



**MONASH** University

**Analysing the Performance Art Process  
through the Forces of Fragmentation and Union:  
An Offer.**

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MA, BA

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
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(Centre for Theatre and Performance, Faculty of Arts)

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## Abstract

The existing scholarship acknowledges performance art as an art form that actively engages with the world. Much work has been done on the transformative effects of performance art on the artists and the audiences, and its impact on the society over time.

In this practice-led thesis, I align with such a perspective and take it further by asking, how does this transformation happen? My aim is to offer a deeper understanding of performance art by investigating its process, namely, what occurs during the unfolding of a piece, exploring the essence of its happening. I argue that the powerful potential of performance art lies in the dynamic character of its process, which evolves according to forces of fragmentation and union.

By drawing upon diverse research fields, and artworks by different artists, I have identified fragmentation and union as the two energies characterising both the process of performative works and the historical development of this art form. Fragmentation and union are active forces that manifest in multiple ways with different significances. As such, they are not fixed categories or labels, but fluid elements occurring in the process of performance art, and lenses through which to read. As opposite energies in action, fragmentation and union generate movements and tensions among the elements at stake in a performance, namely, space, bodies, and time, which intertwine in relationships of mutual influence and exchange.

The performance process, I argue, operates like an ecosystem in which space, bodies, and time have equal agency in shaping the evolution of the event. The performance ecosystem develops as an active dimension that hosts possibilities, namely, the coexistence of opposite forces and diverse phenomena simultaneously. This complex fluidity consists of breaking down what is together (fragmentation) and connecting what is apart (union), and ultimately leads those involved in a performance to experience reconfiguration – of perceptions, thoughts, ideas, and emotions.

According to such a perspective, and through a phenomenological approach, I investigate the performance process of four durational performances by analysing some moments of them. These pieces are *The Foreigner* (2016, 2018) and *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* (2016), which I have designed and performed as part of this PhD, Marina Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View* (2002), and *Daydream Island* by Mike Parr (2013). A fifth work is the *Siluetas Series* by Ana Mendieta (1973-80), which is not a series of performances, but I study the experience of its documentation as performative. My research combines the documentation around the performances together with scholarship that

encompasses art history, continental philosophy, European literature, performance studies, anthropology, and space and place studies. This approach applies to both the artworks that I have experienced live and those that I have not. Where possible, I take in consideration the perspective of both the performer and the audience.

## Research Outputs

### Publications Produced During Enrolment

Viora, Angela. "To Be or Not to Be There." *Performance Research*, vol. 22, no. 8, 2017, 135–43.

Viora, Angela. "The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected." *Performing Ethos: International Journal of Ethics in Theatre & Performance*. 2019. In press.

### Other Research Outputs

Viora, Angela "Dwelling through Performance Art." Conference paper. Performance Climates: 22nd Performance Studies International Conference, 2016. Melbourne University, Melbourne.

Viora, Angela. *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*. Live performance. 10 May 2016, Performing Arts Centre, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia.

Viora, Angela. *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*. Live performance. 24th Performance Studies International Conference, 5 Jul. 2018, Daegu Art Factory, Daegu, South Korea.

Viora, Angela. *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*. Video screening and photographs. In-Diretta Solo Exhibition, 10–16 Sep. 2018, Chiesa di San Giuseppe, Fossano, Italy.

Viora, Angela. *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*. Live performance. 22 Oct. 2016, Sir Louis Matheson Library, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia.

Viora, Angela. *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*. Live performance. 22nd Performance Studies International Conference, 6 Jul. 2016, Melbourne University, Melbourne, Australia.

Viora, Angela. *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*. Live performance. Melbourne #47 Performance Festival, Nov–Dec. 2016, City Library Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

Viora, Angela. *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*. Video projection. BOAA Biennale of Australian Art, Sep.–Nov. 2018, Ballarat, Australia.

Viora, Angela. *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*. Video screening. Human Rights #EDU International Exhibition of Contemporary Art, 23 Jun.–23 Sep. 2018, Fondazione Opera Campana dei Caduti, Rovereto, Italy.

Viora, Angela. Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait. Video screening and photographs.

In-Diretta Solo Exhibition, 10–16 Sep. 2018, Chiesa di San Giuseppe, Fossano, Italy.

## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature: .....

Print Name: Angela Viora

Date: 18/05/2019

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In lovely memory of my grandmother Vittoria,

Who passed away while I was overseas.

She loved me a lot.

## **Preamble—Before Starting**

### **A delicate question**

In this preamble, I want to clarify my personal position on some theories and theorists employed in this thesis that relate to sensitive matters, namely, Italian Futurism, the Italian dramaturg Luigi Pirandello, and the German philosopher Martin Heidegger.

