Performance Art and Agential Realism:

Producing Material-Discursive Knowledge about Class and the Body.

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Master's Programme
Gender Studies – Intersectionality and Change

Master's thesis 15 ECTS credits
LIU-TEMA G/GSIC1-A–21/004-SE

Abstract

Using new materialist approaches to intersectional theories of gender/sex –particularly Karen Barad's ethico-onto-epistemological framework, *agential realism*– this thesis examines how knowledge about class is produced, through feminist performance art practices. Through this lens I will examine how two pieces of performance art by U.K. based artists, Sophie Lisa Beresford and Catherine Hoffmann, can express novel ways in which class is not simply a system acting upon bodies, but inextricably entwined with, and produced through, bodily matter. Furthermore, this essay discusses the ways in which performance art is uniquely positioned to examine this *intra-action* between discourse and matter; providing a way to bridge the gaps in the current theoretical discourses and creative practices.

Keywords: Feminist performance art, agential realism, intersectionality, class, new materialism, class-drag, performativity, class-passing, intra-activity.

Acknowledgments

It is not an exaggeration to say that this thesis would simply not exist without the unwavering support of my supervisor, Dr. Marietta Radomska. Thank you for your remarkable patience, your kindness, and all the insightful direction. I am grateful that you believed in me, when I didn't know if I could do this. And most importantly, thank you for continually trying to teach me how to spell the word practice correctly.

I am deeply grateful for those closest to me, who never let me give up on myself. And thank you to all the nonhuman beings who have helped me shape this piece of work.

Table of contents

Prologue: Bodies Remember[1]

To theorize is not to leave the material world behind and enter the domain of pure ideas where the lofty space of mind makes objective reflection possible. *Theorizing, like experimenting, is a material practice.*

(Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 2007, p. 55)

[…] *we are part of the nature we seek to understand*.

(p. 26)

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[Journal entry: 12th November 2019]

Class-passing: The concealment or misrepresentation of one's social class.

Title: Class-passing.
Scene 1.

me: [Direct to audience/camera]

I don't think anyone ever had to tell me. I already knew, of course. If I wanted to access these middle-class spaces, I was going to have to pretend to be just like them. By then, I was already dedicated to the craft of performing my-self, and I was going to go completely, entirely unnoticed as an interloper. Every good little girl knew that anything was better than the searing, silent shame of being poor; being part of the under-class. So, this would fix everything. I would be re-made.

[End of scene]

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I was young when I decided to become really, really good at performing. I honed this craft through a repeated, re-making of myself, in what felt like almost every situation I found myself

[1] This prologue is my own creative, embodied writing, which includes passages from my journal that are based around the style of scripts used in film, TV and theatre productions.

in. My goal, I decided, was to transcend the various traumas and searing shame of poverty, by pretending to be something else altogether. I was quite sure this would work, but then, I was desperate. Needless to say, this wasn't how my project of 'complete-liberation-through-class-drag' panned out. And thankfully so. It's really no wonder then, looking back, that I have gone on to become an actor in TV and film, and that I went to art school to develop a performance art practice. These were my most practiced life-skills, my tools for asking questions about the world around me, and for making sense of my experiences.

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[Journal entry: 4th January 2020]

Title: The Body Remembers
Scene 6.

me: [Direct to camera/audience]
I suppose I saw my body as a machine for performing different versions of myself. I calculated what would ensure my safety in each situation. Physical safety, emotional safety –whatever was most crucial in that moment. This was survival, and my body was a tool. I was outer, always outer; I was an *it*.
It mattered how it appeared, how it moved, how it mimicked; adapted.
It had no needs of its own, it had no story, it had no voice.
Perform, perform, perform.
Lie, lie, lie.
[pause]
But it remembers. It was just waiting for me to listen.

[End of scene]

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I am writing this during the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic; fourteen months into world-wide lockdowns and quarantines. Class inequalities have made headlines in stark terms during the crisis. In late 2020 The Guardian reported that "Overall, the pandemic has pushed the total

number of people in the UK living in poverty to more than 15 million – 23% of the population" (Butler, 2020), whilst The Independent reported last month that "billionaires in the US have grown their combined wealth by "nearly 45 per cent — or by more than $1.3 trillion — since the Covid-19 pandemic hit the nation last March"" (Muzaffar, 2021). It is no surprise to me that the lowest paid, the most vulnerable and those in poverty have been hit the hardest by government policies and responses to the pandemic, while the rich have continued to hoard resources. Perhaps this outlook comes from my own experiences of growing-up in poverty in the UK.

I was born and grew up in Scotland in the 1980s and 90s –first under a Thatcherite and then a Blairite government –I was immersed in the full spectrum of false political promises of neoliberal economics, meritocratic notions of 'social mobility' and the thorough demonization of the working- and under-classes. Embracing an ethos that the pursuit of wealth and upward mobility was a fundamental and moral imperative for all decent, worthy people, was not only a sign of one's moral character, but could only be achieved through a brutalising form of individualism and class-shunning. If you couldn't achieve these goals, you simply weren't trying hard enough –the middle- and upper classes had managed it, it was all there for the taking; what was wrong with you?

Of course, the material and lived reality for many people in Scotland during this period was very far removed from the neoliberal myths of success in late capitalism, in particular for under- and working-class communities. The cruel narratives about the links between poverty and moral values ultimately and purposefully blamed the oppressed for their own oppression, and mobilised fear and shame to sustain it. The attacks on organised, unionised working-classes were deliberate attempts to crush the power of the people to demand change and leverage, within in an economic system which needed them to accept subjugation.

These are the political underpinnings that form the basis of my own early childhood experiences. I grew up in a two-child household, born to a teenaged single-mother, surviving almost entirely on government assistance and ever-changing insecure and unsafe housing. In some ways I could easily be positioned as a poster child for the lie of neoliberalism –a dogma which ignores the utter vastness and complexities of the mental-physical impacts; the multiply structural inequalities –seen and unseen– which exist in the actual lived experiences of those in poverty– because I *made it out.* Against all the odds –from homelessness to higher education, to a career in film and TV –see, the system works! Except, of course it doesn't, it's a con. The system is rigged. My position is always precarious. And I am the exception, not the rule.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Problem and Aim

I want to consider how class -as a social marker *and* a lived, embodied experience- has specific, complex and nuanced effects on the body. I want to investigate how feminist performance art practices are uniquely positioned to produce knowledge on class and the body - in ways that are insufficiently theorised in current academia. In particular I will focus on two UK-based feminist performance artists: Catherine Hoffmann and Sophie Lisa Beresford. Furthermore, I want to discuss the ways in which performance art is uniquely positioned to examine the *intra-action* (feminist theorist Karen Barad's neologism), between discourse and matter. This includes the ways in which the performance artists that are using feminist theory to inform their work, go on to produce knowledges that propel and contribute to intersectional feminist theory as a whole. I will use two pieces of research material: Catherine Hoffmann's *Ten Tips for Being Feckless and Poor Whilst Pretending Not to Be* (2016); and *Pizza Shop Dance* (2009), by Sophie Lisa Beresford.

1.2 Research questions

The question of how discourse and matter are inextricably conjoined in the processes of knowledge production is at the centre of my research. In this entanglement, I will argue that matter entwined with discourse becomes a complex site for meaning-making, producing knowledges which are more than the sum of their parts. Instead of looking at these categories in terms of binary hierarchies, where discourse is privileged over matter, I am interested in how there is a continuum of connectedness between/through/amongst them, which I will refer to as *material-discursive.*

What I am asking in this piece of work is how material-discursive knowledges about class and gender are being produced through two pieces of feminist performance art. I am interested in how these performance practices express, in distinctive ways, how class is not only enacted by the socio-cultural realm acting *upon* bodies, but also how it is inextricably linked and created *through* bodily matter. I want to understand if there are ways in which feminist performance art is particularly well positioned to examine this relationship between discourse and matter. So, I am asking:

1. What are the devices and strategies that these two performance artists are using which produce material-discursive knowledges about class and gender?
2. Can the knowledges produced from these practices fill in the gaps that I have found in current academic and creative domains? (see the 'Gaps in the Research' section).
3. How are these two art-works, and the artists' wider practices, utilising, and in turn producing, vital contributions about intersectional feminist theorising on gender/sex.

