10}

Contemporary circus is described by Tait as varying from the androgyny of \textit{Cirque de Soleil} to ‘Aggro Femmes’ in \textit{Circus Oz}, to the queer, sexualised performance of \textit{Club Swing}.\textsuperscript{11} Contemporary circus, in its diversity of gender portrayal, creates a rich medium through which my studio practice explores gender performance. By manipulating my presentation of aerial performance through video editing or simply by changing its context, the practice of aerial acrobatics became a methodology where I could draw insight through its association, history, aesthetics and impact on my own body.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, p150.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p150.
1.3 What is performing Gender?

The following section will give a brief account of what I understand gender to be and discuss, as a starting point, the relevance of Judith Butler’s work in exploring gender as a performance. Following a brief discussion of Butler’s work, I will discuss what performance is and what can be understood about gender by viewing it through such a lens.

Gender describes the cultural structures of masculine and feminine and how the individual engages social forms, such as behaviour, physical appearance and sexuality, to gender the self. That is, gender is used to substantiate the social categories of male and female. These categories serve to regulate reproduction, sexuality and create roles for social and cultural structures. In this role as a regulating force, gender becomes a tool for creating power structures. Gender is a significant part of our identity. When referring to identity, I am talking about the external interface through which we interact with everyday circumstance; circumstance being primarily social interaction. Therefore gender becomes another interface through which social interaction occurs and, like all aspects of identity, is fluid and interchangeable according to the context within which it is executed. This fluidity even extends to gender’s definition. As Butler suggests in an interview with writer Liz Kotz: “To the extent that gender is a kind of psychic norm and cultural practice, it will always elude a fixed definition”.

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13 I arrived at this definition of identity with the influence of Foucaultian concepts of multiple selves and technologies of self.
When performing gender, the body becomes the primary mode of expression in gender specific action. It is through the body that the social forms of gender expression are re-iterated.

As previously suggested by Butler, gender is both the division of individuals into masculine and feminine and the process the individual goes through to gender the self. Masculine and feminine are social constructions that are more a cultural ideal than a definitive state of being. These categories, in Butler’s view, do not prescribe a masculine or feminine identity, but rather indicate ideal gender identities to which individuals can aspire. All individuals are placed into a gender category from birth. Any ambiguity in a baby’s body in regard to its sex is quickly displaced via surgery or by ignoring anything that gives rise to the ambiguity.15 From that moment, sex-typing of behaviour begins, reinforcing the individual’s place in their gendered category and giving them the knowledge to aspire to the standards of this category.16 Although some deviation from accepted forms of gendered behaviour is accepted, too much ambiguity is met with disapproval from the everyday social community.

Gender is widely discussed as the culturally constructed side of sex. For example, when Simone De Beauvoir stated, ‘you are not born a woman, you become one’,17 she made a split between the body and the significations an individual

16 Burke, Phyllis Gender Shock; Exploding the Myths of Male and Female. New York: Doubleday, 1996. She states “The First defining moment in a human being’s life occurs in the birth room, and in medical terminology it is called “the announcement”… From the moment of birth, the baby is handled in a way considered appropriate to the body’s sex.” pxix.
presents in order to consolidate their sex. This gender/sex split creates a fertile
ground from which gender, feminist and queer studies/theories emerge. There are
positive and negative aspects to the significance of this split: when looking at its
function as a subversive tool as a positive, the split between gender and sex allows
for acts, appearances and other ways of expressing a gendered identity to be
represented and discussed as social constructs. This suggests that the way gendered
identities are portrayed may have little to do with the sex of the individual. This
separation of sex and gender can evolve into an essentialism that suggests that gender
is “natural”. This then leads into the more negative aspect of gender/sex split, where
the naturalising gender difference can lead to discrimination: as Butler suggests, this
essentialist view can inadvertently naturalise social constructions instead of revealing
them, giving discrimination justification\(^\text{18}\). Similarly, Australian feminist scholar
Moira Gatens suggests the sex/gender split can validate biological assumptions that
have more to do with an ‘imaginary anatomy’ rather than fact.\(^\text{19}\) She argues: “even
the biological determination of sex is not so straightforwardly clear and we must
acknowledge sex as a continuum and bodies as multiple”.\(^\text{20}\)

In her book *Imaginary Bodies* Gatens suggests a coherent destination between sex
and gender cannot be created as it assumes the body is an androgynous, passive
entity that is a site for an arbitrary process of gendering. She argues that this
assumption is easily disputed, as the experience of masculinity in a female body is
different than the experience of masculinity in a male body and vice versa.\(^\text{21}\) For

\(^{18}\) Butler, Judith. “Sex and Gender in Simone De Beauvoir's Second Sex.” *Yale French Studies* 72

\(^{19}\) Gatens use the example of the assumed passive vagina being conceived as biological fact is in
actuality the result of a bias rational. p. 13

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p.19

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 9
Gatens, a sex/gender split misses the significance of the connection between body and a lived experience of gender. She argues:

To speak of ‘acquiring’ a particular gender is to be mistaken about the significance of gender and its intimate relation to biology-as-lived in a social and historical context.  

**Judith Butler and Performing Gender**

The exploration within my art practice of what it means to identify as female in contemporary society began through the integration of aerial acrobatics and video art. In reviewing and analysing the work generated by this process, the performative element became a key aspect of my thesis and moved the project into the next stage of investigation: interrogating gender as a performance. In constructing a theoretical framework I used the work of Judith Butler as a starting point in terms of forming an understanding of what performing gender means. However this exegesis will not be an in-depth investigation of Butler’s work, but rather an explanation of where the project’s theoretical framework began.

Judith Butler is an influential theorist whose work focuses on the way gender is conceived and discussed. Her work emerged out of a feminist domain that sought to subvert the strict categories of gender and sex supported by the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. By blaming forms of sex discrimination on the creation of gendered categories rather than on the treatment of a specific category, Butler’s work became an important stepping stone in queer studies and new feminist rhetoric.  

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22 Ibid., p.14
23 In simple terms this new rhetoric in feminism is labelled as ‘Third Wave Feminism’. The ‘Third Wave Feminism’ that emerged in the early 1990s was more about exploring issues of gender identity and expanding/breaking down these categories. ‘Second Wave Feminism’ was concerned with equality between the sexes, such as equal opportunity in the work place, but still worked within the
main thrust of Butler’s work explains gender as a *performative action* where gender signifiers are repetitious renderings of a script.\(^2^4\) This repetition works to validate gender signifiers and establish sexual identity as naturalistic. She writes:

> As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This action is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimation.\(^2^5\)

In establishing gender as a performance, Butler aims to break down compulsory heterosexuality; denaturalise biological assumptions of the body; subvert the apparent necessity of these assumptions; and establish gender as a fluid construction that is not based on a static or stable fact but rather changes according to situation and context. Butler argues that there is no gender identity behind expressions of gender, only the internalisation of external repetitions. In other words, gender isn’t who you are, but rather something you do. She states:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or a locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.\(^2^6\)

Although Butler's work informed my initial understanding of gender performance, the process of exploring her concepts through art-making created a different idea of agency to Butler's idea. This will be explained in greater detail later in this section.

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\(^{25}\) Ibid. p191.

\(^{26}\) Ibid. p191.
Performance and Performing Gender

This section will look at the characteristics of the term performance, its use in the arts, and the implications this has on understanding the process of gendering the self. Performance has numerous implications from its relationship with the performing arts, as well as its use as a metaphor for social phenomena and the assessment of social action. At its most general level, performance relates to the actions or undertakings of people and things. It can describe either the undertaking of an action or how an action is executed and also encompasses the expression of textual and bodily language, concepts of audience and the history and memory of action. In its application within fields such as sport science and the humanities, performance is a fluid concept situated in the present and dependant on circumstance.²⁷ The word performance is also heavily used within theatre, entertainment and the arts in general due to its flexibility within the blurred lines of hybridised art forms common in contemporary art. It is this versatility that has seen the rise of performance as terminology and/or metaphor to discuss the behaviour and interactions of everyday individuals. This exegesis makes use of the concept of performance mostly as a social metaphor and in the description of social behaviour.

Because the use of performance as a social metaphor is intrinsically linked with its use in the arts, it becomes important to understand what characteristics performance is given within an artistic context.²⁸ With the increasing occurrence of hybridity and artistic endeavours that pushed the boundaries of artistic categories,

²⁷ Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science & Medicine describe performance as an ‘observable act’ that ‘may vary according to circumstances’ while A Dictionary of Geography explain performance as ‘the modes of constructing “the now” by non-textual means’
²⁸ I say artistic context instead of theatrical context as performance describes a broader range of happenings than just the text based, scripted performances associated with the term theatre.
performance has become the over-reaching term of which theatreality is just a branch. Performance describes theatre, happenings, dance, music concerts, circus, live creations of electronic music and imagery, endurance works, multimedia events, Pollock’s ‘action paintings’; even Cindy Sherman’s photographs have been described as performative. What do these artefacts have in common? The key is to look at the core of their processes and their intentions or purpose, such as performances existing in the present, its intrinsic link to an audience and the significance of repetition and script. These aspects of performance informed my theoretical framework in my emphasis on performing gender and further developing insights into the social constitution of gender.

**Gender Performance and the Audience**

By viewing gender as a performance, gender’s role in social interaction can be explored through the idea of a performance’s intrinsic link to an audience and its existence in the present. These two aspects of performance are keys to my analysis of performing gender. First I will explore performance as existing in the present.

From its meanings outside the artistic realm as an undertaking of an action, to its use to describe the assessment of an action, performance describes an unfolding process located in the now. It is the same for its use in the context of the arts. For American feminist scholar Peggy Phelan, one of the founders of Performance Studies International, performance can only exist in the present therefore if it is documented or repeated as a representation, it becomes something else. Although a performance

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can be repeated, it cannot be reproduced. A repeated performance is essentially a
different performance occurring within a different period of time. Phelan states:

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved,
recorded, documented, or otherwise participated in the circulation of
representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something
other than performance… live performance plunges into visibility – in a
manically charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm
of invisibility and the unconscious… 31

By placing performance in the present, it becomes evident that performance
has everything to do with time. Performance is not stagnant, it flows, moves and is
made up of transitory moments; is external yet immaterial. In the realm of
Contemporary Art, performative works are placed in the category of 4D. 4D refers to
artworks that involve the fourth dimension of time. Performance works are arguably
the ultimate example of this category by existing, as Phelan suggests, only in the
present. Once time runs into the future, the performance is transformed into memory
and/or documentation. Time, specifically the present, is fundamental to the
conception of what a performance is. Bound up with performance’s existence in the
present is its fluid nature.

Yet the characteristic of performance existing in the present does not fully
explain how some examples of photography or video can be described as a
performance. To explain this, let me first clarify that an existence in the present does
not automatically denote a live event. As an entity, performance is obviously more
than just an event as it also describes a play between intention and an interaction;
performance and audience. Performance is a means of communication between

performer and audience, and it is this communication or interaction that reinforces performance’s existence in the present. To this extent, it becomes important to acknowledge the intrinsic link between audience and performance, as a characteristic that can identify a performance. In *Performance Studies, an Introduction*, US performance studies academic Richard Schechner states that:

> the treatment of any object, work product ‘as’ performance – a painting, a novel, a shoe or anything at all – means to investigate what that object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performance exists only as actions, interaction, and relationships.\(^\text{32}\)

Phelan explains that “the interaction between the art object and the spectator is, essentially, performative” and insinuates that part of a performance’s ability to “becomes itself through disappearance” is in part due to the “element of consumption” audiences participate in where “there are no leftovers, the gazing spectator must try to take everything in”\(^\text{33}\). American drama scholar Bert O. States goes so far as to say that in the same way a performance exists in the present, a performance must also exist in a presence. He writes:

> Performance's appearance-disappearance act can only take place as a consequence of this interaction: without a spectator the work would degenerate into pure existence (paper, paint on canvas, sound, substance, artefact, bodies). This condition would obtain not only for performance art but for all artistic performance, regardless of the medium, … any "life" a performance achieves can only occur in the present, and there is no such thing as a present unless there is a "spectator" (or a consciousness) there to experience it.\(^\text{34}\)


\(^{33}\text{Phelan, Peggy. } Unmarked; the Politics of Performance. \text{ New York: Routledge, 1993. p148.}\)

Whether or not performance can exist without an audience, as States argues, the relationship between performance and audience is important to consider when looking at gender in terms of performance. A parallel can be drawn between performance as a social event that facilities interaction between individuals, and gender as an interface through which individuals interact.

The link between gender performance and audience can be seen in gender’s status as a platform for social interaction. Like performance, this social interaction is made up of transitory moments of contact that cannot be saved, recorded, or documented. Gender performance’s link to its audience goes so far as to be forced. That is, even if by some chance an individual managed to remain gender-neutral, others would project a gender onto them in order to initiate interaction, and essentially that is what gender is: a social projection. Supporting this idea of gender as a social projection is the fact that gender identity only benefits the social interaction an individual participates in, rather than creating a stable base from which an individual can maintain a balanced existence. For example, US feminist scholar Phyllis Burke’s *Gender Shock* considers case studies where ‘gender treatment’ was given to children who didn’t fit the gendered rules of their social situation. A boy referred to as Kraig is described as having tendencies towards feminine behaviour, such as not wanting to actively engage in ‘rough and tumble play’, preferring to play with his girl class mates. Kraig was encouraged to alter his behaviour patterns by being forced to play with the boys, and was reprimanded for feminine behaviour. He was given a survey, before and after treatment, where he had to rate out of 10 how popular and happy he felt. His classmates were also given a survey where they had to put in order their classmates from most popular to least. These surveys suggested that
gender treatment resulted in a drop in self esteem but an increase in social acceptance.\textsuperscript{35} An individual performs gender to better interact socially, getting the performance wrong results in confusion and the individual being ostracised.

Another example of the intrinsic link between performing one’s gender and its audience can be found in the study \textit{Living the Paradox: Female Athletes Negotiate Femininity and Muscularity} which investigates issues of how female athletes negotiate femininity and muscularity.\textsuperscript{36} This example was important to my research as it had many parallels to my own experience of gender as an aerialist. When preparing for and engaging their bodies in an athletic task, the female athletes in this study were not concerned with their gender status. Their bodies became muscular and engaged in actions associated with masculinity. When re-entering a social environment and required to interact with their athlete’s bodies, the women were confronted with feelings of displacement and ‘being different from the “normal” women’.\textsuperscript{37} Their bodies no longer reflected a feminine ideal. One of the athletes in this study stated, ‘I don’t feel like less of a girl (because of my muscles) but I feel like other people think I’m less of one.’\textsuperscript{38} This statement reinforces not only the importance of the body in expressing gender, but re-iterates the fact gender is a channel through which social interaction occurs and points out the direct relationship between the individual and their viewers.


\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, p8.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p10.
Repeated and Rehearsed

When discussing the terms “gender” and “performance” it becomes important to explore the significance of repetition and script to the term performance. A performance can repeat, such as in Richard Schechner’s description of performance as ‘twice behaved behaviour’ and it can be repeated, such as in rehearsal or a performance that is shown again, but it can never be reproduced, as discussed above in relation to Phelan’s definitions of performance. If, according to Butler, gender norms are reinforced through the repetitious performance of gendered signifiers, and if a performance can never be reproduced, what does this then say about the illusion of a “true gender” created by this process? This aspect of performance reinforces the notion that gender is fluid, dependant on situation, context and reception. It also suggests that “true gender” is an ideal that can never be achieved. For an action to become a performance, in the term’s application in the arts, there has to be an intention to implement a script. When using the term script, I am not only referring to a text, but the designed intention that initiates a performance. For example, a script could take the form of choreography or an outline for an improvised performance or endurance piece, yet it is clear that these performances move beyond their original scripts. By applying the idea of script to gender, gender appears to be based on a fixed point. However, if performance can never be reproduced and a gender’s script is made up of past repetitions, not to mention that a performance can move beyond the script, then this “fixed point” fast becomes precarious in its stability.

What is important to note is that fixed and true gender ideas are believed and are central to the social structures of culture. If the devil’s greatest trick was to convince the world he doesn’t exist then, according to Butler, culture’s retrospective trick is to convince us that gender difference is based on the fact of our sexed bodies. For Phyllis Burke, gender is something that is agreed to yet so ingrained in our identity that “…it feels as if it were part of the body. The gender role seems so innate only because we have forgotten that we agreed to it.” Burke’s suggestion that gender is something external and agreed to, but has been forgotten due to its conformation from repetition, runs in line with Butler’s rejection of a true sex.

Schechner, when discussing the impact of performance studies on the way we study the construction of self, suggests that in accepting the performative as a category of theory, distinctions between appearances and facts becomes ambiguous. He states, ‘appearances are actualities’. By eliminating an essential self, appearance becomes the substance of the individual. Butler states that if a gendered body is performative, then ‘it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.’

Here we come full circle: according to Butler, by viewing gender as a performance we can recognise it as an external force. However, by accepting the performance and repeating it, we give it validity and therefore appearances become actualities.

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1.4 Aerial bodies and the Construction of Gender in My Art Practice

When exploring gender performance through aerial acrobatics I worked conceptually with insights provided by aerial performance. This process not only created the main aesthetic of my works, but became a research tool that informed my exploration of what gender is.

In my performance, I was suspended from a red fabric that represented gender signifiers that bind the body to social constructions. Selection of the colour red was made aesthetically as the colour is striking and bold against the unsaturated bodies I use in my video works, however, the principal reason was conceptual with the primary motive being the colour’s association with the story of Little Red Riding Hood. All forms and signifiers of femineity associated with the tale of Little Red Riding Hood are banded together under the identifying agent of her Red Cloak. By choosing the same colour for my own representation of gender signifiers, I aimed to access the various gendered assumptions made under the banner of Little Red Riding Hood; for example the red cloak’s allusion to menstruation, feminine sexuality, beauty, attraction, sin, danger and target. The duality of the colour also encouraged me to utilize it as a conceptual tool. Red is life and death, an attractive lure and a warning, beautiful and sinful. In my reading of various versions of Little Red Riding Hood, the red cloak was a correct gender signifier (by wearing a red cloak the protagonist’s feminine gendering was supported) but it also had negative connotations that were socially unacceptable (such as easy morals, sin, victim/target or danger). Another duality of red that was important to my selection of the colour was its link to the body. Red is both performative (external, flashy and used to induce
select reactions) and has a strong tie to the body with the colour representing blood (menstruation, life and death). This association attributed to the colour red is an attractive quality to exploit when exploring socially proscribed gendering of the individual and the role of the body in that interaction. In my art practice the manipulation of the red fabric around the body was used to actualise the performativity of gender. As gender is learned, rehearsed and performed, so is aerial performance.

Aerial performance is made up of three core elements: fitness, tricks and presentation. The performance is made up of tricks that have been practised over and over: learned, tested and perfected before they are even considered for public display. Each trick has its own script and together they are combined to create a larger narrative. The body is wrapped and held in a variety of ways to execute a trick. The less contact the body has with the equipment, the more strength is required to defy gravity and execute the trick. Without strength, flexibility or endurance the tricks are not possible. It also takes a large amount of energy and concentration to stay on the aerial equipment for the duration of a routine. The body has to be conditioned to withstand pain including abrasions and rope burn and be able to orientate itself when upside down or spinning. The body does not naturally do these things: they are the result of continuous training and learning. The public side of the performative process is the way in which the learned tricks are presented or, in other words, how the tricks are displayed through choreographed routines and used to interact with an audience. The tricks are then overlayed with an attitude that fits in with the theme, costume and music the performance requires. It is through the presentation of this performance that the learned tricks are manipulated to suit the
circumstance of the performance; they can become sloppy, stiff, emotive, or minimal. A performance cannot occur without the learned tricks, yet it is only through performance that they can be manipulated. In other words, one must learn the rules before breaking them.

