

# FEDA: Between Pedagogy & Politicised Art Practice

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds  
School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies

December 2005

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given  
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## Introduction

This thesis needs to be read in conjunction with accessing the internet site, *FEDA: Between Pedagogy & Politicised Art Practice*, (an aesthetic production and virtual research dossier documenting the stages of my study), together with viewing the DVD *Stones*, (my final exhibition video screening). Each of these practices offers a differing and yet interrelated form for the presentation and dissemination of my PhD research enterprise.

My PhD began as a continuation of an earlier period of study, (between 1996 and 1998), during which time I completed the MA in Feminist Theory, History and Criticism in the Visual Arts course (at the University of Leeds).

1996 was a year that witnessed the rapid advancement of radical reforms throughout the UK Further Education (FE) sector (in which I was employed as a lecturer in art and design). These reforms, initially introduced in 1992 through the Further and Higher Education Act (FHE) were mobilised by political educational policies, and implemented through managerial discourses that entwined the linguistics of finance with moral reasoning in support of predetermined value regimes.<sup>1</sup> Granted the status of independent corporations, colleges adopted a competitive market-driven approach to education, (sustained by a culture of audit), that sought to control and measure all aspects of contemporary pedagogical provision. This economic rationalisation of labour, the workplace and the social realm, was underpinned by a rationale comprised of moral codes and assumptions often applied in relation to stereotypical notions of *good* and *bad* educators, consequently, managerial constraints regulated a continually defensive assault on my subject area, art and design - through value for money assessment strategies, and on my subjectivity as a teacher - through repeatedly measuring and monitoring my labour.

I embarked on the MA in Feminist Theory in September 1996, at the same time as these reforms were established in the institution that employed me. Within a week of operating under the new regime I lost control of my workload, and the excessive time I had previously given to my students, (connected with a personal sense of job satisfaction), became autocratically designated towards the production of data based statistical evidence, governed by an economically targeted agenda.

Devastated at the lack of trust, consideration and humanity being demonstrated by my employers towards myself, my colleagues, students and family, and feeling unable to contend with their pervasive authority, I adopted a self-protective approach toward their oppressive actions by gathering and archiving (all manner) of professional documentation, (detailing the unreasonable managerial demands being made upon me). I also developed an urgent need to make notes, scribbling down my thoughts and feelings about the situation at work in an attempt to allow my emotions some kind of release. These notes provided me with a space, just a space, but one to which I repeatedly returned because it facilitated a form of subjective articulation at a time when my subjectivity was being severely constrained.

By 1997 I was becoming visibly ill from the stress of trying to maintain my excessive workload. While it may seem as though needing to rise at 4.30 in the morning (in order to study for my MA prior to going to work) might have presented me with an additional burden, I found it had the opposite effect. I treasured those quiet, early mornings, for providing me with a space in which to read and think, and I was also discovering that the subject of my studies, feminist art practice, was unexpectedly helping me with the situation I had found myself in at work, by transforming the sense of hopelessness that had previously overwhelmed me.

Feminist art practice has an established history of social, critical and political awareness, and I became introduced to significant theoretical resources mobilised in feminist cultural analysis, together with contemporary feminist art practices produced across global contexts. Learning about feminist interventions in the visual arts made by women artists including, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Mary Kelly, Jo Spence and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, was an absolute relief and revelation. I felt as though I had become enabled to critically explore and articulate my situation, (no matter that I didn't have the time to make art, or that I had never held access to a studio space - which might be conceived of as a predetermined, and therefore restrictive frame anyhow). Most importantly, I felt as though I had regained elements of my subjectivity, by becoming an active agent rather than a victim of circumstance.

On the MA course I engaged with contemporary art practices that were concerned with social change and political activism, where the politics of lived-experience were not excluded, denied or repressed, and where artists were working through a wide and

varied range of processes and modes for production, often in conjunction with their audiences. In these contexts many women were producing art in a transdisciplinary manner, and feminist art practices, the Women's Movement and feminist theories were self-critically intersecting and feeding each other. The work of the artist Jo Spence was particularly influential, and informed my decision to incorporate my archive of institutional documentation and personal diary notes into my art practice. It was in this regard that my experiences of being a student on the MA Feminist Theory, History and Criticism in the Visual Arts gave me the confidence to pursue strategies for constructing my subjective case against my employers as a form of art practice, and which motivated my quest for a sense of truth in relation to art education and ethical behaviour, later pursued through the framework of my PhD research project.