1.3 Background

During the 1970s and 80s, feminist visual art and cultural criticism –in the Anglo-American context– was being produced by scholars such as Laura Mulvey (1975)*;* Linda Nochlin (1971); and Griselda Pollock (1988). These texts helped lay the groundwork for a second-wave feminist responses to gender inequity in art and visual culture. Around this time women of colour were articulating the unjust white, Western privilege not only within this feminist movement, but within academia, visual and wider culture. Seminal work includes authors and scholars such as bell hooks (1995), Audre Lorde (1984); The Combahee River Collective (1977); and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988). French and continental feminist scholars were contributing differing, important theoretical and methodological positions to the fields of visual culture and feminism, including Helene Cixous' term *L'ecriture feminine* (in *The Laugh of the Medusa,* 1976); Luce Irigaray's Marxist feminist analyses of women as commodity (*This Sex Which is Not One*, 1985); and Julia Kristeva's work on the *Abject* and the female body in moving image (*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1982).

Feminism as a socio-political movement was working alongside the growth of performance art, and scholars such as Rebecca Schneider (1997); Roselee Goldberg (1979); and Amelia Jones (2003/2010), have paved the way for looking directly at feminist performance/art in fine art contexts. Goldberg's, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (1979) was the first published history of performance art and is now in its fourth edition (2011). It maps the rise in performance art's prominence in artistic practices during the 1960s and 1970s, and how these practices often directly reflected their surrounding political landscape(s) and activisms. Amelia Jones has been central to contemporary feminist visual analyses of performative art practices, in the Euro-American context. Jones has written extensively on contemporary performance art practices, and their links with various feminist projects, which they describe as "volatile and immensely rich" (2010, p.1), arguing as many

do, that "feminism and visual culture…deeply and mutually inform one another" (p. 2). This co-mingling of these two areas, is the position I align myself with, as I move into the research around performance art and intersectional class knowledge production.

Research about (fine art) performance art which touches upon class is not currently a prolific field of study – and even less so within the specific geo-political context of the UK. That said, there is a small amount of work being done by the Live Art Development Agency (LADA) in the UK. LADA works with performance practitioners and academics to research, develop and produce work that is actively socially engaged and in pursuit of change. Examples of their publications which deal with class-inequalities through performance art practices include: *Let's Get Classy* (2017) and *Ways of Getting Classy* (2018), both produced by performance practitioner-researcher Kelly Green. Written alongside Green's artist residency, the former text is described as a study guide for approaching cultural privilege and class issues in performance art, and the latter as a group of methodologies for engaging with class within performance. More obliquely LADA has produced other work which is rhizomatically and intersectionally connected to class-inequalities, for example, *Know How: On Live Art and Ageing* by Lois Weaver (2017); *The Displaced and Privilege: Live Art in the Age of Hostility* by Elena Marchevska (2017).

1.4 Gaps in the research

My interest in researching performance art and class is partly about redressive action. It comes from not seeing it sufficiently represented in academia, visual culture, or even within contemporary performance art practices. When it comes to finding out how many scholars are writing about these intersections, the data seems to prove my point. Twice in 2017 I researched the academic literature for work which touches upon both feminist performance art and class. Both times I identified no substantial body of work which dealt with these topics directly through the lens of intersectional feminist theory. For the sake of comparison, I have repeated this survey in 2021 – this time also looking at agential realism as a key word, as the lens through which to analyse performance art and class dynamics. Yet again, I don't find a body of work that intersects agential realism, class and performance art, (let alone *feminist* performance art specifically). Some tangentially relevant texts I *have* found, which may be useful as reference for me include Chris Salter's *Entangled* (2010), which deals with the links between

technologies and human bodies in performance art; Annette Arlander's performance practice-based research work, *Agential cuts and performance as Research* (2017) and *Performing With The Weather* (2018); or Florence Fitzgerald-Allsopp's thesis, *Becoming-with-Animal: Cultivating a Feminist Understanding of Human-Animal Transformation in Contemporary Performance Art*, (2019). Rather crucially however, none of these position 'class' as its own phenomena from which to produce knowledge. Given all of this, it seems like there is real value to committing to my research question.

1.5 What is performance art, and what can it do?

My definition of contemporary performance art includes art practices which employ implicit and/or explicit performative actions or gestures –though not always in relation to or performed by the material/artist's body. It can be enacted live to an audience and/or recorded/inscribed in a variety of ways to be understood after the fact. In a broader sense, I will align myself with the following words from visual theorist Griselda Pollock, in the way (performance) art demands to be contextualised: "artworks cease to be objects [and] ask to be read as cultural practices.[..]...They ask to be allowed to change the culture into which they intervene by being considered creative: poïetic and transformative" (Pollock, 2007, p. 10). This potential for performance art to be 'poïetic', (from the philosophical definition, meaning to bring into being), seems to give scope for feminist performance art practices to create new theories of intersectional gender/sex in relation to the corporeal.

Chapter 2. Theories and methodologies.

2.1 Theories

I will discuss the theoretical backdrop which provides the rhizomatic foundations for this essay. I am interested in uncovering feminist knowledge that can be produced when taking seriously matter and the material body's knowledge –whilst simultaneously de-exceptionalising the human body when it comes to engaging with (human/nonhuman) matter. What can be gleaned through the co-mingling of feminist discourses with the intelligence of the corporeal, or nonhuman matter? The theoretical backdrop to my research questions includes looking at feminist new materialism; feminist posthumanities; agential realism; and feminist visual art

theory –all refracted through an intersectional feminist take on gender (and class). I am going to spend a few paragraphs discussing intersectional feminist theorising, as this provides a broad underlying nodal point for much of this essay's context.

My understanding of intersectionality in broad terms is shaped primarily by critical race theorist and lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw, who brought the term *intersectionality* into US law practice, critical race theories and beyond in, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, in 1989. Crenshaw has made it clear that, "intersectionality is not being offered…as some new totalling theory of identity" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244), but that, "the focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (p. 1245). Crenshaw is one of many feminists who have called out emancipatory projects which have not only prioritised whiteness but completely ignored the complexities of those with multiply social markers, looking instead to complex, inclusive and expansive feminist projects (including intersectional practises), by, for example The Combahee River Collective (1977/1982); Audre Lourde (1984); bell hooks (1995), Alexandra Kollontai (1971), and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988).

Within social sciences and beyond, intersectionality has become a popular feminist scholarly tool as well as a cultural buzzword. Social and cultural scientist Kathy Davis describes intersectional feminist theory in this way in the 2008 paper, *Intersectionality as Buzzword*, "'Intersectionality' refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (p. 68). Davis argues that the open-endedness, this vagueness, the availability of the term, is one of the reasons it is so successful as a tool for feminist scholarship. Of course, there is also the risk that this allows hegemonic discourses to co-opt the term to their own ends or simplify and confuse the concept. For example, feminist scholar Jasbir Puar has pointed out that from a transnational and postcolonial point of view, "…the categories privileged by intersectional analysis do not necessarily traverse national and regional boundaries nor genealogical exigencies, presuming and producing static epistemological renderings of categories themselves across historical and geopolitical locations" (2011, para 7).

Within the field of intersectional gender theorising, Nina Lykke has produced a central body of work which is vital both to the direction of the field, and to my own research frameworks (2010a; 2010b). Lykke discusses how intersectionality can be variously used either explicitly, implicitly and/or via other names in different feminist disciplines, for example by postcolonial and anti-racist feminisms; queer feminisms; and profeminist studies of men and

masculinities (2010a, p. 52). These, "temporary crystallisations" (p. 49) as Lykke describes them, illustrate "a landscape as a site of resistance to gender-conservative approaches" (p. 49).

