# Age Becomes Her: Redefining the Possibilities of Ageing for Women (Through Scarred Aged Skin and the Material Body)

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PhD 2019

# Age Becomes Her: Redefining the Possibilities of Ageing for Women (Through Scarred Aged Skin and the Material Body)

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Manchester Metropolitan University

2019

## Abstract

The (art) world is marked by a void into which scarred, post-menopausal women arguably disappear. The display of scarred, aged female bodies is still largely unacceptable in Western culture, which denies women the beauty and eroticism ceded to old men. Cultural narratives and representations of ageing have produced us as disadvantaged and overlooked subjects.

This feminist investigation into representations of these specific female bodies explores the possibilities for re-imagining and transforming ideas for becoming and ways of seeing as woman and artist. It develops through a series of sculptures, drawings, live and documented performances that have closely explored the underrepresented area of aged and scarred skin. The whole project constitutes transformative interrogations of postmenopausal body surfaces. Interwoven with this is an examination of the aesthetics and cultural narratives of illness with a focus on the scarring left after treatment for breast cancer. The work investigates becoming and accumulating as well as loss and decay.

Artists and theorists together provided me with a strategy for representation and analysis of becoming in scarred postmenopausal woman. I am working along a continuum between theory and practice negotiated with the help of polarities adapted from those used by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

My thesis deploys a theoretical toolbox to analyse and a conceptual framework to extend my experimental practice. Relevant concepts include Deleuze and Guattari's assemblages, deterritorialisation and becoming; Deleuze's Baroque fold (after Gottfried Leibniz); Judith Butler’s performativity; Kathy O'Dell's masochistic contract; Joanna Frueh's Monster Beauty and Anca Cristofovici's potential monumentalism.

My work brings a radical expansion to the small body of artists working in the field of representing the ageing female body. Mine is the only work that is about both the

ageing process and the inscriptions on the body from breast cancer surgery. As far as I know I am the first person to use the polarities of Deleuze and Guattari as a theoretical tool in understanding the particular creative flow between the virtual and actual in practice. My approach to humour, beauty and eroticism in illness and ageing is unique in that it takes the erotic old woman seriously combining attention to formal aesthetics with anarchic humour.

**Keywords**:
Feminism, Ageism, Breast cancer, Scarring, Skin, Performance art, Sculpture, Drawing, Material, Surgical aesthetics.

# Acknowledgements and Thanks

Firstly I would like to thank those who came before me and after me in the sisterhood of breast cancer, some of whom are now lost: my mother, who is my inspiration for everything, my sisters Anna and Basia of another mother, all linked by this disease as well as by love and a father (who is another project); the lovely Petra Bucheggar who helped me when we simultaneously discovered the lumps that killed her; my NHS collaborators; my friend and collaborator Veronica Calarco and my beautiful supportive sons, Robert (for the page numbers!) and Brendan.

Particular thanks for academic and intellectual support go to my supervisors Fionna Barber - brilliant, mischievous and tolerant, Amanda Ravetz who put me on the right track and Brigitte Jurack who told me what was what and made me laugh, and Patricia Allmer who was a joy before she went on to Edinburgh - all of you have encouraged and supported me with guidance, references and understanding.

The wonderful and generous Anna Powell has given me time and help to try and navigate the unfolding whorls of Deleuze and Guattari, thoughtfully setting up a D&G reading group just at the time our mutual reading of The Fold was coming to an end – a mind expanding friend!

Thanks to Myna Trystham for finding Frances Williams to swap chapters and share the experience with, and Frances for her insight and encouragement.

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# Introduction

This research is part of a much wider political engagement by postmenopausal women who demand to be seen and heard, and to receive equality of treatment in their representation and their lives. The context is the limited and derogatory ways scarred older women, often notable by their absence in art and popular culture, are represented. I explore these cultural issues and demonstrate the ways that my artistic practice engages with them, and at the same time, works as a repetitive, transformative and performative irritant within ongoing cultural production in support of this revolution.

My project develops across my series of artworks between 2012 and 2018. The subject is scarring by breast cancer, which I have personally experienced, and becoming old as a postmenopausal feminist artist. I explore scarring from breast cancer, and include all the folds, textures, marks and inscriptions of age in the term 'scarring'. I ask what it feels like, how others see me (if they see me) and what might I be becoming? To help in my enquiry I develop a framework of theories and methodological approaches, drawing in particular on polarities, assemblages and deterritorialisations of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the Baroque folds of Deleuze (after Leibniz) (Deleuze, 1988), Kathy O'Dell's 'contract with the skin' (O'Dell, 1998), the monster beauty of Joanna Frueh, (2002) and Anca Cristofovici's monumentality (2009). I used these approaches in a manner best described by Foucault scholar David Garland as a 'toolbox of more or less useful instruments, each conceptual tool designed as a means of working on specific problems' (Garland, 2014: 336). The literature review is interwoven in the chapters where appropriate to support my enquiry.

At the beginning of the research I formulated the following questions:

1. How can contemporary forms of representation (sculpture, photography, performance) achieve performative transformations of the scarred, aged female body?

2. How can new representations challenge existing models of constructed identity in embodied performance and sculptural installations to address the visual history of ageing for women as one of invisibility?

3. Why is the representation of scarred, aged, women, seen as objects of desire and desiring subjects, taboo?

4. Why are my focal women, as Tracy Fitzpatrick describes in the exhibition catalogue of *Hannah Wilke: Gestures* (2009), seen as abject, rather than beautiful?

5. How are western ideologies challenged when scarred, aged skin is re-presented as erotic, beautiful or other currently socially and artistically unacceptable ways?

During my research these questions expanded into an overarching question: What is it to be becoming a scarred, postmenopausal artist? What is happening to me, and what am I doing? I move between polarities, of experience and expression, openness and intention. The movement is rhizomatic. I am using the term 'rhizome' in the way that Deleuze and Guattari use it when speaking about Kafka's story 'The Burrow' where 'his work lacks the usual linear narrative structure and can be 'entered' into at any point to map out connections with other points' (Young et al., 2013: 262) .

I am experimenting with new methods and responding to the challenges of defining and imagining new subjectivities as an artist/activist. In doing so I produce a collection of tools and strategies for thought and action.

Images of sculptures, drawings, performances and photographs that comprise my practice-based research are interspersed throughout the text. The visual research is always developing and unfolding, a materially-led state of becoming that reflects the changes in my own body (from post-surgery absence to reconstructed breast; the changes in the skin brought about by menopause and the ageing body) and the changes demanded by new ways of working unfolding from the various strands of this research. When I began this thesis I decided to include all of my

art from the period of research as part of the experiment, as part of my becoming, and because it would help me to expand my becoming into as many fields of practice as possible.

I identify as a woman and my use of 'women' includes anyone who identifies as a woman. My ‘work’ or ‘artwork’ or ‘practice’ is the objects I make and the process of making them, including performances.

My research has revealed a significant gap in visual representations of scarred, older (post-menopausal) women. The search demonstrates that a more confining and limited set of stereotypes is applied to older women than is applied to young, fertile women and older men (Woodwood, 1999; Faircloth, 2003; Vlänne, 2012). When scarring is added in a search engine it becomes difficult to find anything at all. My art work from 2011 to 2019 thus adds a unique perspective to the small body of artists working in this field, some of whom I include in my thesis and others whose work lies beyond my present scope. As far as I know I am the first person to use the polarities of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as a theoretical tool to understand the creative process between the virtual and actual in practice. Mine is the only work that is about both the ageing process and the inscriptions on the body from breast cancer surgery. My approach to humour and eroticism in illness and ageing is unique. Other artists have worked on similar areas but in different combinations. Clarity Haynes has made paintings of aged women who have had breast cancer surgery. Annie Sprinkle with her partner Elizabeth Stephens and Sam Taylor-Johnson have made work about their own experiences of breast cancer. The Live Art Development Agency (LADA) directed by Lois Keidan actively supports performance art initiatives about feminist ageing, in particular the *Old Dears* project (2015) and *Rocio Boliver Workshop* (2015). Other artists have made work about their ageing selves, like Joan Semmel's self-portraits in *Joan Semmel: New Work* (2016), which also radically critique the canonical representations of age and femininity such as the ‘old and crooked’ (Otto Dix: *Old Couple* 1920, *Old Woman, Vanitas* 1932 Albrecht Durer) and the ‘old and wise’ (Antic and Roman, Christian and other world religions).

The ideas of performative transformation are discussed through notions of ‘becoming’ (Braidotti, 1994; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Rosi Braidotti emphasizes the importance of knowing what we want to become rather than who we are, and learning ‘how to represent mutations, changes and transformations, rather than Being in its classical modes’ (Braidotti, 2002: 2). I embrace Braidotti's idea of the ‘figuration’ that is a ‘politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity’ (Braidotti, 1994: 1) via my intention for the figure and the ground of my artistic practice. However it is difficult to *definitively know* what I want to become, and I prefer to focus on *identifying possibilities* for becoming through artistic production. My aim in this enquiry has been to work outside of or beyond intention as much as possible. This is because I do not always know what I want to become, and I fear that an intention for becoming, necessarily (de)formed by my cultural conditioning, might make it more difficult for me to notice and identify strategies and possibilities for becoming when they arise.

This strategy and way of working is particularly suited to artistic production as originally identified by the Surrealists in their attempts to access the unconscious in the production of new ideas and ways of living through art. I reclaim Surrealism (and Dada) as a feminist practice in seeking to engage the irrational material of the imagination in order to obtain new and surprising results. I honour previously neglected women Surrealists (and Dadaists) and extend their practice, including in imaginary collaboration with them (Chapter three). By 'questioning and subverting this genre...to inscribe the female artist into [it] (Allmer, 2009: 16) the artist can become not only 'her own subject (as opposed to object) (Slinger, 2008, cited in Allmer, 2009: 16), but her own muse.

Stacy Alaimo and Susan Heckman in their collection *Material Feminisms* (2008) question the postmodern dichotomy of language/reality that they believe privileges language and pushes material reality towards invisibility (Casper and Moore, 2009). This invisible reality would be female, in the gendered division that they believe can be applied to all such dichotomies. In Alaimo and Heckman, the personal, political and the material world are woven together. My own approach to artistic practice stresses that I am not engaging in the dichotomy of positive representation against the negative ones of ageing that I am fighting. I refuse to limit myself to this narrow binary arena where I would necessarily be

disadvantaged (see Chapter three for examples). However, I find that I cannot always leave binaries such as old/young, visible/invisible, male/female behind, and that they may be a motivational force (Chapter five). I include both negative and positive possibilities, and expand upon them in an experimental, unfolding becoming of scarred old age up until death.

I use Deleuze's writing on the Baroque fold (after Liebniz) in my thinking about the skin, feeling from the outside in, and the inside out. Chapter one gives the background of tactile work, mediated through material especially rubber and made in haptic responses to the cultural context of images and treatment of scarred old women. I develop the idea of the 'encounter,' (Deleuze, 1994; O'Sullivan, 2006) which is fundamental to my practice and will sometimes unfold into confrontation. Here I introduce the subject of breast cancer and surgery and begin to explicate and expand my use of assemblages, performativity and repetition in my deterritorialisation of the hospital. The past is experienced in an immediate way, through tactile experience such as touch and smell and unprocessed traumatic memories. The polarities are from the intensive spectra; 'irrational-rational'; 'folding-unfolding' and 'enclosing-revealing', connecting with and feeling the world, informing my art practice and process of making. I think and make through the skin and with the skin (Ahmed and Stacey, 2001).

In Chapter Two I consider artists who created art about illness and scarring and compare it to my own approach and becoming, touching on the aesthetics and cultural narratives of illness. As an artist I am interested in the aesthetic implications of surgery, and abandon any yearnings towards the 'aesthetic melancholy [of the] paralytically perfect image [of the Western ideal]...that isolate[s] us in our own obsessional anguish about loss - of beauty and youth, and of life itself' (Frueh, 2002: 1-2). I explore the sexuality of the aged and diseased body through the healthy narcissism of Joanna Frueh's 'monster beauty' (2002):

> *Monster/beauty is the flawed and touchable, touching and smellable, vocal and mobile body that, by exceeding the merely visible, manifests a highly articulated sensual presence (Frueh, 2002: 2).*

The sensual, experienced body described by Frueh (2002) offers a way to live and express my becoming unbounded by the restrictions that were oppressing me and limiting my imagination. I felt that my body and skin were sculpted and inscribed (Connor, 2001) by someone other than me and noticed that most theorists are not interested in the skin or body undergoing such inscriptions, but in who does the inscription and why (Lodder, 2010). My creative expansion from this position uses polarities including 'desire-narcissism'; 'figure-ground'; 'ugly-beautiful'; and 'destruction-creation'. The project begins to unfold beyond the therapeutic environment, extending the deterritorialisations into the museum and woodland.

The relationship with selected works from art history has become an important method crucial in my artistic process developed in Chapter three. I see this relationship as an imaginative collaboration with those artists via my own artistic response in the kind of performative repetitive transformation proposed by Judith Butler. The past joins the assemblage as I meet first Carolee Schneemann and her *Interior Scroll* (1975) and then Henry Fuseli and my muse Anticleia in *Tiresias Foretells the Future to Odysseus* (1800). It is through such re-iterative investigations made in a visual dialogue and collaboration with artists from the past, that I believe transformations in visual perception can become possible (Papastergiadis, 1999; Butler, 1999; Cristofovici, 2009), together with new imaginings often derived from site specific contexts, and through working with others.

Chapter four moves outwards, in extensive, unfolding polarities such as 'imperceptible-perceptible' and 'political thought-political action'. I focus on performance elements related to happening. I encounter pain and the masochistic contract (O'Dell, 1988) as a new strategy for transforming myself and the audience. I form with others a new artists' collective that explores humour and protest, alternative beauty, becoming a subject and producing ourselves.

I consider representation in Chapter five as I continue to expand in scale and scope, introducing my new strategy of becoming-monumental (Cristofovici, 2009) and developing ideas of the erotic. I appropriate dichotomies. The polarities are 'invisible-visible'; 'experimentation-intension (message)'; 'monumentalism-diminution'; and 'erotic-symbolic'.

My artistic practice aims to work outside of verbal language, beyond what I know, or think I know, through artistic action and making. First I think in terms of representation and then move into another register – without language. My ideas come when 'something in the world forces us to think' (Deleuze, 1994: 139). The material world is the catalyst for thought, my inspiration and my succour. I go to my studio already within a set of contexts, values, ideas and assumptions, however much I may try to escape them with surrealistic and other ploys. This is the struggle, the tension through which the practice will emerge, a place of working whose fundamental roots are described by Kristeva in her book on abjection, *Powers of Horror* (1982) where the researcher may situate herself somewhere that is 'essentially divisible, foldable and catastrophic', [a creative and mutable place where the artist/originator can devise] 'territories, languages, works' (Kristeva, 1982: 8).

The creative, innovative and generative process described above can be seen (Barrett and Bolt, 2010) as producing knowledge. Content, form and function may be ascertained through critical analysis; at exhibition; and through critical and audience response. However, certain transformations, caused by an encounter with my art will unfold over time, often years later. Being situated in the body/mind continuum, it might be difficult to attribute to a particular source with accuracy.

My project is generative in that it grows and develops from itself. The trajectory of the research is dependent on what emerges in the studio (or the site where I am making the work) and the decisions and choices arising out of those results and my reflections and responses to them. It is personal in the sense applied by Polanyi who 'opposes the personal to the subjective. Whereas the subjective deals with passive feelings, the personal implies an active striving and intellectual consciousness ' (Coessens, 2009: 71).

## Polarities

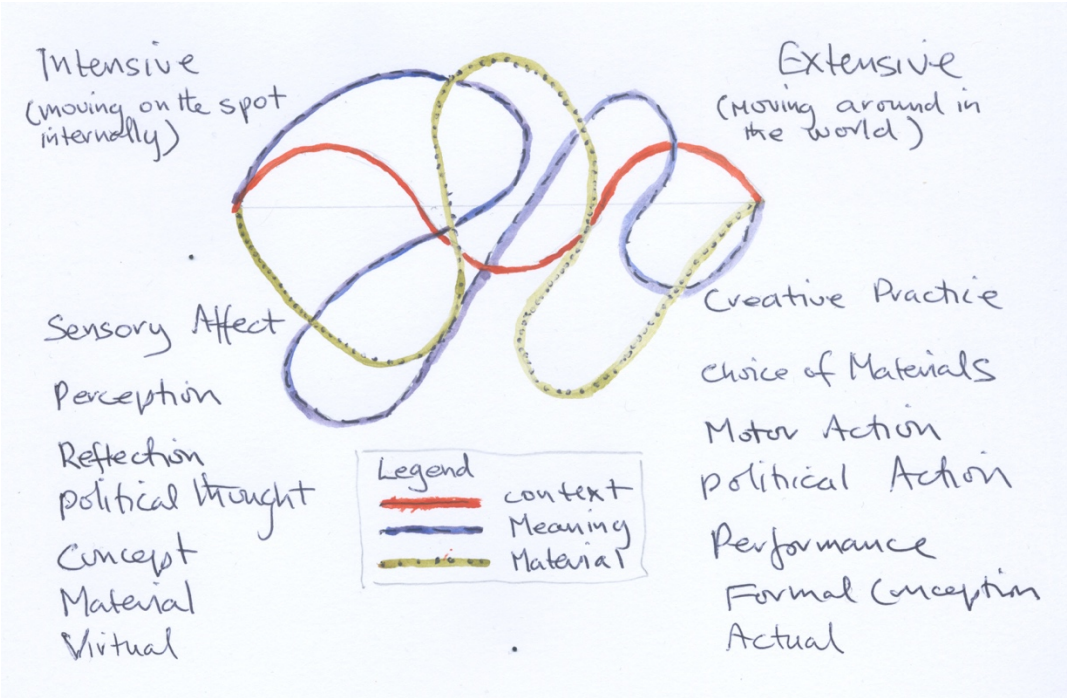


*Figure 1 Map of Conceptual Methodology*

Polarities describe the tension in my work where I veer between trying to make sense of the world and express a political position to an imaginative exploration of what that position could be, what it might look and feel like, and what it might become. My diagrams of polarities occur throughout the research and are inspired by Deleuze's (1988) diagrams after Leibniz's writing on the Baroque fold. I extended their remit during this research as a tool for illustrating and comprehending the fluid, dynamic, sometimes contradictory contingency of my process. They helped me reconcile some of the conflict I experience between my political imperatives (often driven by binaries such as male/female, old/young, visible/invisible) and the speculative, experimental openness I employ in trying to apprehend and express my becoming.

Figure 1 is an initial overview of the mapping, a starter diagram with a selection of polarities, which change as the research develops. The polarities can be folded in any place and in any direction and are without fixed points - unlike dichotomies. Intensive poles are on the left, extensive on the right, but elements at either end might move to their polar opposite. Deleuze and Guattari do not insist on taking one fixed position. Political choice happens after thought and analysis; what does

this specific situation demand, what is the appropriate choice for this set of circumstances (reconsidering position, choosing method, materials, theme, direction for this specific work). Deleuze and Guattari prefer case studies and examples, rather than a didactic programme of rules or choosing a side. They insist on analysis first to inform decisive praxis. That is why they choose lines rather than points, they will not come to the point. Rather they choose the processual middle:

> *A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement. A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get it by the middle (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 342).*

One of the key polarities in my research is one whose poles I have called political thought-political practice, where I try to understand and reconcile the binaries (that are fixed, not fluid) that underpin the didactic force driving me to expose social injustice and facilitate change. It is the polarity that provides much of the energy in the assemblages of deterritorialisation in my art events - the lines of flight away from being trapped in the negative binaries operating against scarred post-menopausal women, and conversely, lines of flight away from being stuck within the limits of my own political vision and mission:

> *A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 342).*

The legend indicates that context and meaning can flow and change in emphasis, the material and body shifting and contingent, yet ever present.

My project seeks to envision a kind of (sexually and intellectually) empowered body, post-operatively re-born (becoming). It engages a visualisation of the invisible, creating work that contains the possibility of transposing the problem of ageing for women into another form, one with more potential and promise. My personal strategies for becoming are made available for encounter in a final conclusion which serves as 'toolbox' for change for the reader.

# Chapter one: Feeling Your (My) Age: Materials and the Tactile

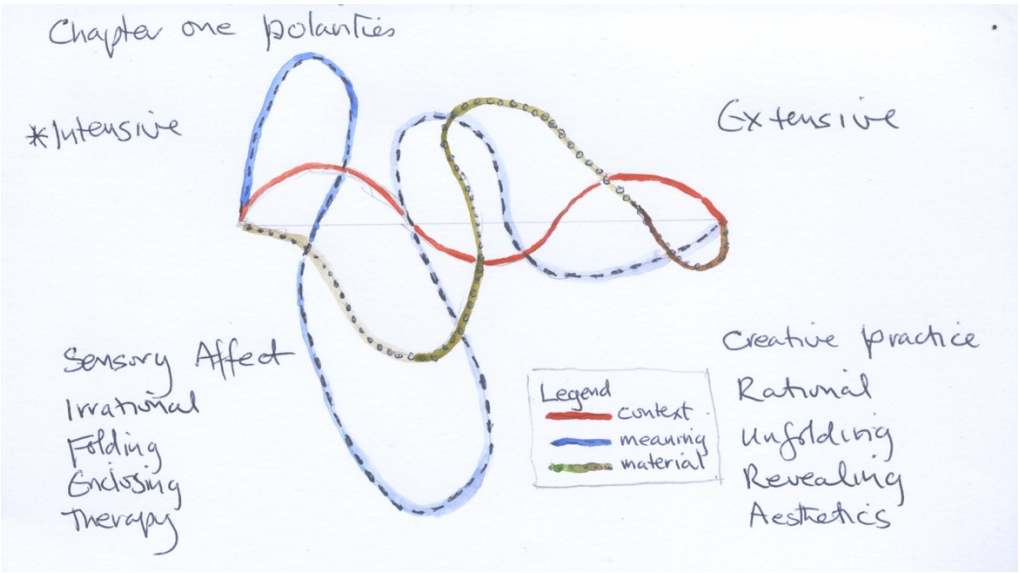


*Figure 2 Map of polarities*

## 1.1. Skin, Touch and the Material

This chapter on the material in my artwork is focussed at the intensive and experimental ends of the polarities, as opposed to the more activist, political ends that come closer to dichotomies and opposition. Chapters four and five shift towards the more activist, political ends of the polarities. However as shown in the examples illustrating the tactile properties of rubber and skin below, the political is never far my mind and the movement across and within the polarities continues to be fluid and interchanging.

I also demonstrate the effectiveness of haptic and expressive art in engaging with audiences in bodily ways that can bypass and penetrate social and cultural barriers designed to protect people from thinking and changing (Jones, 1998; Vasseleu, 2009).

The series of work discussed in this chapter, *Before and After* (Zyborska, 2012) comprises sculptural works in rubber, drawings, collaborative photographs made with photographer Glyn Davies, and a performance accompanied by live music

written and performed by Ann Matthews. *Before and After* (Zyborska, 2012) is about the scarring of breast cancer on my ageing body, and my approach to materials. It explores the state of being after clinical surgery for breast cancer, and before elective reconstruction surgery. My context is personal in a family touched by breast cancer and medicine. To begin, I describe the importance of my media (particularly rubber) in an introductory background on materials, the tactile and surreal expression in my process. I am working with the idea of all thought originating from an 'encounter' with 'something in the world':

> *Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter (Deleuze, 1994: 139).*

It is such fundamental encounters (O'Sullivan, 2006) with art that make it transformational. According to O'Sullivan art creates a crack in the world and another world is created, we are 'forced to thought', and fundamentally changed by the encounter – this is the creative moment between the assemblage of artist, artwork and viewer, a deterritorialisation (defined in section 1.7. below) of the place of this encounter. In this scenario, if all art changes the person who encounters it (O'Sullivan 2006: 2), I would assert that affect and the tactile could magnify that encounter. The materials must come first because that is where everything begins. As mentioned in the introduction, these tactile encounters can be confrontational, especially when the art is deliberately provocative.

## 1.2. Materials

Through my media I explore the possibilities, the becoming, the re-defining of scarred post-menopausal women and myself. Since 1999 the material I use for a lot of my sculptures is recycled rubber tubes from bicycle tubes to big tractor and earthmover tubes, very heavy and industrial. Rubber is a medium that demonstrate the fundamental, generative nature of matter to me as an artist, where the medium can be the origin of and catalyst for ideas and action. My body is also included as a material or medium, specifically an ageing female body that has had breast cancer. During the period of research, 2012 - 2019, the body became preeminent, almost changing places with the rubber.

My encounter with the materials I use is fundamental to what emerges. My understanding of this process is underpinned with ideas from the heterogenous school of thought known as 'new materialism' in terms of ‘matter mattering’ (Barad, 2003, cited in Alaimo and Hekman, 2008:120). Barad relates matter to a 'sharpened' form of performativity, that 'allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming' (Barad, 2003, cited in Alaimo and Hekman, 2008:122). My initial inspirational 'encounter' is with my materials such as rubber and my own body and skin. I see this lived experience as a ‘becoming’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Braidotti, 2002), a mutable process rather than a fixed identity. The recycled rubber comes loaded with many meanings and transformations in its journey from tree sap to inner tube, and undergoes yet another transformation in my hands, together with me. The associations of rubber are mainly tactile ones, from sticky latex running down the tree bark, to the mysterious alchemy of the vulcanisation process in the factory, the smell of warm rubber, the soft flaccid empty tubes and the rigid air filled bladders of the inflated tube, inviting touch.

My practice, which to me is visual and bodily thinking, is expressing how it feels to be subject to the ageing processes, physical and cultural, as they are happening, to myself and others and drawing attention to alternative ways of becoming aged. The recycled rubber tubes can be seen as skin - aged skin in the way I use them. Skin has a very literal and material reality for me as well as being one of the social constructs producing me as subject even as I try to explore and define that subjectivity.

## 1.3. Material Background

I like to use found objects and source tubes that are too old and damaged to be re-used for their original purpose. I choose tubes that are marked by age and use, seeking out patches, logos, textured patterns in the rubber, and those tubes that have rust imbedded in their edges from a corroded steel hub. The markings add incident, character and patina.

The visceral materiality and disruption that I encountered when using found materials to make new work about 'the road' made me consider them in the

*Figure 3 Inner tubes: detail 2015*

light of the ideas and feelings that they come loaded with. Of all the materials I used (tar, stones, bracken, wood, roadside flowers), it was rubber that stayed with me because it was so weighed down with associations. I often appropriate 'masculine' ideas and materials and use 'feminine' textile methods of making, and I was interested to find that many people think my work has been made by a man, and are sometimes shocked that it has not been, mainly because of the materials I have embraced and the way that we interact. The cultural and emotional importance of materials can be demonstrated partly by the way people assign gender to them, even when they are not being used in a gender specific way.

The shocked and sometimes disbelieving response to this perceived disjunction between artist and her material seems to be magnified in the recent work for this research when audiences perceived that I am not only a woman, but an old woman - whilst to me the barriers between artist and media become ever more ambiguous.

*Figure 4 Rubber surface detail 2012*

As I age, I have become even more attached to signs of wear and tear and age in the medium.

*Figure 5 patched tubes detail. 2012*

The patches are like nipples or scars.  Sometimes I turn the tubes inside out,

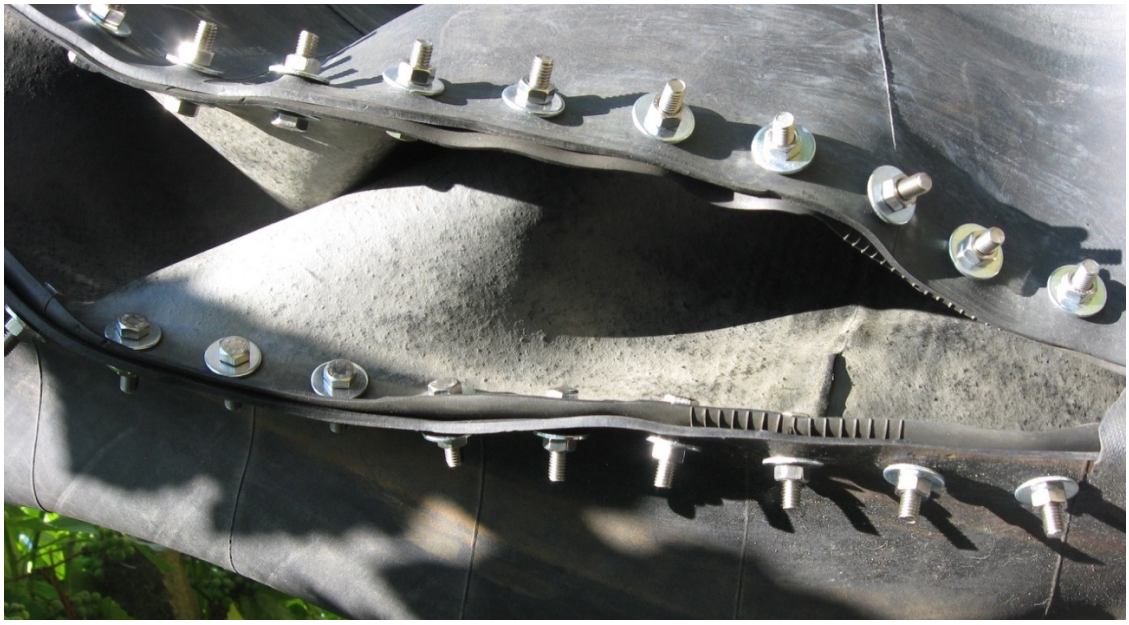

*Figure 6 Inner tube detail showing powdery lining. 2008*

for a softer, powdery, more vulnerable looking skin-like surface.