When overlaying the idea of gender performativity on the process of aerial performance, the starting point is body and equipment; body and gender. The body, although eventually able to perform gender, cannot do so without training much the same way aerial performance is impossible without instruction and practice. Without the proper generation and use of these learned skills, the aerialist will fall, discrediting the performance and rendering it unacceptable to the audience. Not only has the performer failed the immediate performance by falling, they may have irrevocably injured themselves, making future performances difficult or impossible. Like aerial performance gender is practised and modified by everyday instructors ready to be performed. Gender is not displayed without the individual’s confidence that the display is safe, with new additions to external representations of gender carefully considered and researched before they are presented to a public so as not to risk “falling”. This “fall” or incorrect performance of gendered signifiers can lead to ostracism of the performer, making future social interactions more difficult. When discussing the characteristic issue of a “performed self”, American sociologist Erving Goffman states that the crucial concern is whether or not the performance will be “credited or discredited”. It is important to note, at this point, there is a distinct difference between failing to perform gender correctly and a deliberate subversion of

gender, and that is not to say the results can be the same. The following section will look at subverting the dominant script of gender performance.
1.5 Discipline and Agency - The subversion of the dominant script

The above method of exploring my conceptual framework through my art practice became a base through which issues of agency in gender and the consequence of exercising difference in gendering the self could be discussed. In the following section I will look at how agency can be applied to concepts of performing gender by looking at the intention of the performer and exploring how a performed gender identity can be subverted, either through modifying the set scripts, or reconstructing the self previously lost through the normalising effect of repeating the performance. This exploration will be looked at through Butler’s ideas of interpreting and executing the gendered script and Michel Foucault’s notion of the destroyed body reasserting itself.

Intention of the Performer.

Considering that performed characters and situations are now offered up not only on film but on television, in advertising, magazines and the internet, often the only thing differentiating a performance from an unaffected interaction is intention. Even then, not all parties involved are aware of this conscious decision of performance. A good example of how performance is indistinguishable or even intrinsic to social interaction is Augusto Boal’s *Invisible Theatre*.\(^{45}\) In Boal’s *Invisible Theatre*, a script is rehearsed and prepared as if it were any other play\(^ {46} \);

\(^{45}\) Although interesting in its intention for social activism, Invisible Theatre will only be looked at from its placement of theatrical performance into everyday circumstance. Another example of such events could be Candid Camera, prank style media where theatrical actors are placed into the everyday in order to comically disrupt individuals’ everyday life. This example, unlike Invisible Theatre, the audience is eventually told they are experiencing a performance.

\(^{46}\) Although there is an initial script, the actors are given licence to improvise, Boal states “Invisible Theatre is theatre; it must have a text with a scripted core, which will inevitably be modified, according to the circumstances, to suit the interventions of the spect-actors”
however, the play is then performed in an everyday setting, without the spectators knowing they are watching a theatrical performance. It becomes a social experiment intent on activism by forcing their unsuspecting audience to reconsider their ideals. In his book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Boal gives an example of *Invisible Theater* titled ‘Sexual Harassment’. The play unfolded in a series of actions beginning with a male performer sexually harassing another female performer on a train then a few stops later the same was repeated with the male and female roles inverted. For the audience, both incidents were real, with the only distinction between the two groups – performers and audience – being their awareness of the retrospective performances. Even though it is an extreme example, *Invisible Theatre* reveals an acceptance of performed behaviour. Performance only moves from accepted behaviour to the fantastical if it is either labelled as such or an audience knows differently. In the case of *Invisible Theatre*, there was no fantastical (or theatrical) situation for the audience; it was just ‘normal’ social interaction. Yet for the actors, director and others knowledgeable to the context, Invisible Theatre is just that, theatre.

However, when discussing *Invisible Theatre*, Boal touches on the blurred boundaries of the real and the performed. He explains: ‘Invisible Theatre offers scenes of fiction, but without the mitigating effects of the rites of conventional theatre, this fiction becomes a reality.’ He then goes on to give examples of performed actions within *Invisible Theatre* performances and states, ‘all this is

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48 Ibid, p286.
reality, even though it has been rehearsed’. When considering our own interactions within the everyday, Boal’s statement inspires the question, ‘what actions and scripts do we rehearse then pass off as reality?’ Following this line of thought, one could argue that it is not just gender that can be viewed as a performance, but all social interaction. There is no ‘true’ or ‘natural’ state of being, only a series of constructed fronts presented as everyday circumstance requires.

A question of agency. Reworking the trap or individual (destroyed body) reasserting itself.

There are two ways of giving the individual agency over their gendered identity that I wish to briefly discuss; Foucault's idea of the destroyed body and the relationship of the self and power, and Butler's reinterpretation of set gendered signifiers.

Foucault’s ideas of domination and inscription describe the soul as incarcerating the body. Like Butler, he doesn't subscribe to the idea of a central core that dictates a social identity, yet Foucault still locates the body as a site for cultural inscription. This ‘site’ however was not the original but what emerged after the body was destroyed through a process of domination, inscription and creation. This transformed body is a body that has been, in Foucault’s words, ‘totally imprinted by history’. For Foucault, the legitimisation of the present body as natural occurs due to the destruction of a prior passive body. Although this body is

49 Ibid, p286.
53 Ibid.
described as passive, in later works Foucault\textsuperscript{54} gives the self an ability to counteract the regulating forces of power that can be viewed as the re-emergence of the destroyed body. Foucault gives the self an “inverse energy” that can counteract the play of power on the body and escape social imprinting.

There is always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a more or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal removement, an inverse energy, a discharge. “\textsuperscript{55}

What this suggests is that there is an original body/self that can assert itself. This idea borders on an essentialist view that contradicts the idea that there is no central core that dictates a social identity. The central core then does not dictate the social identity of the self, but rather disrupts the process of social inscription. It is the anti power that needs to be destroyed for the body to become the site of social inscription. The play between of the active self and its destruction leads to the destabilisation of fixed identities and renders them fluid entities.

Agency, for Butler, occurs through the way the scripted performance of gender is interpreted and executed. By mixing up gender signifiers, an individual can change the way masculine and feminine is understood. Butler goes so far as to suggest that this disruption of the binary understanding of gender could create a move away from the dualistic conceptions of masculine and feminine to include other genders. In this allocation of agency in gender performance, Butler is clear that an individual cannot be situated outside of their social context, that ‘there’s no


\textsuperscript{55} ibid
position outside power" \textsuperscript{56} and the “possibilities of gender transformation” is in “a
different sort of repeating” \textsuperscript{57}. In an interview for \textit{Artforum International}, Butler
stated:

\begin{quote}
Gender is not to be chosen, and that ‘performativity’ is not radical
choice and it’s not voluntarism… Performativity has to do with
repetition, very often with the repetition of oppressive and painful
gender norms to force them to resignify. This is not freedom, but a
question of how to work the trap one is inevitably in. \textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

It is the process of “working the trap” that is one of the aspects of gender
performance my work centres around; the difficulties, the restraints, desires,
necessities and comforts associated with constructing a gendered identity.

\textsuperscript{56} Kotz, Liz. "The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler." \textit{Artforum International} 31,
no. 3 (1992): 84.

\textsuperscript{57} Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and

\textsuperscript{58} Kotz, Liz. "The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler." \textit{Artforum International} 31,
no. 3 (1992): 84.
1.6 The Use and Influence of Fairy Tales

The main reason fairytales became attractive as a tool within my studio practice was due to their simultaneous status as a fantasy, a reflection of historic and contemporary culture and their use as an education tool in constructing the everyday individual. Another feature that reflects my conceptual concerns is a fairytale’s fluidity. With each new telling, the tale changes to reflect the social context within which it is told, yet will still maintain connections with its past incarnations. It is a rare individual who has not been exposed to the reiteration of fairytales as both a child and an adult. Children’s books and cartoons including Disney films and television are all mediums through which the fairytale has been imparted. The stories told through fairytales help shape perceptions of right and wrong, gender ideals and desires; and what happy endings should be and look like. Upon rereading them as an adult, the more well known fairytales become part of a social/cultural language. US academic Jack Zipes, a leading figure in the scholarly study of folk tales, firmly believes in the influence fairytales have on the construction of social norms. His aim behind writing *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* was to ‘demonstrate that the discourse on manners and gender roles in fairytales has contributed more to the creation of our present-day social norms than we realise’.  

As well as influencing social constructs, fairytales offer insight into past social norms. An example of a study that looks at fairytales in this light is *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* by historian Robert Darnton. In the book, Darnton dedicates a chapter to examining folk tales that originated from eighteenth century France in order to glean insights into the way

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people thought in this time period. Darnton views fairytales as historical documents that have ‘evolved over centuries and have taken turns in different cultural traditions’. He suggests that fairytales do not reflect the ‘unchanging operations of man’s inner being’ but instead give insight into how thought and social norms have changed. It is this quality of fluidity in fairytales that I wish to discuss next.

Fluidity in fairytales occurs either to passively reflect their context or to actively instil moral objectives, current values, taboos and acceptable behaviour. In Darnton’s study of 18th century French folk tales, for example, he reveals the oral traditions to be grounded in the domestic: raw, ‘nakedly brutal’ and without the symbology that veiled their message. Rather than imparting a moral objective through symbolic ideals, these fairytales reflected the harshness of peasant life. The manipulation of fairytales in order to better educate an audience on acceptable behaviour, moral objectives and gender roles is especially rife throughout those fairytales reproduced in literature. Charles Perrault’s rendering of folk tales for French aristocracy was accompanied with an explanation of the moral lesson expressed in his version of Little Red Riding Hood. The work of the Brothers Grimm is another fine example of fairytales being changed to instil moral objectives. US scholar Maria Tatar, a prominent figure in the academic study of folk tales, children’s literature and German literature explores the work of the Grimm Brothers in The Hard Facts of the Grimm’s Fairy Tales. Tatar explains the Grimm Brothers as being ‘ever responsive to the values of their time’ and sensitive to the demands of the

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social category of childhood.\textsuperscript{61} To meet these pressures, the Grimms transformed the oral versions of fairytales into hybrids of folk tales and children’s literature. Tatar goes on to examine how the Grimm Brothers changed the stories to adhere to the current moral objectives and in order for them to be more suitable for a young audience. Among her conclusions she noted that the Grimm Brothers inserted more violence to reinforce punishments for wrong doing, and cut down on the sex.\textsuperscript{62} In \textit{Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion}, Jack Zipes also talks about such issues and suggests that the Grimm Brothers manipulated classic tales to ‘function against conformation to the standard socialisation process’ in order to reveal a ‘different, more just society’ according to their own moral objectives.\textsuperscript{63}

The importance of this characteristic of fluidity in fairytales to my studio practice can be expressed by comparing it to the ideas of gender performance. Fairytales reflect the fluidity of individual identities, giving insight and historical context to the social scripts of the everyday; gendered scripts in particular. We are also, as when considering gender, encouraged to believe that fairytales portray constant and universal truths rather than historical reiterations manipulated to best suit the needs of their context.

The final reason I chose to use fairytales in my studio practice was their ability to be easily recognisable. That is, as suggested above, fairytales have become part of social language. This place in social language creates an aesthetic which a viewer can identify with and then be drawn into the work. Each fairytale is loaded with not only the history of its past lives and contemporary presentations, but the


\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, p48.

viewer’s experiences and emotional connections are also brought to the table. When applying fairytales to the process of rendering my conceptual framework as artworks, I have taken something recognisable and changed it to provoke a re-think on the issues a certain fairytale may raise. Although I invoke the recognition of fairytales in my work, I do not follow the stories strictly, or make use of only one version of a selected story. In my work I took what I needed, and changed and manipulated it to best suit the realisation of my concepts. In Part 3: Studio Practice, I will explain how I have used the selected fairytales Rapunzel and Little Red Riding Hood in my work.

**Fairy Tales and Gender**

The main focus in exploring and using fairytales in this research project is to investigate the idea of gender performance. In setting up the conceptual framework for my art practice, it is important to look at the relationship between fairytales and gender. Using the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* as an example, the following section will look at how fairytales engage with gender; explore what they reveal about gender; and how they are used to influence the construction of gendered identities.

Fairytales engage with gender by providing examples of masculine and feminine ideals. How the author or teller forms the interactions of the gendered characters and application of gender ideals forms the engagement. The many versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* create an interesting historic map of the gendered ideals throughout its retelling, giving example of how fairytales mirror, manipulate and act as example for the gendered individual. The author of *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, Catherine Orenstein states;
‘inevitably the tale has been a vehicle for imparting sexual ethics in keeping with the social fabric of the times. Tellers have consciously and subconsciously manipulated the plot to portray a seduction by a temptress, the rape of a virgin or the passing of a young girl into womanhood.’

To illustrate this I will look at a few key versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* that have been influential to this research project; Charles Perrault’s *Le petit chaperon rouge* (Little Red Riding Hood), Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s *Rotkappchen* (Little Red Cap), the French oral versions that pre-date Perrault’s literary adaptation, Matthew Bright’s movie *Freeway*, the use of the character Little Red Riding in 20th century popular culture, Roald Dahl’s *Little Red Ridding Hood and the Wolf*, Angela Carter’s *The Company of Wolves* and David Slade’s *Hard Candy*.

Perrault’s telling of the tale is the first literary version of *Little Red Riding Hood* and one of the first examples of how the tale has been manipulated by the author to reflect its social audience in order to best teach correct social ideals. It was Perrault who first introduced the iconic red cloak and the cautionary moral ending to locate the story out of the peasantry and into the aristocracy. Zipes describes this version as a ‘tale of sexual suggestion and a moral warning’ and is an example of a civilising process where ‘Little Red Riding Hood is a projection of male fantasy in a literary discourse considered to be civilised and aimed at curbing the natural inclinations of children.’ In this version, the feminine performance is helpless. Sexual maturation is acknowledged but tempered with consequence that has no room for correction or second chances for her indiscretion. It was a lesson against female

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65 Bright, Matthew. "Freeway." 110 min USA: The Globe Film Company (Australia), 1996
promiscuity and reflects the social view that unmarried women were of a hire value and cautions young girls to keep their value or suffer permanent and dire consequences.

When the Brothers Grimm retold the story they promised a happy ending in which a good man saves the day and returns Little Red Riding Hood to the straight path. Zipes states, ‘for the Grimms the tale was still too cruel, too sexual, and too tragic’ and so they reworked the story to ‘stress patriarchal governance’ and ‘demand that the child repress her own sensuality, and obligated her to meet the normative standards of responsibility set by adults.’ The Brothers Grimm turned the tale into Christian morality tale that not only warned against sexual promiscuity (as in Perrault’s version), but erased female sensuality entirely rendering femineity as gentle androgyny where female sexual maturation was denied and stripped from female adolescent development. For Orenstein, when the Little Red Ridding Hood was rendered with Victorian sensibilities, it ‘came to embody the new nineteenth-century child and the new Victorian Woman – two concepts that, it turns out, were then in some ways indistinguishable. That is to say, a woman who was not married remained a child. The Brothers Grimm made the story reflect this social construction of the time, where marriage determined womanly maturation, by stripping her ability to defend herself as well as replacing consequence for her actions with masculine guidance. In other words Little Red Riding Hood cannot learn independence from the encounter and is sheltered from the consequence of her actions by the father figure, thus she remains in childhood/sexless limbo. A woman’s development of a

68 Ibid, p32.
69 Ibid, p41.
70 Ibid, p32.
gendered identity in this version is totally reliant on their male counterpart (father or husband).

In the next two versions I will discuss, the heroines are given licence to form their own gendered identities outside of masculine guidance despite being located in male dominated social structures. Little Red Riding Hood can save herself. In early versions of the French oral tale that pre-date the Perrault literary version, the tale is more brutal but told by women as a tale of maturation and warning. It is an example of a rite of passage in a harsh and wild world where it is up to the individual to survive. This tale of the female rite of passage portrays a feminine world that only involves the masculine element as a danger, if at all (in some versions the wolf is replaced by an ogress)\(^72\). The choice the heroine is given is not loaded with moral implications (such as in Perrault and Grimm’s versions), but simply a choice of the Path of Pins or the Path of Needles. The cannibalistic and unrepentant consumption of the grandmother is seen as another part of the girl’s transformation into maturity and contrasts the innocent rendering of the character in the standardised versions. This self reliance and harsh practicality given to the heroine reveals feminine signifiers that have developed without being a mirror to masculine ideals of femininity. Zipes, in discussing this version states; ‘The story is about initiation, warning or both, one thing is clear: the folk tale celebrates the self-reliance of the a young peasant girl.’\(^73\)

In Freeway, a more modern adaptation of Little Red Riding Hood, a similar slant is given to the main character. The story still warns about trusting strangers, but throws

\(^{72}\) Ibid, p81.
self reliance back onto the Little Red Riding Hood character when she is either alone, mistreated by the hunter (police and justice system), or is forced to take matters into her own hands due to the incompetence of the hunter. Like in the French oral tale, the girl’s reality is harsh, unforgiving and no one can save her but herself. The figure of Little red Riding Hood in Freeway sees the Grandma’s house as a refuge, but the wolf takes that away by killing the grandmother, forcing Little Red to rely on herself, which could mirror the rite of passage (cannibalism of the grandmother and tricking the wolf) found in the earlier verbal traditions of the story.

Although the heroine in Freeway uses her own skills/wit to overcome the wolf and assert her independence, her world was still heavily shaped/influenced by patriarchal governance and masculine abuse. Roald Dahl’s Little Red Ridding Hood and the Wolf, Angela Carter’s The Company of Wolves and David Slade’s Hard Candy’s Little Red Riding Hoods all strip the wolf of his masculinity and incorporate it into their own identities, establishing traditional masculine gendered signifiers as valid forms of female gendered expression. In Carter’s The Company of Wolves, the protagonist goes through the rite of passage, but doesn’t just emerge as self reliant, she transforms into the wolf. The role reversal is emphasised with the original wolf being described as fearful and tender.

In Dahl’s rendering of the story there is no rite of passage, only the presentation of a new Little Red Riding Hood who ‘whips a pistol from her knickers’ to kill the wolf, then skins him for a new fur coat. Although Orenstein reveals Dahl’s intentions for the story as a ‘satirical swipe at feminism’, I cannot

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75 Ibid, p164.
ignore the implications of sexual dominance the image gives the feminine figure over the traditionally masculine role. The acquiring of the fur coat in this version does not transform the character, but merely gives her the external signifier to confirm what was already part of her presentation of self. *Hard Candy* leans more towards the role reversal of violence and predator rather than sexual dominance; however the stripping of the wolf’s masculinity is still there. In the story, the heroine lures a paedophile into a trap that turns his own tricks on him. In one scene, she literally strips him of his masculinity by convincing him she is removing his testicles while he watches sedated and unable to move.

While the above adaptations of *Little Red Riding Hood* reappropriate traditional masculine signifiers to transform the heroine’s status/character, recent and twentieth century popular culture has enhanced the feminine signifiers of Little Red Riding (such as female promiscuity, temptress and sensuality) to both empower and exploit an idealised feminine image. Little Red Riding Hood sheds her cloak of innocence and becomes a symbol of temptress and sexual freedom and a lure instead of a target. Orenstein argues that in advertising, Little Red Riding Hood is cast as ‘femme fatale, hawking liquor, make-up and fast cars.’