Of particular interest to me is how Lykke argues for intersectionality as a *postconstructionist feminist epistemology* (2010a). This term describes a variety of feminist scholarly positions that, "share a commitment to transgressing gender de/constructionism in an endeavour to think through the links between discursively and bodily materiality" (p. 134). Within Lykke's postconstructionist nexus are a range of feminist thinking which wants to offer redress towards the ways in which the corporeal, or matter, has been shunned by some sociocultural feminist projects. Theorising which brings the body back into central focus has been produced by new materialist and feminist posthumanist scholars such as Rosi Braidotti, Stacy Alaimo, Elizabeth Grosz, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad. Lykke goes to lengths to establish that by clustering a range of positions together in this way, she is not establishing a homogenised, fixed category of processes, where one can, for example, reductively make synonymous Rosi Braidotti or Elizabeth Grosz (who are employing Deleuzian philosophy and post-modern critiques), with Karen Barad or Donna Haraway who are "committed to feminist technoscience critiques and their dialogues with and transgressions of constructionist technoscience studies." (2010b, p 134-5). Instead Lykke is asking us to understand these positions as rhizomatically connected constellation of sites that can be brought together for momentary or extended co-mingling, when it is useful to do so (p. 123-135).

So very generally, Lykke makes the case that the postconstructionist positions described above, all share a criticism of feminist gender de/constructionism –namely that by avoiding all forms of biological essentialising, it has abandoned theorising "biological sex" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 107). Lykke argues that biological sex has been under-theorised, and this gap has enforced a "dichotomous understanding of biological sex and sociocultural gender" (p. 107). The danger that Lykke and others, such as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Heckman in *Material Feminisms* (2008) are highlighting within this position, is that sociocultural feminist analyses have left materiality open for essentialist inscription by conservative hegemonies (Alaimo & Hekman, pp. 3-4).

New Materialism

In order for me to take seriously what the body/matter *knows*, I am relying upon scholars who have produced work that can be described as feminist new materialism. In this regard, scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz, Stacy Alaimo, Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti and Karen Barad, amongst others have/are making crucial contributions to the contemporary dialogue.

Alaimo and Hekman describe how, ""Material feminists" want to know how we can define the "real" in science and how we can describe nonhuman agency in a scientific context." (2008, p. 7). Their formative book, *Material Feminisms,* includes chapters by a variety of theorists who are proposing ways in which the corporeal can be understood through how the material and the discursive co-constitute each other. Similarly, *New Materialisms: Ontology, agency and politics* (2010), edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, establishes that the interaction of human and nonhuman matter is a constant process in our everyday lives, yet the primacy of language in the 'cultural turn' has left us looking at the body as "naively representational or naturalistic" (p. 3). Instead, the authors are asking that we radically re-engage with the very fundamental assumptions about the agency of matter, and notions of material practices (pp. 3-4).

Feminist new materialism has become entangled with wide range of natural science research areas such as quantum physics (Karen Barad) and biology, where for example, molecular biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling has theorised that social constructions of difference, don't simply effect the bodies that we can see but, ""events outside the body become incorporated into our very flesh." (2000, p.238). In *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz's contributions to this area include asserting that hierarchical dualisms of difference and binary philosophical thinking can be overcome by resisting notions of the flesh as passive and inert. Grosz adds that as a starting point one should take seriously the experience of the corporeal and difference –rather than solely the social-cultural mechanisms at play upon us. More recently, Grosz has discussed new materialist ethics and ontologies, pursuing an *ontoethics*, described as, "…a way of thinking about not just how the world is but how it could be, how it is open to change, and, above all, the becomings it may undergo." (2017, p. 1).

Stacy Alaimo has written extensively about 'trans-corporeal' feminisms, describing how her neologism, "…emphasizes the imbrication of human bodies not only with each other, but with non-human creatures and physical landscapes" (2010, p. 15). In a similar vein, Manuela Rossini –another central contributor to these feminist new materialist dialogues – writes about feminist, inter- and transdisciplinary posthumanism, and persuasively argues that "At every moment of one's lifespan, socioculturally-shaped behavioural patterns as well as reactions of the neural system to external signals affect one's muscles, bones, nerves and even the architecture of one's cells" (2006, para 5). Rossini makes the point that oppositional thinking in relation to matter and culture is unrealistic, and instead we should consider human subjectivity as, "biocultural systems in which cells and culture construct each other"" (2006,

para. 5). Alaimo and Rossini are crossing between rhizomatically connected spaces here, to touch upon how new materialism and feminist posthumanities meet each other. For the needs of my analyses then, this overlap between new materialism and feminist posthumanities provides another nodal point of reference. Feminist posthumanities require me to take seriously the theoretical, ontological and epistemological position that matter is –in the physical *and* material-discursive sense– a process of ongoing collisions and inextricable enmeshment of the human and nonhuman.

Feminist posthumanities

> "…we are fully in nature, and nature is fully in us"
> (Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018, p. 1.)

Feminist posthumanities are a transdisciplinary cluster of research areas that share a focus on where human and nonhuman knowledge production converge to create possibilities for intersectional feminist analyses (Lykke, 2010a, p. 81). Rosi Braidotti describes, in the seminal text, *The Posthuman* (2013), that, "posthuman theory is a generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as 'Anthropocene'" (pp. 10-11), and that the move to a 'nature-culture' continuum (and a shift from social constructionist paradigms), provides a more sufficient tool with which to analyse the present we find ourselves in. Braidotti's many contributions to the arena of the corporeal in feminist studies includes emphasising the need to pay attention to, "the bodily roots of subjectivity, rejecting any universal, neutral and consequently gender-free understanding of human embodiment" (2002, p. 22). One of Braidotti's most succinct quotes about the important role of feminist posthumanities in the development of a material-discursive paradigm shift, comes when she notes that,

> Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments in Western social, political and scientific history. (2013, p. 1)

Braidotti contends that feminist posthumanities helps to shine a light on the rejection of "dualism, especially the opposition nature-culture and stresses instead the self-organize (or

auto-poietic) force of living matter" (p. 3). This notion of auto-poietic agency of matter coincides with my views on the poietic potential of art practises more generally, which I discussed earlier in the text.

Donna Haraway's important posthumanist texts include *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) and *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988). In a continued commitment to destabilising the notion of fixed categories, one of Haraway's important concepts is 'natureculture' (2003) –a term which reminds us to undercut the notion that 'nature' and 'culture' are separate, containable entities. Haraway's focus on the co-constitutive process of natureculture, extends into the interwoven relationship between human and nonhuman bodies –demanding we take a non-anthropocentric ontological position.

Haraway's work on situated knowledges is a process which is hoping to avoid "the 'god-trick' of positivist epistemology" (Lykke, 2010a, p. 4). It is a call to take ethical responsibility for my-self-as-researcher. Haraway describes this as, "[the] politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (Haraway, 1988, p. 589), With the goal of moving beyond essentialism and universal claims of truth, Haraway is asking me to account for how I am located within/throughout my writing, shunning the notion of researcher-as-neutral. Echoing other new materialist notions of material-discursive entanglements, the practise of situating myself allows me to demonstrate how the researcher (the thinking apparatus, as part of a momentary boundary-making practice) is entangled amongst/through/within the entire process of research and writing. This is an attempt to resist acting out the fallacy that the researcher is a discreet, separate, neutral arbiter of truth. Situated knowledges are, in fact, natureculture.

Agential realism

American feminist physicist Karen Barad's work is central to my practice of material-discursive research and performance art practice. As with other new materialist and feminist posthumanist ontologies, agential realism recognises that matter –human and nonhuman– has agency; that matter is not a thing, but a *doing*: "…the forces at work in the materialization of bodies are not only social and the bodies produced are not all human" (Barad, 2007, p. 225). Agential realism then, is a trans-disciplinary (philosophical-political-scientific) space where myths about coherent boundaries (and binaries) collapse, opening up new possibilities for understanding the ongoing processual nature of material-discursive knowledge production.

Barad describes agential realism as, "an epistemological-ontological-ethical framework" (2007, p. 26), a space where dichotomous categorisations such as human/nonhuman, social/material, and nature/culture are given new ways of making meaning, beyond hegemonic binaries (p. 26). In Barad's theorising, the basic ontological elements are not individual subjects or things, but *phenomena*, (described as "not mere laboratory creations but basic units of reality" (p. 33)), where phenomenon, these entanglements of reality, are understood to *intra-act*. Barad's notion of *intra*-action is set in contrast to *inter*action, making the point that there are no definitively separate agencies which precede each other, with which to inter-act with – agencies are produced *through* their intra-action (p. 33). Intra-action then, "*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*" (p. 33). This ontological lens, where becoming is mutually co-constituted through intra-acting agencies, gives me a radically new way to look at how entanglements of material-discursive phenomena could produce knowledges about class.