## 1.4. Assemblages

One of the tactile meanings the tubes bring with them might be memories of play as a child if lucky enough to have a large inner tube that still held air.

*Figure 7 Stock image.*

Apart from the industrial or childhood associations coming from its use, rubber has a less well known bloody history of exploitation in the collection of the raw

material, organic plant sap, in the colonies of the 19th century empires, such as the Congo or Peru (Hochschild, 1999; Vargos Llosa, 2012).

*Figure 8 Zyborska, W. (2018) H M Stanley statue re-veiling, Denbigh*

I have made activist work about this history, in an annual protest performance that criticizes the contemporary whitewashing of colonial atrocities in the history of the Congo. In this a group of fellow artist/activists and I re-veil a bronze sculpture of the imperialist Henry Morton Stanley with a rubber 'condom'. I mention this performance because it demonstrates in a literal way the meanings that materials can be loaded with, tangible and visceral.

Rubber manifests the colonial history of exploitation and cruelty along with the connections referred to above. It is both the commodity and the metaphor for the place (the human body) where this is acted out. There is something implicit, immanent, intrinsic to the material. The rubber is a kind of membrane and permeable, vulnerable and protective at the same time, like skin. I extend my own

battered, lived in skin into the rubber and transform it. Together we unfold into an assemblage that is always becoming. Assemblage is a term used by Guattari originally to extend the concept of the 'group' beyond what he saw as its individualist and socially defined limitations:

> *Assemblages may involve individuals but also functions, machines, diverse semiotic systems. It is only by taking desiring machines ...to a point prior to the group and the individual...- that we will succeed in misarticulating mass-produced institutional structures, and in giving marginal positions of desire the possibility of freeing themselves from neurotic impasses (Guattari, cited in Young et al., 2013: 34-35).*

I am using the assemblage in the sense that it can mean both group and/or individual plus 'non-human, machinic elements (in) the collective mix' (Young et al., 2013:34) that would include materials. I am also considering the provisional nature of the assemblage - it is a process, an event, not an accumulation of things or people. Deleuze & Guattari (1987: 306) are interested in how it came to be, rather than what it has become, since it is always still becoming. This functions as a conceptual tool for my artistic practices, encompassing as it does the originating function of the materials, the collaborative nature of much of the work, and the contexts and concepts that together constitute what is emerging or becoming.

In every project or individual artwork the assemblage will change in emphasis or composition. People are often surprised to find it is me who made this sculpture and this performance. It subverts their expectations of the behaviour of a post-menopausal woman: some have looked at my hands and said, 'how could these hands have made that?'. I wonder if male sculptors have comments made about their hands in terms of capacity to do the work. How would they respond to people assuming they did not make their work?


*Figure 9 Zyborska, W. (2012) Disruption 2, Swansea*

Audience members touch my sculptures, sometimes quite violently, suggesting that they can't help themselves, the tactile material encourages transgression. Although this response can cause effects that I do not welcome, I myself feel transgressive in the conceiving and making of the works, and welcome the spirit of such actions. During the performance at *Disruption 2* (2012) in Swansea (Figure 9), the boy pictured tried to push me over when the third part of my performance, *Death* was very still.[1] I (deliberately) failed to respond to his attempts to interact, resulting in the disruption of my (disruptive) performance and me clinging to a doorframe. The boy was twelve and strong.

People want to be moved by art, but they don't always enjoy its condition, the impact it may have on them. This can include the artist herself. It is hard to predict the changes it sets in motion, the way it will act on someone over time, because of the different experiences, memories and associations that they bring with them to their reading and experience of it. However, the important thing is that it does set changes in motion, it is more about transformation than transgression. The above is not an isolated incident, just a singular one. At the same event a (drunk) man tried to enter my sculpture/skin (Figure 10), leaning into the void I was making and breathing beer fumes into my balaclava covered face,

[1] The first two sections of the performance 1. *Birth* and 2. *Life* – were both very active and extensive, and he thoroughly enjoyed and engaged with them. 3. *Death* – was passive, contained and intensive, which irritated him and provoked his aggression. See Chapter five for a similar response to my work on a larger scale.

very close. I stroked his cheek gently. There was a brief, tender moment where he seemed to let his guard down and join the assemblage, before he reared backwards and began to kick me. Most interactions are not so immediate and overt, they may be almost imperceptible and unfold over a lifetime. I deploy very different 'stagings' – both private and public – across sculpture, photographic documentation and films. These invite different levels and types of response and participation.

*Figure 10 Zyborska, W. (2012) Disruption 2, Swansea*

I am thinking about the art work as a repetitious series, all part of the same continuum. I am not necessarily claiming some sort of chronological progress in my visual process, more a repetition of the sort of fluid folds described by Deleuze, that my effort 'changes over and again' (Deleuze, 1994:6). Art performances such as these use tactile materials in an accumulative, affective process such that:

> *persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collectivized bodies) with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm (Seigworth & Gregg, 2009:7).*

Expressive, tactile artworks will always provide affective encounters for an audience, and therefore the conditions for transformation. In her preface to

*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999) Judith Butler wrote:

> *The point was not to prescribe a new gendered way of life that might then serve as a model for readers of the text. Rather, the aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realised (Butler, 1999:viii).*

My intention was to utilise Butler's ideas of performativity as another tool in the re-forming and subversion of gendered categories of ageing, in this case by re-imagining the post-menopausal, scarred female subject in tactile art and performance, to see what might happen. Clare Johnson (2010) discusses Butler's:

> *genealogical notion of performance as the bringing into being of ideas, rather than the search for origins. Read through Butler's challenge to identity as substance, the bodies of both artists [in this case Carolee Schneemann and Tracey Emin] can be understood as contingent and constituted in the temporality of "becoming" rather than "Being" (Johnson, 2010: 269-270).*

This brings together the contingency and mutability of 'becoming' with the creative possibilities of performativity.

## 1.5. *Before and After* (2012) and Breast Cancer.

The first series of work made specifically for this research and discussed in this chapter, *Before and After* (Zyborska, 2012) came out of my need to process the period of five years between having treatment for breast cancer (a lumpectomy followed by a mastectomy, radiation and chemotherapy) and, although ambivalent about it, finally opting for elective reconstruction surgery, where a breast shape was created from skin, fat and blood vessels taken from my stomach and re-sited where the breast had been. This is the most radical and complex form of reconstruction, involving (in my case) twelve hours of surgery, and I chose it

because the alternative[2] would compromise the muscles in my back needed for my sculpture and performances.

I experienced a need to think visually about what this transition could mean to me as a post-menopausal woman. The first years of my menopause were chemically induced because the cancer was hormone dependent. I had lost control over the shape and processes of my body. Beyond that, this was not a new trauma for me. I had a lifetime of thinking about the treatment of breast cancer and living with its effects since my single parent mother's diagnosis when I was fourteen until her death two years later. I had been made aware of my body as matter, mutable and vulnerable, transforming in dangerous ways that had to be countered by further derangements in which I could (sometimes) take an active part. My instinctive response had been to go with it, to join in with the process as much as possible. Now was the time to reflect on any outcomes and see where it would take me as a focus for a sustained practice.

I had always been fascinated by surgery, and consider surgeons to be a kind of sculptor (Adams, 1997). I grew up reading my mother's medical books (she was a doctor) and looking at the pictures, particularly of skin diseases, before and after treatment. I appropriated all my treatment into an art work from the beginning, documenting it as a performance in which the health service operatives, equipment and venues took part, thus becoming part of an assemblage. Some of the people involved engaged fully with me, aware that it might be contributing to my wellbeing, and was possibly therapeutic. In addition some of them wanted to look at what I was doing and even found it useful in their work. The surgeons doing an amendment to the reconstruction (such additional surgeries are frequently needed) uploaded one of my drawings into their computer to use during surgery, and were so pleased with it as a helpful tool that they wheeled me in and showed it to me on the screen before commencing the operation. Rhian Solomon makes a link between techniques of plastic surgery and pattern cutting for fashion

[2] The simpler alternative uses latissimus dorsi: a muscle in the back next to the shoulder blade, which is swung around to the front of the chest.

(Solomon, 2013, cited in Ravetz et al., 2013), referencing a positive and conscious collaboration between disciplines, in contrast to the unwanted damage and distress that can result from unacknowledged cultural influences on surgical decisions (Adams, 1997) (Braun, 2009).

I brought the drawing to a pre-op meeting with surgeons because I couldn't be sure they would understand my verbal explanation of what I wanted. The drawing could communicate better than I could but I was surprised how useful they found it. All my drawings of this period had cancer cells in the background. Thus the main subject of the drawings from my point of view was the ground, not the figure, as discussed below. I did not make it for a medical purpose, rather, I was exploring how I felt and what was happening to me. This was just an unexpected outcome of this experiment and an example of the varied and unpredictable effects that art might have.

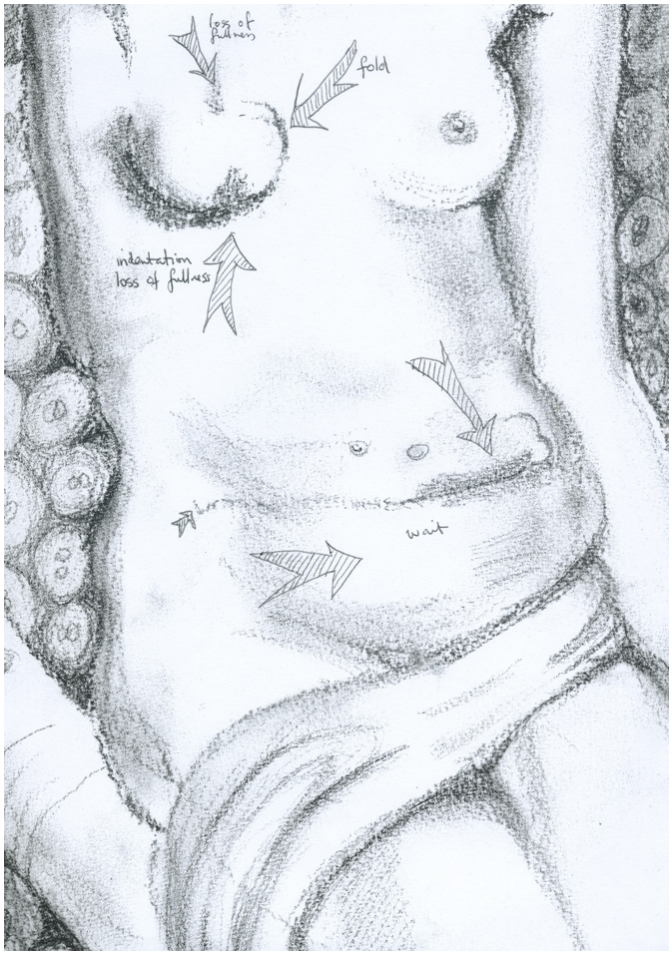


*Figure 11 Zyborska, W. 2012. Drawing about my altered body with added notes for the surgeons*

I was delighted to have the chance to look around the operating room and see the advanced and intriguing equipment and machines without being knocked out in the anti-chamber as usually happens. It made me feel important and part of the process. They wanted me to give the trainee and existing surgeons drawing lessons as an aid to communication and explanation (I regretfully did not take this up due to lack of time and the travel involved).

This relationship with the surgeons was very different from those Orlan had in her operation-performances in *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan* (1990-93). She was in complete control of the theatre, decorating it, dressing the surgeons and staff in designer clothes, the whole initiated and orchestrated by herself as a live performance while she made drawings in her own blood. Any flesh removed during surgery was retained by herself and made into reliquaries that were sold and exhibited as: 'her body is a factory, her flesh its product' (Ince, 2000: 48). In a manifesto, she wrote: 'carnal art opens 'a new Narcissistic space which is not lost in its own reflection'...So I can see my own body open and without suffering!' (Orlan, cited in Ince, 2000: 49).

Unlike Orlan my surgery was imposed on me by a life threatening disease, my artistic interventions were a low tech, opportunist response using what came to hand, an attempt to infiltrate and engage with what was happening to me, whilst not in control of the opening and transformation of my body. Orlan invaded the hospital with a full team of assistants, and was conscious looking into the baroque folds of the interior of her body through *'The second mouth'* (1993). I look at the scars and inscriptions left behind, the reminders of what was inside and is now removed, the portals to the 'irremediably fragmented body composed of organs, tissue and muscle' (Ince, 2000: 52). My project is closer in practice to the *Breast Cancer Project* (2005) of Annie Sprinkle and Elizabeth Stephens, who documented Sprinkle's lumpectomy (involving her anaesthetist in taking photographs) and like me photographed her chemo sessions and shaving her head, although they were not focussed on ageing or the scars or changes in the body after the event, as I am.

*Figure 12 Zyborska, W. (2012) post-surgery photograph, Whiston Hospital, Merseyside*

Sprinkle and her partner Elizabeth Stephens claimed to have invented 'a new genre of photography, cancer erotica' (Stephens and Sprinkle, 2011). They included the *Breast Cancer Project* as part of their *Love Art Lab* (2011), set up to 'explore, generate, and celebrate love' (Stephens and Sprinkle, 2011). I focus on eroticism and illness in Chapter two, as well as the links between eroticism, illness and ageing with the playfulness and humour that Stephens and Sprinkle brought to their *Breast Cancer Project*.

In *Before and After* (2102) I made my own second skin, with mouth that I could emerge and unfold from (Figure 13) in a performative repetition, entering and then leaving the interior of my sculpture in a re-enactment of the penetration of my body by the surgery, giving birth to my own transformed body.

*Figure 13 Zyborska, W. (2012) Before and After. Photograph Glyn Davies*

## 1.6. Deterritorialising the Hospital

Through turning the surgery and other clinical events into art and performance I was able to empower myself and engage performatively with non-art audiences/fellow collaborators. The distinction between art and science, patient and surgeon was blurred. We were an art-making assemblage. I had considered my first surgeon to be an outsider artist, sculpting in secret, but the plastic surgeon is acknowledged as a creator, even if relegated to repeating the norm. Thus the whole experience became an encounter, one of becoming scarred and older, but also engaged in meaningful ways with non-art audience and health professionals - re-imagined into an art event, and a different form of (re)presenting myself (and therefore being and becoming) as post-menopausal woman and patient. By

documenting it photographically it can be repeated performatively with different audiences offering new iterations and possibilities for change.

Deleuze and Guattari (1977) see people as territorial creatures, not from some internal drive, but as 'a seizure and assemblage of …exterior forces' (Young et al., 2013:307) in which:

> *The animal or human being acts (individually or in Groups) on these phenomena in order to establish itself in its environment, to create a border between inside and outside…its actual function is expressiveness. This locates territorialisation as the origin of art and music…[if it opens on to other assemblages (my paraphrase)]... when expressiveness no longer functions strictly for the territory but expresses a becoming – a loss or change of function – it is deterritorialised (Young et al., 2013:307).*

Both mastectomy and the menopause involve loss and change of function, and have many negative effects and implications. Through opening these experiences into tactile art I could experience and express this becoming as spontaneous assemblages with institutions and people, in a less stereotyped and limiting way than is currently imposed by our society . Deterritorialisation thus takes place (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The hospital becomes my studio where some kind of power, creative and self-generated, can be enacted and tested. The hospital also becomes a place to consider the nature of 'acting' and 'political representation'. Later, the studio becomes a place where I can reflect on the hospital encounters and make work that both extends the experience and processes the trauma, allowing it to unfold in a creative assemblage.

Some (few) staff felt threatened by what I was doing, fearful perhaps that I would use my photographs as evidence in compensation litigation. Not all potential collaborators wish to become part of the assemblage (even so they may still be). One nurse who initially refused to help relented when she saw me struggling to twist myself into position in front of a mirror and take photographs at the same time. She took some photos for me and eventually became friendly and engaged with the process, helping me choose the best ones and decide which needed re-taking. The staff were thus audience to the performance and/or sometimes

participants.  Many of the staff were post-menopausal women like me, all at risk of or having experienced the same disease personally or through friends and family.

*Figure 14. Zyborska, W. (2012) Before and After. Photograph Glyn Davies*

I was very ambivalent about whether to have reconstructive surgery, I liked the neatness of my scar but not the lack of wholeness, the prosthesis (uncomfortable with a tendency to fall out during physical activity), the asymmetry.  Pre-reconstruction I felt in tune with a long history of women who had suffered (my mother, St Agatha, American indigenous women whose breasts were removed as trophies), and with women who had transcended and surmounted their condition, such as the Amazon warriors.  Reconstruction felt like a cop-out, giving in to the norm, but I finally allowed myself to do that, because I decided I wanted to, perhaps out of vanity and conformity, partly to see what it was like.

For the photographs I made and used several pod like and enveloping sculptural forms, not unlike vast prosthetic breasts, or indeed tumours. The largest was the installation in my garage that was a total environment, used as a set for the photographs. I put more pods within the womblike installation, and was photographed by Glyn Davies emerging from one of them and draped in the 'arch of hysteria' over another (Figure 17). There were other poses, more heroic, using a growth-like sculpture (Figure 21).

*Figure 15.Wanda Zyborska (2012) Before and After. Photograph Glyn Davies*

## 1.7. Material Aesthetics and Surrealism

In *Before and After* (2012) I was highlighting the scar where my breast used to be, and where the forthcoming reconstruction would take place. This scar was a place of transition, a portal to the inside of my body, closing things in, closing off from where the cancer had begun to unfold. The feeling is intensive, folded, but always with a potential to unfold again. There was an alternative beauty in the scar, in its difference, that I wanted to record. However, this work was equally about the transformations occurring in my ageing body, in the context of my life. The performativity (Barad 2003, cited in Alaimo and Hekman, 2008) in making art can mean that the matter and the representation can become one and the same thing, there is not the mediation of language from the matter of the artwork.

In the photographs this context is literal, if limited to my art work, in that I have placed myself on and within my sculpture, so that I am the figure to its ground. The 'figure' is the object, even an abstract one such as a line or brushstroke, in an artwork that stands out from its surroundings, or 'background'. In art this figure/ground relationship is derived from the way the human brain perceives physical form in distinguishing an object or shape from its context or surroundings. The nude as an art form takes the body out of the context of time, in the sense that the cultural markers of clothing are absent. When the background is also hard to place, as in my transformed garage, the information is reduced to my sculpture and my scarred body. The baroque folds of rubber, the chiaroscuro lighting, the rust stains on some of the rubber which reference the rich colours of an old master, bring in some ideas of art history. However the performative body has a potential to 'destabilise the structures of conventional art history and criticism' (Jones, 1999: 5). I will talk more about referencing and relating to art history in Chapter three. I am trying to destabilise these artistic conventions, and also to destabilise the conventions of representing and becoming a scarred, post-menopausal woman.

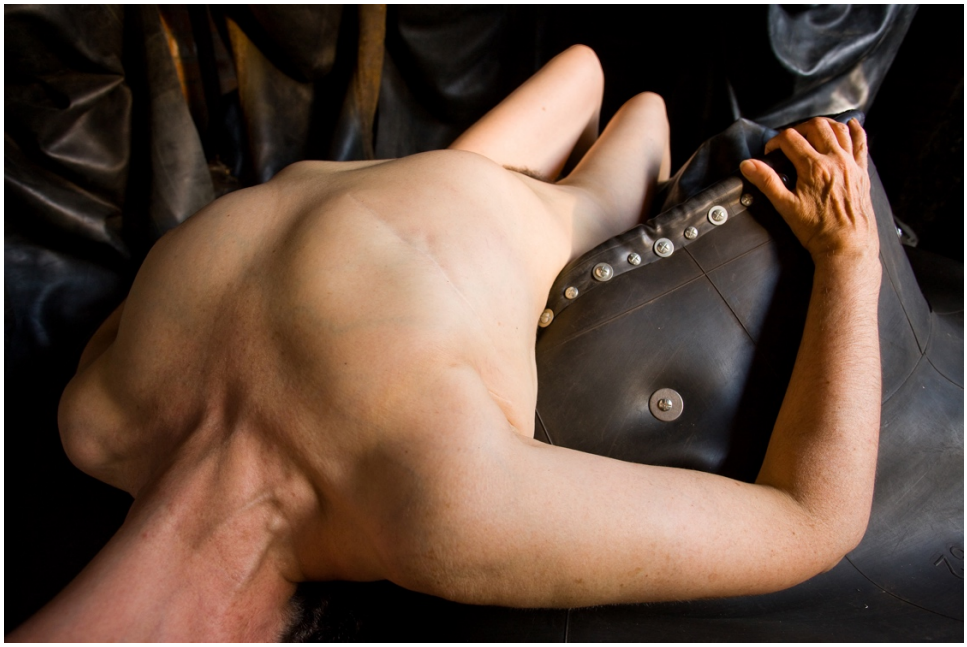

*Figure 16 Wanda Zyborska (2012) Before and After. Photograph Glyn Davies*

My body stands out because it is pale and the rubber is black, but it is similar to the rubber in that they are both a skin, soft, permeable, folded and seamed. I tried to line up the scar with the seams in the sculptures. The rubber and my skin are both battered and scarred, wrinkled, abject and beautiful. By embedding myself in my own sculptures I am attempting to be like Yayoi Kusama in her works, challenging the normative conceptions about the (male/European) artist, where:

> *her body/self is literally absorbed into her work and indeed becomes it…enacting her body in a reversibility of inside and out. The work of art/the environment is an enactment of Kusama and vice versa (Jones, 1999:7).*

I wanted to express my ambivalence about the decisions I was making, which seemed to be a compromise with fear, wanting to be normal and acceptable, practicalities of convenience and comfort in clothing. I wanted to express my anger at the cultural conditions/conditioning that made me feel like that. The language to express this position is visual and tactile. It is also the language of Surrealism. The tension is that between the irrational and inexplicable, and the attempts to express and understand, as Cathryn Vasseleu suggests in her study of Jan Švankmajer:

> *If Surrealism is directed at the restoration of universal powers of irrational thought, emotion and perception, then Švankmajer*

*sought to demonstrate that tactile experience, as poetry, restores access to them (Vasseleu, 2009).*

*Figure 17 Wanda Zyborska (2012) Before and After. Photograph Glyn Davies*

I tried to relate the positions I assumed in the photographs to surrealist art by various artists including Man Ray's artist models, Frida Kahlo[3], Louise Bourgeois and Claude Cahun. I was using the surreal to attempt to make the everyday something different, incongruous, and unexpected. Although I thought about what kind of positions I might wish to place myself in I remained open to what would come out during the photographic sessions, as the art continued to make itself and I responded to being in that place and feeling those sculptures, forms and materials. Throughout I was conscious of trying to experience and present something very different from cultural norms and representations around/about breast cancer and reconstruction for the older woman.

[3] Andre Breton invited Kahlo to join the Surrealists and showed her work. She knew about and was influenced by the Surrealists and used Surrealist techniques such as playing *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse). However Kahlo did not consider herself to be a Surrealist because 'I never painted dreams...I painted my own reality' (Herrera 1992: 124) .

***Figure 18. Brouillet, A. (1887). A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière/ Une leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière.' Oil on canvas, 290 x 430 cm. In: Bijman, M. (2013) Seven Circumstances. [Online][Accessed 16 June 2019]***
*https://sevencircumstances.com/charcot-clinical-lesson-at-the-salpetriere-a-brouillet-1887/*

I referenced the arch of hysteria (Figure 17) for several of the poses in the *Before and After* (2012) photographs, partly thinking of Louise Bourgeois' work on the subject such as the 1993 sculpture (Figure 19) where she was using the arch with a male body to 'deflate the male psyche as a structure of power' (Storr, et al., 2003: 23). I was also thinking of the Brouillet (1887) painting (Figure 18) in terms of the gendered history of medicine and the disempowerment of women, so clearly depicted in this painting, made at a time when hysteria was defined by and associated only with women (the term ‘hysteria’ coming from the Greek root 'hystera' meaning uterus. Hysteria was believed to result from a dysfunction of the uterus). I will talk more about the way I use and relate to art history in chapter three, but here I am using it in a multiple and rhizomatic way; Bourgeois’ feminist subversion, my own response to medical history and the aesthetics of medicine, and then bringing in thoughts about the collaboration and power relationships between Man Ray and his photographic models, all artists in their own right.

*Figure 19. Bourgeois, L. (1993) Arch of Hysteria, bronze. In: Storr et al., (2003) Louise Bourgeois. p 23. London: Phaidon*

But as well as the expansion of cultural implications I was trying to make something very material and tactile to emphasize the physical reality of the scar, skin and flesh.

*Figure 20. Zyborska, W. (2012) Before and After. Photograph Glyn Davies*

From this tactile and Surreal perspective, gendered embodiments are not simply the reproductions of dualist gender formations; rather, gender is engaged, negotiated and produced continually through affects and micro-relations.

*Figure 21. Zyborska, W. (2012) Before and After. Photograph Glyn Davies*

## 1.8. Scarring and Inscriptions on the Body

There are cultural pressures on women scarred by breast cancer, both to have the sort of scars that fit the gendered female body, and also to hide those scars. Steven Connor in The Book of Skin (2004) writes about what he sees as desire or

willingness in contemporary culture to inflict damage or 'inscribe' upon the skin/screen, a desire that comes from a fear of the fragility of the skin, the 'dread of the failure of the surface' (Ahmed and Stacey 2001: 40). How is it possible to deal with scarred skin in visual art when the damage is real and is not of our own inscription, for example with illness, medical surgery, and ageing? Such inscription may feel like violence to the patient. The artist Jo Spence described her relationship with the health service during her treatment for cancer as an unequal power balance redolent with class barriers, and there are also gendered barriers and constructs at work here. Spence documented her feelings of powerlessness and infantilisation by the NHS in the series *Putting Myself in the Picture* (figure 22), calling the artistic and clinical process she developed with therapist Rosy Martin (1986-88) phototherapy or 're-enactment' phototherapy:


*Figure 22 Spence, J. 1982 Property of Jo Spence from Putting Myself in the Picture series,*

> *[Re-enactment phototherapy] involves the creation of new photographic images within the therapeutic relationship…[it] enables clients themselves to make visible what it is to be subjected to and subject of the discourses within society. Through re-enacting and mapping out being the object of various familial and institutional gazes…re-enactment phototherapy makes visible the performative body' (Martin, 2001).*

I too was attempting to make visible the performative body, but I used different methods from Spence and Martin, such as documenting the processes of treatment in real time as in Figure 23, and using other media than photography in sculptures and drawings.

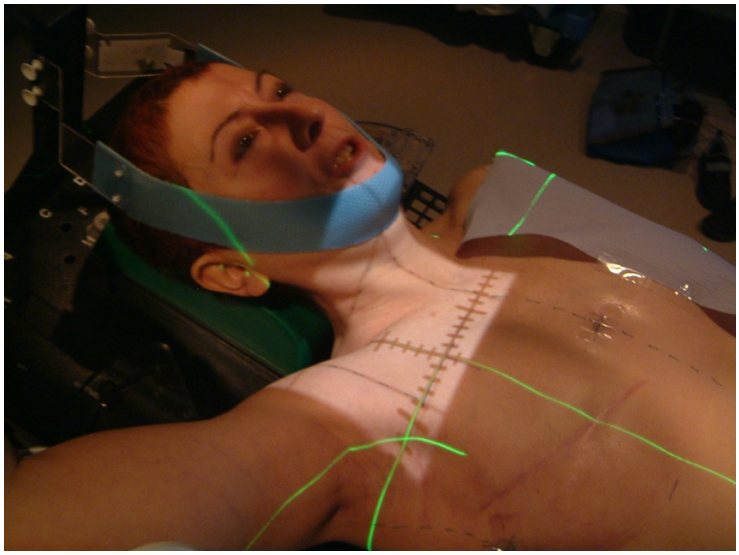

*Figure 23 Zyborska, W. 2007 photograph taken by radiography staff during radiation treatment at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd.*

I shared Martin's aims of therapeutic benefits and making visible the performative body, but I wanted to go beyond 're-enacting' to re-imagining, unfolding my scarred ageing into a new becoming. I was not taking on a dehumanising health service as Jo Spence did, but co-opting them into loving me as well as caring for me by joining in with my project, giving me some extra time.

Breast cancer is a disease generally associated with ageing. When older women are shown in popular media there is an emphasis on health and youthfulness that I wish to challenge. Older women are shown to be obsessed with youth in a vampiric way: 'The old (women), like the undead, it is implied, prey on youth as if they are a different species' (Whelehan and Gwynne, 2014:1). While older men can often be seen as powerful and virile, old women remind our youth obsessed culture of disease and death, with which it is not equipped to deal. Our culture therefore tries to either make older women invisible, or to contain us in limited stereotypes, both positive and negative.

There is a double pressure on me to disappear, as a post-menopausal woman and as a scarred and diseased woman. Responses both verbal and written[4] to my exploration and representation of becoming with the fear, mutilation and

[4] Responses from press; the visitors' book in the gallery; a statement by my fellow collaborator Glyn Davies.

scarring from breast cancer surgery in an ageing body in Before and After (2012) were mainly polarised into those who found it monstrous and ‘like a torture

*Figure 24 Wanda Zyborska 2012 Before and After, Photograph Glyn Davies*

chamber’ (where I was seen as somewhat perverted), and those who considered the work to be a brave account of a heroic survivor, with comments about me looking good for my age.