I am aware that Pirandello and some Futurist artists and intellectuals were involved with Fascism and Heidegger with the Nazi party in the last century. Therefore, before explaining how Futurism, Pirandello, and Heidegger operate in this thesis, I want to declare that I do not sympathise with either Fascism or Nazism. The notions of transformation, regeneration, reconfiguration, fragmentation and union discussed in this project must be understood in relation to the analysis of performance art only, and in no way in a political/ideological sense.

I come, myself, from a family of Italian Partisans who fought Fascism and the German invasion of Italy during the Second World War. Consequently, I distance myself and my work from Fascist and Nazi ideologies, and from the horror perpetrated by these two movements throughout Europe in the last century. By valuing and employing in this thesis some aspects of Futurism as an artistic movement and some theories by Heidegger, I do not intend to relieve Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Luigi Pirandello, and Heidegger of the responsibilities of their political choices.

### **Futurism (1909–1943)**

In this section, I introduce the artistic and cultural relationship between Futurism, Dadaism, and performance art in terms of fragmentation and union, which I discuss in detail in Chapter One. In doing so, I focus on the importance of Futurism in the European context and its complex relation to Fascism, showing why such an uncomfortable relation is still necessary to discuss, both in historical and artistic terms.

My aim is, first, to show that we do not have to avoid considering the thorny questions involving Futurism to acknowledge its cultural and artistic contribution. Correspondingly, it would be dishonest to focus only on the merits of this movement removed from its historical and political implications. Secondly, I argue that labelling Futurism as ‘the art of Fascism’ is not only highly inaccurate, but it implies a superficial reading of the complex historical situation of the time.

Contemporary performance art originates from the twentieth-century European avant-garde movements, particularly Italian Futurism and Dadaism (Goldberg; Marsh, *Performance Ritual*). Dadaism is less problematic than Futurism in relation to historical fascisms. Indeed, Dadaism developed in reaction to the First World War and strongly opposed any form of war that had its roots in bourgeois nationalist and colonialist ideas. Through artistic practices that celebrated nonsense and randomness, Dada aimed to challenge the cultural and intellectual conformity in art and society that the war had produced. It is worth mentioning that some of the most important Dadaists were Jewish: for instance, Tristan Tzara (born Samuel Rosenstock in Bucharest in 1896), and Marcel and Georges Janco.

Alongside Dadaism, the Italian Futurism despised the obsolete conservative bourgeois mindset and aimed to eliminate it. Unlike Dada, however, Futurism supported war, violence and destruction as the only effective means to enact a cultural, political, and social revolution. Following the motto “destroy to regenerate” (Marinetti, *Manifest*), Marinetti and his men supported Italian participation in World War I “alongside the French workers and against the traditional pedantry of Austria and Germany” (Marinetti, *Manifest*; Tisdall et al. 13; my translation from Italian). Although it was “the first and most radical artistic and political avant-garde movement of the [last] century” (Hinz 51; my translation from Italian), Futurism’s complicated relationship with Fascism can make it difficult to appraise the movement’s importance in the European art history. According to my experience, many non-Italian art exhibitions and books only briefly include the Italian Futurism from the European avant-gardes or elide them altogether. Futurism is still often dismissed as “the art of Fascism” but I consider such a view distorted and somewhat superficial, and it does not do justice to the work of important visual arts. The works by art historian Caroline Tisdall (1988) and historian Emilio Gentile (1997) clarify such a perspective

Gentile’s essay “The Myth of National Regeneration” illustrates the differences between the Futurist and the Fascist ideologies. While Futurist ideology anticipated revolution and rejected traditions and the rigidity of dogmas (included the supposed sacredness of marriage), Fascism aimed to return to the glorious past of the Roman Empire through obedience towards rules, disciplines, family, and the leader (Gentile).

The artworks produced by the Futurists and the art supported by Fascism clearly demonstrate these differences. According to communist intellectual Antonio Gramsci, Futurism was part of a Marxist cultural revolution that had no fear of destroying traditions, bourgeois hierarchies, and idols to embrace the new industrial era and build a new society

with new values, culture, and structure that actively involved the masses (Gramsci). Aspects of revolution such as fragmentation, reconfiguration, questioning the status quo, and the involvement of the people are Futurist imperatives which I draw upon in relation to performance art in this thesis.