Similarly, Barad contends that research is not something done from the outside, looking in, but that the researcher is acting from within the material they are researching, intrinsically connected to what is produced, by being within its production (p. 56). So agential realism insists that if research/the researcher is to have meaningful, realistic, and on-going collisions with the material–discursive –i.e., with knowledge produced through/within/upon matter– then one cannot disentangle ethics, ontologies and epistemologies (p. 26). An agential realistic approach argues that there are no real distinct, intact boundaries between these categories, just as there are no distinct, universal and fixed boundaries between matter and discourse. My body/matter –not taken as inherently separate from the process of thinking– is performing as a piece of research apparatus, acting from within the material/writing/human/nonhuman world.

Barad proposes that through her reworking of the material-discursive, intra-activity means acknowledging that,

> discursive practices are not human-based activities but rather specific material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted…matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency. (Barad 2003, p. 828).

Posthumanist *performativity*, in the Barad sense, is also important to my proposal. Barad explains how human/nonhuman bodies –all bodies– "come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity—its performativity. (p. 823). To Barad then, matter has agency, and it

cannot be successfully explored through discursive practices alone. I am not supposing that all matter has intentionality and responsibility in the sense we have considered 'agency' in traditional Western hegemonic, human-centred thought, but that all matter has, nonetheless, the capacity to act. In other words, matter is, "an agential factor in its iterative materialization, and identity and difference are radically reworked" (p. 32).

Performativity as a term is used within various academic disciplines but is perhaps most well known in the work of Judith Butler (1993). Like other feminist scholars I have discussed, Butler's work on gender –which could be positioned in a liminal space between feminist de/constructionism and corpomaterialism (Lykke, 2010a, p. 118)– emphasises gender as a *doing*, and not some essentialist notion of being. To Butler, gender performativity is, "that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993, p. 3). However, one of Barad's main critiques of Butler's perspectives on performativity is its anthropocentrism. In contrast, an agential realist approach to performativity holds that de-exceptionalising and de-centering the human is a fundamental turn in terms of how we understand material-discursive knowledge production. In this regard, Barad's posthumanist notions of performativity are more aligned with the analyses I want to engage with.

Feminist visual and cultural theorising

Similar to feminist positions I have already discussed, feminist visual art theorising is concerned with addressing how art practices can/do resist, transgress or queer patriarchal ideologies. It does this through feminist analyses of the social, visual, structural codes of representation, and by examining how artists use their practices to subvert, play out or imagine beyond these markers. For my purposes, I will be looking at how feminist art theories that touch upon the notions of the *male gaze* –and other neologisms for cultural imbalances of power– are useful tools to exploit for creating knowledges about class and gender. The male gaze was defined by Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), as a defining social power dynamic in cinema (or moving image), exemplifying wider asymmetrical inequalities between men and women. Likewise, the history of the female nude in fine art, (first made familiar as a term by Lynda Nead), is sometimes referred to as an example of how unjust gender/sex dynamics are played out in the gallery and other visual/cultural platforms.

I will briefly discuss some of the important theoretical nodal points within feminist visual art scholarly work, which I will call upon in my analyses. One of feminist visual art

scholar Roselee Goldberg's main contentions has been to frame the history of Western performance art practices as deliberate, creative acts of resistance, against an increasingly commodity-based, patriarchal, capitalist system(s) of power. According to Goldberg, artists have looked to the medium of the performing body to help undo and reclaim various creative, social and political questions around individual, family and community consciousnesses, within unjust cultural and social environments (1979). This notion has been echoed by other scholars, such as critical performance studies researcher Sue-Ellen Case, who describes in her collection of articles, *Feminist and Queer Performance*: *Critical Strategies* (2008), that the motivations for the upsurge in politically-engaged performance art in North America, as being rooted in the performative actions of the political movements in the 60s and 70s in the United States; how political demonstrations, "came to mean a performance of oppressions and liberation through gesture and deed, forming both political action, through disruption, and a pedagogical device." (p. 103). It is from this point then, that I situate feminist performance art as a (sometimes): agitator; tool for liberation; a knowledge producer, and a way of imagining otherwise. Amelia Jones makes the succinct point that "Visuality (the conditions of how we see and make meaning of what we see) is one of the key modes by which gender is culturally inscribed in Western culture" (Jones, 2003/2010 , p. 1), and as such establishing new ways to imagine women's representation –how we see, what we see– has and continues to be a crucial redressive, liberatory feminist action. The artists I have chosen to discuss have looked squarely into the political and the embodied.

Redressive representational tactics have a long lineage in feminist performance art in general, and Rebecca Schneider's seminal text, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997), centres around how the female body is used as a site for resignification through feminist performance art practises. Schneider notes that some common themes which run through feminist performance art practices include disrupting hegemonic narratives about race and gender; the male gaze and the assumption that women are object not subject; how gender, class and race meet capitalist propaganda and structures; and how explicit performative action of the female body can be considered radical and transgressive (p. 3).

In *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (1992), feminist visual theorist, Lynda Nead famously asserted that,

> The framed image of the female body, hung on the wall of an art gallery, is shorthand for art more generally: it is an icon of western culture, a symbol of civilisation and accomplishment. (p. 1)

It remains a condition of Western visual culture, that gendered bodies, queer bodies, Othered bodies –particularly when rendered naked or partially clothed– remain a symbol of unjust power dynamics and oppression. As such, artists, sometimes as political action, augment and assemble creative practices around these codes.

Theorising around the abject –which Julia Kristeva famously brought to the fore in *Powers of Horror (*1980)– will be important to how I discuss the dynamics one of the artists' work in relation to the ways in which classed and gendered-bodies are 'abjected' by capitalist-patriarchy. The abject does not simply mean the disgusting or the repulsive, as Kristeva explains, it is not "lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect boundaries, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Lange-Berndt, 2015, p. 124).

Simon Taylor has made the point that artists make use of these "…malevolent associations of the other with the abject (e.g., women and menstrual blood, gay men and disease, the working class and trash, blacks and dirt)" (p. 128), in order to parody, subvert or celebrate stereotypes. These actions are aimed at destabilising hegemonic notions of subjectivity and power (p. 127).

Amelia Jones' work, which I touched upon in the background section, is central to how I approach feminist visual art theorising. Of particular interest to me is Jones's framing of performance art as the meeting of time, embodiment and experience; and how performance art is a radical act of de-containment, against the containment of hegemonic boundary-making and value practices (Jones & Heathfield, 2012). In my pursuit of reimagining class and gender subjectivities through material-discursive knowledge production, Jones' proposition of the spaciotemporal, material potential for performance art is an integral nodal point.

2.2 Methodologies and methods

> *Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated*
>
> (Karen Barad, 2007, p. 185)

As agential realism already establishes the inextricable enmeshment of ontology, epistemology and ethics, my methodologies –the guidelines for how I will account for my claims to knowledge– will attempt to coherently connect with Barad's work.

I acknowledge that I am not a neutral body, but a specifically situated, co-constituted human/nonhuman; a material-discursive apparatus, in on-going co-mingling with this research. In terms of how I claim any kind of objectivity, I will look to Barad's notion of *agential cuts*. By taking the basic ontological units to be phenomena, Barad argues that we can claim to make momentary agential cuts –moments of stability– thus creating temporary boundaries which establish a 'this' or a 'that', yet this is always from within. Barad contends that in this framework, "We" are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity" (2007, p 828). So rather than being entirely unmoored, shunning the notions objectivity altogether, Barad believes that "*Agential cuts do not mark some absolute separation but a cutting together/apart – "holding together" of the disparate itself*" (Barad, 2012, p. 46). Barad argues that through this process of agential separability, these agential cuts, components of the phenomena (the intra-acting units of reality) can be (momentarily, locally) defined, and thus meaning can be claimed to be attributed (p. 148). I am looking at these agential cuts as provisional moments of coalescing, which does not mark finite outcomes, but temporarily creates a meaning.