Women who have chosen to  display photographs of their bodies altered by breast cancer surgery do not want to see themselves as powerless victims.  They frequently tell cultural narratives of brave survivor, or ‘scarred but still attractive’.

*Figure 25 Facebook Breast Cancer Support Group (2014). Caption: 'Brave: Joanne Jackson, left, and Cheryl Kerr, right' [online][accessed 21 May 2014] https://www.facebook.com/groups/582535348475806/*

An extract from Joanne Jackson's post in UK Breast Cancer Support Group's Facebook page reads; 'I remember hearing my mum make a heaving sound as if she was about to start crying, but I felt strong. I said: 'Don't start crying!' I knew immediately that I wasn't going to be beaten' (The women in this group all wore the same trousers). There is something interesting happening here, the story is conventional, the look is confident and polished; skin tanned and glowing, hair coiffed and faces made up, yet they show the scar as if it too is part of this picture of women who meet the western dream, white, slim and otherwise symmetrical. Facebook deemed such images as the above to be pornographic, and banned and removed them from 2009 until 2012. Facebook since semi-recanted following mass opposition but still regularly removes these images. Artists too suffer from censorship. Clarity Haynes, a lesbian feminist artist who paints large portraits of the bare torsos of women and trans people, including old women scarred by mastectomies writes:

> *A few months ago, Hyperallergic published a review by Heather Kapplow of my solo show at Brandeis University's Kniznick*

*Gallery. The next day, a friend texted me to say that Facebook had deleted the article from her wall. I tried to go on Facebook and found that I'd been banned for three days, as punishment for posting a link to my exhibition catalogue on Issuu. I was warned that if I violated community guidelines again, I would be banned permanently (Haynes, 2018).*

*Figure 26 Haynes, C. (2002) Breast Portrait Triptych, oil on canvas 22" x 80."*

This means that not only are there 'very few' (Haynes, 2016) images of old (and scarred) women, but they are subject to censorship and erasure. In her *Breast Portrait Triptych* (2002) Haynes juxtaposes a young torso, an aged one and one scarred by breast cancer and other surgery, all looked at equally, given the same attention and clarity, no heads, but tactile bodies confronting the viewer with their own response.

The SCAR Project (2010), a series of photographic portraits of young women in various stages of breast cancer by fashion photographer David Jay focused on the scars of breast cancer survivors but failed to represent anyone over 35. 'For these young women, having their portrait taken seems to represent their personal victory over this terrifying disease. It helps them reclaim their femininity, their sexuality, identity and power' (Jay, 2010, cited in Duggal, 2010) claimed Jay. Femininity, sexuality, identity and power - attributes denied the postmenopausal woman. A constant in the narratives of Jay's photographs is the tragedy of blighted youth, and the strength, bravery and resilience of the women. It is their youth that makes them acceptable. If they were old they would become abject, monstrous and unspeakable, like many of Haynes images (Figure 26), censored and deleted. It is hard to find anything similar depicting post-menopausal women.

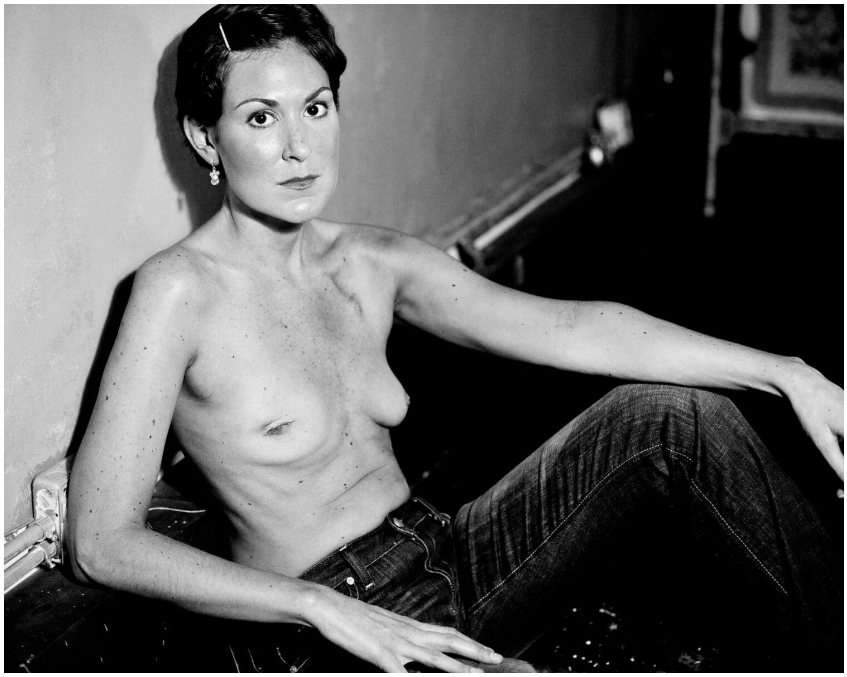

*Figure 27 Jay, D. (2006) The SCAR Project.*

Haynes (aged 50) and Joan Semmel (aged 83) discussed this in conversation about Semmel's 2016 show 'You Have to Get Past the Fear', featuring paintings of her own nude body:

> *CH: Alice Neel did her self-portrait at age 80, and yet, I can't think of many other images of nude old women in contemporary art. Can you? JS: Now there are a few, very few (Haynes, 2016).*

A representation of a woman must always be judged by standards of appearance. Complements to older women are frequently qualified by dissociating beauty with their age, and accrediting it to youth. They 'look younger than their age' because they could not possibly look good at their real age. All beauty belongs to youth. Similarly, all signs of age are seen as ugly; wrinkles, age spots, folds of skin, changes of feature developed by character – at least in women. Character is seen as attractive in men, but rarely in women. Perhaps we need to look at the way small children look at the world (as many early modernists did in the last artistic turn to ugliness) in order to find a new aesthetics of age for women. Children greet the old with less mediation from cultural expectations and taboos. I can still remember how soft the wrinkled skin of aged relatives felt, how lovely (if I liked them). The audience of *Before and After* (2012) in their responses may have

felt the need to comment on the surgery and display of the scarring in a polarized fashion, but more than half of the responses said it was challenging, thought provoking or interesting, which I ascribe to the tactile stimulations working with affect beyond cultural judgements to effect transformation.

My research explores the complex web of feelings and ideas about the experience of surgery and its transformations through such documentations and representations of the relationships between the skin of the artist/patient/object/subject and the skin surfaces of the photograph or film, and those of my sculptures. The research reveals a link, which may be convoluted in the sense of Deleuze's Fold (1988), between the desire to damage the skin/screen/photograph and the desire to display damage to one's own skin by a representation which may be photographic or metaphorical (in the rubber sculptures). I compare the two narrative fantasies, the active watching or looking at the skin screen with Connor's willingness or desire to damage the skin surface in order to counteract the fear of its failure, and the desire to represent one's own damaged skin in order to make sense of what has occurred, in part to achieve a fantasy of control. In *Terratologies* (1997) about her experiences with cancer, Jackie Stacey talks about the importance of testimony and 'witnessing' by survivors of trauma in order to achieve some distance from the event and move on from the repeated immediacy of traumatic memory, which remains fixed in the moment: 'the feeling of isolation imposed by the trauma generates a desire for others to bear witness to the impact of the shock' (Stacey, 1997: 16). The relief from feeling alone which comes from narrative identification can help people to start processing the traumatic memory and put it in the past.

## 1.9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how I use materials in my work, the importance of the tactile, material and affect in re-imagining becoming an old, scarred woman. I have explored the intensive, 'feeling' ends of my polarities, through a series of speculative works using Surrealist techniques to find ways of representing the scarred skin of a post-menopausal woman who has had breast cancer. I have demonstrated the deterritorialisation of the hospital and the way the body as matter can be part of a creative, healing assemblage with place, the people encountered and the artist herself.

Part of this was the need for old women as well as young to make their scars visible, and to resist the many forms of disappearing and control being imposed on them.

I am not interested in producing positive imagery to try to counteract a negative stereotype, thereby engaging with a dichotomy in which women are always disadvantaged as Other; but in producing different gendered assemblages through art encounters in my own practice. I draw on this approach to theorise gender and ideas about age and scarring as continually produced through affects and relations with other bodies, materials and objects. This approach can assist in producing alternative understandings of the conditions of possibility for gendered embodiments and social change to emerge through practice. Expressing this as much as possible in a sensual, tactile and material way, encouraging feeling, wanting to touch, arousing tactile and visual responses, is part of the creation of such tactile assemblages, taking us away from existing expectations and stereotyped binaries of sick/healthy, young/old, male/female, beautiful/ugly, perfect/flawed.

I will discuss more of these possibilities in the next chapter, where I consider beauty and eroticism in old age, as well as developing assemblages with history and tactile objects in the museum as an aged feminist activist. I begin to answer some of the questions raised by this enquiry and show the way that working and thinking in the tactile world of sculpture and performance can express new ideas, transformations and becomings, including the unspeakable ones.

# Chapter Two: From Deterritorialisation to Transformative Encounter

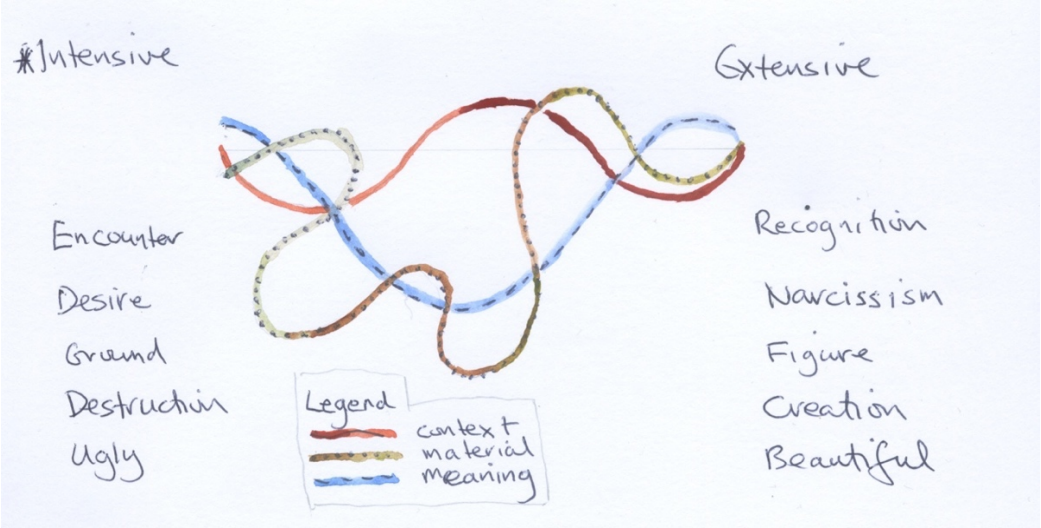


*Figure 28 Map of polarities*

In this chapter I take the scarred, post-menopausal body out of the hospital and the studio into the museum and the woodland in order to expand on the work of Chapter one. I take the work into new and different site specific places, and unfold my material experimentation beyond the direct response to surgery into a metaphorical approach with objects and history. *Material Matters* (2013) is a sculptural and material based response to selected items from the Gwynedd Museum collection, deterritorializing the museum by destabilising its role in an assemblage of objects, institution and ageing artist, finding new encounters to explore my becoming beyond the therapeutic channels mentioned in the previous chapter. *Failing to Matter* (2013) is a film in a Welsh woodland that came out of the work done for *Material Matters* (2013).

I begin by reflecting on the work of two artists who I see as important precursors to my project: Hannah Wilke (1940 – 1993) and Frida Kahlo 1907 – 1954). I see my work as contemporary performative re-iterations of the work they made about illness, as I developed them in the context of breast cancer and ageing. I look at aesthetics and the supposed narcissism of feminist body artists, and why both of these are assumed to disappear with age and/or illness, and I look at having fun

with illness. I discover Joanna Frueh's monster beauty (Frueh, 2002) and breaking taboos about the post-menopausal woman as an erotic and desiring subject.

The work discussed in this chapter discovers a shift in the movement of my polarities in outward, unfolding directions. The deterritorializations spread from the hospital and my studio to the museum and the woodland, the assemblages reformed and grew. The trajectory was always towards a transformative encounter. As Holly Mackenzie suggests; 'When a movement of deterritorialization takes hold, a machine is released that can open the territorial assemblage to other assemblages' (Mackenzie, 2019, cited in Carr and Sholtz, 2019: 4). This opening out of energies enables expression as part of the process of interrelationships between the different parts of the assemblage; '...the subject and the art object have become indistinct because they are lost in the movement in which they are all parts and pieces of one another' (Mackenzie, 2019, cited in Carr and Sholtz, 2019: 4). This to me describes what I would call 'being in the zone' of the creative process, a feeling of losing oneself for a time in the making of art, together with the media or others or whatever components are coming together in that assemblage, a transformative encounter.

This chapter also concerns skin, firstly the skin itself and how it can be damaged, including damage caused by ‘repair’. What it is to be inhabiting that skin when it is mutilated and deteriorating, how it feels, and how to have fun with it. The humour and playfulness that might be recognised elsewhere in the work of Wilke and Kahlo is never mentioned when looking at their work that deals with illness or death, and yet, according to Robert Dickinson, it is there for a purpose: 'Laughter is a social act...It's role in the debunking of power is well known to artists, but so too is its horrific mocking accompaniment to acts of extreme violence...Provoking laughter through an innate acceptance of certain blunt facts about the body...is different, but vital' (Dickinson, 2015). Surgery is a violence against the body, even if necessary, and ageing is frequently experienced as an attack that must be fought against. The art work discussed in this chapter reveals complex layers of

humour, whilst displaying skin distressed almost to death, coming apart, pushed as far as it can go, transformed into alternative, 'monster beauty' (Frueh, 2002).

Connor (2004) asks why the skin has become the object of so many forms of assault, at the same time as there is obsessive care for and idealization of the skin. By assault he means not just state and criminal violence but the apparent prevalence of self-harm, plastic surgery, BDSM[5], tattooing and body modification. His definition of violence and assault is a broad one which does not take into account volition and intention - anything which cuts, pierces or marks the skin is seen by him as assault. But Connor does not look at it post assault. He is interested in the various kinds of 'assault' that he identifies (I would include medical surgery in this, although he only talks about plastic surgery) and the conditions in which is arises, but not its appearance or what happens to it afterwards. Uniquely, I am exploring what is left, the inscriptions and transformations brought about by illness, clinical surgery, and ageing, what and how it is becoming, as alternative beauty. Before I discuss my personal project about breast cancer scarring and age, I would like to look at work by Hannah Wilke and Frida Kahlo whose singular approaches to the female body and their experiences of life-threatening illness have inspired and influenced me.

## 2.1. Illness and narcissism

Hannah Wilke is an artist who dealt with illness and trauma through the self-portraits she made throughout her life. When she was young the assaults she challenged were the cultural inscriptions of others on to her body/self. She aimed to take control of this, becoming both subject/object as artist. In her fifties and with a fatal illness, she examined another kind of inscription, one that penetrated and destroyed her skin/body.

[5] *BDSM* is an acronym of "B&D" (Bondage & Discipline), "D&S" (Dominance & Submission), and "S&M" (Sadomasochism)

*Figure 29 Wilke, H. Intra-Venus 1992-3 photographs Donald Goddard*

Hannah Wilke's partner art critic Donald Goddard helped her document her work from 1982 until she died of cancer in 1993. In 2007 the *Intra-Venus Tapes* (recorded 1990-93) were completed, a collaborative installation consisting of sixteen monitors and more than thirty hours of video footage from the last two-and-a-half years of Wilke's life showing her illness, hospitalisation and treatment. The *Intra-Venus* series is seen as 'documenting her struggle with Lymphoma' (Barliant, 2011: 111), or as a study of vulnerability: 'here her body, ravaged by disease, is bravely displayed in ways that defy her earlier detractors' accusations of narcissism' (Pollock, 2011: 60-61). Pollock is here adopting the brave warrior narrative of illness, in a battle with disease, instead of seeing the *Intra-Venus* series as provocative and playful, not dissimilar in attitude to Wilke's early work. More importantly, like others Pollock seems unable to see the beauty and eroticism of these images, because it is still unspeakable in the ill and aged. The Intra-Venus series from the 1990s has many similarities with the 1970s body work such as the *S.O.S. Starification Object Series* (1994) (Figure 30). The play with different meanings in the titles, the multiple levels on which the works themselves can be read, the found and appropriated objects, the direct yet equivocal gaze into the camera at us are all still there:

> *Wilke's work...was richly tactile (about the folding and unfolding of forms) gestural and sensuous. She was aware of her beauty and performed an erotic, self-empowered woman... What seems to be truly transgressed in Wilke's performance and depiction of herself is that it says I am comfortable if not in love with myself (Crippa and Backman Rogers, 2018: pp66-67).*

*Figure 30 Wilke, H. 1974 S.O.S. Starification Object Series, Black and white photograph, 40 x 28 in. Part of An Adult Game of Mastication installation, 1974-74 (Princenthal, 2001)*

Visual art can express the unspeakable, before even the artist herself can speak it, as I will demonstrate. Wilke had previously been criticised by feminists and critics who accused her of narcissism in her willingness to perform nude public art actions in the 1970s. They believed she was motivated by the desire to display her own beauty, further evidenced by the playful eroticism of many of her poses, rather than by desire for feminine empowerment. They also see her narcissism, and perhaps even her beauty, in negative terms. Lucy Lippard, for an article on body art in 1976 wrote:

> *Hannah Wilke, a glamour girl in her own right who sees her art as "seduction," is considered a little too good to be true when she flaunts her body in parody of the role she actually plays in real life. She has been making erotic art with vaginal imagery for over a decade, and, since the women's movement, has begun to do performances ... but her own confusion of her roles as beautiful woman and artist, as flirt and feminist, has resulted at times in politically ambiguous manifestations which have exposed her to criticism on a personal as well as on an artistic level (Fitzpatrick, 2009: 51).*

## 2.2. Monster Beauty

Joannah Frueh talks about ‘another kind of narcissism…that operates not only in one’s isolated behalf but also relationally - in intimate and everyday social situations’ (Frueh, 2002: 2). She asks ‘how does one live within yet live against a society in which the perfect picture of beauty thrives? (Frueh, 2002: 2). The answer is ‘monster beauty’ (see Chapter three for more on monster beauty); ‘an aesthetic/erotic aptitude, fleshed out and inspirited with the essence of Aphrodite’ (Frueh, 2002: 8). Although Frueh grounds monster beauty in the body, it is a process, a becoming, an ‘inspirited aptitude’, not the static ‘asepsis’ (Boliver, 2018) of perfect beauty. Wilke transforms the monstrousness of the erotic, ageing, sick woman into monster beauty.

There is a danger of escaping one stereotype only to fall into another. Whilst there is a primary need to show a diversity of women, old and young and of every body type, why should this exclude the beautiful, especially when redefining this category and challenging ownership of the gaze that defines it? Most of all, why is Wilke no longer seen as beautiful or erotic when she is old and ill?

Lippard also said in another article about women’s body art in the same year (1976): ‘It is a subtle abyss that separates men’s use of women for sexual titillation from women’s use of women to expose that insult’ (Parker and Pollock, 1981: 126).

Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock explored this abyss in their seminal work *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981), outlining how the subordinate role of women forms an essential support for the construct of the male genius in Western art history. They explore the associated problems for women artists attempting to make representations of either their identity as artists or their sexuality and subjectivity as women, and show that while each role (artist or woman) has its own difficulties for the contemporary woman artist, the integration of the two roles is impossible in a patriarchal art world with its opposing codes of representation.

That is what is interesting and brave about Wilke's work, young and old (and that of Carolee Schneemann, who suffered similar criticisms[6]) that exposes these contradictions and confusions at the same time as challenging them.

It is in this continuing abyss that I choose to work, or have no choice but find I must embrace its challenges. Although I am a feminist artist I am working with different referents than Pollock and Parker, such as the monster beauty of Frueh and the fragmented deterritorializations of Deleuze and Guattari. I accept the anomaly of being a feminist artist on the one hand fighting for recognition and subjectivity, and on the other exploring a scarred and aged existence which is 'contingent and constituted in the temporality of "becoming" rather than "being" (Johnson, 2010) in assemblage with other materials and people, and as mutable material myself, all the while trying to analyse and subvert my own social hardwiring. It puts me in a place of uncertainty where making the art can be a step into the unknown. Feminist artists are trying to re-define ourselves at the same time as being defined by a context that although different from the 1970s, remains limiting in such an unequal power balance. These are some of my dilemmas, the negotiation of which I hope can effect transformative encounters in attitudes to postmenopausal, scarred women, although I cannot predict exactly what these transformations will be.

The young Wilke may parody the role she plays in real life in her art in an attempt to re-appropriate and assert her sexuality, but Parker and Pollock did not believe that her work and that of other early feminist body artists could be effective because of the way they would be viewed under western patriarchal ideology. For them the structure of this ideology is not merely social and historical but psychologically driven by the oedipal phase in childhood development and controlled by language. Parker and Pollock highlight the relevance of psychoanalytic theory to feminists and suggest that deconstruction is the answer for artists.

[6] Schneeman was also accused of narcissism and essentialism for works such as *'Meat Joy'* and *'Interior Scroll',* . (See chapter three)'

Whilst I agree with them that little has changed in the patriarchal power systems of the art world I believe that revisiting the incomplete role reversals and problematic sexual self-expression (Parker and Pollock, 1981: 126-7) of feminist artists of the 1970s can be part of this deconstruction, including for old/aged/post-menopausal women. One way forward is to build on this with repeated performative re-iterations that continue to explore and unfold in (and out of?) the abyss.

When Lynne Segal decided to write 'a feminist sexual politics of ageing' in 2013 she was advised by friends 'to avoid thinking, let alone writing, of my generation…as 'old' (Showalter, 2013, cited in Segal, 2013: Xiii). To be an old woman did not just mean invisibility, it was an unspeakable subject. When Wilke showed herself as 'that monster, an old woman' (Colette, 1920: 88) it could only be seen through the narratives of illness. She was defined by (and subverting) the narratives of illness, age and gender in the 90s, referred to by Jackie Stacey (1997) in her personal treatise on disease, just as she was defined by and subverting the narratives of youth and gender in the 70s.

## 2.3. Aesthetics of Ageing

The *Intra-Venus* series is not only documenting Wilke's dying and disease, it is the only work she could do at that time, with what was available to her (as I did in the hospital with cancer). The hospital is transformed into a studio, the illness transformed into art. The photographs deal with many of the formal and conceptual issues that she is concerned with throughout her practice: feminism, performance, materials (found or otherwise), the interaction with art history, aesthetics, objectification and object, colour, shape and composition.

Cultural theorists have concentrated on the social and cultural aspect of aging, while art historians have tended to neglect it completely, and read it in limited ways when they have come across it. 'The aesthetics of aging – one of the most frequent standards by which we measure the realities of aging – is still very much

ignored' (Cristofovici, 2009: 19). Women artists are part of this culture and tradition and their interest in aesthetics is twofold – part of their cultural understanding of aging along with everyone else, but when they are dealing with these ideas in their art the aesthetic questions are important in different and complex ways. It is a professional issue, for example their interest in art history and their place in the canons of art; how their artworks relate to what has gone before. Many feminist art historians have noted the way critical writing about women artists is frequently reduced to biography, neglecting to discuss formal and conceptual creative achievement (Nochlin, 1989; Caws, 1991; Grosz, 1994; Deepwell, 1995; Krauss, 1999; Chadwick, 2007; Pollock, 2008; Jones, 2012; Parker and Pollock, 2013). It is important to note in the complex web of gender representations and subversions in the work of the artists considered here that although the artists are using a personal and autobiographic focus traditionally used to limit women artists (Parker & Pollock, 1981) as well as by feminists to revolutionise gender roles and representations, they are still primarily engaged in their professional practice as artists within the context of western art – i.e. in aesthetic questions and decisions.

In an interview with Tina Takemoto in 2008 Goddard confirms that Wilke was interested in the aesthetic and material attributes of her hospital treatment:

> *I remember when we went into the hospital for her bone-marrow transplant... Hannah was supposed to put on all these things that connected to her body for some kind of test...The connectors were red with many wires and clips. Hannah thought they were wonderful against her skin and the blue-green gown and got very excited about the visual possibilities… and the name of the exhibition was going to be 'Cured.' So she was always thinking about the work that way… it was a matter of living rather than dying. Making art was really about living (Takemoto, 2008: 126-139).*

In *Hannah Wilke: Gestures*, however, Tracy Fitzpatrick sees the *Intra-Venus* series as 'sometimes horrifying, sometimes beautiful and peaceful' (Fitzpatrick, 2009: 58). In other words, Wilke is like a corpse already.

*Figure 31 Wilke, H. Intra-Venus 1 1992-3 photograph Donald Goddard*

Perhaps because she died it seems hard for viewers to see *Intra-Venus* as anything other than an abject confrontation between Wilke and her own mortality. I would suggest that formal and conceptual enquiry might be as (or more) important to Wilke as the documentation of her illness, just as it was throughout her artistic career. When talking about other work by Wilke Fitzpatrick mentions the absurdist wit that frequently surfaces in her work, but like Pollock fails to acknowledge it in *Intra-Venus*, even when Wilke poses as a caryatid (Figure 33) with a plastic urn of flowers on her head. Neither the ironic smile, the pastiche of classical composition or the kitsch flower arrangement leads Fitzpatrick to recognize the humour in this photograph, and its wider art historical and aesthetic contexts.

There is an affinity between the work of Wilke and that of Frida Kahlo. Kahlo also used what she found in the hospital and transformed it into her studio, with an easel set up over her bed. I recognise this because I too felt and saw this way in hospital. Takemoto's account above showed how Wilke was excited by the novelty of the material things and medical equipment. The tubes, the surgical hat, the dressings, the plastic urn with flowers, (Figures 32 and 33) all became found materials and objects for costume and play.

The likeness between some of Frida Kahlo's work and Wilke's is formal and compositional as well as conceptual. Both artists display a shockingly open response to illness and an original approach to its representation, going from a

literal exposition of procedures to a playful and macabre appropriation of medical artefacts as masquerade. Kahlo had originally intended to study medicine and seemed to take an objective and scientific interest in what was happening to her, asking for medical texts books to be brought to her in hospital. In addition both Hayden Herrera (1992) and Gannit Ankori (2002) refer to the possibility that Kahlo may have had Munchausen's Syndrome, choosing to have risky surgery as a form of narcissistic attention seeking. Whether or not Kahlo had Munchausen's Syndrome it supports the proposition that illness does not rule out narcissism (and/or that women who display their bodies will be accused of it).

Both Kahlo and Wilke frequently reference art history in their work (See Chapter three for the use of art history in my practice). Wilke considered her daring use of her own body in performance art to be rooted in the tradition of living sculpture in the ancient Greco-Roman world (Fitzpatrick, 2009). I make links between these approaches and my own practice, and see them as part of the monumental assemblages and repetitions discussed in Chapter five, *Looking Your Age*.

Although Fitzpatrick acknowledges this art historical connection in Wilke's other work she does not mention it in any discussion of the *Intra-Venus* series. However the Intra-Venus series has just as many references to art history as Wilke's early work. An example of Wilke's direct positioning of her late work within the canon is the caryatid pose (Figure 33) and the severe frontal portrait (Figure 32). The latter work has the formal simplicity of a Dutch portrait. The drains and tubing evoke the vein-like tubes used in some Kahlo paintings, such as *The Two Fridas* (1939) and *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932). In the caryatid photograph the white dressings on her hips (from bone marrow harvesting) balance the white plastic urn of visitor's flowers, the white wall offsets the simple classical pose. The formal rigor leavened with humour is characteristic of Wilke's work.

*Figure 32 Kahlo, F. Self Portrait 1948 (left) and Wilke, H. 1992 Intra-Venus Series No 1 photograph Donald Goddard*

*Figure 33 Kahlo, F. The Broken Column 1944 (left) and Wilke, H .1992 Intra-Venus Series No 1 photograph Donald Goddard*

The dialogue that I read between the work of Kahlo and Wilke can be seen in these four images. Both artists are using the body, together with its personal narratives of pain and illness, as a 'site through which public and private powers are articulated' (Jones, 2012: 22 – 23), a site of protest and resistance that goes some way to answer Frueh's question of how we 'live within yet live against a society in which the perfect picture of beauty thrives' (Frueh, 2002: 2). They achieve the sensuality and disturbing eroticism of 'monster beauty'. By using their own identifiable bodies and skin they are drawing attention to the personal at the same time as placing it always in the wider sphere. They describe the dilemma they find themselves in and make it public. In a similar way I investigate these issues in my own practice to develop new readings and representations of aged and scarred female bodies, including the erotic and sexual, but going beyond aesthetics or identity politics through deterritorialization and assemblage whilst building performatively on the work of these artists in a continuity of transformation.

## 2.4. The Transformative Encounter

Instead of being 'women at the mercy of bodies in transition' (Whelehan and Gwynne, 2014; 3) women can try to experience these transitions in a spirit of exploration in the world. My subject is the transformation of the female body through age and surgery, my object is changing the way I and other people see and think about this. I am interested in the unfolding of my own existence in this world, what is happening to me and around me, through making art in the fluid ground between what Simon O'Sullivan calls 'recognition' and 'encounter', a model for understanding art derived from his studies of Deleuze and Guattari. In this polarity work such as mine is more towards the encounter end of the polarity than the recognition pole.

