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The 'Feminine Un-canny': A Strategy for the Deconstruction of the Homely in Contemporary, Solo Feminist Performance Art

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Abstract

This thesis is a written exegesis to support knowledge discovered through practice-based research, with the accompanying submission of three solo performance art works entitled: *Seven Tables*, *Biting the Plate*, and *Placing, Carrying, Breaking*. The project seeks to demonstrate the deconstruction of the feminine homely through a feminist and uncanny practice expressed as a study of the relationship between the female body and material objects. The research asks if both the strategy and resulting uncanny or disturbing condition can be specifically identified and articulated to better understand the concept of the (un)homely.

Working with an initial exploration of Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny', the research project goes beyond a simple dramaturgy based on tropes of the uncanny to examine the emerging considerations for why the material subjects of the study—everyday objects and the female body—can affect an uncanny condition in performance? The study finds that the implications for deconstruction of the homely rest in the presentation of formless and boundaryless qualities that resists delineation as an expression of uncanny homely/unhomely duality.

The research is located in relation to social domestic histories and work by other artists and is contextualised through feminist theory and related critical analysis. As such, this research offers new insights into structures and strategies for a deconstructive practice that will be of concern to those interested in performance theory and practice, especially in relation to feminist theory and practice, the uncanny and the performing body, material objects, abjection and the formless.

Contents

Figures and illustrations

Accompanying materials

In the following discussion the performances *On the Table* (a research performance to-camera); *Seven Tables*; *Placing*, *Carrying, Breaking*; and *Biting the Plate* are referred to in the demonstration of my research findings, and are drawn upon to discuss my experiences of making and performing these works. Documentation of these performances is submitted as video work to provide evidence and insight into the events that took place.

Performance works
The live research performances have been publicly presented as:
Seven Tables (duration 1 hour) for Where From Here—Third Angel Symposium, Compass Live Art Festival, Leeds. November 17th, 2016.

Tables (duration 35 mins) at University of Glasgow May 3rd, 2017.

Seven Tables (duration 45 mins) at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Gateshead, for GIFT Festival April 28th, 2017.

Crockery (incorporating the content for *Placing, Carrying, Breaking*) (duration 30 mins) and *Biting the Plate* (duration 50 mins)) at University of Glasgow November, 21st, 2017.

Unhomely Actions (incorporating the three core performance works: *Seven Tables*, *Placing, Carrying, Breaking* and *Biting the Plate*), (duration 2 hours approx.') for the Examiner team, at Leeds Beckett University, August 30th, 2019.

Documentation
The documentation of this practice can be found online at:

On the Table (2016)	www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQ3OrlsP5eY&feature=youtu.be
Seven Tables (2019)	www.youtube.com/watch?v=_a9WnE8JQSo
Placing, Carrying, Breaking (2019)	www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHqzcgdI3ck&feature=youtu.be
Biting the Plate (2019)	www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8WKw0E90U0&feature=youtu.be

Unless specified, photos in the body of the thesis are credited to Jennifer Skip.
Video documentation is credited to Lucy Barker.

Illustrations in the appendices are credited individually.

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Finally, and not least I thank my husband and partner Andy Moss for his quiet, tireless and loving support – for 'being there'. And, of course, my family, who don't know how influential they have been in encouraging my lifetime's work.

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Gillian Dyson, February 2020.

Introduction

Introducing my study

This thesis represents the culmination of a body of practice-based research focusing on uncovering a feminist and uncanny strategy for the making and reading of solo performance work which deconstructs notions of the homely. The uncanny permeates my thesis. It is a sensation that we are all familiar with, yet a concept which is awkward to articulate and nebulous to locate. Combining psychological and aesthetic concerns, the uncanny is in its most basic definition 'the familiar made strange' in the realm of 'intellectual uncertainty'. The uncanny is, I argue, a pervasive and palpable emotional impulse that disrupts our expectations of normality and transforms these expectations into anxiety. 'Uncanny' refers to both the source of our anxiety and the feeling or effect it generates. As literary academic Nicholas Royle suggests: 'Uncanny calls for a different thinking of genre and text, and of the distinction between literary and non-literary, academic and non-academic writing' (2003, p. 18), so I am incorporating critical analysis with more personal reflection on the experience of performing in and as a 'feminine un-canny'.[1]

I am analysing how and why performance with familiar or homely objects solicits such a feeling of uncertainty, and I am looking to describe that condition, one which is inherently slippery and hard to define and perhaps ultimately subjective, in order to support the search for a strategy to deconstruct hegemonic notions of the homely. I propose that a specific sense of uncanny dislocation is experienced when domestic objects and the female body are performed together in a manner that is not representational of normative homely behaviours. I argue that the uncanny in this situation is related to the challenge being made to patriarchal notions of the home and the realisation that the homely is no longer a stable or certain concept. In focusing on the context of the home/homely, I reflect on the term uncanny as a moving signifier of something that disturbs the familiar to make it unfamiliar, to disrupt the homely and cause it to become unhomely. My thesis contributes to work already done to establish the connection between the feminine and unhomely strangeness [2]

[1] 'Feminine un-canny' is a hyphenated term I use to identify canny knowing and uncanny strangeness that I discuss in detail later in Chapter One.

[2] Alexander Kokoli's reference to Alice Jardine's and Anne Masschelein's work is helpful here (Kokoli, 2016, pp. 17–38).

by focusing on a distinct feminist and uncanny strategy for solo performance art. As I will continue to reiterate in this thesis, there is a tension between the uncanny as a category that undoes patriarchal thinking on an ontological level and which applies to all subjects, and my attempt to mobilise it with respect to female bodies and for distinctly feminist purposes.

I do not concentrate on how or why the feminine has been prescribed as uncanny by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as this would be a specific field of research, but I grapple with the suggestion that my presence as female performer is somehow inherently uncanny and I am locating my research in relation to a history of feminist art practice.[3] This context forces me into a dialogue with the uncanny in relation to the female body, but also where the uncanny might be provoked when the female body is presented specifically in association with material objects that signify the home/homely. I am making comparison between my work and that of other artists in order to describe the dramaturgical strategies, sensibilities or emotive qualities in my performance work which are driven by a desire to disrupt and deconstruct normative binaries associated with the feminine identity.

The uncanny has frequently been applied as a framework for reading art[4] and feminist practice (Racz, 2015; Kokoli, 2016), especially in feminist film studies (Creed, 1993). Nicholas Royle's 2003 work *The Uncanny* and Alexandra Kokoli's *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice* (2016) are invaluable to my study. However, Royle's work orientates towards literature inquiry without much considerations for theatrical encounters, and whilst Kokoli offers a comprehensive description of the counter arguments to 'The Uncanny', and does engage with performance artists such as Bobby Baker and Monica

[3] I define myself as female: I use gendered pronouns she, her, hers. I mention this not as an essentially fixed sense of self, but to indicate that my upbringing since the 1960s in a white, lower middle-class northern English family has taught me the signifiers needed to perform my sex from a very early age. At a time when definitions of gender (as well as race, disability, etc.) are being contested in academic, political and social spheres, I declare my 'centric' position and that my research in behaving as female/performing my femininity is not seeking to question queer femme issues by re-establishing any sort of polarised 'feminine'. This would be a subject for further research.

[4] See Tate Gallery's description of the uncanny and signposting to how this term has been applied across art history: (Tate, no date. a).

Ross, her evaluation does not focus on the specific qualities of live, solo women's performance as triggers or producers of an uncanny condition. It is my intention, therefore, to extend existing research into the feminist uncanny by focusing on the specific critical qualities of solo performance art as a live, bodily medium for the exploration of the human condition. There has been some study of general theatre performance in relation to the psychoanalytical and the uncanny.[5] But, as far as I am aware, there has been minimal attention paid to the specificities of solo performance and the ways in which this art form might prompt a psycho-emotional response. The strength of my approach is to work from a practitioner perspective, and offer a reading of Freud's text as a tool for the analysis of my own work because, I argue, performance inherently presents a set of behaviours in shared and real time, as opposed to the mediated or constructed communication of film or literature, with the possibility of shifting our view of reality through the uncanny of 'real life'. Despite the constructed context, performance art, I argue, offers the opportunity to blur the distinctions between the uncanny 'real-life' and the uncanny 'staged'. For this reason, the uncanny is the main framework for my investigation and provides a dramaturgical strategy for me to bring into question, trouble or destabilise the familiar—the homely.

My arguments revolve around Sigmund Freud's suggestion that the uncanny is not just an affect-transformation, but reveals the process of repression – which produces anxiety through a returning of the repressed. Freud summarized the essence of repression as '[lying] simply in turning something away and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious' (1915, p. 147), with the main motive of avoiding discomfort. My research asks what happens when an uncanny sense of discomfort is re-introduced to what seems to be homely or familiar performance.

Central research enquiry

My central enquiry is to address the paradox that the uncanny exists in the dyad of homely and unhomely. I propose to trouble the stability of homely representations of hegemonic

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[5] For example, Marvin Carlson's 2003 work *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* which considers the 'recycling' of narrative, gesture or concepts in relation to the spectator's memory along with theatre's illusory effects (including the revealing of illusion).

notions of the feminine identity, whilst confronting the desire to describe my identity via the securities of the feminine domestic. As architecture historian Anthony Vidler suggests:

> '[T]he contemporary place of the uncanny … As a frame of reference, confronts the desire for a home and the struggle for domestic security with its apparent opposite, intellectual and actual homelessness, at the same time as revealing the fundamental complicity between the two … [it proves] a way of understanding an aspect of modernity that has given new meaning to the traditional Homeric notion of 'homesickness' (Vidler, 1992, p. 12).

The responsibility of my thesis is to try to unpack the 'homesickness' of the uncanny through an examination of the conditions of the uncanny in performance art. I am asking: how or where is my sense of the feminine located if not in the home, or can I describe the feminine in terms of the home that are neither homely nor unhomely but a condition that flows between the two?

In order to examine this question of how or where the feminine is located in relation to the domestic, I first need to address the ambiguity inherent in working with the uncanny: how to describe what is at play in relation to the feminine when the very hypothesis of a feminine uncanny cannot be neatly contained. I will expand on a discussion of the slippery and unresolvable nature of the uncanny in Chapter One, and go on to discuss the terms of the feminine and feminist in Chapter Two. In effect, my thesis refers to three conditions or qualities which I am attempting to encapsulate through my phrase 'feminine un-canny'.

The first quality refers to 'feminine knowledge', a sense of 'know how' that I refer to as 'canny-ness' in Chapter Two. This feminine canny knowledge is contrary to masculine knowledge, not because of biological predisposition but through the differing gendered learning and experiences of the two sexes. Secondly, contributing to this feminine canny/uncanny is a 'female uncanny' experience—the historical positioning of the factual lives of women as 'uncanny objects' (be they homemakers, workers or artists)—so in sampling these histories in my thesis I include reflection on my own feminine position. I draw upon such women's historical narratives in this research project to inform the choice of material objects and actions that make up the subjects of my performance research. As such, the female uncanny narrative is woven through my chapter structures. Thirdly, a 'feminist uncanny' is a critical framework that brings together the feminine uncanny and the female experience in order to discuss the political implications of the domestic. In this thesis I explore this 'feminist uncanny' through dialogue with the work of cultural theorists and writers who articulate the implications for reading notions of the feminine in terms that

are not defined by patriarchal hegemony. As a dialogue, my performance works focus on the relationships which articulate or reframe understandings of both the feminine and the domestic between body and objects as subjects and how these domains can be disrupted or deconstructed. I return to a discussion of the key concerns in my analysis of this disruptive condition in Chapter One.

Performance

My doctoral research is motivated by reflection on my thirty years of performance practice. My written thesis endeavours to communicate knowledge revealed through practice which would otherwise remain implicit to me as the artist-researcher and performer of the works. Performance is my leading method of inquiry and I use the term 'performance' throughout the thesis to describe the creative form of my practice in the research process and the summative, public live art works themselves. In describing my work as performance or 'performance art', I refer to a live creative practice emerging from a visual art history and latterly informed by the unsettling qualities of some post-dramatic theatre which do not focus on narrative drama but instead look at the performative aesthetics situated beyond dialogue (Lehmann, 2006).[6] My work falls into a canon of performance art (see Goldberg, 1988; Kaye, 1994) which makes strange the everyday familiarity of the body, space or material object.[7] Performance studies academics Jennifer Parker-Starbuck and Roberta Mock's discussion on 'Researching the Body in/as Performance' (Kershaw and Nicholson, 2001, pp. 210–235) offers a useful benchmark for understanding the body as material of/as my research. At times I use the term 'corporeal'

[6] For an extensive account of the development of performance art as a multidisciplinary art form, see RoseLee Goldberg's often revised and expanded *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present* (first published 1979). Hans-Thies Lehmann uses the term 'post dramatic' to refer to work which 'tends towards a subversion of traditional theatrical hierarchies' (Turner and Behrndt, 2008, p. 91). See Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006). Also, see Heathfield (2003; 2006), Etchells (1999), and Battista (2003).

[7] The exploration of the 'everyday' and banal by Surrealist, Dada and Situationist International art movements, and later in the Happenings of the 1960s, has resonated with my research, notably assemblage sculptures by Surrealist Meret Oppenheim and her treatment of an uncanny domestic with the influential *Object* (Fur Cup) (1936). See Burckhardt and Curiger (1996), and Museum of Modern Art New York (2020b).

in my thesis as a way to refer to the physical material of my body and the sense of consciously engaging with my body as embodied practice (Parker-Starbuck and Mock, 2001, p. 212). Whilst the nature and impact of bodily performance actions is a focus, my research is not concerned with an extended study of the body in feminist performance.[8]

In this thesis I describe and analyse three key performance works: *Seven Tables*, *Placing, Carrying, Breaking*, and *Biting the Plate* (2016–19). These performances consist of actions (by which I mean orchestrated gestures, movements or spoken words as an act of art making) with a selection of 'real things' from the home (initially including table cloths, a radio, chairs, crockery, a sweeping brush, etc.), later to be re-sourced for the research project, especially if multiples were needed. My dramaturgy emerges from the normative handling of household objects, developing into a more orchestrated structure, organised through the re-performing of seemingly domestic actions with the purpose of bringing the relationship between the feminine and the home or homely into question. As I will go on to discuss in Chapter One, this structure is informed by conditions of the uncanny and questioning of the nature of the feminine and of the homely which I seek to disrupt. This thesis aims to identify my strategies for making performance and to articulate my feminist intention to challenge patriarchal expectations of the feminine homely. I also suggest that such an approach to performance making can act as a framework for the analysis of future works (my own and other artists') or strategies for making.

I am referring to the work of other artists to support aspects of my enquiry and note similarly and differences between my work and theirs. In some cases, certain works have directly informed my line of investigation and suggested to me dramaturgical approaches for the investigation of identity in relation to the domestic. I give brief descriptions of art works and signpost further accounts as there is not always the scope for a fuller analysis of them in this thesis. I identify similarities and differences in the ways in which other artists handle, place and manipulate found and every-day things. The danger of trying to see things in common with the compositional strategies of other artists is that the search for connection is subjective and tries to find convenient links to prove my research theory. Consequently, the way I refer to other people's artwork is not to find conceptual or theoretical consistency, but instead to reflect on the resemblances I see between my own

[8] For detailed analysis on the body in and as performance see Schneider (1997), Jones (1998) and Warr (2000).

dramaturgical strategies and theirs, and to locate my work in the lineage of contemporary performance.

My performance intention is to create ambiguity around the symbolic and social meaning of objects to make the familiar appear less familiar, or to invite varied semiotic readings of these actions. I begin by questioning how and why my atypical behaviours with objects, as performance art, stimulate a shift in the certainty of meaning of said objects, perhaps to render them less 'object-ly' and more uncannily 'thing-ly'. In turn, I question the certainty of the body associated with these objects in the act of performance, and consequently, the nature of my identity. (I will return to and extend this discussion of objects and things with the intention of identifying how the seeming irrelevance of or loss of function contributes to a sense of the uncanny in Chapter One.)[9]

I introduce myself as subject and object of the research project. To this end, I might also consider myself as my own 'dramaturg', being the 'critical eye' to my own 'writing' of the performance and 'stage-managing' of the work.[10] Paying attention to the dramaturgy of my performances is relevant because aesthetic and staging decisions are integral to the delivery of actions; decisions regarding the positioning of the spectator for example are both conceptual and practical. The term 'dramaturgy' is used throughout the thesis to encapsulate the aesthetic and structural decisions in the work.[11] However, I also use terms

[9] Unfortunately, I do not have the capacity in this thesis for a study of the ontological differences between objects and things, which would be suitable for further, post-doctorate research. See Brown (2001; 2015) for further discussion on materialist concerns with the binaries of object/thing, drawing on Bruno Latour and Martin Heidegger's work, among others, to explore thingness. Also, see Kristie Miller's work on temporality and objects (2008).

[10] For further definitions of 'dramaturg', with an etymology linking to 'making' or 'doing' see Luckhurst (2006).

[11] I draw on the scholarship of Cathy Turner to identify what dramaturgy means to me in the context of this thesis and I note her citation of Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks (2001, pp. 89–90) to describe dramaturgy as: 'cultural assemblage, works equally with settings, people, bodies, things, texts, histories, voices, architectures. In these connective networks that are the dramaturgical, it is usual to consider things and people as separate, their conjunction considered after their distinction. We propose instead the inseparability of people and things, values, etc'. (cited by Turner and Behrndt 2008, p. 36).

like ‘composition’ and talk in more visual-art terms of the ‘image’ when attending to visual aspects, scenography or to documentation. My methodology is one of composition and I write from the position of my own experience of and ‘in’ the artwork, with some consideration given to the presence of the spectator (see Chapter Two). In order to avoid the challenge of inherent subjectivity of my experience, I read my work through a number of theoretical lenses to substantiate and critically examine my thinking—including feminist theory, readings of the uncanny and subsequent consideration of the abject and the formless, which I discuss in Chapter One.

I identify the table and crockery as exemplifiers of this homely convention and I explore these materials and related performative actions at length in Chapters Four and Five. Through my ‘doing-making’ I analyse how and why I have an established a relationship to these material objects. My understanding comes through handling and actions that are prompted by autobiographic memory and informed by social histories.

My research addresses ‘home’ as a political context rather than an actual architectural site. Initial research took place in my own house however, I was not comfortable in exposing my own home (and that of my partner) to the scrutiny of the project. Instead of limiting my research to the materiality of place[12], it is more appropriate to transfer my research to the art/theatre studio site where the constructed ‘neutrality’ of the white space frames and contrasts with the politic and aesthetics of the work, allowing for ‘seeing the invisibility of the (un)homely’[13] by uncannily re-locating the private home(ly) in a strangely public space. What emerges is not only ‘homely’, but also un-homely, identified as a liminal ‘between’ condition in the ‘un’ prefix. The ‘feminine un-canny’ is not wholly uncanny or wholly canny but ‘between’, gesturing towards a condition which is not completely divorced from the homely but is situated ‘just beyond’ the familiar. As such, my performance research is not grounded in the geography of the home but in the corporeality of me (woman) and my body as the articulator of political concerns of the homely. See Chapters Four and Five.

[12] See Adrian Heathfield’s discussion of ‘displacement’, public space and site (Heathfield, 2004, p. 10).

[13] See Peggy Phelan’s ‘Seeing the Invisible: Marina Abramović’s *The House with the Ocean View*’ (Heathfield, 2004, pp. 17–27).

Research questions

The premise for considering my research work to be original is that my performances represent new aesthetic compositions assembled as a series of research questions. To my knowledge, these questions have not been asked specifically of solo women's performance art before, questions which lead to an attempt to give agency to practice by naming it, (and by agency, I mean the performer's capacity to excite change and to impact their environment with the objective of upsetting normative relationships). If the 'feminine un-canny' is to be a useful terminology for the future, I seek to demonstrate how it can be broken down into a strategy for making and framework for analysis of performance work.

Bearing in mind the dialogue between the uncanny qualities of feminine knowledge, female history and feminist discourse I attempt to describe the feminine and uncanny through my own work. To substantiate my 'thinking and doing' process this thesis raises and responds to the following questions:

a. What does the body/domestic object relationship do to instigate a disturbing, uncanny feeling or condition and through what conceptual qualities is the uncanny condition understood?
b. What are my dramaturgical qualities or strategies and how and why do I interpret my experience of them as uncanny?
c. What further conceptual qualities emerge through the performance process and why?
d. What are the implications for the female/feminine/feminist experience in presenting a 'feminine un-canny' approach in performance?
e. How and why can the 'feminine un-canny' deconstruct hegemonic notions of the homely?
f. What methodological and analytical contribution might the 'feminine un-canny' make to future practice and scholarship?

Thesis Structure

My thesis is composed of three performances and the written contextual and critical discussion that accompanies them. Constructing the thesis around the chronology of the performance works presents the challenge of how to weave reoccurring and repeating theoretical and conceptual concerns across the findings of all the performance research which is subject to further investigation in subsequent iterations. I think this problem is reflective of the slippery nature of the 'feminine un-canny' and of the inherent interests in 'liveness' where critical thinking does not appear in a linear fashion but rather, emerges as a rhizomic structure feeding out of and returning to places previously encountered—at once familiar and unfamiliar.

Following my Introduction, Chapter One outlines the critical and theoretical contexts that give rise to my research. The chapter is broken into three sections: in Section One I begin by introducing Sigmund Freud's interpretation of the uncanny, and offer a summary of the language and main tropes of the uncanny identified by Freud, which I have taken as a dramaturgic structure in my research (repetition, stillness and formlessness). I discuss the relevance of approaching the uncanny through live and performative practice. I consider Freud's general connecting of the feminine and female body with the uncanny and consider the implications of this in working with my body and material objects of the home as research subjects.

Section Two describes the analytical tools for my research and the key theoretical terms used to unpack the uncanny with consideration to the implications for a feminist practice working with a psychoanalytic context. I outline the crucial philosophical and cultural thinking with which I am in dialogue within my practice, which supports my intention to locating the 'feminine un-canny' as a useful consideration in performance theory and practice. I begin by reflecting further on the term 'uncanny', pointing out the connection to the word 'canny' and discussing the idea of feminine 'knowingness' in relation to both the uncanny experience and the formulation of a feminist research practice. I argue for my application of the term 'feminine un-canny' as deconstructing patriarchal assumptions about the home(ly). I describe the qualities which I think are encapsulated in a 'feminine un-canny' strategy in performance, that include dramaturgical intentions and philosophical approaches to the representation of the feminine in relation to emblematic objects of the home.

Next, I describe my use of vocabularies of the 'feminine' and 'feminist'. I reflect on the construct of feminine identity, incorporating Judith Butler's work on gender performativity to inform my dramaturgical intentions, and I introduce concerns with the marking of feminine identity. I make the case for 'the feminine' as a fluid term that can be applied without adherence to hegemonically normative assumptions about the role of women or the describing of the feminine through reductive essentialist interpretations.

I rationalise my reference to and usage of objects, suggesting a simple underpinning in 'thing theory' (borrowed from Martin Heidegger's work, 1967) to make connection between the familiar nature of the objects I use and their potentiality to become uncannily unfamiliar through the effect of performance. I consider the term 'homely' in relation to

feminine identity and as an introduction to the gendering of objects, which I discuss in relation to Sara Ahmed's phenomenological approach to the gendered orientation of objects.

I then set out a feminist response to the uncanny, offering an overview of how feminism has sought to address the biases in Freud's discussion. I do this to establish my reasoning for working with the uncanny in the political framework of feminist practice. I reflect on my personal gendered experiences as informing my research project and the legitimacy for incorporating 'lived knowledge' with theoretical information as a feminist research approach. I argue for the performance of 'unfeminine' qualities to contribute to the destabilisation of the feminine uncanny.

In Section Three I give an overview of poststructuralist feminist theory and how this informs my practice. I introduce my use of historical narratives as a way to interpret the feminising of the home(ly) and to offer reasons for my particular use of tables and plates as subjects alongside the body in my performance research. The chapter continues with an introduction to 'deconstruction' as a framework that enables me to address the various binaries at play in my overall project and to signpost how I might focus on the propositions raised by the 'feminine un-canny' for a 'between' or dual identity of the homely/unhomely.

The section continues with my argument for the relevance of Hélèna Cixous' and Julia Kristeva's writing to my research. I outline Cixous' theoretical readdressing of the feminine through the *écriture féminine* and her response to Freud's 'The Uncanny'. I signpost how I go on to use her work specifically as a framework for my analysis of my performance outcomes in Chapter Five. I relate Kristeva's theories on abjection to those of Georges Bataille's idea of *l'informe* (the formless). I suggest why abjection and *l'informe* enable my analysis of the effects of the 'feminine un-canny'—ones which result in the dissipation of the boundaries between the homely/familiar and unhomely/unfamiliar to the effect of creating a destabilised, fluid and 'un-fixable'—and therefore uncanny condition of the (un)homely.

Chapter Two details my practice-based research methodology (by which I mean a methodological approach rather than strictly defined methods). This method is applied to original investigations seeking new knowledge through practice and its outcomes, disseminated through both the artefact and the critical exegesis (Lyle Skains, 2018, p. 86).

I chose a practice-based approach because I felt that an exploration of the uncanny had to be considered through the experiential and the live, in order to best understand the 'real life' source of anxiety and the feeling or effect it generates. If the purpose of my research is to deconstruct normative representations of the homely, I want to directly apply the materials of the home to the research using creative processes that I am familiar with and competent in, in order to establish the conventions of the homely against which I was working and challenge them.

Chapter Three is a personal description of the three performances being analysed in this thesis: *Seven Tables*; *Placing Carrying, Breaking* and *Biting the Plate*.

Chapters Four and Five consist of the main analysis of these works. Subheadings indicate the dramaturgic decisions and process under scrutiny. Chapter Four opens with a summary history of the table in domestic culture before detailing the findings of *Seven Tables*, focusing on the dramaturgy of uncanny tropes, in particular 'repetition'. The chapter describes the uncovering of more corporeal and abject concerns in my performance work which are given further attention in the subsequent research – in particular, the exposure of my bare feet and introduction of dirty and or formless materials.

Chapter Five has two parts. Part One similarly begins with a summary history of women's roles as makers and consumers of ceramics (which is woven through the chapter) before discussing the findings of *Placing Carrying, Breaking* with attention to research of nakedness, sound and destructive actions that are developed from the findings in *Seven Tables*. In Part Two of Chapter Five I focus on the findings of *Biting the Plate* that lead me to consider proximity to dirt and clay, and performing with/of the mouth. I elucidate the implications for the feminine identity when confronted with or implicated in dirty materials or actions which transgress the boundaries of body and home as formless or fluid matter.

Finally, the thesis Conclusion is an evaluation of my findings and what they mean for the advancement of my research, as well as the implications for scholarship in art and performing arts. I reflect on the results of my investigation and the indication of a paradoxically fluid, boundaryless condition of the (un)homely. I suggest that the (un)homely as intrinsically uncanny, offers a state of being that encompasses homely and unhomely qualities, and that this (still undefinable and slippery condition) offers opportunity for a feminist negotiation of the domestic and the home. I argue for the use of

the ‘feminine un-canny’ as a strategy for generating performance work to deconstruct patriarchal notions of the uncanny. I also advocate the ‘feminine un-canny’ as a useful scholarly tool in feminist analysis of performance and I signpost the directions in which this research might lead.

Chapter One: Critical contexts: Freud's uncanny and feminism

Having established the motivations and aims of my research project and set out the structure of my thesis this chapter describes my references and theoretical framework. I introduce Sigmund Freud's theories of the uncanny, showing how I apply his thinking as a way to describe both the dramaturgical aspects of my research (such as the use of repetition, stillness and formlessness), and as terminology to describe my intention to create a shifting and rather uncomfortable effect. I move on to introduce a feminist response to this psychoanalytic concept and to establish feminist theory as a critical frame. I elaborate on how and why I am referencing Judith Butler's gender theory, Sara Ahmed's phenomenological approach to gender and objects and philosophical underpinning from Julia Kristeva and Georges Bataille. I use subheadings to guide the reader through the evolving themes of my study. I will discuss my methodological approach in Chapter Two.

Section One: Freud and The Uncanny

Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay 'The Uncanny/ Das Unheimliche' is an aesthetic investigation developed through his vocabulary for the confusion of the familiar and unfamiliar, and the resulting feeling of anxiety. Freud establishes the uncanny as the subject of aesthetics because it has to do with feelings and emotional impulses. He begins with a simple understanding of the uncanny as that which is 'frightening, of what evokes fear and dread' (Freud, 1919, p. 123) and established the word as ambiguous in general usage, endeavouring to reach the core concept which can enable us to 'distinguish the 'uncanny' within the field of the frightening' (Freud, 1919, p. 123).[14] He goes on to assemble whatever it is about persons and things; sense impressions, experiences and situations, that evoke in us a sense of the uncanny and goes on to infer it is the 'hidden nature [which] all experiences have in common' (Freud, 1919, p. 124). Freud summarised Ernst Jentsch's definition of the uncanny as: 'being a product of intellectual uncertainty, … something one does not know one's way about in. The better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it' (Vidler, 1992, p. 23), indicating that in order to experience the

[14] Freud's concept was not unique; indeed, he credited much of his thinking to his predecessor Ernst Jentsch's 1906 essay 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny' and to the influence of German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's questions of the uncanny in *Philosophie der Mythologie* of 1835.

uncanny one must be open to its possibilities and not seek to intellectually 'explain' the phenomena.

Rather than 'explain' the uncanny Freud identifies that the entwined uncanny and canny is rooted at a linguistic level, spending a great deal of time unravelling the dual German origins of the words *unheimliche* and *heimlich*, concluding: the word 'Heimlich thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym unheimlich. The uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, 'the unhomely') is in some way a species of the familiar (das Heimlich, 'the homely')' (Freud, 1919, p. 134). Freud appears to suggest the very 'slippery-ness' of the word is a reflection of the dual usage here; a word both associated with the house, tame, comfort, but also with secrets, confinement, or concealment - the first meaning related to the home and what is comfortable and not strange, and the second meaning to that which is hidden and concealed. Freud's argument that 'This uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (Freud, 1919, p. 148) is relevant to my research of once familiar domestic actions that appear to release or 'overcoming' the repressive qualities of the home(ly) through their usage in performance.

My study is not focused on the psychoanalysis of repression, rather as an investigation of the female body and material objects of the home and how and why their inter-relationship can trigger an uncanny condition. I have made use of emergent tropes or traits of the uncanniness that Freud describes through reflection on his own experience or observation of others. These tropes appear in 'The Uncanny' as the repetition and doubling of the doppelgänger and experiences of déjà vu and of coincidence; conditions where the inanimate (or dead) appear to be alive; ghostly, spectral sensations in plays-of-light (shadow, flickering candles, etc.) that lead to a suggestion of formlessness, morphing or shapelessness, that I discuss in detail later. I will now outline Freud's account of these selected uncanny tropes to introduce how, by 'filtering' the performance of my 'normative' behaviours through an uncanny dramatic structure, I seek to create work that no longer presents the safe or stable yet retains familiar aspects of the homely.