In order to take seriously the role of my body within this research, I am going to be positioning agential realism alongside *affective analysis.*

Affective analysis

As a performance artist and an actor, my experience of watching feminist performance art comes with another layer of embodied and experiential interference. When I am interrogating these pieces of material, or when I am (re)watching them, I do so as someone who often imagines being in the performer's position – as well as experiencing the art work as a viewer. I am wondering how the artist may feel, what choices are they making – would I make those choices too? What would I do differently? How would my body lead the way if I enacted this performance? What knowledges are being created about myself and about the world through this performance? What is coming up for me emotionally, what does my body tell me about this performance, about the politics of the (classed, gendered) body and wider culture? How is this changing me? What desires are being produced and where do they come from? Do these feelings empower me, do they diminish me? In order to gather information from these feelings

which arise, I will be including an affective analysis approach. From a Deleuzian/Spinozan/Massumian point of view, *affects* are the (empirical) bodily sensations that are pre-thought or not yet defined by words, evoked by stimuli (e.g., Deleuze 1997; Massumi 2002). This analytical approach considers these body knowledges as vital, or as Laura Mark's says, "We are using our bodies to do philosophy" (Marks, 2018, p. 153). From the point of view of Marks, taking an affective analysis approach to material is to take action which decentralises the role of the intellect and ideology, allowing the affected body of the beholder to acknowledge and uncover what the body knows (2018). In this instance, this process is to help me delay the habit of giving primacy to discursive analyses, allowing knowledges from the pre-cognitive to emerge. By using Marks' triad analytical process, which I will describe next, I want the pre-discursive, material knowledges to meet and intra-act with discourse. Mark's analytical process establishes three manoeuvres called, 'affect', 'percept' and 'concept' (p. 152). The first move, affect, is where one establishes the affective responses to the stimuli/phenomenon; percept is where one attempts to describe what ones sees (albeit corrupted by ideologies and conventions); and lastly, one tries to build a concept(s) around the meeting of the affect and precept. This three-step process creates space between the embodied experiences and discourses. For my purposes, this seems like a crucial position to take, and a position which is congruent with the overall aim of material-discursive, agential realist approach to the agency of matter. By using this type of analysis, I am honouring that I feel and think through performance art from the inside out, emotionally, affectively and/or practically, and often with deep regard for what I takes to use the body as a material and a tool for feminist activism within an arts practice.

This is also a political and academic decision. I am continuing to practise a feminist posthumanist ontology by de-centralising the human and the intellect as culturally dominant knowledge producers. By creating space for embodied knowledge, I am making the point that notions of its insufficiencies are not inherently real, but instead stem from artificial boundaries cut between nature and culture. So, for all the times my emotions have been undermined, belittled or ignored by my culture and society, and by me, this is my redressive action – I will listen to her many voices, and she will teach me what I don't yet know.

Feminist visual analysis

I will be using feminist visual analysis to look more closely at the performance material. Feminist visual analysis comes from the visual culture model of critical thinking, that is, a scholarly pursuit developed specifically to counteract notions of high vs. low art or visual culture; and as an interdisciplinary model of analysis, attempting to make porous the

boundaries between various visual mediums, such as film, fine art, photography (Jones 2010, p. 2). Analytical tools which understand the complex nature of contemporary visual culture, with its multiply readings, codes and mediums, are particularly crucial to my two selected performance artist's work – which traverse live performance, film, and fine art. Much like intersectional feminist analyses by Lykke, Barad, and Braidotti, (which move away from universal claims of gender), visual cultural analyses, particularly helped by scholars such as John Berger, acknowledges that there is no inherent meaning in art – no essentialism or universalism. Instead, meaning-making is a process, one that is co-constituted between the viewer and the visual(s). This process is informed by how the viewers' ontologies, their experiences, meets and exchanges with the image (Berger, 1973). In other words, by how the viewer is *situated* (in the Haraway sense). Feminist performance art scholar Amelia Jones argues that "feminism is not adjunct to, or one critical mode model within, a larger umbrella of cultural or visual cultural studies. Rather feminism is one of the most important ways in which we can most usefully come to an understanding of the image culture in which we are suspended" (2010, p. 4). So visual culture, and specifically feminist visual cultural analyses are good for my aim of understanding the visual imagery of my material and wider culture, when thinking through locally produced knowledge about class.

2.3 Decision of materials to use

Having made a very deliberate choice to re-engage and look honestly at my own experiences of class and gender, I have returned again and again to these questions: Where are all the (other) under- and working-class artists? Why can't I find them? Where is the feminist, under- and working-class art around me? What even *is* under- and working-class feminist art and why do I want to see this kind of (unspecified) art anyway? Where is the feminist performance art that wants to produce knowledge about class?

The pursuit for the material for this research was complicated, frustratingly absent and involved a lot of blind alleys. In the end, the two pieces I chose to use were the only two that I could find that fulfilled my research requirements. This in itself proved to me that this entire arena was under-theorised, under-explored and insufficiently platformed.

I have thankfully, found some small communities of artists and performers who identify as under/working-class –some of whom are making work specifically about the knowledges that can be produced through shining a light on the structural, lived and bodily experiences of

class. Others simply make it be known that they were born into working- or under-class families, and that it shapes who they are within the art world as a whole. For others, it's something to be shunned or ignored, they don't believe it has bearing on the work they make or how they see themselves as artists. One thing I suspect we all have in common: the body keeps score; the body remembers.

I shortlisted a small group of performance artists and their work for this essay – artists whose practice includes strong links to intersectional gender theory and analyses of class, specifically from a perspective of their own lived-experiences. These included Selina Thompson's performance installation, *It Burns It All Clean* (2014) Scottee's art practice (in particular *Working-Class Dinner Party*, 2017); and a variety of pieces from both Travis Alabanza's and Kelly Green's performance practices. I ultimately decided to select the two pieces of work by Catherine Hoffmann and Sophie Lisa Beresford because their practices lean more towards live performance art that exists in site-specific and/or gallery contexts, and because they were the only artists who give primary visual and critical focus to their gendered, classed bodies.

In order to be able to speak to some of the politics and relationships with class in the artist's work, I have chosen to write about artists that are practising in the U.K. From the extensive online and wider research, I have undertaken so far in the U.K., working- and under-class performance artists are under-represented (sometimes non-existent), in archives, databases, galleries, organisations, collectives and festivals. This would suggest then, that this research topic is all the more vital.

2.4 Ethics and ethical reflections

As agential realism argues for the inseparability of ontology, epistemology and ethics, it is from within that space that I define my ethical considerations. I am directly inside this research, as an active, bias, uncontainable participant in its creation. My body/matter and the discursive/matter I intra-act with are in a continuous engagement of agential becoming. My enacting of agential cuts will be affected by my lived-experiences, and by how my body has remembered or made sense of these experiences. In line with my theoretical, ontological, epistemological positions, I will rely on Haraway's situated knowledges to provide me with a kind of location and partiality from where I lay claim to momentary cut(s) in this research material, and to the knowledge I produce. That said, through an on-going practise of trying to

situate myself within my writing, I have come to accept failure as part of the process; I will remain open to critique for where I do not register or account for by blind spots and my biases. Because of this –and not in spite of it– I see this practice as fundamentally important for me within the pursuit of scholarly or creative work which agitates for feminist social change.

I don't present this essay as some kind of endpoint to my opinions. I present it as an interjection into a wider discussion, where I am a moving (changeable) subject/matter. In provisional allegiance to this principle, I have attempted to provide an historical account of my socio-economic and ontological background, in the prologue. From an academic point of view, I call myself a feminist new materialist scholar. I practise feminist performance art and I am also an actor in TV. I am white and northern-European. I sit amongst multiple marginalised intersectional social markers, which have varying effects on how I navigate the dynamics of power within cultural and social spheres. These also have direct effects on my material body – seen and unseen. I am interested in emancipatory, intersectional and liberatory new feminist worldings, and I believe art can be a powerful and dynamic way of imagining and enacting those.

When it comes to problematising my location and my choices for this piece of work, I will try to do that here. When I am discussing feminist performance art; or intersectional gender studies; or social class and so forth, I am narrowing in on material written in, or translated into English (I only speak English); and work that largely focusses on Anglo-American and/or Northern European social histories and political contexts. I am aware this means I am excluding large bodies of work which can tell a wider and more complex story, and which are also under theorised.

