

**Shattered Scattered: Bleak Actions in York**  
**Victoria Gray**

'Shattered Scattered: Bleak Actions in York' is a response to a performance by Bean at O U I #2 Bleak Actions on Sunday 23rd January 2011. The text recalls Bean's public interventions during the performance in York City Centre woven with personal encounters with the artist leading up to the performance.

**scatter** v. & n.

*I. v.t. Throw here and there (scatter seed; scatter gravel on road) ; cover by scattering (scatter road with gravel). (OED, 1976)*

Bean left London (~~home~~) on the Thursday and at this juncture, between leaving and staying, performance happened. This 'beginning' is one from an infinity of starting points, staggered on a line of performance that seems to cut through her everyday life. I see the beginning, the seed, the kernel of this work, stretched and scattered all over the place, all over her history.

A chance meeting on a bridge in York happened on the Sunday (~~performance day proper~~). It was an accident finding her there and I think she felt accidentally found too.

*She was wearing a black coat with the hood up, splattered with white paint. She wore masking tape on her right wrist like an ugly accessory, a microphone trailed from the other hand. A small amplifier sat like a holster at her hip, she hadn't showered for days.*

This was the first (incidental) action I witnessed; hooded on a bridge all held together by tape.

The second (incidental) action (that we shared) was a pre-tattoo herbal tea. Being slightly shaky (me not Bean), I was taken (in) by her slightness. Her gentle tea reminded me of that Feral/Tame 'thing' that she has going on. That 'thing' that she cannot help (because it is bio/graphical/logical) makes what she does so unheimlich.

I sit with this ~~image~~ and try to trace back. She had been journeying for a week and so I imagined her scattering and skimming along the motorway in-between London and York. A state, in between performing and not-performing or forgetting that she was performing at all (and this was surely the point). This '~~image~~' that I sit with (as destination) is surely not the point, it is the journey that counts. I know this, we know this, BUT, Bean does make beautiful ~~images~~. This is not her intention and she will disagree with me when I use the word, I imagine her crossing those ~~images~~ out.

These ~~images~~ are accidents, by-products of actions that act against futile exercises in ~~image~~ making. I use the word with my usual caution and so it is a cautiousness that I feel as I watch them appear.

I watched Bean appear some of the following ~~images~~. They act as landmarks in a work where it would be easy to get lost.

*London....York.....A lay-by on an outer ring road.....A bridge.... A tattooist...A van...A march through York barefoot....A car park.....Masking tape as makeshift shoes....Masking tape as makeshift bandage....Small cuts on foot....Small texts on palm of hand.....Small voice on recorder attached to upper left arm....Yellow thread....Small blade used to cut thread and foot....Microphone between legs.....A mic barking at an amp...An amp barking at a mic....Left foot coloured yellow, careful not to contaminate the cut.*

2. a. v. t. & i. Disperse, turn in dispersed flight, rout or be routed. (OED, 1976)

These images are scattered yet I will turn the text back to them when and where I can. BUT, the work is more than the sum of its visible parts and so I am writing about things that I didn't necessarily see but couldn't help noticing.

I see myself.

*"Bean, I hope you don't think I am psychoanalysing you, this text says more about me than it does you. I will keep going so that I don't turn back on my (gut) feeling and hope that you will follow me here."*

Deliberately they (the images) are accidental, they are scattered, scuffed, blurry and incomplete; this is a good thing, this is where I identify with them. I am scattered, scuffed, blurry and incomplete, but unlike Bean, I am too afraid to show it. I am uncomfortably thrown by these images, yet at the same time I want to learn how to throw more. To throw more gravel on an uneven road, to scatter more seeds into high winds.

I have to ask myself (because writing about Bean is writing about my self), what compels Bean (my self) to move, or any of us for that matter? Progressive time is putting bodies under such strain. Covering this ground again and again each time I make a performance, I return to the same root; that is that it feels necessary, that IT IS NECESSARY. But by what forces, conscious or unconscious are we necessarily routed? I notice that routed has rooted hiding behind it and this pleases me, it suggests a binding of two opposing positions, one to stay and the other to go, to be un-fixed firmly.