Double

Freud used literary and real-life illustrations to show a number of conditions that can be attributed to the uncanny, whilst maintaining that the uncanny is difficult to clearly define. He derived a hidden level of meaning from the logic of repression in the literary tale *The*

Sand-Man (1816) by E.T.A Hoffman[15] (where one character - father, scientist, lover, doll - assumes the place of another). Repetition, doubles, doppelgängers, and the feeling of déjà vu played out in the Hoffman story provide Freud with concrete examples and a taxonomy of uncanny subjects for where fear might emerge in one's lived experience. Freud rationalises the Hoffman story in relation to his theories of castration complex using examples of animated dolls, identity doubles and an association with eyes. The double is explained by Freud as a formation of the super-ego (the self-critical consciousness that is constructed in response to societal and familial behaviours). The double of adulthood calls forth repressed content, either negative conditions that have been supressed, or the wishes and desires supressed by the encounter with society (Freud, 1919, pp. 211–212). That is, the double represents (or triggers) a return to a past sense of self, the child – a place or condition where one was once able to express a sense of self love or narcissism. As adults we experience situations that seem to return us to a past child-like state or memory of childhood, or 'primitive states' which stimulate a sense of uncanniness. Freud attributes the experience of a double or déjà vu to animistic belief that reminds us of a repressed psychic past. The experience of doubling can return a childlike state of both delight and suspicion. I address 'doubling' as a key concept of the uncanny in my research and approach repetition as dramaturgical structure because it offers a range of interpretations for creative exploration that appear to me to be appropriate to the expression of the domestic (the repetition of household tasks for example). I expand on my application of the double in my research in Chapter Four.

Inanimate/animate

Freud maintains that inanimate objects that appear alive can evoke the uncanny '[where there is doubt] whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely whether a lifeless object might not in fact be animate' (Freud, 1919, p. 132). However, whilst he cites Hans Anderson's fairy tales as examples where household utensils and furniture uncannily 'come to life' Freud reminds us that the uncanny cannot be experienced via mediated accounts and that such occurrences are commonplace and to be expected in fantastical stories (Freud, 1919, p. 156). Freud associates fear and dread of the animated/inanimate with death. He claims 'Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts' (Freud, 1919, p. 149), because encountering the (dead) body is where we experience the most corporeal confusion of the animated/inanimate.

[15] A synopsis of Hoffman's story *The Sand-Man* is provided as Appendix 1.

This hypothesis supports the key nature of the body/object relationship to my research because the co-existence of animated/inanimate things is especially provocative of the uncanny. Movement can confuse the status of the inanimate object. Stillness, or a prone pose might confuse the living status of the body. Movement can draw attention to specific body (or object) parts and or bring emphasis to fragmentation of the body, (for example what is visible of my body above or below a table) as a way to articulate a body/object uncanniness. Such a performative intention is further supported by Freud's argument that there is something uncanny about fragmented, dismembered or parts of the body that appear separated from the whole: 'a hand cut off at the wrist, feet which dance by themselves … have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove able to move themselves in addition' (Freud, 1919, p. 151). I am not suggesting that my body is literally fragmented, but Freud's demonstration of the uncanny offers a foundation for the uncanny experience of encountering the body through an unconventional set of movements and construction of unusual visual perspectives.

Formlessness

Freud talks of ghostliness or shapelessness not only as doubles of the living but also as uncanny in being of an indistinctive or formless nature. Royle uses 'ghosting' as a way to describe both the formless, ungraspable nature of the uncanny but also connection to the 'un-corporeal' and association to superstition: 'with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural' (Royle, 2003, p. 1). Formlessness for Freud evokes the uncanny in its disquieting instability. For example, I suggest that liquid or sound appear ungraspable and seem to manifest both the concrete and physical world and something more dream-like. The formless troubles the mutual exclusivity of life and death and the binary of familiar and unfamiliar. Thus, a material which is unstable, formless and fragmented seems to correspond with Freud's uncanny. This concept of the not-formed or ghostly suggests to me that fragmented material (such as broken pottery) or formless material (such as uncontained water or clay) are plausible material subjects for my research. Such research materials might originate in the home(ly) but might become unsubstantial or lose connection to the subjects or contexts they signify as a consequence of my action, implying that by introducing such materials to my study I can further evoke an uncanny condition which can in turn lead me to the abject as a way to describe that fragmented and disturbing undoing of signification (discussed in Chapters Four and Five).

Furthermore, Freud indicates the uncontrollability of the uncanny feeling and its overwhelming magnitude that might come to light as one realises that an experience that

was once repressed has now returned. Freud relates the feeling of being overwhelmed to the threatened loss of boundaries, reoccurring again and again, as the 'symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes, and so forth' (Freud, 1919, p. 150)—where, for example, a 'formless' condition such as darkness might be the symbol and childhood fear what is symbolised (Schlipphacke, 2015, pp. 169–170). The consequence for my research is to approach the boundary-lessness of the uncanny in relation to the home by unpacking the relationship between the/my female body and the (un)homely through actions that explore 'the boundary' and concepts of formlessness in order to further conceptualise the uncanny.

The uncanny (female) body

I will now briefly discuss the female body in Freud's account of the uncanny because I am interested in why, when I share space with the objects of the homely this implicates the/my body in the evocation of 'fear and dread', where my body constitutes the perpetrator of the performance action and the signifying self in my research.

Some of Freud's personal accounts of the uncanny involve seeing women (prostitutes) in unexpected moments where 'a feeling overcame [him] which [he] can only describe as uncanny' (Freud, 1919, p. 143). These accounts prompt the connection between the uncanny and women's bodies (or their cultural representations) (Bissell, 2011, p. 79), furthered by a confusion of 'real' women with inanimate versions as dolls or automata. The connection between the female body and the uncanny is advanced by instances from Freud's psycho-analytical experience. He says: 'neurotic men state that to them there is something uncanny about the female genitals. But what they find uncanny ('unhomely') is actually the entrance to man's 'old home', the place where everyone once lived (Freud, 1919, p. 151). He goes on to interpret dreaming of a certain place as representation of the mother's womb and to suggest that, here too, the uncanny (the 'unhomely') is what was once familiar ('homely', 'homey'). 'The negative prefix un- is the indicator of repression' (Freud, 1919, p. 151).

This concept is noteworthy in relation to my research because it introduces the metaphor of the womb as 'home', cementing the gendered nature of 'home'. Freud's writing articulates the subconscious and perhaps confused analogy between loss of (or alteration to) the home in a concrete or metaphoric sense, and loss or confusion over the womb, or womb-like female body. Freud's theory offers an explanation (albeit problematically biologically determinist or anti-feminine as I will go on to discuss) as to why coincidence of homely

objects and female body might be interpreted as especially uncanny and therefore a valid connection for me to make. Firstly, the female body becomes a personification of (and of course includes) the womb/home. Secondly, the material objects signify the home, thus, one might suggest that such domestic objects (e.g. plates) are also semiotically linked to the womb. Placed 'outside' the home (literally and figuratively) these objects lose or confuse their signification. What was once familiar (the womb) has been made unfamiliar: the body and the domestic objects now evoke the uncanny. A desire to return to the womb or to return home, (or to return to a non-existent construct of the home) is obscured by the uncanny. Thus, the womb/ home becomes something frightening, a place of dread.

The locus of Freud's theories on the formation of identity (subject) and sexuality are 'identification' (who am I?) and 'desire' (who/what do I desire?). But Freud considered the exploration of women's experience and subsequent formation of identity as 'dark regions where there are as yet no sign-posts' (Freud, 1931, p. 248) and much of what he theorised about the female psyche is rhetorical. His proposition that the female is defined through a sense of lack, or desire to pursue an identity solely in relation to the masculine presents a conflicting argument for my thesis. By favouring innate inferiority and biological difference over cultural or social influences Freud reduces feminine identity to either seductress or mother. His lecture on 'Femininity' in 1931 focuses on the pre-Oedipus and Oedipus complex, castration complex and penis envy as part of what he saw as the 'natural process' of becoming feminine, but Freud concludes a reluctance to deal with the 'riddle of femininity' (Freud, 1931b, p. 116).

I have not dwelt on Freud's polarised theories on sex and gender due to the constraints of the thesis and a reluctance to be diverted by depths of psychoanalytical discourse because his work is not the focus of my research. But it is useful to establish Freudian terms because I am, after all, using his theories of the uncanny as an impetus for my performances and it is helpful to have an overview of how his theories on femininity have informed (or formed a counter for) subsequent theorists and practitioners.[16]

[16] For more comprehensive analysis of Freud's work in relation to femininity and feminism see Juliet Mitchell *Psychoanalysis and Feminism. A Radical Reassessment of Freudian* 1974.

Section Two: Formulating a 'feminine un-canny'

Having reflected on 'The Uncanny' I will now describe my own interpretation of the uncanny in an attempt to offer a useful and meaningful concept to apply to feminist performance. I am going to introduce my concept of the 'feminine un-canny' and the terms that I am exploring in my performances. I will move onto address how feminist theory has responded to the Freudian uncanny, feminist terms and contexts in relation to my use of the term 'feminine' and how I apply this in my research. In turn, I will consider the term 'homely' in contributing to a problematic construct of the feminine and the suggestion of 'feminine objects' in association with the domestic. The discussion of objects moves me to consider object/thing differentiation in relation to the uncanny and the implications for working with my/female body as object-subject of my research.

Uncanny knowledge and experience

'Uncanny' encapsulates the familiar, familial regional vernacular word 'canny'.[17] Canniness comes from 'can'–to be able, in the way human beings makes sense of or respond to the environment, something associated with cleverness or craft. '[U]ncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced' (Royle, 2003, p. 1). Uncanny experiences might crop up in the coincidental repetition of a number in everyday occurrences or in finding a worm in an apple. In these moments where something peculiar seems to appear in what was thought to be familiar, we feel momentarily disturbed, uprooted, 'not at home'. We might enjoy the thrill of feeling lucky or the horror of being in an uncontrollable situation. We no longer 'can'. We no longer make sense of our response to the uncanny environment.

Overt canniness could be considered especially uncanny, something historically applied with suspicion to knowing or knowledgeable women. A Guardian newspaper article 'From Circes to Clinton: Why Powerful Women are Cast as Witches' discusses how women with (what is considered by the men around them to be) 'extraordinary' or superior knowledge, have been categorised as actual or metaphoric witches – their 'canniness' seeming so un-usual, unnatural and un-fitting with the feminine that it is considered to be uncanny and or supernatural (Miller, 2018). Surgical and somatic researcher Fiona K. O'Neill talks about a bodily or embodied uncanny/canny knowledge in relation to her familiar and unfamiliar experience of wearing a prosthetic breast after a mastectomy. She usefully reminds us:

[17] My family originates from the North West and North East, and Humber region of East Yorkshire, England.

> Having a canny knack is not about book learning but the way in which the human body, as much as the mind, is skilled in certain activities. Such activities do not lend themselves to verbal explanation and are generally acquired or grasped, as Wittgenstein (1969) notes through hands-on practice. This echoes Mauss' discussion of body technique, [or] as he says 'The English notion of 'craft' or 'cleverness' (1979 [1950] 108: see also Crossley, 2007). Historically, blacksmithing and midwifery (the canny wife) are exemplary canny crafts. Such overt canniness, however, can be considered distinctly uncanny, as if supernatural: this perception played its part in the prosecution of the witch hunts (O'Neill, 2009, p. 222).

The conflation of, or confusion of what the mind thinks it knows (that which is familiar) and what the body experiences (something stranger perhaps), or vice versa, undermines what we are accustomed to. We doubt the trustworthiness of our own 'knowing' and seek explanation for what appears to be inexplicable. My research emerges from the application of such canny/uncanny and dual knowledge, of how I understand my own sense of self communicated through familiar-homely unfamiliar-performance. In effect I am showing aspects of myself through familiar and well-rehearsed patterns of 'canny' behaviour which are skewed, not 'normal', not as they 'should be'. Canniness, knowingness is always there in the emergence of the uncanny. My research seeks to reveal strategies of feminine 'craft' or 'cleverness' in association with 'home' whilst challenging the acquisition of gendered knowledge. I also ask why I might be motivated to do this and what the implications are for my identity in performing strangely disturbing theatrical gestures.

Describing the 'feminine un-canny'

The 'feminine un-canny' is I argue, a feminist strategy because it exposes and subverts potentially reductive assumptions about the female in relation to the home. Because of the canny-familiarity/uncanny-unfamiliarity dyad I am hyphenating my term. Referring to the condition of my feminine performance as 'un-canny' enables me to place both words on the page together. The 'cut' is also a 'join'. I can potentially shape the word to my own use in response to the materiality and theoretical discourse of my practice. I re-appropriate the feminist author and physicist Karen Barad's ideas regarding the deeply connected way that everything is entangled with everything else, to mean that any act of observation makes a 'cut' between what is included and excluded from what is being considered. Nothing is inherently separate from anything else, but separations are temporarily enacted so one can examine something long enough to gain knowledge about it (Braunmühl, 2008, p. 224). This view of knowledge provides a framework for thinking about how culture and habits of

thought can make some things visible and other things easier to ignore or to never see.[18] 'Canny' remains present in the uncanny - the word is separated from its psychoanalytical origins but 'winks' at this history. Accordingly, the hyphen is not a total separation but rather it, re-entangles the two words as echoes of one another.

Instead of reinforcing normative gender roles associated with the female home maker the 'feminine un-canny' acts as a filter through which the familiar actions and objects of the home can be reviewed. By replicating disempowering aspects of the (un)homely, the 'feminine un-canny' objects to the repressive qualities of the home. The 'feminine un-canny' draws (consciously or unconsciously) upon and doubles back on Freud's psychoanalytical concept of the uncanny as a way to problematise normative constructs of the female in a patriarchal space. The 'feminine un-canny' appears in the evocation of something unsettling and uncomfortable. The 'feminine un-canny' is evoked in shared space between the familiar subjects of the female (body) and the everyday object so as to reimagine their inter-relationship. The 'feminine un-canny' exploits the duality of the *(un)heimlich* to create an indirect resistance to and salutation to both. In doing so the 'feminine un-canny' creates a feminist tension around the domestic. Thus, the 'feminine un-canny' troubles the corporeal and psychic identity of the feminine in order to dislocate hegemonic authority.

These statements of the 'feminine un-canny' lead me to ask if the mutual presence of woman and domestic object reinforce pejorative hegemonic notions of the feminine, or if rather, the 'misuse' of these subjects in performance contributes to an un-canny feminine— a no longer wholly familiar feminine but something that re-describes 'woman'? Indeed, does the 'feminine un-canny' depend on the mutual presence of woman and these everyday objects because the subjects signify and pull back to the homely, despite (or because) of the un-feminine behaviours of the woman?

A Feminist term

My use of the term 'feminine' is not intended as a judgement on the condition of being feminine or being a woman per se: nor am I am implying that the feminine is inherently

[18] I was inspired to explore this punctuation after hearing Ben Dalton's paper on the feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad's concept of agential realism and her use of citation and puns to unpack complex and abstract scientific concepts: (Dalton, 2019).

uncanny and by doing so regressing to the pejorative Freudian and Lacanian narrative of instability, lack and anxiety (Kokoli, 2016, pp. 17–38). Rather, I apply the term in relation to art practice, a 'feminine un-canny' that embraces and challenges the implications of both words – feminine and uncanny. If the concept of 'woman' is socially constructed then 'feminine' is the performance of this construct. I am referring to 'feminine' as the behaviours and traits constructed in society to equate with female sex or gender and I mean 'femininity' to be the qualities of this behaviour. By 'gender', I mean the social meanings we impose on those biological facts, the way that women are treated because they are perceived to be female' (Criado Perez, 2019, p. xiii) and the ways in which people express themselves as female.[19] Butler refers to this gender identification as the 'performativity of gender' (Butler, 1999, p. 190). If, according to Butler gender is not a stable condition but an 'effect' we mistake as a product of sex, then my 'feminine un-canny' persona is a response to my sex identity and gendered learning. As such I propose that a 'feminine un-canny' strategy equates to a situation of 'undoing', creating a situation where my gender (as defined by reductive domestic normalities) no longer holds fast: 'we are all undone in the way we collide with each other in the places where our identities do not hold' (Halberstam, 2017).

As a movement, feminism has no one clearly defined ideology or core organisation, and addresses diverse individual and social issue. I use the term 'feminist' to indicate theoretical, creative or political expression which is aligned with the broad objectives of consciousness raising and pursuit of gender equality in all walks of life. In relation to my thesis, I am referencing the progressive feminist theory of the past sixty years or so as a way to contextualise the creative decisions I am making. I am aware such feminist theory incorporates a number of oppositional and contradictory positions and that this thesis does not focus on a critical analysis of feminist discourse per se. Rather, I am trying to make sense of the semiotic reading of my practice-based research and metanarratives relating to my own lived experiences. Pollock synthesis introduces feminism as:

> a dynamic and self-critical response and intervention not a platform. It is the precarious product of paradox. Seeming to speak in the name of women, feminist analysis perpetually deconstructs the very term around which it is politically organised (1996, p. 5).

[19] Sociologist John Money introduced 'gender' in the 1960s to describe different sex roles of men and women based upon the etymology of gender from the Latin genus which means a sort, or kind (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 3).

Such an assertion is helpful for understanding the re-writings which alter and bear traces of earlier feminist theory on a range of art practices to express both feminine qualities (as discussed here) and feminist intention. Pollock's statement appears to indicate that a feminist politic necessitates a continual reassessment of what it means to be a woman, but in doing so, this deconstruction risks undermining the very qualities and experiences which are to be celebrated (or at least acknowledged). This conundrum, of being critical of at the same time as re-determining the association of woman with the domestic, bothers my thinking throughout this research process, and yet seems to be the crux of the paradoxical 'feminine un-canny': 'she' operates between both conditions.

Arguments introduced in this chapter emphasise and encourage contradiction of associations with passivity and dependency towards ideas previously reserved for hegemonic masculinity (Budgeon, 2011, p. 75) allowing women, and women artists to assert ways of being which might previously have been read as 'masculine' and people (however they might define themselves) to adopt behaviours previously associated with femininity. Such a performance of gender provides content for me to investigate in relationship to familiar domestic material objects because performed gender identity is, I argue, informed by the ergonomic and symbolic social function of these objects. My research goal is not to define female identity but to complicate it and in doing so undermine processes which dictate what meanings can and cannot attach to femininity. The feminine emerges not as something definable and fixed but something fluid and un-canny, '[o]pening a new subjective space through performances of femininity that are at once dissonant, irreverent, and ambivalent' (Reed 1997 cited in Budgeon, 2011, p. 75).

This fluidity offers a framework for how I might distort heteronormative feminine behaviours of the home in my work and articulate the relationship between my feminine upbringing and the dramaturgy of my work. I relate Butler's idea–that the bodily and nonverbal discourse or linguistic structure constructs the self (Butler, 2011, p. 138)–to the dramaturgical structures of my research in seeking to describe alternatives to patriarchally normative expectations of the feminine and the homely.[20] My gender is performed through what Butler calls a 'stylised repetition of acts–what we physically and psychically do to

[20] These theories on the construction of gender build upon Simone de Beauvoir argument for recognition of the socially constructed process of 'becoming of woman' in *The Second Sex* (1949, p. 301).

continually communicate our gender based on how we have learnt to do so (Butler, 1999, p. 179). Butler argues that historicity of such norms is like 'chains of iteration invoked and dissimulated in the imperative utterance' (Butler, 2001, p. 139). By informing my own research with historical accounts of the roles of women in relation to the home and domestic objects, I can establish the importance of knowing these dominant historic narratives and why they permeate contemporary culture, in order to subsequently challenge them. 'To operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination' (Butler, 1999, p. 42) – thus I argue that in demonstrating the uncanny paradox of performing (and living) the homely I do not undermine my political intention but rather, position my work as a deconstruction of the familiar. A sense of duality becomes further apparent to me through my performance action as an act of subjective critical analysis whilst working in the reality of a familiar subjective body, which is exploring unfamiliar action whilst retaining the expression of learnt gender behaviours. This observation highlights the dilemma in feminist practice of approaching the body as a site of 'intersubjectivity' where the body is proposed as art 'object'–a site where reception and production come together (Jones, 1998, p. 42). Jones develops this model of thinking using a phenomenological approach to the representation of the body/self and subsequent problems for the communication of subjectivity for the artist and spectator. In accordance with Jones' thinking, I see my self-subject/body as object of knowledge positioning in my work as intersubjective – a position which enables me to make statements about my findings that can be applied to broader contexts without claiming to be universal. By intersubjective I mean the ways in which we have a shared sense of the world and that this experience is also interrelational with others (human or otherwise) and constituted by them. The expression of a phenomenological approach is important to my methodology as it assumes that we establish intersubjectivity through bodily relations in response to and recognition of one another. This ontological structure is inflected by social and political norms. It is the management and deconstruction of such embodied structures which has been the subject of my research. As such, any 'reading' of my performance is also subject to bodily response and social or political inflection on the part of the spectator (even if they behave as onlooker). As Jones continues, the performance is

> Experienced [by the spectator] in the flesh …[to be read as] enacting the dispersed, multiplied specific subjectivities of the late capitalist, postcolonial, post-modern era: subjectivities that are acknowledged to exist always already in relation to the world of

> other objects and subjects; subjectivities that are always already intersubjective as well as interobjective' (Jones 1997,p.3).

It is such interrelational political contexts that are explored in my performances and presented as intersubjective–assumed to be shared, overlapping or in common (or not) with the spectator. My methodology endeavours to take into account the making of meaning as interrelational and intersubjective into account, using the historical as a way to foreground the palimpsests of influence and connection. My performance structure is intended to explore both a feminine and 'un-feminine' presentation of myself, combining essentialist and socially constructed notions of Self and Other. The process of making accounts for subjective experiences and choices of enquiry to ensure intersubjective relation in the production of knowledge. In a place marked by hegemonic discourse of the home; the art institution; the academic institution; my life trajectory, engagement with art, feminism and performance studies all determine my position as both woman orchestrator/researcher and subject of the research. The performances represent and thus attempt to restructure meanings from and through hegemonic norms of the domestic, (for example in the treatment of the table as both functional material object and sculptural and performative subject), addressed from my intersubjective position.

My conceptualisation of the 'feminine un-canny' aims to perform a skewed and oblique notion of feminine, one which is empowered by historic markers of the feminine but also offers the possibility of many, unspecified versions of the feminine future. After all, as Harris points out: 'in historic patriarchal discourse, 'woman' has functioned as a sign with no reference to the 'real', even if they also insist on the existence of a 'true' feminine elsewhere' (Harris, 1999, p. 16). What I mean to say is, in my performance there is no one 'true' domestic woman in me (or for others). It is a construct which cannot be re-iterated and so this thesis is a way of re-describing the feminine subject in a multi-faceted or even 'unconfigured' concept of possible (perhaps not yet realised) forms. The conflict between the desirability of an archetypal feminine homely and a resistance to it motivates my study. In questioning the construction of the 'homely individual' I seek to move beyond what is already known in order to better understand how power as discursively constructed and spatially and materially located. In exploring the home(ly) I am engaged with how power works (especially gendered power relationships) not just to shape us as particular kinds of being, but to make those ways of being desirable so that we actively take them up as our own.

Homely

To locate 'the homely' in the context of the uncanny and the association with the feminine it is necessary to question how and why the feminine can be named by and as homely. By 'homely' I mean an association with or through everyday behaviours and political relationships originating in the domestic context. Naming the feminine frequently returns to the use of 'homely' as an adjective, particularly in popular culture led by continuing patriarchal norms—to express 'homely' in association with notions of innate feminine 'commons sense' or used as pejorative term for a less attractive woman, or the 'homely comfortable' of motherhood (Hackney, 2010, p. 72) [21]. My own 'homely' actions are examined through re-performance (of bed-making, table setting, etc.) supported by feminist critiques of bio-determinist or socially constructed norms of homely feminine. My critique of the homely is further informed by research into the history of these 'homely' object's design or function. Understanding their history enables me to respond to the 'gendering' of objects in post-industrial consumerism related to home-making. I am now going to discuss how I approach these objects as the subject of my research.

My study builds upon work by previous by feminist artists who explore the homely condition and home making roles, for example in the influential *Womanhouse* project (1972)[22] which gave voice to individual and collective female experiences as overtly

[21] Researcher Fiona Hackney cites the magazine *Woman,* aimed at 'homely types', providing domestic tips to create a 'nice homely home': 'Homely' became associated for the lower middle classes with a desire for respectability, genteel, conform and continuity (Hackney, 2010). Even in 2019, an Australian Airbnb advertiser described (her?) property as 'Cute Cottage ... parking ... homely… feminine. Best suited to female travellers, couples or those who enjoy the feminine touches that this country cottage provides' (Cheryl, 2019, paras.1 and 2).

[22] In 1972 a group of Californian women artists (twenty-three Cal' Arts staff & students including Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro) presented an exhibition of installation and performance that destabilised the apparently seamless narrative of developing of Western culture. Employing ideas from the American feminist art movement of the 60's and 70's the *Womanhouse* group drew attention to and made more complex the relationship between constructed and biological female identities and roles. The *Womenhouse* collective took ownership of the house/ gallery (in a literal and conceptual sense). They sought to illuminate and subvert these through installation and performances in derelict house in Los Angeles (Racz, 2015, p. 67). Artists employed activist strategies, synthesised from different avant-garde movements, and worked in the context of the

political and questioning the status quo (Racz, 2015, p. 68). *Womenhouse* marked a clear trajectory for American and British artists (and globally). Exhibitions such as About Time (1980) (instigated by Catherine Elwes, Rose Garrard and Sandy Nairne) further 'indicate[d] the artist's awareness of a woman's particular experience within the patriarchy' (Elwes et al., 1980, p. 1). Accordingly, the work of British artists such as Bobby Baker, Monica Ross, Helen Chadwick explores juxtaposing imagery or actions in order to fracture narratives of the home and domesticity. I differentiate my work from theirs in so much as adjusting to twenty-first century political conditions and examining, not so much the role of woman-as-housewife, but the incorporation of homely qualities into a dramaturgical examination of uncanny tropes.

Objects

The suggestion that the status of the 'things' of the homely and subsequently of the feminine is not stable and fixed is perhaps the first and leading idea to stimulate my research process. My research is less concerned with what the objects of the home are but why and how they are. Objects are inextricably bound up in their historic representation.[23] Hence, my physical exploration runs alongside social histories in order to better understand why certain materials are prevalent in the concept of the home, and therefore why to trouble, 'misuse' or divert their use is so disruptive to our sense of homeliness.

To be an 'object' is to be named in relationship to the human condition and to language. Objects offer a concretisation of abstract ideas and subsequently operate semiotically in the

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feminist movement, utilising feminist theory and voicing women's everyday experiences. They endeavoured to reclaim the muse-like status of the female body, and to celebrate real and taboo experiences of the body such as childbirth or menstruation (Lippard, 1976). Performance and installation appropriated gendered materials and inverted stereotypes to undermine assumptions about gender, object, action and place, included mundane and monotonous housework actions (e.g. *Ironing* by Sandra Orgel or *Scrubbing by* Chris Rush), or comedic, puppet-like costume (*Cock and Cunt Play* by Judy Chicago). See Lynn MacRitchie in Elwes et al, 1980, p.5, and Refugia, 2020.

[23] Artist Sandra Johnston reaffirmed my confidence in working with objects, suggesting that even if materials are bought 'new' they are still imbued with a psychic value and are in some way cherished through the ritualised act of performance. Furthermore, the artist should be able to accept practical or financial constraints to sourcing materials and to resist their commodification as art objects (unrecorded personal conversation on the occasion of Fierce Festival 2019).

way the world is shaped. Objects are the subject of material cultural studies, as accounts of everyday life and the material habitus, as in the 'return of the real' in contemporary art (Brown, 2001, p .2). The process of artistic exploration with objects reveals their 'meatiness' and thus, their explicit material qualities (Miller, 2008, p. 22). We might think of objects as way-markers in our world, producing a sense of longing, or of belonging, or of self-worth. As such, identifying material as an 'object' rather than a 'thing' can be considered intrinsic to our/my understanding of (objectifying of) concepts such as 'home' or 'feminine'. To continue my discussion of the object I am going to briefly set out the concept of 'thing' before returning to consider the notion of the 'feminine object'. I believe that an emerging result of my intention to deconstruct the homely is the suggestion that my actions in some way return the object to its more 'thingly' condition and I will return to this in the concluding section of Chapter Five.

I am considering my interaction with the material objects of the home through the lens of thing theory to distinguish between objects and things—proposing that a thing emerges when it can no longer serve its common function, or is misused, or breaks down, or is sheds its socially encoded value and becomes present to us in new ways through the suspension of habit (Brown, 2001). Heidegger set out the ontological issues relating to the being of entities, what and how they are in his essay 'The Thing' in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971). He introduces the concept that things which are near or far in their relationship to us does not depend on distance, but instead on 'nearness', which in the context of my own research I interpret as 'to-hand' familiarity as opposed to remoteness. An independent, self-supporting thing may become an object if we place it before us, whether in immediate perception or by bringing it to mind in a recollective re-representation (Heidegger, 1971, p. 165). This suggests to me that the proximity of material with the human, in my case the shared space of material objects of the home and the feminine body, is a factor which determines whether material is indeed 'object' or thing. 'Object' can only be a human condition, so to trouble this relationship by shifting proximities and utilising the object differently in performance endeavours to shift the human condition.

By 'thingness' we might mean the physical properties of a given object: the 'woodiness' of a table, its mass and proportions. Such 'thingness' is the subject of some of my actions, exploring the qualities of the wooden table or clay plate in such a way to emphasise these material values–making these thingly-objects strange to me in their supposed familiarity (I think I know what a plate feels like in my hand but know it in a different way by feeling it

with my face or tongue). Objects in my performance exhibit their own 'pressing thingness' (Baker, 2000, p. 82), not as a meaning or a symbol but in the way the objects exercise their materiality on me and the conditions of the space (making sound, effecting the position or balance of my body, etc.).

I suggest that how things appear is determined to some extent by the ontological concerns in light of which they are seen (Howe, 1993) and that the 'feminine un-canny' returns objects to their 'thingly' and unfamiliar condition. To that end, a table is a table, a plate is a plate, a woman is a woman. But experienced through the filter of a 'feminine un-canny' performance these objects-as-subjects might appear to be something else, something 'thingly', something other. In my performances I discover a way to express the 'thingness' of the unhomely 'me' or a self-recognised I through (dis)functionality and not 'form'. That is to say, it is not merely the material properties (or function) of table, plate, woman, which describe the object-as-subject, but also the space that these things delineate. I will return to discuss the 'thingness' of the plate and table in my following chapters but this discussion leads me to look at Ahmed's phenomenological assessment of objects as gendered subjects (Ahmed, 2006; 2014b) and her concrete examples of how the relationship to material objects can inform and emphasise gender difference.

I attempt to articulate the 'feminine qualities' of these domestic objects extracted from social function in the liminal condition of my performance, informed by the ergonomic gendering of objects in relation to usage (or to 'age' objects for that matter) and the way human beings design tool-things to 'fit' the body' or a function of the body[24]. As Ahmed writes:

> Objects may … take the shape of the bodies for whom they are 'intended,' in what it is they allow a body to do …. An action is possible when the body and the object 'fit.' So it is not simply that some bodies and tools happen to generate specific actions.

[24] I note that writing in English overlooks the gendering inflection of other languages: 'English is not a grammatically gendered language …[in] French, German and Spanish however, … a table is feminine [*une table*]' (Criado Perez, 2019, p. 6), a plate is feminine (*une assiette*). I mention this because when I came to examine the historic cultural gendering of these objects, I noticed the convergence of associative meaning (women use these things) with the linguistic gendering. I suggest this coincidence contributes to a mutual justification, further allowing gender to be marked.

> Objects, as well as spaces, are made for some kinds of bodies more than others. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 51).

