

Her Various Scalpels

Also by Sophie Mayer:

(as Sophie Levy)

Marsh Fear/Fen Tiger (2002, with Leo Mellor)

These Are the Licks (2003)

junkmaildays (2004)

Forthcoming

The Cinema of Sally Potter: A Politics of Love (2009)

The Private Parts of Girls (2010)

There She Goes: Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond
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SOPHIE MAYER

Her Various Scalpels

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‘No Such Thing’ collates excerpts from *Filmgrimage*, a series of photo-essays with images by Lady Vervaine, published in *Vertigo*, issues 3.1 (Summer 2006) through 3.7 (Autumn 2007). ‘Je Suis Ici’ was written in response to a scenario and rough cut of *Je Suis Ici*, a short film by Ben Crowe and Preti Taneja. ‘You Are Here’ formed part of *Wänderland*, a promenade show performed by Wingspan (Doug McCabe, Sophie Mayer, Debs Paterson, Davina Silver and Zoë Svendsen) in Cambridge, July 2000.

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Elena Ray: ‘Abstract Tree Collage’.
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For all the stargazers – friends and strangers – who've
shared the dark.

HER VARIOUS SCALPELS

I tell you: I was born
like a knife—all folded—

the rest—I learned. What
you call surface is

space—slotted—with blades.
Its sense of—retractable—its edge

imperceptible. We live by—prepositions
& are mineral—the talent of smoke

in an era of shine. And if I
run a current—

and if I run
a gauntlet—and if red appears

upon it—that is

the flick—and
silver—

over. My trick
blade.

the star poems

SELF-PORTRAIT AS SUPERNOVA

after Lynne Stopkewich's Kissed

I have been so many things: girl, book, bird-
bone, soft fur. All blood

and cotton packing: life marks death at fingertip.
What little we know a trap

admitting no light. Or spring: a tulip,
slender as rain, unshrugs burlap.

Petals against my thigh. He died, yes, and
what was cold in him called

through me, always opening without end
in luminescence. What cannot be held

happens whitely from skin and eye: heat
death, dense at the core, iron heart

imploding. Wave after white wave repeat-
ing evacuation. I am down to parts:

palms, lips, voice. A nerve cluster trembling,
pulsing at the edge of seen. Bang

they name this: this imperceptible furling
of light against light. Blaze what longs,

like comets trailing night's black minute,
scars of gas and flame, so determined

and so free. And in the after,
nothing much. My little art—

release, light as laughter.
Echoes all that last.

CARBON DATING

after Michael Winterbottom's 9 Songs

1.

Nothing much remains.

Carbon, trace of her

burn in me, is all. Exhale once,
twice, again, and it is gone

almost, hanging before my
furred mouth, a cloud

in which I see our residue,
entwining.

2.

That thing a star does with itself
is night. Is irising against

the night in swirls of blaze,
mirror of the watching eye

below it, cast into frigid awe
and molten want, as gaze

coils between open and
open.

3.

Rock. Star. Elements
in any form, coming

together. Small talk like
radiation, reaction, the fight

against gravity. Her fingers
are glowsticks, their length

tastes of sweat, smoke, iron:
heavy metals.

4.

And in her, a universe and
an age. Why range only in

space? Whorled. Mine, she is,
and striated, so I trace her

history, bury myself in her—
take the tarnish off these

phrases in our translucent
newness.

5.

Unknown quantities. In close
proximity: circle, attract, approach,

implode. Reform. A haze about
her—something undiscovered,

off the chart. Under the table.
Against the wall. Everywhere

we can enter each other, gaseous,
nebulous.

6.

And in our orbit, our stately,
violent passing, our horizon-

tal pas-de-deux, the music
of the spheres. Aurora

australis, the rending
of the sky: cold lightning

in widescreen, some shaking.
Handheld.

7.

History is littered with fools
following their stars. Dis-

asters. Burnings and explosions,
distress flares that lead searchers

to skeletons. And in the bones
a spark that speaks, in tongues—

concentric, lapping, porous—of the
heart.

8.

What chokes us, too, is
carbon. Hides the night sky,

blurs outlines. Cigarettes and
cars. Our fault, then. Here, where

all is white, I've come to see
clearly: her million points of light,

scintillating silver knives, rushing
past.

9.

Or from the past. Look up,
see memory: the universe

swishing slow in its developing
tray, brilliant chemical bath

for sore eyes. Click. What was
between us, between us forever.

Frozen moments moving, warmed
by breath.