



Flight of a bird,
life in performance
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SASA
GALLERY

Flight of a bird, life in performance

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Front image: Linda Lou Murphy, *un/gather* EAF performance, 2008

Inside cover: Linda Lou Murphy, *pleatwork roll*, 2008

Back cover: Linda Lou Murphy, *un/gather* EAF performance, 2008



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Introduction

Life of a bird, a life in performance explores psychological and physical risk through the artwork of Ali Baker, Linda Lou Murphy and Yoko Kaijo. As well as maintaining independent practices, these three Adelaide based artists worked collaboratively as *shimmeeshok*, performing in galleries and devising guerrilla street works. This exhibition, curated by Keith Giles, Ali and Yoko, includes archival video, sculptural installations and new performances. Exposing the inherent frailty and pain of being, the work is fragile, intense and sometimes disturbing.

Life of a bird, a life in performance is a tribute to the enduring impact of the art and ideas of Linda Lou Murphy 19/1/58 - 30/8/09. An inspiring woman and outstanding artist, Linda was dearly loved by many people, including staff and students at the South Australian School of Art, where she graduated with a Masters of Visual Arts in 2009. Reflecting her passion for the arts and belief in the future, Linda made a bequest to the University of South Australia to fund scholarships to enable art students who are disadvantaged or isolated to excel.

The SASA Gallery has received immense support in the development of *Life of a bird, a life in performance*. Special thanks to the artists, curators and writers: Ali, Keith, Yoko, Linda Marie Walker and Pamela Zeplin, for your generous and powerful engagement with all aspects of the exhibition and associated events. Also, thank you to Linda's friends and family for your dedication, care and commitment. And thank you to Linda Lou Murphy whose memory we cherish.

The SASA Gallery supports a program of exhibitions focusing on innovation, experimentation and performance. With the support of the Division of Education, Art and Social Sciences and the Division Research Performance Fund, the SASA Gallery is being developed as a leading contemporary art space publishing and exhibiting high-quality research based work, and as an active site of teaching and learning. The SASA Gallery showcases South Australian artists, designers, writers and curators associated with Art, Architecture & Design, UniSA in a national and international context.

Dr Mary Knights
Director, SASA Gallery



Nothing is as it appears¹

Keith Giles

In performance, the objects express their knowledge in/of/about the very fibre/fabric of the body. They generate actions that transform, incorporate dispel, shed, stow, unify, connect and sever. Paper/skin/object/body are interchangeable, as in performance they contain and disclose the matter of time.²

Flight of a bird, life in performance explores the concept of risk through ephemeral performance, video and sculptural installation. This exhibition draws on a substantial body of solo performance work by Linda Lou Murphy and performance group *shimmeeshok*. Since 1998 *shimmeeshok* have been notable for innovative and often disturbing performances. Their performances are beautiful and graceful but consistently make reference to the inherent risk and pain that may underlie the performance.

Linda Lou Murphy, founder of *shimmeeshok*, completed her Master of Visual Arts in 2008 at the South Australian School of Art, UniSA. Linda Lou's research explored many of the ideas that underpinned the performance art of *shimmeeshok*. Their performances are often short in duration, incorporating moving image, sculpture/artefacts, sound and installation. Exploring risk, the body and movement, *shimmeeshok* had developed a strong collaborative practice working together. They have performed in the gallery context and other public spaces including guerrilla street performances.

Japanese Butoh and the raw and intense work of Stelarc, Francis Bacon, Sarah Jane Pell, Patty Chang, Mike Parr and Matthew Barney influenced Linda Lou. In Linda Lou's more recent research based, video performance artwork she refers to the conceptual orientations of the work that relate to risk:

in, *drawing threads*; the interchangeability of skin/paper and artefact/body in a transforming history context.
in, *drawing breath*; toxicity and control
in *ruffwork*; protective strategies and the multiplicity of function and
in *blackwork*; the relationship of material and body – finding out what each can offer, and toxicity as a positive force³.

Linda Lou had a difficult and challenging childhood (at the age of 12 she was made a ward of the state there after growing up in church institutions) this gave her insight and an inner strength and the ability to reflect on the hardship of others. Her friends, colleagues and mentors were extremely important to her and she was committed to assisting others to face adversity and challenges with creative optimism. In her will she has left an endowment to UniSA to fund an annual award to assist isolated/disadvantaged students in the visual arts.

In the past few months Ali Baker, Yoko Kajio and I have sorted through Linda Lou's art archive; selecting works for the exhibition has not been an easy task, many moments filled with sadness. One reflects on the life of a friend and colleague that has departed this blue planet we all share. One is struck by the fragility and impermanence of life and how at times it makes little sense.

The legacy of Linda Lou's artwork consists of many large boxes that contain exquisitely made performance costumes made of paper, sculptural artefacts also made from paper that have been meticulously pleated and pinned. Many more boxes contain images, discs containing video and still documentation of her video performances, copious amounts of research notes – there is a feeling of being overwhelmed.

Sadness diminishes as I reflect ... through Linda Lou I became absorbed in the beauty of performance, the beauty of paper and the simplicity of black and white. Her grace was simply stunning.

1. S. Rinpoche, 1992, *The Tibetan book of living and dying*, p.38

2. L. Murphy, 2007-8, unpublished research notes

3. Ibid.

Many thanks: Ali Baker, Yoko Kajio, Mary Knights, Linda Marie Walker and Pam Zeplin without their support this project would not have been possible. Thanks also to those who contributed to this exhibition: Gavin Chow, Grace Deleo, Carmel Donato, Peter Farrow, Denys Finney, Nicholas Folland, Amy Gebhardt, Anne Harry, Jo Holmes, Josh Lincoln, Andy Petrushevics, Francesca de Rimini, Poul P Snarkis and Stella Topaz.