I wrote extensively about the effects of these educational reforms in a text (produced in 1997, during my MA studies) titled, *This Time Next Year We'll Be Farting Through Silk: Aspiration and Experience*,<sup>2</sup> which offers a detailed account of the background from which my PhD research project emerged. Chapter One of my thesis, *It All Adds Up...* (2003), continues these investigations by setting out the issues I raised in my earlier essay in relation to Mieke Bal's concept of *Critical Intimacy*<sup>3</sup> and examining the ways in which, (as a teacher and as a subject), I registered and resisted the impact of these politicised forces and frameworks (together with the managerial ethos that perpetuated them).

*FEDA* is an acronym for the Further Education Development Agency (who were my paymasters when I was teaching) and is also a descriptor for that which my PhD project set out to achieve... that is to be a *feeder*; a conduit; a reciprocal opening between artist and audience. I began by developing a performative, presentation-based practice consisting of a twofold purpose; to enable me to articulate a critique of the contemporary education sector, and also to facilitate hoped-for-responses to my work from audiences, both unknown and articulated. I wanted to use my art as a prompt to working relations with others, to have it operate in both an aesthetic and a cognitive manner. But I discovered that any request I might make for responses to my work to be materialised, continually returned me to the confines of traditional pedagogic values.

During these initial experimental presentations, I had used my archive of personal notes and professional documentation in the manner of installation props, for example,

I would display management dictates juxtaposed alongside my personal diaries in order to reveal the contradictions and ideologies being perpetuated by the institution. But I found that my physical presence, (visibly damaged by stress), generated excessive amounts of anxiety, (both for audiences and for myself), and also it had become clear that issues relating to time, (with regards to enabling others to engage with my documentation), would need careful consideration, as I was swamping audiences with information in my attempts to include the many complex and miniscule details that situated my research.

These performances proved to be very problematic (in endeavouring to work between art and pedagogy). The dynamic disjuncture between these differing fields resulted in my presentations becoming formed of two parts, *the art* and *the pedagogy*, and at times this generated conflict and confusion. In Chapter Two of my thesis I detail the struggles I worked through in seeking to develop forms for my art practice, and I document all of the performative presentations that I delivered during the first three years of my PhD (together with their processes for production) on my website, including a contentious intervention I made into the field of political activism at a conference held in Berlin<sup>4</sup> and the hostile environment I inadvertently generated at my PhD Upgrade Presentation.<sup>5</sup> While these experimental presentations may not have worked aesthetically they raised questions relating to audiences, modes of reception and the production of meaning in relations between the two.

‘There is an invitation that is implicit in artwork, the solicitation of a response, or the offering of something to the eye and the mind of the viewer’.<sup>6</sup> It did not seem appropriate, however, that I should try to make a solely aesthetic invitation to people to respond to my work because I was not offering it through any specific mode of aesthetic presentation. I was adamant that my painful experiences as a lecturer should remain close to the social, political and economic issues that generated them, and not become distanced from the troubling realities of subjective experience by being classified as formal art practice. Eventually, in the third year of my PhD, I was able to identify an appropriate tool through which I could present the diaries and institutional documentation I had accumulated from my experiences as a lecturer, and also offer an open and unassimilating invitation to people to respond to my research.

By making use of the World Wide Web, I was able to develop an internet site,

exhibiting my research dossier as an artistic production while also tracking the progress of my learning experiences. Although its status as *art* (in a formal sense) is questionable, my website sets out ways in which my experimental methodologies for the production of art practices have evolved and shifted through critical engagements and aesthetic encounters. In my thesis I detail the practical difficulties involved with this virtual venture and outline the rationale underpinning my decision to produce a website, together with offering some examples of responses I received to this work, (indicating ways in which it is able to function). I present an *Opening Guide* to my website at the conclusion of this introduction and also outline a *Site Map* of the varying projects and sub-projects that constitute my PhD research degree, (as presented on my internet site).

Chapter Two of my thesis, *Opening the Index Up To Comment: Picking Up Some Traces to Art Practice* (2005), begins with an investigation into the material indexical trace (prompted by a comment made by Laura Mulvey). I explore a series of questions that set out my struggles, (and self-doubts), in trying to locate a theory for the index that might support the production of my website, (and my emphasis on politically discursive forces and critical encounters). Unable to find the support I seek in Mulvey's article *The Index and the Uncanny*,<sup>7</sup> (which is concerned with indexicality in relation to visual aesthetics and photographic representation), I go on to consider index theory through the writing of Paul Willemen (who investigates indexicality in relation to filmic processes and cinematic products). While Willemen's work helps me to identify the significance that the material indexical trace holds for my website, I am unexpectedly returned to Mulvey's account of the index towards the closing stages of my research when, (in a differing context), I am able to identify the significance that her article on indexicality holds for my DVD project, *Stones*.