Another ethical issue I need to contend with is not only my own whiteness, but that of the artists I have chosen to write about. Academia, Western society and culture are structurally racist and there is an abundance of work by and about white subjects and white experiences. There is an unjustifiable under-representation of work by non-white scholars and experiences –including within the history of feminist theorising and art. In this regard, I acknowledge that redressive action in this area can't be claimed in this work. I will claim to be addressing other intersectional inequalities, by presenting a divergent, non-hegemonic discussion about intersectional gender when it comes to class.

As someone with working-/under-class origins, I don't want to make universal claims about the experiences of anyone else who identifies as working-/under-class. Experiences of intersectional inequities related to class are endless and multiply and claiming any kind of authority over this knowledge seems to be distinctly enforcing the notions of empirical

knowledge and essentialism. When I refer to poverty, I am not implying that working-class communities are defined by living in poverty, nor that living in poverty is a marker of class. However, my experiences of class are deeply enmeshed with poverty, and similarly at least one of the artists that I have selected to discuss. Therefore, it is a relevant experiential marker for me. Furthermore, when I make claims about theorists' and artists' work related to class, I am doing so through the lens that I have established so far, and from my own ontological and epistemological biases. I do, however, want to situate myself, (in the Haraway sense), within this discussion, and make clear that I am passionate about the importance of working-class academics, artists and activists' work in relation to producing knowledge about intersectional theories on gender/sex.

2.5 Material

Ten Tips for Being Feckless and Poor, Whilst Pretending Not to Be.

Catherine Hoffmann's *Ten Tips for Being Feckless and Poor Whilst Pretending Not to Be* (2016) is a performance-to-camera video piece which runs for one minute and forty-four seconds[2]. In it, Hoffmann recites a text whilst always looking directly at the audience/camera, engaging in various tasks in and around a block of high-flats on a council estate in the UK. At various times she holds a dead rat; she wears a fur-coat and grey underpants; some stolen slippers; or seemingly nothing at all. She pours gravy on herself; she breastfeeds the dead rat. There are 16 separate shots, some static and some moving, in 11 locations around and inside the high-flats.

The video opens with a close-up shot of a dead rat lying on the top of a large, overflowing outside bin, the sound of flies buzzing around begins and the start of some lyrics –"Morning, noon and night"– repeating themselves throughout the video. The rat is picked up by the tail, by the artist's hand, before cutting to a wider version of this shot, looking down on the artist, the bin, the rat, through the gaps in the metal railing of a fence. The artist – a woman, white, late-thirties, long red hair, is wearing a partially open dark-brown fur coat, on what appears to be an otherwise topless/naked body. The sky is grey, overcast –very typically British weather. Holding the dead, motionless rat up by its tail, she begins speaking, "Ten tips for being feckless and poor whilst pretending not be".

[2] *Ten Tips for Being Feckless and Poor Whilst Pretending Not to Be* (2016): https://vimeo.com/166494218

Pizza Shop Dance.

Sophie Lisa Beresford produced *Pizza Shop Dance*[3] (2009) in her local pizza shop in the North East of England. In this piece, which lasts a minute and fifty-five seconds, Beresford uses the space in front of the counter of a small local take-away as her dancefloor. The camera is positioned so that in the foreground is the artist, and the front of the shop; in the background you can see the counter and then behind this the open-plan kitchen for the shop, along with two members of staff. Music is playing loudly –hardcore Mákina dance music[4]– as Beresford dances vigorously and joyfully and exuberantly generally towards or in view of the camera, but never looking at us directly, she appears to be engrossed in the energy of the music and the dance. The artist is a white woman, in her early 20s. She is wearing a short, strapless, black dress, trainers, her long hair is tied in a tight high ponytail. The staff seem disinterested, and glance over only a few times, getting on with their work, perhaps used to this display? The piece ends mid-dance, fading out as the performance and the music continues.

In my experiences of growing up at much the same time as Beresford, I always understood that this type of dancing, this genre of music and the style of clothes is associated –generally pejoratively within wider mainstream narratives– with working- and under-class communities.

Chapter 3: Analysis

3.1 She moves – I move – she moves – I am moved.

When I listen very closely, my gut tells me that my body knows vital things, if I would just pay attention. Within an agential realist framing, this body and the nonhuman matter that she intra-acts with are continuously colliding; becoming new; adapting to stimuli in ways I don't control, and with agencies of their own. 'I' is not one. 'I' is multiplicities of intelligences. Chronic illnesses, sensational and emotional outpourings from my body have been a reminder that 'I' am not in control, there is no true 'mind-over-matter' here. This body remembers what came before, and it will enact itself however it sees fit. By using an agential framework, I am

[3] *Pizza Shop Dance* (2009): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04nZyEMNVbE
[4] Mákina is a type of techno music which originated in Spain and became popular in parts of the UK.

committing to asking questions about knowledge production in a specific way. I am asking what is happening to the bodies of these artists in their work; how are the bodies and notions of class materially shaped in the performances, through the intra-activity of these phenomenon? I am looking at the intra-action of speech and movement; symbolism and action; matter and discourse. How are the artists' bodies affecting other non/human bodies; how are they affecting my body. I am asking how discourses – and other social practises – shape their bodies, body politics and class politics. How is class and gender being expressed?

Hoffmann describes herself as growing up in Scotland and England, "as one of the feral underclass in the 70s and 80s" (Frizzell, 2016). On Hoffmann's website, her practice is described as a mix of solo and one-to-one performances, collaborative group performances, theatrically set pieces, and interactive work (Hoffmann, about, n.d., para. 1). Hoffmann often uses her body as a material. She also uses her voice, sets, props, music, costumes, visual texts, singing, and choreography. Sometimes she recreates theatrical/stylised mundane domestic, interactive arrangements, and other times she sets up and performs absurd, humorous and abstract pieces of performance. Hoffmann has described her work as an "attempt to address complex issues relating to who we are and the constraints in our contemporary lives. Gender, well-being, class, extreme mental states and mortality are interrogated using personal material, the body as site, with absurd humour playing an important role." (Hoffmann, statement, n.d., para. 1). It seems to me that she is always in implicit or explicit dialogue with her viewer, she is asking us to come join her. And *Ten Tips* is no different.

Hoffmann looks at me directly, holding unwavering eye contact with the camera. She speaks. Is she daring me to look away, or daring me to look at her? What is she hoping I understand from this performance – what does she hope to get from this performance? Before my mind launches into political and ideological analyses/narratives, I will make space to look at the intra-action between my mind and my body's responses, acknowledging that the corporeal has its own stories and agencies. I want to understand what is being created in the intra-action of this artwork and me, (when 'me' and the 'artwork' are defined by employing a spatiotemporal agential cut; a provisional boundary that is only momentarily stabilised through the intra-action of the said phenomenon). In order to do this, I will use an affective analysis approach. First I will ask myself what the affects are, the pre-discursive, non-cognitive things/sensations that my body-matter knows/tells me/feels when I watch Hoffmann's *Ten Tips For Being Feckless and Poor*? I notice that I am clenching my jaw, and I have goosebumps on my back as she pours the brown liquid on herself. I notice that there is a stiffening of my body, I am swallowing a lot, frowning. There is something akin to nauseous butterflies, and an

adrenaline rush. On a subsequent pass at the video, I notice that I have butterflies, and that my body relaxes and takes up more space, my shoulders drop ever so slightly. I notice that my eyes feel like they widen, my face muscles relax. Now I will look at the precepts.

I am looking at a forty-something woman with long curly red hair and white skin. She is only wearing grey pants, and a partially opened dark-brown fur coat – and at times, no clothes at all. The sequence of shots begins with her staring up to the camera, next to a bin which buzzes with flies. She picks up the stiff, dead rat by its tail. Then the camera pans along her bare legs and the dangling rat, she begins to recite the ten tips: "One. Get involved with…". The camera pans down from an off-license sign to the artist: "Two. Always hide your free school meal ticket…". Bare legs and feet, fur coat, the rat dangling close to camera: "Three. Do not smell…". She takes a pair of slippers from a clothes-donation bin: "Four. Make friends with Nylon knock offs…". She puts on the slippers: "Five. Change you accent…". A very close-up shot of Hoffmann's face: "Six…". Inside the lift: "Seven..". Standing against a shop front shutter: "Eight. Do not get ill…". With the dead rat at her nipple, mimicking breast feeding, panning up to her face: "Nine. Don't get up the duff…". Standing topless in a bathtub and holding a gravy boat above her, she begins to pour brown liquid over her head as she speaks "Ten. Lower you expectations…[…]Avoid self-destruction".