My sincere apologies to any photographer I may have omitted to thank - having sorted through hundreds of images it has been difficult to identify the author of every image.



The sound of a woman dancing inside a bottle

Ali Baker

In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry¹.

Shimmeeshok began performing at what is now a housing estate, the former Underdale campus of UniSA in 1998. In various forms the group performed at galleries, festivals and spaces up until 2006; Art Gallery of South Australia, Womad, Space Theatre, Feast Festival, SALA week, Fringe Festival.

Linda Lou Murphy (aka Patterson) was the creative force in bringing the group together and finding performance opportunities for artists interested in using the body as medium and material for the exploration of fleeting emotionally charged moments. Linda Lou was a person who demonstrated the capacity to change the world through her intention – a sculptor of moments.

We called in a storm sharpening our knives, balanced on seed filled cans. Through darkened spaces our paper dresses rustled and caught shafts of light, imploded and unraveled.

Performing on hot cat walks with long pieces of ribbon up ladders with little spools of audiotape, silent speech. The height of a conversation, the tail end of words.

In baking paper, tissue, and wallpaper dresses we made our entrances, with tea cups balanced on our heads full of dry ice we poured warm water to make the rush of steam.

With magnifying glasses we viewed the world, with little mirrors we reflected our light back out.

Moving with music boxes of sound, with garden shears and small pairs of scissors we made snipping sounds, wheeled dolls houses full of little lights through dark spaces and interacted with the sun and moon on large projection screens where our shadows moved independent of our bodies.

A flock of birds circling edges and laughing. All things must pass.

Knives, balloons, bubbles, wishes and the ways that the shadow of your eyelashes cast lines down your face. All things must pass.

Sharpness, softness the texture of grief.

As Yoko and I prepare for the *Flight of a Bird* performance a little green and red parrot taps its head on the window above us.

1. B. Okri, 1991, *The Famished Road*, p.3

An atmosphere of risk: Linda Lou Murphy, performance and the afterlife of objects

Pamela Zeplin

‘Life is not measured by how many breaths you take [but] how many moments take your breath away’¹.

Breathing is an inherently risky business; not breathing is even more so. The air around us contains all kinds of risks, some real and many more imagined but in the end, it’s all we have. In and out. Our entire lives are lived within this unalterable condition of being, as Linda Lou Murphy (aka Linda Patterson) noted, ‘from the first cry to the last gasp’². In the interval we inhale and exhale an even number of breaths which, over an 80 years totals approximately 30,274,560 or, 21,600 a day³. That’s what life amounts to, despite all the fuss and effort in-between.

Impossibly delicate and yet robust, our breathing and swallowing apparatuses ceaselessly encounter – and pose – very real threats during every moment of *l’élán vital*. These organs and orifices incessantly ingest, expel and mediate all exterior and interior environments; even the involuntary act of breathing harbours the risk of illness or choking and, ultimately, cessation. It’s just a matter of time.

Depending on how it is understood, performance also constitutes high risk. Whether exhilarating or downright dreary, live performance, at least in the form of public speaking, is statistically the most terrifying of all fears; for the majority of people it is even more petrifying than the fear of death⁴. But however mortifying, performance cannot be a non-event; its unpredictable live action is elusively located in the realm of the relational, somewhere in the shared air between audience and performer. And despite its linguistic co-option into measurable targets and KPIs by managerial speak, performance remains potent with possibility.

‘...in the dream world we do not fly because we have wings; rather, we think we have wings because we have flown...’⁵

Performance as a living act informs the curatorial rationale of this exhibition, *Flight of a bird, life in performance*. In taking on the idea of air – and risk – it is but a short leap to the concept of flight. For many, flying is almost as terrifying as live public performance, even though powered flight is becoming ever more risky amidst volcanic ash clouds and diminishing airline maintenance budgets. Perhaps we should be much more afraid.

Increasing aerial trepidation is less about flight *per se*, however, than the dodgy manoeuvres of global aeronautical corporations. Whether actual or metaphorical, flight is something else again; we only have to look skywards to ponder the wondrous movement of birds sharing the same atmospheric stuff that keeps our lungs and hearts pumping. Disporting themselves through this air, soaring, swooping, gliding and flapping, birds, like their mechanically engineered relatives, are held aloft only by air curving and folding over their aerofoil shaped wings. These creatures remind us of a time when we too flew, as gods, as primordial pterosaurs or via spiritually (or chemically) altered states of being. Our sense of aerial wonderment, and the related phenomenon of vertigo, a flying instructor once explained to me, is a residue of the primitive human impulse to fly. Whether true or not, this theory offers an interesting spin on the human compulsion to ascend⁶.

When facing imminent death in 2009, Linda Lou Murphy, a passionate proponent of performance and avid researcher of risk and of air, explained that she would soon be released into the sky as a bird. Although of small comfort to her large following of friends and artists, this poetic image of the airborne creatures she loved encapsulated much of what she brought to her unique practice. Performance – and risk – were the very air that she breathed as she metaphorically soared upon new creative currents to re-define relations between performance, new media, design and contemporary craft. In this heady atmosphere the interplay between body and object would be radically redefined⁷.