Family histories that are introduced in Chapter One are picked up in a series of narratives that configure Chapter Two, providing texture and detail to the cross-classed and cross-cultural background from which my art practice emerges. These familial anecdotes, myths and memories contribute towards an understanding of how my notions of resistance, in conjunction with my personal beliefs relating to ethical behaviour became motivated, and lays out the ways in which subjectivity becomes constructed and constructs itself in relation to personal experiences of significant events. Every process that I engage with, (as an agent situated in a spatio-temporal context), is routinely connected with materiality, until whenever, or if ever, singularly significant events in any given process prompt me to apply critical consideration or meaning to them. I discuss this notion of

a significant event (activated by or charged with meaning) through Badiou's concept of a truth-process.

My particular approach to my practice is that each project I develop requires singular consideration, in relation to what will eventually become the appropriate tools and methodologies for its production and presentation. My website has evolved with particular regard being given to technological constraints together with the documentation for display, however, there are certain things that my website does not account for. My web pages titled *Counselling Diaries*<sup>8</sup> and *Stones Video Diaries*<sup>9</sup> allude to these things, and I think them through the familial narratives presented in my thesis. But these things are unsignifiable and outside of language, and require differing, although related methodological approaches to those presented on my website, or through my writing.

At the times of producing my *Counselling Diaries* and my *Stones Video Diaries* I had no idea of how they might be associated with my research. But rather than trying to make connections, I just went along with my need to document my thoughts. 'Non-knowingness is an attitude, not a technique to perform'<sup>10</sup> says Trinh T. Min-Ha. I have become open to unexpected thoughts and emotions through my engagements with art, and towards the beginning of the third year of my PhD I identified connections between the emergence of a specific desire (becoming apparent in my everyday life) and my research. Until this time I had been busy with my experimental presentations and had made no link between this *new* desire and my PhD project.

My desire was *for* a particular type of stone, rubble and dirt. I experienced it as an extremely intense, potent and seductive feeling that was able to generate visceral responses, *urging* me to physically get among the stones... to feel and see them, to hear the sounds they made as I dug, pushed and scratched at them with my hands and feet... trying frantically, and unsuccessfully, to absorb them.

Although it seemed beyond anything I might cognitively relate it to, over time I began to associate my desire with sentient memories from a specific period of my childhood in Iraq. As I began to give consideration to those things that it might be connected with I developed the need to explore it further, to re-present these deep memory traces, (that became activated by specific materials), and therefore to provide

my desire with some kind of form.

The outcome of this exploration is my video *Stones*, which offers an embodied encounter with the ways in which discursive forces, (social, political and institutional), together with unknown psychical activities, work interrelationally and dynamically to position subjectivities. This work invites reflection around how these forces condition subjectivity, as much through resistance and conflict, as compliance, and points toward the profound significance and the complex relations between my experiences of being subjected to oppressive regimes, and my responses to them. Although my (somewhat random) decision to select video, (as a tool for aesthetic production), unexpectedly provided me with a means to realising a visual representation that was *absolutely* appropriate to my needs, recording my encounter with the stones of my desire was simply the beginning of a lengthy engagement that included complex, lengthy and expensive editing and post-production processes. I give a detailed account of the many alterations my video recording underwent on my internet site,<sup>11</sup> and offer a summary of these in my thesis.

Aesthetic practices coexist through supplementary relations, and it is in this sense that each (independently produced) element of my PhD research degree; my internet site, video and thesis, interrelates with and expands the others, becoming a constitutive part of my enterprise rather than the product of any singular part of my work.

### *Endnotes*

1. Farzana Shain documents the historical contexts for these politically-driven reforms, together with the contradictory responses they generate in *Changing Notions of Teacher Professionalism in the Further Education Sector* (online), accessed 14 June 2005, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/documents/000000939.htm>>
2. Wilks, Sue, *This Time Next Year We'll Be Farting Through Silk: Aspiration and Experience* (online), accessed 14 June 2005, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.feda.co.uk/fartthrosilka/index.shtml>>
3. Mieke, Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, (Canada: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2002), p. 286.
4. Wilks, Sue, *Interventions in a Political Field* (online), accessed 22 July 2005, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.feda.co.uk/politicsb/index.shtml>>