I will collide the affects and precepts to form some concepts, thus framing Laura Marks' affective analysis as a material-discursive, agential realist practice of intra-acting phenomenon, where my agential cuts are provisional but situated. It occurs to me that many of the affects I experienced are indicators of a stress response in the body. By materially intra-acting with Hoffmann's performance, my body is responding with something like the fight-or-flight response – my body appears to be prompted into remembering my own complex and sometimes stressful experiences of poverty, class and gender. This is a material and corporeal recognition of Hoffmann's experience, created between our two bodies. These phenomena, this information and knowledge has materially transpired *before* I have begun to cognitively analyse the tactics she is using to provoke these affects.

Hoffmann has said that the point of this work is to rid herself of the shame she feels/was made to feel about her upbringing, of her gendered-class markers. In another piece of work within which the text for *Ten Tips* appears, (*Free Lunch with The Stench Wench,* 2017a), Hoffmann describes how, "I show myself naked, expose family material, betray my mother – washing the dirty laundry in public so to speak. All the things I should feel shamed [sic] of but instead I illuminate these actions to relinquish them, to say no to shame" (Hoffmann, 2017b, para 5).

Within the *Ten Tips* performance, Hoffmann has deliberately evoked pejorative stereotypes of working-class women, codified visual elements which she –and I– know are marked as 'shameful'. Simultaneously, she is using her body, by re-enacting, augmenting, and exploring performative actions and words, to work through and "relinquish" the shame that these embodied experiences are imbued with. What I read from this is that these experiences of shame are carried *in* and *by* her body, as well as in her cognitive memories. Hoffmann's work is body-work, it is also mind-work, these are inseparable. This is an example of the intra-activity of matter and discourse in action. Specifically, these knowledges about class are made possible through the intra-action of feminist performance art; intersectional, embodied knowledge about class and gender; and the material-discursive, agential realist lens through which I view it.

The notion that some experiences of living as working- or under-class in the U.K. effects the physical body has recently begun to be studied more extensively, particularly as it relates to children living with ongoing stress, and their well-being outcomes as adults (Nelson, Bhutta, Burke, Danese & Samara, 2020)

In fact, there is even scientific data on the direct correlation between poverty and diminished life expectancy in Scotland. This phenomenon is named after Scotland's biggest city: *The Glasgow Effect.* This research shows that people in Glasgow are 30% more likely to die prematurely than in other industrial cities in the UK (Walsh, et. al., 2017), from both regular diseases, "as well as the "despair diseases" of drugs, alcohol and suicide" (Goodwin, 2016). This report states that this is the outcome of deeply unjust, inhumane legacies of political and economic policies. The bodies of those living in certain marginalised communities in Glasgow show that the impact of the socio-cultural structures acting upon them have a direct and lasting impact on the corporeal – on bodily matter.

Writer and activist Darren McGarvey, who is based in Glasgow, talks from personal experience in his Ted Talk, *Understanding Anger In An Age Of Outrage* (2018), about the anger that develops as an outcome of living in dehumanised and other-ed bodies/communities, and how these experiences are etched into the very matter of the body. Stress, fear, trauma, and shame can all impact the functioning of bodies and their life expectancies. McGarvey is taking a material-discursive, intra-active approach to discussing the body and class, joining/echoing Hoffmann in her pursuit of making the body an integral part of how class is talked about and manifested through their respective pieces of work. What I understand from these examples is that the experience of classist structural policy and social practices are not simply theoretically and practically oppressive, but materially embodied and remembered by the corporeal as

trauma. When we listen to these makers speaking and mattering from *within* their work (from their own experiences), we learn that the knowledge held by the body is integral to the activism and liberatory actions that are taking place with their work, as well as to the knowledge that is being produced. What they are conveying to audiences is that matter is affected by cultural class dynamics, and without this acknowledgement, we miss out on vital knowledges. Not only this, but by ignoring what the body knows, we are enforcing Western, hegemonic, hierarchical dichotomies which tell us that the mind is the only or primary source of knowledge, especially when it comes to the bodies of those who are most marginalised.

Intersectional feminist perspective

Hoffmann is drawing from feminist intersectional gender theorising by acknowledging that gender intra-acts with class in specific and complex ways, creating discrimination and marginalisation in nuanced and co-constitutive manners. Speaking about *Free Lunch With The Stench Wench*, Hoffmann says, "I've been researching this a lot and if you're talking of socio-economics, the female poor are the lowest of the low. A female poor body has its own connotations" (Frizzell, 2016). What Hoffmann is alluding to are the pejorative narratives and tropes attached to working-class and poor women, that portray them as animalistic, feral and/or sexually available –which are all explored in *Ten Tips*. She uses sexist, heteronormative, classist stereotypes from both visual culture and fine art culture to offer us ways of looking beyond these stereotypes/this framing of working-class women as a subjecthood. She is in the pursuit of creating new worlds for us, new subjectivities. I want to posit that Hoffmann is contributing back into intersectional theories of gender/sex, by producing knowledge that is materially driven and directly from the lived experiences of the bodies most affected by the social markers in question. This is affectively political.

Class-drag

The style of spoken-language Hoffmann is using –both the content and delivery– are counterpoint to the visual cues the artist is employing. "Ten tips for being feckless and poor, whilst pretending not to be", Hoffmann's title and opening line – is a direct nod to the neoliberal notion that we working-classes should always be in the process of pretending; of striving to *not* be working-class, whilst simultaneously making sure our shameful secret of *being* working-class is hidden. *Fake it 'til you make it, you too can assimilate.* As Hoffmann herself has pointed out, shame as a social practise is a useful tool for enforcing power dynamics: "shame in relation

to class and economics in the UK is the most pervasive device to keep millions of people feeling small and powerless and it's getting worse" (Hoffmann, 2017c, para 7).

The text is written and spoken using a style of English grammar and diction which, when I was in school, was considered 'proper', in contrast to my 'improper' use of my regional language, which was labelled as 'slang' and working-class, thus, lesser-than. As I discussed earlier, the performance Hoffmann is presenting alongside the text is a complex mix of visual cues and codes, referencing visual tropes and social stereotypes which are commonly aligned with dehumanising and demeaning (working-class) women. For example, the exposed bodies of women in all visual contexts; rodent infestations, filth/smells as synonymous with poverty, (although experiencing these things sometimes *do* come with a lack of resources, money and options); and the animal/feral nature of (particularly) working-class women. I am being asked to recognise that this subject, this performing body, understands the semiotics, the codes and performativities of multiple class stereotypes, and is attempting to complicate these visual and cultural short hands, by making messy their co-mingling. I am witnessing the ability to perform class-drag; class-passing. Like many of us, Hoffmann speaks many social languages, we know how to code-switch. Crucially though, Hoffmann is making a mockery of the very act of class-drag, by showing how both marginalised and venerated cultural markers can be codified performances; that they can be *doings*, and they are not essential beings. This is not to say they are constructed and therefore 'changing' class is simply a matter of *de*construction – the systems of power acting upon us all are structurally real, and the damage is more than a performative doing. These are intra-acting material-discursive practices of oppression which are deeply enmeshed with our abilities to navigate the world, and how the world, structurally, acts upon us. Hoffmann's work then, is an example of how subjectivities are made through their 'iterative intra-action', in this case with the artist's body, her/our understanding of the social codes of class, and performance art strategies. Hoffmann brings-into-being other possibilities for how gender and class knowledges are created and understood.

3.2 Joy is an act of resistance

I have tried to convey that Hoffmann's piece of work is about evoking affective outcomes through abjection, through visual-linguistic and material-discursive re-enactments and re-imaginings, in order to self-exorcise shame. This in turn offers a rallying cry to everyone with embodied, materially-remembered trauma related to experiences of class-based power

dynamics. Beresford's *Pizza Shop Dance* then, is about *joy* as an affective and radical act of self and communal re-inscription of the classed and gendered body. My hunch is that expressions and performances of joy are particularly potent when they are enacted by marginalised bodies in feminist performance art practice.

