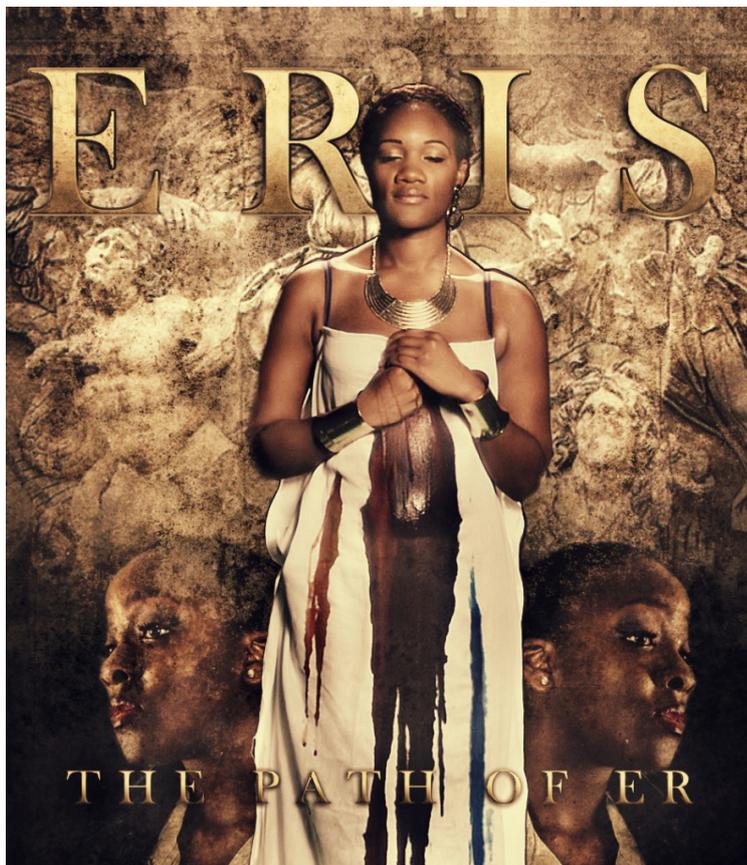


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### Claire Hooper's 'Eris: The Path of ER'

May 28, 2012 · by **Thomas Morgan Evans** · in Journal



Claire Hooper, 'Eris: The Path of ER', 2011/12, performance and video. Courtesy Hollybush Gardens

The telly is always on in the background. Always. *Hollyoaks*, *Eastenders*, drama all the time. At the end of the night, when you get back, it's still on. TV drama tells the story of people's lives, providing a point of contact with something that has been worked out *ahead of time*, so to speak. In close ups and musical cues, it tells its audience what and how to feel. TV drama is there for that apposite window of time when you allow yourself to listen to how you are feeling. Its narrative is a touchstone for emotional orientation.

Yet, the "story" of modern art has been one that has systematically discredited narrative as an organising principal. We don't want to feel manipulated, we don't want our stories narrated by others. We want critical distance from the work, but equally expect the work to

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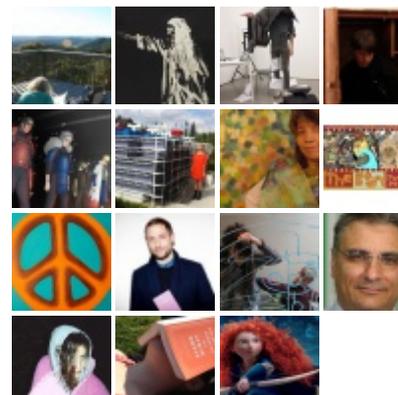


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reciprocate and not breach the line. It is only quite recently, and with the reluctant inclusion in to the art world of the stories of cultural others, that narrative has re-emerged in contemporary film and video work. In conceptualism's wake, narrative was replaced by endless beginnings, repetitions and non-linear and spatial frameworks. The formal innovations that have come to be associated with the critical work from the 1960s and 70s, have become tropes that now *signify* rather than *enact* a critical precedence. There are two kinds of "critical", and we privilege one over the other all too easily: critical, as in "critical mass"; and then there is the criticism of the art critic, of people like me, who wrap things up in words and take them into care. "Art is my priority. It's my baby now."

In tragic drama, the chorus sings the action before it happens. The platforms are split up: the choir's voices transmit from above, the humans wait below. You see where I'm going with this metaphor, right? It's just like TV.