5. Wilks, Sue, *PhD Upgrade Presentation* (online), accessed 22 July 2005, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.feda.co.uk/upgradea/index.shtml>>
6. Griselda Pollock, *Personal discussion*, 5 May 2005.
7. Laura Mulvey, *the Index and the Uncanny*, in *Time and the Image*, ed. by Carolyn Bailey Gill, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 1.
8. Wilks, Sue, *Counselling Diaries* (online), accessed 22 July 2005, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.feda.co.uk/counsellingdiariesb/index.shtml>>
9. Wilks, Sue, *Stones Video: Transcribed Diaries* (online), accessed 1 July 2005, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.feda.co.uk/stonesc/index.shtml>>
10. Min-Ha, Trinh T., *The Digital film Event*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 48.
11. Wilks, Sue, *Stones Video: A Brief Background to the Project* (online), accessed 1 July 2005, available from the World Wide Web <<http://www.feda.co.uk/stonesa/index.shtml>>

Opening Guide to: <<http://www.feda.co.uk/>>

My website presents an artistic production and an online dossier, tracking the progress of my PhD research degree in fine art practice (throughout its duration). The layout is structured in a linear manner to provide coherence but this linear structure is not rigid, and a different kind of encounter with my work can be experienced through an abstract approach to accessing the content. As an abstract approach would be unpredictably located within the domain of the individual user, the Opening Guide offered here is on relevance to those who may want to adapt a linear approach to this practice.

- Four primary project areas (representing individual academic years of study) situate a number of sub-projects, constituted of the research undertaken in each particular phase of my PhD programme. Each sub-project area includes diaries, visual images and documentation, detailing my processes for production and research methodologies.
- These primary project areas are preceded by a section of my website dedicated to a period titled, *Prior to my PhD*, during which I produced the work that sets out the background from which my research emerges.
- Following the four primary project areas I present an open invitation to users to offer responses to my work, and also a series of related, yearly-defined

*Responses* pages, allocated to the presentation of the feedback that I have received during each associated stage of my studies.

## Site Map

This *Site Map* structures the varying projects and sub-projects, (constituting my PhD research degree), as presented on my internet site.

### *Section Title:*

Prior to my PhD

Sub-project content:

#### *This Time Next Year We'll Be Farting Through Silk*

- *Introductory page*, (presenting links to sub-projects).
- *This Time Next Year We'll Be Farting Through Silk: Aspiration and Experience*, (1997). Essay setting out the background to my research.
- *Diaries*, (1994 - 1999). Produced in response to my personal experiences of the audit culture, these diary notes (and related institutional documents) contextualise my critique of authoritarian discourses and ideologies.
- *Visuals*, (1996 - 2002). Images that provide the events described in this project area with visual representation.

Sub-project content:

#### *Counselling Diaries*

- *Diaries*, (1996 - 2002). Personal diary notes produced during my diagnosis and subsequent treatment (therapeutic and psychotropic) for mental-health issues. These diaries offer multiple threads of continuity that entwine throughout my research, and allude towards the potent and unknown psychical activities that come to the fore in my later video art practice.
- *Visuals*, (1999 - 2000). Images produced in relation to my clinical diagnosis for depression, together with a series of visuals documenting the regular journey I made to my counselling sessions.

*Any one of this series of visuals leads to a separate section of this sub-project area titled 'The Journey', in which I present a short audio/visual animation of the journey to my counselling sessions. The audio accompanying this animation is a sound recording, (made in Baghdad, 1968), of a conversation held between my father and myself while using a Ouija board.*

*Project Area Title:*

Year One Projects

Sub-project content:

*Academic Appeal*

- *Academic Appeal... A Research Proposal*, (January 2002). This work details my initial attempts to disseminate my work through a lecture-based, or performative presentation format, by constructing a proposal to send to specifically identified academics inviting them to participate in my research project.
- *Responses to Academic [Book Proposal] Appeal*, [2002]. This page presents the responses that I received to my proposal.

*Political Interventions*

- *interventions in a Political Field*, (January 2002). Introductory page presenting links to sub-projects.
- *Berlin*, (February 2002). I document my first experience as an artist seeking to work in a political field, through presenting both my authorised and my unauthorised conference reports from an adversarial conference in Berlin.
- *Geneva*, (June 2002). These reports detail my experiences of presenting a political mandate (working as an activist) at a conference held in Geneva.

*Upping my Grade*

- *PhD Upgrade Presentation*. Introductory page presenting links to sub-projects.
- *Upgrade Performance*, (May 2002). Presented in this area is the performative script that I presented at the PhD Upgrade Symposia, (an explosive event and a significant learning experience). This is followed by the transcribed feedback that I received in response to my presentation.
- *An Account of What I Did and Why I Did It at my PhD Upgrade Presentation, or, The Outcomes of Pure Research*, (2002). This text presents an edited version of my 10,000 word upgrade paper and investigates the contentious issues generated at my upgrade performance (and my role in their production).