Questioning 'whose body is it made for' takes my investigation onto how, where and why to place my body in relation to the 'feminine' objects of the home, and what happened to the political and psychic understanding of object and body when physical proximity is explored, messed around with and disturbed? Design historian Pat Kirkham compiled an effective critical history of gendered material objects in *The Gendered Object* (1996), demonstrating the complexity and sometimes over-determined gender coding of objects which I argue contribute to the gendering of the people using these objects and inform social life (Kirkham, 1996, p. 5).[25] Through performing I develop an understanding of the feminine subject as somehow shifted through my orientation with/to/by objects. In asking what such a 'shift' might be I identify what the resulting feminine distinctiveness has become. My work is not about 'saving the feminine' in the sense of destroying personal or political value in the homely, caring or everyday roles women take on, but rather to disturb or rupture the social practices associated with the domestic and the homely in order to highlight the inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies in the female experience. These inconsistencies are exposed through my re-orientation with the table and the plate in order to challenge the normalcy communicated by a patriarchal hegemony.

Thus, my investigation of a 'feminine un-canny' is an act of wilful willingness, making manifest and intensifying something that was unconsciously present all along.
Furthermore, Griselda Pollock reminds me:

> The body is a construct, a representation, a place where the marking of sexual difference is written, and it is because the body is a sign that it has been so invested in feminist politics as a site of our resistance. For this kind of feminist theory, the body is precisely a point of transaction between the social systems and the subject, between what is classically presented as an intimate or private inside and a public or social outside. The somaticized body, as a figure of political speech and organization, erodes

[25] As a contemporary note, Caroline Criado Perez's 2019 *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in A World Designed for Men* uncompromisingly charts the lack of design for women and for women's bodies and the way in which women are set up to 'fail' in using things (medicines, cars, keyboards, etc.) in the 'right' or safe or successful way because women have not been considered by male designers and decision makers.

> the distinction between that opposition, which has, up to this point, shaped the conception of the politics of liberation (Pollock, 1996, p. 6).

The inference for my practice-based research here is that the/my body becomes the site where the physical symptoms of private and intimate and public political are expressed: my resistance to internalised (patriarchal) learning is 'pulled and spat out'—marked in the protesting noise of scraping and banging tables or the gobs of clay. This site of resistance might both expose and confront my sex identity, presenting a potentially, momentarily confusing 'body sign' in the construction of the performance image; challenging normative expectations of the feminine and woman, as an identity which occupies the space between homely and unhomely.

To summarise this section–I argue the 'feminine' can be re-positioned due to the instability of the signification of words: enabling a divergence from prior meaning and liberating the 'feminine' from the pejorative historic contexts of hegemonic patriarchy. The term feminine is open to failure and 'up for grabs', available to those who refuse to identify with the derogatory meanings attached to the word in the past. I have suggested it is possible for feminist practitioners like myself to deal with the presence of their own femininity whilst critiquing prescribed notions of the feminine. The nature and intention of my theatrical actions in the work is discussed in detail in later chapters.

Section Three: A feminist response

In this section I continue to outline feminist approaches to the uncanny and describe how the subsequent vocabulary for my feminist and uncanny research has been informed. I do this to mark the lineage of my own formulation of the term 'feminine un-canny' and to demonstrate where my research might contribute to a canon of feminist art practice and scholarship.

Marking the home-maker

Several women theorists (de Beauvoir, 1949; Kofman, 1980; Grosz, 1990) have been wary of the biases contained in Freud's discussion and of the overt content of his labelling of women as 'the problem' (Freud, 1931b, p. 113), keen to establish female identity as not merely as an inferiority based upon the effects of penis envy and a secondary formation premised on castration. Nonetheless, feminist theory has developed careful analyses of Freud's fundamental concept arguing that femininity cannot satisfactorily be defined in

Freudian terms if the nature of femininity is changing in the context of the 'external' world. Performance scholar Peggy Phelan examines the problematic binaries of gender presented in Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis. She suggestd the feminine 'she' is 'unmarked', lacking value and meaning:

> Within a psycho-philosophical frame she who is unmarked is re-marked, rhetorically and imagistically by the male; she is the Other who is only given value through the remarking of the male (Phelan, 1993, p. 5).

Phelan iterates the difficulty of seeking to define the feminine when the marking of the feminine can only be (in psychoanalytic terms) described as relational to the masculine. My expression of feminine uncanniness emerges in part from my response to psychoanalysis' lack of understanding of the female sense of self identity (forming from biological or psychological experience and external social experience), resulting in my unsatisfactory feeling of being constituent 'not quite' feminine. This leads me to consider how the domestic and homely condition rests not on the concept or reality of being feminine or 'mother' per se but on a relational status of femininity expressed the performativity of the gendered roles - 'wife' or 'homemaker'- as sociologist Miriam Johnson discusses:

> For Freud, 'femininity' is only tangentially related to women's capacity to bear children and is defined largely in terms of men's capacity to impregnate women. The social structural parallel to his biological emphasis on impregnation as opposed to childbearing … reflecting general societal views, that women's mothering is subsumed under marriage and a woman's sense of self is based more on being a wife than on being a mother. The Oedipus complex as Freud describes it can be read as the critical point at which girls move toward being passive wives and boys move toward being active and dominant husbands (Johnson, 1988, pp. 157–158).

I am suggesting therefore that the notion of femininity to which I am responding is not about childbearing but rather the passivity of 'wife' (something my research 'home-making' performance gestures are perhaps rooted in). Or as American feminist writer and activist Tillie Olsen puts it: '[w]omen are traditionally trained to place 'others' needs first, to feel those needs as their own' (Olsen, 1962, p. 17). Such thinking leads me to conclude that the behaviours I exhibit (as performance and in general) are socially constructed in response to my sex. Furthermore, it supports my suggestion that the assertive and deconstructive strategy in my performances is in itself uncanny, simply because it 'just doesn't seem feminine anymore'.

On psychoanalysis and feminism

My reading of 'The Uncanny' is informed by poststructural feminist theory [26] which offers a vocabulary for the analysis of my performance practice. Poststructuralism examines the ways that the social inscribes itself on the individual, calling into question the construction of the individual in the essentializing terms of humanist and modernist theories (Davies and Gannon, 2005, p. 312). My performance is contextualised as a feminist practice, noting that the term 'feminist' appears to resist definition (Harris, 1999, p. 27). Perhaps my own performative resistance is prompted by the plurality of 'feminism' to incorporate and adapt to contemporaneous and personal concerns. But also for the pragmatic and simultaneous relational and deconstructive position that feminism takes that results in an 'undecidable' and ever-changing idea.[27] A challenge to my research has been the conflation of 'feminism' as both a critical framework and a method or strategy for art making and that 'my feminism' comes from a 'palimpsest' of social and political experiences and education, building upon, erasing and rewriting in order to inform my understanding of the term and how I then 'write' it through my performance practice – recognising the 'weave' in my thesis of academic, theoretical learning with knowledge coming from lived experience (Scannell, 2016, pp. 73–82) and through dialogue with the work of other practitioners.

Feminist arguments emphasise and encourage pragmatic caution in adopting psychoanalytical interpretations of a woman's experience. Sheila Rowbotham challenges the absence of the female identity in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, stating that: 'The exclusion of women from all existing language demonstrates our profound alienation from any culture which can generalize itself' (Rowbotham, 1973, p. 70. She encourages adoption of the language of experience as well as psychoanalytical terminology and to bring together the personal histories of women's consciousness with the social analysis of the public, patriarchal world. Juliette Mitchell goes on to promote the use of

[26] It is not possible to bring an extensive engagement with poststructural and feminist discourses to this thesis. I look to authors and editors Griselda Pollock (1988; 1996; 2009), Sara Ahmed (2006; 2010; 2014b; 2017) and Hilary Robinson (2015) who unpack these concerns sufficiently for me to be able to apply key concepts to my research practice. Also, see Gannon and Davies (2005) and Munyford and Waters (2014).

[27] For a historical survey of and attempt to define the term 'feminism', see Offen (1988).

psychoanalysis as a tool to scrutinise patriarchal society. She is not interested in what Freud did but what can be taken from him as a political rather than academic explanation of feminine experience. Mitchell argues that feminist theory needs explanation of the processes through which sexed identities are acquired and maintained, accounting for the strength and ambiguity of these identities and seeing them as culturally constructed – thus open to change (Mitchell, 1974, p. 362). Moreover, Jacqueline Rose argues the political need for feminism to tackle Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as a means of accounting for ideology and subjectivity, avoiding these issues plays into the hands of the patriarchy (Rose, 1986 cited in Thornham, 2000, p. 79–80).

Whilst the uncanny is my main theoretical framework I reflect on the ways that my subjectivity and the 'inferiority of the feminine' presupposed by psychoanalysis can be addressed (Grosz, 1994b). Feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz contests presumptions of the female body, arguing that Freudian and Lacanian theorising of the feminine is via a male corporeality only and feminism should reclaim the body; partly because the body foregrounds the question of sexual difference, and partly because, as the 'threshold or borderline concept [it] hovers perilously and undecidedly at the pivotal point of binary pairs' (Grosz, 1994b, p. 23). I tend to agree with Grosz's paradigm, one which proposes a rethinking of body-mind relations as a Möbius strip with one surface twisting into another, the inside becoming outside in a process of endless reversibility and transmutation, without the presiding of mind/body dualisms. As reiterated throughout the thesis, I am interested in how, where and why the body might be the site of both corporeal experience and social and culturally investment, or 'marking' of the body, with 'value' (Grosz, 1994b, p.192). I will revisit this concept of the 'body as threshold' in my analysis in Chapter Five.

In taking on board the feminist psychoanalysis debate outline within the limits of my project, I incorporate how feminist psychoanalysis theorizes why we might learn to occupy and also resist the ideology of given roles – of feminine identity built around the home, into my study. I understand 'the feminine' as a concept of the unconscious, there is no stability of sexual identity because the unconscious always undermines an apparent identification of self. 'Femininity' is therefore impossible to achieve.

I am going explain my use of the term 'deconstruction' in my thesis and why this theory is applicable to my research project, before discussing my specific reference to Kristeva's and Cixous' writing in my study.

feminist deconstruction

My approach to investigating the feminine and homely is deconstructive in the sense of recognising and critiquing the underlying and implicitly understood assumptions made about culturally defined concepts and I consider this notion of 'deconstruction' to be aligned with the broader feminist intention of my thesis. Mary Poovey claims deconstruction provides an essential tool for feminist analysis:

> deconstructive strategies [can] enable feminists to write a history of the various contradictions within institutional definitions of woman that would show how these contradictions have opened the possibility for change' … deconstruction can 'challenge hierarchical and [binary] oppositional logic; … deconstruction offers the idea of the 'in-between' which constitutes 'one tool' for dismantling binary thinking (Poovey, 1988, pp. 58–59).

The questioning of conceptual distinction is derived from the work of Jacques Derrida who approached the complexity of language with a search for things which run counter to the intended meaning or structural unity. But he was reluctant to define deconstruction as a set of theorems, tools, techniques, methods–deconstruction has 'no specific object' and is not a method and cannot be transformed unto one. (Derrida, 1991 referenced in Rolfe 2004, p. 274).

Faced with this 'not method' I believe the 'deconstruction' of my research rests in and of the performance work itself —the tensions around and dismantling of concepts of the homely reside in the process of the performance, inherently live and located in time and space. I suggest a working description of 'deconstruction' might be the dismantling of what is already described (Rolf, 2004, p. 275) 'through the focus on previously un-regarded details (casual metaphor, footnotes, incidental turns of argument)' (Norris, 1987, p. 19), revealing new signification in order to demonstrate that the antithesis (to the homely) is already always present, through 'exposing and challenging existing binaries, reversing hierarchies to expose the unacknowledged (Rolf, 2004, p. 275). In this sense, I believe that instead of 'binary' my practice describes a 'dual' co-existence of conditions. Thinking about this has also led me to consider the 'feminine un-canny' existing not as a condition beyond the homely but, in Derrida's terms, as a concept (or experience) which functions within a classification of the homely or domestic. This strikes me as an uncanny quality in itself: that the 'feminine un-canny' includes both the homely and the unhomely (*heimlich* and *unheimlich*) – a duality that is inherently destablising. In keeping with the deconstructive intention, my study does not seek to dismantle 'the home', but rather to trouble the structures within institutions which have become too rigid, or are dogmatic, or

which work as an obstacle to future research (Derrida 1997, referenced by Turner 2016, para. 5). Perhaps problematically, a suspension of the homely offers some degree of security, allowing the possibility of return but also, I argue, working with a malleable concept of the homely which can embrace the unhomely.

Feminist writer Diane Elam describes feminism and deconstruction as two ways of thinking alongside each other, asking: 'not 'how can they go together' – but 'how are they beside each other' (Elam, 1994, p. 1). She argues feminism and deconstruction are besides one another in sharing a parallel divergence from (or dislocation of) politics and philosophy. I am interested in how, on the one hand feminism shifts the ground of the political, interrogating the opposition between the public and private spheres; and on the other hand, deconstruction displaces our understanding of how theory relates to practice by rethinking the opposition to philosophical reflection to political action. Questioning the terms of the homely and the feminine tests the desire to have a fixed and central point of reference. Performing against the fixed notion of the homely disturbs the logocentric–the fixedness of prescriptive language. The uncanny qualities of my performance take me beyond the potentially reductive attempt to 'define' what is occurring. Instead, the performance experience allows for slippages, dualities and multiple meanings to occur, perhaps unwritten or even unsaid.

Working with Cixous and Kristeva

French theorists Hélène Cixous' and Julia Kristeva adopted poststructuralist approaches to literary and cultural criticism and a discussion of identity politics. I offer an overview of their key concepts to show why and how I might apply these in my research. Throughout my thesis I make use of broader discussions on gender from Butler (1999; 2001) and the phenomenological discussion of gender and objects from Ahmed (2006; 2010; 2014b) and I will integrate my application of their theories into the body of my performance analysis (Chapters Four and Five).

Hélène Cixous' theories of the feminine support my position that, rather than attempting to define or pin-down a contemporary definition of the feminine, I can contend with the more creative and abstract possibilities of a feminine which is undefined and fluid. Cixous responded directly to 'The Uncanny' with reflections on the feeling of the uncanny and complex structures of anxiety, but used the opportunity to challenge the supposed uncanniness of the feminine by arguing for the opportunity that a lack of understanding of the female condition afforded women writers – to be challenging to the existing canon:

> We are told that the dark continent of woman is unexplorable – but we are exploring it and we find that everything has yet to be written about women and femininity. Feminine texts explode and dislocate: a feminine text cannot fail to be subversive (Cixous, 1976b, p. 884).

Cixous encourages women to 'write women' and in doing so explode patriarchal notions of the feminine and subvert existing theories (by men such as Freud) on what it means to be a woman. This approach does not offer fixed solutions but rather suggests the possibility of a blurred identity, 'We find out what she is not rather than what she is' (Hekman, 2014, p. 45). More generally, Cixous' proposal of the *écriture féminine* or women's writing enables me to recognise the incorporation of doing, thinking, writing in my process and unpack the relationship between the/my female body and female differences in language, ('writing' in a non-textual sense, applied to my creative and critical performance which makes possible the repositioning of the feminine 'other' by refusing to reconstruct the self in masculine terms). I am not offering a specialist research of Cixous' theories as this is beyond the scope of this thesis [28] but suggest that Cixous' reference to a uniquely feminine approach to the disruption of texts and attention to gaps and tangential observations is a useful approach for my account of a practice-based process and has an inherently uncanny quality, inviting a boundary-less and fluid way to describe my/woman's experience. In particular I make use her essay 'Bathsheba or the Interior Bible' to consider the impact of working with shattered plates in Chapter Five.

In order to make reference to Kristeva's concepts later in my thesis I am going to briefly introduce her notion of the abject here before setting out my terms for the 'feminine'. Kristeva's theories of the abject contribute a theoretical framework for the later chapters of my thesis, in particular with application to my analysis of working with clay.[29]

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[28] For discussion of Cixous' theories, see Conley (1992), Sellers (1994), and Dunn (1998).

[29] In *Volatile Bodies…* Grosz charts a series of theoretical approaches to how we might consider the body, body image and constructions of identity. Her description and analysis enabled my navigate of the potentially problematic notions of essentialised sexual difference presented by Kristeva et al. Like Grosz, my understanding of Kristeva's concept is informed by anthropologist Mary Douglas's writing on dirt in *Purity and Danger* (1966) where she theorises purity and impurity in terms of the instantiation and disruption, identifying bodily 'pollutants' as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order (Douglas 1966, p.3).

The literalisation of the notion of the abject through Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1980) offers further conceptual framing of my practice. Kristeva's work is rooted in psychoanalytic (Lacanian) theory and crosses many disciplines with an assertion of the gendered subject. For Kristeva, the abject is that which is neither subject or object and as such becomes 'something' disturbing or repugnant. She suggests:

> The abject has only one quality of the object that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses (Kristeva, 1980, p. 230).

It can therefore be assumed that the abject object (in the case of my study this includes house dirt) functions to sit in opposition or outside to the self – 'I'/me/my body/the home. However, in being seemingly excluded (like the vacuum cleaner dirt) the presence of the abject object causes the subject (self/I/homely) to 'give way' because the abject signals the fallibility of that seemingly certain subject. Thus, the abject prompts the collapse of what is thought to be certain, familiar, homely. The realisation of this, I propose, is an uncanny experience.

Kristeva's explanation for the process of abjection is not simply about a 'natural' disgust for things which are biologically threatening to our life, health and hygiene, but of a deeper psychological process which destabilises the subject. Whilst she gives the examples of the abject as some foods, filth, waste or dung, one's relationship to which is characterised by 'retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage and muck' (Kristeva, 1980b, p. 230), Kristeva proposes that the abject arises from a dissolution of the borders of subjectivity, in which the subject fails to recognise the other as object and 'finds the impossible within' (Kristeva, 1980b, p. 232).

Like Grosz, what interests me in the analysis of my performance action is the way this notion of abjection links the lived experience of the body with social and culturally specific meanings of the body, and cultural investment in selectively marking the body. The 'value' of the homely/unhomely body is the consequence of a culture intervening into the constitution of the value of the body (Grosz, 1994b, p.192). Grosz discusses Kristeva's theories that the conditions under which the clean and proper body, the cost of its emergence designated by the term *abjection,* and how demarcating a clean and proper body functions for the social subject in the transmission and production of specific body types (Grosz, 1994b, p.192). Grosz suggests that whilst the abject necessarily partakes of

both polarizes terms it cannot be clearly identified with either. Furthermore, I support Grosz's problematising assessment of Kristeva's categorisation of menstrual blood as a 'dangerous' and defiling body substance alongside the category of excrement. Because this categorisation implies that the female body per se, and in turn female identity, must always return to an oppositional, relational place alongside that of male identity–to be less than, lacking or biologically or psychically 'dangerous', Grosz criticises Kristeva's adherence to an essentialist dualism that is not 'convincing' (Grosz, 1994b, p.207). Instead, I apply Grosz's more useful phenomenological approach, without the separation of mind and body, public and private, to better understand the cultural construction of such a dualism. Whilst the body is crucial to understanding women's psychical and social existence, the body is no longer understood as an ahistorical, biological given, acultural object ((Grosz, 1994b, p.18).

I consider my use of the physical and cultural properties of clay and saliva (and dirt and water) as 'borderline' or marginal states which are located at the site of biological and cultural vulnerability, or instability in relation to the body. I am interested in the potential of these materials (of the body or not) and sites as something fluid and pliable. In describing the body as a cultural product within the constraints of biological limits, (Grosz, 1994b, p.187) there is a way to navigate the differences of the female body, and differently experienced female body, without reducing one's argument to essentialist dualities. Rather than associating my body and dirt with reductive iterations of Lacanian 'lack', or Kristevian 'danger' to identity (in which the male identity is the 'benchmark') I want to explore the relationship with dirt as a signpost to an uncanny and shifting identity. If, as Grosz outlines, 'bodies are not fixed, inert, purely genetically or biologically programmed' (1994b, p.190) then there is the opportunity in performance to explore and push the unfixed-ness and the active identity of the body. Grosz reminds us of Hélèna Cixous' words: '[I refuse to strengthen the words of the past by repeating them,] to confuse the biological and the cultural. Anticipation is imperative' (Cixous 1976b, p.245). It seems possible then, to interpret the domestic body through the exploration of the disruptive, fluid and boundaryless. If 'dirt is what disrupts order, and order is conceived of as an arbitrary arrangement of elements in relative stability or harmony' (Grosz 194b, p.201) then my exploration of the disorderly or 'troubling' body and matter might serve to uncannily present *both* the returning (doubling) homely and unhomely.

I propose that my attempt to collapse the meaning of the homely create a condition which, for an uncanny moment, renders the subject (be that the material object or me)

unrecognisable. I feel this is most acutely described in the final moments of *Biting the Plate* discussed in Chapter Three, although, I suggest the abject is established from the beginning of my research process – from the moment I walk upon my dining table in the research performance *On the Table* (2016) - the abject is present in the 'feminine uncanny', not because lack of cleanliness causes abjection but that which disturbs identity, system, order. It is something from which one does not part, something one does not protect oneself from. Importantly, Kristeva differentiates the abject from the uncanny stating: 'Essentially different from 'uncanniness', more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory' (Kristeva, 1980b, p. 5), which suggests to me that whilst my practice incorporates the abject it retains an uncanny familiarity about it that makes the practice not 'wholly' abject.

Douglas's discussion of the ritual and social implications for dirt as being and ambiguous and formless symbol of power (or power relations) led me to Georges Bataille's theory of *l'informe* or 'formless'[30] and I outline the central premise of Bataille's argument, but suggest that this concept deserves much further exploration in future research.
To supplement my understanding of the abject I refer to *l'informe* as a way to further describe the concerns with the boundaryless or the unsubstantial in my exploration of the (un)homely. Bataille developed a notion of the formless or *l'informe* to reject the categorisation of the art object through the metaphor of visual shape. The implication of the formless is one of intrinsic worthlessness and unredeemable futility (Crowley and Hegarty, 2005, p. 10). He used the concept of form in an abstract sense to introduce the possibility of disruption and suggest the process or object of art can be without boundaries – literal or figurative edges [31]. Bataille refused to define '*l'informe'*, instead describing

[30] I note Bataille's often, explicit and metaphoric references to the phallus and ejaculation as a masculine interpretation of the societal and the body are challenging to a feminine and feminist position in the research. However, the paragraph on 'the formless' stands alone as a definition, and I set this aside from Bataille's larger bodies of work, offering the opportunity for re-interpretation and *selective* use in this feminist research context and as stimulus for the reading and intention of my work.

[31] Published in 1929 as a short definition in a series of entries to a 'dictionary' of terms made in the magazine *Document* (Crowley and Hegarty, 2005, p. 10).

> 'formless [as] not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term which serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring each thing to have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. … affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit (Bataille, 1985, p. 31).

This concept provides a way to attend to the encroaching and boundaryless matter that results from the abject actions in my performance and perhaps a way to reclaim banal, 'worthless' aspects of the everyday. Bataille ties his concerns with the abject and to the body, unlike Kristeva who does not limit the abject to the body and body waste (Noys, 2000, p. 34). However, I think that whilst Kristeva offers a system to understand the abject as 'of the body' so as to perhaps limit it within a meaning – no matter how shocking that meaning is, Bataille's formless is like 'spit', moving and fluid, ignoring of boundary and evading classification – even of the abject. *L'informe* equates everything rendered formless to 'nothing' because it undoes narrative that privileges form and offers 'nothing' as an alternative maintaining that things or matter are always fluid, and 'active'.[32]

Kristeva's concept offers me another approach to re-describe the uncanny whilst also presenting the abject and unfamiliar. Bataille's ideas further 'trouble' the uncanny, offering ways I can make sense of 'what is left' after deconstruction (destruction) of the home–the detritus. Consequently, I am considering the exploration of the abject as an implication of my performance actions: to what end the results or products (the traces of things that are left over and are beyond my control–the sweepings, the marks on the tables, the fragments of plate) contributing further to the disturbance of the familiar and homely. I will describe how the abject applies as an analysis of my work in Chapter Three**.** I will now introduce Chapter Two, outlining my methodological approach to addressing my research project through the application of performance.

[32] For a fuller account of Bataille's theories of abjection in relation to his greater works see Noys 2000. For an application of formless to art analysis see Bois and Krauss (1997).

Chapter Two: A practice-based research methodology

The theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter is variously encountered and explored through my process of performance making, described in Chapters Four and Five. I will now outline the methodological approach of my project and draw on descriptions of practice-as-research in art and performance studies that argue for 'making' as a critical creative research process, before introducing the analysis of my performances.

My practice-based research methodology is developed from Robin Nelson's practice-as-research, a process model of making and reflecting: doing knowing (Nelson, 2013). Nelson discusses an iterative process of 'doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing' (Nelson, 2013, p. 32). I apply a 'repeating -spiral' process, of drawing and note taking; making in studio; reviewing documentation; creative and analytical writing; theoretical, historical and practitioner-based reading and returning to make performance. I am working to Melissa Trimingham's notion of continually emerging, rotating, revisiting practice-as-research process. She suggests a spiral model allows the researcher 'to abandon the original intent in the heat of creative work, and go on with what is working well' (Trimingham, 2002, p. 57). And academic and theatre maker Baz Kershaw articulates the challenging nature of performance practice as research in the following terms:

> [T]he most crucial effect of performance practice as research is to dis-locate Knowledge … such performed moments can unravel all established forms of representation, becoming irresistibly viral to any assumed stability of thought. The source of that power is paradoxical, as it makes the commonplace extraordinary (Kershaw cited by Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 105).

Faced with what Kershaw suggests is the extraordinariness of the commonplace, I am trying to find scholarly ways to unpack the unsaid knowledge expressed in my performance gestures, which are after all located in my body (in time and space). I not am suggesting that I 'abandoned' my initial research concerns in the process of the creative work. But I have a found a helix approach to practice-based research useful in pushing the creative making towards a more systematic line of research enquiry whilst allowing me to revisit and reiterate familiar performance techniques and reconsider aesthetic decisions as part of the research. To continue with Trimingham's argument:

> the process of later evaluating [my work] (that is, revisiting the point of entry, and reviewing theory in the light of the journey just undertaken through practice), then

> formulating and articulating … is a necessary discipline for keeping the research process under control and reviewing progress (Trimingham, 2002, p. 57).

I tease out conceptual findings in written reflection so as to contextualise the practice and in turn suggest next steps. Recognition of the unpredictable process validates my subjectivity, aligning the process to a 'studio practice' (Freeman, 2010, p. 81). The spiral or helix allows for varying points of entry into the research process, or 'arbitrary' points of entry and exit as Trimingham puts it (2002, p. 57).

I have included academic studies of women's social history in my research, and I introduce these social histories in subsequent chapters, 're-entering' them into to my research journey, 'injecting' new data, validating my thinking and generating performance content.[33] Additionally, how I sourced my materials became an extended part of the research process. Before proceedings to the examination of my performance works, I am going to explain my thinking in a bit more detail.

Procurement as field research

I associate my thrift shopping for performance materials with the nineteenth-century 'pleasure shopping' and the 'lifestyle consumerism' of today (referred to in more detail in Chapter Five). In the context of my research I frame 'sourcing of materials' as a gendered behaviour, extending and combining female responsibility for the home to a responsibility for shopping for the home. As the nineteenth century industry advanced, ornamental wares emerged primarily for display in the home, marketed to the growing middle-classes for the 'woman of the house' to choose, curate and enjoy. As class and feminist historian Susan Porter Benson remarks in relation to middleclass consumers in the US: 'In the latter part of the nineteenth century retailers increasingly defined shopping as a feminine activity and transformed crockery emporiums, tea store … into appropriate public spaces for women …' (Witkowski 2016, p. 46). Witkowski goes on to explain how products that women were sold became increasingly gendered by nineteenth-century UK and US department stores such as F.W. Woolworth, moving ceramics consumerism from the confines of the wealthy, to the new petit bourgeoisie and in turn the working classes. This trend established the consumer relationship with ceramics that I, and I suspect many women

[33] I am aware the spectator to the live work does not necessarily have these histories in mind in the moment of watching – they are not made explicit in my work through use of dialogue for example because I did not want to suggest a narrative or illustrative intention in my work.

from ordinary backgrounds, have experienced. I suggest that consumption was attached to the rising cultural ideal of female domesticity. A few decades later, the focus of bourgeois consumption is no less of a 'making of the family and the class' (Auslander 1996, p. 95). Historian Leora Auslander defines wealth as essentially social. 'Bourgeois women,' she argues, 'not only had to produce themselves as cultural objects but also needed to acquire, arrange and use those goods – especially furnishings – defined as necessary for representing and constituting the family's social position' (Auslander 1996, p. 84).[34] Furthermore, after the mid-century, argues Auslander, female consumers were expected to take on the extra burden of representing their nation as well as their family and class process of rapid change - implying is that the 'woman of the house' is responsible for thrifty, creative and 'patriotic' solutions to managing a challenging domestic ideal.[35] Thus, the responsibility of ordinary women for the expression of 'taste' and status through the choice and placing of material objects is a background to the decisions I make, as home maker and performance maker. The relationship between contemporary consumerism and 'home making' could be extended as the subject for future research.

However, in my study I experienced the feminist paradox of desiring and being repulsed by a female consumerism, resulting in what Rebecca Schneider describes as 'the drive toward disembodiment' [from what] …culture offers as 'femininity' (Schneider, 1997, p. 122). This inability to recognise myself in the possibility for a perfect homely life, signified by many consumer goods, is a seam through my research experience and is perhaps the uncanny condition.

[34] These social obligations were clearly set out in housewife manuals that, as Auslander shows, gave precise instructions on how to buy objects of taste, durability, comfort, and utility (De Grazia and Furlough, 1996).

[35] I propose that we see a resurgent expression of a 'British identity' through popular television programmes like *Great British Bake Off*. Despite the presence of male presenters and contestants I believe that 'feminine consumption' of domestic material objects is encouraged through the use of the 'traditional' Mason Cash mixing bowl (circa 1901) or Tala measuring cones (1920's brand) or 'shabby chic' cake stands. These objects are replicas of pre and post war kitchen utensils, and thus express a nostalgia for 'make do and mend' and war time jingoism that suits the current austerity and Brexit climate.

I frame this 'sourcing field work' as part of my practice-based research activity because it allows me to attend to information accumulated at the periphery of my core study. Furthermore, found and rejected crockery also represents for me the abject uncanny - the second-hand nature of the plates perhaps hints at something 'grubby', 'uncomfortable' reminders of a similar object once encountered. In contrast, my tables from Ikea[36] are ubiquitous in their newness, although they might also provoke the uncanny experience of seeing a 'double' to 'our' Ikea table in someone else's home. I will return to consider the emergent concerns with 'uncomfortable objects' in subsequent chapters.

Recording the performances

Stages of my research process are documented using still photography and video. This media is an intrinsic tool in my reflective and analysis process, enabling me to look back at myself and attend to unconscious or emergent content in the performance research. I am cautious in my use of documentation as a secondary research tool as I am aware of the contested issues around the ontology of performance and the ephemeral and experiential nature of the practice —as debated by Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1999). Matthew Reason (2006) and Philip Auslander (1999) set out the challenges for assessing performance in the academic context and the need for something to be 'touched or measured', where that which is documented is knowable (and that which is not documented is unknowable) (Reason, 2006, p. 46) and I certainly do not feel it is necessary to defend the live practice as 'proper' research (Reason, 2006, p. 74). Both written or visual approaches imply technological or temporal limitations to accessing 'the document'. I am presenting live performance as my research and treat my documentation (visual media and written account) as tools to aid analysis rather than an attempt to recreate the conditions or impact of the performances themselves and I feel my written and visual documentation offers a 'true-ish' impression of what has taken place for the purposes of my process, accepting its partial and interpretive limitations. Writing reiterates findings to the research community and enables me to question the validity of the principals I am proposing in the work (Hannula et al., 2005, p. 110).

