

**University of Surrey**  
**Department of Theatre & Performance Studies**  
**School of Performing Arts**

**THE FEMININE / ORAL IN**  
**CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE**

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**OCTOBER 2000**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a radical connection between femininity and orality across a range of disciplinary fields. In particular it proposes the term 'os-text' to describe the relationship between writing and speaking one's own text in performance. This term takes in the meanings of the uttering mouth (the 'os'), the kissing of text into performance (osculation), and the oscillation between writing and speaking. The thesis involves critical writing, performative writing, poetic text, a CD-ROM (*mouthplace*), an audio CD (*snow ghosts*) and video documentation of a dance theatre production (*The Secret Project*). This multi-disciplinary submission uses different critical and artistic discourses to argue and perform the os-text and the relationship between femininity and orality.

The CD-ROM *mouthplace* performs the relationship between femininity and orality as *theme*, through my own os-textual performance practice. The proposal of the os-text is developed in the written thesis as a model for transgressive performance practice. It does so through my own os-textual performance work, and through analysis of the os-textual practice of Karen Finley, Rose English and Laurie Anderson. The important differences between os-textual practice in live and recorded media are problematised here. In relation to new technologies, I refine the os-text through a further term in relation to voice – the 'loa'. I suggest that voice in relation to new technologies can elaborate transgression in os-textual practice, even when the medium is not live.

The broader connections between femininity and orality are examined in the use of food in women's performance, and in the visual field in photography and painting.

My original contributions to knowledge are (i) the category of the os-text, (ii) the original art practice (iii) the particular combination of critical and performative writing within the body of the written thesis.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Doctoral submission has been supported by a range of individuals and institutions during the six years of its writing / making. I would like to thank all those who gave me intellectual, practical and financial support during these years.

My supervisors for this PhD were Caroline Bergvall, Director of Performance Writing at Dartington College of Arts (1994 – 8) and Lizbeth Goodman, Director, The Institute for New Media Performance Research and Senior Lecturer, Theatre and Performance Studies at The University of Surrey (1998 – 2000).

*half/angel's*<sup>1</sup> research into motion-sensing systems and performance began in 1996 with two residencies at STEIM (Studio for Electronic and Instrumental Musics) Studios, in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Steina Vasulka was Artistic Director during these residencies.

Mary Brady, Artistic Director of ICD (Institute for Choreography and Dance), Firkin Crane Cork, Ireland, took the plunge by supporting our research into motion-sensing technologies and choreography / text, before she knew the work well. Mary's belief in and support of this research has been a consistent enabling force in the development and performance of this work in Ireland.

Sara Diamond, Artistic Director of the New Media Institute at The Banff Centre in Canada supported our research into motion-sensing and performance from an early stage, and continued to co-produce the work to its final performance and premiere in Banff.

I would like to thank Cindy Cummings and Mary Nunan, performers (along with me) in *The Secret Project*, whose tenacity and vivacity made the piece the success it was.

™

Many organisations have supported this research financially over the last six years. All of these contributions of economic support actively enabled my practical and theoretical research. I would like to acknowledge the following institutions for their support; Dartington College of Arts, Devon, England; The Arts Council of England (*Emotional Computing Award*, Department of Film, Television & Broadcasting 1995 & *New Audiences Programme*, Department of Literature 1999 / 2000); The Arts Faculty Research Fund at University College Cork, Ireland; The Arts Council of Ireland (*Travel Awards* 1998 & 1999, and *Interdisciplinary Collaborative Commission Scheme* 1999); The Cultural Relations Committee, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland; RESCEN (Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts), Middlesex University in association with The South Bank, England.

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The bulk of writing in this thesis was completed during two writing residencies in Ireland during 1999 / 2000. I would like to thank Noelle Campbell-Sharpe, Director of *The Cill Rialaig Project*, Ballinskelligs, and *The Tyrone Guthrie Centre* at Annaghmakerrig, Co. Monaghan.

Several of my colleagues in the Department of English at University College Cork read chapters of this thesis prior to their submission, and gave me valuable feedback: Thanks to Patricia Coughlan, Jean Donovan Sanborn, Clióna Ó Gallchóir and Eibhear Walshe. Special thanks to my research assistant Noelle McCarthy.

And to Richard Povall, my long-time collaborator and co-director of our performance production company *half/angel*. Richard and I have been working together for five years, and he has been a consistent friend in life and work. Thank you for loving my writing into ghostly presences, and for dancing with me through and beyond screens, into the mouths of angels . . .

At the thesis' end, Vittorio Bufacchi led me through the hesitancies of completion, with a steady hand and a smile. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> *half/angel* is our performance production company. The co-artistic directors are myself and Richard Povall.