For example, the Chanel No.5 add directed by Luc Besson shows a beautiful, sensual woman in a red dress applying the perfume and then donning the traditional red cloak. The scene cuts to a wolf that appears to be stalking her, but as the two meet, it becomes clear that the wolf is her house pet and Little Red Riding Hood commands her pet to stay and be quiet and then leaves to enjoy a night on the town. The wolf is left trapped in the house, pining after his mistress. The sultry image is very traditional in its

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76 Ibid, p126.
presentation of gendered signifiers, but still emasculates the masculine image of the wolf, leaving Little Red Riding Hood dominant in her gendered role. The feminine qualities that were shunned and punished are now socially acceptable and desirable in this context or version of the tale. The myriad of tales of *Little red Ridding Hood* weaves its way through renderings of feminine ideals such as chaste commodities, passive mirrors of masculinity, victims, naive innocence, owners of practical and harsh self reliance, sexually dominant wolves, temptresses, dangerously sensual and independent.
Part 2: Gender Bending - Examples in Contemporary Art

2.1 Introduction

In order to further locate and contextualise my practice within a contemporary art context, in this chapter I will interrogate three Sydney-based art practices. I will focus on two individual practitioners, Monika Tichacek and Liam Benson, and one art group, The Kingpins (Emma Price, Katie Price, Techa Noble and Angelica Mesiti) to explore the way in which gender has been approached within recent art practice, primarily within video and performance. I believe the aforementioned examples share a commonality as far as gendered identities are concerned, and by comparing and contrasting their work to mine I have developed further insight into the underlying themes within my own practice.

2.2 The Kingpins: Taking the piss out of the stereotype

The Kingpins are a collaborative group made up of contemporary artists Emma Price, Katie Price, Techa Noble and Angelica Mesiti. The group use a combination of drag king culture and video art to explore pop culture, mass media, consumerism, the urban landscape and gender identity. They create fantastically absurd landscapes where the glitter-glam setting frames narrative-based music video-esque dramas. They layer gendered abstractions throughout their works, such as the feminine body performing masculinity - women wearing beards and depicting masculine stereotypes in contrasting feminine glamorous attire. The Kingpins’ work
is synonymous with gender issues, as gender not only forms part of their thematic content but is also used as an artistic tool. I will examine their work through Butler’s concept of gender performance and investigate their drag king personas as liminal expressions of gendered identities. I will discuss The Kingpins’ use of a performing arts-based discipline (drag king performance) as an aesthetic and conceptual tool in their artistic process, as well as their creation of hybrid bodies through digital media.

Masculinity is subverted in the work of the Kingpins: firstly, it is presented as a drag act and secondly, the presentation of masculinity is interwoven with non-traditional masculine details that render the characters grotesquely formed or absurdly gendered. For example, their piece in the video *Sydney Infinity* (2005) presents four male athletes ribbon dancing to modern rock ballads. In this piece the Kingpins invoke the fanatical sports-loving, beer-drinking Australian masculine stereotype commonly referred to as the Aussie Bloke. In their aim to subvert and comment on this gendered stereotype, the masculinity of the Kingpins’ characters is entrapped by stereotypically feminine attire and actions. For example, the characters’ prosthetic ‘beer bellies’ and fake male genitalia are covered by pink and purple lycra, not to mention the fact their patriotic sportsmanship is ribbon dancing. When reviewing a Kingpins’ exhibition in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, journalist Tracey Clement described their routine as ‘paying homage to that great icon of Australian culture, *Aerobics Oz Style*’ in amongst ‘going all blokey’ with ‘beer guts, bum cracks and porn moustaches’.

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1. Kingpins
*Sydney Infinity*
Video Still
2005

2. Kingpins
*Verses*
Video Still
2002
As well as masculine characters, The Kingpins also create and perform feminine characters throughout their work. Yet on closer inspection the feminine figures are revealed to be just another aspect of the “masculinity” The Kingpins are performing: the drag king act is continued. To explore this representation of gender, I will briefly touch on the work of French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray and The Kingpins work *Rhapsody Happens*. In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Irigaray suggests there are not two sexes, male and female, but only one: male. She asserts that the social ideal of femininity is a male construct that supports and reflects masculine signifiers and has left women without a language to define themselves from masculinity. Irigaray writes:

The rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts women in a position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) “subject” to reflect himself, to copy himself.\(^{80}\)

*Rhapsody Happens*, a five channel video installation, projects images of drag king bikers and go-go girls that exude glam-rock style aesthetics to the sound track of Metal music and motorbikes. The go-go girls in *Rhapsody Happens* are an example of how The Kingpins’ work reflects Irigaray’s assertion that the ideal of femininity is another masculine signifier. At first the go-go girls appear to reflect the bikers’ masculinity by resembling objectified sex objects that have been, in Irigaray’s words, ‘conceptualised on the basis of masculine permiters’.\(^{81}\) However, as more of the feminine figures are revealed, the viewer suddenly sees bearded ladies that refuse the stereotype of objectified femininity. The audience is confronted with masculinity

reflected in the feminine other of the go-go girls. Once again the gender signifiers and signified are confused. This method of depicting masculinity is also evident in the Kingpins past works such as *Verses* (2002) where bearded glamour girls flank the male Hip-hop stars of ‘Raw Sewage’. The Kingpins do not present feminine characters, but rather masculinity's contrived reflection.

The popularity of The Kingpins is contradictory to the often assumed consequences of a failure to perform gender “correctly”, such as ostracism, discussed in part one of the exegesis (Page 34). For example The Kingpins’ work is considered by many to be entertaining, fun and accessible to a wide audience: in an article for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Mesiti conveyed that school-aged children were amongst their appreciative viewers. She stated ‘The feedback we were getting was that, like, the school kids love this shit.’\(^{82}\) To explain why The Kingpins’ unorthodox presentation of gender is acceptable, I will use British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner’s concept of ‘liminal entity’ and apply it to The Kingpins’ drag characters. Best known for his work on symbols and rites of passage, for Turner a ‘liminal personae’ is a social entity that is ambiguous and exists somewhere outside the positions of everyday life, and hence, cannot be expected to abide by the normal rule. These ‘liminal entities’ have special concessions with social structures that allow them to subvert the normal rules of social interaction and not suffer the usual adverse consequences of these subversions. Turner calls these concessions ‘the powers of the weak’\(^{83}\). Turner writes:

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83 Ibid, p112.
The attributes of liminal personae are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.84

He explains that these ‘liminal entities’ are of low status or position and use the ‘powers of the weak’ to uphold the human condition; Turner describes them as ‘immortal antagonists’85. When applying these characteristics to The Kingpins, the ‘powers of the weak’ translates into The Kingpins’ drag characters’ licence to perform gender incorrectly. This licence to perform gender incorrectly is used by The Kingpins to wreak havoc with the social absurdities of masculinity, thus fulfilling the expectations of an ‘immortal antagonist’. The drag performer is awarded with a sense of liminality that allows their disregard for social norms to be accepted within the confines of the performance. In the case of The Kingpins, their status as drag performers gives them a liminal status which gives them licence to play with and comment on gender ideals, subvert images gender in popular culture and reveal social ills.

When entering the back room of Artspace where *Rhapsody Happens* was exhibited, I was initially overwhelmed by the noise of motorbikes and dwarfed by larger than life bikers displayed on the projection screens. This first impression resonated in stereotypical masculinity. However, the ultra masculine status of the biker depicted in this work was soon undermined by the setting. Even his “motorbike” betrayed the biker; a tinsel-covered pushbike dressed in drag to

95 Ibid.
85 Ibid, p130.
resemble a motor bike mimicked the drag act of the rider. Further emphasising the subversion of masculinity were the drag kings themselves. As the viewer takes stock of what they are seeing, they realise the figures are made up of two bodies, manipulated to form one masculine hybrid: an inverted head disguised as an up-right face with false nose and facial hair. Protruding from the top of these examples of masculinity are the feminine torsos of the performers, further compromising the biker’s masculine bravado. It is clear in this work that the hybridisation of drag king performance and video art is an essential part of the exploratory process and without the hybrid form, The Kingpins’ work would not have its current complexity.

Although starting out as a drag king group, The Kingpins’ take on gender identity becomes more complex in their video works and installations. In a similar method to my own practice, this combination of a performing arts discipline and digital video is used as a process through which they can explore their chosen concepts. By digitally manipulating their performative elements, The Kingpins allow themselves a greater scope to manipulate, play with and ultimately subvert their chosen conceptual tools of pop culture, mass media, consumerism, and gender identity. This is probably more evident in their later works such as Rhapsody Happens (2005) where the combination of performance, costume and editing creates a gender parody that teases the audiences’ gendered sensibilities. The Kingpins’ performances, although making a mockery of mainstream gendered standards, use techniques that give their works a liminal status that allow them to entertainingly point out things such as the idea that the ideal femininity is ‘conceptualised on the basis of masculine perimiters’. 86

3. Kingpins,
Rhapsody Happens
(Above) Installation Documentation
(Below) Video Still
2005
2.3 Liam Benson: Gentle Subversions

Another artist who uses drag characters within his art practice is Liam Benson, a Western Sydney-based artist who uses drag, fantasy, desire and images of popular culture to explore issues of identity, sexuality and cultural stereotypes. Benson is interested in critiquing the social identities associated with Australian culture, especially male identities and their roles within the Australian social context, and translates these themes through a performance-based art practice. His glamorous characters are presented through video and photography and are used not only to explore the artist’s own identity, but to subvert stereotypes, particularly stereotypes associated with gender identities. One of the reasons I have chosen to discuss the inseparability of his work and issues of gender identity is because even when his work is not primarily about gender issues, Benson enfolds his performances with subversions of gender signifiers. The contradictory and ironic nature of masculine and feminine expression within gender performance is explored in Benson’s work through the detailed construction of his characters’ appearances and behaviours. In this section, I will be discussing what his works say about gendered identities, the way he constructs his characters and performances to explore these issues, and the influence and impact his personal experiences have had on his exploration of gendered identities.

Of particular interest is Benson’s layering of traditionally contradictory gendered signifiers, which can be used to illustrate Butler’s idea that agency in gender expression can be achieved through subversive repetition of the gendered script or signifiers. Butler states that agency ‘is to be located within the possibility of
a variation on that repartition.87 Before I begin this aspect of my discussion of Benson’s work, I wish to outline, in more detail, the issues of gender Benson’s work explores and how these issues are closely aligned with Benson’s personal experiences with the construction of a gendered identity.

Unlike The Kingpins, who distance themselves from their drag characters, Benson’s characters are an extension of his own identity. Throughout his work, the viewer glimpses an extremely personal portrayal of the artist where Benson’s self is as much a part of the characters he creates as the costume he wears. In the majority of his works, Benson integrates an exploration of self into his art making with his use of drag becoming a frame for his personal expression of identity. Rather than poking fun at stereotypical performances of masculinity or femininity, through this integration, Benson transforms gendered norms into a performance that points out the inconsistencies and limitations of rigid gender categories. In an article reviewing the group exhibition Man: Depicting Contemporary Masculinity88 for The Australian, Rosalie Higson described Benson’s work as gently questioning gender roles89. In other words, Benson takes gendered signifiers out of their original context and presents them in a way that subverts these categories and the assumptions made through them, with the ‘gentle questioning’ occurring through his incorporation of self within his characters. For example, his work Ophelia (2006) unashamedly expresses intense emotional feeling in a way that, according to the artist, is not normally acceptable due to the preconceptions surrounding a masculine identity. In

88 Man: Depicting Contemporary Masculinity, an exhibition exploring issues of masculine identity, was held at Penrith Regional Gallery and The Lewers Bequest, 26th April – 29th June, 2008.
the artist’s statement for Man: Depicting Contemporary Masculinity, where Ophelia was exhibited, Benson inferred that gendered stereotypes limit an individual’s avenue of expression. He stated:

In Ophelia I appropriated the role of the iconic Shakespearian character so I could channel my emotions into a role traditionally reserved for a female. I have always related to the character of Ophelia, despite the preconception of how gender may influence my emotional range.90

Ophelia was displayed as a photographic print and performative video work which documented Benson channelling the tragic Shakespearian character Ophelia, who drowned herself in an expression of intense emotion she associated with unrequited love. Although the character of Ophelia can be used to explore a variety of concepts, Benson has only used the character as an embodiment of a feminine expression of emotion denied to men. Standing at the base of a waterhole, Benson’s character sings Your Song by Elton John while laying flowers in the water which will eventually be his grave. On entering the space where Ophelia was exhibited, my attention was first drawn to a photographic print depicting a drowned man in a ring of flowers. This image announced the tragic end for the very character who was just starting to sing Your Song on the screen adjacent to the image. Putting on the headphones, I listened to Benson’s character choke on tears while singing the words ‘how wonderful life is while you're in the world’91. Although Benson is not dressed as a drag queen, as in many of his other works, the subversive mix-match of gendered signifiers is achieved through the assumption of the feminine qualities of Ophelia’s character, the flowers framing the performative action and the intense emotional expression being communicated.

S. Liam Benson

*Ophelia*

Photograph

2006
For Benson, this work is about transcending gendered boundaries; he specifically tries to break through the preconceived restraints of masculinity such as the boundaries created around emotional expression. Benson likes to discuss the sensitive side of men in his works. In the accompanying essay for the exhibition *Man: Depicting Contemporary Masculinity*, Luke Parker relays the artist’s intentions for *Ophelia*:

Benson argues that he is fully capable of the intense joys and pains of love – emotions usually attributed to female characters in art and literature – and as a consequence he has always identified more with female characters. Rather then a de-masculinisation, Benson’s work argues for a deeper understanding and representation of the often repressed emotional states of men.  

Ultimately, Benson’s work shows gender as fluid, requiring the individual to find a balance between masculine and feminine within the self.

*You Like that… (Nocturnal)* (2005) is another work that transcends and plays with the boundaries of gendered categories. Part of *At The Vanishing Point*, the opening exhibition for the artist-run space of the same name, *You Like that… (Nocturnal)* was a video work depicting a drag fantasy under the surreal light of night-vision and documented by the unseen voyeur behind the camera. Benson, assuming a drag queen character in the video work, uses intimate glances and gestures to draw the individual behind the camera into the performance and therefore the action. As the narrative of the performance progresses, Benson’s character and the viewer are driven by the voyeur to an undisclosed location where Benson’s

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93 ‘*At the Vanishing Point . . .*’, the show to launch the space, (ATVP Autumn 2007 Show of the Season), 05-22 April.
character takes off on foot, followed closely by the voyeur. In this work Benson seeks to limit the relevance of feminine and masculine signifiers to an individual’s construction of self and their identification with a specific sex. In an artist statement for the exhibition At the Vanishing Point, Benson writes:

There comes a point where feminine representation becomes irrelevant to women and exists only as a stereotype for the imagination and scrutiny of men. In this work I claim this point as my own, removing it from its significance to femininity and playing with the scenario in a whimsical drag fantasy.  

Representations of gender in this work are ambiguous, with masculine and feminine being inferred through the power play of the characters, rather than simply through the superficial gendered signifiers of Benson’s costume. As the character behind the camera is never revealed in the flesh, the suggestion of masculinity is achieved through the individual’s gaze, illustrated by means of the camera’s focus. Similarly, the femininity of Benson’s character has more to do with her vulnerability than her long blonde hair. It is this stereotypical aspect of femininity – vulnerability under a masculine gaze - that Benson confirms as irrelevant to women and claims as his own in his ‘whimsical drag fantasy’. Benson places representations of femininity into the realm of the fantastic, the imaginary and the unreal by taking the feminine and masculine constructs, or signifiers, out of the everyday and applying them liberally to his characters in fantasy scenarios. By placing gender into the realm of the fantastic, Benson destabilises the pretence of naturalism in gendered categories.

When discussing Benson’s work in relation to Butler’s theories of gender as a socially constructed performance, his series *Show Girls* (2005) can be related to Butler’s premise that gender performance is an external façade that gives the illusion of an essential core. In both images under the title *Show Girls*, Benson wears beautiful, elaborate drag costumes. Rather than mask his maleness, the costumes allow Benson’s masculinity to be revealed through the costume in a display of body hair and beads. The stylised nature of the photograph and dramatised poses announce the work as a performance with gender as a focus. The feminine costumes are layered over masculine body images which are held in feminine stances. This layering of gendered signifiers creates an ambiguity that undermines potential assumptions made on the part of a viewer on the character’s essential core, effectively questioning whether the character truly has one. Of particular interest is Benson’s second image in this series, *Silver Show Girl*, in which the artist toys with essentialist ideals of the natural body as a basis for gendered difference. In Benson’s *Silver Show Girl*, the artist is shown kneeling on the floor in a provocative stance, wearing a beaded drag costume that frames masculine and feminine body parts. In this image, all external gendered points of reference are attachments; the costume, the breast Benson holds, and the male genitalia. The line between adornment and body is blurred in this work, which undermines the suggestive power of a gender performance and disrupts the idea of the sexed body being a stable core on which a gendered identity can be built. In Butler’s terms, Benson is denaturalising biological assumptions of the body, reinforcing the idea that the sexed body is materialised through gender’s script, or the external force that binds the body to social expectations. For example, Butler states:
acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organising principle of identity as a cause.

Ultimately the idea of performing gender is fundamental to Benson’s art practice. In his stylised performances, Benson’s characters draw from the stereotypical signifiers of gender identities, displace them, mix them and subvert them in order to destabilise preconceptions about behaviour in gendered categories.

6-7. Benson
Show Girls
Photographic Series
2005
2.4 Monika Tichacek: That love hate relationship with the feminine ideal.

Monika Tichacek is an artist who uses installation, performance, and video to create dark isolated worlds that take the viewer on a voyeuristic journey through the artist’s exploration of “freedom, expression, possibility, mutation and desire”.

These issues are all bound to the construction of social identities. Tichacek’s influences include glamorous 1950s starlets; the construction of femininity through props, costuming or plastic surgery; the meeting of ‘artificiality’ and ‘natural’; and socially abnormal bodies and beauty competitions, all of which combine to create beautifully grotesque images. Using an awareness of romanticised feminine ideals, her work explores and subverts mainstream codes of heterosexuality and the obsessive striving for the perfect body through the aid of technology. Tichacek investigates the psychological states, the desires and drives that are linked to these extremes of constructing the self.

Like Benson, Tichacek explores these issues with her body acting as the central medium of her artistic practice. She manipulates her body through costume, make-up, prosthetics and surgically implanted hooks, pins and clamps, taking bodily signification to the extreme. Tichacek’s work is made up of elaborately constructed installations, designed to house endurance performances, viewed live, through video documentation or via a combination of the two. These performative works are ritualistic in approach, creating images of sensuality, distortion, torment and beauty;

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often likened to nightmares and horror films.\textsuperscript{98} In discussing Tichacek’s art practice, I will look at how her work addresses the extremes of gender performance in her exploration of technological enhancements of the body such as plastic surgery, genetics and prosthetics. Also of interest in reference to my own project is Tichacek’s manipulation of fairytale imagery to explore gendered identities, in particular her use of Rapunzel.

In exploring what Tichacek’s work says about gender performance, I will be focusing on the following three works, \textit{I wanna be loved by you} (2000), \textit{Romance} (2000) and \textit{Lineage of the Divine} (2002). \textit{I wanna be loved by you} was a performative installation in which Tichacek encased herself in a sterile white capsule, her heavily made up face on show behind a circular glass panel.\textsuperscript{99} The glass panel distorted the artist’s expressionless face, alternately exaggerating the femininity of the features and causing them to distort grotesquely depending on the angle her face was viewed from. A blonde wig long enough to make Rapunzel herself jealous was attached to Tichacek’s head via hypodermic needles, and allowed to escape from confinement of the panel through an opening at the capsule’s end. As the performance stretched over hours, reviewer Tanya Peterson stated that, “the weight of the wig gradually pulled the skin of Tichacek’s face into a taut mask, so she began to wear the startled expression of a face lift stretched too tight.”\textsuperscript{100} While lying in the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{98} Edward Colless described her work as her ‘Nightmare on Elm Street’ and that her imagery is ‘flooded with the marvellous morbid erotic and indulgent pleasures of a horror movie’. Colless, Edward. “Monika Tichacek: Mirror, Mirror ….” \textit{Australian Art Collector}, no. 32 (2005): 76-7.