[36] I chose to work with Ikeas's *Ingo* table (pine. 120x75cm, 'seats four') designed by Gillis Lundgren, as a ubiquitous and prototypical table. The design is robust yet light enough to lift; cheap to buy and with removable legs for storage and re-staging; and, it turns out, familiar to several spectators to my work as 'their' table (Ikea (1999–2020) (Online).

The use of written or visual documentation as a reflective tool also raises questions around the accuracy of memory. Even though I have received some audience feedback on the works I did not conduct a comprehensive audience survey.[37] At the time I was not focusing on audience experience. However, this potentially poses a problem for performance research and audience studies more broadly. How can I quantify my impact but avoid speaking for or assuming the experiences of others? Exploring ways to stage my research necessitates addressing the condition of the spectator and recognition of their contribution to the individual and communal experience of my work. (I discuss this further in Chapter Five). But while audiences and performers may recognise their responsibility in creating meaning (Jones, 2012; Jones and Silver, 2016) it remains difficult to analyse and understand those non-verbal dialogues without speaking for the other. Further consideration of audience experiences the 'feminine un-canny' deserve future post-doctorate investigation.

Thus, I am reliant on my own memory of the work informed by the documentation. At times reviewing the documentation created an uncanny slippage between what I thought had happened and what I could now see taking place (the chronology of actions for example). I recognise this performer-perspective (as with spectator perspective) is not a wholly adequate record, but instead offers an internalised point of view; a memory – often in the micro and somatic detail of doing and not watching what is being done. Reviewing the video enables me to adopt a secondary 'watching' perspective to prompt more objective analysis of the experience of making, for example in managing the temporality of task-based elements which leads me to question how the initially unconscious gestures contributed to an uncanny 'slippage' of time. This re-viewing provides the 'directness' of knowledge Reason mentions. If nothing else, the documentation is an important aide-mémoire in what is after all a protracted research process often distanced from the origination of the performance works. Therefore, in the context of this research thesis the performance does not 'become itself through disappearance' (Phelan, 1993, p. 146) but 'becomes' through a number of reiterations and re-appearances. Later in my thesis I explore concerns with the remains of the performance in relation to the traces of the homely (for example dust and broken crockery). These traces carry further uncanny implications for the notion of disappearance and reappearance, repetition and the sense of déjà vu or having twice experienced a condition (Schneider, 2011). My ephemeral

[37] Ethics approval for my research project was given by The College of Arts, Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research, University of Glasgow, October 2016.

performance is not ‘lost’ but reformed; an uncanny trace which allows me to reconsider and redirect my thinking.

After having considered the theoretical framework for my work and established practice-based research as my methodology (discussing how I have gone about my practice) I am going to analyse my performances. But first, having discussed the relevance of the written description as documentation, I will set out a personal account of all three performances: *Seven Tables*; *Placing Carrying Breaking*; and *Biting the Plate* before carrying forward my discussion on the nature of the feminine in relation to the deconstruction of the homely. I do this to embed a descriptive account of the work in the thesis, (and I use italics to indicate the author/artist ‘voice’) but I refer the reader to the supporting visual documentation or to their own memory of my live work.

Chapter Three: Performance descriptions

Seven Tables

Seven wooden tables. Four radios. A folded white cloth. A jug of water.

I enter a large white room with large windows, black floor. I am wearing denim jeans, a grey t-shirt, bare feet, my hair tied back. In the room are seven unpainted pine wood tables. Other objects and materials are at the edge of the room. The tables are stacked irregularly, leaning into and on top of one another. Spectators have arrived, they gather in the doorway, chatting. I have placed a few chairs for those who need them and some of the ten or fifteen spectators sit whilst others remain standing at the edges of the room. People become quiet. I don't talk.

I begin to move the tables and move between the tables. I lift one from another, rotating them on one leg to reposition them, or carrying a table on my back to put it somewhere different in the room. I begin to feel the weight of the tables and their dimension. I measure my body against the tables – my arm, leg or trunk of my body along the table edge or leg. I climb on top of the table stack and crawl through the upright legs or under the table-tops. Gradually I release each table from its entanglement and position it in the room.

I position the radios in the room. I tune a radio – finding a voice, or a strain of music. I am looking for something 'not in tune' — 'shushing' white noise. I hold my ear closer to the radio and concentrate on finding the 'non-specific' sound. When I have 'tuned' the radio I adjust the volume and put the radio on the floor close to a table. This is done four times.

I 'dance' with each table in turn. I hold it upright against my body, gripping a leg in one hand and the top in another. I move in a circular fashion, turning one way then the other, then the first way again, counting my steps. I place my feet in relation to the one table leg in contact with the floor, rising and falling on toes and heels. I adjust my grip and move around with the table. I feel the surface of the wood and the shape of the table leg. After each dance I carefully set the table down again, feeling for the moment that the table leg touches the floor. I repeat the dance seven times.

I take the white cloth and unfurl it on a table, smoothing the surface with my hand. I walk then run backwards between the tables. I sway my arms to keep my balance and move quickly. I pause at a table, and then run on, repeating until I have visited each table. Breathlessness quickly overtakes me. I then refold the cloth before going to another table to repeat the action. I do this seven times with the same cloth before removing it all together, refold it and putting it aside.

I take the jug of water and pour water onto one table-top. The water pools in surface tension, then spills over the sides of the table. I wait for a moment, listening to and watching

the water dribble and pool on the floor. I put the jug aside and lower my face to the water and table-top. I push my cheek into the wet surface then move around the table, maintaining contact with the surface with my face. I move my head to adjust my position; cheek, forehead. I keep my hands away from the table, and shift weight on toe tips to manoeuvre around the four sides of the table. For a moment my foot touches the wet patch on the floor. When the circuit is completed, I step away.

I drag all the tables together into the centre of the room and position them 'end on' so they form one long table. I shove the tables hard so they bang together. I adjust their positions so that the table-tops meet to create one continual surface. I take a carrier bag of dirt, the contents of my vacuum cleaner and hearth sweepings. I scatter this dirt onto the length of the tables. I climb on top of the tables then crouch and begin to crawl through the dirt across the seven tables. I can smell an earthy, decaying, sweaty smell and feel the dust entering my nostrils and clinging to my body. There is hair, fragments of paper or plastic, crunching charcoal. I reach the end of the table then stand and pause. I become aware of my breath, the light from the windows, the shuffling of people around me.

I turn to view the table tops then come down from the table. My front is covered in dirt that drops on the floor. I exit. The sound of the radios continues in the space. Spectators approach the tables to look at the dirt.

Placing, Carrying, Breaking

Table. Two chairs. Fifty assorted plates. A radio. A sweeping brush.

I am seated at the middle of the table, looking into the middle distance. There are two chairs at the table. I stand and move the chairs aside and undress. I take off my black trousers and top and I am naked.

In the space on the floor near the wall are stacks of mismatched plates. I pick up a pile. I have to crouch to do this so that my back is to the spectator and my backside is in the air. I feel the tension of my arms, shoulders, back and buttocks as I stand and position the plate stack in the cradle of my arm. The striated edges of the plates press into and mark my body with lines. I carry the plates to the table and begin carefully to place the first stack, as if setting a table at intervals around the table, not precisely but with some attention so that there are eight 'places' at the table. I go to collect another stack – again crouching and rising to shift the weight of crockery against my body. I repeatedly place the plates on the table, but already there is not much room and I have to slot one plate under another, or balance one on top of another. The pile accumulates. I continue to collect stacks of plates, to walk around the table. The piling becomes precarious.

Suddenly, inevitably, a plate slips (and crockery smashes to the floor). This triggers a change of activity and I start to clear the table. I pick up plates from the table and stack them in my arms. The crockery is heavy. The layers of plates nip against my skin, press into my ribs, and pinch my breast. I try to shift the pile in the crook of my arm as I walk around the table collecting them all until the pile is too heavy to hold together. The plates slip and crackle. I go to put them down, carefully lowering the tower of plates onto the table by bending my knees and dropping my back, and slipping my arms carefully from the crockery.

I take one plate in my hand – as if to weigh it, balanced on my open palm. I turn from the table and fling the plate to the wall – then again, one after another. They bounce and smash. The splinters of crockery scuttle across the floor. I take more plates and do the same, smashing them to the adjacent corner walls. Some plates smash on impact with the wall, imbedding fragments of ceramic in the plasterwork. Others bounce and skid or spin to a halt before smashing. Sharp ceramic blades begin to litter the floor. Tiny fragments like needles colour the surface and a fine dust appears at the moment of impact—pulverised fired clay that clouds against the wall and forms dust on the skirting board. I continue until there is one plate left, hesitate and throw it. (Do I leave it on the table or return this to the pile?–I cannot remember).

Now I take a broom and begin to sweep. I tidy the shards of crockery into a pile. I try to sweep into the corners and collect the splinters from the edges. I sweep the piles under the table. The noise annoys my ears, ringing and cracking in the empty space. A path through

the broken pieces is created where I sweep. I tread carefully but do not avoid the shards and I wince at the splinters in my feet. I notice a spot of blood above my knee.

Then, once the floor is clear and the pile neatly defined by the table edges, I put down the broom and drop to my knees. I pull myself under the table on top of the broken fragments. Sharp edges cut into me. I pull myself forward on elbows and knees. I lie under the table with my arms and legs extended. I adopt the dimensions of the table. I stop and rest there (how long?).

Eventually I pull myself out. I stand at the table. I breathe. I go to my clothes, dress and exit. The audience becomes animated and some approach the table for a closer look.

Biting the Plate

Table. (White table cloth). Two chairs. A plate-like circle of reddish-brown unfired 'green clay'.

Dressed in black clothes with bare feet I return to the table and put down an unfired clay plate. Underneath the table are the swept-up shards of broken pottery. I tell the audience that someone can join me at the table, (they do and at some point, a different person joins me). I sit. I breathe. I look at the form of a dinner plate in raw, damp clay.

I lift the clay plate carefully to my face. I can smell earthiness. I can feel cold dampness as it nears my top lip. I pause for a moment, considering the action ahead, holding the plate in my two hands, fingers spread. Holding the plate flat (as if to drink from it) I take a bite from the edge. Despite the smooth appearance the clay is gritty. The grit abrades my teeth. The gob of clay is sticky, blocking my tongue against the roof of my mouth. I take another bite. My teeth mark the clay but it also gives way a little under the pressure of my mouth so that the trace in the plate is more of a cracking than a clear 'bite'. My body is trying to produce saliva to counter the drying effect of the clay as it soaks up the moisture in my mouth. The taste is not unpleasant, a little sour perhaps but it is this desiccating absorbing effect that is objectionable. The clay clings to my teeth and I find myself sucking on the lump that leads to it slipping towards the back of my throat. I focus on suppressing the urge to gag. I take another bite. Now my mouth is full. I am muted. I move my tongue around to try to form the clay in my mouth into a manageable bolus. I realise that some of it must be slipping down my throat. I think about the toxicity of clay full of metals and minerals. I manoeuvre the gob of clay to spit it out onto the plate. I spew out the clay, pursing my lips to spit it out. The gob rests on the bitten plate, or table surface—a blob of nothing.

I look forward momentarily and catch the eye of the spectator seated at the table with me. She holds my gaze for a moment until I look away to the plate.

I repeat, lowering my face to the plate in my hands and running my tongue across the rim – the lip. A slick slip of clay forms where I lick. My tongue is not rough enough to graze the clay but I think that it must be doing so on a micro level. I think about the roughness of my tongue, pitted and landscaped. I think about the clay adhering itself to the buds of my tongue. I have the sensation of saliva flooding my mouth again, but this time I let the clay create a slip in mouth that dribbles on-my lips and onto my chin. As I lick, I begin to erode the edges of the plate. The lip of the plate starts to fold in on itself and the form of the edge is lost. I can see that the saliva is lightening the clays colour. I wonder if this lightness will last and how permanent marks of the tongue and teeth are being traced into the clay. I take another bite. The grit of the clay catches between my teeth and grazes on my lips. Clay-slip drips from my lips onto my knees. Continuing, I turn the plate in my hands to expose new aspects

of the surface to my mouth. As the clay is wetted it becomes soft and crumbly and I realise that cracks are forming where the edges are destroyed and the integrity of the disc is undermined. I stop and look at my work and notice the difference between the rounded edges created by my mouth and the sharpness of cracks. I continue to bite, suck and chew, forming gobs of clay against the palate and teeth. I push out the blobs onto the table. I repeat until all the plate has been taken in and spat out.

I pause for a moment, breath. I stand and leave the table. The audience begins to chatter, some leave whilst others approach the table for a closer look.

Chapter Four: Considering the table

Chapter introduction

This chapter traces how I approached the initial research questions explored in my performance *Seven Tables* (described in Chapter Three): what strategies can be employed to evoke an uncanny condition in performance; why is the appearance of everyday objects especially provocative of the uncanny; what does the interaction of the female body and inanimate objects do to create an especially uncanny condition, and why? In essence I am referring to two notions of the uncanny–the first being one that everyone can feel in the anxiety caused when expectations of normality are challenged and secondly to specific discomfort aroused in relation to the disruption of patriarchal logocentrism. It could be generally argued that any performance work might initiate both aspects of the uncanny. My findings assert that the collision of the female body with emblematic objects of the home is particularly disruptive of the binaries between homely/unhomely, familiar/familiar, etc. which challenge patriarchal hegemony for the reasons set out in Chapter One. However, the uncanny result of resisting such binaries is hard to pin down and important to bear in mind as I try to describe a gap that will always escape me. Perhaps for this reason, the following chapters involve their own repetitions and reiterations of ideas.

I primarily apply the Freudian uncanny concept of ‘repetition’ to my research performance, also working with aspects of ‘stillness’ and ‘formlessness’ which are further investigated in my subsequent performances. My intention is to establish what might both represent and be the antithesis to the homely conditions that my research practice might ‘rub against’. I apply the notion of deconstruction (introduced in Chapter One) to contextualise the introduction of immediate and ‘damaging’ actions in the performance. I am not proposing a ‘deconstruction method’ but rather a framework—much like that of the uncanny—that offers explanation for my compositional decisions. I use headings in the forthcoming chapters to indicate the dramaturgical unfolding of my work and the connection to qualities or conditions of the uncanny emerging through my research process. I begin this chapter with a reflection on the history of the table in order to establish the gendered connections made between this furniture and the concept of the home and expose some of the binaries that demarcate the home(ly), in order to make the case for the subjects and actions in my deconstructive composition. I will then unpack why I have used tables and what implications emerge from working with them as a subject of my research.

A history to be disrupted (tables)

The association of home and women is enduring. My thesis is not a comprehensive historic research of domestic objects, but looking into the history of the home and specifically the socio political and economic relationship of women to tables and crockery (as makers, consumers, users), substantiates some of the inclinations I have in responding to specific materials in my performances. These histories also create a context for my reflection on who and how I am in a relationship to 'table' in a way that is governed by gender, class and age, on how the table has become a cultural and social 'institution'. My historical understanding is further informed by Ahmed's writing on the table and the implications for and individual's identity in the political manoeuvring of familiar and social structures around the table (Ahmed 2006 and 2014a).

The table is a far more ambiguous and uncannier signifier of the domestic than first expected. Whilst we might initially consider the dining table as a component of a feminine domestic architecture it demarcates a peculiar masculine place in the home. 'Table' is synonymous with both or either domestic order or the communal consensus of work, politics or social space. The architecture of the table in social space determines the number, type and hierarchy of the community who use it – as we see in the familiar conventions of the wedding breakfast, committee meeting, café or classroom. The prototypical table made up of a top surface and supporting legs reoccurs in our contemporary world as a place to put things, to eat or work at.[38] The English verb 'table' signifies a coming together, an agenda, order and agreement. Tables are the sites for conventions (in both senses of the word) providing for and prompting mutually agreed behaviours that in the extreme can become the rules of etiquette or political decorum that form the basis of social control. According to cultural historians such as Anthony Buxton[39] the table seems to have evolved as a piece of familiar furniture through a number of historic functions and designs, coming into being as a raised surface for the protection of objects by the ancient Egyptians or Greeks, or as a surface to support the process of writing and drawing by the early Chinese (Evarts, 2019). Architectural historian Clive Knights

[38] The etymological word 'table' is derived from the Latin *tabula* to mean 'board or flat top piece' (Lexico, 2020).

[39] For a fuller discussion see Anthony Buxton's 'Commensality & Conviviality–Table Furniture'. (Buxton, 2015 pp.148–151).

describes a middle-class Roman dining space or triclinium as a table with low chairs located in the family dwelling close to the master's bedroom, 'Associated with the whole ceremony of feasting and receiving guests, the triclinium was where the master of the house showed who he was and what he was' (Ariès and Duby 1987, p.ix).

This history signifies the place 'at the table' as a peculiarly masculine precedent within a familial context, the suggestion being that the dining space, as defined by this specific furniture, is the place in the private home which allows for strangers, guests to enter a transient space that welcomes others in whilst at the same time keeping them aside from the more private spaces of kitchen or bedroom. These findings suggest an apparently uncanny disruption occurring as the table becomes an unhomely, public site embedded within the homely private house. Literary historian Cynthia Wall suggests in her essay 'Gendering Rooms: Domestic Architecture and Literary Arts' that the notion of the dining room evolved in late eighteenth century middle-class English housing (Wall 1993, pp.330–335). The dining room became a space for masculine political discourse whilst the drawing room was the room to which women 'withdrew'[40]. Up until this point, save for the most formal private house, there had rarely been a separate dining room for ordinary people. Dining had taken place in a communal kitchen/cooking area or in a combined

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[40] 'In London (circa 1890s), when the hostess rose from the table, only her female guests would follow her to the drawing room. The men stayed at the table, drinking and smoking, before eventually joining the women for coffee' (Rich 2011, p. 109).

However, the politics of the 'withdrawn' feminine discourse should not be undermined here. Jane Austen's 18th century novels depict a separation of masculine and feminine interior space that was complete and explicit, and 'ideologically justified'. Her heroines 'await the gentlemen in the drawing-room … But those drawing-room scenes tend to obscure the more subtly activity on their perimeters: opinions are formed, prejudices confirmed and dramatic twists enacted in the more ambiguous spaces of stairs, vestibules, doorways, windows, and outside the houses altogether– quietly pressing against the boundaries of the drawing-room as the sphere for feminine activity' (Wall in Bloom 2009, p. 103).

fireside/living room setting as shared spaces of entertainment by men and women. Tables could be set up for larger communal eating and celebrations.[41]

The overall interior of the nineteenth century house is described by art historian Juliet Kinchin as increasingly being a 'feminine' space (in contrast to a masculine external world), the codification of the interior spaces through details of décor, function and content, saw a contrasting masculinity appeared in the specifically 'outward facing' dining room (Kinchin 1996, p.13). Behaviour of and in these gendered domestic spaces echoed the rigid social etiquette and fashion of the day. In an action that remembers the hunt, the male head of the household carved the meat from the top of the table.[42] In more ordinary[43] nineteenth-century households family dining might also be a highly valued daily occurrence but was more likely to take place at a shared kitchen/ living room table where male or female heads of the household presided over ritual and celebration meals. It is relevant to note that meal preparation for poorest families might take place outside of the dwelling by communal and public city bake houses, street vendors and the like, eaten more opportunistically. I speculate that the table for the poor was more likely to be a work place

[41] I recall Pieter Bruegel's 1567 depiction of *The Peasant Wedding* that shows a coming together of a large group of ordinary people around an extended table made up of what might be barn doors on trestles. (Kunst Historisches Museum Wein, no date).

[42] In 'Designing the Dinner Party, Advice on Dining and Decor in London and Paris, 1860–1914' (2003) historian Rachel Rich records how British and French middle-class dining rooms separated the feminine process of food preparation from the masculine presentation of the meal in a relationship perhaps not unlike the modern masculinity of the barbeque perhaps – *man, fire, meat*.

[43] I use this term 'ordinary' on the advice of author Rachel Rich who suggested the difficulty of class based social historic writing as overlooking what 'ordinary people' do who are not at the extremes of social classes, but who experience a more every day, pragmatic 'mix' of the domestic. The historic term 'middle class' described by authors cited above tends to refer to the new bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century. As a non-historian I use the term in a rather vague 21st century colloquial sense to mean 'not the working class or aristocracy'—a lived 'aspirational' situation perhaps in the condition of the lower middle/upper working-class white collar or public sector worker whose income enables them to be homeowners (or rather, mortgage debtors). (Personal discussion 17th Oct 2016).

than a dining place, suggesting perhaps an inherent uncanniness associated not only with the functionality of the object but of who uses it (be that philosopher or piece worker).

Technological advances in kitchen appliances that supported further emancipation of women throughout the twentieth century seem to be tempered by the persistent image of the home maker serving the table rather than sitting at the head of it. British housing of the 1930s, whilst to some degree embracing modernist trends against space defined by function, persisted in differentiating the dining room from other spaces in the home (Historic England, 2017). The dining table since the 1950s has come to symbolize the importance of the happy nuclear family with the image of patriarchal family dining becoming a staple for media-advertising (Griffin, 2016, para 6).[44]

I am not suggesting that my own experiences of the dining room table include such elevated bourgeois design but I recognise a diluted version of the habits of the historic dining room in the division of space in my childhood and present-day households—perpetuating the gendered divisions between kitchen area, dining and living spaces and the management of the dining table space in moments of family gathering which still tend towards the patriarchal.[45] I am suggesting that we might think of the table as an 'event' with the patriarchal/matriarchal governance of these actions coming and going according to time of day, day of the week, time of the year.

Ahmed also reminds us that the table is presented as a place or object associated with (masculine) reasoning and knowledge, stating that for the philosopher 'ideas' begin with

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[44] The 1980s Oxo campaign has actor Lynda Bellingham serving food to the husband reading the paper at the table. The 1990s McCain 'chips or daddy' campaign depicts mum preparing the food and daddy 'sneaking in' at the last minute to steal a chip. In the Farm Foods advert circa 2010 the actor Ricky Tomlinson recalls his *Royal Family* character by inviting a family of look-alike kids with beards to a fish supper made by an invisible/off-screen mum and the invitation "OK tuck in" : Bee, J. (2009); (Casey 2010); Bennet, S. (2011).

Note that the Advertising Standards Authority introduced new legislation in 2019 to curb gender stereotyping in advertising (Advertising Standards Authority, 2019).

[45] I am thinking in particular here of the extended family Christmas meal, or the ritual of Sunday dinner but I am aware of some matriarchal traditions in non-western or non-Christian family situations such as the woman's role at a Jewish Shabbbat.

the writing table and, she continues (in relation to Edmund Husserl), that 'because the writing table is the object nearest the body of the philosopher it appears in (his) writing; … perhaps revealing something about the 'orientation' of phenomenology, or even of philosophy itself'(Ahmed, 2006, p. 3). The table becomes an ordering device, it 'enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, … to group them according to names that designate their similarities and differences' (Foucault, 2002 quoted by Ahmed 2006, p.181–182). Thus, suggesting that the table in itself is an instrument of identification implies that it might have the potential to order or 'mark' my identity. Because the table holds with both the feminine, (maternal expression of nurturing), and with the masculine (patriarchal familial structure and sense of gravitas and importance of 'thought') I propose it as an especially uncanny object to then conduct a practice-based research with. In my performances I seek to disrupt the table's ordered identity and effect the influence of this ordering on my own identity. I am suggesting that my tables are not places of orientation, but rather, are places of uncanny disorientation and disruption.

I have established a context for considering the table as an especially gendered object. I argue that the table as object and site is fluid, uncanny in seeming familiar and unfamiliar at once and confusing masculine/feminine binaries. I see the table as an uncanny place of repetition, a pivot around which familial habits revolve. The table is a liminal surface—whilst dividing and defining oppositional territories or arguments it also provides a clear space, offering potential for co-existence and flexible functionality. Furthermore, the table is a conspicuous object or place of the uncanny because it encapsulates and filters the duality of the *(un)heimlich* public and private.

I am now going to discuss how and why I worked with the table as a primary subject in *Seven Tables*. Through performing I seek to uncover the implications for the feminine identity by describing habitual and cyclical behaviours with and of the table. I am proposing that carrying out repetitive actions with the table problematises the table as a 'stable' component of the homely familiar, and by association the actions begin to destabilise what is understood of the woman carrying them out. By drawing on contradictory associations with table as the object of work/play/eating/meeting, etc. I hope to make strange what appear to be familiar subjects and in turn trouble expectations for a feminine homely. I will explain specific actions in greater detail to demonstrate how my dramaturgical decisions constitute a 'feminine un-canny' strategy.

Preliminary enquiry

My dramaturgy of uncanny tropes began in earlier research. *On the Table* (2016) consisted of my direct and simple behaviour of repeatedly walking in silence across my dining table.

Figure 1: On the Table. Research performance to camera. March 2016.

The impression of my (familiar to me) dining room; the exposure of this private space to a public eye; noticing my bare feet on the table cloth; moments of unbalance and the unexplained exit, work towards the research intention of disturbing the normalcy of my table and contributed an unfamiliarity in and of the home. The uncanny is apparent to me in body/table interaction and also in my ambivalent quietness. Furthermore, the foot on the table and repetitive behaviour might broker a fractured and abject sensibility which deserves further attention. These initial lines of enquiry are developed and refined as *Seven Tables*.

Analysis of Seven Tables

Placing the table and body

I begin *Seven Tables* by exploring and then confusing the physical relationship between my body and the table to ask if this interaction was a sufficient catalyst for the uncanny. In an exploration of the recognisable sculptural table shape I position myself alongside the object, using my arms and legs to ‘measure up’ to the table, drawing on a history of the object and it’s multiple functions, as well as disrupting ‘the familiarity of form’ and the ‘knowing’ of a table (and all its functional and political implications) through the

exploration of its lines (Ahmed, 2006, p. 82).[46] In doing this I try to challenge the familiarity of the table as object perhaps indicating a more 'thing-ly' table because its functional identity is being lost in the unfamiliar behaviours. In turn, the table also shapes my own body, revealing and challenging the 'muscle-memory' of body-with-table or the 'sedimentation' of histories of the repetitive (homely) bodily action (Butler, 1988, p. 524).

Figure 2: Dimensions of the body against the table. August 2019.

'To place' suggests belonging or accommodation. It is my aim therefore to not only 'place' and mis-place the tables but also to bring into question my own place (geographic and political) by re-placing (substituting) and re-placing (repeating). Bodily intimacy is invited by the lines of the table (Ahmed, 2006, p. 68) as I put my backside, arms, face on the table. Multiplying the tables into seven versions of the same thing increases the forceful presence of the table, (notionally as 'seven days in the week' and the repetitive domestic calendar). By placing myself at, under, around the table I experience the childlike thrill of being in the 'wrong place' or the physicality of my own body in describing the proportions and dimensions of the table and its functionality.

[46] Such a sculptural form was significantly explored by artist Rachel Whiteread, for example in *Untitled (Nine Tables)* (1998): a series of nine 'blocks' of resin which describe the negative space of a table. Whiteread comments: 'the first table I made in 1989 was to do with exchanging one's personal space with that of the table, the physicality of how you sit when you have a table in front of you, how your legs behave, etc.' (Whiteread, 2001, p.71). Her casting of negative space in multiple units not only references traditions in conceptual sculpture but, relevant to my research, recalls the dimensions of domesticity, the repetition of function and the relationship between the human body and object.

This dramaturgy of body/object intimacy I argue, further contributes to the removal of the object-specific identity of the table for a less certain table-thing. Grosz describes the inter-dependency of body and thing:

> The thing and the body are correlates: both are artificial or conventional, pragmatic conceptions, cutting, disconnections, that create a unity, continuity, and cohesion out of the plethora of interconnections that constitute the world. They mirror each other: the stability of one, the thing, is the guarantee of the stability and on-going existence or viability of the other, the body. The thing is 'made' for the body, made as manipulable for the body's needs. … The thing is the life of the body, and the body is that which unexpectedly occurs to things (Grosz, 2005, p. 132).

I hope to communicate the tension of this 'mirroring' inter-dependency, but rather than simply suggesting a 'unity' I argue that the co-stability exists within an undecidable unstable condition – if the stability of one ensures the stability of the other it would be reasonable to suggest that instability is similarly mutual. The body effects table and vice versa, harmonising and dividing to test the boundary between the two ways of being.

My research project is informed by works of other artists [47] and I am now going to discuss the similarities and differences in our explorations of the proximity of body and table, leading me to particularly to consider the uncanny condition of my female body on or under the table rather than at the table.

In the performance work *Table(land)* (1998) Simon Whitehead carries his kitchen table on his back for hours through the paths criss-crossing the Llanaelhaearn uplands, Wales (Lavery and Whitehead, 2012, pp. 111–119). Whitehead's work not only speaks of the ecology of place through the interrelationship between him and the surrounding landscape, (suggested by his representation of 'dwelling' as the table and alluding to cultural identity built around literal and symbolic dependence on a specific geology), but the decision to carry a kitchen table foregrounds an immediate sensitivity to the meaning held in that object of the home and all which is implied in the simple but challenging action of carrying

[47] Works cited in the thesis are by male and female artists. These works impact my research with, I argue, the potential to be read through the feminine un-canny frame because I think they act as 'everyday micro-utopias' or studies of the everyday (Reckitt 2013, p.136) and potentially address aspects of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002) – through theoretical or practical explorations of human relations and social context, how people operate in a social system. For a fully developed discussion on the representation of the utopia or dystopia in performance further study is needed.

it. He is physically and symbolically 'weighted down' by the table. It is a workman-like image, an act of Sisyphus in eternal labour. Whitehead's body is 'placed' and orientated in Ahmed's terms, by the ergonomics of the table. The image Whitehead produces is reminiscent of the migrant or pioneer, simultaneously the displaced and coloniser taking the emblem of 'home' into the public landscape. I believe he is 'home-less' *unheimlich*, less-than-home but more than 'wild'. Whitehead causes me to question the different kind of 'contract' that is described when the male body is in proximity with table, instead of the female (Ahmed 2006, p. 169). I agree with Deidre Heddon and Cathy Turner's comments regarding walking practice that:

> We do not want to assume that women's experience can automatically be mapped onto a concern with the domestic, or to make similarly essentialist assumptions about men's epic walking. However, … observations clearly reflect the ways in which personal experience … can inform perceptions of space and of its attendant degree of difficulty, complexity, risk and mystery (Heddon and Turner, 2010, p.16).

My table is I believe similarly a place of 'sedimentation' to Whitehead's—layers of identity accessed through repeated action but born out of a different conceptualisation of 'struggle'. Any physical 'oppression' of the table on my body is rotationally disrupted when I surmount the table and then turned around again as I slip under the table (see the repetition of this motif in *Placing, Carrying, Breaking*). My cyclical rather than linear structure (Whitehead's walking journey) aims to represent a banal, looping labour that is uncannily originated in the invisible 'stasis' of the home rather than locating visibly in the political and public landscape.