‘...longing to create and hold onto something that is real even as everything melts’⁸

In a philosophical sense, Murphy’s practice dynamically engaged the aerial imagination, a trope popular in recent cultural expression to celebrate formlessness, liminality and drift. In this way the ineffable and fluid domain of performance may be seen to approximate the elusive nature of sky and clouds, which Leonardo so poetically described as ‘bodies without surfaces’⁹. Paradoxically, however, Murphy propelled this idea further by simultaneously incorporating the body and (its) solid objects into her airborne reveries. In drawing upon complex Aristotelian models of motion (*potentia* and *actus*¹⁰) – and time, she challenged simplistic notions of past/present, process/product, performance/object. Just as aeronautics depends on critical relations between lift, thrust and drag, this artist understood the body as ‘a juncture between moving air and the rotating earth’¹¹ and her work activated states of ‘being within what has not yet come into form’¹². These potentialities, which include risk as well as material products/objects, question the veracity of linear, spatial time so that, in Aquinas’ words: ‘the future belongs to the present...and the present [becomes] an absence of just those particular absent things which are about to be’¹³. This somewhat convoluted concept nevertheless brings all Murphy’s work into [our] present. The body of objects produced for and during her performances remain purposefully in the present – whenever that is, problematising conventional notions of (past) ‘props’ or ‘costumes’. Endowed with a sculptural integrity of their own, the artefacts are embedded with memories and bodily traces of live events that nevertheless insist on an after-life.



Exquisitely fragile, Murphy’s fibre textile sculptures/garments are feather-light and vulnerable; one breath could blow them away. These tissue paper objects, painstakingly constructed and ‘bristling’¹⁴ with thousands of dressmakers’ pins, have been likened to Victorian needlecraft¹⁵ but could equally be compared to the myriad components and delicate calibrations involved in aeronautical engineering. Both enable the miracle of flight, but while the latter achieves literal take-off – even at 600,000 kilograms¹⁶ – Murphy’s philobatics¹⁷ embark on more poetic flights. Her

gossamer garments and ephemeral performances allow navigation of less visible lines of flight, although these in no way position her oeuvre as lightweight or 'flighty'. Indeed, the gravity of the inhaling and exhaling body, and its capacity for risk attracted her to performance as an intensely generative platform for philosophical and artistic speculation on physicality.

How then does an art gallery, configured to present two and three dimensional objects, accommodate a show about live performance, which eludes art institutional insistence on materiality and containment? To extend the aeronautical metaphor, if live performance is comparable to the experience of flight, it follows that the gallery provides a hangar. Therefore, since the exhibition in question features performance largely occurring in the recent past, this enterprise may be interpreted as re-envisioning the gallery as a metaphorical form of 'aviation museum'. This makes for tricky territory. *Flight of a bird, life in performance*, however, is not a memorial exhibition although it pays due homage to Linda Lou Murphy's immense and ongoing contribution to this art form in Australia. The relations she set in train between performance and material objects-imbued-with-life allow a shift in conventional understandings of this genre beyond the binaries of live act *versus* dead documentation.

Far from being leftover residues or vacated chrysalis of a particular performance, these tissue paper works now invite our contemplation as intricately constructed, stand-alone sculptures – and mnemonic devices. Indeed, we are invited to imagine these – and perhaps all objects – within the realm of animism or 'sympathetic magic'¹⁸, invested with a life force of which we may be as yet unaware. This possibility has long been understood beyond the rational west, where, for example, Buddhist consecration of artworks refers to 'opening the eyes' of a statue¹⁹. While Murphy's works challenge conventional ways of seeing, they also challenge western precepts of time as here today, gone tomorrow. For this artist, time may be apprehended in other, more 'textural'²⁰ and complex ways where past, present and future constantly enfold into and around one another.



Flight of a bird, life in performance keeps faith with Murphy's respect for the unique unrepeatability of every performance and for launching fearlessly into unknown territory; this allows her objects and ideas to take on new and unexpected life. In mounting this project, therefore, new performances were commissioned alongside selected works created by Murphy between 1995 and 2009. Ali Baker and Yoko Kajio, Murphy's long time collaborators in the performance group, *shimmeeshock*, have devised original performances for this event, entitled *Flight of a bird # 1 & 2*. This conscious decision not to re-stage past works as 'museum pieces' not only re-inserts Murphy's work in the present but allows the entire project to 'fly', to float and to breathe anew. It also invites risk.

'It is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all.'²¹

Risk is becoming harder to take in contemporary society where, through heightened consciousness of real and 'constructed' threats, ludicrous levels of risk-aversion and 'security' are engineered by legal and military interests, escalating into unprecedented levels of fearfulness, vulnerability and anxiety. As Murphy explained, 'safety and security cannot be guaranteed'²² despite the haemorrhagic costs of supposedly safeguarding our society. Moreover, this artist knew that risk can be beneficial for wellbeing and resilience, and it can be glamorous and exciting, as well. Like Icarus whose wax wings flew him too close to the sun, Wall Street hubris, enchanted by the allure of the always potential, continues to extol risk and high flying performance, notwithstanding recent and spectacular financial nose dives.

Murphy understood the speculative nature of managing risk as an 'articulate and productive technique for creative expression in performance art'²³. Her position was not entirely new; artists have always leapt into the void, a phenomenon nowhere more evident than in twentieth century artistic avant garde practice, particularly in the non-object performance that flourished during the 1970s. As Gallasch notes:

Consciously or not, artists have long put at risk their bodies and souls, and sometimes those of their audiences. They have tempted the disfavour of critics, audiences, governments, monarchs and dictators and lost income and careers.²⁴

Of all art forms, performance has risk built-in and leaks messily between the domains of visual art, performing arts, new media, sculpture and life – sometimes all at once. Impossible to contain, it is not surprising that this art form has, for two 'cool' and ironically detached decades, remained largely marginal to mainstream art, even though it continually attracts, and even captivates, new audiences. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that in the wake of hyper-capitalism's latest plane wreck, performance art is again on the ascendancy, influenced by artists' increasing dismay at commodified art systems and their concomitant attraction to alternative modes of expression such as relational aesthetics and more socially oriented practices.