\end{flushright}
capsule, Tichacek lip-synced the Marilyn Monroe song, ‘I wanna be loved by you’. 101

With its sterile white setting, the aesthetic of Romance was similar to I wanna be loved by you while the surgical implements stretching Tichacek’s made-up face and the subdued posture of her body was evocative of Sleeping Beauty. In Romance Tichacek was situated within a room covered with white plastic and love hearts, reclining on a specially made plinth that, according to Tanya Peterson looked like, ‘the product of a chance encounter between a sewing machine and an operating table’. 102 The artist was secured into the sterile environment by the hooks piercing her eyebrows and lips which were, in turn, attached to the walls of her room by strings. The viewer was unable to enter the sterile space and could only view a close up of the artist’s face through a monitor. Tichacek states:

A hidden camera records a close-up of my newly-enhanced face, which plays on a monitor next to me. The audience is not allowed to enter the room. A space too white, too shiny. Too sterile. Too unreal to be entered. It is a space that exists within fiction. Dreamlike. Perhaps the production of a science fiction or a padded cell of a psychiatric clinic. 103

Lineage of the Divine is the most complicated of the three works. Incorporating video more intricately into the performative installation and thereby making it a work in itself, rather than simply a documentation of Tichacek’s performance, the piece sees the addition of another performer; the transgender personality Amanda Lepore. Although Tichacek did perform within this video

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installation, I will be focusing on the video work that continued to play long after she had left the space. The action was staged in an overtly feminised room, decked out in plush pink padded walls and plastic copies of stag antlers. Tichacek again assumes a passive, reclining stance in the video and not only wears restrictive prosthetics on her arms and legs, but is constrained further by a prosthetic corset. Amanda Lepore, dressed to resemble Tichacek without the prosthetics, moves unrestricted through the space, pausing frequently to manipulate her double, moulding her face and manipulating Tichacek’s body as would a puppeteer. The two characters are not only coupled by the similarities in their dress, make-up and exaggerated facial features, but are physically joined together by the Rapunzel-like hair in a gold hairnet which snakes around the room. Near the beginning of the video, the camera journeys from Amanda Lepore’s face, moving along the hair to arrive at Tichacek and revealing her bound existence. These works explore the ambiguous disposition of agency in constructing gendered identities, the extremes of bodily signification in expressing gendered ideals, the psychological and emotional states behind gender performance and the role of desire in performing gender. These issues are interwoven with questions about gender performance’s audience by the voyeuristic nature of Tichacek’s work.
8.9 Monika TichÁEek
Lineage of the Divine
Video Stills
2002
Agency, in an individual’s construction of a gendered self, is tempered in Butler’s theory on gender performance with the fact no one can live outside the influence of their cultural environment. This idea is present in Tichacek’s art practice through the creation of tension between the desire to achieve the idealised social self and finding the process itself dehumanising and abhorrent within her works. Tichacek describes such an experience as, ‘That love-hate obsession with perfection and femininity’\textsuperscript{104}, and her work mirrors this ambiguous agency through the contrast between the beauty of her aesthetics and the pain she endures, the repulsion and fascination of her work, and the process of distortion and control her body goes through during her performances. The work that best encapsulates these issues of agency and gender performance is \textit{Lineage of the Divine}, through its metaphorical division of the self into two characters. The clone-like appearance of the two characters, their physical connection via the umbilical cord of the Rapunzel hair, and their isolation within a padded cell all work together to create the impression they are representing one individual. One character, Tichacek, who appears uncomfortable in her body’s signification of femininity, appears to suffer passively while the other, Lepore, the stylised embodiment of perfect femininity, puppeteers and manipulates her. As they interact, the characters play out desire, control, choice and repression. What proves to be the most interesting aspect of this duality is Lepore’s status as a transvestite. Lepore’s construction of her gendered self both proves the essentialist theory of gender false, while reinforcing the mainstream heterosexualised signifiers of idealised femininity. Tichacek, by placing Lepore in the dominant role in \textit{Lineage of the Divine}, sets up contradictions in the process of gendering the self that ultimately blurs the line between freedom of expression and the social pressures of conforming

to a gendered ideal; Lepore represents both extremes at the same time. Tichacek explains in the artist’s statement:

Amanda encompasses so many things that my work addresses…What Amanda has done with her body is very brave. It is a difficult choice to follow a dream to such extremes. She allows us to believe in the fantastic, whilst reflecting controversial issues of addiction, accessibility and the bodies created with the (non)limitations of contemporary technology.105

Tichacek’s work not only explores issues of agency in gendering the self, but also subverts gender’s social ideals by exaggerating gendered signifiers beyond normality into the realm of the grotesque and the absurd; Tichacek’s work is an extreme of the extreme. This distortion of gendered signifiers to the grotesque points out the ridiculous, disturbing qualities the gendered ideals of femineity can conjure. This aspect of Tichacek’s work can be seen in I wanna be loved by you through the distortion of her face made by viewing glass and the Rapunzel wig, and in Romance via the hooks and string that pierce her face and pull it into a parody of plastic surgery. In both works her made-up, collagen enhanced face is further manipulated to over-signify the stereotypical feminine ideal. Her work points out that, if an individual need go to such lengths in manipulating their own body to achieve the ideal in their gendered category, then the essentialist platform for gendered identities are betrayed as a falsehood.

In the three works discussed, Tichacek’s character is always there by choice: that is, the viewer is given the sense that she has willingly entered the confined, repressive spaces in a desire to don the appropriate physical attributes for her gendered expression. The reason the characters enter these repressive, binding spaces

is central to Tichacek’s work, and she aims to gives insight to the psychological states of gendering the self through her works. She states, “I use the surface of the body to explore psychological processes, agonies and conflicts.” One of the “psychological processes” she explores is desire. Desire is laced throughout Tichacek’s work as a lure for both her character and the audience. For Tichacek’s character, desire is an incentive to iterate the socially constructed gender scripts. For example, when Tichacek’s character lip-syncs the words to the Marilyn Monroe song ‘I wanna be loved by you’ in the similarly titled work, the audience is given insight into the reason she has allowed herself to be confined in a display case with her face distorted by hypodermic needles and a heavy wig. Her passiveness during performances and the isolated caged environments that display her hyper femininity mirror the repression often experienced through the process of generating a body that signifies gendered ideals. These negative consequences act to express the strength of desire on an individual’s motives.

In I wanna be loved by you, Romance and Lineage of the Divine Tichacek references the story of Rapunzel to further enhance the themes relating to idealised femineity. The image of Rapunzel’s hair acts as a token of femininity in Tichacek’s work; that is, it becomes an exaggerated gendered signifier that must be applied to the body in order to accomplish a correct gender performance. In the fairy story, Rapunzel’s hair is her glory, her defining feature. It is also the means through which the outside world can access Rapunzel in her tower and, as punishment for betraying the witch, Rapunzel’s hair is cut off before she is banished to the desert. In I wanna be loved by you, an audience may wonder if Tichacek’s character would be better off

if someone cut the hair to reduce the pain she suffers. As a symbol of the feminine ideal, the character chooses to remain painfully attached to the hair’s symbolic status. *Lineage of the Divine* has the added element of the witch through Amanda Lepore’s character. Amanda Lepore comes to represent both the enforcer and an example of correct gender performance. In this work, the line between the Witch and Rapunzel (Tichacek’s character) is blurred as both characters wear the same continuous wig, causing the parallel line between the influence of social doctrine in the construction of a gendered identity and an individual’s agency in this process to become hazy.

**Conclusion**

To conclude this section I will compare the work of Monika Tichacek, Liam Benson and the artist group The Kingpins to my own practice and its realisation of gender concepts. As stated in the introduction, I chose these artists because of their common interest in exploring gendered identities through performative video works. Taking into consideration the underlining commonalities between my work and that of the aforementioned artists, the following section will look at other ways in which my studio practice coincides and diverts from these artists’ work. One of the major areas where my work differs from these artists is that it does not involve drag or have as strong a reliance on costume. Although my work is still performative in quality, my artistic practice is as much about my internal experience with the gendered body in aerial acrobatics as it is about an external presentation of a gendered self. My work presents a minimal performing body, where muscularity, body movement, the aerial apparatuses and digital manipulation of the body represent the gender signifiers and expression, rather than through subversive applications of gendered costumes.
The Kingpins’ use of a performing arts discipline, drag king performance, and video art coincides with my own mixing of aerial acrobatics and video techniques. The creation of hybrid bodies through digital manipulation of video, such as in *Rhapsody Happens*, also has relevance to the experimental work I created as part of the exhibition *Cloaked, Caught or Carefree* (2006) where I combine masculine and feminine aerial bodies. (A more detailed description of this exhibition and its works will be discussed later on page 95) Although gender is a common thread through the work of the Kingpins and my own, our explorations of gender differ. The Kingpins point to the ridiculous nature of stereotypical gendered behaviour, whereas my work explores the process of performing one’s gender in direct reference to conceptual framework outlined in Part 1 and through my personal experiences with constructing a gendered identity as an aerialist. This more personalised approach to exploring gender identity is one of the reasons why I chose to look at the work of Liam Benson. Although the issues he raises are universal, it is Benson’s layering of costume and self to form the complexities of a gender identity that gives his work appeal. In the performative works Benson creates, his characters interact with the viewer in a directness that contrasts with my own work. It is the direct gaze that looks out of his performative video works and still images that give the viewer an impression that Benson’s characters are addressing them. When addressing gendered issues, Benson’s work and my own are similar, even though we begin from opposite sides of the gender spectrum insofar as we both showcase the socially prescribed limitations of gendered identities to be falsities. Benson reveals that masculinity can express sensitivity and my own work shows femineity to be capable of strength, masculinity and risk taking behaviour. Tichacek’s work and my own make use of the aesthetics and symbolic language of the fairytale. Like my own,
Tichacek’s work integrates Rapunzel’s hair into the symbolic language of idealised femineity, we both use it to bind our characters to the site of oppression and represent archetypal beauty. My work differs from Tichacek’s in its use of fairytales by utilising the plots of my chosen tales as well as their popular imagery. The similarities and diversions from the fairytale plots in my work are used to stimulate familiarity in my audience, then contrast the preconceptions provoked by these stories in order to reveal my own opinions on gender identities.

In relation to the theories that have influenced and supported my research project, one stands out as integral to the discussed artists and my own artistic practice; Judith Butler’s idea that the subversion of gendered ideals occurs through, in Butler’s words, “a different sort of repeating”\(^\text{107}\) of the gendered scripts given to the individual. Whether it is The Kingpins’ bearded go-go girls in \textit{Rhapsody Happens}, Benson’s integration of masculine and feminie bodily signifiers in his drag costumes or Tichacek’s use of gender bending Amanda Lepore in \textit{Lineage of the Divine}, it is clear that in their performance of gender there is a deliberate and different sort repeating of gendered signifiers occurring.

Part 3: Studio Practice

3.1 Introduction

In Part 3, I will explore the methods, media and eventual works that have realised the conceptual framework of this research project. In order to examine my studio practice, this section will be broken into two parts: In the first part I will present my methodologies and set out my approach to this project by using examples of work produced early in my candidature and discussing how this work led to the current focus of the project. The second part will discuss the selected works within the project and will describe, analyse and relate my body of work to concepts surrounding gender performance. The bodies of work that will be discussed in this section are the videos from the exhibition Cloaked, Caught or Carefree, the series Gender and the Happily Ever After and the stand alone work, Wrapped by Rehearsal.
3.2 Beginnings and Changes

The process of my research methodology was one in which the research, art making and exhibition of finished works all influenced and eventually related to each other. As well as this interaction between research and art making, I have reinvented, re-contextualised and recycled previously completed artworks in order to either enhance the work with new influences gained from my research or to create an entirely new work. For example, the piece with the working title of *The Mouth Work* (2006 – 2007) was shown in five different exhibitions, had three different exhibition titles – *Untitled, Born* and *Her Mother Craved Rampion* – was re-worked countless times and was even incorporated into a separate video work.¹⁰⁸ Before I delve into this aspect of my project, I would like to briefly discuss the early works that make up this project and how they developed into the current focus. This discussion will illustrate the implementation of my methodologies and show where this project started.

The original objective of my research project was to create a series of door-to-door exhibitions¹⁰⁹ where the viewers’ homes replaced the gallery space. I originally created a series of private, domestic exhibitions but as the project developed the focus moved away from the site of exhibitions to the content of the exhibitions: gender performance. The first works made within the bounds of my candidature, *Hi how are you?, Who Is Little Red Riding Hood?* and *Three Blind Mice*

¹⁰⁸ Please refer to the DVD titled *Process DVD* under the menu option ‘Making of a Video Work’ to view the documentation of making *The Mouth Work*

¹⁰⁹ The term “door-to-door exhibition” references the process of selling products by knocking on a series of doors, taking the retail experience into a private, domestic setting. I have used it to describe the idea of a touring exhibition that takes the artworks directly to a person’s home for their private viewing.
were made as part of a 2005 door-to-door exhibition entitled *Hackneyed* and tied to personal experiences of working in the retail industry and the resultant frustrations. These works, through video, sound and performance, sought to challenge the distraction, boredom, fantasy and unsociable behaviour that can often lurk behind the acceptance of repetitious everyday experiences. The works endeavoured to reveal the dualities created in the human condition by the forced façades of the everyday by revealing and manipulating the moral constructs behind fairytales and rhymes. An example of this occurs in the use of an alter ego, *Sprite* when recreating rhymes and fairytales. Sprite is an ever so slightly deranged clown and is used to re-create and highlight the ambiguous and fluid nature of human identities. In these works, *Sprite* is the embodiment of the rebellion against everyday banality. In *Three Blind Mice*, a DVD work involving an interactive menu that leads the viewer through four videos, I used the tails of the mice to symbolise the right of an individual to interact in everyday society. This plays on the rhyme’s original use as propaganda, illustrating Queen Mary the First’s execution of three Protestant Lords; the removal of the mice tails mirrored the Lords’ removal from society. The exaggerated movements and slapstick violence of silent films are imitated to form a narrative of Sprite’s desire for liberation. In my recreation of the rhyme, the alter ego *Sprite* tries to infiltrate the everyday by stealing her façade’s (a mouse) tail. Even with possession of a tail the other everyday individuals (the other mice) ignore Sprite, going about their everyday tasks. Eventually, however, they notice the excitable clown and force her out of their world by cutting off her acquired tail with a carving knife. This work and others in this line of research eventually became an investigation into how an individual goes about constructing the self within the confines of social conditioning. Although the
body of work created was successful as a starting point, it lacked clarity and was too broad in its conceptual concerns.

The project’s focus on gender as a socially constructed performance emerged from these original works and were facilitated by the introduction of aerial acrobatics into my video works; my experience of obtaining my Riggers Ticket\textsuperscript{110}; the influence of reading texts on \textit{Little Red Riding Hood}; and a need to narrow my research of constructed identities to a specific example. Although I had experimented with aerial acrobatics in \textit{Who is Little Red Riding Hood?} (2005), the final DVD made for the exhibition \textit{Hackneyed} began to engage this medium in a new way, as I will go on to detail. The main work that sparked a turning point in my art making was a video work, later titled \textit{Happily Ever After} (2005-2007), which featured a feminine performer clothed in black underwear highlighted against a background of red fabric. As the video progressed, the performer began to climb the red fabric. Each time the woman reached the top, the video cut to her climbing yet again. This repeats at length until finally the female performer is allowed to reach the top where she creates a loop in the fabric. Again, like the climbing, the action is repeated over and over. In the last segment of the video, the female performer places her neck into the loop and proceeds to repeatedly hang by her neck. Even though the viewer is aware of the fact the woman is performing an aerial routine, the high risk of the move, combined with the manipulation of the footage, creates a sinister atmosphere that seeks to depict the darker side of conforming to a social ideal. Although the work was not originally meant to reference concepts of femininity, it was an obvious element in the finished work. As such, the role of concepts relating to femininity needed to be considered.

\textsuperscript{110} A Riggers Ticket, issued by WorkCover NSW, is a qualification in rigging used primarily in the construction and performing arts industries.
and addressed in the research process. Where this work succeeded over the previous work made for *Hackneyed* was in its simplicity and distinct aesthetics, such as the desaturation of the subject, used to highlight the red fabric utilised in the works. Some of my earlier works were over-produced and, visually, tried to layer too many images within the one frame, complicating the conceptual reading of the work. 

*Happily Ever After* used the expression of the body’s movement during aerial performance to form the foundation of the image: the editing was then used to enhance this image rather than adding distracting complexities. The aesthetics created in *Happily Ever After* formed the basic template for the works that were created after it.
With the introduction of aerial acrobatics into the core of my studio practice, I needed to obtain a Riggers Ticket in order to comply with Occupational Health and Safety requirements. Completing the course was a necessary hurdle when it came to creating my work, but also became part of my research process insofar as helping inspire a turning point in my conceptual framework. As a by-product of undertaking this training, the environment in which the course was situated inspired the creation of later works that revolved around the construction of gender identities. A TAFE course, it was principally aimed at the construction industry and attracted a clientele based on a target group that was made up primarily of men who performed physical labour. The activities designed for a construction industry and its participants created a highly masculine environment as well as a segregation of the feminine through the lack of women present in the classes and as instructors. Working in this environment led me to begin an exploration of the effects of adapting masculinity to the idea of the feminine in typically masculine environments. I was forced to find my masculine side, and at the same time was confronted with my classmates’ and tutors’ expectations of my femininity. For example my classmates would continually apologise for their coarse language and offer to lift heavy things for me despite seeing me lifting such objects for myself and my repeated reassurances about not being offended by their use of profanity. On one occasion I met a student from another rigging class who knew me by reputation: he said he knew who I was, that I was the girl who was good at rigging. Keen to explore exactly what he meant, I questioned him further. He seemed to infer that rather than being more capable than my classmates, I was good because I could simply do what was required. At first I was overly sensitive to my difference as female however, by the end of the course, my differences didn’t seem as apparent or perhaps had ceased to be a concern for me.
Ultimately the experience made me question and consider how I performed my gender, how my gender was perceived and how I manipulated that performance in response to the context in which I was situated.

When researching *Little Red Riding Hood*, I discovered the tale offered a unique historical map of how femininity was perceived, what it meant to be feminine and what the expectations for an individual performing femininity were. Of particular interest in this regard were the contemporary versions of the tale in film and literature, such as *Freeway*\(^{111}\) and *Hard Candy*,\(^{112}\) where the idea of femininity, represented by *Little Red Riding Hood*'s character, began to encompass the traditionally masculine role of the wolf. I would also like to touch on the importance and influence exhibiting and sharing my work had on the direction and outcomes of this project. It became clear after exhibiting *Hackneyed* that some works were more successful than others. The work *Happily Ever After* (2005-2007), stood out for many people either as a good work or simply as something disturbing. I would not have been willing to continue in this line of work without the positive response to its exhibition. On another level, the placement of my work in the domestic environment inspired me to recognise the links to be made between the unreality of the work in the domestic space and the question of essentialist ideas of gendering the individual, versus the concept of the performativity of gender.

\(^{111}\) Bright, Matthew. "Freeway." 110 min USA: The Globe Film Company (Australia), 1996.