Using the template of the story of Eris, goddess of strife, Claire Hooper's latest work *Eris: The Path of ER* (which contains both recorded and live performances), tells the story of Danielle Marie Shillingford's attempts to regain custody of her children. The children are the third generation of Danielle's family to be brought into, and brought up within the British social care system. Half-way through the performance, Danielle finds herself trapped in a violent relationship. Her story, then, is both one of domestic abuse and an abuse of *the domestic* by the bureaucratic and managerial forces at play. The story is based on real events and Danielle plays herself on stage and on screen. But the work addresses how the event itself is always already part a story.

In *Eris*, events are impossibly caught up in narrative structures: there are the stories Danielle tells her social workers, and there are the statistical stories these social works have written into profiling Danielle's character. Hooper's work is also about the stories we tell ourselves as a society, the very old stories that are more proscriptive than reflective. The sizeable amount of documentary matter included in the work speaks to the way in which what occurs is *already* part of a story. Everywhere, language is both an inadequate connection to the event and part of the event itself. For Hooper, language has the future written into it and the past written out of it.

*Eris*' major strength is the way it demonstrates how different forms of intelligence can be represented and mobilised. No matter how intelligent you are, repression (be it self-inflicted, institutional or interpersonal, and including the codes of representation) makes you stupid. Refusing narrative stultifies the imagination. Hoopers' work

functions in this context as a statement concerning critical action rather than reaction, a statement whose aim is to keep critique at the edge of art and world.

Drama exercises the intelligence, which eventually informs our notion of reality. Contrary to the negational and backward-looking logic of the postmodern condition, it is the experience of catharsis, rather than trauma that acts to rewrite and re-right our understanding.

To perpetuate a cycle, momentum is  
needed  
In me there is a need  
Once named that need gains weight  
That weight is enough to spin the wheel.  
I named that need desire  
And desire named me struggle  
What is written cannot be changed

Let us turn to the titular character. Eris's origins are Babylonian. She is Discordia, the goddess of strife, daughter of Nyx and Athena. Her liason officers are the three fates. The cast also includes Lyssa goddess of rage, Erebus primordial darkness, Leto, Apollo, Artemis, and Metis – good council. Pain, meanwhile, defines Danielle's experience. At one point, Pain is personified as a figure slouched over Danielle's shoulders as she attends to the ironing.

In Greek mythology, Eris is excluded from the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. She is left out of the celebration, ignored by social conventions – conventions which still define our ideas concerning the 'proper' and 'normal' environments in which to raise a family. In her fury, Eris storms in uninvited and throws a golden apple onto the table. This apple is precious but it comes with a proviso: it can only be given to the fairest of the assembled goddesses who, in competition with each other, proceed to make promises that they can't keep. Their greed leads to rifts and upset yet it is Eris who is blamed for setting in motion the events that lead to the Trojan wars. Hooper describes Danielle's son to me as this golden apple: one that lays bare the vanity and conceit of those that stand for the institutionalisation and politicisation of cultural norms.

Eris, meanwhile, is also a father. She fathers war. In the video, Eris parents both the conflicts with the authorities and the conflicts on the streets in which her sons, literal and otherwise, fight like young Spartans. She is father and mother to the conflicted hope invested in the relationship with her abuser. I make this gender switch, modelling

Eris as male, because perhaps it is accurate in some ways. Culturally, men have a monopoly on aggression, as they do power. Problematically, so it does in *Eris*. Rage, who is supposed to be the goddess Lyssa, is played in the video by a man.

In Hooper's reconstructed myth, welfare authorities 'foster' the situation used to discredit Danielle's appeals for her son. The wheel of fortune turns another generation. What is represented is the way in which the people in power (whose power is not of their own devising) palpably don't believe in their own system. These are feckless, hopeless people and those who run the world.

Lives also have soundtracks and again these are un-retractable from the sense we make of our experiences. Hooper told me that, during the making of the film, Danielle's experiences of the kaleidoscopic symmetries of love and violence produced a constant intensity of emotion that Hooper chose to reflect in the rapid patter of grime-flow within the performative element of the work. A MC-narrator accompanies the original musical score composed by Beatrice Dillon. Lioness' contribution to *Eris* does the job of telling the story, but at the same time her lyrical meter performs the same task as the Greek chorus, providing a relational structure in which to create a present connected to a past.

Language has the future written into it and the past written out of it. Action begets cycles within cycles; the cyclical movement itself is fate's mark, a disorientating whirlwind.

Narrative is my compass through Athenia.

Claire Hooper, *Eris: The Path of ER*, performance co-produced by Electra, Saturday 26 May, 9.30pm, ICA Theatre

Tags: Claire Hooper, domestic abuse, Eris, myth, performance, The Path of ER, tragedy

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