Murphy's approach to the role of risk in performance can be situated within this more ethically informed context but is distinguishable from many other performance practices. Less an obvious spectacle of aesthetic bravado or yet another demonstration of abjection, hers is a practice that 'hovers on the threshold'²⁵ as

a program of intensifications that reconfigures appearance to make a 'place' for the expression of unseen sensate forces, such as, for example; anxiety, trauma, fear, pain, control, and isolation.²⁶

As the artist explained in her Master of Visual Arts exegesis, 'un/gather: the body in the work of art: an investigation into the expressive capacities of risk in performance art [sic]', this 'place' embraced 'the productive capacities of threatening forces that are played out in the performance of the face and the mouth'²⁷. In this way the head and facial orifices, so strongly associated with individual identity and rationality, are subsumed into a continuous corporeality of respiratory and alimentary systems from which objects and matter are created, extruded, expelled and 'un/gathered' into the world. The face/head become conduits in drawing the entire bodily organism upwards and outwards.

For all the potential hazards lurking within and outside of our physical selves, Murphy presents these as inherently generative in nature. Inextricably entwined with the life force itself, the ever-present risk factor – internal and external – is thus released from its negative connotations and metaphorically re-configured as a potentially animating force. In terms of material manifestation in her work, Murphy explains that risk:

emerges more subtly as ‘tissue forms’ [that] take shape during the performance, ungathered from my face and mouth, and activated by my body. These ‘things’ reconfigure my appearance into a productive site for expressive artefacts to un-gather[sic] from my body.²⁸

This ‘un/gathering’ of intricately folded and pleated ‘things’ thus creates a literal opening out of unexplored possibilities, a strategy for making ‘the more of the self’²⁹. Here, Deleuze’s interpretation of Leibniz’s musings on the fold³⁰ is palpably embraced by the artist as she ‘folds the bodily envelope into itself’³¹ while simultaneously unfolding its internal energies ever outwards and upwards. During and after their performative role, the mobile contours of these ‘things’ assume a life of their own.

‘To live is to be at risk of death; this is both a force and the ultimate fact of all meat, all flesh.’³²

Murphy’s performances heighten the presence of corporeal intensity with much more than current theoretical insight and painstakingly detailed construction. While the physical risks present in her work require gruelling rigour as regards occupational health and safety compliance, these are subsumed into an apparently effortless performance; this draws upon her unique sense of stage presence, impeccable timing and drop dead elegance and the works are unapologetically beautiful and meditative. Critically, these elements combine to engender a situation of intensely exquisite anxiety that slowly builds into an atmosphere of deferral and uncertainty; this is, of course, integral to the idea of risk itself. As the action literally unfolds, the audience gradually becomes aware of the performer’s exposure to very real as well as metaphorical risks. These sites of tension are, astonishingly, created by Murphy’s vulnerable

tissue paper artefacts, held together with steel pins, or are finally revealed, for example, in *drawing threads* (2004), under her long black satin gown in the form of a small, potentially treacherous footstool – one tiny teeter away from disaster. Anxiety is further intensified when a frilly Victoriana-style reticule purse is donned as a facial mask (*headpiece goggle*), revealing a previously concealed armoury of lethal pins. The purse/mask’s mirror base obliterates the performer’s face, thereby ‘ingesting’ the surrounding audience, which is now visually implicated in the performative object while the (visually impaired) artist negotiates a precarious sense of balance.

Always, Murphy’s slow dances with danger are partnered with breathtaking beauty. Pleated and plicated, creased and folded, black tissue paper and pins construct impossibly long tubular coils and waves that, when ‘un/gathered’ in *facework* and *pleatwork* (2008), threaten to overwhelm the figure at their centre. Suffocatingly spectacular, *facework*’s ‘boa’ is set in fluid motion around and beyond the performer, drawn seemingly endlessly from a large tissue paper sac concealing – and potentially stifling – her mouth and nose. This couture collar-cum-flotation device gradually assumes the form of a monstrously beautiful colonic ‘accessory’. As its compressed and folded contents are gradually released, they writhe around, above and beneath the performer, evocative of giant inky octopi or the dreadlocks of Medusa’s mythical flying head. While rehearsing the rolling peristaltic choreography of the alimentary system, Murphy’s obsessively worked paper ‘plumbing’ exploits the effects of rustle, fold and flexure. Hauntingly reminiscent of skin and the astonishing fragility of internal bodily tissue, the vulnerability of tissue paper provides an effective foil for the compressed force field that is folded within these forms – and by implication, the human body.

facepiece’s collar/sac is tenderly removed to uncover a huge sewing needle between the performer’s teeth, it has been there all along and its thread is attached to a minutely pleated, fibre-textile ‘ribbon’ secreted within the performer’s cheek (*mouthpiece*). Slowly, this perilous object unravels from the mouth, revealing words interspersed with blackened text; these make visible the silencing of the performer’s (and others’) voices and histories by oppressive and censorial institutions. While ‘inside’ the mouth (or institution), this situation literally presents a choking hazard but expelled, the



saliva-moistened text is ritually nailed to the wall where other performed (and transformed) objects await their next life. Here, a tiny – and potentially deadly – pearl appears, daintily sewn onto the end of the ribbon.