O'Sullivan defines an object of recognition as something that reconfirms 'that which we already understand our world and ourselves to be. An object of recognition is then precisely a *re*presentation of something always already in

place' (O'Sullivan, 2006: 1). This unchallenging kind of pleasure can be offered by an observational landscape or a realistic portrait such as Isobel Peachey's painting of the Queen (Figure 34).

*Figure 34. Peachey, I. 2010 Portrait of Her Majesty the Queen*

Works like this confirm conventional ideas about the world being a stable and unchanging place and would be a re-presentation in O'Sullivan's terms, a scenario of 'recognition'. But to O'Sullivan (and Deleuze) art is always necessarily an 'encounter', a 'complex event that brings about the possibility of something new' (O'Sullivan, 2006: 2), previously discussed in Chapter one in relation to my materials.

The more tactile an artwork is, the more visceral impact the encounter will have, it is more profound and communicative because it reaches more parts of the body/mind, stimulating new sensory experiences and evoking old memories and associated ideas and analogies, forcing us to thought (Deleuze, 1968), and bringing new assemblages and transformations into becoming:

> *There is a "tactile memory" that stretches back to the most remote corners of our childhood, from which it bursts out in the form of analogies evoked by the slightest tactile stimulus or by stirred tactile fantasy. Tactile art thus becomes communicative (Švankmajer, 1994, cited in Vasseleu, 2009: no page no).*

*Figure 35. Zyborska, W. and Calarco, V. 2013 Wreck in Coed y Brenin: Material Matters*

## 2.5. Material Matters (2013) and Deterritorialising the Museum

The visual research discussed in this chapter is *Material Matters* (2013), a collaborative project curated by Helen Jones with a group of six sculptors who all have a strong connection with materials, and the Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery, responding to one or two artefacts from their collection to make new work for an exhibition. The question for me was how would this connect with my concerns of postmenopausal scarred skin, following the tangents of associations and labyrinths of folding and unfolding materials and processes.

I looked for items in the museum that related to my ideas, that I could respond to from the viewpoint of a postmenopausal breast cancer survivor. I had a similar approach to the museum as the hospital, as a resource for play and re-imagining the objects deterritorializing and transforming it, as it transformed me. The collection of eighteenth century goffering irons (Figure 36) suggested damaged skin and drudgery. These tools appealed to me as objects of domestic torture, phallic in shape, and because they were used to make folds such as those lining a bonnet or a man's cuffs. Perhaps also on some level these poking, invasive little

tools suggested to me primitive amateur surgery on the kitchen table. Like scalpels they could leave an inscription on the skin. They brought to my mind an aged woman bent over her goffering iron with her poking sticks, burning her hands on the hot metal and getting rheumatism from the damp linen she folded over it. But they are also funny, attractive little objects, carefully crafted in cast iron.

*Figure 36 Eighteenth century goffering irons (2013) Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery, Bangor. Photograph Robert Zyborski*

Following the work in *Before and After* (2012) Chapter One, where I had stitched my found rubber together to make folded and enveloping shapes and environments, I was pushing the handling and treatment of my materials further. This was to see what could be done with them and to mark them myself with additional damage, taking an active role in the ageing, wrinkling and scarring of my media, appropriating the role of surgeon.

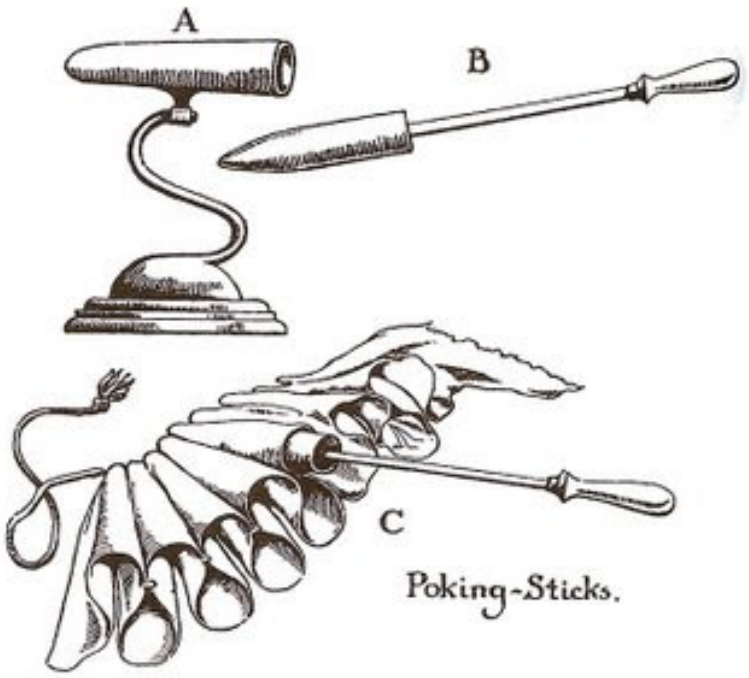


Fig. 717. Poking-sticks

*Figure 37 Use of goffering iron and poking stick: Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery, Bangor*

Because *Material Matters* (2013) is less contained and intensive than the work in *Before and After* (2012) I wanted to use open and broken, fragmented forms, and more extensive energy, expanding the rhizomatic nature of the work, whilst continuing to concentrate on material and the tactile. It offered me an opportunity to draw the ideas and experiences of illness and surgery in an ageing body through a new set of encounters, objects and a different institution, one that I had a more tangential and professional relationship with. The work is partly sculpture and installation, and partly performance and photography. I was using crimping, piercing, pleating and folding to mark and shape the samples and sculptures, taken from the domestic crafts of sewing and ironing juxtaposed with the ideas from *Before and After*.

*Figure 38 Zyborska, W. 2013 Material Matters: Details from work in progress*

I decided to combine the ironed folds of cloth with the burnt skin of the ironer, enlarged in scale in structures loosely based on the goffering irons.

*Figure 39. Zyborska, W. 2013 Material Matters installation image with goffering irons (those on floor not included in the exhibition).*

To do this I burnt the rubber tubes, blistering and singeing them, transforming and degrading the surfaces, then pleating, crimping, folding and piercing them with rusted reinforcing rods. In 2013 Bangor's culture and economy seemed to be dying, the shops were closing, the museum and art gallery was under threat, and buildings were being torn down. The broken concrete foundations in the demolition sites, with rusting reinforcing steel bars sticking out of them, looked to me like beautiful found sculptures. I wanted to take them. The vision of these relics of buildings morphed in my mind with the goffering irons and dictated the form and materials for the goffering iron sculptures. At this time the plinths merged with the armatures and began to be part of the sculptures, emerging from inside to outside. It was as if the bones began to poke through the damaged skin.

*Figure 40. Zyborska, W. and Calarco, V. 2013 Material Matters. Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery, Bangor*

The second object chosen from the museum collection was a quilted baby's bib,

*Figure 41. Zyborska, W. 2013 Item 153. Baby's bib found on Moelfre Beach from the wreck of the Royal Charter 1859, Gwynedd Museum collection*

(Figure 41) washed up on a local beach in 1859 after the wreck of the Royal Charter in which no women or children survived.  39 men lived out of 450 people on board.  Handstitched (like my breast), padded and quilted, the bib was now transformed by trauma into a stained and abject, poignant object.  Its isolation, removed by the waves from the drowned baby, brought to my mind Lee Miller's (circa 1929) severed breast on a plate or the beautiful white breast in a kidney dish I saw handed to the family of a young Japanese woman in a documentary on Japanese culture (It was how they told the family she had breast cancer). Additionally the bib resonated with me because the Royal Charter was sailing from

Melbourne to Liverpool when it sank, the reverse of my journey as a small child a century later in 1961, when my mother, my sister and I travelled from England through assisted migration and landed in Melbourne, where we knew no one. We were escaping the wreckage of my mother's marriage to a traumatized and violent Polish refugee, and the privations of post war England, where my mother had been working.

## 2.6. Deterritorialising the Woodland

At the same time of working in the museum, I found a discarded, burnt out wrecked car in Coed y Brenin woods, on a walk with the Australian artist Veronica Calarco. I related this remnant to the shipwreck and the baby's bib, both poignant memorials of violence and trauma . Veronica took me there because she thought I would respond to the beauty of the rusted metal, the melted glass and burnt objects within, transformed and revealed by fire. It reminded her of what she had seen in my studio. We both had memories of similar cars scattered beside long country roads in Australia, broken down and abandoned or smashed by drunken boys.

*Figure 42. Zyborska, W. and Calarco, V. (2013) Wreck in Coed y Brenin: Material Matters photograph Veronica Calarco*

I related the shipwrecks of the nineteenth century, recorded in the museum through relics such as the baby's bib, to the car wrecks of the twenty-first century,

and the whole to my damaged, scarred body (and the wreckage of my own family). I felt violated and aware of my own part in choosing to undergo further surgery. I was relating the damage and wear of the car to my scars and ageing skin.

*Figure 43. Zyborska, W. and Calarco, C. (2013) Wreck in Coed y Brenin: Material Matters. Photograph Veronica Calarco*

Veronica and I made two series of nude photographs in the car, highlighting the scars of the reconstruction surgery. It was different working with a woman than with Glyn Davies in *Before and After* (2012). I was much more relaxed and able to work in a spontaneous way, less self-conscious. I was aware of a different gaze. Veronica on her part was also informal and irreverent, less respectful. These works took my post-menopausal, scarred body into further contexts and situations, the car, and the woodlands which are also an outdoor activity centre. A deterritorialization of the countryside experience came forth, as the clearing in the forest became an assemblage of alternative materials, an event celebrating nature and birdsong, the alternative beauty of destruction and decay, and the alternative eroticism of the scarred and ageing post-menopausal body.

*Figure 44. Zyborska, W. and Calarco, V (2013) Wreck in Coed y Brenin:Material Matters. Photograph Veronica Calarco*

I wanted to place my body in the car, to make links with its alternative beauty and my own. I put rubber sculptures filled with soft material in the car to re-upholster the seats. The rusted red and damaged body of the car made a contrast to white skin and black rubber and was in tune with the way I felt about my battered body after gruelling surgery.

*Figure 45. Wanda Zyborska and Veronica Calarco (2013) Wreck in Coed y Brenin: Material Matters*

As part of my literature review on skin and film (but before making the work) I had watched the David Cronenberg film *Crash* (1996) and now considered another side to the violence implicit in the abandoned car, deliberately set on fire if not first destroyed in an accident. It brought to my mind dark images such as Ana Mendieta's *Rape Scene* (1973) or Hans Bellmer's fetishistic *La Poupee* (1938) (Figure 46). I was thinking partly of repetition as protest as in Mendieta's work, partly at ideas of trauma in performance art (discussed in Chapter four) and partly just looking at correlations between the car and my body. Some of our images are ambiguous and even disturbing, we began to explore the dark side, perhaps trying to 'break down the barriers of self-censorship' (Warr, 2012; 99) in order to release creativity and explore the boundaries of imagining and becoming a post-menopausal scarred woman. I did not want this to be a positive affirmation of ageing, but an exploration of all the possibilities, even the frightening ones.

*Figure 46. Bellmer, H. (1938) La Poupee (Doll)*

Perhaps because I was working with an old friend and a woman, rather than a man I don't know well as in *Before and After* (2012), I did not prepare drawings of how I wanted to be in the car beforehand, apart from planning to highlight the post-operative scarring. I responded to ideas that came into my head, or Veronica's in response to being in that place with the materiality of that car. It felt subversive to be a naked, scarred post-menopausal woman performing in a dirty wreck of a car. We were both aware of taboos surrounding what we were doing. Coed y Brenin is a forest park popular with mountain bikers and walkers, and we had no guarantee of privacy. In the event we had no audience, but it had the feeling of live performance in a way that the studio setting of my garage did not. It felt to me like 'improvised action of the naked body as positive self-liberation through the breaking down of taboos'(Warr, 2012; 95).

*Figure 47. Zyborska, W. and Calarco, V (2013) Wreck in Coed y Brenin: Material Matters. Photograph Veronica Calarco*

Calarco and I returned in March 2015 to the car to make a different response to the car and the place, in the film *Failing to Matter* (2015) (Figure 48) with both of us performing, filmed by Robert Zyborski. The following night the car was further trashed by local youths, making their own response to its material presence.

*Figure 48 Zyborska, W. and Calarco, V. (2015) Failing to Matter. Film still Robert Zyborski*

The film *Failing to Matter* (2015)[7] responded to the displacement and invisibility of the lost and abandoned car rather than the violence and abjection of its destruction.

Two postmenopausal women dressed in frumpy clothes sit in a burnt-out car in a wood. Both are attempting to speak in the languages of their (dysfunctional) families - neither can for historical reasons - and in Welsh, which they are both learning. Veronica is trying to say 'thank you' in Gournai and Welsh, and I am trying to say 'sorry' in Welsh, Polish and Irish. This is because we noticed that we both respectively say, 'thank you' and 'sorry' when it is neither required nor appropriate.

*Failing to Matter* (2015) explores the invisibility of post-menopausal women, and the difficulties many of us have in expressing ourselves and in making connections, yet at the same time it is a celebration of tactile experimentation and surreal displacement.

[7] Link for Failing to Matter (2015) https://vimeo.com/manage/362544506/general

*Figure 49. Zyborska, W. and Calarco, V. (2015) Failing to Matter, Film still Robert Zyborski*

## 2.7. Conclusion

In this chapter I have continued to demonstrate how I use materials in my work, finding the tactile, material and affect in the museum and beyond in re-imagining becoming an old, scarred woman. I have explained more of the 'feeling' ends of my polarities, through a series of speculative works exploring ways of experiencing and representing the scarred skin of a post-menopausal woman who has had breast cancer. I have looked at what happens to skin when it is damaged and inscribed, and explored how it feels to be inhabiting and experiencing the alternative beauty of decay and the eroticism of the ageing body in assemblage with distressed objects in a deterritorialization of the museum and the woodland.

I have looked at some of the taboos surrounding the representation of scarred, aged women as objects of desire and explored some of the possibilities of becoming an erotic and desiring scarred, aged subject.

In this chapter I began to discuss how feminist artists challenge the art canon whilst trying to take their place in it. In the next chapter I will look further at the

importance of art history in my work, and my own particular take on working with art history in the form of imaginative collaboration, where I work with both living and dead artists in deterritorializing assemblages in time.

# Chapter 3 Imaginary Collaboration

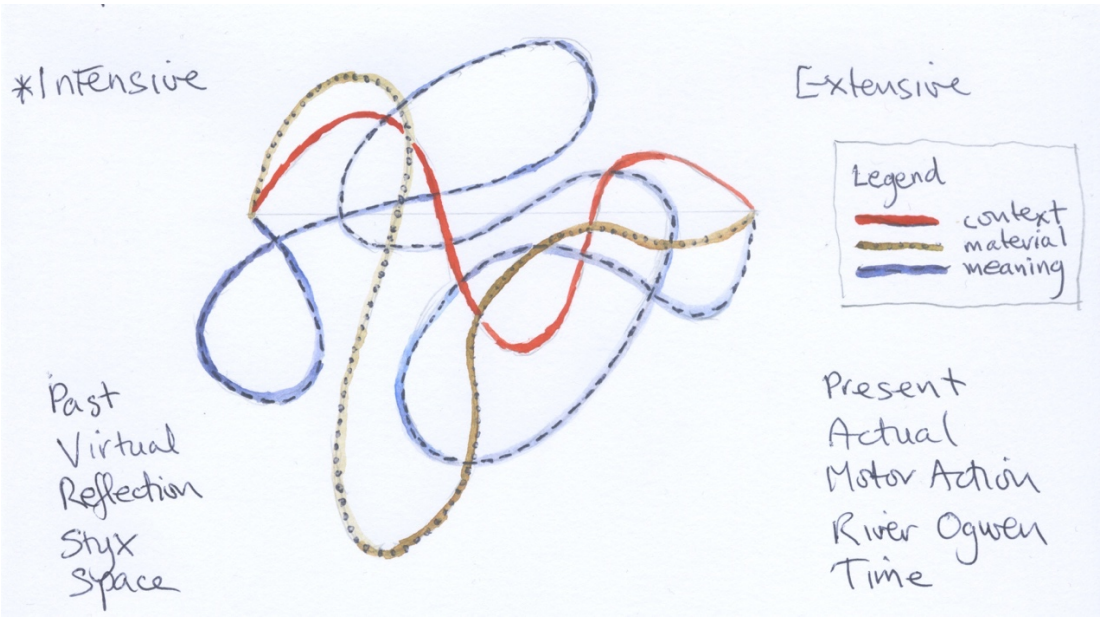


*Figure 50. Map of polarities*

## 3.1. Performative Assemblages in Time and Space

This chapter develops the notion of imaginary collaborations with artists who are dead, or those I have yet to meet. It builds on the ideas from Chapter one in my use of the arch of hysteria (Bourgeois, 1993 and Brouillet, 1887) and the work of the Surrealists, and Chapter two of feminist artists working to situate themselves within art history, but develops it in an imaginative way specific to my process, whereby I find myself having a transformative encounter with artists from the past. My work and I are changed by them, and their work is changed by entering in to the assemblage. My assemblages and deterritorialisations are expanded to include time, and ideas of imaginary collaboration put forward by Nikos Papastergiadis (1999) are given a new dimension by extending the possibilities for change into the past.

The chapter conceptualises what I mean by imaginary collaboration and how it works, through the bodies of work discussed below. I will show how these encounters extend the assemblages of the research in time, and in space, folding and unfolding. The research extends relationships with material and people into the past, increasing the visualisation of the invisible older woman.

## 3.2. Defining Imaginary Collaboration

Imaginary collaboration builds on ideas of repetition and performativity (Butler, 1999). By believing myself to be in collaboration with artists from the past, I can coalesce their artworks together with mine into the assemblage, thus adding to the cumulative power of the reiterations of art works about old women. This experience is comparable to collaborations with people who are physically present. It is more than transcription, more than a source of ideas, or a way to discover and learn from historical techniques and artistic methods, and more than engaging professionally with the canon of art.

If collaboration can be defined as 'an interactive process having a shared transmutational purpose' (Tate, 2012) then my own practice is enhanced by imaginative collaboration with art(ists) of the past. Just as my work is transformed by my encounter with theirs, so theirs is transformed by its inclusion in the assemblage, even if temporarily. In 2000, the artist Mike Knowles first drew my attention to different ways artists use art from the past when he told me about the feeling that he experienced when painting from a work by Poussin or Titian. He did not claim special knowledge about the artists as people, but the encounter touched him, changing how he saw both their work and his own, and shaping his methodology. Over the next ten to fifteen years I began to notice striking similarities with collaborative projects I was doing in real life with artists, poets and musicians. However it was only whilst working on this research that it rose to the foreground of my mind and working process, becoming an essential tool in joining and reflecting on assemblages around my goals. Deterritorialisation thus extends into the past.

Collaboration is always challenging as well as stimulating, a crucial benefit being that it makes me do work I would never have done, or been able to do, without that interaction. This influence can be unexpected and is beyond my conscious control, which links it to accident, another valuable encounter in the process of making art. More importantly it makes it a complex assemblage, something more than the work of the self with materials and contexts, and including other artists.

My belief in this imaginary process makes it an enriching and inspiring experience. I intend imaginary in the sense of 'existing only in imagination or fancy; having no real existence…formerly also: existing only as spirit, not corporeal' (OED). It comes from the Latin imago, or image, based in the making of art. I could argue that any art work is an assemblage with the past of that culture, but it is in the noticing of and engagement with the relationship that the creative encounter takes place and the virtual collaboration takes form.

Nikos Papastergiadis in *What John Berger Saw* (1999) speaks about imaginative collaborations between artists and writers, which:

> *can proceed without personal contact. Ideas travel and in the process new possibilities develop…This imaginary collaboration can be very similar to the more direct forms of collaboration, both demand a surrender of the self to the other...a heightened and intimate level of receptivity of the signals that can cross between and transfigure the understanding of identity…Berger described the collaborative process in the dual terms of both a complicity with the subject and a form of hospitality towards the unknown (Papastergiadis, 1999; 6).*

It is in this area of openness to the unknown, stimulated by the interaction with the collaborator, that possibilities for new ideas, transformations and becomings are found. The surrendering of the self to the other is what makes any collaboration to some extent frightening, or challenging, but it is not dissimilar to what happens when one attempts automatic drawing, or being open to chance and accident in one's work. It is a becoming. The same impossibility can be applied to the problem of knowing the unconscious, the fellow collaborator, or the dead artist; it is the attempt to reach or understand them that develops perception and penetration.

All works of imaginary collaboration (Papastergiadis, 1999, Morphet, 2000) discussed in this thesis enhance my expression of ageing and post-menopausal women, from the point of view of a scarred post-menopausal artist. The works have been chosen on very different grounds; a polarity between those

sympathetic to the making visible of old women; and those who are not. The latter were used to draw attention to the stereotypes and underlying attitudes that are currently limiting old women, and creating negative and patronising attitudes towards us.

The two bodies of work discussed in this chapter are *Silent Scroll* (2015), a performance after Carolee Schneeman's (1975) *Interior Scroll* and *RE-Take/RE-Invent* (2016), a series of sculptures and drawings after Henry Fuseli's (1800) *Tiresias Foretells the Future to Odysseus* held in Cardiff Museum. *Silent Scroll* (2015) was in the first category and *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016) was in the second, made in response to what I saw as a negative and reductive depiction of an old woman. This latter piece was of fundamental significance in developing my process of imaginary collaboration and provided me with my muse, Anticleia, the mother of Odysseus, who first drew me to Fuseli's painting because of her treatment in his work.

## 3.3. Imaginary Collaboration 1. *Silent Scroll* (2015) (After Carolee Schneemann)

*Silent Scroll* (2015) was made in response to Carolee Schneeman's *Interior Scroll* (1975). Although this was a performance by a young woman, I have imagined it being re-made in 2015, forty years later, when Carolee Schneemann was herself an old woman of seventy six. Schneemann (1939 - 2019) was only 15 years older than me. I became aware of her work in art school in Australia when still in my teens. I was asked to make a performance for the North Wales International Poetry Festival 2014 with Martin Zet[8] from the Czech Republic, who was the keynote artist. Zet had chosen silencing or censorship as his concept for the festival and was painting texts black with Indian ink, inviting the public to bring texts to be silenced. The silencing of texts made me think of the silencing of older women, enacted covertly in Western culture by not listening. This in turn

[8] Martin Zet can be found at http://martin-zet.com

reminded me of a seminal performance from my youth, Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975).

Figure 51. Schneemann, C. (1975) *Interior Scroll* . Photograph Anthony McCall

I had been revisiting the body artists of the Seventies and Eighties whose work continues to resonate and act upon those who experience it, picking up the baton of their feminist investigation as an older woman working in contemporary conditions. These transformative encounters combine creativity from the past and present to produce an art event beyond representation. *Silent Scroll* (2015) embodies the performative (Butler, 2007) power of imaginary collaboration:

> *Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalisation in the context of a body, understood in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration (Butler, 2007: xv).*

Imaginative collaboration extends the temporal duration of performativity as far into the past as the artist's imagination can take it. The performance that I call

*Silent Scroll* (2015) (Figure 52), references Schneemann reading feminist arguments from a scroll she had placed in her vagina. My re-enactment of *Interior Scroll* (1975) is silent, referencing the fact that people no longer want to listen to the wisdom of postmenopausal women. Clare Johnson (2010) notes that most people experience *Interior Scroll* (2015) as a photograph or series of photographs, and are unable to hear what Schneemann is reading. Schneemann herself complained of being forgotten and ignored throughout her life apart from one or two seminal works including *Interior Scroll* (1975), that did not bring her financial security and neglected the rest of her work.

*Figure 52 Zyborska, W. (2015) Silent Scroll (after Carolee Schneemann) North Wales Poetry Festival, Bangor*

Schneemann said of her work:

> *I thought of the vagina in many ways – physically, conceptually: as a sculptural form...the source of sacred knowledge... transformation... This source of 'interior knowledge' would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh…the source of conceptualizing, of interacting with materials, of imagining the world and composing its images (Schneemann, 1979; 234-5).*

The sacred knowledge that Schneemann referred to envisaged a holistic world in opposition to the mind body split of Cartesian dualism where the privileged mind is gendered male and the abject body female. Schneemann's 'interior knowledge' is a fluid model, encompassing body and spirit whilst interacting with the material world:

> *The body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological (Braidotti, 1994; 4).*

Schneemann was trying to find a female symbolic and to develop a female subjectivity. I was repeating this attempt as a post-menopausal woman, outside of the gendered economy of reproduction. The giant but silent vagina remains symbolic of unseen power made visible and at the same time posits questions about the nature and the position of the becoming older woman. I refer to the possibility of the female symbolic within the strategy of becoming-monumental in Chapter five.

*Silent Scroll* (Figure 52) is a solo, sculptural performance. I see works where I perform with large sculptural pieces such as the above as performative sculptures moved by my body, rather than thinking of the sculptures as some sort of costume for the movement of my body. I do not think of myself as 'wearing' the sculpture, but as me moving it from the inside (sometimes outside). Together we are a sculptural machine or assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 1977), becoming something other than what we are apart. This kind of assemblage is a complex becoming where the nature and affect of the materials, the others involved (in this

case Schneemann), dictate the outcome as much as all the memories and experience and knowledge that I bring. Together we create the assemblage. The assemblage is an event which can sometimes leave behind an art object. The event and/or the object can be encountered and experienced, or as in this case, become a performative expression that can be repeated, different each time.

Whilst making the large tubular sculpture it began to suggest the womb as well as the vagina and became the whole reproductive system without me realising it. I wanted to bring what is inside outside, to make the invisible visible, and I put myself inside it, thinking of enlarging the symbolic element of Schneemann's work to monumental proportions, changing the scale so that I was both maker and made, being reborn as an old woman from inside my sculpture (in chapter five a similar sculpture is used as part of a soft coffin/rebirthing performance in *Not Dead Yet* 2018). My arms could become fallopian tubes, emerging to bring silent messages from the empty ovaries.

As so often with making material based art encounters I did not consciously make this analogy until much later. It brought to my mind an association with the work of Frida Kahlo (Figure 53) that I had made with my work for *Before and After* (2012). One of the cultural narratives around breast cancer is the 'rebirth' story, you are supposed to come out of your 'brave journey' transformed in some kind of positive way. I was emerging from my pod-like but also tumour-like sculpture in what I intended as an ironic rebirth. *Silent* Scroll (2015) is a kind of repetition of such a barren re-birth. In *Before and After* (2012) I was referencing the sewn up scar on my chest to the atrophied opening of the aged post-menopausal body, in *Silent Scroll* (2015) I return to the womb, infertile yet still resonating with symbolic power.

*Figure 53. Zyborska, W. 2012 Before and After (photograph Glyn Davies) and Kahlo, F. 1944 Flower of Life*

*Figure 54. Kahlo, F. Flower of life (1944) and My Birth (1932)*

Kahlo's astonishing painting *My Birth* (1932) (Figure 54) pre-dates by fifty years Judy Chicago's *Birth Project* (1980-85), which celebrated the power of giving birth, tellingly almost totally neglected by the patriarchal modern Western art canon. Unlike Chicago's project Kahlo does not celebrate birth, but mourns her recent

miscarriage in a surreal painting that seems closer to death than life. The three ages of woman are conflated in this painting, the armless Kahlo/mother is arrested halfway through giving birth to herself, with the sheet drawn over her face as in death. Another symbolic mother (the virgin?) looks down from the wall, presaging old age. It is painted in the style of the retablo, or ex-voto painting, traditionally made to express thanks to a sacred being for surviving a dangerous experience, but the scroll at the base of the painting is empty of words. Yet despite the despair contained in this work Kahlo emphasises the transformative possibilities of art. By giving birth to herself she takes power over her own creativity and audacity in making an image beyond representation.

Eighty years after Kahlo's dark painting (made when she was twenty-five), forty years after Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975) and thirty years after *The Birth Project* (1980-85) such imagery is still largely unseen, especially in relation to old, post-menopausal women.

I repeated *Silent Scroll* (2015) the same year at the Ogwen River Festival (Figure 55). The poets had left the assemblage, and in their place the river and its banks began to exert their energies.

At that time I was already immersed in the second imaginative collaboration in this chapter, *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016) the subject of which was the dead mother of Odysseus, Anticleia, and the artist, Fuseli. The deterritorialisation of the Ogwen River imposed by the sculpture on its banks began to include new polarities in time, between the Ogwen River and the Styx.