12. Early aerial acrobatic Little Red Riding Hood works
Video Stills
2005
3.3 Cloaked, Caught or Carefree?

The exhibition *Cloaked, Caught or Carefree?* marked the beginning of the final stages of this project. The works used the techniques of combining aerial acrobatics and video art developed through previous works and presented them in a false domestic space. Masculine and feminine bodies were mixed with red fabric, dangling precariously from unknown heights. The aerial bodies were alternately striking and ambiguous in their representations of gender, but all contrasted the domestic setting in a surreal display of an alternative world. The aerial bodies were created by compositing layers of male and female bodies together, creating figures that would be impossible in the everyday, thus contrasting the everyday reality the domestic space created. The images ran parallel to the application of gender signifiers on the self being beautiful, grotesque, strange and ultimately false; a fantasy of the everyday applied to the body.

This exhibition, *Cloaked, Caught or Carefree?* was presented for this project under the banner of Western Front.\(^{113}\) It was staged at an old caretaker’s cottage (scheduled for demolition) located on the Kingswood campus of the University of Western Sydney. The house was cleaned and set up as a domestic space complete with furniture, a well stocked kitchen and my own personal effects. It was amongst this resemblance of a domestic space that the video installations were installed. They were hidden in cupboards, under bed covers, in drawers and one work was best viewed while using the bathroom facilities. With the exception of two projections that were displayed in full view, the audience had to search for the artworks, with

clues given from a map in the catalogue. For the attentive participants, there were also a few surprise works thrown into the mix. The opening night resembled a house party more than an exhibition launch with viewers lounging on the furniture and eating at the kitchen table. In fact, after initially viewing the work, the viewers became part of the domestic setting, lending it credibility as a lived in space.

*Cloaked, Caught or Carefree?* was chosen as a title to insinuate the process of creating a gendered self. Each aspect of the title references a choice or perception of the individual when dealing with issues of gender performance. ‘Cloaked’ suggests a mask or façade that an individual offers up as an identity, with the inference that there is something different or true behind the cloak. This essentialist idea of a gendered self is offered up as a question and placed directly next to ‘Caught’. Is the individual caught by the repetition of gender performance or are they caught in an essentialist view of a natural sex? ‘Caught’ is used to incite impressions of being trapped or forced into a particular conception of gender whether or not the performance allows for the individual’s choice. The last term, ‘Carefree’, is used to convey a passive acceptance of gender divisions and applications. ‘Carefree’ is an acceptance of gender as natural or at the very least, it suggests an individual’s lack of concern for the process of social conditioning they go through. They are carefree and happy with the drag show they present. Ultimately the title is used to provoke the viewer to assess the artist’s acceptance and position on gendering the self as well as their own position on this process.
13. Cloaked Caught or Carefree
Exhibition Map
2007
The works presented in this exhibition were exclusively video installations, hidden throughout a simulated domestic space. Each work dealt with a different aspect of gender performance. They explored issues such as the use of gender signifiers including clothing and physical presentation choices; accepted recreation; attitudes towards everyday situations; and sexual preference in order to communicate within an everyday setting the role of agency in gendering the self as well as the fluid complexity of performing a gendered identity. Because of the large number of works involved in this exhibition, the following section will describe selected works which best represent the exhibition as a whole.

**You Throw Like a Girl**

The title of this work, *You Throw Like a Girl* (2007) suggests a derogatory conception of femininity, insinuating the individual throwing is incapable of executing the activity with skill or, primarily, strength. This gendering of an action illustrates a gender signifier that is applied to an individual by social situation. Whether the individual is male or female, the signifier makes suggestion as to their gender identity. The work created under this title was born out of the confrontation of identifying as female with the ability to compete in a patriarchal society. During the research process, questions were raised such as: is weakness a gender signifier? Can adopting masculine traits improve social standing and what effect does this adoption have on the individual’s identification as female? Does this co-existence of masculine and feminine in the individual create multiple selves or a new reading of gender identity?
14. You Throw Like a Girl
Video Still
2007
The process of the creation of *You Throw Like a Girl* rather than its final form was most important to the project in terms of exploring gender performance. The work consists of aerial performers engaged in a duo performance digitally manipulated to create a cascade of masculine and feminine bodies supported by a single female performer. As an individual that identifies as female, I have struggled with the insinuation that to be female means I am weaker than a male. Beating a boy was infinitely more rewarding than beating a girl at any given activity because of this assumption. Being just under a 150cm tall means, as an aerial performer, that I am generally the flyer, the person being thrown, caught and supported by another individual. One of my acts was an acrobatic interpretation of Superman rescuing Lois Lane. It involved stereotypical gender role playing such as a male saving the distressed female (the male aerialist bases the female aerialist in the acrobatic action: the base in aerial acrobatics is the person who throws, catches and supports the flyer in a doubles act. They are also referred to as catchers in flying trapeze).

After the show, a friend told me they were disappointed that Lois didn’t save Superman. She was right: what had I done? I had created an act that illustrated everything I did not want to be.

The best way for me to explain the significance of *You Throw Like a Girl* is to recount the experience of making the work, as the physical requirements of the act allowed me to experience firsthand the concepts I wished to explore around feminine weakness. To create an image that defied the ‘you-throw-like-a-girl’ insinuation and explored the multiplicity of gender I decided to flip my Superman act on its head. I set out to base my duo partner\(^{114}\). My ability to do this came to symbolise the

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\(^{114}\) I wanted to be strong, feminine and able to base a man twice my body weight. I had to train my body to put up with the new pains and pressures the trick would place on my body. The pain was
adoption of masculine traits and the image it created came to represent the multiplicity of gender identity. The creation of the work became data in itself by means of engaging directly with the embodiment of both traditionally female and male roles in aerial acrobatics. By taking on both the masculine and feminine experience, I gained a unique understanding of the issues surrounding perceived female weakness.

_You Throw Like a Girl_ emerged from this process, proving my strength as an individual gendered as female. The work, however, became more than just the desire to prove myself as I began to reflect on this process and its relation to my original practice-led research questions. If gender is represented by the fabric which suspends me, what impact would holding a masculine body have on the analogy of gender as an aerial performance? With the increase in weight, my task of remaining suspended by the fabric becomes, not more difficult, but more painful. By denying the scripted gender signifiers and adopting others, the individual’s situation in society becomes strained and isolating.

In _You Throw Like a Girl_, I didn’t stop at the image of a female performer supporting the weight of the male, but sought to convey multiplicity by layering the reverse of this performance over the original image. The female performer was at the top of the screen, secured in the red fabric, as she held onto a male performer. Emerging from the male performer’s back is another image of the same male performer holding onto the repeated image of the female performer. Coming out of her back is another clone of herself basing another repetition of the male performer.

almost unbearable as the red fabric tightened around my back with the added weight. It took several goes before I could hold my male flyer long enough for the shot. I dropped him on several occasions and put my back out for a week. But I was eventually able to do it.
The male performer in this work has his identity obscured by a skin-coloured hood, while the female performer’s identity is revealed and made the subject of the image. The footage has been slowed down so only subtle movement is detected by the viewer. The repeated images of the aerial performers sway gently, defying any sense of gravity. Only the original female performer remains fixed to one point, grounding the subjectivity of the work to her image.

When situating the work in the simulated domestic space I overlayed the collage of bodies on a still image of the lounge room the work was occupying. The video work was displayed on a monitor that represented the communal TV in a home. As the viewer sits on the lounge chair mimicking the daily ritual of TV watching, the room is mirrored back to them. The overlayed image serves to create a surreal impression of the room’s presence, generating an alternate reality within the screen.

This work was the first I made for this exhibition and, on a personal level, expressed everything I wanted it to however, in the end, the process of making You Throw Like a Girl contributed more to the realisation of my conceptual framework than the finished product did. Conceptually You Throw Like a Girl focused my ideas, and in terms of technique, the processes of making it led to experimentation that formed the foundations of later works. However, as a stand alone work, it had a number of failings. The first of these failings was that the work did not read in the way it was intended to be read. The cut and paste method of merging the aerial bodies made it hard to work out what was going on in the image, leaving most viewers unengaged, and therefore unwilling to explore its conceptual intentions. It
was my original intention that *You Throw Like a Girl* would centre around the subjectification of the female aerialist’s identity, however, when viewing the finished work, the conglomerate of layered bodies created an image of an inanimate thing rather than the distinction of a mutated character.

**Escaping My Masculine Side**

The work *Escaping My Masculine Side* (2007) developed from *You Throw Like a Girl* in its exploration of multiplicity in the gendering of the self. It depicts a female aerial performer holding a hooded male performer in an arm to arm grip. The image seems everyday in its depiction of circus performers until the viewer is confronted with a stray arm pushing its way out of the male performer’s back. The arm escalates to become a head, then another arm and then finally a torso. The viewer is now face-to-face with a clone of the female performer lodged in the back of the male performer. The clone never fully escapes the confines of the masculine body before the scene is returned to the uneventful swaying of the original two performers. *Escaping My Masculine Side* was presented as a projection displayed in the corner of the room. The aerial performers were life size, and by placing them on a black background during the editing process, the room the work was exhibited in became the aerialists’ setting. The aim of presenting the work in this fashion was to create the feeling that the aerial performers were part of the space, rather than figures in a dislocated documentation, framed by a monitor.
16. Escaping My Masculine Side
Video Still
2007
*Escaping My Masculine Side* deals with the fluidity of gender identity in a way that suggests the difficulty in this process: gendering the self becomes a fluid action where the combinations of gender signifiers are swapped, replaced and bent to cope with the varying situations the everyday presents. It could be an illustration of simultaneously applying and breaking away from gender categories in order to situate the self within cultural constructs. From a personal perspective, the work expresses my desire to escape from the idea that, to compete in a patriarchal society, masculine traits need to be adopted. It articulates my frustration in the choice of the feminine signifiers available to me, and the need to take a flexible, subversive approach to creating a gendered identity. *Escaping My Masculine Side* was one of my more successful attempts at expressing these ideas. I simplified the aesthetics of *You Throw Like a Girl*, allowing the conceptual function of the aerial acrobatics to emerge. The escalating action drew the viewer into the work and prevented them from being overwhelmed by too much information at once.

**Conforming to a Divergence**

*Conforming to a Divergence* explores the conflict between ideas of rigid social structures negating agency and the belief that the individual can have some control over gendering the self. While exploring the work of theorists such as Foucault, Gatens, and Irigaray\(^\text{115}\) in relation to this idea, *Conforming to a Divergence* directly relates to Butler’s work. In Butler’s theories of gender performance, for

example, agency takes on the form of reworking gendered signifiers in order to subvert the ideals of rigid gender categories. Butler states:

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.\textsuperscript{116}

Ambiguity is embedded in this incarnation of agency, as displacing gendered signifiers and imitating them in a different context can also lead to reinforcing stereotypical gendered behaviour rather than causing it to re-signify. Added to this ambiguity are the binding nature of social structures which punish an individual for embodying gender “incorrectly”, creating a conflict between a need to escape the repressive aspects of gendered norms and a desire to remain in the comfort zone adhering to the world these norms creates. It was this complexity and ambiguity that make up an individual’s subversion of gendered doctrine that inspired the creation of *Conforming to a Divergence*. The title is a juxtaposition of terms highlighting the contradictory nature of gendering the self or the process of gender performance. In this title, “divergence” refers to a disagreement and a difference, and in this context suggests that conforming to preconceived gender norms may contradict the individual’s sense of self or their desires. *Conforming to a Divergence* also explores the application or performance of gender norms where an individual may adopt gendered qualities that contradict their perception of self in order to compete or blend in. In this process of conforming, the work focuses on the good intentioned but failed attempts at applying these gender norms. That is, by trying to adhere to the

normative gendered categories, the individual finds their efforts are still socially unacceptable if not more alienating.

In the work itself, the viewer is presented with a female figure performing an aerial move whereby she suspends herself by wrapping red fabric around her arms. Her position is precarious and it is only her strength that keeps her from falling. A giant hand grasps the top of the fabric giving the impression that the aerial performer is being controlled like a puppet. The hand is representative of the social pressures that instigate the need to conform to a gender norm. The performer initially gives the impression of an inability to escape the constraints of the domineering hand, yet the viewer comes to realise it is the aerial performer who holds herself in place at great cost to her strength. It is at this point that agency in gender performance comes into question in this work. It is the individual that perpetuates and performs the gender signifiers that adhere to the social constructs of sex. Whether or not the individual has choice in this performance is ambiguous, because if she lets go, she will still fall into the unknown black void. As when performing gender, if the performance is not accepted or the performer deliberately subverts the script, then the individual is faced with the possibility of ostracism.
15. Conforming to a Divergence
Video Still
2007
3.4 Wrapped in Rehearsal

*Wrapped in Rehearsal* was made for and exhibited at the performance *Walking on Air*. Unlike the other aerial/video works produced as part of my candidature, *Wrapped in Rehearsal* used a trapeze as the foundation of the performance. It begins by revealing a static figure, wrapped from neck to feet in skin-toned fabric and framed by a black void. As the action unfolds, the aerialist twists around the bar and ropes of the trapeze, slowly unwinding the constrictive fabric wrapped around her body. This process inadvertently creates a constricting web around the trapeze. Up until this point, the image has been black and white however, as the fabric is rolled away from the aerialist’s body, a striking red seeps into the image, later revealed to be a red dress worn by the performer. The end frame shows the aerial performer wearing the red dress in an image that mimics the opening scene, emphasising the transformation that has occurred.

The work was created in response to Gatens’ connection between body and a lived experience of gender or, in her words, ‘the significance of gender and its intimate relation to biology-as-lived in a social and historical context’. And Butler’s discussion about the materialisation of sex in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*. Butler argues:

The category of ‘sex’ is, from the start, normative… in this sense, then, ‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of the regulatory practice.

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117 *Walking on Air* was an Aerial Club Night at The Studio in the Sydney Opera House. It featured live bands, aerial acts and projections of video works by various artists.

that produces the bodies it governs... In other words, ‘sex’ is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialised through time.\textsuperscript{119}

The wrapped body of the aerial performer, in the beginning scene, represents the normative status of “sex” when categorising the body into gendered identities by mimicking the appearance of a neutrally feminine body (a body that is stripped of gendered signifiers). The allusion of this essential core is disrupted when, during the course of the performance, bands of red are revealed under the neutral fabric. The image of the red dress embodies the performance of gendered signifiers through its status as traditionally feminine garb and by referencing Little Red Riding Hood’s cloak. This dress, in being revealed under the supposedly neutral sight of conscription, aims to reveal the intrinsic link between sex and gender. The red dress, instead of being applied to the external presentation of a sexed body, is revealed to be another force that manipulated the sexed body first presented. In other words, the gendered signifier (the red dress) is revealed to be part of the layers of gendered expression rather than simply being forced onto a neutral body. The regulatory function of sex is still present in the performance, even though it has been removed from the aerial performer’s body, by becoming a restrictive web around the trapeze thereby influencing her movements as she reveals the red dress. The progressive image of the trapeze, performer, skin-coloured fabric and red dress aims to present the performer as being influenced by body, gender signifiers and the performance in the creation of fluid identity that is simulations a product of all these elements.

The reason I chose to swap the red fabric for the trapeze goes back to my conceptual use of the apparatus. The red fabric was used in previous works to

\textsuperscript{119} Butler, Judith. Bodies That Matter; on the Discursive Limits Of "Sex". New York: Routledge, 1993. 1
represent gender signifiers and was manipulated around the aerialist’s body to suggest the performativity of gender. In *Wrapped in Rehearsal*, the red fabric was replaced by skin-toned fabric to draw a parallel between sex and gender and reveal “sex” as an “ideal construct which is forcibly materialised through time.”

120 Ibid.
17. Wrapped by
Rehearsal
Video Stills
2008
3.5 Gender and the Happily Ever After

Rapunzel: Her Mother Craved Rampion

I chose to use the fairytale Rapunzel\textsuperscript{121} in my art making, a childhood favourite of mine. When playing as a child, the character of Rapunzel represented the ideal feminine form I desired to be. It wasn’t about being locked up and then rescued by a prince: it was all about the hair. As a young girl between four and seven years old, my mother used to have my hair cut in a bob with a severe fringe. This was not a hairstyle for a princess. In all the books and films I was exposed to, princesses had long flowing locks. Although I was considered a tom boy at this age and enjoyed being stronger and faster than a good number of boys, I still wanted to be recognised as a girl, and the ultimate girl was a princess and a princess had long flowing hair. Pretending to be Rapunzel compensated for my lack of locks. When bringing the story of Rapunzel to my studio practice, her hair became a symbol of the socially acceptable and often expected stance that can also be a means of controlling the individual.

The use of the story in my project is not a study of Rapunzel, that is, I am not concerned with giving an accurate account of what it has meant or now means in a contemporary context. Instead the story became a tool I manipulated to help realise my conceptual concerns. Rapunzel has been integrated into many works across several stages of my studio practice. These various works culminated in one of the concluding works of this project, Her Mother Craved Rampion (2007). Before I look

\textsuperscript{121} Grimm, Jacob, and Wilhelm Grimm. "Rapunzel." In \textit{Children's and Household Tales -- Grimms' Fairy Tales}. Berlin: Kinder- und Hausmärchen 1812. The Grimm Brothers’ original version is the main version of the story used to inform my art making.
at this work in more detail, I will outline a brief history of the works that influenced and were part of its development. The initial work which featured Rapunzel was a book made as part of the door-to-door exhibition Hackneyed (2005). This work embodied my early investigation into how an individual goes about constructing the self within the confines of social conditioning. In this work Rapunzel becomes the individual, society the Witch, and Sprite (the deranged clown of my alter ego) featured as the prince. It worked with the premise that there is a Tower especially made for every person, built out of our own achievements, punishments and desires, inhibited or realised. “Good” and “bad” become ambiguous as within the work it becomes clear that the presence of Sprite, although alleviating monotony, causes isolation and rejection for Rapunzel. It seems impossible to have both the security of the Tower and the exuberance of Sprite within Rapunzel’s life, yet living without either presents its own impossibility.