pleatwork continues to ‘un/gather’ compressed and pleated tissue, this time in the form of a large, tightly coiled ‘wheel’ external to the performer’s body. Hypnotically drawn out from its centre, this object develops a twisting helical energy, a maniacal Issey Miyake of sorts, and as its force slowly unravels, it determines its own trajectory as a garment-cum-force field, almost indistinguishable from the performer’s bodily contours. The work ‘accumulates suspense, anxiety and mystery’³³ until the threat of smothering passes. Then the artist finally slips off her footwear, revealing towering platform soles that had potentially endangered every one of her choreographed movements. Perhaps serendipitously, the brand, ‘Destroy’ is stamped on their innersoles³⁴. Newly emerged, the multi-folded black artefact finally separates from ‘the body’ and transformed into sculpture, is dramatically draped across platforms in the gallery. Evocative of a monstrosity expanded ‘lung’ or a form of exploded energy, *pleatwork* now completes *un/gather*’s suite of performed artefacts. Haberdashery has acquired habitus. Transformed through the performance, the objects await re-coiling, unfolding and potential risk in a future performance. This was meant to happen at a gig in Rio – the next stop on this artist’s career horizon.

‘The very idea of freedom as a flight from the bodily takes wing, so to speak, from the very shapes and movements it would leave behind.’³⁵

I could never have guessed when Linda Patterson appeared in my performance class in 1997 that within a few weeks her group performance, *Cutting piece* – knife sharpening enacted in a shallow tray of water – would be holding an audience in awe or that the subsequent swish of her extravagant paper dresses and accessories would, with Ali Baker and Yoko Kajio, soon begin transforming the performance medium in Adelaide and beyond. Neither could anyone have anticipated that only twelve years later Linda Lou Murphy’s body would be at serious risk from its own internal forces and those mysterious energies she so magically called

up in performance. Who could have guessed that *un/gather*’s writhing viscera and endless enfoldings would prove so painfully prescient?

Now released into the sky or, as she hoped, ‘staying with the Greek goddesses’, Linda Lou Murphy challenges us to continue this work and to breathe new life into the ‘unfulfilled but possible futures’³⁶ that constitute her legacy. While this is rarely achievable with conventional performance documentation, *Flight of a bird, life in performance* proposes more subtle and continuing relations between risk, the performed body and its products/artefacts. This is possible ‘using the very shapes and movements’ that the artist has entrusted to us. Hopefully, new audiences will enter into the aerial imagination she embraced to transform matter into gossamer possibilities without, paradoxically, relinquishing the *materiel* of the moment. Because this work continues to endure, it is entirely possible that this and future events celebrating Linda Lou Murphy’s breathtaking oeuvre will again ‘take wing’.³⁷

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26. Patterson, p. 1.
27. *Ibid*.
28. *Ibid*.
29. Russo, p. 34.
30. Deleuze, G., *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
31. Russo, p.27.
32. Patterson, p. 41.
33. *Ibid*.
34. I am indebted to Dr Debra Porch, an examiner of Linda Patterson's Master's thesis, for this observation.
35. Russo, p. 51.
36. Russo, p. 31.
37. Freud, S., cited in Russo, p. 31.



This is a spool of wool ... or, it loses itself to offer itself.

Linda Marie Walker

I wonder where Linda Lou's memory is now; I imagine it far ahead of me, in a future she knew about, and worked toward in the objects she made and performed. The memory I wonder about has left me behind, the memory I am in wonder of is here now, in our midst, in its strange ethereal liveliness.

I wrote this text for Linda Lou's long black sleeve in particular, but all of Linda Lou's paper body-works, for me, are touched upon in this sleeve's animal-tenderness; it speaks their magic, their exuberance, their capacity to affect her, in performance, and their capacity to affect us, during our watching. The sleeve helped my memory remember things, some of these found their way into this writing (like Louise Bourgeois's drawing, and H el ene Cixous's 'libidinal structure').

The photographs that accompany this text are ones Linda Lou chose for the writing.

...

If you see Linda Lou Murphy's sleeve in the gallery, laying in a pile, or drawn out somewhat, it could be, it could have become, a home for some other sort of being/flesh that might be looking back at me/you, from inside the sleeve – a fragile balance between (real) flesh and (imaginary) flesh and the inside here and the inside there; suddenly, there is no outside.

The sleeve has caught me, for instance, or has missed me (out) completely; or, will your sleeve fit me; or, is it fitting for me to have your sleeve; and/or, is it fitting for you to give me your sleeve. My arms are growing away from me, they are not the arms I once knew, they are sleeved arms now, arms done-up in sleeves (a death-sentence, an inner trembling of the disaster-flesh); in some circles, bare arms are rude arms; sleeved, I could be armed; sleeves are rarely talked about (how are your sleeves, she asked shyly, he blushed); all our lives we (take time to) push our arms through sleeves (and then we roll them up).