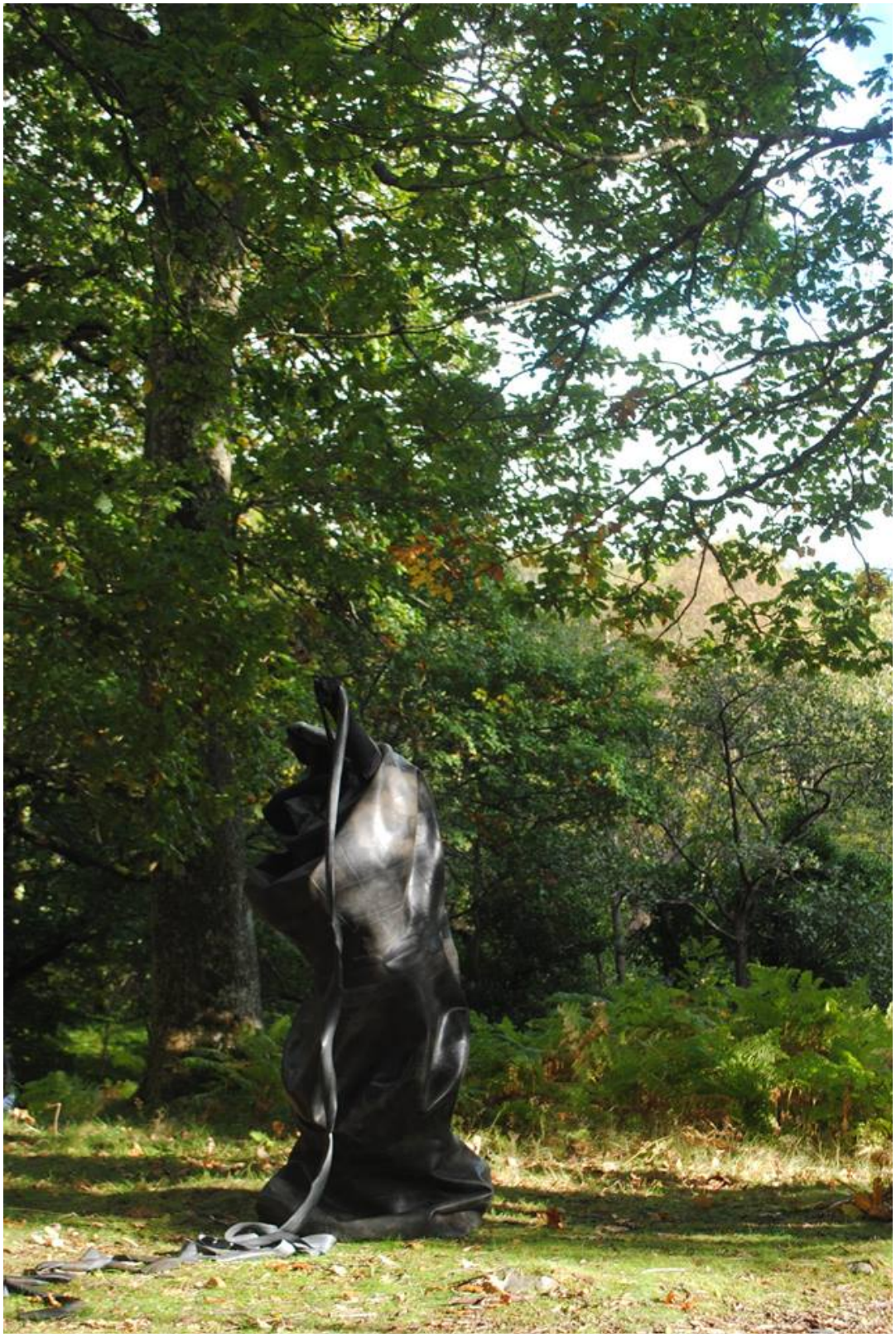

*Figure 55. Zyborska, W. (2015) Silent Scroll (after Carolee Schneemann). Ogwen River Festival, Bethesda. Photograph Jessica Davidson.*

In *Silent Scroll* (2015) I imagined myself re-iterating Schneemann's work, drawing attention to the silencing of her message as well as my own. I imagined *Interior Scroll* (1975) forty years on, transformed into an old woman's interior scroll. My

scroll is not spoken, but it is very long, forty years longer. I emphasise the struggle for recognition and the ambiguity I feel towards the becoming of old age by making it appear to be difficult to bring the scroll from the inside to the outside. I have shed most of the body and expanded in scale the folds of the vagina and uterus, the inside/outside of woman's sex and the counter symbol to the phallus on a polarity of Lacan's Imaginary.

My sculpture is both phallus and uterus. If the phallus "owes its extraordinarily high narcissistic cathexis to its organic significance for the propagation of the species" (Lacan 2002; 227) then surely the uterus has an equal or paramount claim for significance and power, since it is the site of production of the next generation (and the most powerful muscle in the human body). Yet the process of birth is significant only in its invisibility in the Western canon of art. In my performance the uterus has shed its biological purpose, leaving behind the symbolic.

I have been changed by my affective encounter with Schneemann's work, and have been impelled by it to re-iterate the performance in my own way, using my own materials and methods, from the perspective of someone who has lived through many of the same struggles for liberation and subjectivity as Schneemann, and now faces the additional discrimination and erasure imposed by western society against post-menopausal women.

I aim to both change the minds of my audience, and to liberate their imagination through the affective tactile encounter with my art, 'the emotive charge of inner states communicated by tactile analogy' (Vasseleu, 2009).

*Figure 56. Zyborska, W. (2016) Silent Scroll (after Carollee Schneemann). CAM Naples. Photograph Andrew Smith.*

Affective, tactile art works through the senses and the body to make its transformations; ‘art works virally ‘not through representation, but through *affective* contamination’ (Guattari, 1995; 92) where 'the suggestive potency of art...is shared - or, rather, 'caught' - by the perceiver like a contagious infection' (Powell, 2005: 112). It is a rhizomatic movement, not an hierarchical, top down dissemination of influence, unpredictable yet powerful, and this viral analogy suggests that it could be passed on to others who have not even encountered the art work through contact with those who have. My intention is to keep making work in this way, repeating it, and other similar yet different works, in order to spread this affective contamination.

## 3.4. Imaginary Collaboration 2. *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016)

The work for *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016) (Figure 58) was made a year later than *Silent Scroll* (2015), and it has been the project that above all others developed my understanding of the process of imaginative collaboration in my practice. It began to unfold in my reflections in the convoluted, backwards and forwards nature of such energies and polarities.

*Figure 57. Fuseli, H. (c.1800) Tiresias Foretells the Future to Odysseus. Oil on Canvas. Cardiff Museum*

*Figure 58. Zyborska, W. 2016. Anticleia has disappeared. Recycled wood, inner tubes, coat hangers, wire, broken car mirror, breast prosthesis, RE-Take/Re-Invent installation, Royal Cambrian Academy, Conwy.*

*Re-Take/Re/Invent* followed on from *Material Matters* (2014, Chapter 2) in the sense that it was the second time I worked closely with objects from public museums in a structured way in institutions. By that I mean that we were invited in to the museum, could discuss things to a limited extent with curatorial staff, and had access to objects in archives. I limited my search in Cardiff to works depicting old women and on public display, rather than from the collection as a whole. This was because in this project I was concerned with what is being made visible to the public from our collections, not what is hidden away in archives.

Both were group projects curated by a participating artist. In both projects our contracts included the requirement to contribute to a public blog[9] about the process of interacting with the museum, working with the chosen objects and the

[9] http://retakereinvent.blogspot.com and https://materialmattersbangor.wordpress.com

making.  This made me record more details about my working methods than I usually do.

The combination of the subject of my research and its relationship with the past made a pre-existing fascination with the artistic process of working with art from the past into a major component of my methodology.

In 2000 the National Gallery in London held an exhibition, *Encounters,* of work by twenty-four major contemporary artists whom the Director of the Gallery, Neil MacGregor, had invited to 'converse with the greatest artists of all time' (Morphet, 2000; 7), the results of those 'conversations' exhibited next to the paintings from the collection that had inspired them.  In addition to showing a confident belief that the work of the artists was a two–way process described by him as a dialogue, MacGregor stated that:

> *The Gallery's Collection was put together precisely to allow us to eavesdrop on these dialogues across the centuries that have criss-crossed Europe since the Renaissance.  And indeed the Gallery was founded in part at least so that artists in London could at last join in the talk (Morphet, 2000; 7).*

It seemed to me two years after making this work, that the painting I chose for *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016) could be seen as illustrating this process as described by MacGregor.  It depicts Odysseus having a conversation with the dead, across imaginary time and space.  One can imagine Odysseus as the artist, with his sacrifice/medium of sheep's blood, selecting from the hordes of dead artists the one who can help him make his next actions.

*Figure 59. Zyborska, W. (2015) drawing after Fuseli for Re-Take/Re-Invent. Ink and graphite powder.*

In 2016 I was feeling my way around this painting, as a piece of evidence for my research, that I needed to understand before I could respond to it. Most of the artists in the *Encounters* (2000) exhibition began, as I did, with drawings from the original, getting to know the work through their hand and eye, thinking with their skin (Ahmed and Stacey, 2001).

The catalogue for the *Encounters* (2000) exhibition claimed it to be the first exhibition with this dialogic encounter as the central precept, entailing more than just copying and learning from the past in a technical and formal sense. In their definition of 'encounter' as a dialogue with art(ists) of the past the curators of *Encounters* do not go as far as O'Sullivan, Berger or Papastergiadis in considering

the encounter to be a collaboration, but they are on the spectrum of this polarity; 'encounter-collaboration'.

What follows is a detailed description and analysis of *Re-take/Re-invent* (2016), made with Fuseli's *Tiresias Foretells the Future to Odysseus*, c.1800, - how the imagined collaboration begins, evolves and concludes. With this section, I lay open the rhizomatic meandering which eventually leads to the production of artworks submitted.

I was invited to make work for an exhibition[10] based on a piece of art from the collection of Cardiff Museum. My intention was to find an illuminating example of how older women are represented in our museums. Those on display in Cardiff were (as expected) few in number and limited to allegorical figures (negative ones such as *Avarice,* whereas *Hope* was a young woman), portraits of a few wives of important men, and an opera singer.

My first response to the Fuseli painting[11] was negative. In it, a grey, wraithlike woman wilts between two men. Too faded to have many distinguishing features, her age is uncertain, but the label said that she was Odysseus's mother, a ghost in Hades.

Although also dead, Tiresias, the blind seer of Thebes, is depicted in the painting in as corporeal a way as Odysseus, a living visitor to Hades. In contrast his mother is in monochrome, blending into the background, her arms crossed over her chest as if she is still in her tomb, without energy to move.

[10] *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016) was curated by Andrew Smith supported by the National Museum of Wales, the Arts Council of Wales and Bangor University. It was shown in the Royal Cambrian Academy and Oriel Ynys Mon. http://retakereinvent.blogspot.com

[11] For ease of reference I have included the illustration again here.

*Figure 60. Fuseli, H. (c.1800) Tiresias Foretells the Future to Odysseus. Oil on Canvas. National Museum Cardiff*

In figure ground terms (described in Chapter two), she is more ground than figure. She seems to be still wearing her shroud (unlike Tiresias), and is semi-emerged from a mass of ghosts spiralling in the background of the painting. The mother appeared to me to be neglected by the artist and his protagonists. I began to be aware of the engagement that marks the beginning of the imaginary collaborative relationship. As this happened I began the surrendering mentioned above, and my judgmental approach began to soften.

A number of elements combined to draw my attention to this work rather than the few others in the museum with old women: the difference in treatment of the female character from the two men; the strangeness of his technique (Fuseli was a major influence on the surrealists, and later, American cartoonists creating the Marvel superheroes (Myrone, 2001)) and the spiral composition. I consider myself to be a latter day surrealist, and no doubt the same things that drew them to Fuseli also attracted me. In addition Fuseli is a strongly 'sculptural' painter, whose strength is in his (often peculiar) drawings, and I am a sculptor who draws.

However, I was not conscious of anything other than the subject and the figure ground relationships when I made my choice

Further research confirmed its suitability for my purpose in more ways than I could have expected, as I explain below. I began to make drawings, taking apart and analysing the composition in a playful way, and to think about it three dimensionally. I considered isolating shapes and movements from the painting, such as the spiral of ghosts that Odysseus's mother is part of. I made copies of the painting to put on the walls so that I could look at it all the time and absorb it. Different things occur at different times. I found out that Odysseus's mother's name, Anticleia, means 'without fame' - I had found a perfect subject to illustrate the way older women are ignored in a definitive way. Chance further emphasized what I had noticed in the painting:

*Figure 61 Fuseli, H. (c.1800) Tiresias Foretells the Future to Odysseus. (bleached photograph)*

Problems with my printer meant that a photograph of the painting (Figure 61) came out in bleached tones. When this happened Anticleia and the spiral of ghosts disappeared completely. Her tonal value in the painting is very low, reflecting her lack of importance to the picture as a whole, as reflected in the

Odyssey where she occurs as a conduit for masculine genesis. She is not a separate individual as each of the men is, she is a vessel for patriarchal values just like the allegorical statues in the museum. The narrative import is contained within and between the two men who look at each other, not at her; Anticleia is part of the background of both the story, and the painting. However as I began to surrender and warm to Fuseli and read about his friendship with Mary Wollstonecraft I began to shift the blame to Homer for the story, and imagined to myself that Fuseli might be depicting it in a critical way, sympathetic to the ignominious treatment of Anticleia. I have no evidence for this. Other paintings and drawings by Fuseli of the same subject omit Anticleia completely. *Tiresias Appears to Odysseus* (Fuseli, 1780-85) (Figure 62) shows Homer's dead sheep, sacrificed for its blood, but not Anticleia.

*Figure 62 Fuseli, H. (1780-85) Tiresias appears to Odysseus. Watercolour with tempera.*

The kind of chance or accident that occurred with my printer is an important part of my working process. In my drawing (which I describe as 'semi-automatic') I am

using Surrealist automatic drawing tactics, such as not looking at the paper or what I am doing on it, and sometimes disengaging almost entirely from what my hand is doing. This method is interspersed in some drawings with glances at the subject from which I am drawing. Or I might be thinking of an imaginary subject, often the human body, that I am familiar with drawing. This familiarity means that my hand often knows where to go without my looking either at the paper or at what my hand is doing. It is partly automatic, and partly a sort of thinking and looking through my hand (Ahmed and Stacey, 2001), a very tactile form of drawing.

**Figure 63. Zyborska, W. (2015) Sketch for Re/take Re/invent. Graphite powder on paper**

I moved graphite powder around with my finger to get the feel of the composition (Figure 63), and felt with my other hand where I was on the page, to locate myself within the drawing and consider where to go next. Any marks, washes, or collage

may involve accident or chance together with more conscious decision-making. In my sculptural practice, I use a mixture of planning and accident, the rubber medium particularly is unpredictable and constantly changing. It is difficult to work with and its fluctuating and unstable properties make it impossible to wholly predict the outcome, it determines its own form. I attempt to get into a mental 'zone' where I work in a semi-conscious way allowing things to happen, rather than trying to control everything. I want things to emerge, to unfold, and to become. One sculpture of my imagining of Anticleia's struggle to emerge from Hades in the contemporary world as an empowered subject changed my mind completely as to its final form when I was trying to turn it inside out (Figure 64).

*Figure 64. Zyborska, W. (2016) Anticleia tries to become somebody, work in progress. Rubber inner tubes, whipping twine.*

When I saw the energy of the concertinaed shape and the flow of the tongue I stopped working on it and kept it (Figure 65). Originally I planned a spiral floor piece.

*Figure 65. Zyborska, W. 2016 Anticleia tries to become somebody. Rubber inner tubes, whipping twine.*

Each singular act of making a piece is part of the assemblage together with Fuseli's painting in a movement from 'recognition' to 'encounter' (Simon O'Sullivan, (2006):

> *An encounter bears a problem which 'perplexes' the subject and forces them to think. Thinking through this problem forces the subject to think of an idea, not to solve the problem but to transform it in order to bring about a new way of thinking and being (MacKenzie, 2019:1).*

O'Sullivan writes that to precisely define the ideas of Deleuze & Guattari would be to lose the meaning. Their ideas cannot be 'recognised' and pinned down. They refuse to come to the point since points are only made in dualistic arguments. I experienced something of this elusive unfolding in my initial observations of the Fuseli painting. At first I thought I recognized his work and his rather heightened Romantic style as something that I already knew, fitting some of my search criteria for the '*re*presentation' of older women - I had in mind the sort of work I was looking for, neglected, overlooked and underestimated older woman depicted in a negative fashion when contrasted with the male heroes of the piece.

*Figure 66. Wanda Zyborska 2016 Anticleia's Dilemma. Pencil and watercolour*.

As I began to make initial drawings about it and think about how I would like to work with it, it started to become an 'encounter'. With an encounter 'our typical ways of being in

the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted' (O'Sullivan, 2006: 2). In following the ideas of the painting it began to say different things. It started as a protest about Anticleia's position and how she is treated in the mythology. Then I found that Fuseli was a friend (some say lover) of Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote about 'the grandeur of his soul, that quickness of comprehension, and lovely sympathy' (Knowles, 1831: 164). Peter Tomory claimed that Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) 'grew out of discussions with Fuseli' (Tomory, 1972; 175) and 'the artist was in agreement with most of what Miss Wollstonecraft proposed' (Tomory, 1972: 175). I began to imagine that Fuseli had some sympathy for her ignominy.

Although in terms of tone, colour and painterly detail the spiral of ghosts are relegated to the background, they provide most of the compositional energy of the work. There is a potential force in the twisted form, perhaps enhanced by the phallic shape of Anticleia in her shroud.

*Figure 67. Zyborska, W. 2016 Sketch for Re-Take/Re-Invent. Anticleia Rises, or Odysseus stops underestimating the power of the uterus [pencil]*

My imaginary collaboration places the artist in my consciousness, like an imaginary friend. I 'encountered' areas of ambiguity and energy in the work. It was challenging to untangle where these came from, me or the painting. This ambiguity brought an energy or vibration of meaning and form between my work, Homer's epic and the Fuseli painting.

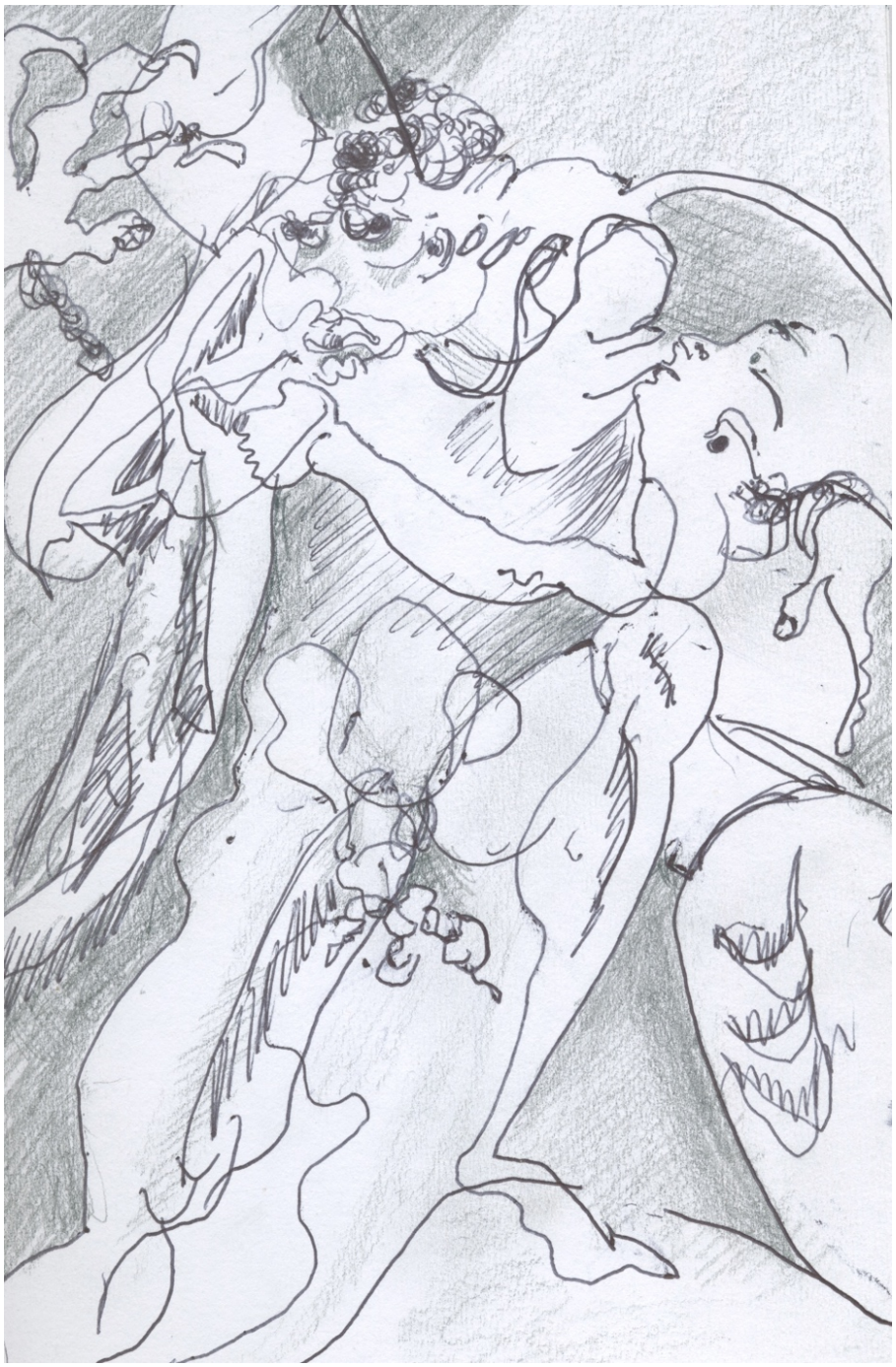

*Figure 68. Zyborska, W. 2016 Anticleia begs Sisyphus (distracted by a Harpy) to leave her alone [pencil and ink]*

Reading revealed that Anticleia was the granddaughter of the god Hermes, daughter of Autolycus and mother of Odysseus by Laertes (or Sisyphus). Sisyphus seduced or raped her because her father had stolen his cattle, and she married Laertes. She is defined only by her family relationships to notable men and gods, and she herself is definitively 'without fame'. She appears in Hades as a conduit to bring Odysseus news from the home he has not seen since he began his Odyssey.

Anticleia had died of grief, pining for her missing son. Women were valued for (and expected to display) excessive devotion to sons and husbands at that time. Her death is a sign of virtue at an age when she is no longer of value. Contemporary re-workings of the Odyssey similarly overlook Anticleia. Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005) depicted Anticleia as a jealous and spiteful mother-in-law. Although Atwood reimagines the assiduous (and still relatively young) Penelope, her Anticleia is an un-deconstructed stereotype of a bitter older woman. It seems she is not worthy of Atwood's wit or attention.

## 3.5. Transformative Encounters In Time

Atwood spoke through Penelope in her book, and like me she imagined her emerging in the present; 'Sometimes the barrier dissolves and we can go on an outing. Then we get very excited' (Atwood, 2005: 17). I also am excited when I imagine Anticleia coming on an 'outing' with me. It is liberating to be joining in assemblages between the past and present, merging the distinctions between artist, subject and materials. I went to Bardsey Island and took Anticleia with me.

In the poem Odysseus must take blood from a sacrifice (a sheep) to embody the ghosts. I found some bones on Bardsey, from either a sheep or a seal (Figure 69).

*Figure 69. Zyborska, W. 2015 Maquette Anticleia (bone, wood and piano wire]*

I preferred to think of it as seal bones. Seals in mythology are often related to women, perhaps the origin of the sirens encountered by Odysseus earlier in the Odyssey. On Bardsey I could hear the seals singing from the house where I was staying (the artist Brenda Chamberlain's house, with her murals), and they often came close to me when I was swimming.

Bardsey Island (Island of the Bards), or Ynys Enlli in Welsh, is a sacred island and is special in many ways, which to me added significance to the bones, which became relics. The shape of the found bones is formally perfect, relating to the coil of ghostly bodies in the Fuseli. The wire from the base is a segment of piano string, referencing the singing of the seals on Bardsey and the sirens in the Odyssey.

*Figure 70 Zyborska, W. 2015 Odysseus Ignores Anticleia. [ink, pencil, watercolour, graphite powder, collage, gouache]*

In his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) Hogarth defines the 'line of beauty' as a 'precise serpentine line…represented by a fine wire, properly twisted round the elegant and varied figure of a cone'. To give it animation and grace, the cone should be tilted slightly to one side. The figure equates to the spiral form of a seashell and countless shapes that occur in organic and inorganic matter that follow the recurring mathematical sequence identified by Fibonacci in the thirteenth century.

*Figure 71. Zyborska, W. 2015 Anticleia is Becoming [pencil, watercolour and gouache]*

The sheath like shape of Anticleia and her shroud, erect and subsumed within the swirling ghosts resonates with me. I see her emerging from the ground wherever I go.

While making the sculptures of both Tiresias and Odysseus the armatures again became the sculptures, even more so than in *Material Matters* (2013), and again this was not originally intended. In this instance it seemed to me to embody some sort of death principle, the armatures being the bones of the sculpture. Tiresias was a woman for seven years, transformed into a woman by Hera as a punishment for hitting two copulating snakes with a stick. He represents both sexes and was powerful enough to embody himself without the need of a blood sacrifice.

*Figure 72. Zyborska W. 2016 Tiresias (detail). [wood, wire, burnt rubber, hair and prosthesis]*

Whilst he was a woman Tiresias became an acolyte of Hera and gave birth to a daughter. Because of his sexual ambiguity and his psychic powers Surrealists[12] found him of interest, and I too was seduced by stories of Tiresias and gave his sculpture (Figure 72) my now redundant prosthesis (after my reconstruction) and some of my hair lost in chemotherapy for a beard. Then I returned to making sculptures of Anticleia, who by now appeared to me to be composed of pure energy, intent on escaping Hades, reappearing in the present to unfold in all the ways denied her in her previous unconsidered incarnation.

The attenuated, spiral forms suggested by the painting began to manifest in the studio. A collection of bicycle inner tubes threaded themselves over some left over plastic water pipes (we were putting water in our print studio at the time, so I was digging ditches and building sink units concurrently) to embody Anticleia's return in her transformed condition.

[12] Apollinaire wrote a play *The Breasts of Tiresias* (1917) in which he coined the term 'Surrealism'. In the play the breasts of the heroine, Thérèse, float away like balloons when she decides to become a man.

The River Ogwen Festival (2016) where I had performed *Silent Scroll* (2015) the previous year, suggested a conduit for Anticleia's first outing in this manifestation. I imagined her entering the Styx and emerging from the river onto the banks of the Ogwen, spiralling into the air and penetrating an oak tree.

*Figure 73. Zyborska, W. (2016) Flow, Ogwen River Festival 2016*

Following this I made further experiments with flows and energy, always imagining the flow to begin from beneath the surface, bursting upwards and returning again to the ground, following the coiling shapes of the tubing and the wrinkled sheath of the inner tube ‘skin’.

*Figure 74. Zyborska, W. (2016) Flow, Cain Sculpture Garden for Anglesey Arts Week*

The gallery version of *Anticleia Returns* for *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016) (Figure 75) threatened to block the flow of her energy, as I could not obtain permission to drill into the floor of the gallery. I had to find a believable substitute floor, so used steel plates of the sort used to cover holes in the ground during construction work.

I had no idea of any of the histories and contexts of his work when I chose Fuseli’s painting and yet it feels like serendipity. It led to so many avenues directly

*Figure 75. Zyborska, W. (2016) Anticleia Returns (sculpture in foreground) Re-Take/Re-Invent, Oriel Mon, Llangefni, steel, alcathene piping, recycled bicycle inner tubes. In the background is Anticleia Decides to Become Somebody, recycled tractor inner tubes, whipping twine.*

overlapping my own spheres of interest. It brought me into contact with Fuseli, an artist with whom I had never before had affinity. Contextual reading fed the imaginative collaboration that started in making connections with the artwork, touching at certain points visually and over time. However, all the contextual influences, intentions and life experiences that I later discovered were already present in Fuseli's work, speaking to me in the haptic and visual language of art, that is, beyond what Fuseli knew, projecting into the future of Surrealism, Marvel comics and twenty-first century feminism. Fuseli's composition with its folds and the spiral of ghosts apprehends the energy and shapes of Deleuze's versions of Liebniz's Fold. The referencing backwards to Michelangelo and the Greeks and Romans, and forwards to the Surrealists and the superheroes of Marvel Comics is part of the historical, haptic and conceptual assemblage of the imaginary collaboration.


*Figure 76 Zyborska, W. (2016) Re-Take/Re-Invent. In the foreground is Anticleia Decides to Become Somebody, behind is Anticleia Returns.*

## 3.6. Conclusion

Imaginary collaboration was fundamental to the two bodies of art discussed in this chapter but not all my practice for this project is framed under this methodology, just as my practice in general is not always collaborative. It would be impossible to tease out in every instance the exact influences and relationships in force at any one time. Collaborative projects undertaken with living artists under agreement between the parties are easier in some ways to define, but the edges of these projects are endlessly permeable and may go on for years later, sometimes stopping and then re-surfacing. I have become more aware of this process over time. It is part of the memory process and the increasing reflection and distance of old age, seeing the bigger picture and how one fits into the patterns. That is, art assemblages with different groups of materials, contexts and people, in different times and places:

> *Art 'turns back on itself, opens onto itself, revealing until then unheard-of potentialities, entering into other connections, setting love adrift in the direction of other assemblages' (Deleuze, 1988: 349).*

I drew on the performative and repetitive aspects of imaginary collaborations in fighting the invisibility of old women in our culture, and our absence as subject matter in our galleries. More importantly it extended the variety of possibilities of becoming and transformation. By including works from the past I can reiterate the performance of becoming older in new and expanded ways, adding their works to the number of iterations and thereby to the critical mass of encounter and affect leading to possibilities for change. By drawing attention to those artists through the lens of the body of work discussed in this thesis, I can add them to the number of artists taking part in contemporary assemblages of art about women ageing. If the artist I am working with in my imaginary collaboration was already dealing with this subject, I can add to the number of their iterations as well as to my own, expanding the viral contagion back into the past.

To me it is not just the subject matter, or even the repetition, that makes this process relevant to this research. It is the reflexive, backwards looking (as well as forward) nature of this process. It extends the assemblages beyond matter, people, animals and places into time. It echoes the way we look back over our lives as we age, noticing similarities with the past in the new and thus transforming our perceptions and ideas. This is one of the positive aspects of ageing, one that is currently undervalued in our culture with its obsession with the young and the new.