How to be firmly un-fixed? Peter Sloterdijk suggests that our impulse to move is swept up in the ethics of modernity (Sloterdijk, 2009). And so, to be moving is to be doing (something) and to be doing is (apparently) productive. Whilst Beans moving produces an escape route from the tread of this machine, paradoxically it also performs the kinetics of modernity. So for all her scattering and escaping, her get OUT has perhaps been a get IN, unwittingly entangling and embroiling her IN the pace of our times.

Bean's moving is not this, this passiveness to being swept up in the capitalist tide. Her movement is performed with agency initiated and directed by her own power, even if she is not entirely sure where she is (going) or if she has the power to stop.

3. *v. t.* Dissipate (cloud, hopes) ; (Phys.) deflect or diffuse (light, particles, etc). (OED, 1976)

She should have arrived by boat, it would have been messier, more true to (her) form(less), less concrete and more wave like. As we sipped our gentle tea she told me about a dream she had about crossing water to get here, and that the GPS router, when sourcing a route from London to York, unconventionally took her through the sea. The significance of this, and the fact that we met on a bridge with the ~ river ~ easing its way underneath us should be surfaced.

Whilst the performances texture was **TOUGH**, [**getting a tattoo, marching through town, using razor blades to cut thread and skin**], her performances are still *fluid*, loose tongued and likely to be spilled. There is a contradiction here between performances that are [tight] and controlled and clean, so called ‘rigorous’ works that work; and ones that are ... loose ... and messy, a so called ‘sloppy’ work. But Rigour/Rigor mortis, something chimes here. I see rigor mortis hiding behind the facade of rigour (I should know I am well practiced at this), and yet we chase rigour to avoid making a dead work.

Beans work is not dead.

Yve Lomax says; ‘Let us finally laugh about those who called rigorous what was precisely their soft discourse. And let us no longer scorn what is soft – fluid ensembles.’ (Lomax, 2000: 150) Bean is more Mendieta than Andre and this pleases me. There is nothing efficient about the work, it is contingent upon too many variables and this is what keeps it (her) alive. But, this contingency still stirs us, the unrepeatable and unrehearsed is terrifying. Lomax provokes, ‘An ontology founded on liquid: are we petrified of this?’ (Lomax, 2000: 193) [Petrified, frozen, rigor mortis] YES, we are thirsty and stiff, MORE ~ WATER ~ PLEASE. Like performance, the fluid form, water has the ontological potential to evaporate and disappear.

Coincidentally (or not) it started to rain as we arrived at the car park, just before she settled down to colour her foot yellow and to reveal /small/careful/cuts/. Feedback chatters between mic and amp whilst she repeats and repeats a text held in and on her hand. The text (and Bean) sits like a bird or spare change, on the verge, on the curb, in the ditch. With palms up and open fluidity really happened as the sea appeared to fall from the sky, drops scattered and punctured the ground. On falling, we all got wet, but we were shimmering and we could see ourselves in the water, we could reflect.

4. v.i. & t. (Of gun) send charge, send charge, send (charge), in spreading manner. (OED, 1976)

Bean sat on the tattooist's bed, hooded and eyes down. She had removed her shoes, (now in my bag) and instead her soles were protected, but only just, by strips of black masking tape acting as shoes. A voice recorder was bound to her left arm by yellow thread and was throwing sound out, the tense air was p u n c t u r e d and time was 'punctuated' by a text, 'deconstruction/construction, deconstruction/construction'. The text, both formed itself and un-formed itself at each repetition. There was a tension in the room that / cut / each time the needle found her skin, her inside thighs fall open and we see her wait, shoulders tight as the tattooist made his first mark on the inside of her lower right leg. There was nothing violent about this, or sexual, it was gentle. He showed more signs of fear than She did. Bean was breathing calmly to save the pain, and we embodied this rhythm, falling in and out of the text sound and the breath sound and the tattooist's needle sound, all sounding off at each other.

She walked with such charge; the cling film wrapped around her newly tattooed leg was left flapping in the wind. With the microphone trailing limply between her legs she walked through the centre of our city, she and it skit the road.

She was followed and found mouthing off like a soft gun in the car park, repeating and firing textual rounds:.....:

**'Frontier bound, boundary bound, branch of knowledge, discipline field, field of study, subject, subject area, subject field, wild wilderness' (BEAN)**

Rain was falling at the same time and was having the same effect, a rhythmic impacting on the ground. Useless watery bullets dissolve on impact and are safe blank shootings. A yellow foot, a safe small cut, a text that gained confidence the more it was aired; I could have listened to this for day's. This is not usual behaviour for a car park on a Sunday in York, this is not usual behaviour. Why is this not usual behaviour? What if this was usual behaviour? Lets make this (performance) usual behaviour.