It takes a long time to put an arm in a long sleeve, it takes a long time to take the long sleeve off an arm; she (Linda Lou) had to stand patiently while it fell away, sometimes it fell away peacefully, like rocking; you could fall asleep while her sleeve fell away. Louise Bourgeois's drawing 'Throbbing Pulse' (1944) looks like a section of a finely pleated sleeve. She writes, "you can see that this is a pulse." She writes too that, "it is also a landscape." It is like the landscape her mother came from in France. This pulse-landscape looks like a sea too. "But this mountain landscape", she writes, "is friendly; nobody attacks you there, nobody is there, and it is wonderful." She writes that her work – her drawings – are a defense against fervour; and this drawing is a "call for meditation." When you meditate you become aware of your breathing and your pulse, and eventually you are calm. Being calm/asleep is paradise, she writes. "My drawings are a kind of rocking or stroking and an attempt at finding a kind of peace. Peaceful rhythm. Like rocking a baby to sleep."¹

When there is nothing up one's sleeve, not even memory, the sleeve's emptiness overflows (and appears to have a mind of its own), it reaches (toward) its limits, growing by the moment into a garment that will wrap the body, bind its parts, keep it safe. An untitled drawing of Bourgeois's from 1989 has three black and white cocoon-like structures, the one in the middle bigger than the other two, slightly curved, either side. They could be spinning around. "These are maggots ... if I were religious [she writes], I would say that it [the drawing] is the theme of the resurrection ... it means that however hard things are, there is still hope if you believe in maggots. Something has decomposed, and it is from the decomposition that hope comes again."²

The sleeve is (always) a specific sleeve, and is seen at a specific time in a specific location on a specific body; it is a space-thing in a space-realm. It is approachable ... as an element (a fraction) of everyday clothing, here and now, sewn (in place) around an armhole. It is precisely shaped, cleverly, aesthetically, to cling to the edge of the shoulder, or give the shoulder more width and volume; it can cascade downward, billow like a sail, or be a useful (sensual) bandage for the arm. The word 'sleeve' means to-slip, and to-slope, to slip down a slope; to slip-away (to the bottom), to meet with others in the sleeve of a slope – to set-out, hopefully.

This excessive sleeve is paper though, pleated, stitched, folded, compressed (has died a million times by a million pin-pricks), and its use must be invented, premised on a baroque past where life, was, often, hidden, secret, brutal, short. And this sleeve is severed, even though it was, to begin with, attached to Linda Lou (moulded in/by her hands), and has 'to-sever' in its cells, by default (by necessity), by the fact it is alone, itself, single, singular, and at the mercy of being-object/artefact. We should put this sleeve out in the weather; that is, this sleeve should 'happen' (and happen to be found), across the history of garments, and art, and deserts, and travel, and so forth. History (n)everending, to provoke this 'sleeve' – to undo it; its end (its 'finished' or 'finite' state) collected by fragile threads, and is a consciousness (sleeved), a human/hand-making.

The sleeve made of black paper – almost, but not quite tissue – is abstract and figurative – one can wear it as adornment, as enveloping brooch; a dark investigation of the social-ordinary, of useful(less) – value – a role it might be (or be avoiding) enacting (a mimetic mode or mood, brooding even). An open-work that 'waits-on' the viewer; the viewer comes to think (in session) with the sleeve. This thinking is theoretical and political/sensual, at once, together, in the heat of a chemistry.³ Sense is plural, impure; labour meets labour (language comes). A memory I never had is remembered, and is moving, melancholic, and is a force that takes me out of myself into the 'dread-full' impossible (no) 'outside'. The sleeve, or art, can be anything at all, anything (un)imaginable; it can take me wherever I want to be, to speak of whatever I want to speak. "Once the associative processes of meaning formation are liberated from a fixed panel of connection, the spaces and directions of interpretation are expanded. The field from which viewers can respond to an artwork can be as wide and as diverse as each person's experience. This suggests that a response does not need to conform to any predetermined hierarchy to be valid. The viewers can approach art freely from their own position, drawing on the uncanny and unpredictable planes between the conscious and unconscious, but also in ideal circumstances establishing bridges across the boundaries of personal and cultural differences."⁴ This is haunting; one is haunted by one's self, in bringing oneself – in the stillness of thought – to meet the art before one, toward one; one haunts the other by a raw and emotional force (anything could 'happen').

Haunting shatters intention, reference, reverence; it upends my reserve, and the object's desire for its own reserve. This sleeve plays at being a sleeve, it takes the countenance 'of-sleeve' and presents it as solid yet fragile, contracted yet extensive, wearable yet improbable, beautiful yet repulsive. It's a talisman – an event of magic, of calling forth and warding off. "The event is presentation as gesture or motion, indeed, as emotion, and as fractal ex-position: presentation as fragmentation."⁵ And, in the end, without end, without finish; an art of the fragment (as an independent solitary completion), "... as itself fragmentary and fractal, and of fragmentation as the presentation of being (of existence), tracing [frayage] of/in its totality ..."⁶

This is a complex concern, an opening/cutting of structure standing before other structures – the bareness of existence, the surprise of sense, the play-of-sense (through the pores, the nerves, the pulses): "... the subject of art ...", not "... embellishing this existence..." but "... necessary to the thought of the sense of the world ..."⁷

The sleeve, this, is many things (a multitude) without being truly otherwise (sleeve and art and paper and Linda Lou). It is a place that has its own memory up its own sleeve. And writing too must be (as remains), in baring/bearing itself, impossibly itself and (not quite) otherwise; not explanation, but 'a sleeve' of its own making. To say a 'text', here the sleeve-text, is 'many things', is to take, as given, the path that Hélène Cixous offers in writing of writing and reading; that one is alive with the text (with the sleeve), that one must pass through the law to the outer/other-side (of it); pass through (the outer) to see that the law/view is non-existent. "... I take the plane and go through colours, painting, and touch down at the question of mirrors ..."⁸; Cixous is writing from above, from traces, from remains. The path is in the air, and the "... subject spreads into water ..."⁹ In writing of Clarice Lispector's *The Stream of Life (Água Viva)*, Cixous picks out bits and pieces (shapes) that affect her ("... alighting here and there in the text, at various points ..."¹⁰, to make of the text with what is (presently) on her mind: "... the law, the word, writing, and the (libidinal) structure of the writer ..."¹¹. The sleeve, like *Água Viva*, remains just as it is (this), and is also what is unknown to it(self); one reads, that is, from the self (this, too) that approaches, and crosses over without forgetting (that I have crossed

the ‘outer(no)side’).