Imaginative collaboration involves a detailed engagement with ideas of what might be the original contexts and concepts of the piece, a dynamic coming and going between how it looks now, what the original artist did then and what I am doing now, even without meeting at any definable point. I would fancifully relate this flow to the unfolding and folding activity of the monad in Deleuze's Baroque house (after Liebniz) (Figure 77), which posits the imminent potential for change and becoming, in a sense between mind and matter, between times, and from one perception to another. This movement is 'a correspondence and even a communication between the two levels, between the two labyrinths, between the pleats of matter and the folds in the soul' (Deleuze, 1988: 4(2)).

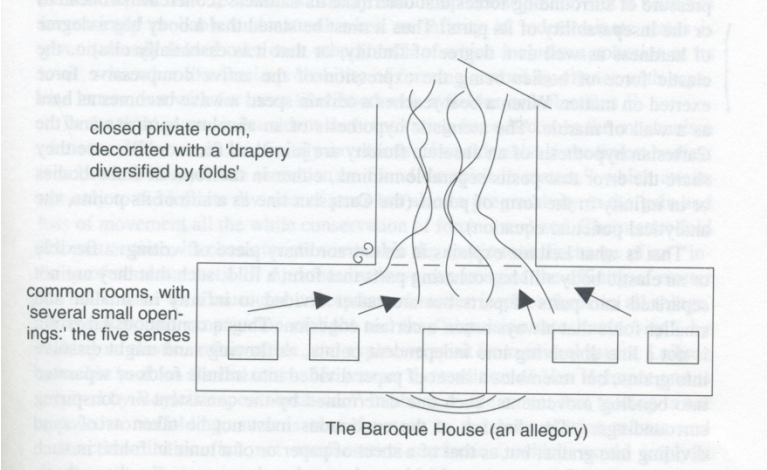


*Figure 77. Deleuze, G. (1988; 5) The Baroque House (an allegory)*

The heightened sensuality of Fuseli's work links him as much to the Baroque as to the Romantic sensibility. Both he and Schneemann were out of place in their own time, and their work projected into the future. In Deleuze's model all options are possible because of its fluid and interconnected nature. To me this fluid interconnectedness is not limited to ideas and formal aesthetics, it exists over time, in an imaginary and potential way, projecting into the past and postulating or indicating possible futures.

The next chapter is about performance and begins at opposite ends of the polarities that constitute the energy and flow of my practice to the more intensive work discussed in this chapter. In the exposing, extensive polarities of Chapter four I explore the performance elements of my research related to action and find ideas about the (social) contract coming from masochistic performance art (O'Dell, 1998) that I will add to my toolbox.

This field of representation first focuses on the body being an object of desire or pain or trauma (the feeling end of the polarities) and moves towards to the acting ends; becoming a subject and/or a more public assemblage. It will unfold from inside the skin to the outside, touching and meeting with others.

# Chapter Four: Acting Your Age

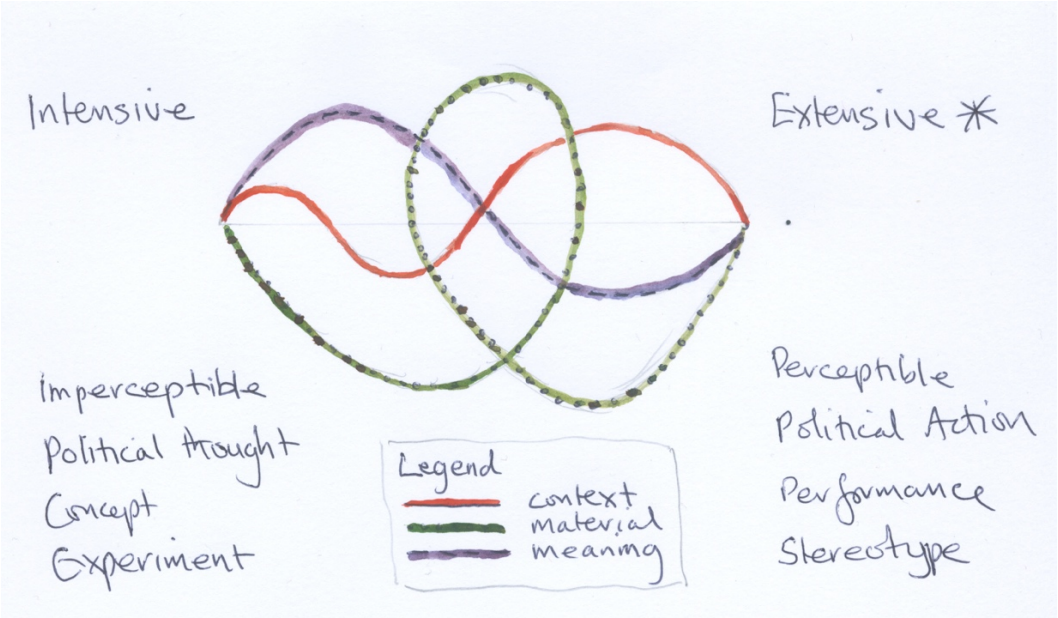


*Figure 78. Map of Polarities*

Since my project began the performance side of my practice has increased significantly – as a result of this research. This chapter explores how this happened and why my desire to communicate and relate directly to others about my feelings about the possibilities of ageing for women has increased. I aim to share my feelings of rage at how we (old women) are made invisible, my curiosity, grief and acceptance of what we are becoming, and rejection of what we are taught to become. My work explores taboos around desire in post-menopausal women as subjects and objects through an exploration of masochistic performance art and develops links with illness and surgery (in the last chapter with Wilke and Kahlo). The performances are more overtly political, subversive, extending the assemblages to include the contract[13] with the audience and inviting the audience to become part of the work. For me personally there was an

[13] As outlined by Kathy O'Dell in her study of masochistic performance art of the nineteen-seventies and eighties, *Contract With the Skin* (1998) in which she used the contract between the artist and audience as a metaphor for political struggle.

extension of perception and of practice - from performative sculpture to performance.

The collaborations move from the past of the imaginary collaboration to the present, to include new, living people. Yet, the relationships made with artists from the past remain with me, in particular my neglected hero Anticleia, found in making the work for *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016) (discussed in the last chapter), and now with me continuously as an inspirational force or charge. This chapter explores the development of performance in my practice through an event; *From Menopause to Old Age: Alternative Beauty* (2015) run by Mexican masochistic performance artist Rocio Boliver. This was a Live Art Development Agency (LADA) workshop held in London at Apiary Studios, Bethnal Green, with performances at Westfield Mall, and Chelsea Theatre. The workshop and performances deterritorialised the Mall and the Theatre.

This field of representation shifted the focus of the work to the extensive polarities; becoming a subject and/or a more public, expressive assemblage, exploring the notion of post-menopausal women as desiring and desirable women. I moved from inside the skin to the outside, naked to clothed, from political thought to political action, touching and meeting with others. My practice remains tactile and will always flow and fold back towards the affective ends of the polarities.

In *Contract with the Skin* (1998) Kathy O'Dell describes the centrality of the metaphor of the contract, always present in what she terms 'masochistic performance' (O'Dell, 1998: 2) i.e., performances that involve physical pain to the artist. In this chapter I propose that the contractual nature of 'masochistic' performance art outlined by O'Dell can be expanded to include art about the scarred, post-menopausal woman. The contract formed between artist and audience draws attention to the nature of agreements made in social and cultural relationships. By 'pushing their actions to an extreme', 'masochistic' performance artists can 'dramatize the importance of a transaction that is often overlooked or taken for granted'. O'Dell, 1998: 2). I extend this questioning of the nature of

unspoken cultural and social contracts to my own performances. I warn my fellow scarred, post-menopausal crones to reject such contracts and refute those who seek to impose them on us.

The chapter focuses on the experimental and subversive side of the performance of ageing; that is doing things that are not expected or 'allowed', and exploring what it feels like to be becoming old, as much as possible, outside of stereotypes, and questioning stereotypes. Margaret Morganroth Gullette (2004) in *Aged by Culture* believes that drawing attention to the performance of age could have a positive effect on perceptions about ageing for women; 'seeing bodies with age as if they were on stage would give this now utopian idea – of ageing as cultural capital, increasing over time – more kick and more sincerity' (Gullette, 2004: 177). I embrace the idea of performing age because it draws attention to its contractual and performative nature and emphasizes the possibility of choice. However I am suspicious of the phrase 'cultural capital' with its neoliberal overtones. I do not intend to put a cultural gloss on ageing. I do not know what the outcomes will be beforehand, but they may not all be positive (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

## 4.1. Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty (2015)

In November 2015 the Live Art Development Agency (LADA) ran the *Old Dears* series of workshops and performances by and about older women. I participated in the workshop; *Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty,* believing it might offer answers to two of my research questions:

> 3. Why is the representation of scarred, aged women as objects of desire and desiring subjects taboo? and
>
> 5. How are Western ideologies challenged when scarred, aged skin is re-presented as erotic, beautiful or other currently unacceptable ways of being for scarred, post-menopausal women?

The Mexican artist Rocio Boliver, also known as *La Congelada de Uva* had been brought to London to perform, lecture and run the workshop, which culminated in a collaborative performance at the Chelsea Theatre. Boliver is a feminist

performance artist who makes body art about her opposition to the oppression of women. As part of this she proposes the formation of 'alternative beauty'. The stated aims of the workshop dovetailed with my research, being an exploration of how collaboration and performance might help with ‘exploring new possibilities for representations and understandings of some of the issues facing women artists, and particularly older women artists, including the ageing body, disempowerment and invisibility’ (LADA, 2015).

*Old Dears* was part of the research project *Restock, Rethink, Reflect Three* (2012 - 2015) mapping ‘the impact of performance on feminist histories and the contribution of artists to discourses around contemporary gender politics’ (LADA, 2015). Two key strands of LADA programmes are 'performance of gender' and 'feminism and ageing'.

I was in a group of 10 artists selected for funded places to work for a week with Boliver (Figure 79):

*Figure 79. Boliver. R. 2014 Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty [performance]*

> *Rocio described her workshop, Between Menopause and Old Age, Alternative Beauty, as "demystifying the horror of old age, inventing my own deranged aesthetic and moral solutions for the problem of age (Keidan, 2015 no page no).*

## 4.2. Pain, Nudity and Psychosis

Having seen images of Boliver's work (Figure 79) I was fearful of working with her, wondering if the other artists in the group would also use pain in their practice and if I would be expected to pierce or cut my skin, I had no desire to hurt myself and had only used my naked body in photographs. I hadn't faced a live audience without wearing clothes or performing inside a sculptural carapace. The brief for the workshop said that Boliver was looking for 'warriors, powerful, transgressive women' (LADA, 2015), which suggested a challenging experience.

The topic of the workshop was central to my research area and I was curious. I often choose to do things because I am frightened in order to push boundaries. In searching for different ways of being and becoming it offered experiences outside of my knowledge and comfort zone. I wanted to know more about artists whose 'performance of bodily pain and decrepitude has become a crucial strategy to imprint the psychic sufferings of individual and collective subjects on to the social screen' (Jones, 2012: 32). Boliver uses enactments of bodily pain coupled with anarchic humour to embody the oppression of Mexican women and express her rage at the capitalist system:

> *as a performance artist and specifically as myself, a 56 year old woman living in the 21st Century, a time where we still suffer from ageism…To age gracefully? Hell no! I'm psychotic about how this media PHENOMENON is used to convert the victim (of age) to a compulsive consumer, lost in the useless search for her lost youth (Boliver, 2012).*

*Figure 80. Boliver, R. 2015 performing with 'diapers'.*

The workshop offered an opportunity to explore the spectrum of contemporary performance practice that deals with pain that is chosen and voluntary. I believe that the more tactile a work of art is, the more powerful is its effect: 'In being disturbed, we ask questions. In being moved, we seek answers' (O'Dell, 1998: xiv). If I want to disturb and move people, should I be following this masochistic path in my quest to push the boundaries of my experience? Masochistic performance art actively inscribes the body[14] in real time, the present, and it is

[14] Not all masochistic performance art involves cutting, it may be about endurance eg. Marina Abromovic's durational work.

voluntary and unnecessary in any accepted sense. The photographs of my re-formed and scarred chest produced in *Before and After* (2012) recorded the scars, the traces of the surgical inscription on my body, not the surgery itself, although I photographically documented some treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation. The plastic surgery filmed in real time by the artist Orlan perhaps bridges the gap between my work and theirs, closer to my reconstruction than the original cancer surgery, being voluntary and not clinically necessary, and in the use of anaesthetics, so in that sense without pain.

## 4.3. Forming a New Collaborative Group

Boliver has applied her masochistic approach to her examination of ageing as a woman in Western culture.

*Figure 81. Workshop members 2015 Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty LADA Workshop Apiary Studios, Bethnal Green. Photograph Pinar Derin Gencer*

The women in the workshop were either beginning or still experiencing the menopause, or post-menopausal, the oldest of us in their seventies. The workshop structure provided an opportunity to discuss how we as ageing women artists are seen (or ignored) and treated (including by ourselves), and what kind of art we wanted to make about it.

*Figure 82. Boliver, R. and Zyborska. W. 2015, Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty: LADA Old Dears workshop photograph Pinar Derin Gencer.*

In a day of exploring nude performance with nothing but a roll of cling film I questioned how I would make something. What was my purpose? How could I be naked in a new way? What could it express about becoming and performing age? I wondered if it was Rocio's intention to make us experience pain in performance and how I would respond. The workshops challenged taboos and overturned stereotypes about the behaviour of old women. However, this was not a medium that initially spoke to me and offered me ideas and things to do in the way that sculptural media do, it would all have to come from me. I felt doubly naked.

This workshop gave me a space to consider the role of performance in my practice. I had previously considered my sculptures, not me, as the performers. I expressed myself through/with art objects. Emerging from the sculptures to show my scars in *Before and After* was an exception to this unspoken and unconscious rule. That was a necessary aberration from my usual practice because of a need developed out of a traumatic and extraordinary experience of illness and bodily change. How can you make art that is not all about me, when me is all there is? When I make work I try to remove myself from the equation and let it emerge,

giving reign to the subconscious and things I don't know yet, outside of the constrictions of language. How does that fit into performance art when one is not playing a role but one's self? The poet Lee Harwood once said to me 'there are two kinds of poets, those that say; 'look at this' and those that say; 'look at me'. I understood this to be about the need to remove ego from one's work, something I thought essential to produce art of any quality. How does one make work about and with self, without self? I now believe it is as possible to do this with performance as any other art form. It is something that must be attempted and negotiated in order to make art, similarly to (and synonymous with) attempts to access the unconscious mind.

I went into Boliver's workshop with the aim to be as open as possible to new methods of working and new experiences offered by such a tactile and challenging workshop. For the first exercise we were asked to devise a nude performance with a roll of cling film. I thought of a brief scenario of making shapes, to turn back to back with a partner and then try to pick the other up on to my own back after linking arms, to show strength and inter-connectivity. The way I approached the cling film was to make sculptural shapes with it and my flesh, thinking of it as alternative skin and using it to sculpt bulges and new shapes with my body fat – alternative and transforming body shapes. I had no intention of hurting myself, or anyone else, but let myself be led into it as part of the process, as I might hurt my hands in a tug of war for example, ignoring the pain as I focused on pulling, as we each tried to pull the other towards opposing sides of the room. I found I trusted Rocio and I began to get some idea of the nature of the contracts between masochistic performance artists, which seemed to me to be one of profound trust with an element of risk taking.

I was aware of mixed feelings about the performance as I was doing it, curiosity about this way of working, and my reaction to it and taboos around it, and an undertone of resistance to any real or imagined manipulation by Rocio as she enthusiastically encouraged further effort. The emphasis on skin, marking the skin, and the visceral tactility of such performances clearly offers opportunities for subversion and affect. The audience cannot ignore or remain unmoved by the

sort of actions Boliver produces, experiences on the edge of trauma that may also be very funny.

I came to an understanding that my performance art is not a matter of choosing from a list based on what might be the most effective tool for getting the message across. The workshop with Boliver confirmed for me that for performance/body art to work it must feel as if it comes from the heart and be as emotionally authentic as can be, as an embodied subject making a social enactment as a multiply identified, activist, post-menopausal woman. As Sheree Rose says:

> *When I perform, I am not putting on a rehearsed play … I am having a visceral, human experience in front of other people. And I like that idea: to share something with an audience that is not supposed to be shared, not knowing how it is going to turn out (Rose, 2015 no page no).*

My feelings about using pain in my own practice remain ambivalent, for the present anyway. I am not aware of a desire or impulse to use it, but the workshop has transformed my understanding of those artists who do choose to work in this way, and of the wider BDSM community.

I had previously (and unconsciously) considered the work of 'masochistic' artists to be 'other', powerful but not necessarily relevant to my own work. Through working with Boliver and observing her interactions with other members of the BDSM community I came to believe that it was closer to what I was doing than I had thought. Much of the relevance to me lies in the contract as defined by O'Dell (1998). Artists who use aspects of BDSM to challenge ideas of gender highlight the social contracts people have made with regard to how they perform desire and sexuality. Artists like Boliver, Orlan, Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose all make work that examines the relationships between desire, sexuality and traumatic experience. Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose together documented Flanagan's life and death with cystic fibrosis. Boliver too had a severe childhood illness with its associated isolation from others, and in her case, recurring depression. Like

Flanagan she finds that ritualistic pain gives relief from those feelings and transcends them in a creative exposition of human power relations and behaviour.

## 4.4. The Contract

The contractual reading of such work suggested by O'Dell (1998) seems to offer possibilities for ageing and living that extend beyond the world of BDSM, just as 'masochistic' performance can deal with a whole spectrum of issues. When looking for reasons why artists would 'push their bodies to such extreme physical and psychological limits' O'Dell states that:

> *intuitively, I knew that women's rights, gay rights, civil rights, and the Vietman War were all part of the reason. But I also sensed that the masochistic bond between performers and audiences was a key to the situation (O'Dell, 1998: xii).*

This research extends this masochistic, affective, tactile bond to scarred post-menopausal performers and their audiences.

Seeing someone enact very different performances of sexuality, gender and age can make people question their own norms and the values they have been taught by society and parents. This can give an insight into the performativity of gender (Butler 1999), beauty and ageing. When Orlan asks for horns to be placed on her head or the chin of a 15th century mythical character she might make women question why they want their breasts lifted and enlarged, their foreheads frozen and their lips engorged.

I found it strange to do a movement performance without being inside one of my sculptures. My previous naked collaborative photographs were all stills, and I was always connected with the rubber sculpture even if not inside it. I found myself moving almost as if a sculpture was still there (Figure 83). Strength, struggle and slowness were motivating forces, showing a contradiction between the slowing down of age with the power and energy of our mutual struggle, and a desire to make sculptural shapes, a constant preoccupation with composition. For example

wrapping the cling film around my flesh in ways that would make it bulge and change its shape, to transform it simply to make new and interesting shapes with tactile powers.  As mentioned above the performance element of my art came originally from the desire to make my rubber sculptures move, to make them performative, and I still strongly identify with them.

Figure 83. Gambogi, T. and Zyborska, W. 2009. *Data Golem,* Space Gallery, Portsmouth

Both Boliver and Pinar Derin Gencer (the photographer engaged for the workshops) remarked on the slowness, weight and sculptural quality of my movements, that they believed I had carried into the performance work from my sculptural object work.  Although this made me understand how closely I had identified myself with my heavy rubber sculptures and made me want to rid myself of this self-induced burden, (the weighty moving without them, not the sculptures themselves) I reasoned that it could have some value in that it might resonate with the sort of gravitas and power more generally associated with memorials to old men (In Chapter five I discuss Xsexcentenary's performance work in Glasgow Necropolis and the use of monumentality).

I did not intend this direction of emergence or unfolding of my performative self from the sculptural object to be a final one. I am concerned in this research to maintain a broad spectrum of practice between object-based art, which could range between permanent and ephemeral objects, to time-based performances, films, photographic or unrecorded events. The extension of opportunities for haptic expression through different media and methods can mirror the various becomings of this post-menopausal woman and I want no more limitations.

I relate the loading with meaning of the rubber objects made during this research to the accumulation of scars, wrinkles, knowledge and experience that comes with age. Such accumulations can be a burden that we may wish to hide or discard, or something to be valued and celebrated. I consider these accumulations, positive and negative, to be part of the art assemblages about becoming a post-menopausal scarred woman that I make by myself and with others.

## 4.5. Contracts of Care and Critical Contracts

I was struck by the care and respect demonstrated by Boliver's helpers when she was having the pins and piercings gently removed from her skin after her performance, and the wounds cleaned, and in the models presented by the contracts of care agreed between the participants (see below). As mentioned above, artists use bodily mutilation to 'reveal symbolically the structure of agreements we make as we try to come to terms with an unsettling, indeterminate consciousness of our own bodies' (O'Dell, 1998:16). There seem to be two kinds of contract, different but related; the ones with the audience mentioned above, and the carefully negotiated contracts agreed beforehand between performers, and also with their helpers. These are sacred, the trust between them is very important.

*Figure 84.* Boliver, R. 2015*, Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty:* Chelsea Theatre LADA Old Dears

In an interview with Tina Takemoto Sheree Rose explained the SM contracts that she and Bob Flanagan negotiated:

> *We always had SM contracts. That was something we thought was a good idea. Instead of going through the 'I love you forever, until death do us part' marriage vows, I thought we should have a contract for a set period of time. At the end of each contract term, we would go over it and see what worked, what didn't work, if either of us wanted out, or if we needed to make some changes (Takemoto, 2009).*

SM contracts are a way of imagining and creating new types of relationships, in which the power relations are clearly defined and overt, instead of covert, patriarchal, outdated and insidious. I had previously thought the idea of this problematic. How could one live a fantasy if it was all spelled out in a pragmatic and mundane contract? I was only thinking about the sadomasochism, but one could negotiate anything in such a contract (Flanagan did all the housework for example). I found it hard to understand how one could trust another person with this power, once handcuffed or trussed up. Yet I was a witness to the trust that the contracts represent, one that I saw enacted in Chelsea Theatre and other performances. The SM contracts are a concrete example of the symbolic agreements that O'Dell mentions. It is as if they can show these as a working example of how contracts between people could be, and in the performances

highlight the second kind of contract, the unconscious pre-existing social contracts, those 'that we all make with others but that may not be in our best interests' (O'Dell, 1998: 2). 'Masochistic' artists are not advocating masochism as a model for behaviour, but using it for their own expression in challenging and deconstructing existing power constructions in their performances, and finding new ways to negotiate relationships with others in their mutual arrangements.

## 4.6. Sexcentenary

During the course of the LADA workshop with Boliver the members of the group formed relationships and became a working assemblage. We agreed on a collective approach to the subject of aging that included political actions highlighting discrimination and indulging in inappropriate behaviour to make our point. At the end of the workshop we decided to form a feminist performance collective that we would call Sexcentenary, the roman word for six hundred, roughly the total number of our collective ages (10 x 60). We wrote a manifesto and agreed rules of engagement, making our own contract for behaviour and intentions:

*Artistic criteria for actions in Sexcentenary collective*[15]

- Actions will be rooted in questions about gender, ageing and feminism (especially the inter-relationship of these three).
- We will counter reductive notions of us as old and reject clichéd representation of 'old' women. We are interested in ourselves (and our alter-egos) as we are.
- Subtlety and nuance are an important part of our practice. Actions may take a simple form but should always be complex and challenging in meaning.
- We are not actors and this is not a stage: props and costumes must always be critically considered in the light of the above.
- We recognise humour as a strategy with a subversive role; however, we will not try to be amusing or entertaining.
- Being annoying is appropriate when it is a reaction to injustice.
- We will work with surprise, the unexpected, interruption and intervention' (Sexcentenary 2015).
-

[15] Sexcentenary members: Teresa Albor, Katherine Araniello (now deceased), Kate Clayton, Sarah Kent, Katherine Meynell, Helena Vortex, Wanda Zyborska

## 4.7. Tired of Being 21: Deterritorialising the Mall

Having worked with the body, language and object, we devised a short performance to take into the street. Being aged and therefore tired, we would fall asleep in a pile, outside a women's clothing outlet called 'Forever 21' in Westfield Mall, London (Figure 85).

*Figure 85 Sexcentenary 2015 Tired of Being 21, Between Menopause and Old Age. Action outside Forever 21, Westfield Mall, London. Photograph Pinar Derin Gencer*

The performance lasted five minutes. Security guards (with dogs) were called. We explained that we were tired of being 21 and were having a sleep. After being initially suspicious the security guards thought it was funny and liked us, and hung around trying to talk to us. Some managers from the shop came and were very angry - we had drawn a large crowd and the entrance to the shop was congested.

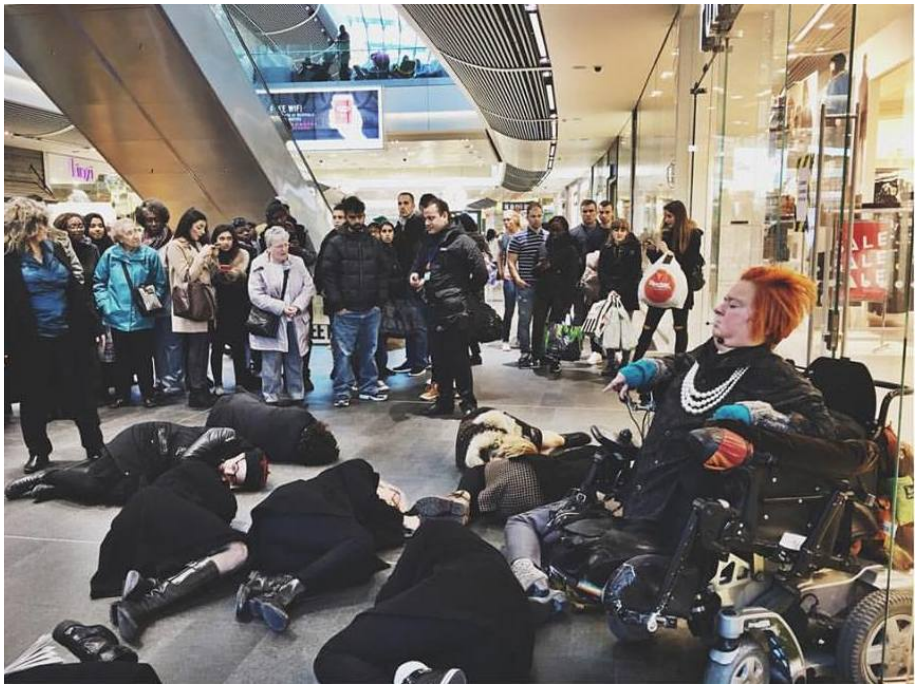

*Figure 86. Sexcentenary 2015. Tired of Being 21, Between Menopause and Old Age. Performance outside Forever 21, Westfield Mall, London. Photograph Pinar Derin Gencer*

The crowd seemed mainly appreciative, and a few (older) women stayed to talk to us after we had finished, and in some cases asked to join up with us. We later found this to be a constant of our performances (see Chapter five). The affective tactile nature of our assemblage seemed to resonate in an empathic way with other older women, like calling to like. Those who spoke to us (a self-selected audience) showed sympathy with and recognition of the ideas underlying the apparently simple nature of the action. This action formed a model for exploring reversals and degradations of age (as well as the positive sides) that I continue to negotiate. To perform what it is to have less energy, more illnesses, less strength and an unreliable memory and to still be becoming more, exploring this with curiosity, power, humour and acceptance, whilst rejecting being cute, apologetic, negligible. To confront with what is (or might be), not what is expected, not processed or packaged away into appropriate invisibility.

We would defy 'the frightening spectre of the ageing women who haunts so many women …as they head towards what is seen as the definitive turning point of the menopause' (Segal, 2013: 27).

*Figure 87. Sexcentenary 2015. Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty. Workshop members at Westfield Mall, London. Photograph Pinar Derin Gencer*

## 4.8. Deterritorialising the Theatre

Following the experimental workshops and the street performance, we needed to devise something new for our final collaborative performance at Chelsea Theatre. I intended to make a performance about my imaginative collaboration with Anticleia's struggle to embody herself in the underworld (Chapter three). I didn't want to leave her forgotten in Hades, prematurely killed off and denied a proper role in Homer's Odyssey by false consciousness. I was unable to leave her in Wales, where I was concurrently working on the drawings and rubber sculptures for the *Re-Take/Re-Invent* exhibition (Chapter three). Anticleia had become part of everything I was doing in my practice; her naming (meaning without fame), her treatment in mythology, being defined only in terms of male progeniture and utility to men, and my imaginative resurrection of her meant that she had become a muse or a companion. She was subsumed into my performance and a part of what I was doing in this workshop, in which I also used one of my performative rubber sculptures. I liked the idea of the assemblage created by the imaginative collaboration with Fuseli or with his painting continuing (although constantly mutable), Anticleia with me like an imaginary friend no matter which project I was working on at that particular time. Her name was a constant reminder of my struggle for recognition and engagement with others as an ageing, scarred, post-menopausal woman artist.

On later reflection I wonder if there was another symbolic correlation unfolding here, typically unknown to me at the time. Was Anticleia's emergence into the Chelsea Theatre concurrent with my emergence, naked and live, from my sculptural rubber carapace of virtual, damaged skin, and the photographic skin through which it had previously been experienced by audiences? Why was I adding (more and more) of my own physical reality to the material explorations I had been producing? Looking back over the period of this research the performance and collaborative elements have gradually increased proportionally, until they have become, perhaps temporarily, the greater part of it.

