

## **‘Notes on Apparitions and Returning’**

Nathan Walker & Victoria Gray

This paper was presented at *Notes on a Return Symposium*, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle Upon Tyne. ‘Notes’ was an exhibition and symposia revisiting performance art works performed at Laing Art Gallery between 1985-87 by Anne Bean, Bruce McLean, Rose English, Mona Hatoum, and Nigel Rolfe.

The paper was presented as a performance (writing), by Victoria Gray and Nathan Walker. The presentation involved objects, actions, and gestures, as well as being devised to be read as a script, as if for a play.

The text indicates using the initials ‘V’ and ‘N,’ where each of the “players” speaks, either alone or together, with director’s notes.



Victoria Gray and Nathan Walker, Notes on a Return Symposium, Newcastle, Laing Art Gallery.  
Image detail, Nathan Walker with VHS of ‘Ghost’ sellotaped to their head.

**V+N(loudly): *A Specter is haunting Newcastle – the specter of performances, the ghosts of actions!!!***

N: They come, back, this is their comeback. Ghosts respond to light, or perhaps we respond to ghosts through light. Light works, and light ghosts work.

**V: *‘Every good work is alive somewhere, never lost. It’s the people who may disappear.’ (Knowles, A: 2006)***

V: So where is it then? Where did the work go? And what if the remains are that which we cannot see? Troubling disappearance. That which we cannot hold, that which we cannot hold. Care, from the Germanic, relates to grief, suffering, loss and trouble. If we trouble over something, it is because we care. If trouble is to care, how do we care for disappearance? Caring for performance is a troubling over its disappearance.

How do we hold onto something that is not solid, concrete or formed? How to know something if its remains are re-turning in disguise, as the invisible, the formless, the slippery?

**N: *Remains are slippery and invisible, remains are trouble. And remaining is that rigor (or rigor mortis) that cares, and it is one ‘S’ away from caressing us. I care about the return of the ghost, specter or visible invisible. The return is not in care, but care is here. Careful returns are ghosts. Careful ghosts return. Carefully and without form.***

***The ghosts today appear and when they don’t appear they are still here but they’re not there, they’re gone. Because visibility does not stop ghosts. Nothing stops a ghost. Ghosts walk through things***

**V (quietly) [LIKE WALLS],**

**N: or float, fly or otherwise move through. Density is no object and ghostly objects have no density they are not simply weightless and transparent they are soft remains,**

**V (quietly) [LIKE CHALK]**

**N: of themselves. Ghosts also trouble the idea of soft because they are of care, because they are easy and not easy, ghosts are both Hard and Soft, like Light and like Grief.**

**V: 'See sun think shadow'(Zukovsky, L)**

N: Writing in favour of a documentation that is not solid, not concrete, is a writing in favour of the ghost. The turn of the ghost. The ghost of Derrida (for he must be here) returns persistently to remind us of his trace. To remind us again and again that 'the self-deferring realm of the trace, is in fact an embracing of vanishing.' (Lepecki, A:2004) Embrace the vanishing, at the vanishing point, performance happening 'always at the vanishing point.' (Blau, H: 1982) See the blind spot. The, he's behind you. That which cannot be seen. So where is it then? Where did it go? Troubling disappearance. That which we cannot hold. like Light and like Grief.

**V: Light, crying light, drying eyes and seeing on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2009 – Antony and the Johnsons perform the Crying Light tour at Gateshead's SAGE. We, Nathan Walker and Victoria Gray, observe the disappearance and/or transformation of Antony Hegarty into a light that is a ghost. Into a ghost that is a light. Hard Light Soft Light. It makes it hard to see light, it makes it easier to see light. Hard to see him, he disappears, he becomes light, he be-comes be-hind light, he is light. Soft and warm light, on us, on audience, on auditorium, on the watchers, the ghostly faces in the dark light up. The light sees us (and helps us**

*see us, the other us) it also blinds us. Blind Light. Ghost Blind. I can't see him, but I can see myself without a mirror.*