The arm, of all the body parts (with the exception perhaps of the eyes), articulates the need to touch far away from the body, to weave around the body a space within which to engage in ‘behaviour’ that is (un)becoming, that releases expression – a handshake, a wave goodbye, a shove. The arm takes the sleeve with it, strains its seams, wears it thin.

This sleeve, the exact one in this writing, interrupts the smooth proceedings that let the symbolic off the hook of fracturing-sense. It, by its non/secretive presence, opens this (one) who looks ‘to’ it, in hope that this (one) will receive the re-turned look as an open-secret. That’s its labour, its enjoyment at having manifested (by the labour, delight, pain of the maker; she has conditioned the paper, worn the paper, left the paper), at having arrived somewhere, for awhile; it enters the field of ‘difficult joy’, without a verifiable identity (without proper paper(s)) – off the restless body, serving no/thing, unresolved, and resistant to signs (telepathically or not) of ‘end’ (from one ‘end’ to the other ‘end’ the sleeve situates flesh/thought producing minute, ephemeral, and fabulous topographies).

The writing stops soon; two fragments *make* this stopping: an untitled drawing by Louise Bourgeois from 1986; and a paragraph from Hélène Cixous’s text ‘Clarice Lispector: The Approach’, from 1979. If there was a way of mixing these together, stirring them, one material with another material (like a chemist), perhaps the emerging substance would suggest a ‘temper’, a modality, a small hospitable coloured mound from where one could know *how* everything is of its own accord, and arrives in time, on time, with time (and is perfect): “Restoring things to things, giving ourselves each thing for the first time, restoring the first time of things to ourselves, each time, restoring the lost first times to ourselves.”¹² Now, *this* fragment (quotation), becomes part of the mix with this (next) fragment (that had already been chosen): “Receiving is a science. Knowing how to receive is the best of gifts. Clarice gives us the example: it is a matter of receiving the lesson of things. If we know how to think, in the direction of the thing, letting ourselves be called to it, the thing leads us to a space composed of the thing and of us; of the thing and of all things. Clarice’s lesson is: by letting the thing recall something to us, we no longer forget, we un-forget,

we recall the boundless other, called life. Clarice teaches us to give ourselves, again, the time not to forget, not to kill.”¹³ The drawing is a swirl of red lines, a spiral, thin, thick, joined, separate, solid, like looking down a tunnel, a sleeve sliced to let the light in: “This is a spool of wool, writes Bourgeois, a game – can you tell how many strands there are and what direction they go? There is a certain irritation there. I don’t have to do perspective, and I can be as wild as I want and still get some fun out of it. Because what all these drawings [in the book] have in common is that they were made with pleasure.”¹⁴

This is *it*: Linda Lou’s sleeve is pleasure living.¹⁵

1. Louise Bourgeois with Lawrence Rinder, *Louise Bourgeois, Drawings & Observations*, A Bulfinch Press Book, Little, Brown and Company, New York, 1999, p. 107 (allquotes in that paragraph)

2. *ibid.*, p. 162

3. Isabelle Stengers in *The Cosmopolitical Proposal* writes of the ‘art of chemists’ who understand the multiplicity of chemical ‘actants’, and in dealing with these ‘actants’ know how to manipulate them and “get them to do what they may be able to do”; this is an old sense of chemistry, where associations were guided by propensity: “... manipulation, the art of the disposition that makes it possible to take advantage of the propensity of things, to fold them in such a way that they spontaneously accomplish what the artist, the man of war or the politician want. All this aside from any opposition between submission and freedom: a thought focused on efficacy.” (Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public, Atmospheres of Democracy*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England, 2005, p. 1001; Stenger is referring to Francois Jullien’s *The Propensity of Things, Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, Zone Books, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995)

4. Nikos Papastergiadis, *Spatial Aesthetics, Art, Place and the Everyday*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 2006, p. 169

5. Jean Luc-Nancy, ‘Art, A Fragment’, in *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 1997, p. 126

6. *ibid.*, p. 128

7. *ibid.*, p. 128

8. Hélène Cixous, *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, trans. Verena Andermatt Conley, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 24

9. *ibid.*, p. 25

10. *ibid.*, p. 11

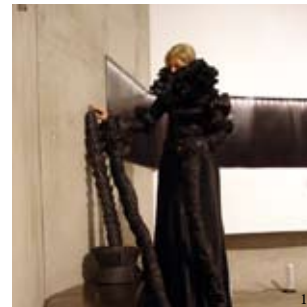
11. *ibid.*, p. 11

12. Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, trans. Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jensen, Ann Liddle, Susan Sellers, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1991, p. 64

13. *ibid.*, p. 62

14. Bourgeois, Rinder, *ibid.*, p. 142

15. Overall this text makes continual reference to one particular work: *sleevepiece*, 2006 (detail *blackwork*); this work is one of a set of works; focussing on a single work has allowed, within the space of writing, a fictional gesture which is impressionistic – the gesture can, on the one hand, venture out to other pieces, in a blurred way, or, on the other, be read as a lingering, a type of surface-remains, that carries the bearing of the sleeve-piece that was, in truth, amidst others.