Turning tables

Tables are turned. I begin with the tables in a jumbled stack, as if perhaps, they had been used before – a work-in-progress to suggest pattern where there is none, drawing on Freud's suggestion that the uncanny can be seen in coincidence in numbers or the compulsion to repeat (Freud, 1919, pp. 144–145). This literal representation of 'turning tables' – shifting positions, swapping places, animating the tables is created to appear anthropomorphic for a moment, paralleling the uncanny anthropomorphism Freud saw in inanimate things (Freud, 1919, p. 140). Ahmed suggests, '[we] 'turn toward' objects, which appear in their perceptual 'thereness' as objects given to consciousness' (Ahmed 2006, p.25) so I argue that by 'paying attention' to the tables I bring a notional consciousness to them, much as Freud describes the child willing their toys to life by concentrating their gaze upon them (Freud, 1919, p. 141). I am suggesting that the animation of inanimate tables as they rotate and seem to tumble, recalls home as a place of

co-residence (people and things) where the multiple uses of the house result in an inherently unhomely state of flux and change. Historian Bart Verschaffel describes '[the house as] a place where things start wandering around or haphazardly mix without rules' (Verschaffel, 2012, p. 153) suggesting that the uncanny quality of the unhomely is already instigated through the interaction of people and objects. The table is so familiar as to be almost invisible in the way we 'memory map' our spaces (Ahmed 2006, p.7). If this is the case then the foregrounding of the table in my research is a likely contributor to a 'shift' or change in the understanding of the space by spectator and performer. The body and table are in 'dialogue' as I move under, over and around in a dramaturgy that alludes to the creation of a Freudian confusion of that which is (in)animate, that which is (un) familiar.

Figure 3: Repeating and rotating. August 2019.

The rotational and cyclical is explored in Japanese artist Seiji Shimoda's work *On the Table* (1990–onwards).[48] Shimoda's work furthers my assessment of the disorientating possibilities of table and body, but leads me again to question the impact of the male body in this relationship instead of my own. Shimoda manoeuvres his naked body around and under the wooden table. He rolls, shoulder-stands, summersaults in slow motion, 'placed' and orientated by the ergonomics of the table, drawing attention to the body's strength and weaknesses of the now aging body. Exposed on the table, Shimoda can been seen to stretch and strain to hold his mass in sudden movement or slow adjustments around the table for some twenty-five minutes.

[48] I saw Shimoda's performance *On the Table* 1995: ROOT 95 (Running Out Of Time) Festival of Contemporary Live and Time-Based Art, Hull: Civil Liberties Civic Pride, Hull 4th–29th Oct 1995 and I am reviewing this work (and others cited in my thesis) through various still and video documentation.

I interpret Shimoda's labour as one 'fixed' to the table and argue that because the action does not originate in a work-a-day domestic context it maintains a masculine autonomy of body and table. What I do read as a similarity to my own intentions is the uncanny 'suspension of time' or activity as if re-performed 'ad infinitum', adding to the boundary-less temporality that I connect to the nature of domestic labour. Shimoda's work demonstrates to me the potential of physical exploration to disorientate the coherence of the home(ly) (Ahmed, 2006, p. 170) and a mutability and disturbance of the normalcy of the table from his nakedness. However, instead of being 'fixed' to and of the table, my performance research examines the singularity of the table with the introduction of multiple tables and the interaction of other material objects, in order to demonstrate the unspecified and multiple relationships that might be had with the table so as to undermine the certainty of the domestic.

In considering the shifting and boundaryless nature of the uncanny and applying this to the home I see my 'getting down from' as well as 'onto 'the table as notable because I argue the action addresses the desire to 'unfix' or disrupt, marking the moment when the 'boundary' of the table is breached. In discussing 'un-fixed-ness' I refer here to a work by Austrian artist Valie Export.[49] She is explicit in performing the act of becoming un-fixed in the work *ASEMIE, Die Unfähigkeit sich durch Mienenspeil ausdrüker zu können* (1973). Export spreads a cloth on the table; ties a dead bird to the table; stands on the table and pours hot wax over her hands, feet and the bird. Export crouches above the bird and cuts herself free from the wax with a knife (Bourgeois, 2003, p. 55). To me this motif not only offers a short hand for that which is domestic and locates the table as a literal and figurative platform for body action, but I suggest that the action produces the immediate disruption of language because it interrupts this architecture of communication, the place for discussion. I seek to similarly occupy the table but not be weighed down by it or fixed to it. I seek to interrupt its political function and shift the status of the body. In *Seven Tables* I am looking to articulate the body and table into a different, unfamiliar condition, complicated further by the presence of the other familiar objects: 'This body with this table

[49] I am referring to the artist as 'Valie Export'. She changed her name from Waltraud Hollinger to VALIE EXPORT (often seen in all upper case) as a declaration that she would counter the male-dominated Viennese art world (artnet, 2020). The full title of the work *ASEMIE* (SEMIA or the inability to express oneself through facial expression) makes direct reference to a pathological condition–the inability to either make any signs of communication, or inability to receive or understand such signs (Mueller, 1994, p. 44).

is a different body than it would be without it. And, the table is a different table when it is with me than it would be without me' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 54), If Export and I are on the table, we not at the table and therefore not engaged in consensual political dialogue. Nor are we the same 'I' or 'object' (table). By standing on then getting down from the table I argue that the discursive location of communication has been disrupted. I intend (and I make an assumption about Export's intention here) to re-imagine the interrelationship between feminine body and table in order to evoke an uncanny condition and draw the notion of political dialogue into question. Export's action 'ruptures the Freudian framework in so far as it is directed towards a greater questioning of women's predicament in patriarchal society' (Mueller, 1994, p. 55). I want to highlight 'rupture' as an opening out, expressed in the private as well as the public sphere through the use seemingly familiar objects moved into a condition of instability. Whilst the same might be said of Shimoda and Whitehead, as masculine bodies I argue that their occupation of the political table remains familiar and 'coherent' regardless of however unusual their performance actions may be. This coherent masculinity (Jones, 1998, p. 453) is articulated in relation to the table as an emblem for those (people or institutions) which uphold their/his identity, by which I mean and affirmation of identity as a result of their partial dependence (or not) on the feminine other's 'incoherent' identity. It is this 'incoherence' that I am manipulating in my exploration of the 'feminine un-canny'. The presence of the female body as holding greater agency for the uncanny cannot be ignored but I seek to engage in and manipulate the paradox of being both the signifier of the familiar/home/womb and personification of 'fear and dread' by disrupting my relationship to the table.

Having established the table(s) as a subject, site and catalyst for a 'feminine un-canny' strategy I am now going to offer an analysis of some of the details in *Seven Tables*, and extrapolate initial concerns with uncanny tropes of repetition to identify where the concepts of the inanimate/animate and formless emerge in my research, signposting how these qualities move me to focus in more detail on aspects of the abject and formless in subsequent performances.

Repeat re-set

I emulate domestic work through the repeated laying of a tablecloth. This repetition is intended to evoke Freudian themes of déjà vu whilst creating a visual and physical rhythm

as paced, dramaturgical device. I reflect on the experience of repetition in daily life[50] and how doubling returns a childlike state of delight and suspicion of simultaneous familiarity and strange newness.

Figure 4: Laying the table. (Rehearsal). August 2019.

I want to create an unconscious and indirect sense of domestic work without an obvious narrative. This is a kind of 're-setting'—a 'Groundhog Day' moment in the performance structure[51]. At times I appear disorientated between the tables, moving backwards, causing me to 'lose where I am' and become disorientated, breathless. Attention to all seven tables is demanding, the action of 'running backwards' furthers my own real disorientation and

[50] Artist and director Tim Etchells describes the experience of repeatedly hearing a fire alarm test, on the same day, at the same time at a public swimming pool. He describes being both reassured and disturbed by the familiarity of the alarm that signifies 'emergency' where there is none. Etchells then reflects on the uncanny sensation of hearing the same radio song, in the same café for consecutive days (Etchells, February 2008). Both incidents draw on what Freud describes as 'primitive' belief that coincidence is something uncannily more than just that. The doubling and repetition we experience in everyday life seems to take on extraordinary meaning, inserted into the banality of the everyday.

[51] Reference to the film *Groundhog Day* (1993), where a cynical TV man frustratingly relives the same day over and over, until he sees a way to take advantage of the situation. The title has become a familiar metaphor for situations in which a series of unwelcome or tedious events appear to be recurring in exactly the same way ('Groundhog Day', 2019).

becomes a metaphor for time-repeating.[52] Moreover, an unexpected result of the action is that something of my appearance solicits an uncanny theriomorphism, the running action adds to my sense of uncanniness—my swinging ponytail hair and trotting-like gait. Animal characteristics have the potential to confuse the stability of the human. To be horse-like is to be between the wild and the domesticated, tame perhaps, and Freud includes the categorisation of animals in his definitions of the Heimlich (Freud 1919, p.126). Despite this not being an intention of my research, for me, this effect serves to further confuse my identity. Whilst there is not scope for extended research of the human/animal in this thesis, the observation invites me to consider this element of my performance and how I might address 'the animal' in my future work.

Figure 5: Running backwards. August 2019.

Dancing with tables

Ahmed asks 'So what happens when the table dances?' (Ahmed, 2006, p.164) and uses Karl Marx's explanation of 'commodity' to consider what happens when the normative, functional history of an object is disturbed.[53] By dancing with tables I am attempting to

[52] In one iteration of the work I lost count of how many tables I visit—perhaps I performed one more than once and missed out another.

[53] Marx visualises the table 'dancing' as an uncanny expression of the falsity of a commodity having a life of its own: 'a commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a use-value, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it satisfies human needs, or that it first takes on these properties as the product of human labour. It is absolutely clear that, by his activity, man

invert the relationship between person and object, inviting the object to have a life of its own and communicate the absence of real human-to-human communication and 'compulsion to repeat' (Royle, 2003, p. 90).[54]

Figure 6: Dancing with the table. April 2017. Photo: Richard Kenworthy.

I have demonstrated how uncanny repetition (in the multiple of the tables and the repeated actions) perpetuates and re-describes the interdependency of my table and body. In doing so the performance demonstrates my interest in a repeated 'playing' between body and object so as to bring into question the boundaries shared in spatial proximity and co-operation. The opening gesture of crawling through and leaning over the table legs, etc. serves to position my body in close but unusual proximity to the tables, with the intention of disturbing the normative, horizontal relationship between person and furniture, in an

changes the forms of the materials of nature in such a way as to make them useful to him. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless, the table continues to be wood, an ordinary sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will' (Marx, *Capital* 1818-1883, p.42).

[54] For a discussion on the relationship between the uncanny and dance as a deathly expression see Steven Bruhm's essay 'Only the Dead can Dance: Choreography, Ballet, Gothic' (no date).

immediate expression of Freudian uncanny concerns—an 'upturning' of the world which can throw my body (literally) out of balance.

I will continue with a discussion of other material actions in the work and highlight their significance in prompting further research questions and scrutiny in my subsequent performances before drawing my conclusions for this chapter.

Laying the cloth

Figure 7: Unfurling the cloth. (Rehearsal). August 2019.

In the layering composition of my work I want the table cloth to contribute to the building of the feminine-uncanny intention and affect. The table operates as the invisible surface for writing, dining, debating, but 'disappear[s] from view' when covered in cloth, or work stuff, or papers (Ahmed, 2006, p. 168). I decide that the cloth both conceals and 'draws attention to' that which is underneath. The draping conceals and describes form. The action of unfurling and smoothing the white cloth momentarily conceals my body, like a child dressed up as a ghost. For a moment the inanimate object affects the reading of my body. In a split second the flapping cloth momentarily described what cannot be seen – the air. The action distinguishes what is familiar and what is not, something visible and something underneath – veiled things: old furniture, shrouds or female faces.

I connect the 'folds' of fabric that 'open out' to essentialist historical association with women and textiles.[55] The 'opened out' creates a flattened and actively 'non-phallic' matrixial surface (Ettinger, 1993) that can be 'unfurled' or 'folds in' and collapses the stability of surface. In the case of Bobby Baker's 1988 *Drawing On A Mother's*

[55] For a critique of the relationship between women and textiles, in relation to contemporary art practice see on the Parker 1996 and Elinor, Richardson et al. 1987.

Experience Baker lays out a cloth 'as table' and later wraps herself in the cloth (Barrett and Baker 2007, pp.149–157). I see Baker's action as upsetting the certainty of the surface and as she locates herself in the collapsed identity of the domestic by 'cloaking' herself with the now soiled cloth, apparatus of concealment and comfort perhaps. Similarly, my work is an attempt to 'upset' the surface so that the table becomes something 'underneath' and hidden. The covering conceals what is 'lost' whilst 'preserving' it until it is returned to.

Proximity and edges

Figure 8: Doubled: exploring surface with the face. Leeds August 2019.

Poured water I argue, also conceals and describes surface, transgressing the edges to that surface, negating the borders of the table:

> The object does not 'stand apart'; it is felt 'by' the skin and even 'on' the skin. In other words, we perceive the object as an object, a something that "has' integrity, and is 'in' space, only by haunting that very space; that is, by co-habiting space such that the boundary between the co-habitants of space does not hold' (Ahmed 2006, p. 54).

Applying Ahmed's assessment to my research illustrates the possibility for my action with water to trouble the 'integrity' of the table and all it has come to represent. The boundary of the table ceases to hold or differentiate between the homely/unhomely. And so I run my face, my mouth across the surface-tension of water on the table in an exploration of surface 'tension'. I explore the surface of the table, feeling the roughness of wood and smelling the wet timber as I do so. 'The edges of the world disappear as you zoom in' (Ahmed 2006, p.157). I experience a sense of proximity not available to the spectator. I consider the play between closeness and distance which Freud expresses in his interpretation of the function of the spyglass and telescope on the Hoffman story: the eyeglass (or proximity) makes the

world less certain, not more (Freud 1919, pp. 138–139). In performing I want to explore and 'test' the integrity of the table and make the surface less certain, testing my closeness to it. In doing so, I uncover a loosening of the boundary between table and water, water and body. The surface-tension is broken by my presence causing water to flow onto the floor with more energy so that water dribbles over the now boundary-less edges of the table This breaking of the boundary between co-existing subjects addresses my research

Figure 9: Table, woman, radio, jug, water over flowing. November 2016.

questions concerning the proximity of the female body and material object of the home, because the action draws attention to the fluidity of this boundary. Like the table cloth, the water describes the table form whilst at the same time concealing it so that for a moment the table is unfamiliar, its identity modified by the addition of an adverb: wet-table. 'In water everything is 'dissolved', every 'form' is broken up, everything that has happened ceases to exist; nothing that was before remains after immersion in water, not an outline, not a 'sign' not an 'event'' (Douglas, 1966, p. 199). My literal and figurative vision of the table is one without outline, but looking up again further disorientates me, for me as I experience a 'switch' of dimensions, back into the room again (Ahmed, 2006, p. 158).

The extended table

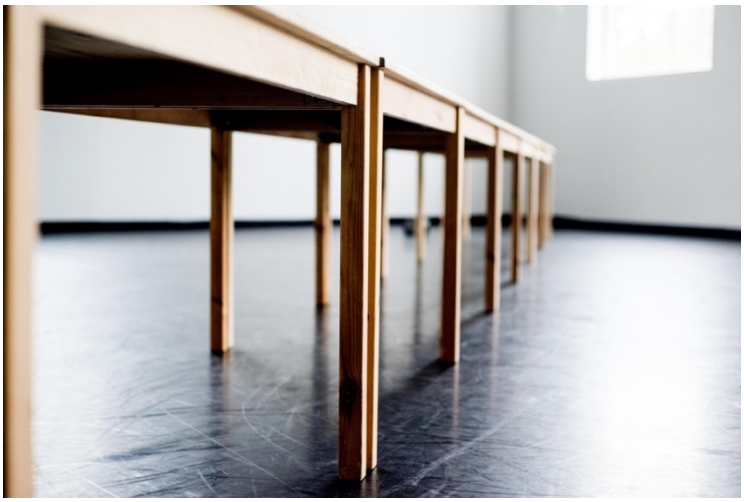

Figure 10: Extended table. August 2019.

For the concluding part of *Seven Tables* I forcefully push the tables together to form one extended surface which dissected across the diagonal of the room, pointing to the doorway and the space beyond the limits of the (un)homely performance studio. I am making the repetition of seven into one as I to bring everything together to signpost a dramaturgical development, perhaps the imminence of an event. The extended table retains something of its domestic origins whilst looking more like a boardroom table, a political (masculine) space. I suggest this is because the long table describes a space of coming together which is to be subsequently disrupted by soiling the table with dirt.

Figure 11: Scattering dirt. August 2019.

Feet on the table

By performing bare footed on the table I begin to explore a pollution taboo which challenges the form of the homely cleanliness:

> pollution taboos – rules in society that guard against the unclassifiable, the impure and the hybrid – have a physical expression. This emerges from an image of social well-being as synonymous with clearly delineated physical form, a form which is habitually counterpoised against a sea of potentially threatening and polluting formlessness (Shonfield 1988, p. 356).

With this in mind I reflect that bare feet are the feet of uncanny identities: beggars, the sick and penitent, or the carefree, childlike or animal – identities which I postulate are rarely invited to the table. 'Feet on the table' is a social faux pas or taboo – impolite, objectively dirty and an expression of masculine power (Park, et al., 2013).

Figure 12: (Detail) toe, heel. April 2017. Photo: Richard Kenworthy.

Then again, Bataille and others draw upon Freud's identification of the foot as a fetish body part (standing in for the phallus) and marking the foot (female or male) as abstracted from the whole body to be idolised as 'fragments' that are sexually charged, 'the 'most uncanny' of body parts, a subject of phobia and attraction (Chow 2006).[56] What is surprising in my research enquiry is the idea that I might be attempting to create 'a double impression of exceptional agility and of confident composure' (Mayer, 2012, p. 560) in the rise of my heel and in doing so confuse my 'feminine' quality with a more animal or less

[56] For a full discussion of Bataille's concerns with transgression, desire and repulsion – 'inter-repulsion' see Olivier Chows' 2006 'Idols/ Ordures: Inter-repulsion in Documents 'big toes'.

human locomotion?[57] I orchestrated the potentially fetishized feminine foot to be displayed at eye-level on the table, perhaps contributing to the uncanny slippage towards a female body disconnected from the whole/desirable/homely female. The status of my body and my identity is further confused when I crawl through dirt on the table.

Tainting the surface

Any sense of conviviality or stability is further broken by scattered dirt on the table.[58] I want a physical expression of the idea that 'something that should have remained hidden [absent] and has come into the open [has returned]' (Freud, 1919, p. 148) I climb onto the table and crawl on my hands and knees through the dirt, before standing and leaving the table and the room.

Figure 13: Crawling through dirt. April 2017. Photo: Richard Kenworthy.

Analysis of my dramaturgy is further informed by my reading of Export's *ASEMIE* (discussed above) and Stuart Brisley's *10 Days* (1973). Consideration of Brisley's work furthers the scrutiny of my own interruption to the integrity of the table surface as a gesture

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[57] I saw the plaque of Gradiva in the hallway of the Freud Museum, London, uncanny because of the uncertainty of her living or inanimate identity (Mayer 2012). The novel *Gradiva* by Wilhem Jensen (1902) is about a young archaeologist who, obsessed with Gradiva's particular gait, dreams that the image of the walking woman comes to life only to be buried in the ashes of a volcanic eruption. The story is the subject of Freud's 1902 study 'Delusion and Dream in Jensen's Gradiva' (*Der Wahn und die Träume im W. Jensen's Gradiva*) (Freud Museum London, 2018).

[58] The dirt is made up of the bits of hair, ashes, dust (itself made up of skin, plaster, outside dirt) which were swept up from the floor and hearth in my home and saved over weeks.

to inform a 'feminine un-canny' condition. Brisley occupies a gallery space for ten days,[59] each day offering an uneaten meal to a gallery visitor. Brisley fasts at the head of a long table whilst the food that is notionally prepared for him is served at the table set with white cloth, cutlery and crockery. The gallery visitor is able to eat or not eat the meal offered. The remaining detritus of the meal is left to accumulate and decay in the place setting. At the end of the ten-day process Brisley removes his clothes and stands on the table of rotting food and dirty plates. He crawls through the mess of left overs before exiting the room.

Aspects of this work have directly, albeit unconsciously, informed my own decision to walk/crawl along the table top. I concentrate my discussion on this action rather than the significance of fasting, which, whilst hugely important to Brisley's work, is not a focus of my own research. *10 Days* has the political intention to discuss aspects of consumerism and the literal and metaphoric place at the table.[60] The table shapes the action in the space, marking the status of the artist and invited participants. In the long periods of absence of any other person the table itself stands in for the presence of those with whom the artist is in dialogue. Crucially, Brisley further disturbs the order of this 'still life' by crawling naked across the table.

By crawling I intend to damage anything remaining of a wholesome relationship to table, as domestic furniture or administrative tool. I want to conceptualise an abject relationship between body and surface, expressed in the decaying matter—decaying matter that is close to/of the body, of the home but no longer wholesome or homely—because I am exploring the implications of the boundarylessness of the (un)homely and the actualisation of 'outside' encroaching on 'inside'. In doing so through the act of performance, I am examining how the abjection functions as a contributor to the uncanny in Chapter Five. Using dirt on the table attempts to both separate and distinguish surface like a covering of

[59] The performance took place in Berlin and London, December 1973. Filmmaker Ken McMullen later interpreted the live work: *Stuart Brisley–10 Days/5th Year Anniversary* (1978) with Brisley and Manfred Blob, Acme Gallery, London (Brisley 1984).

[60] Brisley made only passing reference to the actual table in his interviews with Ken McMullen (also with Roberts 1996; and Kaye 1996) although I trust that the specific material qualities of the table were brought about by the artist.

dust, snow or indeed a dust sheet. Dirt has the potential to disguise, shroud the individual form under it, describing instead an undulating surface that makes any familiar shape unfamiliar and edgeless. In *Seven Tables* the dirt from the house introduces the abject because dirt overcomes the spatial partitioning or 'zoning' of clean and dirty, public and private, wild and domestic. My dirt is 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966) because it is the stuff that has rubbed off or broken away from the whole 'place' (be that a body or a food stuff or a building material). The displaced, formless and 'uncontrollable' nature of this dirt is what is disturbing, rather than the 'dirtiness' per se. The unpredictable and 'fluid' nature of this matter troubles the homely—infiltrating, 'getting everywhere' and pollute the homely condition established by my repeated returning to the table.

Figure 14: Lifting body from the surface. August 2019.

The vacuum cleaner dirt is a manifestation of the no longer 'assimilated' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1) because it can no longer be returned to/as the whole despite remaining close, always present (on/in the body or in the home). Floor sweepings are deemed to be 'objectional' 'contaminates' of the home and represent 'a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me [body/homely] as radically separate, loathsome' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Without realising, I am bringing 'back' the stuff which had been 'forgotten' and 'separated' from the homely. The dirt returns to 'contaminate' me/the body/the homely. For Kristeva, 'excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened

by its outside, life by death' (Kristeva, 1980, p. 71). By scattering and crawling the dirt on the table I want to activate an immediate disturbance of the 'stability' of the table as subject, upsetting its normatively clear and clean surface. Additionally, crawling imprints the dirt on my body making my body and clothing 'filth' and filthy. Moreover, I argue the dirt remarks my body as transgressive because it is dirt of my body (hair, skin, and so forth). An unanticipated reaction to the action was my sense of being 'reduced'—lowered in social status perhaps, but also 'distilled', remarked with the 'essence' of what I might be —felt in the moment of performing, in smelling the sweat, ash, and dust.

Chapter conclusion

I conclude that all of these unfixed layers of association and resistance to fixing meaning contribute to furthering the uncanny nature of my work. *Seven Tables* successfully establishes a 'feminine un-canny' approach through dramaturgical decisions with the body and objects. My analysis has focused in particular on the actions of placing and 'dancing' with the tables which trouble the human/inhuman relationship; working with cloth and water in a way to both describe and transgress surface and boundaries; and performing in dirt as a way to drive an abject relationship between body and table so as to rupture any sense of the homely and mark, a place of no return. I have examined my dramaturgical decisions based upon the Freudian concerns with repetition, signposting how this work leads me to further investigation of the inanimate and formless as contributing to an uncanny quality in my work. Through performance I draw attention to the preconception of the table as a constant, stable against a body which is malleable and fallible. I argue that the performative interaction of body and table serves to destabilise and make uncanny this table/body relationship. Clarity of form is the antithesis to the formlessness which emerges in/as the uncanny. The table is a metaphor for that which draws us back, the home to which we return and are returned to. Likewise, re-locating the body draws attention to the 'underside' and question what is beneath/ beyond that which is familiar and seemingly understood. I have located these modes of being within the framework of the domestic, articulated through the performance of my female body with material objects of the home.

Having made the case for the table as subject and site of the 'feminine un-canny' I will now discuss the performance works *Placing, Carrying, Breaking* and *Biting the Plate*, where concerns with stillness, repetition and formless are further developed through an investigation of materiality, surface and the abjectification of the body.

Chapter Five: Considering the plate

Chapter introduction

In this chapter I develop my arguments through performative exploration with plates and the creation of the two performances: Part One - *Placing, Carrying, Breaking* and Part Two - *Biting the Plate*. (The performances are described in Chapter Three). I extend my initial concerns with uncanny tropes (repetition, stillness, formlessness) to further question the connection between the uncanny and the abject. I am doing this to address the implications of my dramaturgical decisions to carry, place, smash and bite and to ask how as a 'feminine un-canny' strategy, these performances evoke the uncanny. From these performances I deduce that the 'feminine un-canny' is allied to an uncanny that involves the dramaturgy of defamiliarisation – of presenting everyday things (objects, actions) in an unfamiliar or strange way, in order to enhance perception of the familiar. However, I argue that the 'feminine un-canny' goes further to elicit discomfort or anxiety, firstly–because expectations of the normative are challenged through especially abject or formless exploration, and secondly that the resulting feeling of uncanniness comes from the uneasiness aroused when the stability of hegemonic norms is interrupted. My subheadings indicate the dramaturgical decisions and conceptual findings in these works.

I begin with a summary history of the role women have played in nineteenth to twentieth century British ceramic manufacturing and design, and introduce the role of women as consumers of household pottery in order to indicate the contribution that this commerce has had in shaping the identity of women as homemakers. I identify the severe political and physical impact of the work environment as material context for my live actions. Conceptual links with an essentialist feminist discourse are made between the gendering of work roles and handling of 'earthy' material and I make reference to artists working with clay and ceramic to locate my own practice in a lineage of feminist works.

For example, my decision to work with clay was further informed by Ana Mendieta's 'earth-body works'–sculptures, installations and performance. Mendieta carried out essentialist feminist explorations of creation mythologies and notions of 'origin' connecting the feminine with historic cultural and geographic landscape—using the earth as something literally and metaphorically 'grounded' to an exterior landscape of fertility

and life (Perrault, 2004, p. 240)[61] I am not looking to re-interpret Mendieta's performance through the lens of the uncanny although I suggest that we see a demonstration of uncanny troubling of the feminine body through the exploitation of 'dirty' material. Rather, I highlight commonalities in material strategies to describe the feminine or women's experience but challenge the essentialist body/clay position and instead contextualise my research to consider relation to post-industrial social constructs of the feminine. Whilst there is not the capacity to focus on women's art history, I am aware of arguments in mid twentieth century art criticism that have informed feminist art practice (Pollock, 1988, 1996; Gerhard, 2013; Jones, 2012) and I feel that the performative qualities of clay/ceramic practice are available for future research. In considering the aphorism 'a women's touch' I want to incorporate aspects of placing and 'curating' in my performance with the intention of drawing further attention to 'surface' and boundary and alluding to act of gender performativity in 'homemaking'.

In Part One I discuss how I applied some of these concerns to *Placing, Carrying, Breaking* and identify the key moments in my dramaturgy that signal a development from initial concerns with the uncanny tropes to discover the significance of my/woman's body in affecting an uncanny condition. My analysis of the 'smashing' and 'naked' segments in my performance is informed by Hélène Cixous' essay 'Bathsheba or the Interior Bible'– a structured reflection on Rembrandt's 1654 painting *Bathsheba At Her Bath* (see image and description of the painting in Appendix 2), published in 1998 as part of *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*. In particular I apply Cixous' discussion of the splinter, sting or *piquer* to the detail of my performance and draw on this physical and conceptual detail to discuss the permeability of the body as an analogy to the breaching of boundaries that define inside/outside, private/public. I take from this practice research that the naked woman marks the boundary or point of rupture, splitting analogous to the division between homely and unhomely. This development is further considered in Part Two in relation to my performance with a clay plate.

In Part Two I focus on *Biting the Plate*, offering an assessment of components in the action of biting into clay. I develop my exploration of the boundaries which demarcate the

[61] Mendieta described her works as 'earth-body works' and 'earth-body sculptures'. The language is drawn from an unpublished statement by the artist (Perrault, 2004), as well as the artist's notes on her slides found at the Mendieta slide archive (Galerie Lelong and Co. 2020). For a full discussion of Mendieta's performance and sculpture see Blocker, 1999.

homely/unhomely, conceptualised as inside/outside of my body, and go on to focus my analysis on why my actions can be read as abject. The history of women's roles in ceramic manufacture and consumption led to my use of clay (as a progenitor of the plate), investigating an investigation into how formlessness contributes to and emerges from an apparently uncanny condition and asking what this does to my understanding of the feminine.

I am studying my physical interaction with crockery and subsequently with the clay plate through performance as a reflection of the visceral interaction between the potter and the clay. My focus on the tongue and mouth as exploratory body parts aims to distort normative 'touch' and handling of an object and draw my attention to the surface of the plate and clay. This 'touch' is further informed by the political relationship to surface decoration that women potters and designers have. My enquiry leads me to consider what residue or trace might remain after the investigation of the plate with the mouth. I discuss the implications of formless and unrecognisable material on my exploration of the feminine (un)homely uncanny in my concluding section.

In particular, I am attempting to uncover what Douglas describes as a 'clinging viscosity with the horror of femininity', which disturbs through 'its refusal to conform to the laws governing the clean and proper' (Grosz, 1994b, p. 195). In taking on this 'refusal' I am working towards the deconstruction of the familiar feminine homely to reveal that (as Freud instructs us all along) the homely and unhomely are co-habitants of the same 'house' and that the abject and formless are unfamiliar, uncomfortable factors in the uncanny. Throughout Part Two I endeavour to make sense of the dual uncanny quality in relation to abjection (Kristeva) and formless (Bataille). In part, this chapter continues a discussion of the table as an uncannily returning, prevailing representation of the (un)homely, which I argue is further interrupted in *Biting the Plate*. I restate that I am developing my thinking in and through performance actions and by applying the discussed theoretical frameworks to my reflexive process I seek to contextualise such actions in order to locate my work in relation to wider meaning and help to create some distance from my inherent subjectivity. I will then introduce my concluding comments, reflecting on the significance of my research project in proposing that the 'feminine un-canny' can be seen as a feminist strategy for the deconstruction of the homely.

A history to be disrupted (crockery)

I am going to give a historic overview of women's association with crockery to contextualise to why such narratives need disrupting and to indicate how and why I have integrated this history into my research process.