Unlike Hoffmann, Beresford never looks at us. The camera is positioned in order to give you a static view of the high-intensity performance that is unfolding, with the artist in the foreground and the pizza shop counter behind her. There is an absurdity to the context of this performance. We have a highly-energised, dancing young, white woman; her very short, strapless black dress twirling, and white pants showing as she moves. Her long hair is in a pony-tail whipping around, as she bounces and leaps around her small make-shift dancefloor, with bare legs and white trainers. The backdrop is a functioning pizza take-away shop in the day-time. The two men at work behind the counter don't look at the camera, and they only once each glance at Beresford. These men appear to be unphased and disinterested by the artist's dancing and the loud, ecstatic music. Perhaps this is a regular performance for Beresford?

As I did before, I will look at the affects that are produced by this piece, as it intra-acts with my viewing body. What I notice is that my body seems to move on its own with the beat, I notice that I am smiling, there is a rush of adrenaline at one point. At certain points I feel like I want to join in, I want to make some noise, but I stop myself. I want to join in with this dance, I want to move. At other moments I fell some restriction, I feel a tightening of my body and a sense of discomfort.

If I move to encourage a meeting between the precepts and the affects, what do I discover? I find the energy of this performance joyous, infectious, untamed, direct and celebratory. The setting and the performer send me visual cues that relate to working-class signifiers from my own upbringing and of others around me. Through this performance, the material affects are energetically intra-acting with my cognitive understanding of the stereotypes sometimes used to demean and belittle working and under class communities. This material-discursive proposition by Beresford presents an hegemonically incongruent mixture of reification of working-class culture –what Beresford calls her "council estate culture" (Hall, 2018)– through the mechanisms of contemporary art. Notions of value and cultural worth are being asserted here, through the rituals of dance –*through her body*– that are directly associated with Beresford's class and gender. By making her body a central and vital part of her message here, Beresford, like Hoffmann, is establishing that matter has agencies and knowledges that are crucial to the feminist change-making that they are reaching for.

Beresford has called into question the oppressive narratives around working class communities choices about 'work' and worth, instead trying to inspire creative action and political change:

> My experience of my own culture is that we have no time for creativity because we are supposed to get on with getting a 'proper job'…[…]There is so much creativity in people it is a travesty to see it being locked away. (Dupree, 2018).

Much like Hoffmann's practice, there seems to be a genuine reaching out to others who identify as working- and under-class, asking them to embrace the beauty and power of their cultural practices, or to take up spaces in the art world and beyond, with, in this instance, the material-discursive ritual of dance. It is clear to me that Beresford is passionate about producing work which takes seriously the beauty in her cultural practices, and that she perceives creativity as an embodied and empowering practice of healing. (Abject Gallery, 2018, para. 2)

If you have ever danced to EDM, or to techno music, you might recognise that rush of adrenaline and joy that happens at the crescendos in the music, when (or if) you let your body respond to the music and dance with abandon –as Beresford exemplifies in her performance. She is dancing alone, and this doesn't matter, she is channelling enough energy for us all. This culturally-situated (embodied) dance practise resonates with certain working-class demographics in the UK, as it resonates with me. Not only this, but there is a real sense that Beresford has honed her dancing skills, that there is cultural repetition and social ritual at work here. Beresford has pride in this, she is taking this seriously, and joyously.

Taking a wider agential realist lens to this work, I would describe this work as a dynamic practice of going beyond the mind and into other consciousnesses/matters/bodies, through a feminist performance art practice that directly deals with class. Or as Beresford has described it: "My overall mission as an artist, you could say, is to open a portal with no bounds for humanity, so they may easily access higher levels of their own consciousness…" (McDonald, 2016). As an artist, Beresford has positioned herself within the new materialist/agential realist ontological and philosophical realm by denying homogenous readings of her subjective boundaries. Furthermore, Beresford has described herself as not only an artist but a healer, taking an agential realist approach to how her body/mind intra-act, by saying,

> My work is my spirit, my essence is my work, often when people ask what art do I do, I tell them I do art by any means necessary, to provide healthy code resonant structures for other humans to tap into, which is so necessary today. (McDonald, 2016)

She is describing how there are no real boundaries between artist, healer, human and spirit. She is implicitly acknowledging that she is human/nonhuman, material-discursive, intra-acting phenomenon.

It is exhilarating to feel the intra-action of the affective sensations that come with remembering this type of dancing; the infectious energy of the artist; and the cognitive recognition that this codified cultural practise is being reification by taking place within the context of fine art. There is a brand-new world of subjectivities here. Her joy and energy are infectious, my body responds to her body.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

It has taken me years to understand the cluster of affective sensations that I now loosely, provisionally link to my experiences of class and gender dynamics acting upon my body. These affects seem to become less effective to me as sources of knowledge when they are labelled, so I am wary of naming them. It seems to me that when affects are designated and confined by language –by a social or discursive practice– their potency as embodied knowledge producers is diminished, they lose their pre-discursive, non-cognitive uncontainability –and their poïetic potential. Through the process of writing this thesis, it has become clear to me that where they *do* retain their efficacy, is in the experience of viewing feminist performance art which deals with class and gender. Crucially though, these affects only preserve their poïetic energy when they are brought to the fore through material-discursive encounters, i.e., where both the material and the discursive intra-act; when liminal, mutliplicitous spaces for new imaginaries and subjecthoods become possible.

Within Hoffmann's and Beresford's performance work, the artists are navigating complex visual, semantic and affective languages in relation to socio-cultural and embodied experiences. Both artists exemplify material-discursive feminist practice in action, not only through the very decision to perform their politics through/with their bodies, but also by letting their bodies 'speak' in intra-action with their cognitive, political intelligences. Both of these

artworks let me know that there are vital feminist knowledges about class and gender in their/my/our bodies, if we let them out. Letting bodies speak is no easy task. We are asking to make meaning from pre-cognitive, non-discursive, agential, human/nonhuman matter. I suggest that the intra-action of affective-discursive performative actions by these artists allow the viewers –the beholders– to enter liminal, productive spaces for complex subjectivities in relation to class and gender. Hoffmann and Beresford create subjectivities that are neither one thing nor another, but multi-layered feminist posthumanist performativities.

It is specifically through the lens of agential realism that this comes to light. Without this framework to my analysis, I may only have looked at the visual and discursive information that they convey. Although there are powerful knowledges to be gleaned from visual representations and/or recognition of ourselves in visual art, (in this instance, as working- or underclass women), I have come to see that through Barad's agential realist approach, these artists are producing something more complex. They are engaging with nuanced strategies such as class-drag; class-passing; re-appropriation and subversion of stereotypes; and practices of self-healing through performative action, (in this case in the form of dance and shame-shunning). They are co-mingling the discursive, human/nonhuman matter, the social and the creative. They are always denying a homogenous reading of their visual and affective languages, they are never only one thing. These artists are multi-lingual, uncontainable and resisting categorisation. This is where I believe their most potent poïetic potential lies, and how they are successfully opening up novel intersectional, new materialist perspectives on class and gender.

What remains

I want to imagine a world where material-discursive knowledges about class and gender, along with other intersectional markers, are being explored by performance artists in increased numbers –imagine the things we could learn! There is such productive potential in the intra-action between intersectional feminist theorising and performance practices. It was quite challenging for me to find self-identified working-/underclass performance artists from which to analyse my research questions. From my own experience, I know the art world is fundamentally exclusionary, and that there are many seen and unseen barriers in the way of individual/communities engaging with creative, social and cultural spaces. There is a real need for research (and then redressive action) into how marginalised communities are kept out of creative sectors, and the cycle of exclusion this fosters.

As I move beyond this thesis, I am beginning to wonder what would happen if I looked at my own performance art practice through an agential realist lens? In fact, what would happen if I conducted my research *through* my embodied performance art –creating an intra-active art and academic writing practice? How does intersectional feminist knowledge produce itself through me/my body when I enact material-discursive feminist performance art? What specific knowledges could be produced in this process which aren't available to me otherwise? As I begin to imagine this next research topic and what remains unanswered, what I know for sure is this: my body remembers, and I want to find out what she knows.

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