**V+N (loudly): *Like Grief, we, both of us, struggle to see the remains, to remain seeing.***

**(N) [GHOST VHS ACTION]**

**(Nathan performs action of sellotaping a VHS of the film 'Ghost' - Demi Moore and Patrick Swayze – to their face. Nathan leaves the VHS on their face for the remainder of the performance)**

V: The returning light illuminates heavy thoughts, is connected to the spirit, the other us, the heavy heart. And so, living things, ghosts and bodies, we turn and grow towards this light. Show us, what remains to be seen or unseen in place of performance after it has vanished. What is left in its place, in the space where it has been? If places and spaces are 'spectral gathering(s)' (N, Thrift: 1999) then who else is gathered here today that we cannot see. A spectral gathering, an unsettling space in which to unsettle, to draw out the ghosts. 'As in drawing one may be aware of a negative shape created by and between the positive shapes of things the invisible is what is not actually visible but could be.'

(Merlau-Ponty, M: 1963)

**V+N (loudly): *We see what we want to see. Watch for the ghost, go ghost!!***

V: We thank the ghost for 'Ghosts are often those bodies that needed to remain unseen in order for others to be seen at all.' (Hargreaves, M: 2006) Ghosts are present in the spaces between our bodies. Look behind, between, in the in-between. Choose to see Ghosts. Give the ghost a turn. The return of the ghost. It is sensed but where is the sense in - The ghost if he's behind you. What is behind Ghost – in the crypt/onym, the words that hide, behind

ghost– ghosting ghost. Dressed in hand me downs so full of holes we can see the other side:

**N (said behind ‘Ghost’ VHS sellotaped to their face): *Ghost behind you. Ghosts ghost behind each other when the TV Goes Ghost Ghosting the film Ghost with Demi Moore & Patrick Swazey. Andre Stitt, the Patrick Swazey of Performance Art: 2004 ‘people dead see I / I see dead people’ I see dead people. Dead people see I. Eye sees dead people reversed. The reverse, the other side, the other side of the eye, backwards, the back, the back again, the coming back again, the comeback. Take that. Dead People Reversed is the ghost as it first sees us, as Derrida points out in Specters of Marx:***

*The perspective must be reversed, once again; ghost or revenant, sensuous-non sensuous, visible – invisible, the specter first of all sees us. From the other side of the eye, visor effect, it looks at us even before we see it or even before we see period. We feel ourselves observed, sometimes under surveillance by it even before any apparition. Especially – and this is the event, for the specter is of the event – it sees us during a visit. It (re)pays us a visit. Visit upon visit”*

*“visit upon visit. Visit a us (re)pays it. Visit a during us sees it – evet the of is specter the fore, event the is this and – especially. Apparition any before even it by surveliance under sometimes, observed ourselves feel we. Period see we before even or it see we before even us a looks it, effect visor, either of side other the from. Us sees all of first specter the, invisible – visible, sensuous-non sensuous, revenant or ghost; again once, reversed be to has perspective the.*

V: Backwards. Backwards we work through memory. Backwards we see lines of history, of our past lives, the haunt lines. ‘The ghost is both the memory of an event that was, but also a return of someone/thing/body which unsettles the time of the act (and the certainty of its presence)’ (Hargreaves, M: 2006) So presence. Not the type of presence that ‘Indicates

that which is *prae* (from ‘before’) as in front of me and in view. It is a presence in the sense of the ghost that is present. Sensed behind, between, in the in-between. The shadow, the ball and chains. So, presence, the truth before me, as in front of me, but also before me in that it existed before me, pre-me. A transgenerational haunting, a hand me down.

*Sens* (from ‘I am’) indicates ‘that which is that which exists, is true.’ (OED) What claims can we make to truth if we write of these remains from the shadows, as things that existed rather than continue to exist. A truth that is second hand, the hand me down, is passed on. Has the truth passed on – like in death? Chinese whispers distort in passage. Are we, what are we, if we are in hiding and whispering? Writing here is to write from a hauntology and to write from a hauntology is not a methodology. It is a shadowy space in place of the place of knowing. A ghost story. Obscure, as in dark, as in hidden but with light and shade. Light and shade.