The substantial contribution of women labourers to the pottery industry between 1870 and 1955 was made (as with other manufacturing industries) under the patriarchal work practices of male owners and managers, categorising the employment of men and women in specific roles according to perceptions of physical, mental and moral suitability. Men worked in the design of the form of ceramics and in the preparation and firing of clay, women were employed to sort and decorate fired pots, in the preparation and application of glazes and in the design of surface decoration (Buckley, 1990, p. 1). Gender-specific skills were seen as biologically suitable because women were considered to be more dextrous with 'naturally innate' abilities for decorative, delicate and meticulous work (Buckley, 1990, p. 2). As recently as 1977 these women represented the largest concentration of female workers in one industry in one location in the Stoke-On-Trent region of the United Kingdom, and although women were in the majority in the industry and the union, a long tradition of lower pay and status persisted, as can be seen in this claim from an anonymous observer in the 1970s:

> the men were the centre of things, with women doing ancillary jobs, … or else they were a class apart, secure in the mastery of highly skilled trades, such as the gilders and a few more on the decorating side. (Jones quoted by McFarland 1985, p.25).

I find the relationship of women to the manufacturing process pertinent and I connect the biological determinism of the potteries to a broader feminist discussion on the status of craft as a visual art form. As Moira Vincentelli records in her essay 'Potters of the 1920s': 'In the nineteenth century ceramic decoration was considered an ideal medium for women. It conformed to all the stereotypes of women's art. It was decorative, small-scale, had domestic associations and did not require a heavy intellectual or philosophical content such as history painting …' (Vincentelli,1987, pp. 74–84).

Women's engagement in industry was considered detrimental to their efficacy as home makers.[62] Low wages and long hours were justified to position Britain in a rapidly

[62] Whilst this might be an antiquated position, the responsibility of woman to be 'breadwinner' over 'children and home-making' is persistently a discussion for media debate. See current gender-pay gap discussions (Walker, 2018).

changing, competitive global market. Harold Owen, writing around the turn of the twentieth century, claimed that 'the mere fact of a wife working at all is an incentive to domestic disorder and squalor' (McFarland 1985, p. 32) and quotes a Father O'Rourke (no date) as saying:

> I don't see how it is possible for a woman to properly attend to her household duties and go out to work all day. I know cases where more is lost by want of attention in the home than is actually earned by the woman herself on the potbank—that is, more is lost in cash, apart from any consideration of comfort which the hand of a woman can impart to all domestic arrangements. (Owen, 1970, p. 345).[63]

This echoing voice of the past might not seem representative of modern attitudes, and yet the 2012/13 Survey on British Social Attitudes concludes that in British heterosexual households gendered inequalities persist.[64] The implications for my critical argument is that gendered roles are so entrenched that any 'stepping between' related binaries presents an uncanny and disruptive position. The specific context of ceramic manufacturing introduces the plate as the subject of my deconstructive action. To continue—respiratory disease or 'potters rot' in the late 1800s was caused by poisonous lead glazes and the inhalation of dust or silica. Whilst kiln fires produce noxious smoke and gas and the obvious dangers of fire and heat, women workers were more likely to be employed in unheated sheds, sitting or standing for long hours, lifting heavy pots and working with desiccating clays and slips, and with toxic transfers and glazes in cold, wet conditions. Nineteenth-century writer and Journalist Arnold Bennett wrote of the pottery towns of North Staffordshire:

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[63] 'Potbank' is a colloquial word for the pottery factory, see Jones' 1961 *Potbank– A Social Enquiry into Life in the Potteries*.

[64] See Park, Bryson et al., 2013 for a more detailed analysis: '[Whilst] public support for a traditional division of gender roles within the home and the workplace has declined substantially over the last three decades … it is wrong to think that the gender role revolution is anywhere near complete … Men's uptake of unpaid domestic work is slow, and women continue to feel that they are doing more than their fair share … Gender inequalities in the home undoubtedly make it difficult to achieve gender equality in the workplace' (p.134).

> The vaporous poison of their ovens and chimneys has soiled and shrivelled the surrounding country till there is no village within a league but what offers a gaunt and ludicrous travesty of rural charms (Bennett cited by Maxfield, 1994, p. 139).

The marginalisation of women's skilled and innovative design work continued into the twentieth century (Parker and Pollock, 1981, p. 48), compounded by the separation of craft from art by Modernist design historians such as Clement Greenburg who constructed a linear progressive history, ignoring products that were traditional in style, material or productive function in favour of the formally and technically progressive products made within a modern industrial context (Buckley, 1990, p. 30).[65]

As late as the 1950s segregated work areas in the pottery industry meant that decorative work could be respectable for unmarried and widowed women without other income (McFarlan, 1985, p. 26). The disruption of the two world wars encouraged an exploitation of women as a cheap labour but ultimately new jobs for women appeared in post-war years, with better pay and a breaking of the sexual division of labour. Designers such as Susie Cooper (1902–1995) or Claris Cliff (1899–1972) became 'household names' but are perhaps still exceptions in industrial design history (Buckley, 1990, p. 5). [66] Even so, my research reveals a persistent hinting by design historians at a 'natural' connection between the female homemaker and ceramics (a women's touch), even in the twenty-first century. This interview with contemporary designer Emma Bridgewater (whose company celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2010) suggests an expression of femininity through the purchasing, use and arrangement of tableware to reinforce hegemonic domestic norms: '[I

[65] There is not the capacity in this thesis look further at the challenge to high art made by men and women in in craft-based design in the 20th century. I refer the reader to Hess et al. 1973, which includes Linda Nochlin's influential essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?'. For a thorough analysis of the practical and theoretical relationship between women and craft as 'art' see Elinor and Richardson, et al. 1987; Barry and Flitterman-Lewis 1987; Parker 1996, and Parker and Pollock 1981 and 1987. And refer to Clement Greenberg's influential *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* (1939).

[66] These were certainly familiar names to me prior to this research project however, I am aware that these women might not be known to everyone. Nonetheless, work by these female designers is much sought of in on-line collector sites or replicated in cheaper mass-produced versions, as with Mabel Lucie Atwell and Barbara Vernon Bailey whose 'nursery ceramics' reinforce the connection between the maternal consumer and maker and still feature on the potteries' design catalogues as christening gifts, see Royal Doulton (no date).

feel] that tableware ‘is how a woman expresses herself domestically. … I feel I have a very intimate connection with a customer's life’ (More, 2011, p. 24). The article continues: ‘[as] a 1930s magazine advertisement so succinctly puts it, ‘a woman knows best for a woman's home’ [and] female designers [are] bringing The Potteries back to life.’ (More, 2011, p. 25). Such an ambiguous compliment gives merit to the status of women in ceramic design whilst rather unsubtly projecting pre-war values onto both the female designer and consumer/homemaker. Feminist writers such as Vincentelli reveal that pejorative attitudes persist in twenty-first-century art criticism with regard to the status of women’s work that incorporates craft, handy-craft or industrial processing, or art that includes objects deemed to be ‘of the home’. My argument is that despite headway being made in the presentation of ‘high art crafts’ it is all too easy for the symbols of aesthetic status to return to the feminine domestic as both the justification for and the desire for woman’s creativity to be less valued than that of men. I suggest that an uncanny feminine appears where women’s creative work appears less straightforwardly homely and where what is produced might be considered ‘worthless’ or formless.

A woman’s touch

Acknowledgement of women as consumers of these new commodities was used as further justification to explain the role of women in the manufacturing process—it was they who had the apparent facility as women to produce beautiful objects for the home and know what other women wanted. I have introduced my own relationship to the consumption of household ceramics as ‘field research’ in Chapter Two. In the 1930s it was agreed that women were well suited to designing domestic tableware because they had an ‘intuitive’ understanding of domestic matters (Buckley 1990, p.4). Isabelle Ascombe’s 1984 *A Woman’s Touch: Women in Design from 1860 to the Present Day* concentrates on those women designers whose work contributed to the modern home and its furnishings, but I believe that Ascombe is inadvertently reinforcing patriarchal positions by describing women as the discerners and arrangers of beauty in their ‘natural’ space—the home. Women designers, so Ascombe would have us believe, have a sex-specific ‘touch’, that transforms a house into a home (Buckley, 1990, p. 7).

I challenge Ascombe’s assumption, and yet, my experience of a lifetime of innate conditioning and unquantifiable gendered learning has taught me how to hang a picture, how to make up a bed or dress a Christmas tree—how to construct a ‘reality’ that women can bring aesthetic design to a home. I would go further to suggest that the arrangement of material objects (such as a decorative plate) in the home is a ‘performance of identity’ that

serves to ‘install’ that gendered identity. As such, my plates trace the gendered conditions in and to the home. Not to suggest that these considerations cannot be fluid nor that some material relationships are useful and or pleasing to all home occupants.

I want my disruption of the homely to put tension on the unattainable narratives of the home and to expose what is excluded from those narratives. Martha Rosler describes this tension by alluding to the supressed violence of the everyday. In *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) Rosler performs alphabetised gestures to camera with familiar, kitchen tools (from ‘apron’ to ‘tenderizer’), beginning with ‘mimes’ of normative actions but becoming more and more absurd and aggressive (stabbing the air with a fork). For ‘U–Z’ Rosler finally turns herself into a tool, not to personify another utensil but the letter itself. ‘U–Z’ are written by her body, ‘which in turn means that her body becomes written by them’ (Eiblmayr 1999, p. 153). The work parodies the idealised housewife or TV cooking demonstration. Rosler’s actions are delivered ‘dead-pan’, replacing domestic terminology with a language of anger and frustration (Rosler, no date). The tension is evident in the re-describing of normative behaviours, contextualised by Rosler as signifying motifs of both a homely feminine domestic and by making present what might be denied or ignored as unhomely feminine experiences. Like Rosler, in order to critique the potentially oppressive aspects of the home I, in effect, re-enact my homely accomplishments whilst attempting to describe them anew and in doing so potentially re-describe my gendered identity. In exploring my proposal that the object/feminine body relationship is especially uncanny I not only ‘write’ my object subjects but allow my body to be ‘written by them’.

Whilst the social history introduces why and how a plate might be an especially evocative subject to work with, preparatory research in a ceramic studio[67] propelled consideration of the base material clay, to directly address the physical and metaphoric properties of a plate in my investigation. An etymology of ‘plate’ adds metaphor to the body/clay connection, offering interesting and relevant puns and dual word-associations with the body–with the mouth (denture appliance) and feet (rhyming slang: plate of meat – feet) and in metaphors

[67] This practice-based research was supported by ceramic artist Adele Howitt at Studio 11, Hull, August 2017. I carried out a number of research ‘experiments’ – drawing in glaze on the plate surface; experiencing the more industrial process of transfer application; moulding and re-bonding or firing fragments of broken pottery; and trying to leave a trace of my body on/ in the surface of the plate using my hair, hands and mouth.

of landscape and geography echo corporeal research concerns in my performances (Lexico, 2020). The anthropomorphic description of a plate with a ‘hip’ and a ‘lip’ is an interesting intimation of something that might uncannily be more corporeal but not alive. Plates are particularly ubiquitous objects in daily life as meal-time utensils, but also serve a decorative and commemorative function, extending their presence beyond the dining table into the design and function of the home. Plates take on dimensions of body, ergonomically designed for handling and placing and ‘orientate the body’ (Ahmed, 2006, p. 54). The plate has not only been shaped to the usage and ‘fit’ of the body and tools such as forks, but in turn the plate shapes the way our bodies are placed in relation to it. The plate is an object that moves between the private, feminine designation of the kitchen into the public arena of the table (Kinchin, 1996, p. 12–27) and along with other crockery such as tureens or tea services becomes a proxy for the hostess or acts as ‘go-betweens’ for the hidden preparation of food and the presentation and consumption of it.

Figure 15: Plate research: surface transfer, painted glaze. October 2016.

A relationship with food is apparent and, although a subject for much wider research, prompts me to investigate the action of consumption or digestion, returning me to consider the body and the abject in relation to the (un)homely and I will return to a discussion of consumption and plate in Part Two of this Chapter.

Having established the history and contexts for working with plates I am now going to elucidate my findings from this stage in my research. I return the Freudian tropes of repetition, the inanimate/animate and formless as triggers for and manifestations of the uncanny. Having introduced how I might conceptualise these conditions through performance in Chapter Four, I am going to break down my findings via the two parts, although there are interconnected concerns spanning both works. Whilst I am going to focus on an analysis of performing naked and smashing the plates, I want to first draw the reader’s attention to two other aspects of *Placing, Carrying, Breaking*–the decision to use

multiple or many plates and the performance of stacking and placing them. I feel that these are important concerns in the evocation of the uncanny and as expressions of the feminine homely and deserve some attention as dramaturgic decisions because the actions imitate the repetitive work of the home. I also spend some time reviewing the impact of ambient or diegetic sound in the work and how this sensory content is further contributing to a deconstruction of the domestic and homely, through an evocation and disruption of both. Some of the themes are carried over from the first chapter, and thread through my narration of my research works.

Part One: Analysis of Placing, Carrying, Breaking

Multiple doubles

Plates accumulate on the table as a mismatched, chaotic and dysfunctional 'dinner'. As with the tables, I want the fifty or so plates to be 'multiples'[68]. Multiplicity suggests to me a version of uncanny 'doubling' with the possibility of evoking disquieting unease. I am not re-presenting the mismatched plates as 'multiple' art works in the manner of Clare Twomey's installation *Forever* (2011).[69] I have not crafted a series of individually unique objects to assemble as components in a larger work like the individually sculpted plates in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1979)[70] Neither was the subsequent destruction of my

[68] 'Multiple' is a term used in art to refer to a series of identical found or artist-made objects, having significance for sale perhaps, like an editioned print. (Tate, no date. b).

[69] *Forever* is an installation consisting of 1,345 multiple versions of *Cup*: replicas of eighteenth-century white earthenware white Sandbach model cup. *Forever* occupies a space between commercial ceramics, the sculptural and the performative—exploiting a sense of temporal and spatial déjà vu: see Twomey, (no date); and The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (2011).

[70] Chicago organised the making and assemblage of a triangular table installation of thirty-nine place settings that incorporate an embroidered runner and elaborate, vaginally iconographic symbolic plate. Each setting represents the life of a historic woman, goddess, female artist or author and is intended not only to celebrate the significance of those women but to celebrate the skill and creativity of textile and ceramic art and the role that women play in the development of these mediums. There is much discussion on the influence of Chicago's work in in challenging the patriarchal status of art; the politics of the making of *The Dinner Party*, the collaboration, expense,

plates 'managed' to create a secondary 'limited edition' commodity, in the way Michael Landy orchestrated *Break Down* (2001)–the systematic destruction and 're-packaging' of all his material possessions (Artangel, 2001). Twomey, Chicago and Landy's works challenge the binaries of art/not art, domestic/public, skilled/unskilled or cheap/expensive. Whilst I believe that I am testing similar binaries I do not sculpt aesthetic objects but instead worked with found, the homogenous and therefore, it can be argued that mine are 'invisible' versions of plates with the intention of drawing a meta-narrative of class through the re-use of the everyday and overlooked.[71]

Figure 16: Stack of plates in performance. April 2016.

I believe that my plates evoke an uncanny slippage or déjà-vu through the encounter with the 'same-as' and repeated, but the form and 'commodity' of my plates is not retained. Instead, the plates become dust, 'plastic' and formless as grit on the floor. By setting out my plates and then destroying them I am trying to unsettle or apply further pressure to the

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authorship is well documented but not a focus for discussion in this thesis. For further description and analysis go to: Gerhard 2013, and Jones 1996.

[71] 'Second-hand' is thought of as the place for disadvantaged groups to purchase new products but perhaps due to recent economic crisis, the rise in internet sales sites or the nostalgia for 'vintage' the middle-class have become increasingly involved in the second-hand market. For a fuller study of consumerism and the second-hand see Alam, M. D. (2015). Class as a subject or context in performance could be undertaken in future research.

stability of the signifiers of home. The subsequent fragmentation of the already 'doubled' many plates creates, I argue, an excessive number of doppelgängers– too many to be individually described. To this extent the homely I am exploring is longer present, 'othered' as a fragmented trace.

Placing and stacking

Figure 17: Stacking plates. August 2019.

Stacking plates reflects my interest in sign-posting the sculptural installation in order to challenge what might be functionally or symbolically valued of the invisible domestic, not only by placing the plates carefully in the room but holding them close to the body (before this 'relationship' deteriorates as the plates amass, slip and smash). I also want the stack of plates to recall the general accumulation of household objects and to trigger a sense of domesticity. Placing is a dramaturgic device to 'activate the room' and introduces plates as 'orientating' objects to my subsequent actions. 'Setting the table' is a reprisal of the earlier table placing and covering in *Seven Tables*. Only by performing can I experience the strain on my body—the weight of the plates forcing my knees to bend, orientating me to lean back from and balance the stack in my arms. The possibility for the plates to fall is explicit and palpable. I 'will' myself to hold the stack of plates together.

Formal concerns with the performing body and multiple objects along with a conceptual interest in gender and the destructive are echoed in Irish artist Sinead O'Donnell's

performance *Art of Begegnung Comes Tomorrow Slowly* (2012/13).[72] O'Donnell stacks plates as tall as herself before letting them fall away with a crash. The process is repeated, two women assist in restacking the plates, until the tower diminishes to nothing. O'Donnell lies down whilst others cover her with pieces of broken pottery. Whilst I share with O'Donnell the purposeful use of domestic material as a way to discuss that which defines us or communicates our values, I feel that her approach differs from my own. A possible explanation for the presence of O'Donnell's 'assistants' is to communicate solidarity in (or perhaps policing of) gendered experiences, maybe as a way to gesture the shared experience of domestic violence. In contrast, I perform and am solely responsible for my actions—isolated by them with the intention of maintaining a sense of the private.

If 'privacy' equates to 'stability' then the veneer of the stable homely is arguably further troubled by my decision to perform naked. In this next section I analyse my decision to work naked as a strategy to disturb normative homely conditions which might be associated with any reading of my (a woman's) body.

Being naked

The intention to appear naked[73] was twofold in asking how could nakedness further disrupt the certainty of the domestic: firstly, to literally expose my incontestably female body in such a manner as to throw into disruption any pretence of not 'being myself' or representing the feminine in an abstract way; secondly, enabling direct interface between my body and the research materials to allow for a more immediate examination of surface, and exterior/ interior space. Nakedness further troubles the corporeal and psychic identity

[72] The work was originated in the V*iolent Series* and is intended to draw attention to domestic and state violence (Wylde, 2012, Online). For a fuller description and commentary see (Leahy 2013, Online).

[73] 'To be naked is to be oneself … to be nude is to be seen by others and yet not recognised for oneself (Berger 1972, p. 54). I use the word 'naked' in keeping with feminist responses to Kenneth Clark's much contested assessment of the status of representations of the female body in art in *The Nude: A Story of Ideal Art* (1956) where he maintained that naked is to be without clothes, whereas the nude is a form in art and that the female body as 'nude' is the appropriate subject and muse to the (male) artist as an expression of form. John Berger criticised that 'the nude is always conventionalised–the female nude is always subservient to the male spectator … other' (Berger, 1972, p. 53). This argument was of course developed by feminist writers, including Amelia Jones 1998, 2003; 2012; Griselda Pollock 1981; 1987, Laura Mulvey 2009 and Linda Nead 1992.

Figure 18: Being naked. August 2019.

of the feminine, and serves to emphasise the reimagining of the inter-relationship between material object and body so as to create further tension around any remaining impression of homely domesticity. My research decision was significant in leading me into a new analysis of the importance of my body and consideration in particular of the conceptual and physical risk incurred in working, not only with the broken shards but with also with the clay. I am going to describe the impact of nakedness on my exploration of the uncanny through Cixous' writing (introduced in Chapter One).

After nearly thirty years of work I hesitate at performing naked—the complications of being 'myself' as subject and 'body' as object of performance are accentuated by nakedness. Nakedness strips me of covering, of theatrical pretence. Butler suggests:

> '[t]he body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and the instrument of all these … or the site where 'doing' and 'being done to' become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine (Butler, 2004, p. 21).

Butler's observation prompts me to consider how the performance of my own (naked) body positions me between the private and the public. I perform the physical and psychological 'vulnerability' (to which Butler refers) with ambivalence and the intention of reclaiming a body that is uncannily both attractive and disdainful—a body that is perhaps symbolically 'marked' by repressive assumptions about gender and age. That is to say, in performing 'owning my body' I remain subject to the social constructs of sex that

determine how this body should be performed (or performed on/with) in public or private and subject to the political assessment of phallocentricism. I am forced to confront the issue of me in and of my naked body as a physical experience of skin, breath, weight.

Perhaps to some extent my naked gesture is 'learnt' as a political strategy of performance practice—I navigate my nakedness in the context of the contested debate on whether or not the feminist artist should be naked, coming out of the essentialist or radical practices of the 1970s which I will discuss in brief.[74] In the 1997 article 'Bodies of Evidence' Erin Striff discusses how the body was a central focus to performance art of the 1960s and 1970s: 'When a woman appears on stage, her body too often speaks for itself. It becomes the object of the gaze, an object of desire. Feminist performance artists attempted to disrupt the cultural associations with the female body' (Striff, 1997, p. 1). There was, however, a division amongst seventies feminists regarding whether or not it is possible for artists to control the way in which their bodies are perceived on stage (Battista, 2013, p. 54). Critic Jeanie Forte asserts that 'women performance artists expose their bodies to reclaim them, to assert their own pleasure and sexuality, thus denying the fetishist pursuit to the point of creating a genuine threat to male hegemonic structures of women' (Forte, 1988, p. 229). It might seem unrealistically ambitious to suggest performance art has the power to alter attitudes towards the body, but it would be too defeatist to conclude that feminist artists are unable to use the naked female body in an attempt to do so. Afterall:

> Feminist performance artists use the female form as a palimpsest, re-writing the body in order to efface its original inscriptions within Western culture … However, the over-exposed, over-determined female body proves a difficult text to rewrite … The project of feminist performance art uses excess and surprise and often causes disgust in order to challenge notions of the female body… [the] grotesque destroys the myth of the clean and proper body which is part of the feminine (Striff, 1997, p. 16).

I take from this debate that not only does nakedness bring forward physical, visceral possibilities in my dramaturgy, but that nakedness addresses ingrained patriarchal categorisations of the woman's body and in doing so, challenges the presence of these assumptions. By exposing my body, I also want to introduce the concerns of clean/dirty which I will elaborate on later in this chapter. The apparent conflict between earlier feminist artist's approaches perhaps contributes to my own hesitation in performing naked,

[74] There is a huge body of work that deserves acknowledgement which I do not have the capacity for here, and is addressed to some extent by Kathy Battista, 2003; RoseLee Goldberg, 1988, 2004; Linda Nead, 1992; Amelia Jones, 1998, 2012; and Rebecca Schneider, 1997.

but my nakedness is not a question of 'bravery' as Rose Finn-Kelsey rebuked of her own experiences of 'not performing naked' (Battista, 2013, p. 12). My strategy is to express the tension between the destabilising intentions of the work and the potential for the repressive constraints of the homely and proper to return (or continue) by the possibility of my own 'embarrassment'. I am going to continue the analysis of my research strategy to perform naked and attend in particular to the idea that the object subjects are not only written by my body, but that my body 'becomes written by them'.

My nakedness comes not from being 'stripped' but rather is intended as a proactive shifting of the familiar into the unfamiliar condition; or as Cixous describes: 'The non-nude nudity; non denuded; not undressed'– not 'stripped' or deprived of identity or agency' (Jones 2003, p. 258). In her assessment of Rembrandt's painting of Bathsheba, Cixous draws attention to the dual and uncanny performance of Bathsheba's self: 'everything is in the interior' despite or because she is observed (by the maid, by Rembrandt, by Cixous, by us) in the moment of decision and fatal realisation that is punctuated by a letter (Cixous, 1998, p. xi). Perhaps like Bathsheba, despite the process of being observed I am also 'returning' myself to the interior, to the domestic, not only through the signification of my feminine identity, reinforced by the domestic objects that accompany me, but like Bathsheba, 'interior' through the focus of my intention and seeming ambivalence towards the presence of the other – the spectator. Nakedness draws the eye**.** Drawing is to bring-attention-to. I am 'drawing' myself in the metaphoric sense of 'becoming' the artwork and creating a visual composition. I am (with)drawing to the bourgeois drawing room of feminine dialogue. I am drawing to the interiority of the performance, but as I draw and pull something irritates and troubles who I understand myself to be – a splinter under the skin that pokes like a nagging finger to remind me of my homely place, my homely body. Splintered crockery literally and symbolically threatens the skin, the eye, recalling Freud's notions of emasculation in 'The Uncanny'. Thus, I intend my crockery to be a punctuation – a marker between homely and unhomely. Yet it could be said that the fragments in/of my performance (physical shards or temporally fragmented dramaturgical 'segments') are simultaneously a release from that homely 'given', suggesting a corrosion of the patriarchally defined domestic that the feminine uncanny seeks to facilitate. Like Bathsheba's letter, the smashing is a chance to 'save one's skin' (Cixous, 1998, p. xi).

The smashing results in tiny cuts in my body—the opening of metaphoric and literal gaps. Maybe these cuts are more like stings, *piquer* as Hélène Cixous calls them. The cuts don't

do any lasting damage but sting as reminders of the performance I have made, they 'annoy and excite at the same time' (Cixous, 1998, p. xiii). Maybe the cuts are to be expected, after all, I choose to crawl over broken shards in an action that literally describes the quiet repression of domestic behaviours—walking on eggshells. The performative experience made it possible for me to understand the piercing and breaching as emblematic of two becoming one, the inside is emptied out—the outside comes flooding in.

One might consider the performative 'staging' of Rembrandt' painting; the direction of light, position of figures and central positioning of the letter held in Bathsheba's right hand. This is a fleshy wide body, marked with the imprint of her stocking; a puckered breast; muscular legs; and bulging stomach. The description sounds familiar to me. 'This young woman is in the process of aging … Bathsheba is also then this other woman' (Cixous, 1998, pp. 13 and 11). With this reference as context I believe that my performance leaves room to investigate the uncanny apparition through the unhomely aging female in future research.

After the performance I notice nicks and cuts. I realise that the spectator might have seen a trickle of blood or a greying bruise that I was not aware of. The implication of the spectator noticing that which I did not, the marking of a fallible body, is to suggest an exterior presence that I am not in control of. Cuts and marks on my exposed stomach or leg become a new and unfamiliar feminine self, again maybe drawing attention to aging, fallible, deteriorating skin. The cuts are '[t]he trace of the quick of life, hidden behind the rounded appearance of life' (Cixous, 1998, p. 21), mimetic of the vaginal 'wounds' marking the irrefutably female. The body is revealed as a permeable surface, punctuated with orifices that open up as fissures in the firmness that might be thought of as the homely feminine. Marking the soles of my feet, forearms, belly and thigh these tiny cuts carve out a place for themselves (Cixous,1998. p. xiii). The implication being that these are marks of who I am – marking 'me' as the boundary of the (un)homely that also removes part of me, embedding in me (Cixous, 1998, p. xiii).

Ugly corporeality

I do not make assumptions about the spectator's reading of my naked body, but perhaps my nakedness might be 'ugly' to some[75] and I might provoke some sensation of 'disgust'

[75] In cultural theorist Maria T. Pramaggiore's terms ugly is the intentional transgressive display of a woman's naked body when not performing as sexual object (Pramaggiore, 1992, p. 284).

in being ‘incongruously in the wrong place (Cousins, 1994, p. 147). As Ahmed describes: disgust is about proximity, the sensation of being both drawn to and repulsed by something we find disgusting (Ahmed, 2014a, pp. 82–100). Not only does the spectator witness the exposed body in its totality – backside, mouth, armpit, etc. but they see that body interacting directly with the waste materials of the no-longer-homely broken plates and floor sweepings. Such ‘ugliness’ is implicit to the way in which I go about performing both naked and dressed actions—soiling the body or contorting the body through crawling and climbing gestures. Thus, I argue that my body might be seen as disgusting insofar as being designated ‘troubling’, ‘bad’ or disturbing through the ‘sensuous proximity’ of it to and with the other material objects in the work (Ahmed, 2014a, p. 85).

Figure 19: Plates against the skin. August 2019.

Additionally, my objective is to make unhomely the objects around the me by touching them with my body, proposing that neither body nor plates are homely any longer—they have been shifted into a less attractive and less ‘acceptable’ condition through their association with the increasingly abject ‘other’.[76] What is more, it is possible that a sense of fallible mortality may be revealed in my physicality—the corporeality that the naked body. Like the clay plate, the naked body is imperfect and fallible in a moment of ugliness (Cousins, 1994, p. 146). I believe that only by experiencing myself naked, at the body’s most vital, can I unpack the possibility of the demise of homely feminine. Whilst the ‘non-naked’ approaches of Bobby Baker, et al. also informs my work, my decision to communicate a contrast between the naked and clothed aims to bring further uncanny confusion and ambiguity to the performance.

[76] If you are in any doubt of this, think about how you would feel to eat off a plate someone had put their naked backside on.

A naked body is ‘all orifices’, perhaps signposting to me the subsequent performance with my mouth. To perform naked could be seen as ‘in bad taste’. ‘So, disgust, even defined simply as bad taste, shows us how the boundaries that allow the distinction between subjects and objects are undone in the moment of their making’ (Ahmed, 2014b, p. 83). The ‘bad taste’ of what is taken into the mouth (clay) maybe associated with margins of the body, contradicting any idealisation of the body with the reminder of the abject fallibility of that body (able to bleed or shit) that no longer sits at a safe distance.

To summarise: In my naked performance and subsequent focus on my mouth I am working towards the demonstration of a breaching of boundary that both separates and joins the homely from the unhomely. This challenge to ‘boundary’ seems most explicit to me in the moments where tangible ‘damage’ was done to my body in the nicking of the skin or the plugging of my mouth (which I am going discuss to in Part Two). Nakedness describes the surface between inside/outside. The cuts mark that border, but also breach it – marking the female body as the place of fluidity of movement between the homely and unhomely. The decision reinforces my feminist intention to bring into question the representation of the feminine whilst enabling me to explore a place of agency in and through the act of performance. In the context of the (un)homely the resulting image of woman challenges historically banal ‘nudity’. The expression of violence has both analogous and real impact on my body—the possibility for a splinter to pierce the skin exposes the vulnerability of body and homely(familiar) feminine.

Figure 20: (Detail) Cuts on skin. (Research performance). May 2018.

Smashing and shattering

Having talked about my nakedness I now turn to the significance of smashing plates as a directly damaging gesture of the 'feminine un-canny'. Like the piercing of the body or the act of walking in the table smashing is, I argue, a point of disruption: smashing plates allows for a different, energetic performance of the body, one in which the explicit effect of the female on the material environment can be experienced. It is a moment of Cixous' 'excess'–a calling out. Throwing shifts the dynamic of the body and space into an immediate violent condition, maybe communicating that 'to be female is to be angry'. Smashing plates expresses the moment when what is present collides with how it is present.

Figure 21: Scratches in wall. August 2019.

The fragmented plates take out scoops of studio wall plaster so perhaps the reality of the gesture signposts my further dislocation and dissatisfaction with the representation of woman (myself) in art, education or political institutions as much as in the home. This might seem a diversion from the core themes of this thesis but suggests a further dislocating effect of the performance on the feminine public and private, with a future research opportunity to perhaps consider the 'work place'.

'Smash' turns the audible sound of breaking plates into a linguistic break, a fracture. It has a literary effect, drawing attention to it reminds us of the visual onomatopoeia of the cartoon page and 'sound bubbles' that surround the Superhero that ask us to vocalise the words in order to hear their effect. Smashing operates as a speech act, a re-working of John Austin's language of performativity (Butler, 1988). The smash promises the smash and the ringing in our ears has perlocutionary effect: in saying smash I do smash. Yet, my smashing is not intended to be 'destructive' per se, and in an uncanny contradiction I also

tidy it up. The gesture might suggest reassembly, exposing the architecture of the homely in its constituent and baser parts because this sense of the 'reduced' but not 'destroyed' enables the homely to return – the 'left overs' remain, arguably as points of orientation.