The next development in my work that also directed the evolution of my use of Rapunzel stemmed from the exhibition Hidden (2006). While I have not mentioned this exhibition so far in this exegesis, Hidden not only influenced my Rapunzel works, it also laid the foundations for Cloaked, Caught or Carefree. Hidden was an exhibition curated as part of Cirquinox, a yearly circus festival held at historic house ‘The Everglades Gardens’ in Leura in the Blue Mountains, NSW. The exhibition was installed in the house and featured four video installations that worked with the first aerial/video works made after Happily Ever After (2005). In the downstairs bathroom a video showing an aerialist coming out of an open mouth on a piece of red fabric was projected onto a towel, while the upstairs bathroom displayed an expanse of red fabric falling down from the shower head, out of the bath and onto
the tiled floor. The fabric was punctuated with mirrors and small monitors showing a video of legs continually running in mid air. At the back of a short hallway, a stack of monitors featured lines of red fabric in crosshatched pattern being continually climbed by numerous copies of a female aerialist. The final work consisted of two monitors showing a female form suspended horizontally from red fabric. This image overlayed still images of the room the monitors occupied, with transparent fabric gliding over both the aerialist and the picture of the room. These works loosely dealt with the tension between conformity, the individual and the need for survival. However, the primary importance of the works in *Hidden* to my studio practice was the techniques developed in their production. The way they integrated the aerial acrobatics and video art would be continued throughout the rest of the project. The videos created for this exhibition, along with a few additions, were all re-used in the next version of *Rapunzel* (2006), a door-to-door exhibition that took the form of a DVD box set. Although this exhibition used the original themes as did the previous *Rapunzel* work, I revisited it for a public exhibition in 2007 and reworked it to reflect the changes to my conceptual framework: issues of performing gender. It was this later public exhibition that lead to the creation of *Her Mother Craved Rampion*. 
18. Her Mother Craved Rampion
Video Still
2006-2007
Her Mother Craved Rampion

Although the focus of this version of Rapunzel was looking at gender as a social performance, it still had its roots in the earlier, more Foucauldian concepts of discipline, punishment and the conditioning of the everyday individual where the body is a site for cultural inscription or in Foucault’s words where the body is ‘totally imprinted by history’\textsuperscript{122}. The work was not about subverting socially prescribed gender roles, but about the pressure and need for succumbing to normality versus a desire to find some level of agency in gendering the self. This work stressed that it is impossible to remove an individual from their social context, yet acknowledged the room for subversion, deviation and dislocation. Butler, in an interview for Artforum International argued:

I think that it’s inevitable that there’s no position outside power, and in that way I’m linked with Foucault: but I don’t think that means one is determined by power relations.\textsuperscript{123}

Butler’s statement above sums up the issue I have explored in this work. In discussing Her Mother Craved Rampion, I will first explain how I have interpreted and utilized elements of the story; that is, what certain components of the story mean in my rendition of the tale. In summary, Rapunzel came to represent the everyday individual; the Witch or Fairy became society or the governing force of everyday normality; the Tower was a symbol of socially prescribed gender roles; and Rapunzel’s hair developed as an expression of gendered signifiers or an individual’s gendered identity (the performance). In my version of Rapunzel, the prince is another


side of Rapunzel herself (the individual), the side that desires to subvert prescribed gender roles while her exile into the desert is the consequence of performing gender incorrectly. Keeping this groundwork in mind, the following analysis of Her Mother Craved Rampion will follow the narrative of the work, beginning with a birth.

At the beginning of the video, red bleeds across a black screen bringing with it an image of an open mouth. As the image scrolls across the screen, a female aerialist drops out of the open mouth from a piece of red fabric. She dangles there for sometime, unconscious and helpless. After a moment, the performer comes to life and untangles herself from the red fabric, only to fall to an unknown fate.

At birth, or conceivably earlier, an individual is assigned a gender by the vocalisations of the attending medical practitioner. In Rapunzel, the child’s fate is sealed without her consent before her birth and because of her parent’s actions: when Rapunzel is born, the witch claims the child as her own, ‘When the woman gave birth, the fairy appeared, named the little girl Rapunzel, and took her away.’

Gender is given then reinforced by the society that claims the individual. It is at this point in the story that it becomes clear that Rapunzel’s world is dictated by matriarchal figures; her mother’s desires, the witch’s control, love and punishment. In Her Mother Craved Rampion these relationships can be related to the rehearsal and repetition of gender performance.

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19. Her Mother Craved Rampion
Video Still
2006-2007
Next to the open mouth that has just birthed Rapunzel is a red pod or cocoon. As the image scrolls across the screen, Rapunzel again emerges from the pod dressed in red. The purpose of the red pod is to represent the Tower and goes back to my use of the red fabric as symbolic of gender signifiers (For an explanation of the use of red refer page 38). The Tower represents that which shapes our understanding of acceptable behaviour; it is isolation from difference and also a safe place. Never in the story of Rapunzel is the girl shown as being unhappy with her lot in the Tower, it is only when she is cast from the Tower that we are told she suffers. Performing gender correctly is rewarded; it is a safe option, and directly linked to the Tower is Rapunzel’s hair. In *Her Mother Craved Rampion* Rapunzel’s hair is represented by still images that form the background of the video which is weaved throughout the action like a motif. In my work, Rapunzel’s hair is equated with the performance of gender. It is an outward symbol of acceptance and is a part of her beauty and identity. Rapunzel’s hair is both her glory/notoriety and that which binds her. It is the only means of contact through which the girl can have access to social encounters, as gender is used as an interface through which to communicate. As the scene continues to scroll across the screen, the hair leads the viewer into the next action of the narrative: the Prince.

The Prince represents a desire to go against prescribed gender roles and the act of subversion all rolled into one. Swinging above a sea of hair, the Prince in this video work is epitomised by a male and female aerialist performing a duo trick. In this trick, the female aerialist is wrapped in the red fabric so her body is horizontal, with the male aerialist sitting directly on top of her. The male performer is hooded,

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125 A duo trick is a specific position performed by two aerialists on the one piece of equipment.
obscuring his identity, with the female’s face overlayed on his back. The aim of this image was to give the impression Rapunzel has displaced her identity within a masculine form. At the end of the performed trick, the male aerialist stands on the female performer, causing her pain before his eventual departure. I believe this section of *Her Mother Craved Rampion* to be the least successful in realising the concepts I was attempting to present. The aim of taking way the male performer’s identity and incorporating his body into Rapunzel’s depiction of self was not wholly achieved. Both performers were perceived as separate entities rather than symbolic of one. The idea of this image was the starting point for the works in *Cloaked, Caught or Carefree*.

Next is Rapunzel’s exile into the desert. Her exile is the consequence of performing gender incorrectly; that is, performing gender against accepted social norms. Two images scroll across the screen in order to depict this consequence. The first is a still image that presents a red clad Rapunzel amongst a sea of her clones dressed alike in white shirts, all perfectly made-up with cosmetics and resplendent with perfect hair and cheesy smiles. In contrast, Rapunzel hangs her head in shame and exudes helplessness. Directly following this image, multiple aerialists climb multiple strands of red fabric in an act of endless repetition. The crisscrossing of the red fabric creates a woven pattern interrupted by the performers’ repetitious climbing. Both these images place the female performer representing Rapunzel in a social context where her counterparts or clones are repetitions of her socially acceptable selves. To become acceptable again in the eyes of rigid and sometimes oppressive gendered categories, she has to rehearse the social iterations of gendered performances. This exile links to the process of discipline and punishment, whereas
in my version of Rapunzel, the end of Rapunzel’s punishment results in the acceptance of social norms for security and potential happiness. However, that acceptance still has a thread of rebellion woven through it, causing a tension between conformity and a desire for difference. The conclusion of this work shows a female aerial performer hanging by her neck from red fabric, this image is an extract from the video work Happily Ever After and overlays a white plinth where Rapunzel is displayed, having dressed in a fashion similar to the retail clones. This duel image concludes the work with a not-so-happily-ever-after ending and could be said to show the death of individuality or, in Foucault’s terms, the 'destroyed body' (neck hang) and then the body being culturally inscribed (Rapunzel dressing as a clone).\textsuperscript{126}

19. Her Mother Craved Rampion
Video Still
2006-2007
Little Red Riding Hood: A Wolf, Eaten or Saved

Unlike Rapunzel, the tale of Little Red Riding Hood was not a childhood favourite of mine, however the imagery and thematic baggage attached to this story enticed my interest as an adult due to its continual integration into popular culture. The story of this red-clad heroine is interwoven throughout my project as inspiration and artistic tool, and also helped spark the turning point in my research to focus on gender. Little Red Riding Hood featured early on in my candidature in the work Who is Little Red Riding Hood?, created in response to my personal interest in the story. Although marking the beginning of the story’s role in my project, it was unsuccessful as a stand alone work due to the lack of a clear theoretical context. I continued my research into the fairytale mostly due to personal interest, which proved advantageous as the story offered a unique historical map of how femininity is perceived, what it means to be feminine and what the expectations of an individual performing femininity are.

The most influential renderings of the tale were the contemporary versions of the story in film and literature such as Freeway\textsuperscript{127} and Hard Candy\textsuperscript{128} where the idea of femininity, represented by Little Red’s character, began to encompass the traditionally masculine role of the wolf. In Little Red Riding Hood: Uncloaked Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale, the American author Catherine Orenstein discusses the evolution of the story by looking at Little Red Riding Hood’s acquisition of a fur coat; either her own or the wolf’s, in later renditions of the tale.

\textsuperscript{127} Bright, Matthew. "Freeway." 110 min USA: The Globe Film Company (Australia), 1996.
\textsuperscript{128} Slade, David. “Hard Candy ”, 104 min USA: Icon Productions (Australia), 2005.
Orenstein argues:

By switching her garb/and or trading skins, Red Riding Hood sheds the historical associations of her own red cloak – sin, scandal, blood, sexual availability – and acquires a new set of meanings.  

Orenstein suggests the fur coat empowers Red Riding Hood: challenging the patriarchy of the wolf, highlighting her sexuality, enhancing her animal instincts, removing the connotations of exploitation and in general confusing the binary gendered categories usually set up by the story. This mixing and matching of masculine and feminine signifiers in the gendered performance of Little Red informed my conceptual framework and generated another aesthetic through which I explored gender performance.

130 Ibid.
21. A Wolf, Eaten or Saved
Video Still (Forrest)
2008
A Wolf, Eaten or Saved

A Wolf, Eaten or Saved (2008) takes aspects from the history and reincarnations of the story of Little Red Riding Hood as well as from the way the story is understood and used today. The work does not follow the story religiously, but uses elements of the tale’s narrative and imagery to illustrate ideas of gender performance. In other words, although I recognise the story has many meanings and interpretations, I have recreated the story to suit my own conceptual undertakings. Whereas the work Her Mother Craved Rampion portrayed the “trap” of gender, A Wolf, Eaten or Saved is primarily concerned with, as Butler puts it, working the trap: “Performativity has to do with repetition, very often with the repetition of oppression and painful gender norms to force them to re-signify. This is not freedom, but a question of how to work the trap one is inevitably in.” 131

A Wolf, Eaten or Saved expresses the ambiguity and the fine lines between body, sex, gender and agency in the process of gendering self. In a similar way to my use of Rapunzel in Her Mother Craved Rampion, I have used key elements of the tale of Little Red Riding Hood in this work to symbolically represent the ingredients used when constructing a gendered identity. In this work, the character of Little Red Riding Hood represents the individual or performer; the forest becomes the threat of punishment for performing gender incorrectly (the potential to be eaten); the wolf equals the interpretations and/or aspects of gendering the self that do not adhere to designated norm, or in Butler’s words “gender trouble” 132; the path through the

woods embodies performing gender correctly or the gendered ideal; the Mother epitomises the force of social conscription and Grandmother is the repetition and rehearsal of Butler’s gendered scripts.

Setting up the scene for Little Red Riding Hood’s ordeal is a forest made up of passive aerial bodies, hooded and attired in skin-coloured fabric, dangling by their arms and legs which are caught up in red fabric. The image scrolls across the screen to reveal a path cutting through the forest of punished bodies. Moving along the path are cloned, black and white aerial performers being manipulated, puppet-like, in perfect synchronisation by a large hand. The hand is representative of the Mother figure in the story, and performing a repetitive tissu. Little Red Riding Hood enters the scene dressed in brilliant red in contrast to the black and white aesthetics of her surroundings. She performs a similar routine, yet embellishes it by twisting the fabric around her legs rather than staying still in the splits, which causes her to become tangled in the fabric and the performance to become disjointed and unrefined in comparison to the clones seen previously. Finally, after failing to execute the designated routine, Little Red Riding Hood slides off the red fabric and leaves in search of an alternative to the reparations routine played out on the red fabric. In these scenes, the viewer is presented with the ideal: the aerial clones to which the protagonist should aspire. The potential consequence of failing to achieve this ideal is represented by the trapped isolation of the forest’s aerial bodies, and sets up Little Red Riding Hood’s desire to leave behind the repressive aspects of her gendered identity. In the final moment of her gendered performance, Little Red Riding Hood, controlled by an outside force, untangles herself from the gender signifying fabric and leaves the path.
22. *A Wolf, Eaten or Saved*
Video Stills (Path)
2008
The scene scrolls again to reveal the wolf made up of fur and bits of masculine and feminine aerial bodies. This realisation of the wolf was born out of a previous work titled *Pretty Monsters* (2007), where a single form was created by the mixing of the body parts from masculine and feminine aerialists performing a duo routine. Each piece of the gender monster shifted with slow and subtle movements creating a pulsating form that gave the strange body life. The movements also create an ambiguity to the body parts as they merge together and then separate. The manipulation of the aerial performance created a Rorschach display of beaks and eyes that generated a disturbing image the viewer could never accept as a reality. It alluded to the non-acceptance of unusual interpretations of gender scripts and that an ambiguous gender identity can be disturbing and confusing in an everyday setting. The gender monsters are not a mask and do not suggest an inner core of a true instigator of gender identity, rather its compilation acts to contradict the signification of a true inner core that is suggested by the performance of socially constructed actions and gestures. By making the wolf follow a similar aesthetic, it was my intention to set up the wolf as representative of the greys found in the black and white categories of binary gendered norms.

In the earlier versions of Little Red Riding Hood, particularly around the 1700s, the wolf tricked Little Red Riding Hood into eating and drinking her Grandmother’s flesh and blood. The story goes:

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133 The idea that an inner core is a fantasy produced by signifying actions and gestures comes from Butler’s ‘Gender Trouble’. She writes ‘In other words, acts gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through a play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause.’ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. p185.
‘Hello, grandmother. I have brought you some bread and milk.’
‘Have something yourself, my dear. There is meat and wine in the pantry.’
So the girl ate what was offered; and as she did, a little cat said,
‘Slut! To eat the flesh and drink the blood of your grandmother!’

I have used this aspect of the story to represent the process of destabilising
gender ideals through the subversive repetition of gendered signifiers. The wolf, by
tricking Little Red Riding Hood into consuming the aerial clones and the forest aerial
bodies, sets up a situation where these ideals are part of Little Red Riding Hood’s
conception of her performance but are longer in a position of power to govern Little
Red Riding Hood’s iteration of these scripts.

In this rendition of Little Red Riding Hood I have incorporated three of the
four most prevalent endings to the tale and used them to make up the title of the
work, A Wolf, Eaten or Saved. Little Red Riding Hood is either eaten, saved by the
huntsman or becomes the wolf. Each ending represents a different conclusion in
the process of subverting gender norms. In the first of the three endings Little Red
Riding Hood gets eaten. The story goes:

‘What big teeth you have, grandma!’
‘The better to eat you.’
And upon saying these words, the wicked wolf threw himself upon Little
Red Riding Hood and ate her up.

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134 This version of Little Red Riding Hood came from; Darnton, Robert. "Peasants Tell Tales: The
Meaning of Mother Goose." In The Great Cat Massacre And Other Episodes in French
135 The other ending, which I have not used for conceptual reasons, is where Little Red Riding Hood
tricks the wolf and saves herself.
136 This extract was taken from the first version of Little Red Riding Hood by Charles Perrault
published in 1697. I sourced it from:
Zipes, Jack. The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in
23. *A Wolf, Eaten or Saved*

*Video Still (Meeting the Wolf)*

*2008*
In *A Wolf, Eaten or Saved*, Little Red Riding Hood is symbolically eaten through a process of her transformation into one of the forest aerial bodies. It begins by Little Red Riding Hood climbing into the wolf’s mouth via a white piece of fabric suspended from the wolf’s jaw in order to resemble one of its fangs. The aerial performer encases herself in the white fabric to form a cocoon which turns red on completion. When Little Red Riding Hood emerges from the pod, she is wearing the skin-coloured body suit like the other forest aerial bodies. After she has fully emerged from the cocoon, Little Red Riding Hood falls, her ankles becoming tangled in the red fabric. At this moment, the wolf’s mouth fades, then the forest from the beginning of the work fades into the background, incorporating Little Red Riding Hood into its ranks of aerial bodies. In this version of the ending, the individual is punished for performing gender incorrectly through isolation and abject control. It illustrates the excuse of biological assumptions for the justification of its punishment, represented by the minimal presentation of aerial bodies; however, the bodies are still suspended by the red fabric, making a lie out of the body’s status as a neutral sight for social inscription.

The next ending played out in *A Wolf, Eaten or Saved* is when Little Red Riding Hood is saved from the consequence of being eaten and reconditioned to avoid being eaten again. This the most recognised version of the ending, made popular by the Brothers Grimm:

The huntsman was just passing the house, and thought to himself, "How the old woman is snoring! I must just see if she wants anything." So he went into the room, and when he came to the bed, he saw that the wolf was lying in it. "Do I find thee here, thou old sinner!" said he. "I have long sought thee!" Then just as he was going to fire at him, it occurred to him that the wolf might have devoured the grandmother, and that she
might still be saved, so he did not fire, but took a pair of scissors, and began to cut open the stomach of the sleeping wolf. When he had made two snips, he saw the little Red-Cap shining, and then he made two snips more, and the little girl sprang out, crying, "Ah, how frightened I have been! How dark it was inside the wolf," and after that the aged grandmother came out alive also, but scarcely able to breathe. Red-Cap, however, quickly fetched great stones with which they filled the wolf's body, and when he awoke, he wanted to run away, but the stones were so heavy that he fell down at once, and fell dead.137

In this version, the huntsman characterises a fatherly, masculine hero who rescues a girl child from the consequence of her disobedience and, in Orenstein’s words, “gives her a second chance to walk the straight path through life.”138 This time, in my rendition of the tale, when Little Red Riding Hood climbs up the white fabric, a giant hand swoops down and removes her from the wolf’s jaws. As the hand grasps the fabric, Little Red Riding Hood turns from brilliant red to black and white, beginning her conversion into one of the aerial clones seen gliding along the path at the beginning of the work. This image, although rescuing Little Red Riding Hood from the abject forest, takes away her agency in constructing her gendered identity.

The final ending given to *A Wolf, Eaten or Saved* transforms Little Red Riding Hood into the wolf. English novelist Angela Carter, in her version of the story *The Company of Wolves*, ended the tale with:

> She saw how his jaw began to slaver and the room was full of the clamour of the forest's Liebestod, but the wise child never flinched, even when he answered:

> All the better to eat you with.

> The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face, ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. The flames


danced like dead souls on Walpurgisnacht and the old bones under the bed set up a terrible clattering, but she did not pay them any heed. Carnivore incarnate, only immaculate flesh appeases him.

She will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt and perhaps she will put the lice into her own mouth and eat them, as he will bid her, as she would do in a savage marriage ceremony.\textsuperscript{139}

In this version of the story, Little Red Riding Hood’s sexual appetite outdoes that of the wolf’s, causing him to be fearful, ultimately reversing the gender roles usually portrayed in earlier versions of the story, and suggests Little Red Riding Hood has transformed into a wolf herself. In the movie based on Carter’s version, similarly titled \textit{The Company of Wolves}, Little Red Riding Hood’s family arrives at their grandmother’s house to save their daughter, only to be presented with two wolves instead, one of which the mother figure recognises as her daughter. I use this ending, and the images it conjures, to relay Little Red Riding Hood’s subversion of gendered ideals in a way that empowers her, rather than forcing her into a social exile. The final image in \textit{A Wolf, Eaten or Saved}, shows Little Red Riding Hood performing an aerial routine, where the red of the fabric has been replaced by the fur, face and teeth of the wolf, giving the impression Little Red Riding Hood is wrapping herself in the signifying aspects of the wolf. Although Little Red Riding Hood is still performing her gender, the rules have been changed and the trap is being worked to subvert the repressive gender ideals and the punishment dealt for not aspiring to this ideal.