*Project Area Title:*

Year Two Projects

Sub-project content:

*University Challenge*

- *University Challenge*, (June 2002). *I Talk Two Languages, Everyday and Academic*. This scripted text was written for the CongressCATH 2002 conference, *Translating Class, Altering Hospitality*, and is published here along with accompanying personal notes that document my approaches to this event, and detail its outcomes.

*February 4<sup>th</sup> 2003*

- *February 4<sup>th</sup> 2003: A Presentation for the MA in Feminism and the Visual Arts group, the University of Leeds*, (2003). This performance-based presentation is documented in its entirety, including diaries detailing my processes and methodologies for production, my scripted text, my self-critical reflections upon my work and the responses that I received to my presentation.

*February 12<sup>th</sup> 2003*

- *February 12<sup>th</sup> 2003: Research Seminar, the University of Leeds*, (2003). My processes for production are again fully documented in this area of my website plotting through my thoughts and learning, prior to, during, and following my performance-based presentation at this academic research seminar.

*Project Area Title:*

Year Three Projects

Sub-project content:

*Stones Video*

- *Stones Video: Working Through an Art Making Process*. Introductory page presenting links to sub-projects.
- *A Significant Shift... Stones Video: A Brief Background to the Project*, (2003). I present my thoughts as they undergo a significant shift, altering focus from performance-based practices to video art production, in response to an awakening desire mobilised by deep memory traces.
- *Making it... Stones Video: Transcribed Diaries*, (2003). These chronologically presented diary notes detail my processes, my thinking and my methodologies for recording the video *Stones*.

## *Mieke Bal Symposium*

- *The Immeasurable is Invaluable*, (September 2003). The first screening of my unedited *Stones* video was at Mieke Bal's, *Frames and Other Travelling Concepts* symposium. On this page I document my rationale for presenting my work in a transdisciplinary manner (by selecting an academic, lecture based environment in which to disseminate my art practice), together with presenting personal notes that detail my thinking, prior to, during and following this event.

## *CASA Meeting*

- *CASA Meeting, Stones Video Editing Diaries, and Notes from my Tutorial with Mary Kelly*, (2004). This area of my website brings together three differing but related aspects of this particular sub-project. The *Stones Video Editing Diaries* plot through the many alterations, incarnations and edits that my video underwent during 2004, and detail the learning I gained from engaging with video production processes. *Notes from my Tutorial with Mary Kelly* presents my reflections on a unique meeting, when I was offered the opportunity to discuss my art practice with the artist Mary Kelly. *CASA Meeting, The Cultural Analysis Summer Academy*, details the paper I contributed to the Summer Academy, where I also screened an edited version the *Stones* video. Accompanying my text are the diaries I produced, laying out the thinking that informed my presentation and my review of its outcomes.

*Link to audio/visual animation from CASA. Prior to the CASA Meeting in Amsterdam, attendees of the meeting were approached by a participant, Julius Nil, and asked if they would be prepared to come to the event with a piece of music in mind and talk about it for broadcast on his Resonance 104.4fm radio programme 'One Reason to Live'. The audio accompanying this short visual animation is taken from Julius's introductory opening to his programme.*

## *Project Area Title*

### *Year Four Projects*

Sub-project content:

#### *Stones DVD Excerpts*

- *Stones* (2005). This space is situated five short extracts from the DVD version of my *Stones* video (as presented at my final exhibition and examination).

#### *FEDA*

- *FEDA*, (2005). The introduction to my thesis *FEDA: Between Pedagogy and Politicised Art Practice* is located in this area.

*Section Title:*

*'I' Invite 'You'*

- *Comments and Feedback.* This page displays a link to an e-mail responses area provided for users to submit feedback relating to my research (should they choose to do so).

*Year One Responses*

- *Responses: Prior to my PhD and year One Projects.* All of the responses from these periods and their related sub-projects are brought together in this space.

*Year Two Responses*

- *Responses: Year Two Projects.* The responses from this period of study and its related sub-projects are presented here.

*Year Three Responses*

- *Responses: Year Three Projects.* Articulates why there are no responses available to present in this area.

*Year Four Responses*

- *Responses: Year Four Projects.* The responses from this period of study and its related sub-projects are presented here.

*Home*

- Links to all areas and a page containing my CV