5. (in *p.p.*) Not situated together, wide apart, sporadic, (*scattered villages, garrisons, instances*). (OED, 1976)

The elements of the work were not situated together.

*London....York.....A lay-by on an outer ring road.....A bridge.... A tattooist...A van...A march through York barefoot....A car park.....Masking tape as makeshift shoes....Masking tape as makeshift bandage....Small cuts on foot....Small texts on palm of hand.....Small voice on recorder attached to upper left arm....Yellow thread....Small blade used to cut thread and foot....Microphone between legs.....A mic barking at an amp...An amp barking at a mic....Left foot coloured yellow, careful not to contaminate the cut.*

The elements of the tattoo were not situated together and the tattoo, whilst visible on the surface, had such depth. Elizabeth Grosz says, 'All the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject's corporeal surface.' (Grosz, 2004: vii). The marking of these (tattooed) instances were drawn corporeally and they had fleshy spaces in-between.

Instruction to Tattooist:

*Inner leg (my right, your left). Start at base of ankle/foot. End top of leg. Please tattoo in your handwriting, without prior transfer – so freehand.*

*M168*

*M130*

*M89*

*M9*

*M175*

*M45*

*M173*

*M20*

*M242*

*M3*

*M172*

*M17*

*M122*

There is something strange here, something that I haven't yet grasped. The tattoo is so permanent and therefore so at odds with the impermanent and unfixable nature of everything else that she does. Bean appears thick skinned but the ink spills and writes a paradox that pulls beneath her )vulnerable( surface.

6. ~**brain**, heedless person; ~**brained**, heedless person; desultory, \*~**shot** *n. & a.*, firing at random. (OED, 1976)

I cautioned her to take heed when travelling.

Andre etc; so rational and so repeatable, so cool and so collected. Give me Hesse, she really knew how (not to) repeat. Biomorphs formed out of such compulsion, to repeat in order not to repeat, to keep on transforming in a moving way. And so narcissistic and so wonderfully narcissistic is Bean. Logic is not necessarily a useful power of reason (Krauss, 1997) and so to her, the subjectivity of those scattered gravel images is reasonable enough. I repeat her text that she fired at random:

‘Frontier bound, boundary bound, branch of knowledge, discipline field, field of study, subject, subject area, subject field, wild wilderness’ (BEAN)

There is really nothing minimal about it, and so, to those rationalists, your metal does not fool us, your grids fabricate ‘an abyss of irrationality.’ (Krauss, cited in Batchelor 1997: 69)

7. n. Act of scattering; extent of distribution esp. of shot; \*~ **cushions, rugs**, etc., (to be placed here and there in room). [ME, prob, var. of SHATTER] (OED, 1976)

Cushions and rugs and home comforts when you get in SHATTERED and SHOT. 'Let us learn to negotiate soft logics.' (Lomax, 2000: 150)



## References:

Batchelor, D. (1997) *Minimalism: Movements in Modern Art*. UK, Cambridge University Press.

Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.

Lomax, Y. (2000) *Writing the Image, An Adventure with Art and Theory*. London & New York, I.B. Tauris Publishers.

Oxford English Dictionary. (1976) 9<sup>th</sup> ed. Oxford, Clarendon.

Sloterdijk, P. (2009), *Mobilization of the Planet from the Spirit of Self-Intensification*, in Lepecki, A & Joy, J (eds), *Planes of Composition*, India: Seagull Books, pp. 3-14.

## Writer Detail:

Victoria Gray is a performance artist and Lecturer within the Faculty of Arts, York St John University. She is co-founder, with Nathan Walker, of O U I Performance, York.

[www.victoriagray.co.uk](http://www.victoriagray.co.uk)

[www.ouiperformance.org.uk](http://www.ouiperformance.org.uk)

## Artist Detail:

Bean is a performance artist and Director of ]performance s p a c e[, London.

[www.11ii.com](http://www.11ii.com)

[www.performancespace.org](http://www.performancespace.org)