*Figure 88. Zyborska W 2015 Anticleia: Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty. Chelsea Theatre Photograph Alex Eisenberg*

Anticleia was become my symbol for overlooked older women, and I was investing her with my own desires. I am still trying to envisage her as a creative event, a site for possibilities. I am fantasizing about her energy continuing until today and further, imagining her struggle for recognition, not apparent in the poem, but as imagined and projected by me in a bodily and sculptural way. The assemblages in time of the performances in London, short lived and made in collaboration with the audiences, combined with the longer, slower duration of the rubber sculptures

and drawings of the object and material-based research taking place in Wales, for *Re-Take/Re-Invent* (2016).

*Figure 89* Zyborska, W. 2015. *Anticleia: Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty.* Chelsea Theatre. Photograph Pinar Derin Gencer.

The final performance took place in a black auditorium at the Chelsea Theatre where we were spaced out like a gallery installation, performing in pairs or alone. The fact that human blood was flowing in two of the nearest corners of the space I was occupying, in the celebratory and sacrificial performances of Rocio Boliver, Sheree Rose and Pascale Ciapp, referenced (to me) the re-awakening of Anticleia in the Chelsea Theatre/Hades. In Homer's poem Odysseus uses sheep's blood to embody the ghosts, who must drink it in order to speak to him, apart from Tiresias who is able to embody himself because he has special powers. Anticleia never had powers, special or otherwise, and her ghost must drink the blood in order to speak to her son. In Chelsea Theatre she was able to join with us in our assemblages because of the libations of Boliver, Rose and Ciapp. Surely even the blood of post-menopausal women is better for this purpose than that of a sheep (or, in Bardsey, a goat!).

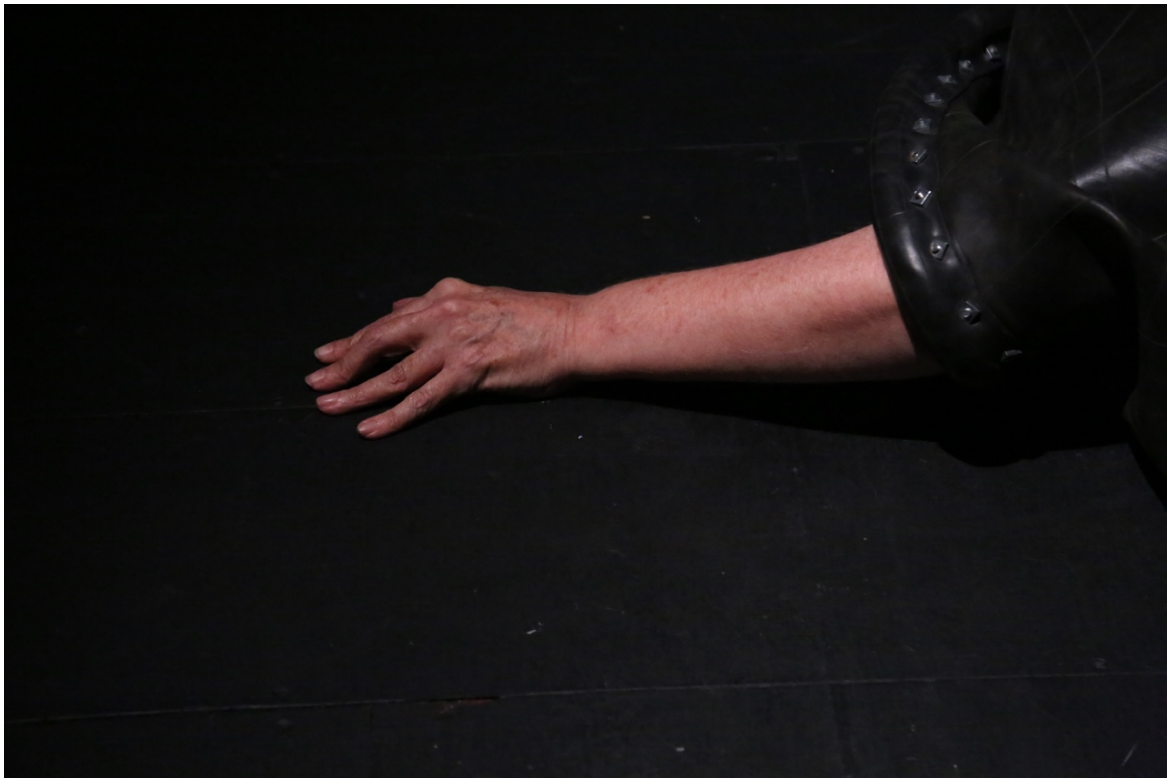

*Figure 90. Zyborska, W. 2015. Anticleia: Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty. Chelsea Theatre. Photograph Pinar Derin Gencer*

I was feeling my way into an awakening, inside the skin of my rubber sculpture, and breaking out of it. The sculpture was part of the form of the performance, and also a chrysalis for a metaphorical transformation, with my body (and Anticleia's) as still forming (becoming) matter tentatively emerging/unfolding, at least that was how I saw it at the time. As the first time I used my naked body in a live performance, outside of the workshop space or studio, it was something in the nature of a rite of passage. I wanted my body to begin to unfold from inside the sculpture in curiosity and resentment. All of us were confronting the audience with ageing women's bodies, inside and outside, emerging, bleeding, breaking taboos in an alternative beauty and eroticism. We were beginning to answer my research questions with a display of monster beauty (Frueh, 2012).

I was imagining being Anticleia as well as myself, she being re-embodied in me, wanting to live again even if only for a while, excited about her outing as Atwood suggests in Chapter Three, yet angry about her premature death and shoddy treatment by mythology. At first my arms felt their way from the inside to the outside, then my legs kicked free, I fell over, thrashed around a bit making different shapes and bulges, had a rest, then got to my feet and stomped around

in a circle showing my bottom.  I repeated this three times before the performance was brought to a close by a bell.

*Figure 91. Zyborska, W. (2015) Anticleia: Between Menopause and Old Age: Alternative Beauty.  Chelsea Theatre. Photograph Alex Eisenberg*

I realized through discussions at the workshop with Rocio that I am very much part of my sculptural work in a material way.  I had thought that I was giving them movement, but they are also moving me, the relationship is closer than I realized, we are an indivisible assemblage.  However, as will be shown in the next chapter, I was finding new ways to explore the becoming of age that would take me more apart from them, but still using them.  My art and I are an event that is always becoming, 'produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity' (Deleuze, 1988(2): 76). For the final performance in Chelsea Theatre I had brought together elements from earlier sculptural work, and Anticleia and Fuseli from the ongoing *Re-Take/Re-Invent* project.  In this way the various strands of my material processes, and the different stages of the visual research come together in rhizomatic assemblages and deterritorialisations.

*Figure 92. Zyborska, W. (2015) Anticleia: Between Menopause and Od Age: Alternative Beauty. Chelsea Theatre. Photograph Alex Eisenberg*

The performance *Anticleia: Between Menopause and Old Age* was an assemblage of sculptural and bodily performance, a hybrid performance of inside and outside. What was to come would build on this event in the evolution of our new group Sexcentenary, explored in Chapter five.

## 4.9. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the development of performance through this research, and the concept of the contract in my performances. These contracts, or the idea of them, seem to me to be models for the relationships and assemblages constructed in my research, made visible in the socially engaged environment of the performances in this and the following chapter, more obscure than the ones negotiated by Flanagan and Rose and in no way as explicit as a written contract. O'Dell offers insights into the nature of the encounter between art and audience that can be applied in new ways. I extend O'Dell's contractual model to the whole of my own practice, including the object-based work, and believe it could be extended as a composite part of the assemblage of political and tactile art.

The assemblages continued to expand and contract, including collaborations with audiences and masochistic performance artists.  Deterritorialisations occurred in London and Manchester, temporarily disrupting the mall, the theatre, the gallery and the square.

Chapter four also looked at breaking the taboos surrounding the sexuality and eroticism of post-menopausal women, and finding alternative modes of beauty. This will be further developed next in *Chapter Five: Looking your Age* which is about representation and the work of the feminist collectives Sexcentenary and XSexcentenary.  Here, I consider the performance of ageing right until dying and death, with the final events of *Not Dead Yet* (2018) performed at the *Non-Stop Memorial Shop*, in the street and the Glasgow Necropolis as part of the Glasgow International Festival 2018.

# Chapter Five: Looking your Age

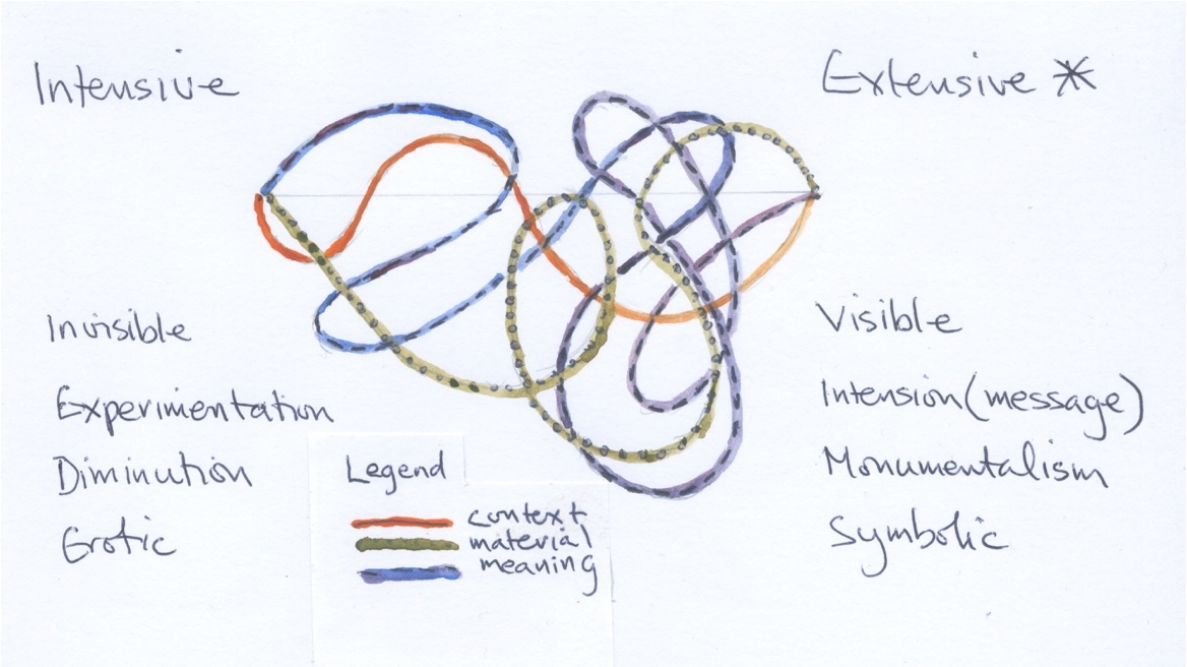


*Figure 93. Map of polarities*

Chapter five concerns 'Looking' your Age, the representation of post-menopausal becoming and its possible memorialization. It explores invisibility and visibility. The theme is (becoming) monumental using Anca Cristofovici's (2009) concept of the monumental in representing age. In this final chapter of my research I reconcile my contradictory relationship with the dichotomies that frustrate and provoke me, accepting their role in the unfolding of becoming a scarred, post-menopausal woman. Intimations of what may come next emerge as I draw closer to the 'new materialism' (Alaimo and Heckman, 2008) the post-human Haraway (2016) and becoming-animal (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

This chapter explores my provocations against the invisibility of scarred, post-menopausal women and what I have come to believe are the expectations and attitudes towards me held by audiences. I extend my search for alternative possibilities to these expectations through collective performance practices. In earlier chapters I discussed skin in terms of the material I use for my sculpture, my own skin and scarring, the tactile and affective qualities of these, which I placed in the 'Intensive' ends of the polarities, where the emphasis is on the unfolding and

speculative nature of ‘becoming’. In Chapter four I explored the contract, a political tool for transformation that offers opportunities for the audience to become part of the assemblage through an affective encounter with the artist. I am not in control of the assemblages, I initiate encounters in which they may unfold, welcoming the unexpected. 'Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away...[this work]... is an assemblage ... and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 1-2).

I deal with aged skin that also can be scarred, always in a tactile and material way, in a polarity at one end of which I place monumentality, and the other, diminution, where ageing is seen as a 'condition' analogous with illness. In the collective public performances that make up the art work discussed in this chapter the contradiction inherent in my research (which I contend provides much of its energy) comes to the fore. The resolution or understanding of this contradiction evolved through moving between art with a 'message' at one pole and art that is experimental at the other, as discussed in my introduction and throughout this thesis. I use energies from the binaries - male/female, visible/invisible, strong/weak, old/young - to fuel the exploration of what is unknown and possible in my becoming. The unstable trajectories of this polarity feed the assemblages and deterritorialisations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) that make up the art events.

This chapter begins at the extensive polarities with a discussion of the notion of monumentality as a strategy in relation to photographic representations of scarred, aged skin, in art and in popular culture.

The exposition of monumentality is followed by four studies of performances by Sexcentenary (2015-2017) and XSexcentenary (2017 - ?) artists’ collectives;

- Precarious Assembly: *Do You See Me?* (2016), Whitworth Gallery; Manchester;
- *We Refuse to be Unseen* (2016). Hazard Performance Festival 2016, Manchester;

- *Now You See Me Now You Don't* (2017). Buzzcut Performance Festival 2017, Glasgow and
- *Not Dead Yet* (2018), Glasgow International Festival 2018.

## 5.1. Monumentality

In her study of late twentieth and twenty-first century photographers who are imagining models for the appropriate representation of ageing, Anca Cristofovici (2009) said that rather than attempting to find what old age looks like, she was attempting to 'bring into focus the photographers' gaze projected on the photographed subjects' (Cristofovici, 2009: 3). This photographic skin/screen is inscribed and articulated:

> *between images and time…[where] time is not only an element of progressive degradation but also a formative category as well as a source of creativity, a re-categorization which shifts the focus of ageing from the condition of being old to a dense network of perceptions and visualizations of change, movement, and temporality (Cristofovici, 2009: 5).*

In my photographic collaborations, I am also working in this shifting network of 'perceptions and visualizations', being subject and object of the work in a strategy of curiosity, transformation and provocation. Cristofovici shifts the focus away from the 'condition of being old' to something where ageing is vibrant and contingent.

In my work the network of perceptions and visualisations that Cristofovici describes become art assemblages and deterritorialisations through the inclusion of others and the tactile relationships with materials.

*Figure 94. Zyborska, W. and Calarco, V. (2013) Wreck in Coed y Brenin: Material Matters. Photograph Veronica Calarco*

If ‘skin is the site for the playing of cultural anxieties regarding youth and age’ (Flanagan and Booth, 2006: 2) there is a need for aged skin to be both visible and felt if we are ever to relieve anxiety around ageing and the way it is played out in the erasure of post-menopausal women, especially scarred ones. I incorporated the concept of monumentality as defined by Cristofovici at this point in my research as a strategy for combatting erasure. Hers is an aesthetic approach that considers the 'possibilities of composition to shape our consciousness of form in ways that relate to subject construction' (Christofovici, 2009:7). In other words she is in some ways equating form with identity just as the early Egyptians did (Bazin, 1964: 24). Cristofovici applies her concept of monumentality to the artists Jacqueline Hayden and Melanie Manchot whose work on ageing bodies has been an important reference to me in my research.

Gillian Wearing’s (2018) portrait statue of the suffragist Millicent Fawcett is the first memorial of a woman to be placed in Parliament Square. It is also the first sculpture in Parliament Square by a woman sculptor. In March 2019 a statue of Emmeline Pankhurst by Hazel Reeves (2018) was unveiled in Manchester's St Peter's Square to mark International Women's Day and 100 years of women

having the vote.  It was the first statue of a Pankhurst in Manchester, where she came from, one of the (astonishingly) few statues of women to be erected in Manchester (Wyke and Cocks, 2004), most of the few being of Queen Victoria, unusually represented in age.  The scarcity of women in general as a subject for public celebration and remembrance motivated me to adopt the monument as a subject for protest and experimental infiltration in addition to the strategy identified by Cristofovici.

Melanie Manchot's photographs of her mother (1998-2000), and Jacqueline Hayden's photographs about ageing are rare exceptions to a 'visual history of aging as one of invisibility' (Hayden, 2000).

*Figure 95. Hayden, J. (1991-96) Figure Model Series (10) Unique silver gelatin print. 75 x 52 ins*

Hayden worked with professional artists' models aged over 60 to create constructed images referencing art history which she called 'projections of the idealized pose altered by reality' (Hayden, 2000). These were the *Figure Model Series* (1991-1996) (Figures 95 and 97) using contrasting academic or playful poses created by the models and the *Ancient Statuary Series* (1996–2000) (Figure 96) where the models were photographically fragmented and morphed into classical statues.

Cristofovici believes that the large format of images such as Manchot's portraits of her mother (Figure 98) and Hayden's *Figure Model Series* (Figures 95 and 97) bestows a potentially monumental quality to the images 'that symbolically redeems the diminishing that may come with time' (Cristofovici, 2009: 30). According to her this monumental scale makes these images 'crucial to the visual integration of the realities of old age into an aesthetic circuit, especially because Western art has mostly relegated images of old age to the domain of the caricature' (Cristofovici, 2009: 30). The monumental quality comes partly from the large scale and partly from the composition and poses of the models, which reference classical figures from art history. What destabilizes the monumental quality and gives it the contingent or potential aspect mentioned by Cristofovici is the realism of the visual signs of ageing in the photographs she discusses, that goes against the idealised aesthetic of most monuments, and the transformational change in the becoming of ageing shown in Heyden's and Manchot's work, counter to the frozen time of the monument that is 'cast in stone'.

To apply the monumental to durational performance art is a novel concept emphasising the contingent nature of becoming-monumental, it is the antithesis of the bronze or stone monument intended to last for ever, yet it is appropriate for a state of becoming, a transformation in process that is the re-imagining of the scarred postmenopausal woman. Hannah Wilke was again prescient, referring to herself as a 'living sculpture' (Princenthal, 2010: 58) and referencing the:

> *tradition of living sculpture in the ancient Greco-Roman world [demonstrating]... the line Wilke walked between her desire to investigate the transitory nature of art and life and her desire to*

> *create a lasting record of her own art and life, what she described as 'making myself into a monument' (Fitzpatrick, 2009: 10).*

Cristofovici cites Katja Blomberg on Melanie Manchot who said that Manchot's use of the monumental 'shows the female body removed from time and place...shattering the boundaries of shame and taboo' (Cristofovici, 2009: 32). This indeterminate and potent position incorporates Joanna Frueh's concept of 'monster beauty,' that reinvents and eroticises the ageing female body, and proposes that 'if each period reinvents the feminine, the photographic images that explore the rich texture of the ageing body will, perhaps, in time reshape the category of beauty' (Cristofovici, 2009: 29).

Although anonymous and mostly naked, without cultural markers apart from the aesthetics of hairstyle, pose and medium, Hayden's *Figure Model Series* (Figures 95 and 97) are striking because they do not fit any cultural stereotypes in the representation of age, rather they dismantle those norms using 'photography's potential to expose a continuum of identity in the very discontinuous perceptions of change [which]... relocates the notion of ageing from 'being old' into 'growing older' (Cristofovici, 2009: 11), a process of becoming. They do not tell us how we should view them, rather they invite the viewer to question how they should look at and think about age. The *Figure Model Series* are very large, approximately eight feet by four feet each, life size. We must confront these images as equals because they are as big as us, and we must confront what it looks like to be ageing. They cannot vanish into the background because there is nothing there and it is black and they are white. They are the figure on the ground. Hayden has removed most of the context and surroundings so there can be no confusion other than the creative ambiguity of what they are performing, what is being represented, and how we are going to respond to this encounter. Each of them is the singular yet anonymous subject, the thing we must look at and take into account. The one remaining cultural referent in the images (underlined by the title) is the life room of the art academy, with its classical depiction of the human body traditionally representing the human ideal (Figure 95). The classical references, the lack of contemporary cultural referents and the large scale all

emphasise the monumental qualities.  By removing them from the normative associations of contemporary referents and giving them the power of the potential monument the possibilities of the erotic and 'other forms of positive affect' (including beauty) can arise.

Another radical component that I include in my strategy for monumentalism and representation is humour and playfulness, as discussed in Chapter two with reference to the work of Wilke and Kahlo as well as my own, and evident in Hayden's image (Figure 97), showing a woman standing on her head literally upending our expectations of the behaviour, strength and representation of post-menopausal women.  Humour is a powerful strategic tool when appropriated and used by the subject and not against them.  Hayden is careful to leave decisions of how to place themselves in the hands (and bodies) of her models, thus allowing them to explore and display some of the variety of their own becoming.

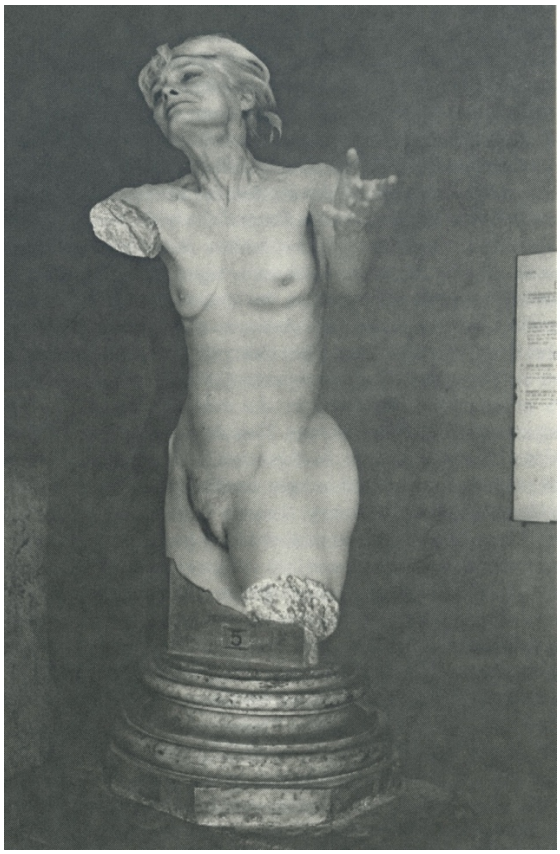

*Figure 96. Hayden, J. (1999) Ancient Statuary Series V The Nymph of Dampierre. Platinum/palladium print, 7.75 x 4.5 inches.*

The virtual damage Hayden inflicts on her models in the Ancient Statuary Series (1996-2000) with digitally removed limbs references both the fragmented classical statues and the scarring and damage to the skin and bodies of the old caused by age and illness, and at the same time destabilizes the ancient monuments with her hybrid accretions:

> *The various forms of indeterminacy created by the liberation of the body from the referential dimension-forms in which one reads open cognitive spaces - leave room for the viewers to bring in their own experience, their own perceptual spaces, and also their own mental representations of age consciousness* (Cristofovici, 2009: 126-7).

*Figure 97 Hayden, J. (1991-1996) Figure Model Series (4). Unique silver gelatin print, 75 x 52 inches*

This kind of appropriation of art history to say something very different can be seen in the work of artists I have been working with in my imaginative collaborations, such as Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke, and with Fuseli and Anticleia in *Re-Take/Re-invent* (2016) (Chapters three and four). All can be included in an extended assemblage of alternative representations of becoming women, confounding stereotypes and expanding possibilities and expectations.

## 5.2. Representing Ageing (Erotic Disruption)

*Figure 98. Manchot, M. 1997 Portrait of Mrs Manchot Posing*

Virpi Vlänne in *Representing Ageing: Images and Identities* (2012) finds that although in the last 20 years there has been an increase in the representation in popular media of middle aged and older women, there is a high likelihood of the women being misrepresented through air brushing or digital enhancement. Middle aged and older women are more likely to be represented when they can be shown as examples of people who 'don't look their age' or are 'youthful'. Those who seem to look as old as they are, or older, are seen as having 'given up', to 'not be looking after themselves'. In addition, when an old woman is believed to be

beautiful or good looking those looks are attributed to youth. People say, 'you don't look sixty' if they think a woman aged sixty is looking good. The implication is that to look sixty (or indeed any age over forty unless it is ten years younger than ones actual age) is to look terrible. Why can't they say, 'you look attractive', or 'you look healthy' without qualification? There is a cultural taboo against showing women with all the changes and marks of mortality that ageing brings, to the extent that it cannot be shown.

In her series of large format photographs of her mother, *Look at You Loving Me* (1998-2000), Melanie Manchot 'examines the aging body with a protective, inquisitive gaze' (Cristofovici, 2009: 31). Mrs Manchot looks back, but over our heads, we are below her. This increases the monumentality of this image (Figure 98), we look up at her as if she is an important personage. Melanie Manchot may well feel protective of her mother but she does not look to me as if she needs protecting. I do not see protectiveness in Manchot's images, I see love and admiration of her mother's beauty and strength. Mrs Manchot looks as if she loves herself, that healthy narcissism forbidden of women of any age. I see this as an erotic image, full of monster beauty, 'an aesthetic/erotic aptitude' (Frueh, 2001: 8). Mrs Manchot looks comfortable in her skin, the signs of age are mirrored in the slightly distressed surface of the photographic print; unique silver gelatin prints onto canvas, then worked into with chalk and charcoal. This painterly, aesthetically pleasing surface suggests that distressed skin too is a beautiful surface, and perhaps more interesting than a smooth and glossy print surface[16].

I embraced the idea of monumentality as proposed by Cristofovici and found it was already present in the large scale photographs of *Before and After* (2012) (Chapter one), (84 x 119 cm) and in *Material Matters* (2013) (Chapter two) taken in surroundings without contemporary cultural referents, or with destabilised referents, the poses taken from art history and the large size of the prints. I

[16] I have often wondered if there was a link between the ever increasing demand for smooth and flawless female skin and the fashion for distressed surfaces on walls and furniture. As if being denied it in our bodies we can only indulge this kind of pleasure by enjoying it in our interior decoration.

extend and qualify the monumental by placing it in my strategic tool box together with assemblages and deterritorialisation, in order to conceive of it as a 'becoming-monumental', an active process of monumentalising rather than the static, timeless condition that the monumental suggests. Cristofovici avoids this stasis by calling it 'potential monumentality' which is also a process of becoming, but I find this a little tentative. Becoming-monumental is a viral force, a deterritorialising unfolding.

Joanna Frueh believes that 'the experienced body is deeply erotic, for it wears its lusts and (ab)uses of living' (cited in Cristofovici, 2009: 31) but nowhere is this represented in the images of popular culture. Cristofovici stated that this form of desire (for and by the aged body) was not only unconventional but unrepresentable until recently. During this research I have been paying attention to public art and monuments[17] (looking in vain for representations of scarred old women (apart from Queen Victoria, symbol of patriarchy and empire)) following the searches I made for representations of old women in The National Museum of Wales in Chapter three. I would suggest that to aid in becoming-monumental the female symbolic (as in my *Silent Scroll* (2015) after Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* [1975], Chapter three) can be utilised in the representation of the erotic, monumental, post-menopausal woman.

The erotic representation of scarred post-menopausal women is a problematic area, one that when it is touched upon with humour is most apt to descend into the caricature mentioned by Cristofovici. I suspect that the feminist fear of what the patriarchy will do to attempts to visualise female sexuality, as suffered by Wilke and Schneemann, might still be alive when it comes to the almost unrepresented area of post-menopausal sexuality, but this seems to be a reason

[17] Following on from my annual performance protest the *Funeral Condom Re-Veiling of the H M Stanley Statue* (2012- ) and work on women's memorials with (X)Sexcentenay I did an eight hour walk with Lindsey Colbourne researching monuments in Llandudno, a lecture and workshop in *Cenotaph to Selfies: Mapping the Monuments of Llandudno* 2017, Culture Arts LLandudno (CALL) and *Grrrls yn y Garej* (2018) a workshop and performance researching and monumentalising notable yet forgotten women of Llandudno, LLAWN 2018 and Wrexham Open 2018.

for more erotic representations, not less; how else can the ways of seeing it be changed? My approach so far has been to pick up the baton laid down by Wilke and Schneemann and carry it into old age, to integrate it when it feels right into whatever I am doing, perhaps as sensuality, which I cannot separate from feeling and the tactile in general. In fact I am only likely to recognise the erotic in any artwork I have made afterwards, whilst always trying to be open to sensory pleasure whilst making/performing. I welcome any erotic unfolding in my work, I can see that it is there at times. *Before and After* (2012) with Glyn Davies was understood in that way by some, even if with horror. I was thinking of the erotic when I made *Material Matters* (2013) in the burnt out car, perhaps because I felt safer with a woman photographer. But when I was negotiating a travelling show of *Before and After* with four galleries in Wales I was rejected by the former director of the Mostyn Gallery, the self-styled 'foremost contemporary gallery and visual arts centre in Wales' *because* of the erotic nature of the photographs. He seemed to think that was a reason for rejection that I would understand. Instead I was pleased that he had found them erotic, and disappointed with his response.