24. A Wolf, Eaten or Saved
Video Still (A Wolf)
2008
Part 4: Conclusion

In a desire to explore what it means to identify as female in contemporary society, my research became less about what it is to be female, and more about discovering what gender is. One of the motivating factors in the decision to explore gender was my personal experience of overtly tailoring my gendered identity to appeal to an audience when performing as a professional aerialist. If my gendered identity on stage could be scripted by the perceived desires of my audience and then re-learned and rehearsed, it begged the question, what other aspects of a gendered self follows the same process? Rather than proving that gender is performed, Dubiously Wholesome transformed into a project about the creation of a body of work that revealed insight into what gender is, how it manifests and what agency the gendered individual has over these manifestations. Through the process of exploring Butler’s ideas on performing one’s gender through a research based studio practice, I was able to investigate these questions and consolidate my understanding of what gender is. By using Butler’s performance theory, the stable core of essentialist ideas of gender are destabilised, revealing gender to be fluid in its manifestations, yet still bound to the constraints of a social script. Agency in the subversion of repressive gender norms is executed through the reworking of script created by social constructs.

Although there are precedents in some components of my research project, the combination Dubiously Wholesome mixed together is unique and adds a new perspective on the exploration of gendered identities. The aerial acrobatics reflected
my personal gendered experience which was developed further in the introduction of insights from fairytales that punctuated the video works with a history of representations of female gender constructs. My examination exhibition, *Dubiously Wholesome*, not only expressed these aspects of gender, but also aimed to take the viewer on the same journey I had taken to in discover what it means to be a gendered individual.

### 4.1 Examination Exhibition: Dubiously Wholesome

Each of works exhibited in *Dubiously Wholesome* commented on and explored different aspects of the concept of performing one’s gender. Selected videos from *Cloaked, Caught or Carefree?* represented the performance of gender, *Wrapped by Rehearsal* revealed the script of gendered signifiers, *Her Mother Craved Rampion* looked at the rehearsal process and *A Wolf, Eaten or Saved* explored the agency given to the individual by looking at gender through the lens of Butler’s concepts of gender performance.

The examination exhibition presented these works, and the aspects of the conceptual framework they represented, as a holistic account of my research project. This exhibition took place in the gallery *At the Vanishing Point* and consisted of six video works displayed in four installations. The video pieces were a selection of works from across my candidature that best represented the development of my project and the realisation of my conceptual framework: gender performance. The video works were woven together through installation techniques that utilised lighting and sound to create an atmosphere that mirrored the settings of the video
works. Physical elements of the video works, such as pieces of aerial equipment, were placed within the space to further the impression the viewer was stepping into the world embodied by the videos. The aim of this installation was to allow the viewer to explore the unoccupied site of the video works and therefore ground the action played out in the videos in the viewers’ reality.

When first entering the space, the viewer left the gallery foyer through a passage created from red fabric suspended from the ceiling, which led into a room dimly lit by red light. Cased within the red light was a forest of red fabric that boarded three projections, *Escaping My Masculine Side, Her Mother Craved Rampion* and *A Wolf, Eaten or Saved*. A single soundtrack played throughout the space, disturbing the atmosphere with breathing, heart beats and distorted music from a wind-up music box. In the next room, a red lit corridor featured two small monitors displaying *Untitled (Happily Ever After)* and *Conforming to a Divergence*. The border created by the monitors contrasted the large scale projections of the other room by confining each of the works into their own space. Out of the corridor and into the next room, the viewer was confronted with a trapeze lit with white light, framing the work *Wrapped by Rehearsal*, playing on a large monitor at the back of the small room. The controlled lighting and overarching soundtrack drew the separate works together, solidifying their connection and enabling the relating concepts of gender performance to be read as a whole.

On the opening night I performed an aerial act that illustrated the guise I adopt when booked to perform for a corporate audience. The ambient sounds of the exhibition were suddenly cut as I emerged on the scene decked out in full burlesque
costume, feathers and all. I ran through my standard routine to the song ‘Big Spender’, until the music began distorting and repeating, forcing taxing repetitions of tricks and deviations in the overexaggerated femininity of my performance persona. Through the escalating distortions of the soundtrack, ‘Big Spender’ transformed into the exhibition’s original sounds of distorted music from a wind-up music box and breathing. At the end of the performance, I created a noose from the red fabric I was suspended from and then lowered myself into an Untitled (Happily Ever After)-style neck-hang, accompanied by a single heart beat. The decision to place the exaggerated femininity of a standard burlesque aerial performance in an environment that was dedicated to provoking subversive views on gendered identities was in order to provide the viewer with an example of my launching point. It was meant to contrast the dark imagery of the distorted aerial performance in my video works with a bright exaggeration of gender performance that, in its own way, was just as disturbing. The performance would not have had the desired effect if it had not been performed amongst the video projections in a dimly lit red room; it needed the juxtaposition to relay the overstated femininity, the absurdities and confining structure of the aerial performance’s manifestation of gender.

The success of the exhibition and in turn the project was the ability of the research or conceptual framework to be expressed through my studio practice and its eventuating artworks. Unlike many other works I have produced, the extent of the research process created works that were conceptually laden and bound to the writing component in a way that incorporated the text into the artworks themselves. Because of this interweaving of research, text and artwork, the project successfully explores the many facets of gender performance and creates an environment, through the
examination exhibition, that allows for gender identity to be explored and informed by Butler’s idea of gender performance.

4.2 Future Research

This research project focused on my own experience of gender as a professional aerialist and built upon this through an investigation of circus history and fairytales through the lens of Butler’s ideas of gender performance. In the future, I would like to expand on this investigation of gender in aerial performance by interviewing, working with and observing my contemporaries in aerial performance in order to gain further insight into how gender is manifested in the industry.

I would also like to expand upon that which emerged out of this project – the integration of aerial acrobatics and video art. This combination created a unique medium through which to explore gender performance: I would like to apply the techniques developed in this project to the further realisation of other concepts and themes.
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Appendices
Once upon a time there lived in a certain village a little country girl, the prettiest creature who was ever seen. Her mother was excessively fond of her; and her grandmother doted on her still more. This good woman had a little red riding hood made for her. It suited the girl so extremely well that everybody called her Little Red Riding Hood.

One day her mother, having made some cakes, said to her, "Go, my dear, and see how your grandmother is doing, for I hear she has been very ill. Take her a cake, and this little pot of butter."

Little Red Riding Hood set out immediately to go to her grandmother, who lived in another village.

As she was going through the wood, she met with a wolf, who had a very great mind to eat her up, but he dared not, because of some woodcutters working nearby in the forest. He asked her where she was going. The poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stay and talk to a wolf, said to him, "I am going to see my grandmother and carry her a cake and a little pot of butter from my mother."

"Does she live far off?" said the wolf.

"Oh I say," answered Little Red Riding Hood; "it is beyond that mill you see there, at the first house in the village."

"Well," said the wolf, "and I'll go and see her too. I'll go this way and go you that, and we shall see who will be there first."

The wolf ran as fast as he could, taking the shortest path, and the little girl took a roundabout way, entertaining herself by gathering nuts, running after butterflies, and gathering bouquets of little flowers. It was not long before the wolf arrived at the old woman's house. He knocked at the door: tap, tap.

"Who's there?"

"Your grandchild, Little Red Riding Hood," replied the wolf, counterfeiting her voice; "who has brought you a cake and a little pot of butter sent you by mother."

The good grandmother, who was in bed, because she was somewhat ill, cried out, "Pull the bobbin, and the latch will go up."

The wolf pulled the bobbin, and the door opened, and then he immediately fell upon the good woman and ate her up in a moment, for it been more than three days since
he had eaten. He then shut the door and got into the grandmother's bed, expecting Little Red Riding Hood, who came some time afterwards and knocked at the door: tap, tap.

"Who's there?"

Little Red Riding Hood, hearing the big voice of the wolf, was at first afraid; but believing her grandmother had a cold and was hoarse, answered, "It is your grandchild Little Red Riding Hood, who has brought you a cake and a little pot of butter mother sends you."

The wolf cried out to her, softening his voice as much as he could, "Pull the bobbin, and the latch will go up."

Little Red Riding Hood pulled the bobbin, and the door opened.

The wolf, seeing her come in, said to her, hiding himself under the bedclothes, "Put the cake and the little pot of butter upon the stool, and come get into bed with me."

Little Red Riding Hood took off her clothes and got into bed. She was greatly amazed to see how her grandmother looked in her nightclothes, and said to her, "Grandmother, what big arms you have!"

"All the better to hug you with, my dear."

"Grandmother, what big legs you have!"

"All the better to run with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"All the better to hear with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

"All the better to see with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big teeth you have got!"

"All the better to eat you up with."

And, saying these words, this wicked wolf fell upon Little Red Riding Hood, and ate her all up.

Moral: Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf. I say "wolf," but there are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home
and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most
dangerous ones of all.  

140 Ashliman. "Little Red Riding Hood and Other Tales of Aarne-Thompson-Uther Type 333 "
http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html.

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1697). The French title of this famous tale is "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge."
Appendix B

Little Red Cap
Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

Once upon a time there was a sweet little girl. Everyone who saw her liked her, but most of all her grandmother, who did not know what to give the child next. Once she gave her a little cap made of red velvet. Because it suited her so well, and she wanted to wear it all the time, she came to be known as Little Red Cap.

One day her mother said to her, "Come Little Red Cap. Here is a piece of cake and a bottle of wine. Take them to your grandmother. She is sick and weak, and they will do her well. Mind your manners and give her my greetings. Behave yourself on the way, and do not leave the path, or you might fall down and break the glass, and then there will be nothing for your sick grandmother."

Little Red Cap promised to obey her mother. The grandmother lived out in the woods, a half hour from the village. When Little Red Cap entered the woods a wolf came up to her. She did not know what a wicked animal he was, and was not afraid of him.

"Good day to you, Little Red Cap."

"Thank you, wolf."

"Where are you going so early, Little Red Cap?"

"To grandmother's."

"And what are you carrying under your apron?"

"Grandmother is sick and weak, and I am taking her some cake and wine. We baked yesterday, and they should give her strength."

"Little Red Cap, just where does your grandmother live?"

"Her house is a good quarter hour from here in the woods, under the three large oak trees. There's a hedge of hazel bushes there. You must know the place," said Little Red Cap.

The wolf thought to himself, "Now there is a tasty bite for me. Just how are you going to catch her?" Then he said, "Listen, Little Red Cap, haven't you seen the beautiful flowers that are blossoming in the woods? Why don't you go and take a look? And I don't believe you can hear how beautifully the birds are singing. You are walking along as though you were on your way to school in the village. It is very beautiful in the woods."
Little Red Cap opened her eyes and saw the sunlight breaking through the trees and how the ground was covered with beautiful flowers. She thought, "If I take a bouquet to grandmother, she will be very pleased. Anyway, it is still early, and I'll be home on time." And she ran off into the woods looking for flowers. Each time she picked one she thought that she could see an even more beautiful one a little way off, and she ran after it, going further and further into the woods. But the wolf ran straight to the grandmother's house and knocked on the door.

"Who's there?"

"Little Red Cap. I'm bringing you some cake and wine. Open the door for me."

"Just press the latch," called out the grandmother. "I'm too weak to get up."

The wolf pressed the latch, and the door opened. He stepped inside, went straight to the grandmother's bed, and ate her up. Then he took her clothes, put them on, and put her cap on his head. He got into her bed and pulled the curtains shut.

Little Red Cap had run after flowers, and did not continue on her way to grandmother's until she had gathered all that she could carry. When she arrived, she found, to her surprise, that the door was open. She walked into the parlor, and everything looked so strange that she thought, "Oh, my God, why am I so afraid? I usually like it at grandmother's." Then she went to the bed and pulled back the curtains. Grandmother was lying there with her cap pulled down over her face and looking very strange.

"Oh, grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"All the better to hear you with."

"Oh, grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

"All the better to see you with."

"Oh, grandmother, what big hands you have!"

"All the better to grab you with!"

"Oh, grandmother, what a horribly big mouth you have!"

"All the better to eat you with!" And with that he jumped out of bed, jumped on top of poor Little Red Cap, and ate her up. As soon as the wolf had finished this tasty bite, he climbed back into bed, fell asleep, and began to snore very loudly.

A huntsman was just passing by. He thought it strange that the old woman was snoring so loudly, so he decided to take a look. He stepped inside, and in the bed there lay the wolf that he had been hunting for such a long time. "He has eaten the grandmother, but perhaps she still can be saved. I won't shoot him," thought the huntsman. So he took a pair of scissors and cut open his belly.
He had cut only a few strokes when he saw the red cap shining through. He cut a little more, and the girl jumped out and cried, "Oh, I was so frightened! It was so dark inside the wolf's body!"

And then the grandmother came out alive as well. Then Little Red Cap fetched some large heavy stones. They filled the wolf's body with them, and when he woke up and tried to run away, the stones were so heavy that he fell down dead.

The three of them were happy. The huntsman took the wolf's pelt. The grandmother ate the cake and drank the wine that Little Red Cap had brought. And Little Red Cap thought to herself, "As long as I live, I will never leave the path and run off into the woods by myself if mother tells me not to."

They also tell how Little Red Cap was taking some baked things to her grandmother another time, when another wolf spoke to her and wanted her to leave the path. But Little Red Cap took care and went straight to grandmother's. She told her that she had seen the wolf, and that he had wished her a good day, but had stared at her in a wicked manner. "If we hadn't been on a public road, he would have eaten me up," she said.

"Come," said the grandmother. "Let's lock the door, so he can't get in."

Soon afterward the wolf knocked on the door and called out, "Open up, grandmother. It's Little Red Cap, and I'm bringing you some baked things."

They remained silent, and did not open the door. The wicked one walked around the house several times, and finally jumped onto the roof. He wanted to wait until Little Red Cap went home that evening, then follow her and eat her up in the darkness. But the grandmother saw what he was up to. There was a large stone trough in front of the house.

"Fetch a bucket, Little Red Cap," she said. "Yesterday I cooked some sausage. Carry the water that I boiled them with to the trough." Little Red Cap carried water until the large, large trough was clear full. The smell of sausage arose into the wolf's nose. He sniffed and looked down, stretching his neck so long that he could no longer hold himself, and he began to slide. He slid off the roof, fell into the trough, and drowned. And Little Red Cap returned home happily and safely.\(^\text{141}\)

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\(^{141}\) Ashliman. "Little Red Riding Hood and Other Tales of Aarne-Thompson-Uther Type 333 " [http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html](http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html).

Appendix C

The Grandmother
French Oral Tale

There was a woman who had made some bread. She said to her daughter, "Go and carry a hot loaf and a bottle of milk to your grandmother."

So the little girl set forth. Where two paths crossed she met the bzou [werewolf], who said to her, "Where are you going?"

"I am carrying a hot loaf and a bottle of milk to my grandmother."

"Which path are you taking? said the bzou. "The one of needles or the one of pins?"

"The one of needles," said the little girl.

"Good! I am taking the one of pins."

The little girl entertained herself by gathering needles.

The bzou arrived at the grandmother's house and killed her. He put some of her flesh in the pantry and a bottle of her blood on the shelf.

The little girl arrived and knocked at the door. "Push on the door," said the bzou. "It is blocked with a pail of water."

"Good day, grandmother. I have brought you a hot loaf and a bottle of milk."

"Put it in the pantry, my child. Take some of the meat that is there, and the bottle of wine that is on the shelf."

While she was eating, a little cat that was there said, "For shame! The slut is eating her grandmother's flesh and drinking her grandmother's blood."

"Get undressed, my child," said the bzou, and come to bed with me."

"Where should I put my apron?"

"Throw it into the fire. You won't need it anymore."

And for all her clothes -- her bodice, her dress, her petticoat, and her shoes and stockings -- she asked where she should put them, and the wolf replied, "Throw them into the fire, my child. You won't need them anymore."

When she had gone to bed the little girl said, "Oh, grandmother, how hairy you are!"

"The better to keep myself warm, my child."
"Oh, grandmother, what long nails you have!"
"The better to scratch myself with, my child!"
"Oh, grandmother, what big shoulders you have!"
"The better to carry firewood with, my child!"
"Oh, grandmother, what big ears you have!"
"The better to hear with, my child!"
"Oh, grandmother, what a big nose you have!"
"To better take my tobacco with, my child!"
"Oh, grandmother, what a big mouth you have!"
"The better to eat you with, my child!"
"Oh, grandmother, I have to do it outside!"
"Do it in the bed, my child!"
"Oh no, grandmother, I really have to do it outside."
"All right, but don't take too long."

The bzou tied a woollen thread to her foot and let her go. As soon as the little girl was outside she tied the end of the thread to a plum tree in the yard.

The bzou grew impatient and said, "Are you doing a load? Are you doing a load?"

Not hearing anyone reply, he jumped out of bed and hurried after the little girl, who had escaped. He followed her, but he arrived at her home just as she went inside.  

Source: Conte de la mère-grand, from a website sponsored by the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 2007.

142 Ashliman. "Little Red Riding Hood and Other Tales of Aarne-Thompson-Uther Type 333 " http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0333.html.
Excerpt from The Company of Wolves
Angela Carter

It is midwinter and the robin, friend of man, sits on the handle of the gardener's spade and sings. It is the worst time in all the year for wolves, but this strong-minded child insists she will go off through the wood. She is quite sure that wild beast cannot harm her although, well warned, she lays a carving knife in the basket her mother has packed with cheeses. There is a bottle of harsh liquor distilled from brambles; a batch of flat oak cakes baked on the hearthstone; a pot or two of jam. The flaxen-haired girl will take these delicious gifts to a reclusive grandmother so old the burden of her years is crushing her to death. Granny lives two hours' trudge through the winter woods; the child wraps herself up in her thick shawl, draws it over her head. She steps into her stout wooden shoes; she is dressed and ready and it is Christmas Eve. The malign door of the solstice still swings upon its hinges, but she has been too much loved to ever feel scared.

Children do not stay young for long in this savage country. There are no toys for them to play with, so they work hard and grow wise, but this one, so pretty and the youngest of her family, a little latecomer, had been indulged by her mother and the grandmother who'd knitted the red shawl that, today has the ominous if brilliant look of blood on snow. Her breasts have just begun to swell, her hair is like lint, so fair it hardly makes a shadow on her pale forehead; her cheeks are an emblematic scarlet and white and she has just started her woman's bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforth, once a month.

She stands and moved within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel; she has inside her a magic space the entrance to which is shut tight with a plug of membrane; she is a closed system; she does not known how to shiver. She has her knife and she is afraid of nothing.

Her father might forbid her, if he were home, but he is away in the forest, gathering wood, and her mother cannot deny her.

The forest is closed upon her like a pair of jaws.

There is always something to look at in the forest, even in the middle of winter - the huddled mounds of birds, succumbed to the lethargy of the season, heaped on the creaking boughs and too forlorn to sing; the bright frills of the winter fungi on the blotched trunks of trees; the cuneiform slots of rabbits and deer, the herringbone tracks of the birds, a hare as lean as a rasher of bacon streaking across the path where the thin sunlight dapples the russet brakes of last year's bracken.

When she heard the freezing howl of a distant wolf, her practiced hand sprang to the handle of the knife, but she saw no sign of a wolf at all, nor of a naked man, neither, but then she heard a clattering among the brushwood and there sprang onto the path a fully clothed one, a very handsome one, in the green coat and wide-awake hat of a
hunter, laden with the caresses of game birds. She had her hand on the knife at the first rustle of twigs, but he laughed with a flash of white teeth when he saw her and mad her a comic yet flattering little bow; she'd never seen such a fine fellow before, not among the rustic clowns of her native village. So on they went together, through the thickening light of the afternoon.

Soon they were laughing and joking like old friends. When he offered to carry her basket, she gave it to him although her knife was in it because he told her his rifle would protect them. As the day darkened, it began to snow again; she felt the first flakes settle on her dark eyelashes, but now there was only half a mile to go and there would be fire, and hot tea, and a welcome, a warm one, surely, for this dashing huntsman as well as herself.