**N: *Camera Obscura. Navigate Festival, Baltic, Newcastle Gateshead, June 2005 – I visit Andre Stitt’s intervention with a wall on the upper levels of the Baltic Center for Contemporary Art, this is my life in 2005, I have not met Victoria yet and have four years until I do. I’m standing with my arms folded and watching Andre move and move me. He writes on the wall, backwards, like the image in the camera obscura, he scrawls:***

**V+N (loudly): *GHOSTLY PATRONS OF THE CULT. The cult is here today, the ghostly patrons are watching, in reverse, they are watching us, and we are letting them!!!***

V: If writing as ghosts (the stuff of smoke and mirrors) is an obscurity, a state of being unknown, or a lack of clear expression, then what can be said that is clear. Instead of identifying through seeing, and fixing through holding, are we letting it slip in choosing to write from the position of the phantom? Slippery Ghosts escape us. Writing from a hauntological perspective asks us to trust in obscure phenomena. Obscured, as in hidden. As in the unclear. The transparent. The see through. The ghost. You can see right through it, clear as day, but it is also the thing that goes bump in the night. In the dark. Perhaps it

is a trust in a writing in the dark, in the language of the ghost, despite being told that the phantom lies.

***N: Phantoms lie about the past. Spectres gesture towards a still unformulated future – Jacques Derrida***

**N: So, in this underlying secrecy and unknowing are we fooled or are we fooling you into thinking/feeling that there is something behind you worth noticing? Pulling the wool/the sheet over our eyes.**

V: We are still writing from a hauntology and seeing through this idea of seeing the ghost.  
Not concrete,

**(N) [LIKE CHALK]**

V: not solid,

**(N) [LIKE WALLS]**

V: not formed.

**(N) [LIKE GHOSTS]**

V: ‘...matter “exists” but it is as if it did not exist, because one can see through it. As an object of contemplation, it offers neither hardness nor resistance...’ (Cirlot, J.E: 1962).  
Performance resisting forms of documentation, documentation resisting forms of performance. All of it resisting transparency. But what does it matter, the stuff of matter? It matters to us that the stuffs of performance exist and continue to exist in some form, or another. But troubling transparency. That which we cannot see. That which we cannot see. Just because it is transparent doesn’t mean it doesn’t have weight. ‘See sun think shadow.’ (Zukovsky, L)

(V+N: the following read in canon as a form of ghosting. N starts and V picks up when N gets to *\*and*)

***“The one who has disappeared appears still to be there, \*and his apparition is not nothing. It does not do nothing. Assuming that the remains can be identified, we know better than ever today that the dead must be able to work. And to cause to work, perhaps more than ever” (141)***

V: Is documentation working for performance – or performance working for documentation? The graft of performance makes hard work of documentation, the hard copy. What is the point of documentation if it only serves as a mirror? Re/flecting the same? Casting performance remains in solid documentary practice is choking the life out of it. ‘... casts embody the compression and congealing of "life," meaning, and the spatial intervals necessary to sustain them.’ (Merewether,C: 1999 in Cvorov, U: 2002) Sustaining performances through casting rigid forms of documentation risks congealing, trapping and destroying it. We must trust in ‘soft logic’. *We are* making a light and clearing a space, a light clearing space for a soft, pliable documentation.

**N: For us they are not documents, the word is too hard, documentation is hard and a hardly suitable term for soft performance, that light and chalky bastard of time-based practice.**

**All signs point to the ghost.**

**V+N (loudly): ‘If you want to be a ghost you will become a ghost’ (Cage)**

**(N) Antony and the Crying Light**

(V) Eyes shut, not sunlight

**but like sunlight on shut eyes**

makes daylight inside eye

**Call.**

I see dead people



**Dead people see I**

Blind.

**The Not Seen**

and The Phantom Menace

**A sheet over the head,**

he's behind you,

**dropping eaves**

If these walls could talk

**Chalk**

Ghosts are both hard and soft

**Like Light**

and Like Grief

**See Sun**

Think Shadow.



Victoria Gray at Sage Gateshead for Antony & the Johnsons 'Crying Light' Tour  
29th May 2009. Photograph: Nathan Walker