In searching for appropriate and engaging images of ageing, Cristofovici found that some photographic images from the 1980s and 1990s (including those of Hayden, and Manchot) had challenged the 'artificial and frozen aesthetics of aging which had for a long time placed youth at its centre' (Cristofovici, 2009: 19). She observed that Western culture attempts to deal with age by bringing it into alignment with youthful models. I compare the classical and contemporary ideals of beauty and youth to stasis and death, and the scarred and aged body to processes of transformation and 'becoming' (Braidotti, 2002; Frueh, 2002). Part of this is my own transformation and becoming. Cultural anxieties about death and aging seem to mean that the skin of older women (and sometimes men) must be changed in an artificial and retrograde way, the marks, additions, accumulations of age and experience such as wrinkles or sagging muscles are seen as negative disfigurements which must be erased, either digitally or surgically to make them look 'right', i.e. young. The changes which are naturally taking place are not celebrated or seen as interesting or additive, part of the accumulations of life, or as part of an ability collectively to accept death as part of the lifecycle, having its

own potential assets. Instead they are replaced by the above imposed changes which could be seen as paradoxical or atrophying, attempts to take action in order to stay still, denying ageing because it leads to death, just as we deny other attempts to attain balance and sustainability in our collective behaviour. In section 5.6. below I discuss *Not Dead Yet* (2018) where XSexcentenary looked at collective ways to accept death as a necessary part of our lifecycle as well as celebrating and memorialising post-menopausal women.

Cristofovici suggests that people are frightened of the formless matter of decay, resulting in 'the poverty of metaphors our culture has for representing the transformations of the body' (Cristofovici, 2009: 44). In her exploration of the possibilities for the much needed contemporary 'appropriate' representations of age Cristofovici proposes:

> *new forms of expression and new aesthetic conceptions that integrate conventionally negative categories into new visions, very much like the negative categories introduced into modern aesthetic forms throughout the twentieth century* (Cristofovici, 2009: 19).

In my work I incorporate damaged and decaying matter and welcome it - and ugliness - as part of the assemblage of becoming-monumental, together with the other members of Sexcentenary (2015-17) and XSexcentenary (2017-?) in our experimental performances that explore such new forms of expression and aesthetics.

## 5.3. Infesting Public Invisibility

Our group/s are an assemblage that includes not only ourselves and our ageing, scarred bodies. 'No longer able to sustain the fictions of being either subjects or objects, all the partners in the potent conversations that constitute nature must find new ground for making meanings together' (Haraway, 2008 cited in Alaimo and Heckman, 2008: 158).

Over the unfolding of this research I have become more aware of the interconnectedness and reciprocity of my relationship with others (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Haraway, 2016), and with the matter of the world and my media. I n unfolding we potentially increase in scale and monumentality (or could do if this was viewed in a different way culturally) and become impossible to ignore by those who encounter us, who enter into a contract with us. We have just enough ugliness to be beautiful, if only people were ready to see our alternative beauty. 'civilisation resists her transgressive beauties by burying [them]... in the ugliness that operates as the necessary correlate to normative beauty' (Frueh, 2001: 135).

I can identify fear of the potential power of post-menopausal women, the need to make us either disappear or behave as if we have no past or role in society other than a supportive and unobtrusive one, without political agency, or to be honorary (castrated) men? This is coupled with an inability to see us as we might be, or imagine us as we are. The relative novelty of our existence in large numbers, being a demographic that has become substantial only in the last one hundred and fifty years[18] is one reason for the gap in representation and at the same time creates a need and an audience for work such as mine.

## 5.4. Deterritorialising the Collaboration or Disrupting the Assemblage

As the balance of my practice shifted more towards collective performance work so I began to enter more into the territory of new materialism, yet without leaving behind my claims for subjectivity. Something about the nature of the way we worked in the groups broke down my artistic individualism to some extent - forming ideas collectively, not knowing who or where the ideas came from, my feelings of connection with my media and the foregrounding of the tactile in my practice, and feelings of empathy with other overlooked and neglected creatures. I embraced Donna Haraway's argument that; 'we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become -

[18] Machin, A (2018) *The New Age of Dating.* https://medium.com/oxford-university/the-new-age-of-dating-7d3d24366c81 [online][accessed 3 July 201

with each other or not at all' (Haraway, 2016: 4). I applied this imperative to my experiments in expanding the experience and possibilities for postmenopausal women. Haraway's inclusive 'hot compost piles' are to me just a change in attitude away from the fearful decaying matter of the abject, as applied to the bodies of postmenopausal women and deterritorialised by the lines of flight of becoming monumental and the textures of monster beauty. This shift towards the post human came in part from an acceptance of a partial or changing subjectivity where the disjunction between different kinds of identity - 'postmenopausal woman' 'artist' 'mother' 'teacher' - might be in connection as well as alienation, and points towards the work that might come after this project.

The women's performance art groups Sexcentenary (2015-17) and XSexcentenary[19] (2017-) made alternative representations of and for postmenopausal women, building on the work discussed in the last chapter, expanding the contract with new audiences, developing new assemblages and repetitions. We often used the street or other non-art venues so that anti-stereotypical behaviour seems more incongruous and noticeable than it would in a gallery where such material has become the norm. In Chapters one, two and four I referred to deterritorialising different places such as museums and hospitals. Part of this process is the making of place for scarred, post-menopausal women, even if those places are temporary and precarious. Our collective too was undergoing a transformation as people left to form new groups and new people joined ours.

Through this research I have learned the necessity of working with and 'think[ing] with other beings, human or not' (Haraway, 2016: 7) if we are to successfully negotiate the re-imagining and becoming of age. But to move in the formless direction of the becoming-animal of Deleuze and Guattari's deterritorialisations might take us so far that there would be no coming back:

[19] XSexcentenary members are Wanda Zyborska, Kate Clayton (founder members) and Norma Hunter. XSexcentenary in Wales are Wanda Zyborska (founder), Lindsey Colbourne, Lisa Hudson and Toni Dewhurst.

> *Animal elegance, the camouflage fish, the clandestine: this fish is crisscrossed by abstract lines that resemble nothing, that do not even follow its organic divisions; but thus disorganized, disarticulated, it worlds with the lines of a rock, sand and plants, becoming imperceptible* (Young et al, 2013: 45).

My strategy continues towards the eroticism of monster beauty (Frueh, 2001), and Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming-woman' whose 'sexuality is the production of a thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings'. The more experimental, tactile ends of the polarities are unfolding here, before the dictates of intention draw me back to the dichotomies.

## 5.5 *Precarious Assembly: Do You See Me?* (2016)

*Precarious Assembly* (2016) at the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester featured women artists who created a performance for a specific location within, throughout or around the Whitworth building, that responded to the history of women artists and curators who have exhibited in the Whitworth since its opening in 1889.


*Figure 99. Sexcentenary 2016 Precarious Assembly: Do You See Me? Whitworth Gallery, Manchester*

Sexcentenary applied for this opportunity and gave the keynote performance *Do You See Me?* at the opening. Whilst we acknowledged the work done by the Whitworth to archive and celebrate the work of women artists and artisans, Sexcentenary took a critical stance against the forces of erasure that operate in our cultural institutions, that re-assign women to obscurity almost as soon as they emerge, from the point of view of postmenopausal women. We were determined to expose and fight against the kind of ignominy that Joanna Woodward identifies in *Figuring Age* (1999):

> One day as eighty-six-year-old Anna Gerbner was leaving the storefront centre, she was runover by a young man on his bicycle…She died of her injuries. What was his defence? 'I didn't see her,' he said (Woodward 1999; ix).

We aimed to modify perceptions and spark a rethinking of the wider role of older women in the arts.

*Figure 100. Sexcentenary 2016 Precarious Assembly: Do You See Me? Whitworth Gallery, Manchester*

Sexcentenary reacted to the art and the institution as ageing women through a series of unannounced, site-specific interventions comprising a series of actions, throughout the evening, including taking a nap in front of the work; asserting our collective power by 'gently blocking' a door or access point (for a few minutes); holding up signs saying 'DO YOU SEE ME'. We were referencing both our

presence and the presence of women (and the lack of it) in the Whitworth, attempting to extend our assemblage to include the women who had been 'written out' of their presence as well as the audience. We engaged in an agitprop rant about women in the collection, for example May Morris, whose design for '*Honeysuckle*'[20] is wrongly attributed in the Whitworth website to William Morris, and what we saw as the underexplored, undervalued and underrepresented conditions of older women in all aspects of the art world, in museum collections, in funding opportunities and in commercial viability.

The way this unfolded was through the bodily presence of the women in the group, taking space and time, the nuanced differences in performing mundane actions in ways that demand attention. We set about deterritorialising the gallery, even as we were in some ways re-territorialising it by taking part in an organised event.

Our interventions frequently take the form of something like tableaux, sometimes site specific and unique to that place and time, others become part of the repertoire for repeated performativity. These tableaux can have monumental qualities of scale and presence, including as a group where the individual can become indistinguishable in the milieu. In the Whitworth we used benches and balconies to gain height and scale, adopting statuesque postures when expounding our arguments, using careful positioning within the built environment and the composition of our performance to achieve monumentality. Monumentality as a strategy must be used with care. Although it serves us well in gaining attention and gravitas It needs regular debunking if is not to fold back into the rigid strata of territorialisation. Having embraced monumentality it goes into the 'toolbox' for use when possible and appropriate.

The message in the Whitworth was more clearly expressed (including the use of text) than in the tactile sculptures and drawings I was making for *Re-Take/Re-*

[20] https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/may-morris-art-and-life-william-morris-gallery

*Invent* (2016) or *Material Matters* (2013). I am not making a case for clarity, it is one of our strategies, which could equally be obscurity. But although in this case the political message was clear and didactic, it was cut up and delivered by us in disjointed sequences from different parts of the room, sporadically broken up by the group coming together to sleep in a pile. The physical, tactile presence of the women and how we encountered the audience and the building, and how they encountered us in the tactile encounter formed between us, and between them, swings to the other ends of the polarities, those of speculation and experimentation.

## 5.6. Coming to Terms with Dichotomies

In 2017 Sexcentenary split into two groups. One group is called GraceGraceGrace and based in London and the south. I am in the other; XSexcentenary, with members throughout the UK. Because of possible confusion between Sexcentenary (2015-17) and XSexcentenary (2017-), when I speak about joint issues unrelated to specific performances I will call them (X)Sexcentenary.

I will discuss the next two bodies of work together: *We Refuse to be Unseen* (2016). Hazard Performance Festival, Sexcentenary (2016), Manchester and *Now You See Me Now You Don't,* XSexcentenary (2017), Buzzcut Performance Festival 2017, Glasgow. There were similarities in our approach to both, and I discuss them in relation to particular aspects of the performances rather than in a consecutive sequence of events, even though at the Hazard Festival I was there as a member of Sexcentenary, and at Buzzcut I was with the new group, XSexcentenary.

*Figure 101. XSexcentenary 2017 Now You See Me Now You Don't: Mansitting. Buzzcut Festival Glasgow. photograph Duncan McClaren*

The dichotomies seem to arise in works where the intention and message of the performances is clear, as in *Mansitting* (2017) (Figure 101), instantly recognizable to our audiences, where we appropriate the power of aggressive male body language at the same time as parodying it. Here we utilise the conscious language of the already known agitprop message. This is from the extensive, action ends of the polarities, not the abstract, tactile, material experiments of the performances on the intensive, feeling ends, and forms the paradoxical tension within the performances that I mentioned in the introduction, a polarity from clarity to chaos. The apparent simplicity of the messages in work like *Mansitting* offers audiences the pleasure of ‘recognition’ as well as the challenge of an 'encounter'.


**Figure 102. Sexcentenary 2017 *WE REFUSE TO BE UNSEEN* at Hazard Festival Manchester photograph Duncan McClaren**

As well as sleeping (Figure 100) we also come together in between actions to huddle, (Figure 102) returning to the group. The whole is an experiment in sending varied and sometimes confusing signals about our ageing bodies, and our ability to call attention to ourselves in a becoming-monumental way. Performance needs to be repeated if more people are to experience it (and its performativity), and our mission is to fill the identified gap in representation of post-menopausal women.

We made a repetitious homage to Hannah Wilke's appropriated monumentality by becoming caryatids (Figure 103) to the pillars of a closed bingo hall in Govan.

Although in the precarious time based monumentality of performance art we could not place ourselves on a blank canvas, we could incorporate the built environment into the site specific tableau.  Here the large and defunct Art Deco building becomes part of the assemblage for the duration of the performance, a monumental transformation.  Being aged and unwanted like ourselves, from another era, it is 'out of time' like Hayden's *Ancient Statuary Series* (1996-2000). Destabilising the temporal references and contexts is alternative strategy to removing them as a means of aiding becoming-monumental.


*Figure 103. XSexcentenary 2017 Now You See me Now You Don't: Caryatids.  Buzzcut Festival Glasgow. photograph Duncan McClaren*

We had devised a uniform for ourselves from another previous era, the nineteen-sixties; black knee length skirts, black sensible shoes, a white twinset and pearls, handbags and black umbrellas.  We do not have to wear this uniform at all times. We saw it as a visual representation of our stereotype and it emphasises both our collaborative aggregation, and the becoming-monumentalness of our multiplicity.

Our final performance at Buzzcut 2017 was an accidental one owing to a decision to take additional photographs at the charity shop used for one of our tableaux

after the event had finished.  We wanted to try out some additional, more statuesque poses standing up as shop dummies (in the performance we were seated on stools/plinths).


*Figure 104. XSexcentenary 2017 Now You See Me Now You Don't . Buzzcut Performance Festival 2017 Glasgow. photograph Duncan McClaren*

The videographer for the event decided to come and film us doing this.  What happened became a film[21] of  a spontaneous event with an aggressive public response by a group of youths to post-menopausal women behaving outside of their stereotype in a display of becoming-monumental.

The tribal nature of their response shows just how deeply rooted the cultural investment in containing and repressing old women is.

[21] *Now You See Me Now You Don't* filmed by Beth Chalmers. https://www.facebook.com/wanda.zyborska/videos/10158952524363644/


*Figure 105. XSexcentenary 2017 Now You See Me Now You Don't. Buzzcut Performance Festival 2017 Glasgow. photograph Duncan McClaren*

## 5.7. Extending Becoming-Monumental

Monumentality has grown from a strategy of representation into a series of interventions and protests about who is represented (old men) and who isn't (old women apart from Queen Victoria) in public art and actual monuments. XSexcentenary expanded its research to focus on the remembrance of death with an increased focus on the speculation and unknowingness of becoming on the perceptible-imperceptible polarity; contemplating the end of ageing whilst celebrating the continuance of life.

Sexcentenary first protested the absence of women in public commemorative art by parodying the statue of Richard Cobden in St Ann's Square in Manchester at Hazard 2017. At *Buzzcut* 2017 the new group XSexcentenary looked more closely at this absence, and examined the statue of Sir William Pearce, a

shipbuilding magnate known locally as ‘The Black Man.’ It was erected by his wife, a philanthropist who set up the Pearce Institute in 1906 as a gift to the people of Govan. Lady Pearce was a pioneer of the ‘Fresh Air Fortnight Scheme’ which sent hundreds of sick children to convalesce at the coast or countryside, amongst other notable charitable works. Yet the engraving we are holding in front of our faces (Figure 106) was the only image we could find of her.

*Figure 106. XSexcentenary 2017 Now You See Me Now You don’t . Buzzcut Performance Festival 2017 Glasgow. photograph Duncan McClaren*

XSexcentenary's *Not Dead Yet* (2018) at Glasgow International was devoted to memorialising women, death and the monument. We were centred at Glasgow Necropolis, a Victorian cemetery overlooking the city centre that is filled almost entirely with eminent men, mainly industrialists. We deterritorialised the cemetery by filling it with women, making it an unstable place where the frozen and solid memorials to men could be parodied and decoded, and where temporary, virtual

and living memorials to women were respectfully and ceremoniously celebrated. Becoming-monumental now had the added referent of remembrance as well as being a strategy of representation for post-menopausal women, reminding us that women artists are often forgotten in museums and within the canon of art, just as we are rarely memorialised in grandiose funerial effigies.

*Figure 107. XSexcentenary 2018. Not Dead Yet: Memorial to Margaret Oliphant . Glasgow International 2018 Photograph Duncan McClaren*

The performances at the Necropolis were a mixture of symbolic desecration of the memorials to men (Figure 108) and the creation of virtual memorials to neglected Victorian women (Figure 107), such as the authors Margaret Oliphant and Mary Brunton[22], whom we 'placed' on blank cartouches on the back and sides of a

[22] Margaret Oliphant (1828-97) was a prolific writer of hundreds of short stories, essays, articles and serialised novels such as *Katie Stewart*(1853). She also wrote critical works such as *A Literary*

memorial to a man). We made an iconoclastic parody of the memorial to Charles Tennant (Figure 108) whose factory at St Rollox polluted the valley next to the necropolis and filled the neighbouring hospital with sick and dying workers from the chemicals in his bleaching processes. We aped the manspreading posture of his statue and performed a masquerade of the pollution of his factory by puffing lavender talcum powder into the air around us, together with a recitation of the history of pollution and abuse of workers at his factory.


*Figure 108 XSexcentenary 2018. Not Dead Yet: Defiling the Memorial to Charles Tennant Glasgow International 2018, photograph Duncan McClaren*

We need first to become-monumental if we want to be considered for noticing and remembrance. Like Hannah Wilke we must make ourselves into monuments. As well as the performances at the Necropolis we had a social hub based nearby

*History of Scotland* (1882) and travel writing. Mary Brunton (1778 - 1818) was a novelist, author of Self-Control (1811) and Discipline (1814).

where we could show other work and devise interactive events to engage with local people and visitors to the festival on different levels.


*Figure 109. XSexcentenary 2018 Not Dead Yet One Stop Memorial Shop: Shrine with objects, photographs and drawings of remembrance made by visitors to our hub. Photograph Duncan McClaren*

The public workshops XSexcentenary held at our Hub (the *One Stop Memorial Shop*) near the Necropolis, opened our assemblage to women from the general public and invited local community groups to help us discover alternative and durational memorials. We had a shrine (Figure 109) where people could place their own memorials to women they had lost. Workshops included two for the making of alternative mourning clothes for our final performance, a funeral procession culminating with a remembrance ceremony at the Necropolis (Figure 112). We held *Death Yoga* classes, poetry and writing workshops, classes for making alternative mourning jewellery out of black rubber, puppet making and

near-death re-birthing experiences in the soft coffin; one of my rubber sculptures (Figure 110). *Not Dead Yet* (2018) acknowledged the closeness of death that is part of old age, exploring possibilities for agency, play, becoming-monumental and contracting tactile and transformative participatory audience encounters.

*Figure **110** XSexcentenary (2018) Near Death Re-birthing Experience in the Soft Coffin. Glasgow International*

*Not Dead Yet* (2018) provided alternative representations and paradigms for post-menopausal women to those portrayed in popular culture and made space for people to reconsider their own becoming, and eventual dying (Cristofovici, 2009: 30). Working as part of a performance group has enabled me to unfold my research in an expanded trajectory, in playful and often humorous ways, as well as monumental and erotic. I have found that other women who identify as old, as scarred, as postmenopausal, want to join with me and work together, and that I want to work with them, that I need them in my becoming.


*Figure 111. XSexcentenary (2018) Not Dead Yet One Stop Memorial Shop: Alternative Mourning Clothes Workshop. In the background is the poetry corner with books provided by the Scottish Poetry Library. Photograph Duncan Maclaren*

## 5.8. Conclusion

In this chapter I reflected on my most recent work, the unfolding of the collective performance elements in my practice, developing further tactics to oppose invisibility and discovering the new strategic tool of becoming-monumental, on the crucial polarities of 'political thought-political practice' and aesthetics-politics. I further conjectured on the place of eroticism and monster beauty in becoming-monumental, in challenging taboos and extending alternative representations of becoming post-menopausal woman.

I gained new understanding of the disruptive yet constricting dichotomies that drive me, and their important place in my theoretical toolbox on the polarity of stasis-revolution now that I have founds ways of negotiating and accommodating them alongside my polarities.


*Figure 112. XSexcentenary (2018) Not Dead Yet Funeral Procession. Necropolis, Glasgow International Festival. Photograph Duncan McClaren.*

I reviewed the importance of Butler's (1990) performative repetition as a strategy for change, giving examples of how we used and developed this tool in two strands through the four performances discussed in the chapter. One strand is a recognisable re-iteration of a repetitive action such as mansitting or sleeping in piles, instantly clear and easily identified with, the other strand responds to singularities of place and history, where the repetition is thematic yet experimental, open and unfolding.

Finally I reflected on death through doing the work with others in this chapter, my own and that of others. On a personal level I now feel more able to accept my own death and its inevitability and how I would like to be remembered.

# Conclusion

Through my sculptural works, drawings and performances I have achieved performative transformations through the becoming of the scarred post-menopausal body. My particular focus has been on breast cancer, challenging the way people see the scarred postmenopausal body, stereotypes of ageing women and their relative invisibility in our culture. In order to do this I adapted a set of theoretical tools and devised practical strategies to help me (working with others) to make this original contribution to a very small body of artistic production about post-menopausal women.

This project developed a spirit of humour and playfulness, producing alternative paradigms of aesthetics, eroticism and beauty for postmenopausal women scarred by breast cancer. This provides a much needed performative development in a field of representation that can support and reinvent a growing demographic that currently suffers discrimination, misrepresentation and neglect (Commission on Older Women[23], 2013).

My research uniquely combines an investigation into the cultural aesthetics of breast cancer surgery for older women along with experimental imaginings of the scarred aged woman as an erotic, desiring subject. I conjoin the inscriptions on the skin and body from breast cancer surgery to signs of ageing such as wrinkles, age marks, sagging and stretching to make a textured assemblage of monster beauty (Frueh, 2002).

[23] In The Interim Report of the Labour Party Commission on Older Women 2013 Harriet Harman identified the inequalities and prejudices suffered by older women:
'This is a generation of women which is invisible in public life. Despite the problem of ... age discrimination, there is an evident and long-standing role for older men in public life... in television [t]he older male presenter represents wisdom, authority and experience. Yet the woman TV presenter has to struggle to look younger than she is and is then pushed off our screens when she turns 50. This is discrimination... and an insult to viewers - many of whom are themselves older women - who do not need to be protected from the sight of older women (Commission on Older Women, 2013).'

I have come to understand some of the mechanisms of the challenge this poses, facing the power structures that generate the negative fears and beliefs that diminish me as a scarred, post-menopausal woman and finding ways to overcome them. I have developed new strategies for the alternative representation of scarred, postmenopausal women, for the use of other artists and women seeking alternatives for their own becoming.

Those who are making art about ageing or disfigured women are a small band of much needed change-makers. Much of what we are making is visible only to a few, partly because of its scarcity, and partly because what we are showing is not yet acceptable or even representable, when it comes to sexuality, eroticism and beauty (Boliver, 2015).

Visualising a set of polarities derived from Deleuze (1988) gave insight into the contradictions and diverse energies of the field I am negotiating. From perceiving myself as a defined (by patriarchal cultural mores) and gendered subject I developed a process of becoming as a scarred, post-menopausal, erotic and vital woman. To my knowledge I am the first to use Deleuze's polarities to model the tension in my methodology between political engagement within a speculative epistemology and affective expression of what it looks and feels like, and what it might be becoming. Here I use and adapt an artistic paradigm as proposed by Guattari (1995), where new non-individualistic subjectivities [created through assemblages] - in this case, artworks – arise from the unstable and chaotic ground of materiality: ‘The aesthetic paradigm – the creation and composition of mutant percepts and affects – [that] has become the paradigm for every possible form of liberation’ (Guattari 1995; 91).

Chapter one showed the therapeutic and expressive power of tactile, material art in finding new ways of becoming a postmenopausal woman after clinical surgery for breast cancer. My body folded and unfolded with the sculpture skin, as I began to seek out and engage with the materials, tools and techniques I would need for this thesis; assemblages, performativity, repetition and deterritorialisation

entered the toolbox for this tactile experiment. Together with polarities they gave me a porous framework for building unstable and permeable projectiles of dynamic transformation.

In Chapter two I continued the exploration of scarring and how to negotiate and accommodate its inscriptions in a wider field of expression. Frida Kahlo and Hannah Wilke were two of the artists with whom I have developed special relationships during this project, whose innovative work on their own experiences of disease, surgery and scarring introduced an aesthetics of age and illness that I could apply to my own approach in exploring the inscriptions on my body from breast cancer surgery. This included the powerful and therapeutic strategies of having fun with illness and embracing narcissism. I discovered Joanna Frueh's monster beauty (Frueh 2002) as a tool for breaking taboos about the post-menopausal woman as erotic and desiring subject in a deterritorialisation of museum and woodland. I began to actively damage and distress the already dilapidated rubber/skin, where the making is in a polarity between destruction and construction, and the armatures began to emerge from the skin of the sculptures, almost like the bones unfolding to become more prominent within the assemblage, leaving behind the skin that yet remains.

The strategy for Chapter three brought art from the past into the assemblage through imaginary collaboration. A key strategy for this research, imaginary collaboration developed a new approach to working with art from the past, which became deterritorialised in my practice as a result of this work. Historical work was added to my own repeated re-iterations, thus increasing the scale and number of transformational representations of scarred post-menopausal women. Creativie encounters unfolded in space and time, as I enacted a performative repetition of Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975) and found a muse, Anticleia, through working with Fuseli and his painting *Tiresius Foretells the Future to Odysseus* (1800).

The cancer scars merged into the general decay as the work became less about the scarring from cancer and more about the marks and experience of ageing, a tactile and affective contamination.

By Chapter four I turned from sculpture to engage directly with the audience in an exploration of a new strategy in my work, the (social) contractual relationships of masochistic performance art (O'Dell, 1998). The strategy of forming tactile contractual relationships with the audience brought the audience into the assemblage, dramatically increasing the scale of possibilities for transformation. Political action explored becoming subject in a shift from intensive to extensive production. The polarities were inside-outside, the assemblages public and expressive as our collective produced ourselves as desiring and erotic, alternatively beautiful post-menopausal women.

In Chapter five I considered death and memorialisation, the power of letting go and becoming imperceptible in a polarity whilst still wanting to be noticed, acknowledging the need in the artist for the assemblage to leave something behind, art objects or memorials, encounters that might continue after death.

I explored ways of negotiating the 'entrapment' within dichotomies such as young-old, beautiful-ugly; an entrapment which was discussed in Chapter two as patriarchal and limiting (Kristeva, 1982; Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Parker and Pollock, 2013), and by Chapter five was understood as a positive irritant for change and action towards creative unfolding. I found that those dichotomies that are still operating were a driving force in my experimentations, my exploration of becoming, they had their place in the polarities of this research, perhaps even becoming transformed into mutable fluidity. Together we unfolded and spread virally, touching and infesting all those we encountered in our repetitive deterritorialistion of an ageist culture. Sometimes we were clear and sometimes chaotic, often at the same time. We performed and created as often as possible. The scale of repetitions, added to the larger than life behaviour and accumulations

of collaborators, materials and methods ensured the continued unfolding and folding of becoming-monumental, scarred, post-menopausal women.

## Unfolding into the Future: Viral forces

My future project arising from the current research is the production of a *'Museum of Breast Cancer'* where I could develop ideas and incorporate material from this research that goes beyond the bounds of this thesis, delving into the history of the aesthetics and power relationships of breast cancer surgery and reconstruction. This will include the ways some women are negotiating the power over how their bodies will be inscribed by surgeons, often without their knowledge or permission (Flat and Fabulous, 2013; Adams, 1997) and who are doing ground-breaking work in designing how they can live with their changed (breastless) bodies and re-invent themselves via an aesthetic and existential metamorphosis.

The second potential direction emerging from the latter part of this project unfolded as I found myself impelled by our existential crisis to read more about strategies for dealing with the challenges of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene (Haraway, 2016) in order to learn 'to live and die well with each other in a thick present' (Haraway, 2016: 1). I will extend my project into sustainable living and ageing (and dying) and environmental actions against the extinction of species. Here I will develop 'becoming-animal' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), a condition that was already emerging in much of the work. This was most notable in the collective actions of (X)Sexcentenary such as sleeping in 'hot compost piles' (Haraway, 2016: 4) of becoming with others in addition to *Ugly Sheep: Strangers to Ourselves (Old Women Drawing Attention to Themselves Boldly*)[24] (2017), a performance that unfolded outside the scope of the PhD research as this artist

[24] *Ugly Sheep: Strangers to Ourselves (Old Women Drawing Attention to Themselves Boldly*) (2017), ICAW Connexion 2017 *Luggage Art* at Oriel Brondanw, Llanfrothen, XSexcentenary in Wales (in this performance Wanda Zyborska and Lindsey Colbourne) took the side of oppressed animals and livestock, from a feeling of empathy. *Ugly Sheep: Strangers to Ourselves* (2017) was an assemblage of sheep, Shelley, stately home and old woman.

herself became deterritorialised by the lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) emerging through the assemblages.

I now have at my disposal a formidable toolbox of theory and practice to utilise in performative action. The accumulating inscriptions and erotic textures of monster beauty, the power of becoming-monumental and the deconstruction of the contract have been added to the assemblages with the material and tactile. My encounters in time and space will multiply as I instigate new deterritorialisations 'on the edge between the virtual and the actual' (O'Sullivan, 2008 in O'Sullivan and Zepke, 2008: 99), negotiating this borderland with the aid of polarities. I will do this as an alternatively beautiful, scarred, erotic and sexed being, experiencing:

> *Not just libidinal desire, but rather ontological desire, the desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject towards being' (Braidotti, 2003: 44).*

My crucial work producing the ageing female body with its accumulating inscriptions and erotic textures will necessarily continue as I unfold in the experiment of my creative becoming.

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