Figure 22: Smashing plates. (rehearsal image). August 2019.

To 'shatter' suggests a violent breaking of something into pieces with the implication of emotional breaking: we receive 'shattering' news and feel overwhelmed; we are 'shattered' by the physical and mental pressures of life. Shattering marks the breakdown in confidence in what we thought we knew, what was stable and reliable. How do we re-orientate in the moments when we feel shattered, or respond to shattering news? (Ahmed, 2006, p. 157) Arguably it is the 'traces' that we re-orientate to and are re-orientated by. It is not my intention to represent emotional breakdown in my work, but rather to explore the 'shatter' as a prompt to shift my orientation away from the homely, towards something less definable but no less present.

Uncanny sounds

In discussing 'sound' I will now consider all three performances to identify how sound makes an uncanny connection between them. It is plausible that sound animates the performance where nothing seems to happen until 'something happens'. My work might be remembered as continually quiet and the white or black space as signalling silence or stillness–darkness (or brightness) being a cognate of silence (Biguenet, 2015, p. 44). Yet, any implication that quiet equates to order is upset by the intentions of my work to not be

quiet but a cacophony of noisy objection. It is with the chaotic nature of the noise[77] rather than a consistent volume, that I am trying to imply unbalance or disorder of the harmonious expected of social relation (Hendy, 2014, p. 140). In my performances the quiet, homely is replaced with dissonance that media historian David Hendy equates with the audio protest of post-industrial working classes: 'I'm here, I exists, I won't be ignored' **(**Hendy, 2014, p. 143).

Non-verbal language is active in all three performances—expressed in the murmuring sound of 'turned-on' radios; by the movement of tables; 'real world' sounds from outside the space that leak in; from the muttering of spectators to the reflux noises of bodies. My dramaturgy of the 'active' non-verbal is to suggest an uncanny 'voice'. It could be said that the repetition of sounds (produced because of the repetition of actions – moving tables and so forth), serves to further the evocation of the repetitive Freudian tropes of the uncanny. I want to create confusion by swapping my (live) silence for the voices of (not live) objects. I experience the 'voicing' of inanimate objects and even though I 'know' that the plate or table is not really moving on their own, my understanding is confused for a moment, in a suspension of belief. Just as Nathaniel in Hoffman's *Sand-man* wants to make sense of the imagined voice of Olympia, it might be suggested that we want to find a communicative language in the sounds made through the scraping, clinking, crashing. I try to draw attention to the noises made through my choreographed movement of and with material objects–the scraping table-legs on the floor, the dripping water and the crackling shards, as well as less audible sounds of my skin in contact with these materials. I am looking for uncanniness in the shift from familiarity to originality, how might I understand this table or plate if I 'listen', and what then are the implications for the female body in the space if it too is listened-to? The sounds that simulate a language are uncanny 'words' which irritate the ear, inviting us to lean in closer to hear better. We cannot ignore undefinable sounds because our own ears are 'tender' uncanny organs of the body that 'double' in being open and closed at once (Royle, 2003, p. 64). The sounds are another 'flickering', another sense just out of reach, the unnameable, ungraspable: '*What's that? Let me catch that again'*.

[77] 'Noise' comes from the Latin word for nausea and in audio-engineering the term describes unwanted information that interferes with the desired signal – 'white noise' (Neal, 2016, Online).

On my silence

Figure 23: (Detail) Dirt on face. August 2019.

I now draw attention to the implications of my own silence or lack of speech in the performances that might be further affecting an uncanny condition, particularly in relation to the politics of the casually silenced woman. Paradoxically, noise provokes silence. Waiting for the noise to stop halters conversation and heightens the spectator's inclination to 'listen' and therefore be receptive to the performance (Dyson, 2014, p. 2). The 'silence' in my work is constructed so you can hear. Throughout the 'noise' I, the woman, do not 'speak'. I plan to speak through the familiar objects and by 'speaking'/actioning, make the voices of those objects strange— 'quiet' rather than 'silent'. Quiet silence is a dramaturgical decision to bring focus and contribute to a sense of presence, enabling me to explore and reflect upon what is being encountered in the moment of performance. Thus, it could be said that silence contributes to the open-endedness, inconclusiveness of the work.

Self-silencing reminds me (and perhaps the spectator) of the experience of being casually silenced as part of a woman's daily experience, but as Cixous discusses in 'The Laugh of Medusa' (1976b): quietness is a strategy to invite the spectator to attend—to listen to the woman who is writing through her body, to hear the silence as an irreverent laughter. I take from Cixous the suggestion that my silence is a kind of excess – a way of taking up space. Silence as a performance strategy does not equate to 'silenced' (as lacking agency). More specifically 'speechlessness' as expressed in the muting effect of eating clay, is intended to draw attention to the affirmation of power of silence: silence as refusal, a resistance to 'filling the space' … extending the unspeakable. (Malhotra and Carillo Rowe, 2013, p. 5). Importantly mine is not an externally imposed condition, it is a strategy that invites the ear and the eye, expressing what is difficult to say in words.

Accordingly, my own silence and the quietness of the space, and the noticeable clamour of the material objects, could maybe make the experience all the stranger; all the more uncanny because silence prolongs the effects of an action (as in a terrorist's refusal to claim responsibility for a bombing [Biguenet, 2015, p. 72]). Silence evokes deeply seated anxieties (or frustrations). To remember Freud's uncanny: 'As for solitude, silence and darkness, all we can say is that these are factors connected with infantile anxiety, something that most of us never wholly overcome' (Freud, 1919, p. 159). This suggests to me that in my silence I am inviting a repressed solitude, evocative of the privately repressive homely.

To conclude this section: we sense and make sense of sound such that it seems to exist before the experience of the performance, operating as a signifier of something to come (we hear the train coming before it arrives). Additionally, sound leaves a physical effect on our body long after the mechanics of making that sound have ended (we hear the tinnitus ringing of an alarm long after the motion of the bell has stopped). When I throw the plate against the wall my physical stance predicts the sound of the smashing plate – we anticipated the sound. The sound of dripping is more discernible than the visual drip. Thus, I argue that the categories of 'presence' and 'absence' break down. The 'smash' is uncannily there even before I throw the plate (Butler, 1999, p. 145).

Part Two: Analysis of *Biting the Plate*

I now move my discussion to focus on the outcomes of the performance *Biting the Plate* and I will return to some of the concerns of silence and muting. I re-introduce my use of clay as a strategy for conceptualising the abject aspects of the uncanny which might emerge through the return of repressed sensation or experience. I am seeking to perform what Freud might have described as a 'fantastical' behaviour (1919, p. 156), 'making real' plate eating and therefore hoping to threaten the distinction of both the real and fictional. This might invite further abject horror and uncanny effect, perhaps because 'the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, … something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality' (Haughton, 2003, p. liii). As I have discussed at the beginning of this chapter, my experimentation with clay and ceramics increased my understanding of the impact this material has had on the historical body. The resulting performance action is to bite into and chew and spit out the clay.

Mouthfuls

Douglas discusses the horrors induced by the viscous and the fluid: ‘A state half-way between solid and liquid … it is unstable, but does not flow … its sickness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attaches the boundary between myself and it’ (Douglas cited by Grosz 1994b, p.194). Only by learning of the bodily proximity and political distance existing between the female (my) body and clay through performance do I understand what Douglas describes as a that which disturbs through ‘its refusal to conform to the laws governing the clean and proper’ (Douglas cited by Grosz 1994b, p.195). As a consequence of performing I equate the clinging clay with the persistence of the patriarchal homely - returning, re-attaching. In bringing forward more literal aspects of destruction in the work I discovered how disgust ‘does something’ (Ahmed, 2014b, p. 83). Taking the ceramic into my mouth was an attempt to explore the border between inside and outside and to, in some way, mark that boundary. I understand Douglas to mean that the uncanny abject remarks the boundary, filling the gap between home and not home like flux, creating, paradoxically, another margin. Perhaps then, the unhomely can never be boundaryless, the boundary simply shifts. The clay marks the inside and outside, moving between but co-joining the two. I want to not only make the theatrical moment abject, but to imply a rejection of the histories of the material object, the perpetual association between the feminine and crockery, no longer objectified but returned to a thing. But I had overlooked my subjective response, the performance of my own suppression of disgust perhaps and so my corporeal reaction prompts further findings which I now outline.

My internal, physical experience of clay in my mouth triggers associations with the processes of chewing and the mouth as organ of language. In gagging I seem to be responding to the ‘non-assimilable alien’, ‘edged with the sublime’ (Kristeva, 1982, p. 11), channelled into a symbolic or cultural form perhaps, as I keep the clay under control and my normative features distort with the gurning and teeth baring. Making marks with my mouth in the clay by licking and biting leads me to consider how the tongue (as language-maker) inscribes. This action seems to reveal the inconsistency in the construction of the homely/ unhomely and in turn in the construction of my own identity because the language of the homely no longer seems adequate to describe what I am experiencing. I believe that what threatens to break down the adequacy of the homely is not the spitting out of stuff itself but the implication that what is produced is worthless, formless. My research identifies that the ‘feminine un-canny’ is not about object/meaning making but rather invites an undecidable quality that cannot be described. It is the unstable and clinging that I am presenting in my performance to concretise the idea that the unhomely becomes

formless–by this I mean, the clinging but boundarylessness of the home. The implication being for my critical argument that the unhomely/ homely returns in its unstable but clinging form.

Spat out

Spitting communicates a rejection of and objection to something, as both a bodily ejection and as a signifier of disapproval or hatred even and I devise the action to communicate something of my rejection of homely sensibilities. I believe that there is a self-deprecating self-control expressed throughout my research works and so the decisiveness to eat clay comes with some regret—in the real and physical experience of biting and chewing clay I realise I have committed to something difficult, irreversible and without any 'useful' or

Figure 24: Clay bolus. (Performance research). October 2017

purposeful outcome. The action reveals to me the fallibility of my body, I have to control the reflux to gag which would make me vulnerable, uncanny because the boundary between internal and external is being troubled. Gagging is the result of the 'disgusting' clay working on and over taking my body (Ahmed, 2014b, p. 85). The action also gives me a sense of depletion with the destruction of the plate and the potential to destroy the body (I might choke or be poisoned by the toxicity of the clay). There is the possibility for the clay (familiar and unfamiliar) to overwhelm my body. Only by experiencing the performance action can I start to understand the clay as a representation of the 'almost internal' space of my mouth. The clay moulds the liminal space that cannot be seen, an amorphous representation of a space between inside and outside – public and private. It is

possible that my action strips away any familiarity with ‘form’ (plate/feminine homely) becomes the plate becomes a formless ghastly object, raw and sublime in the sense of it becoming a solid object from the unlimited space (the moving tract) of the body. My mouth, ‘chief aperture’ (Bataille, 1995, p. 195) with similarity to the vaginal, anal and auditory spaces as ways into and out of the body, has been ‘plugged’. It feels like the bolus of clay temporarily mutes my body, objectifying me, removing voice, ‘ceasing to sustain the body as a subject’ (LaBelle, 2014, p. 2).

Grotesque Action

My performance investigation appears to become more abject and grotesque. The general adjective ‘grotesque’ is a useful companion to ‘abject’ and ‘uncanny’, bringing further implications for the strange, incongruous and unpleasant. In her 1994 book *The Female Grotesque*, Mary Russo discusses the category of female grotesque in western art work and literature. She writes: ‘The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official ‘low’ culture or the carnivalesque, and with social-transformation’ (Russo, 1994, p. 8). I think of my performing body as open (mouthed), secreting, multiple in movement, changing in nakedness. Russo also suggests that the grotesque is strongly related to the psychic register and to the bodily as a cultural projection of an inner state (Russo, 1994, p. 9). If this is the case, then I believe that my reaction to descriptions of women (and men) and their bodily experiences of working in the potteries (see above e.g. heavy lifting and ingesting the clay dust) is also a reaction to the implication that their bodies betrayed some sort of grotesque or uncanny instability in their political lives, which, if not connected to gender is perhaps something to do with class/labour identity. I encourage my own extension of risk and the abject in pursuit of the collapse of the boundaries of the homely which might excite the uncanny and result in the collapse of my own identity. ‘Ooze and slime and drool optimise ugliness because they are escaped stuff, uncontained by surface’ (Hutchinson, 2002, p. 153): the body and the unfamiliar, ooze and escape the boundaries of the homely.

Dirt

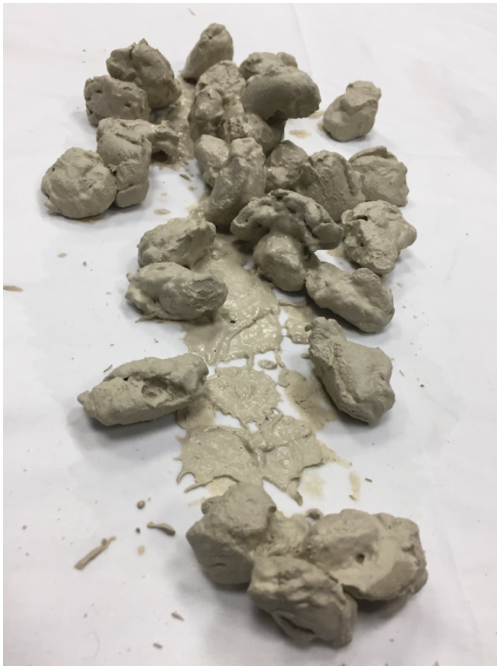

Figure 25:(Detail) Gobs of clay. August 2019.

I am now going to consider the consequences of my performance in relation to subconscious associations of clay with dirt and excrement that in turn serve reoccurring concerns with the formless matter of the unhomely (dust; soot; clay)[78] and continue to argue that confusion of the formed object (plate/body/home) and the unformed material thing (clay/excrement/unhomely) can contribute to the 'feminine un-canny' strategy, prompting the uncanny through an associative leap made between familiar object, via raw material to unfamiliar shapeless thing.

With the appearance (and sensation) of the spat-out gobs of clay comes acute awareness that this substance has the appearance, not of food, but of excrement. Kristeva suggests '… polluting objects fall, systematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 71) so as such, my reading of the clay is no surprise. The clay is an expression of mud, smacking of ordure – excrement.[79] In the act of performing I experience the 'excrement' that can be considered as a degradation–'a geological wearing down and a mortification or process with no value' (Lexico, 2020). However, an unexpected response

[78] This discussion is taken up in the 2009 forward to the exhibition catalogue for *Dirt on Delight. Impulses That Form Clay* (Schaffner, Porter et al., 2009, pp. 25–31).

[79] Stuart Brisley's 2003 creative writing on the *Intimations of Ordure*, and *The Collector* have provided useful creative thinking around the normalcy of the formless.

to my research was the shared memory for some spectators of eating Easter egg chocolate, specifically the sensation of cracking the shard-like fragments and taking the thins of chocolate into the mouth, feeling the heat of the mouth melt the chocolate into a cloying mess. I do not think their memory of over indulgence is irrelevant to my research. Indeed, Kristeva refers to the possibility of food appearing as a polluting object (Kristeva, 1982, p. 75). The commercialised ritual-object-made-chocolate is not 'real' food but a luxurious proxy. Childish desire in being presented with the uncanny size of the chocolate egg, prompts you to want more, until you are figuratively or literally sick of it. Such memories might have invited a different uncanny to my work, where the security of the comfort of food is instead prompting feelings of nausea, abjectly threatening security in a confusion of abject pleasure and shame.

I reiterate my argument that whilst aiming to conjure an appearance of the domestic homely my 'feminine un-canny' performance work corrodes the form, ceasing to function as the homely. As a result of my sensory experience of and within my own performance I reason that the homely is without 'security', without substantial structure, because the earthy, outside is creeping in – or was always there. The 'feminine un-canny' has the possibility to arrest the certainty in the solidity of the homely and introduce a state of flux and constant decay. For Kristeva, 'excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 71). This threat to identity is further experienced in the abjection of self, in the way the abject simultaneously 'beseeches and pulverises' the subject to the extent that the subject is unable to identify with something on the outside (the object) and finds the impossible within, realising that 'the impossible constitutes its very being that is none other than the abject' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 5). My work endeavours to present the 'pulverised' home (dust from the walls, from skin, irredeemably broken splinters, unnameable gobs) as impossible expelled/returning uncanny things.

My performance may be operating as the actual and representational breaking down of the commodity object to become waste (Petrie and Livingston, 2017, p. 30)–biting into the clay creates cracks and fissures in the firmness of surface. It can be argued that the action mimics the first steps of pottery making, wetting and squeezing the clay—*l'informe* does not stop but moves in all directions as it is slapped and squeezed. A plate takes shape from sensual and resilient possibilities. Like the clay figures in a Švankmajer animation, clay

can be regurgitated into any other possible form.[80] I offer the raw clay to my mouth like an *oble* (an un-consecrated Eucharist wafer (Sofer, 2003, p. 31); an 'offering' that literally embodies the ground bones, the dust and the decay of the past in a gesture, bringing to mind the ritualised, the sacred, the phantom. I permit myself to consume, to take in and internalise the ubiquitous substance of the home (bricks, tea sets and bathroom tiles). The decayed matter of clay binds to me, as toxic to me as it was to the industrial potter. This gesture offers meaning in relation to the overarching arguments of my thesis and this chapter. The action can be interpreted as disrupting to patriarchal 'natural order' because the normal relationship between the digestible and indigestible has been interrupted. The overlooked materiality of the home(ly) has the potential to become altogether less stable, more visceral as it is literally becoming part of the corpus.

Excess

One of the results of *Biting the Plate* was the discovery of 'excess' without any purpose—nothing useful was made, what was useful is destroyed or made unrecognisable. This raises new thinking about how my performed refusal to produce 'commodity' as a feminist art strategy (something for further research) can be considered as an expression of 'unproductive expenditure' (Bataille, 1995, p. 21)—useless eating, like chewing gum—an action without nutritious benefit, created for the very purpose of creating waste.[81] The lumps remain incongruous. They cannot return to the homely, they remain 'outside' (body and home) and on the surface.[82]

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[80] Reference is made here to the stop-frame animation *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982) by Czech filmmaker Jan Švankmajer who made use of found objects and modelling clay to create a series of uncanny visual dialogues between two heads 'speaking' with matched then mismatched objects emerging from their mouths, such as toothbrush and paste, shoe and laces, butter and knife in (*Jan Švankmajer: the complete short* films, 2007).

[81] I am aware that 'useless eaters' is a term used in the Nazi German genocide to justify the euthanasia of several million people with disabilities. I do not intend to draw any insensitive comparison here to that context. A critical analysis of such a history is offered by Moster, 2002.

[82] During my research process the resulting bites or clay discharge were fired so that the strange lumps might become 'something' through the firing process. They were uncomfortable things, potentially profane and irreverent because they did not seem to relate to anything worldly. Experiments to re-bond them to plates were unsatisfactory.

Figure 26: (Detail) Left over shards. August 2019.

Inside/outside duality further echoes the concerns of my wider critical argument. There is no longer a singular thing-object. Instead, everything–all the plates, all the clay slips and dust sweepings–form an expanding matrix of surfaces. One particle of broken pottery is no more significant than another, and whilst fragments might be distinguishable, they are soon lost in the 'crowd' through the action of being swept into a pile. In effect the condensed accumulation of the now abject home can be seen as reduced to fragments, partials, formlessness.

Proximity

'Disgust brings the body perilously close to an object only then to pull away from the object in registering the proximity of the offence' (Ahmed 2014b, p.85). The closeness of the spectator enables me to explore both the 'at-the-table' connotations of sociability that I address in Chapter Four but to also force proximity with the intimate gestures I was making. I am investigating the creation of the 'private' space of the table within the framework of the larger theatrical structure in order to draw attention to the detail and intimacy I 'feel'—a reminder of intimacy of the homely. In reflecting on this moment in my work through Ahmed's description of 'disgust' (2014b), I believe I am managing the attraction towards and recoil from myself as subject. The gobs are an expression of what Kristeva describes as that 'which cannot be assimilated' (1982, p. 3) – something that seems to be like the homely but is not. I am positioning the spectator to face the familiar woman/me/feminine body and yet allow them to pull away from the unfamiliar in the same uncanny moment: 'Disgust is deeply ambivalent, involving desire for, or an attraction towards the very objects that are felt to be repelled' (Ahmed, 2014b, p. 84). Furthermore, we are reminded of the duality between speaking and eating, a duality between 'corporeal

things and incorporeal events … things and propositions, bodies and language' (Deleuze, 1990, p. 23). Similarly, I argue, my performance might confuse 'eating' and non-verbal 'speaking' (through the dialogic implications of soundless mouthing). I am attempting to explore a confusing sensorial experience that when described by language of the conceptual and or imagined ceases to make 'sense', (to say 'eating a plate' does not make social or corporal sense but does describe the activity accurately).

Figure 27: Audience at the table. August 2019.

Return–the table is (still) present

Having talked about my proximity to the spectator I conclude this chapter by addressing the continuing presence of a table in the works *Placing Carrying Breaking* and *Biting the Plate*. I appreciate that this perhaps interrupts the chronology of the thesis structure, but I want to attend to the returning and repeating table motif as in itself an uncanny 'spirit' of the patriarchal concerns of the homely set out in Chapter Four.

I draw attention to the table as a constant, stable against my body which is malleable and fallible. But I argue that the table's own firmness, as a metaphor for the domestic, is undermined by the performance of my body. Clarity of form is the antithesis to the *l'informe* which triggers the uncanny. I argue that paradoxically in order to prompt a formlessness that overtakes boundary, that boundary must first be present—the table is a bench-mark against which the behaviours of the body can be placed and assessed. The table is a metaphor for that which draws us back, the home to which we return and are returned to. Re-locating my body in *Placing Carrying Breaking* is an attempt to draw attention to the 'underside' and questioned what is beneath/beyond that which is familiar and seemingly understood.

Analysis of the table in Abramović and Ulay's works [83] informed my decision to sit at the table and later invite the spectator to join me. Abramović's much celebrated performance *The Artist is Present* (2010) problematises the dialogic and spiritual values that the table appears to represent in the earlier works by Ulay and Abramović. Amelia Jones comments on Abramović's use of and subsequent removal of the table in a footnote to her 2011 article for *The Drama Review*:

> She removed the table partway through the roughly three-month length of the show (14 March–31 May 2010) … this was because she felt the table distanced her psychologically from the individuals she faced (Jones, 2011, p. 17).

Abramović herself comments: '… I felt that I didn't need the table, I didn't need the structure …' (Blaswick and Abramović, 2011, p. 8). It seems that the table can therefore create 'nearness' and/or 'distance'. To sit at the table rather than without a table, the performer (me or Abramović) creates a social orientation and disorientation. I argue that Abramović is in effect 'putting aside' (Ahmed 2006, p.33) the uncanny ambiguity but perhaps also removing any possibility for the spectator to feel 'secure' behind the table edge – they are as exposed as she is. I suggest that despite her efforts Abramović's table remains present as a 'grey shadow' (Blaswick and Abramović, 2011, p. 8) it is the artist who still figuratively 'controls' who sits at the table. The contracted situation does not necessarily respond to a relational world (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 85), the experience of the 'performance' does not equate to normative experiences of the convivial table (Chapter Four). The social contract of the table is so engrained that the table is described even when it is not there. Thus, the potentiality for the table to 'hold us to the social contract' returns when I invite the spectator to my table, but it is a contract that 'distances'.[84] For me 'only the table is the same' (Ahmed 2006, p. 35) and my intention is to further the spectator's and my alienation from the discursive and communal. I am aware that you look at me; I

[83] *Rhythm 0* 1972 and *Night Sea Crossing*, a series begun in 1981 (Biesenbach, 2010).

[84] Other performances have employed a dramaturgy of inviting the spectator 'to the table', not least being Reckless Sleeper's *Last Supper* (2002) evoking the composition of Da Vinci's famous painting, inviting the audience to 'dine' with the performers (Reckless Sleepers, Online). In Bobby Baker's *Table Occasions* (1997) she explores the 'rules' of dining through a one-way discussion with the audience as she operates as a 'server' who is not allowed to touch the floor. She uses the table and two chairs as a way to move about whilst she sets the table or prepares the food (variously discussed in Barrett and Baker 2007).

look at you; you look at the plate; it looks at you. And other people look at us doing this, looking in on an uncanny simulation of a private encounter. I do not claim to assume the thoughts of my own spectators, hazarding to guess their position as participants in a construct of social engagement [85] but our 'simulated exchange' might bring the uncanny rushing in, because whilst the work stages a theatrical representation of domestic conviviality, I believe that the situation is actually an uncomfortable 'reality'. My attempt to challenge the conviviality of the table is to invert the sense of 'occasion' in the celebratory and temporal sense, (an 'occasion' I argue is paramount for Abramović) not only through the accumulation of detritus on the table but also by inviting the spectator to the table. I argue that I am attempting to avoid 'spectacle' by cultivating an equality of alienation between performer and 'guest'. I see this as us being alone together, physically placed 'at the table' yet within a psychic space which is not convivial, an evocation of uncanny unfamiliarity.

[85] I imagine the dialogue in the spectator's mind: *There is no conversation here. I am forced to watch a revolting action: repulsive, revolving. I want to look away, walk away, but I am drawn to the spectacle. And at the same time my commitment to sitting reinforces the action. The more I sit at the table the more this woman has to do this. Even if I leave, someone else will take my place. At moments, her eyes meet mine and I am further confused: am I supposed to stop this? Say something? Smile? My smile is a gesture of empathy, sympathy even for the distress I imagine the artist is going through. She looks at me, I see her seeing me. She looks away.*

Conclusions

> Identity cannot escape its discursive construction in/as iteration but, through performance, it may exert a counterpressure. It may repeat with a vengeance, making repetition stumble, stutter, driving a wedge into the practices of re/turn (between turn and return), thus at least promising repetition with a difference (D. Pollock, 1998, p. 92).

The three performances discussed in this thesis have investigated different but interconnected aspects of the uncanny, unfolding the relationship between the female body, feminine knowledge and a female history through an exploration of material objects of the home. The findings of these performances resulted in the identification of an abject and formless aspect to the uncanny that paradoxically is not without association with a more familiar homely condition. I will summarise my findings and suggest how my research might have consequences for performance practice and studies, and perhaps for a wider social and cultural context. Della Pollock's comment parallels the returning and repeating quality of the (un)homely. The implication for her suggestion in relationship to my performance research might be that my work has 're-turned' (turned to and overturned) the homely—making a difference to how the feminine and domestic might be understood, or at least is articulated through the fluid and unstable nature of the binaries that attempt to differentiate the homely from its unhomely neighbour. In restructuring my focus as 'feminine un-canny' I establish a way that we might acknowledge the intentionality of a feminine and uncanny practice, countering the suggestion that the uncanny is a chance and unmanageable condition. I reveal the feminine 'knowingness' of the practice and the affect it can have on our understanding of the feminine in relation to the homely or domestic. I do this by exploring the performativity of both my body and material objects of the home in such a way as to describe their simultaneous familiarity and strangeness.

This thesis has analysed the findings of my performance study and discusses the conceptual qualities by which the uncanny condition is understood in relation to the feminine and the home. The performances explore the semiotics of visual/performative 'language' or communication of idea and the material qualities of the subject, described through multiple relational properties. The unconventional encounter of objects and body as subjects seeks to establish an uncomfortable shift in expectations from normative experiences of the home(ly). My dramaturgy recognises the potential for unstable identities to emerge by allowing for responsive and unconscious gestures, to trouble the integrity of homely or familiar origins of the subjects, resulting in a collapsing of the identities of both

object and body—ceasing to be fixed and instead become permeable and fluid. My thesis offers an insight into the research methods of performance practice, providing examples of how theoretical analysis can be extrapolated from a process of doing and making. These finding have further application for the study of performance in general and particularly of feminist practice.

My research began with the intention to show why the performance of the body and domestic objects might instigate disturbing, uncanny feelings or conditions and through what conceptual qualities is the uncanny condition understood. I have tried to firstly show that in the act of performance there is a disturbance of what we think of as familiar signifying subjects of the home (including me as woman). Secondly, ambivalence is performed towards the formlessness materiality of the body. Thirdly, an abject correlation leaches from association between apparently familiar and banal material objects and the body. I connect these three qualities firmly to the original inspiration of Freud's uncanny: the disturbance we experience in the uncanny as expressed through animation of inanimate things; a repeated and returning to what was familiar and becomes unfamiliar and a shapelessness which might be 'ghostly', there and not there. By exploring ways to actualise Freud's tropes for the uncanny and investigate the emergent concerns with the body/object relationship I expose an abject and formless quality in the (un)homely.

The project of rewriting the female body as positive (rather than 'lacking') entailed reorganising and reframing of the terms by which the body has been socially represented (including psychoanalysis as a cultural frame). This challenged the discourses which claim to analyse and explain the body and subject scientifically, instead developing different perspectives that may better represent women's interests (Grosz 1994, p.61). My research has established a vocabulary for describing the intention and impact of solo feminist performance work which makes reference to the home or the domestic in a direct or oblique manner, through the employment of ordinary material objects and the female body and with consideration of the social and cultural representations of both. Thus, the 'feminine un-canny' can be considered to be a useful framework, not only for the generation of new performance, but plausibly, to be applied as tool for reading performance—enabling the practitioner and performance scholar to recognise characteristics in performance that uncomfortably evoke qualities of the home whilst demonstrably attacking the supposed stability of the homely—executed by performing the body and material objects of the home as subjects.

The thesis remains in paradox: advertising feminine (essentialist) qualities by reframing these as socially determined; navigating psychoanalytic interpretation of the feminine whilst maintaining a critical distance to psychoanalysis' gender bias; amalgamating normative gendered behaviours with subjectively constructed actions in order to disrupt hegemonic expectations of homely and create alternative presentations of Self and Other. In attempting to gain agency over marking difference through performance I have perhaps presented a version of myself which is less 'about gender' and more 'about' the essentially *human* condition. Whilst I have written about the essentialist sexual dualism favoured by some feminist artists (Chicago and Mendieta for example), I also argue for semiotic analysis as a tool for describing the human condition in and through my work. My ontological position remains as one that interprets social structures imbued with gendered power relations. As such, I assume human connectiveness that operates between me/artist and spectator (and between spectators). Perhaps then, moments of essentialisation through the conceptual framework of a feminine un-canny are important in the process of challenging the material conditions of the domestic. These tendencies towards essentialism are not uncritically fixed but revealed to be fluid, boundaryless and challenging.

Historical research of domestic objects and women's relationships to them provided an initial explanation for the socially constructed and biologically determinist reasons for why certain objects and materials might be perceived as especially 'feminine' or 'homely' and/or evocative of uncanny qualities of the female body. Whilst *Seven Tables* focused on interpreting the dramaturgical qualities or strategies I derived from Freud's uncanny tropes, the performance signposted more disquieting qualities to the interaction of the female body and inanimate objects. This included the suggestion that the animate (live) and inanimate (not live/dead) might be conceptually confused; that the boundaries that demarcate the homely and unhomely or familiar and unfamiliar might be breached through the impact of object on body and vice versa, and that a consequence of this interaction might be to return the object (subject) to its more thing-like and less determined state.

There are, perhaps, inherent contradictions to consider when attempting to develop a psychoanalytical conceptual framework for the feminine uncanny (with its tendencies towards essentialism), whilst seeking to embrace feminist social-constructionist theories of subjectivity and identity. I am going to reflect for a moment on my research methodology and consider the practical and conceptual effect of the work presented.