Linda Lou Murphy

1. *drawing threads* 2004-06. Performance installation for the 16th Tamworth Fibre Textiles Biennial, a matter of time, curated by Suzie Attiwill. Research photograph.
2. *drawing threads* detail. Research photograph.
3. *drawing threads* at Ballarat Regional Gallery. Performance photograph.
4. *ruffwork* 2006. Performance Installation for Re-Frame, curated by Karina Clarke, COFA, UNSW, Ivan Dougherty Gallery and Sydney Design Week 2006.
5. *ruffwork* performance. Video still.
6. *ruffwork* cuff research. Research photograph.
7. *ruffwork* cuff research. Research photograph.
8. *ruffwork puff* research. Research photograph.
9. *ruffwork puff* research. Research photograph.
10. *ruffwork puff* research. Research photograph.
11. *blackwork* 2006. Performance Installation for surface, given the face, curated by Linda Marie Walker, South Australian School of Art Gallery, October 11, 2006, with Live Catalogue Event October 14.
12. *blackwork* sleevepiece. (detail)

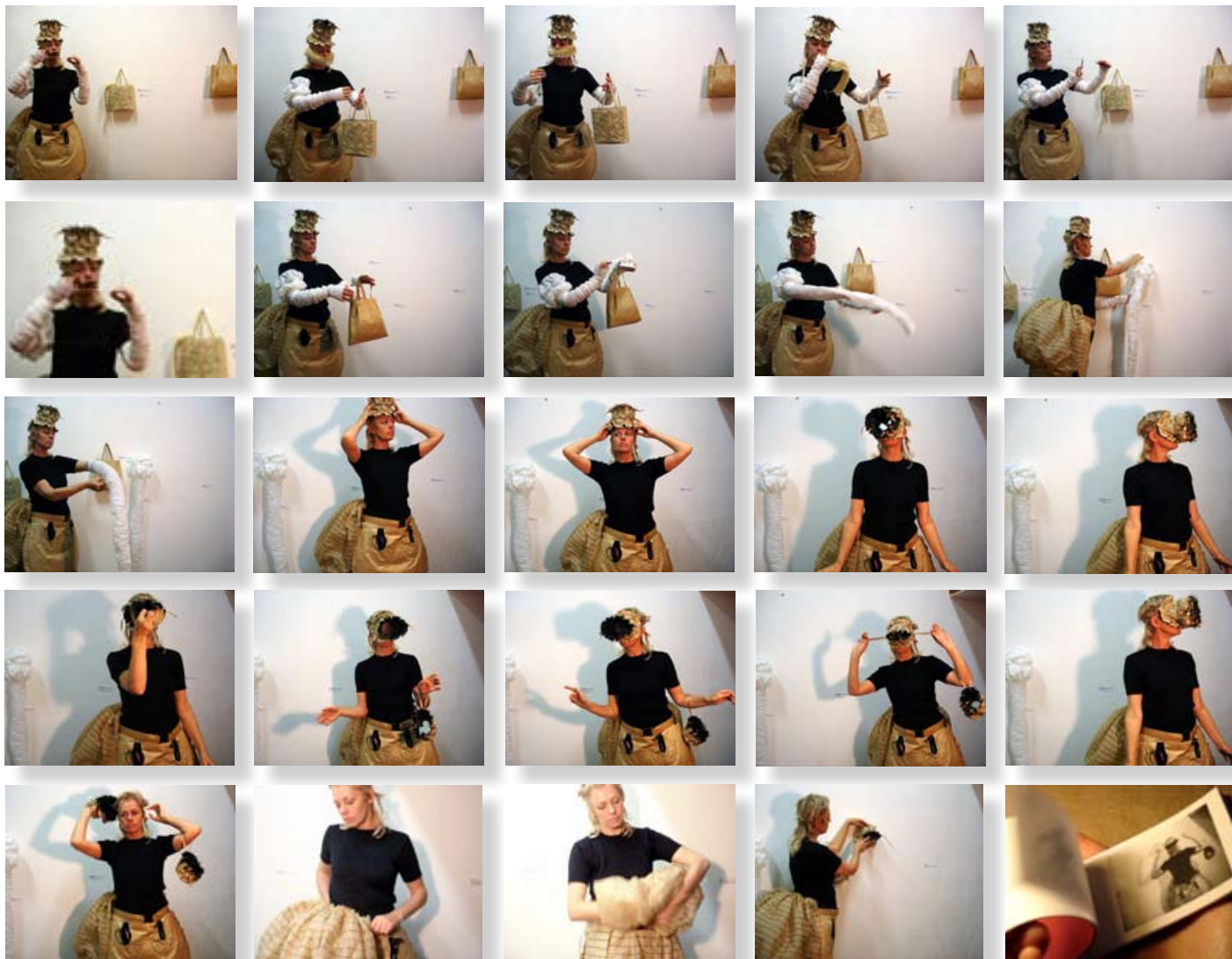
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6. Linda Lou Murphy, *un/gather*, Liverpool Street Gallery performance, 2008
8. shimmeeshok performances, (left to right) *interplay*, *settlement*, *cutting piece*, *snip clip*, 2003-05
11. Linda Lou Murphy, *weighting*, (pinned cushion), 2004, black *pleatwork*, 2006 and *weighting* (purse), 2004
12. Linda Lou Murphy, *pleatpiece*, EAF performance, 2008
15. Linda Lou Murphy, *headpiece goggle*, 2006, Object Gallery, Sydney
17. shimmeeshok guerilla street performance, 2006
22. Linda Lou Murphy, *facepiece*, EAF performance, 2008
23. Linda Lou Murphy, performance stills, 2003-05
24. Linda Lou Murphy, *drawing threads*, 2004-06, flip book series







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