This huntsman had a remarkable object in his pocket. It was a compass. She looked at the little round glass face in the palm of his hand and watched the wavering needle with a vague wonder. He assured her this compass had taken him safely through the wood on his hunting trip because the needle always told him with perfect accuracy where north was. She did not believe it; she knew she should never leave the path on the way through the wood or else she would be lost instantly. He laughed at her again; gleaming trails of spittle clung to his teeth. He said if he plunged off the path into the forest that surrounded them, he could guarantee to arrive at her grandmother's house a good quarter of an hour before she did, plotting his way through the undergrowth with his compass while she trudged the long way, along the winding path.

I don't believe you. Besides, aren't you afraid of the wolves?

He only tapped the gleaming butt of his rifle and grinned.

Is it a bet? he asked her. Shall we make a game of it? What will you give me if I get to your grandmother's house before you?

What would you like? she asked disingenuously.

A kiss.

Commonplace of a rustic seduction; she lowered her eyes and blushed.

He went through the undergrowth and took her basket with him, but she forgot to be afraid of the beasts, although now the moon was rising, for she wanted to dawdle on her way to make sure the handsome gentleman would win his wager.

Grandmother's house stood by itself a little way out of the village. The freshly fallen snow blew in the eddies about the kitchen garden and the young man stepped delicately up the snowy path to the door as if her were reluctant to get his feet wet, swinging his bundle of game and the girl's basket and humming a little tune to himself.

There was a faint trace of blood on his chin; he has been snacking on his catch.
Aged and frail, granny is three-quarters succumbed to the mortality the ache in her bones promises her and almost about ready to give in entirely. A boy came out from the village to build up her hearth for the night an hour ago, and the kitchen crackled with the busy firelight. She has her Bible for company; she is pious old woman. She is propped up on several pillows in the bed set into the wall peasant fashion, wrapped up in the patchwork quilt she made before she was married, more years ago than she cares to remember. Two china spaniels with liver collared blotches on their coats and black noses sit on either side of the fireplace. There is a bright rug of woven rags on the pantiles. The grandfather clock ticks away her eroding time.

We keep the wolves out by living well.

He rapped upon the panels with his hairy knuckles.

It is your granddaughter, he mimicked in a high soprano.

Lift the latch and walk in, my darling.

You can tell them by their eyes, eyes of a beast of prey, nocturnal, devastating eyes as red as a wound; you can hurl your Bible at him and your apron after, granny; you thought that was sure prophylactic against these infernal vermin …Now call on Christ and his mother and all the angels in heaven to protect you, but it won't do you any good.

His feral muzzle is sharp as a knife; he drops his golden burden of gnawed pheasant on the table and puts down your dear girl's basket too. Oh, my God, what have you done with her?

Off with his disguise, the coat of forest-colored cloth, the hat with the feather tucked into the ribbon; his matted hair streams down his white shirt and she can see the lice moving in it. The sticks in the hearth shift and hiss; night and the forest has come into the kitchen with darkness tangled in his hair.

He strips off his shirt. Hi skin is the color and texture of vellum. A crisp strip of hair runs down his belly, his nipples are ripe and dark as poison fruit, but he's so thin you could count the ribs under his skin if only he gave you the time. He strips off his trousers and she can see how hairy his legs are. His genitals, huge. Ah! huge.

The last things the old lady saw in all this world was a young man, eyes like cinders, naked as a stone, approaching her bed.

The wolf is carnivore incarnate.

When he had finished with her, he licked his chops and quickly dressed himself again, until he was just as he had been when he came through her door. He burned the inedible hair in the fireplace and wrapped the bones up in a napkin that he hid away under the bed in the wooden chest in which he found a clean pair of sheets. These he carefully put on the bed instead of the telltale he stowed away in the laundry basket. He plumped up the pillows and shook the patchwork quilt, he picked up the Bible from the floor, closed it and laid it on the table. All was as it had been.
before except that grandmother was gone. The sticks twitched in the grate, the clock
ticked and the young man sat patiently, deceitfully beside the bed in granny's
nightcap.

Rat-a-tap-tap.

Who's there, he quavers in granny's antique falsetto.

Only your granddaughter.

So she came in, bringing with her a flurry of snow that melted in tears on the tiles,
and perhaps she was a little disappointed to see only her grandmother sitting beside
the fire. But then he flung off the blanket and sprang to the door, pressing his back
against it so she could not get out again.

The girl looked round the room and saw there was not even the indentation of a head
on the smooth cheek of the pillow and how, for the first time she had seen it so, the
Bible lay closed on the table. The tick of the clock cracked like a whip. She wanted
her knife from the basket but she did not dare reach for it because his eyes were fixed
upon her - huge eyes that now seemed to shine with a unique, interior light, eyes the
size of saucers, saucers full of Greek fire, diabolic phosphorescence.

What big eyes you have.

All the better to see you with.

No trace at all of the old woman except for a tuft of white hair that had caught in the
bark of an unburned log. When the girl saw that, she knew she was in danger of
death.

Where is my grandmother?

There's nobody here but we two, my darling.

Now a great howling rose up all around them, near, very near, as close as the kitchen
garden, the howling of a multitude of wolves; she knew worst wolves are hairy on
the inside and she shivered, in spite of the scarlet shawl she pulled more closely
round herself as if it could protect her, although is was as red as blood she must spill.

Who has come to sing us carols? she said.

Those are the voices of my brothers, darling; I love he company of wolves. Look out
the windows and you will see them.

Snow half-caked the lattice and she opened it to look into the garden. It was a white
night of moon and snow; the blizzard whirled round the gaunt, gray beasts who
squatted on their haunches among the rows of winter cabbage, pointing their sharp
snouts to the moon and howling as if their hearts would break. Ten wolves; twenty
wolves - so many wolves she could not count them, howling in concert as if
demented or deranged. Their eyes reflected light from the kitchen and shone like a hundred candles.

It is very cold, poor things, she said; no wonder they howl so.

She closed the window on the wolves' threnody and took off her scarlet shawl, the color of poppies, the color of sacrifices, the color of her menses, and since her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid.

What shall I do with my shawl?

Throw it in the fire, dear one. You won't need it again.

She bundled up her shawl and threw it in the blaze, which instantly consumed it. Then she drew her blouse over her head; her small breasts gleamed as if the snow had taken over the room.

What shall I do with my blouse?

Into the fire with it, too, my pet.

The thin muslin went flaring up the chimney like a magic bird and now off came her skirt, her woolen stockings, her shoes, and they onto the fire they went, too, and were gone for good. The firelight shone through the edges of her skin; now she was clothed only in her untouched integument of flesh. Thus dazzling, naked, she combed out her hair with her fingers; her hair looked white as the snow outside. Then went directly to the man with red eyes in whose unkempt mane the lice moved; she stood up on tiptoe and unbuttoned the collar of his shirt.

What big arms you have.

All the better to hug you with.

Every wolf in the world now howled a prothalamion outside the window as she freely gave him the kiss she owed him.

What big teeth you have!

She saw how his jaw began to slaver and the room was full of the clamour of the forest's Liebestod, but the wise child never flinched, even when he answered:

All the better to eat you with.

The girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face, ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing. The flames danced like dead souls on Walpurgisnacht and the old bones under the bed set up a terrible clattering, but she did not pay them any heed.

Carnivore incarnate, only immaculate flesh appeases him.
She will lay his fearful head on her lap and she will pick out the lice from his pelt and perhaps she will put the lice into her own mouth and eat them, as he will bid her, as she would do in a savage marriage ceremony.

The blizzard will die down.

The blizzard died down, leaving the mountains as randomly covered with snow as if a blind woman had thrown a sheet over them, the upper branches of the forest pines limed, creaking, swollen with the fall.

Sunlight, moonlight, a confusion of pawprints.

All silent, all still.

Midnight, the clock strikes. It is Christmas Day, the werewolves' birthday; the door of the solstice stands wide open; let them all sink through.

See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{143} "Excerpt from the Company of Wolves." University of Pittsburgh, http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/harris/StudentProjects/Student_FairyTales/WebProject/Fairy\%20Tales/Company\%20of\%20Wolves.htm.
Appendix E

Journal Entry

The room is empty. Devoid of any human aspect that would usually give comfort, companionship or connection. The word ‘room’ is inadequate to comprehend this space. A theatre transformed into a black void where the only light is gathered around a piece of cloth suspended from a single point, indiscernible from the blackness of its surrounds.

The fabric appears like a slash of red, as though the void bled through a disruptive wound. To most people it would resemble a curtain. Soft, beautiful even. Weightless, defying gravity as it disappears into the indiscernible height. However it has other meanings: it simultaneously represents my strengths, weaknesses and desire to overcome my body’s constraints. It is my livelihood, with the constant threat of bodily devastation. I use it to prove my strength, uniqueness and skill. It reveals the fragility of my body, rendering burns across my flesh, biting into muscles and constricting my breath. All worth it. In reality the pain serves as proof of my control over body and self.

Defying gravity, I pull my body up the fabric until I reach a suitable height. I heave my legs up over my head placing my body upside down on my life line. In this position I hang by one knee and proceed to wrap the other leg twice round with the tail of the fabric. Throwing the excess fabric over my shoulder I climb above my top knee, making the fabric tighten around my upper thigh. From this position I support myself by holding the top of the material by one hand and the bottom of the material with the other. In this position it feels like I have nothing underneath me. In fact I
really do not have anything underneath me. The lighting has rendered the ground invisible, but I know it is there and I know the consequences if we should happen to meet. I didn’t really know if I was high enough to execute the drop I had just wrapped for. I just had to have faith in my repetitious training.

I breathe in. I let go.

I free fall for a second until my body is flung in another direction as I tumble out of the wrap. Again I fall. I reach the last wrap and I feel the force of my falling body get taken by the final wrap on my knee. A dull pain is followed by a sharp pinch where the material has tightened around my joint and bitten into my skin. I hang by one knee till I cannot stand the pain any longer. In my haste to escape the pain, I descend too quickly. The ground is closer than I thought. I land with a thud.

I inspect behind my knee where the force of my landing was taken. A bright red mark framed a burn line across my thigh. A war wound.
Appendix F

Rapunzel by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

Once upon a time there was a man and a woman who had long wished for a child but had never received one. Finally, however, the woman came to be with child. Through the small rear window of these people's house they could see into a fairy's garden that was filled with flowers and herbs of all kinds. No one dared enter this garden.

One day the woman was standing at this window, and she saw the most beautiful rapunzel in a bed. She longed for some, but not knowing how to get any, she became miserably ill. Her husband was frightened, and asked her why she was doing so poorly. "Oh, if I do not get some rapunzel from the garden behind our house, I shall surely die," she said. The man, who loved her dearly, decided to get her some, whatever the cost. One evening he climbed over the high wall, hastily dug up a handful of rapunzel, and took it to his wife. She immediately made a salad from it, which she devoured greedily.

It tasted so very good to her that by the next day her desire for more had grown threefold. The man saw that there would be no peace, so once again he climbed into the garden. To his horror, the fairy was standing there. She scolded him fiercely for daring to enter and steal from her garden. He excused himself as best he could with his wife's pregnancy, and how it would be dangerous to deny her anything.

Finally the fairy spoke, "I will accept your excuse and even allow you to take as much rapunzel as you want, if you will give me the child that your wife is now carrying."

In his fear the man agreed to everything.

When the woman gave birth, the fairy appeared, named the little girl Rapunzel, and took her away. This Rapunzel became the most beautiful child under the sun, but when she was twelve years old, the fairy locked her in a high tower that had neither a door nor a stairway, but only a tiny little window at the very top. When the fairy wanted to enter, she stood below and called out:

Rapunzel, Rapunzel!
Let down your hair to me.
Rapunzel had splendid hair, as fine as spun gold.

When the fairy called out, she untied it, wound it around a window hook, let it fall twenty yards to the ground, and the fairy climbed up it.

One day a young prince came through the forest where the tower stood. He saw the beautiful Rapunzel standing at her window, heard her sing with her sweet voice, and fell in love with her. Because there was no door in the tower and no ladder was tall enough to reach her, he fell into despair. He came to the forest every day, until once he saw the fairy, who said:

Rapunzel, Rapunzel!
Let down your hair.
Then he knew which ladder would get him into the tower. He remembered the words that he would have to speak, and the next day, as soon as it was dark, he went to the tower and called upward:

Rapunzel, Rapunzel!
Let down your hair!

She let her hair fall. He tied himself to it and was pulled up. At first Rapunzel was frightened, but soon she came to like the young king so well that she arranged for him to come every day and be pulled up. Thus they lived in joy and pleasure for a long time. The fairy did not discover what was happening until one day Rapunzel said to her,

"Frau Gothel, tell me why it is that my clothes are all too tight. They no longer fit me."

"You godless child," said the fairy. "What am I hearing from you?" She immediately saw how she had been deceived and was terribly angry. She took Rapunzel's beautiful hair, wrapped it a few times around her left hand, grasped a pair of scissors with her right hand, and snip snip, cut it off. Then she sent Rapunzel into a wilderness where she suffered greatly and where, after a time, she gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl.

On the evening of the same day that she sent Rapunzel away, the fairy tied the cut-off hair to the hook at the top of the tower, and when the prince called out:

Rapunzel, Rapunzel!
Let down your hair!

The prince was startled to find the fairy instead of his beloved Rapunzel. "Do you know what, evil one?" cried the angry fairy. "You have lost Rapunzel forever."

The prince, in his despair, threw himself from the tower. He escaped with his life, but he lost his eyesight in the fall. Sorrowfully he wandered about in the forest weeping and, eating nothing but grass and roots.

Some years later he happened into the wilderness where Rapunzel lived miserably with her children. He thought that her voice was familiar. She recognized him instantly as well and threw her arms around his neck. Two of her tears fell into his eyes, and they became clear once again, and he could see as well as before.144

Appendix G

Accompanying DVD information

**DVD 1: Finished Works**

**Video Works**
The works include on DVD 1 are the selected works discussed in this paper. They are:

*Untitled (Happily Ever After)*
Duration: 2:44min
2005

*You Throw Like a Girl*
Duration: 2:07min
2007

*Conforming to a Divergence*
Duration: 1:00min
2007

*Escaping My Masculine Side*
Duration: 1:00min
2007

*Wrapped by Rehearsal*
2007

*Hidden*
Duration: 3:47min

*Her Mother Craved Rampion*
Duration: 5:00min
2006-2007

*A Wolf, Eaten or Saved*
Duration: 7:50min
2008

**Exhibition Documentation**

*Dubiously Wholesome*
Duration: Walk Though 4:03min,
Performance 5:12min
2008

*Cloaked, Caught or Carefree*
Duration: 7:08min
2006

*Door to Door Exhibitions*
Duration: 3:00min
2006-2007

**DVD 2: Process DVD**

This DVD 2 was made for the exhibition *Behind the Scenes* (2008) and documents my studio practice through an interactive DVD. This DVD was created as an artwork, and should be viewed as such. The next page is a site map of the DVD’s menus and materials.
Appendix H

Documentation of Aerial Performance

Appendix H

Documentation of a corporate aerial performance
Appendix I

List of Works and Exhibitions (2005 – 2008)

* **Works that are included in DVD 1: Finished Works**
# **Exhibitions that are included in DVD 1: Finished Works**

**#Hackneyed,** Door-to-door Exhibition, various participants’ homes, Blue Mountains and Sydney, 2006 – 2007

*Who is Little Red Riding Hood?*, Interactive DVD, 2005
*Hi How Are You?*, Interactive DVD, 2005
*Three Blind Mice,* DVD, 2005 - 2006
*Clone and Other Works,* DVD, 2006
*Put it Away,* Mixed Media, 2005 – 2006
*No Sprite,* Sticker, 2005

**#Hidden,** Part of Cirquinox (Blue Mountains Circus Festival), Everglades, Lura, 2006

*Untitled,* Video Installation, 2006
*Monotony Can Be Pretty,* Video Installation, 2006
*Cloaked Caught or Carefree,* Video Installation, 2006
*On a Daily Basis,* Video Installation, 2006

**Rapunzel,** Door-to-door Exhibition, various participants’ homes, Blue Mountains and Sydney, 2007

*Her Mother Craved Rampion,* (Originally Titled: Untitled 2006), Video, 2006
*The Witch's Tower,* Video, 2006
*Rapunzel, Rapunzel Let Down Your Hair,* Video, 2006
*The Prince?*, Video, 2006
*Exiled* (Originally from *Clone and Other Works,* Titled: *Clone*), Video, 2006
*The Desert* (Originally Titled: *On a Daily Basis*), Video, 2006
*Rapunzel’s Tower* (Originally from *Clone and Other Works,* Titled: *Getting Dressed*), Video, 2005
*Happily Ever After* (Originally from *Clone and Other Works,* Titled: Untitled 2005), Video, 2005 *

**The Adventures of Sprite,** Don’t Look Gallery: Experimental New Media Gallery, Dulwich Hill, 2007

*No Sprite,* Video, 2007
*Sprite Attacks,* (from *Hi How Are You?),* Video, 2005
*Eaten,* Video, 2006
*Sprite is Board,* (from *Hi How Are You?),* Video, 2005
*Sprites Revenge,* (from *Hi How Are You?),* Video 2005
Little Red’s Amalgamation, (from Who Is Little Red Riding Hood), Video, 2005
Rapunzel, Book, 2006
A Wolf’s Tricks (from Who Is Little Red Riding Hood), Video, 2005
Rats (from Who Is Little Red Riding Hood), Video, 2005
Intro (from Who Is Little Red Riding Hood), Video, 2005
Sprite (from Who Is Little Red Riding Hood), Video, 2005
The Wolf (from Who Is Little Red Riding Hood), Video, 2005
Untitled (from Clone and other Works), Video, 2006
Three Blind Mice, Video, 2006

At the Vanishing Point…: The Show to Launch the Space
(Group Exhibition), At the Vanishing Point, Newtown, 2007

Keep It Up, Oil Painting on Canvas, Digital Projection, 2007
Painted 1 and 2, Video Installation, 2006

#Cloaked, Caught or Carefree, Part of Western Front, Care Takers Cottage,
University of Western Sydney, Kingswood, 2007

When I Grow Up…, Interactive Video Installation, 2007
I Dreamt I was a Man, Interactive Video Installation, 2007
A Ritual Drenching, Site Specific Video Installation, 2007
Conforming to a Divergence, Video Installation, 2007 *
Escaping My Masculine Side, Video Installation, 2007 *
Pretty Monsters, Video Installation, 2007
You Throw Like a Girl, Site Specific Video Installation, 2007 *
Stock Standard, Interactive Video Installation, 2007
Born, Video Installation, 2007
Hairy Legs, Video Installation, 2007

#You Throw Like a Girl, Door-to-door Exhibition, various participants’
homes, Blue Mountains and Sydney, 2007

See exhibition list for Cloaked, Caught or Carefree

Her Mother Craved Rampion, At the Vanishing Point, Newtown, 2007

See exhibition list for Rapunzel

Behind The Scenes (Group Exhibition), At the Vanishing Point,
Newtown, 2008

Process DVD, Interactive DVD, 2008

Walking on Air (Group Show), Performance Night, Sydney Opera House,
2008
Wrapped By Rehearsal, Video, 2008 *
Passage, Video, 2008

#Dubiously Wholesome (Examination Exhibition), At the Vanishing Point, Newtown, 2008

Untitled (Happily Ever After), Video Installation, 2005*
Conforming to a Divergence, Video Installation, 2007*
Escaping My Masculine Side, Video Installation, 2007*
Wrapped by Rehearsal, Video Installation, 2008 *
Her Mother Craved Rampion, Video Installation, 2006-2007*
On a Daily Basis, Video Installation, 2006