I feel that these conceptual contradictions were to some degree addressed in/as the performance itself–the demonstration of seemingly normative 'feminine domestic' actions which lead to less explicable gestures that were developed from the conceptual framework of the uncanny. I return to Rowbotham's suggestion, discussed in Chapter One, that we might adopt a language of experience as well as that of psychoanalysis in order to bring together personal histories with social analysis of the patriarchal world (1973, p. 70). This two-part approach informed my methodology and enabled me to utilise the performance process as a creative tool for the incorporation of experiential content responding to the formulation of an un-canny strategy, informed by Freud's writing. I hope that this methodology invited a 'reading' of my conceptualisation by the spectator through their own (inter)subjectivity.

Grosz highlights the effects of subjectivity in relation to one's corporeality and the subsequent 'inscriptions' on and transformations of one's corporeal surface (Grosz 1004, p.vii). It is for this reason that I feel that my feminine un-canny practice has the potential to affect the spectator. Here I reconsider tension over an implied feminine/feminist intersubjectivity or 'closeness' perhaps existing for artist and (female) spectator. Have I assumed spectator's experiences to parallel my own? Am I also assuming that the spectator's gendered experiences might inform their interpretation of my work and understanding of their own identities in relationship to the experience of the performance? We are situated in a multiplicity of social and political contexts. I might therefore suppose the engagement of my spectators with my work, not least because I recognise priori knowledge of performance, cementing patterns of performer/audience behaviour. The interrelationship of me as subject and object of the art work and the spectator as witness or observer has been discussed earlier in my thesis. However, I believe that my performance works also invite spectators to take a corporeally empathetic position or to project themselves in the experience of performer. I believe this was especially the case when observing and trying to make sense of the physical interaction of my body and the material objects in the space. My method included the use of socially situated material objects which in turn situated me the performer *and* the spectator in the context of the domestic. I suppose this 'empathy' to be reliant on an assumed and essential understanding of the human and the corporeal and I would like to think that the spectator was acutely aware of her own relationship to the materials and subjects of my performance. Evidence of this filtered back to me in anecdotal form (mentioned in the body of the thesis) but I did not actively seek quantitative or qualitative audience feedback. *I can imagine what it feels like to crawl in dirt,*

the sensation of the grit on my skin, based on my own experiences of dirt and skin.[86] As such, the work invites an embodied spectatorship, not 'immersive' process (Shaughnessy, 2012, p.126). The phenomenological process of both doing and observing has not been my research focus but should perhaps be the context for further research. Nonetheless, I maintain that my practice can solicit an altered sensibility for those engaged in the work (performer, spectator and indeed reader); that this experience is not only subjective but perhaps also extended beyond the spatial and temporal specificities of the performance event itself, and so is not possible to quantify beyond my own biographic analysis.

Whilst spectator surveys might be a useful tool for me in future work, for the moment, in the development of this research project I felt it was important to focus upon the experience of the solo woman performer-maker. My intention was, as Heddon describes it, to uncover and forge identity at the same time (2008, p.13), to reveal to myself and the spectator the unravelling of a sense of self predicated on a certainty of the homely. How effective (in quantitative terms) my work has been is not measured. But I maintain that my work offers 'an embodied perceptual experience in which [the spectator is] both critically and creatively engaged' (Shaugnessey 2012, p.128). Nicola Shaugnessey goes on to draw upon cultural geographer Sarah Whatmore's work to elucidate on the nature of 'affect' as the force of 'relationality intensities that are felt but not personal; visceral but not confined to an individuated body' (Shaugnessey 2012, p.128). Whatmore's phrasing suggests that perhaps it is not necessary to consider only the personal, individualised experience of performance but possible to surmise that the affect might be more generalised and social and intersubjective.

Whilst *affect* has been discussed throughout this written exegesis, I acknowledge that the impact of or effect of the uncanny strategies at play in the work can only be recognised as and through *my* experiences. I remind myself of Freud's own belief that the uncanny is a felt and phenomenological experience. I suggest that the sense of uncanniness present in my (and indeed any) art work is in part dependent on the socially situated condition of the individual, be that me or the spectator. By socially situated I mean the way in which one might interact

[86] I am reminded of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's illustration of the 'intersubjective relationship' in his description of the infant's response to seeing and 'knowing' what the physical experience of biting is when watching the adult's mouth move, even when the infant has no 'understanding' for the reason of the action. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, p.368).

with the physical and social (political) environment.[87] This research project afforded me the opportunity to investigate my own social situation and to share this with the spectator.

For these reasons I am content with the way that I presented work for my spectators to watch, but might consider differing strategies of interaction in the future in order to further explore the spectator's interrelational response to subjects in the work. As Tim Etchells states, 'to witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight of things and one's own place in them, even if that place is simple, for the moment, as an onlooker' (Etchells 1999, p.17).

It is in the experience of performing 'making doing' that I identified the interrelationship between body and objects, affecting one another to actualise uncanny sensations. These experiences were informed by contextual research and lead my line of enquiry to the seemingly peripheral concerns of overlooked materials of the home, literally the detritus or base matter of the home. I applied my analysis to the destabilisation of patriarchal structures of the homely and domestic, extending this reading to the subsequent subject findings of my research, including the significance of sound, the function of the body in performance, etc.

> A feminist text must not only be critical of or a challenge to the patriarchal norms governing it; it must also help, in whatever way, to facilitate the production of new and perhaps unknown, unthought discursive spaces – new styles, modes of analysis and argument, new genres and forms – that contest the limits and constraints currently at work in the regulation of textual production and reception (Grosz, 1994b, p. 23).

Grosz's case for feminist writing supports my position that the sexually specific body is socially constructed, but that biological corporeality is not in opposition to the social or cultural. Rather, that the incompleteness of the body identity offers the possibility for re-writing and action, and reaction to all sign systems. As such, I have the opportunity to apply my performance work as critical 'text' to create a new, discursive space. I carried out a challenge to patriarchal notions of the home through my performance as 'texts', contributing a performative approach to the research of identity and contributing new arguments that test and extend an understanding of both the homely and the unhomely. My research privileged my experience as practitioner and homemaker and the influence this has on the choice of material objects and actions that were abstracted from their origin.

[87] My research project does not claim to operate as art in a social context or as art for social change: see Lorraine Leeson 2017.

There was a risk of perpetuating degenerative feminine characterisations, biologically determining a return of the feminine to the homely. Recognition of this risk inspired more demonstrative and destructive performance actions resulting in the production of formless 'waste'. This led my research to further conceptualise not only the fragmentation of the home(ly) but also my own feminine identity.

These ideas were further developed in subsequent performances in order to identify what additional conceptual qualities emerge through the performance process and why these qualities prompt more disturbing and uncertain implications for the feminine and homely. These qualities were examined in *Placing, Carrying, Breaking* and *Biting the Plate* through the concept of the abject, including *l'informe* or the formless. By focusing on the corporeal and permeable attributes of the body and the permeating and 'returning' qualities of the materials being used (crockery and clay) the performance work was able to further describe the boundarylessness of the uncanny and make the concept of formlessness as a 'real' action of/on/by the body and matter. Thus, the performance works actualised uncanny tropes to activate uncanny properties in and of the performance itself (be those experienced by the performer and or spectator).

Further inferences were drawn as to the implications for the female/feminine identity of my own lived experience, which returned me to my initial conceptual framework–where feminine knowledge might be interpreted as something 'unnatural' and disturbing; where the historical position of women is further impacted on by recognition of an aging, fallible and porous body; and feminist political intention disrupts not only the social political landscape but how we 'gender' our identities and navigate the gendering of that landscape. As such, I argue that the 'feminine un-canny' is both a manifestation of and instigator of my own identity. The 'feminine un-canny' can be summarised as deconstructing hegemonic notions of the homely because it upsets familiar boundaries and replaces them with dual, slippery and plastic concepts. In doing so the feminine identity is represented as an authoritative agent to affect the certainty of both the notion of the home and the notion of the feminine itself.

However, familiar tropes of the domestic were not entirely abandoned but acted as 'reference points' with which to navigate the work. These tropes of a feminine domestic were not enacted as a parody or with the intention to create a representational scenography of the domestic. Rather than performing the character of 'housewife' my practice examined societal expectations for the mature heterosexual woman to behave in a 'homely manner', countering these expectations with a sense of uneasiness and discomfort through

uncanny themes rather than representations of domesticity. Agency over the (un)homely was expressed as the performer's (or material object's) capacity to excite change, in this case to evoke the uncanny, and the capacity to impact their environment or indeed each other with the objective of upsetting normative relationships. It is my belief that the performance afforded me/the woman the environment in which the normative expectations of homely feminine behaviour are set aside. What these performance actions did was not to necessarily become fragmented, but to show the process of negotiation and cross-over between the action of culture upon me/woman and the cultural action of me/artist (Pollock cited by Heddon 2008, p119).

Furthermore, the body/subject in phenomenological terms is always both representation of the body-as-object and a thinking subject at the same time; 'the subject poses as an object *in order to be a subject'* or in words of body artist Eleanor Antin: 'the notion of the body is itself an alienation of the physical aspects of the self … But what if the artist makes a leap from 'the body' to 'my body'? 'My body' is, after all, an aspect of 'my self' and one of the means by which my self protects into the physical world' (Antin cited by Jones 1998, p.159). This quandary–of being both subject and object is at the centre of the troubling of feminine identity–and in turn troubles the intersubjectivity of the spectator (who is also performing as both 'audience' object and individual subject).

I am confident in the effectiveness of my aim to evoke a sense of strangeness through my aesthetic decisions. As discussed, the performative process defamiliarized the material object as subjects of the work to me and constructs new meaning, so I can positively assume that this was the case in some instances for the spectator (although not necessary all people and all meanings). 'An abundance of meaning is produced but no 'decidable' or pre-decided meanings' (Phelan, 2004, p.571 in Harris 2009, p.8). Perhaps all I can ask is that the spectator is open to the meaning of the performer and performance (Gadamer 1975, p.235 cited by Wolff 1981, p.101). As such, it was important to me to leave the dialogue 'open ended'.

To summarize: I have positioned my research in relation to feminist arguments over the application of psychoanalytical interpretations of women's experiences. I have made use of a language of experience as well as a psychoanalytic frame (Rowbotham, 1973) to bring together my personal understanding, histories of women's lives and the knowledge gained through performance art making. In doing so I believe that I have made a feminist argument for the critique of socially and culturally constructed notions of the homely and the feminine in association with the domestic. Within the limitations of my research project I have theorized

how the ideology of given roles–of feminine identity built around the home–might be occupied and resisted. I have proposed that the act of resistance can be investigated through and expressed as performance art, and that strategies for making this artwork can be described as 'feminine un-canny'.

Through my research project I have come to understand that 'the feminine' and 'the homely' are unstable and subjective concepts and that 'femininity' (or indeed 'homely') is therefore impossible to achieve. My research goal was not to define female identity but to complicate it and in doing so undermine processes which dictate what meanings can and cannot attach to femininity. I see my work as exerting a 'counterpressure' on normative understanding(s) of the homely and the home, '[o]pening a new subjective space through performances of femininity that are at once dissonant, irreverent, and ambivalent' (Reed 1997, quoted by Budgeon, 2011, p. 76). Thus, the feminine emerges not as something definable and fixed but something fluid and un-canny.

In these concluding moments of the thesis I consider that the 'shattering' of identity cannot be 'felt' by the spectator in the same way as for me (despite them having a physical, phenomenological response to the sensory experience), perhaps because what is constantly present is the same patriarchally determined notion of the feminine and the homely. In Chapter Five I use the onomatopoeic 'shatter' to describe the experience of breaking plates as a way to conceptualise the breaking down of a sense of self as determined by hegemonic norms of the feminine. I critique my own vocabulary here and reflect that instead of a sharp, momentary or sudden 'shattering' of identity, my work describes a more surreptitious collapse or fragmentation–a collapse of boundaries between self and other, public and private and the difference between the signifier and the signified (Jones 1998, p.51). Looking back on my experience of the performance I reflect that bringing the audience member to the table was my attempt to foreground and collapse the separation of performer and spectator at the same time. This dramaturgy might have also operated as acknowledgement on my part of the Duchampian sense of the viewer 'completing' the work.[88] I reflect that the spectator might act as the 'bridge' between the constraints of the performance site and the external world. I argue that we all bring a dimension of reality to

[88] 'All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act'. Marcel Duchamp, 'The Creative Act' (1973).

the viewing of art, to operate at the same time as a fictive space, creating a space for critical reflection, whether through distance or immersion in the creative (theatrical) space (Breeman, 2020). The questioning of equality in relationship to performer and spectator has not been a concern of this thesis, but nonetheless, I think that my work does draw attention to the relationships between both parties and the function of the performance to be a starting point for discussion of experiences of daily life.
Thus, the shattering of plates did not mark a *destruction* of the hegemonic, despite personally felt 'release' or 'liberation' in-the-moment. Instead, the performance moved towards 'unfixing' hegemonic certainty. Further pursuit of this 'unfixed-ness' prompted the 'eating the clay plate' action–to better conceptualise, not the 'destruction' of the domestic self, but the regurgitation, returning and simultaneous, uncanny presence of differing feminine selves. These actions (smashing and eating-into) both distanced (created a gap between) and reaffirmed affiliation to relationships of the home and homely. As Grosz argues–feminist theory is about a concept of difference, 'difference *not* from a pregiven form, but [of] *pure difference*, difference in itself, difference with *no identity*' (Grosz, 1994a, P.53). I think that it is the 'flicker', a moment felt of 'no identity' which produced for me the uncanny moment.

For me, this uncanny moment was not necessarily in the experience of the action where I was also focused on the practical realities of managing the performing. But rather, the uncanny experience appeared for me in re-addressing myself in the video and in the writing–not seeing my Self but instead seeing a version of myself. The 'shatter' or collapse for me therefore is in the realisation that both states of homely and unhomely being are simultaneously possible and impossible to attain and maintain. As the subject and author of my work I argue that despite any 'collapse' I maintain agency over the representing of the selfhood. But I am also placed in the position of the spectator, seeing my own spectatorship as contributing to, acting upon and sharing the construction of meaning. The spectating me/them/you are complicit in persistence of the feminine un-canny.

At this point I reflect on the limitations of my written analysis from the perspective of the maker, in attempting to assess the efficacy of work in prompting a social or political 'shift'. I have suggested that what the viewer is seeing–is reading, is in some ways a 'documentary trace' (Jones 1997, p.3) of my reactions (and re-actions) to the staged physical and contextual conditions of the work. Writing has been the reflective tool in my iterative process of 'doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing' (Nelson 2013, p.32), to articulate my own experiences and critical analysis of the performance works rather than, for example, a reflective discussion

with the spectator.[89] I suggest that a challenge in biographically writing about one's performance work is one of 'absence'. This writing, with its focus on *my* experience, or my *memory* of that experience, and whilst acknowledging the interrelationality of me/object/subject and spectator, has to overlook the responsive interpretation of the spectator.

I conclude therefore that my performance methodology enabled a lived situation and a person-to-person phenomenological relationship to occur between spectator and artist (and art work). It also invited the spectator's deeper interpretation of political, social and personal contexts in the work. Meaning, therefore, emerged through the stimulus of the performance work via our common or uncommonly shared experiences of the world, including the social and political significance of the subjects in the performance. Whilst I might assume, given the academic context for this work, that the spectator has some sense of my intentions for the work (and some notes were provided in some of the public iterations of this research project), I can accept that a deeper 'understanding' of my work might emerge over a longer period of time, or not at all.

Additionally, the writing process enabled the structure of a narrative around my exploration of identity. One could argue therefore that this implies that there is /I am a 'readable' subject; that I am described through this experience, not as 'me' the individual but the subject – not only as my 'self' but also as "Self". Afterall, 'identity is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one's own self' (Hall 1991, p.49 cited by Heddon 2008 p.27). As such, I *experienced* a sense of self of and through the subjectivity and intersubjectivity of the performance. I shared this with the subjective spectator–and trusted that they 'received' this/my experience through their own. But, as feminist political scientist Jane Flax emphasizes, the borderline of subjectivity is fractured and unstable, marked as she describes it, by 'a somewhat unpredictable whirl of fragments', each fragment with its own intra- and inter-subjective modes of relating. Thus, 'Any stable moment of rest and continuity feels tenuous and insecure' (Flax 1993, p.105 cited by Radden, 1996, p.82). I therefore consider the performance context (like the fragments of pottery and house dirt) as itself being one of uncanny fragmentation and insecurity.

[89] The difficulty in writing about the ephemeral material of performance is addressed by Nicola Shaughnessy (who in turn signposts us to Phelan 1993 and Schneider 2011) (Shaughnessy 2012, p.xiv).

Through the viscerality of performance I exposed that the uncanny cannot sit in isolation but shares concerns with the abject and the formless as theories which undermine the stability or certainty of the familiar. The results of my investigation demonstrate that the 'feminine un-canny' can be considered not as a sub-section of the uncanny (in the Freudian sense) but as the locus or meeting point in the 'Venn diagram' of abjection, formlessness and uncanny. I ascertain that the 'feminine un-canny' is a distinct strategy for performance making because it incorporates the domestic as content and context rather than focusing solely on the body as a site and whilst abjection or formlessness are contributors to the disturbing or unsettling qualities of the resulting work, these are outcomes of the work and not strategies for making per se. Much is written on the abject in performance (or body art)[90] but I argue the 'feminine un-canny' is a layered approach that might include the more overt body-based performance, or rather work through less overt but no lesser uncanny, abject and deconstructive dramaturgies of body and object as subject. The result remains, that the uncanny qualities of my performance rest in the acceptance of producing unsettling experiences that are intended to disturb and deconstruct the homely condition.

What emerges

I finish this thesis with a short reflection on emergent implications for my research.

A challenge to the self

I admit that the research journey has been a struggle, not merely in the commitment and rigour demanded, but in the challenge placed on me to consider my own sense of self in the very real terms of being academic and artist, wife and daughter. As such, my project is informed by autobiographic narratives that sit behind the texts of my performance research. Whilst (happily) I do not feel any sense of either alienation or catharsis in having carried out my performances, I reflect further on what drove me to be naked in front of strangers, or to crawl in dirt and eat clay. I think about what aspect of 'me' such actions represent. The contradictions and dualities of my identity are felt as inherently uncanny. I am informed by Peggy Phelan's discussion in 'Broken Symmetries: Memory, Sight, Love'

[90] For discussion on the abject in performance see *Performance Research* 19(1): 'On Abjection', as well as Arya 2014; Roselee Goldberg 2004; Tickner in Parker and Pollock 1987, pp. 263–275**;** Warr 2000 and Jones 1998.

(1993, pp. 1–34), reflecting that perhaps my interest in performing is motivated by a desire to secure a self-image, a construction of my 'self', through mimetic representations of versions of 'always-lost' memories, or projections of a version of my feminine. 'Mimetic representation requires that the writer/ speaker employs pronouns, invents characters, records conversations, examines words, and images of others, so that the spectator can secure a coherent belief in self-authority, assurance and presence' (Phelan, 1993, p. 5). Thus, in constructing a 'feminine un-canny' version of myself maybe I present to the spectator an identity that is coherent, but which is perhaps still 'haunted' by 'the image we believe in, the [one] we remember seeing and loving' (Phelan, 1993, p. 6). The homely is still present in the unhomely version of the woman (me).

Home making

Further research ideas are suggested by this project, to include aspects of gendered homely behaviour in consumerism and 'home making' through the archiving and curating of household objects. Additionally, exploration of the geography and architecture of the home and 'not-home' such as public space or the workplace might serve to further articulate the tensions between expectations and realities of the feminine. Whilst I am aware that such contexts have been explored by artists such as Martha Rosler, Monica Ross and Mierle Laderman Ukeles (Phillips et al., 2016 and Conte, 2015) I feel that the twenty first century issues around housing, homelessness and migration have shifted general understanding and expectations of what 'home' and 'homely' might mean.

The 'feminine un-canny' is a wholly familiar concern for all women who manage multiple and often conflicting roles and responsibilities, which come and go through life. I reflect that in my fifties, the concerns of an aging body will further inform my understanding the 'performing body' and in turn challenge normative expectations of the familiar feminine. Maybe then, the 'feminine un-canny' offers a way to feel 'comfortable' about the leaking body, the formless body, the lack of boundary between familiar and unfamiliar. Which perhaps suggests making the uncanny 'domestic' (rather than the other way around) – the uncanny is after all made up of 'the familiar' the banal and quotidian, inherently homely (as well as unhomely). It is such a sense of a plural and complex feminine I allude to through uncanny strategies which play between familiar and unfamiliar behaviours, images or spaces of the home. To further this discussion feminist theorists Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson argue for a definition of 'the subject' which proposes we 'replace unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others,

attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation' (Fraser and Nicholson, 1999, p. 92). My research projects signpost towards further performative examination of the aging female body, and experience of/as it.

However, my initial findings in the connection between the uncanny and the grotesque, the abject or the formless lead me to conclude that it is a plural and complex subject, not only of gender and age but also of class. Further research is justified for an examination of how class identity (self-described or imposed) might inform (or limit) a feminine and an uncanny identity. One challenge will be how to manifest this socially constructed identity in performance, without illustration or parody. Certainly, such a context would return performance research to historic concerns with the value of art, of the body and labour and political marginalisation, but I suggest these contexts deserve re-visiting and can be built upon.

Not at home

I do not claim to have resolved the paradox of the dual uncanny residing in both the homely and unhomely. The tension remains between the uncanny as a category that undoes patriarchal hegemony—which applies to all subjects, and my attempt to activate it with respect to female bodies and with distinctly feminist intentions. But by addressing my own desire to describe my identity via the securities of the feminine domestic relationship whilst also attacking the stability of the homely I have been able to further understand the fluidity of the construction of identity – of self and of 'the home'. Rather than seeing this fluidity as an abject home 'sickness' as Vidler describes it (1992, p. 12) I have suggested a way in which one can be less uncomfortable or less 'sickened' by the prospect of this formless and ungraspable, uncanny duality. I suggest that the 'homesickness' exists not 'in' the state of flux but because that fluidity brings us closer to the originating homely. Scrutiny reveals the constructed nature of the homely as having always been a composite with the unhomely. It is not the unhomely that creates discomfort per se but the realisation that the homely always was a fluid and undefined concern. The more attentive we become of the homely domestic familiar, the more unsettling it can be seen to be. And I argue that only by working in a process of deconstructive performativity have I been able to draw attention to, or to bring close the disrupted instability of the homely/unhomely and recognise that one is fully implicated in the other.

I am going to briefly signpost what it might mean to conceptualise and literally 'flesh out' (as performance) the slipperiness or elusiveness of the unattainable and how that 'unattainable' might be described in future scholarship. 'Utopia' might bring a context to my research project into the 'not home(ly)' so far. Thomas More (Levitas 1990) describes a notion of utopia as simultaneously a 'good' place and dystopic 'no place', where 'good' is the comforting and familiar and 'no place' the more unsettling and anxiety inducing manifestation of yearning or nostalgia for that 'good'. If, as seen in Freud's own analysis, the unhomely is both predicated and contained within the homely (Karaftl, 2005, p. 135) it might be supposed that it is the desire to pursue the homely that results in the unhomely. Marc Augés theory of 'non place' asks what might it mean for our experience of 'home' if it is experienced not as something fixed and comforting but instead as more liminal, a more anonymous place instead of an 'anthropological' or social space? (Augé, 1992, p. 122). A further exploration of uncanny yearning for the nostalgia of home and social architecture of the house/ home as implying sense of place offers me future research opportunities—to unpack the idea of the home(ly) as a non-place in the twenty-first century experience and discover how this might be articulated through performance.[91] Acknowledging the 'feminine un-canny' maybe recognises this duality of desire and rejection and place it under tension as a way to examine how all homes/homely—which are concerned initially with the familiar and comfortable are also potentially effectually unsettling in the act of exposure (performance)—it is not possible to divorce the 'ideal home' from its unsettled and unsettling neighbour.

Consequences for performance studies

From my performances I deduced that the 'feminine un-canny' is allied to a dramaturgy of defamiliarisation – of presenting everyday things (objects, actions) in an unfamiliar or strange way, in order to enhance perception of the familiar. However, I argue that the 'feminine un-canny' goes further to elicit discomfort or anxiety—firstly, because expectations of the normative are challenged through especially abject or formless exploration, and secondly that the resulting feeling of uncanniness results from the uneasiness aroused when the stability of hegemonic norms is interrupted.

If we are to formulate a more fluid understanding of the home (in a real and conceptual sense) and of who is 'at home', we need to find a vocabulary for the expression of

[91] For a full discussion on the theory of 'non place' see Augé 1992, and Fisher 2012 and 2016. For a discussion of site and performance see Kaye 2000.

gendered, performative expressions of a synthesised homely and unhomely. Feminine un-canniness has the potential to foster greater understanding of less homely and alarming aspect of life. Despite being unseen, unrecognised or hidden, the abject and formless are not expressions of repression but rather are expressions of the embodied and tacit knowledge of the 'feminine un-canny'. This uncanny quality is activated by the 'canny' knowledge of the feminine, potentially embodied in non-binary terms. My findings suggest further research into the 'site' of the home(ley) and states of 'incompleteness', where the home might be homely and discomforting and unhomely at the same time (a hostel room or in the detritus of the home perhaps). The uncanny slipperiness and formlessness that comes about in recognition of the familiar and unfamiliar invites further scrutiny and offers possibilities for actualisation in performance.

> The uncanny is never simply a question of a statement, description or definition, but always engages a performative dimension, a maddening supplement, something unpredictable and additionally strange happening in and to what is being stated, described or defined. (Royle, 2003, p. 16).

Whilst I have referred to other artists work in this thesis, I am not retrospectively proposing that their work is feminist and or 'feminine un-canny', but rather that I identify aspects of their work that could be suggested to demonstrate some of these themes—perhaps that they offer a foundation for a canon of practice that could be described as 'feminine un-canny'. I feel the relationship between the body and found object as subjects of solo performance remains under explored in existing scholarship. I see future scholarship in the continued interest of object/body subjects in performance art as a continuation of historical interests that challenge the commodification of art, address the objectification of the body or adopt artist-led and non-institutional processes of art production.[92] This interest is I think in part related to recent shifts in understanding of the ecological impact of consumerist culture, and changing concerns with what 'home' might mean in a global context.

Thus, I reiterate that the 'feminine un-canny' is more than an outcome or reading of performance but can be a strategy or approach to making, based on clearly outlined content and themes. These themes can be described as: a replication of disempowering aspects of the (un)homely in order to challenge the repressive qualities of the home; drawing (consciously or unconsciously) upon the psychoanalytical concept of the uncanny as a way

[92] For an account of the social and global political context of recent performance art practice see Deirdre Heddon's chapter 'The Politics of Live Art' in Heddon and Klein, 2012, pp. 175–205.

to problematise normative constructs of the female in a patriarchal space; evoking something unsettling and uncomfortable through dramaturgical or compositional choices that include the presentation of familiar materials of the home with the female body so as to reimagine their inter-relationship, and troubling the corporeal and psychic identity through those dramaturgical or compositional representations of the feminine in order to dislocate patriarchal authority.

To return to Freud's etymological introduction to the uncanny: we cannot separate the duality of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* and we must instead acknowledge the liminal shudder that places us between the two and in both. By offering a way to look 'closer to home' the 'feminine un-canny' approach can contribute to understanding wider anxiety over our 'not-at-homeness' and acknowledge the banality of 'fear and dread' which we live with on a daily basis.

Appendices

Appendix 1. The Story of the Sand-man–a summary.

A summary of the story based on my reading of the original: *The Sand-ma*n (*Der Sandmann*) by E.T.A Hoffman,1816 (Hoffman, 1844).

The story begins as letters between the main protagonist Nathaniel, his fiancée Clara and her brother Lothar. In his letters Nathaniel describes his fear of a 'bogey-man' that his Nursemaid would threaten Nathaniel with in childhood. The Sand-man, comes at night to steal the eyes of children. He scatters sand in the children's eyes to irritate until they scratch their own eyes out, which the Sandman can feed to his own owl-like offspring.

Nathaniel equates this prophetic story with a regular visitor to the family home, the feared lawyer Coppelius. Coppelius meets with Nathaniel's father to conduct alchemic experiments. On one occasion Nathaniel believes Coppelius to have threatened to throw hot cinders in the boy's eyes. Later, Nathaniel's father is killed in an explosion (perhaps at the hands of Coppelius) and the lawyer mysteriously disappears. These events bring on a bout of illness or madness in Nathaniel.

As an adult at University, Nathaniel encounters a man called Coppola and immediately confuses him to be the Coppelius of his childhood. Coppola is an ophthalmic and scientific instrument maker. Nathaniel tells Clara and Lothar about the 'evil man' but they convince him that it is a childish delusion. Time passes, Nathaniel returns home to battle with the confusion of memories.

Once back at University Nathaniel is introduced to Olimpia, the daughter of a Professor. Nathaniel buys a 'weather-glass' from the optician Coppola and uses this to spy upon the beautiful girl Olimpia, with whom he falls in love. He becomes infatuated by her, seeming to forget previous obsessions and indeed his friends. Nathaniel watches Olimpia through the telescope or weather-glass. However, Olimpia is really an animatronic doll made by the Professor and the scientist Coppola, who has set working eyes into the doll. Nathaniel does not know this and is fascinated by Olimpia's silence and apparent poise. But one day, whilst watching he sees Coppola and the Professor fighting over the ownership of their doll-daughter. Coppola knocks out the eyes of the doll and they roll across the floor. Nathanial is horrified and thrown into another fit of insanity.

Lothar and Clara try to console him but Nathaniel further confuses Clara with Olimpia and attacks her. Nathaniel climbs a high tower in the town and from there spies who he believes to be the lawyer Coppelius. Nathaniel jumps to his death crying 'oh lovely eyes'. Clara goes on to marry happily.

Appendix 2. Bathsheba At Her Bath

Hélène Cixous' reflections on Rembrandt's painting appear in the essay 'Bathsheba or the Interior Bible', originally published in 1993 as part of *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (1998).

Figure 28. *Bathsheba At Her Bath* (1654).
Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. Oil on Canvase. Louvre, Paris. (Collange, no date).

Rembrandt's oil painting depicts a life-size biblical scene: Bathsheba the wife of Uriah, General of Kind David's army, is bathing. Bathsheba is shown naked except for jewellery, seated draped with white cloth, attended by her elderly handmaid who crouches to wash Bathsheba's feet. Bathsheba's body fills the canvas. The maid is in shadow. Light falls from behind and to the left of the viewer, mainly on Bathsheba's head and body. Behind her the image fades into vague shadow. According to the story, Bathsheba has received a letter, which she holds in her right hand. The letter is from King David summoning her to his chamber. It marks the beginning of an adulterous affair, whilst Uriah is sent into battle and certain death by the King. Bathsheba's expression is pensive, her eyebrows raised. Her arm is bent to rest her hand on her crossed thigh, where it clutches an unfolded sheet of paper, on the underside of which there is writing. (Collange, no date, para. 2).

The model for Bathsheba is believed to have been Hendrickje Stoffels, previously Rembrandt's maid, with whom he had been living after the death of his wife in 1642. There has been much comment on the slight asymmetry of her breasts, shown in the painting, and small swellings towards the left armpit, and implications of the model's breast cancer or as evidence of breastfeeding (Against Breast Cancer 2015).

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