Manfred Hinz describes how the problematic relationship between Futurism and Fascism has been approached in the literature (Hinz). Hinz points out that at the end of the 1970s, the discussion centred on the political question, namely, how the avant-garde, progressive and radical Futurism could have allied with the fascist regime—without later retracting this support. Subsequently, the scholarship has adopted a more apolitical approach by focusing on the archival material and the study of documentation. Hinz, however, condemns this trend that isolates Futurism from its historical context and, thus, relieves it and its leader of their political responsibility. A similar divide about the issue amongst critics is also visible in the scholarship on the work of Heidegger (O’Hagan). One group of these critics attempts to reappraise the initial revolutionary drive of Futurism, advocating for its artistic value in spite of its subsequent infamous political developments. The second group, instead, identify a strategic hunger for power and dominion hidden within the anti-traditionalist and revolutionary rhetoric of Futurism. Hinz labels Marinetti “a fascist ideologist” and attempts to identify fascist thinking within Marinetti’s writings and manifestos.

As the differing scholarly positions have shown, the relationship between Futurism and Fascism is complicated. I will briefly illustrate the main points here in order to show that, firstly, Futurism was not necessarily “the art of Fascism” and, secondly, that understanding the revolutionary value of some futurist ideas within the European cultural context does not mean aligning with Mussolini and his ideology.

### **Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944)**

Mussolini, despite initially despising Marinetti, moved closer to him when Futurism became more and more popular. The two leaders were useful to each other despite their differences and often mutual dislike. Mussolini studied the poetics of Futurism and employ its language in his rhetoric, having the political power that Marinetti lacked. Between 1915 and 1919, during the years in which they were particularly close, Marinetti had a romantic view of Mussolini as “the Futurist man of action” according to Tisdall and Bozzolla (255). Marinetti openly joined Mussolini at the end of 1914. The two main qualities that these leaders had in

common were their support for the war and the desire for technological and industrial progress as a means of national growth.

However, the contents of the February 1918 Futurist Party manifesto were “anarchist, socialist and utopian” (Tisdall et al. 256). Among other proposals, the manifesto included the abolition of monarchy and the Catholic Church, women’s salary equal to men’s (despite the earlier 1909 *Manifesto Futurista*’s disdain for womanhood), divorce, free legal assistance, press freedom, and the non-intervention of the military forces in civil struggles. The manifesto also declared that the Futurist political party was independent of the Futurist artistic movement (Marinetti, *Manifesto*). Is it nevertheless possible to discern the value of artworks such as those by Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni with reference to the movement within which those works were created, and its alliances? Even if it were possible, I agree with Hinz on the necessity of illustrating the historical and political contexts in which these artworks were made when they are exhibited and discussed in the present.

The manifesto of the Futurist party was also contradictory and included ideas that were vague but also violent. It included terms such as “revolutionary Nationalism,” “Patriotic Education,” “schools of bravery and Italian essence,” “a Parliament empty of wimps and scoundrels and the abolition of Senate,” the reinforcement of the army to finally triumph over Austro-Hungarian domination and to “clear out, clean up, and expand the Italian borders” (Marinetti, *Manifesto*; my translation from Italian). Such statements were congenial to those futurists who sympathised with Fascism such as Piero Bolzon, Giuseppe Bottai, Mario Carli, as well as Federico Vecchi, who contributed to making the movement increasingly violent and intolerant and closer to fascist ideals. In turn, Mussolini gave Futurism more political power and visibility, and in 1919, he appointed Marinetti as one of the candidates for the Parliament. While futurists such as Bolzon had a career in the Fascist movement, others dissented. Musician Arturo Toscanini came to distance himself from Fascism and explicitly criticised its practice, for which he was beaten up by fascist thugs.

From 1920 onward, the ideas embraced by Marinetti and Mussolini diverged. Marinetti, albeit with contradictions, increasingly advocated for the “universal revolution,” acknowledging the importance of Russian futurist artists in the Bolshevik revolution, and he argued vehemently against any form of established order: from bureaucracy to monarchy, from the papal authority to the prison system. Mussolini, on the contrary, emphasised the importance of established order in his rise to power as he established his dictatorship and shifted his politics towards the right wing. The image that Mussolini wanted for Fascism was of order, solidity, and harmony—thus, a perfectly disciplined structure.

For these reasons, the futurist rebellion no longer served him. The art supported by Fascism instead promoted neoclassicism as a return to the Roman era, more in alignment with the perspective of poet Gabriele D'Annunzio. There was no room for the dynamic excess of Futurism in the rigid lines of Fascism, which relegated the artistic movement to a marginal position.

Another thorny question concerns racism within the Futurist movement. Despite supporting the war, Futurist propaganda was not deployed against specific ethnicities or groups of people: Futurism aimed, indeed, to be a universal movement across the countries. Marja Härmänmaa asserts that Marinetti was a nationalist but not necessarily racist or xenophobic ("Dark Side"). For instance, Marinetti admired and wrote about the importance of African art and culture; in his view, the real enemies were "passéism and nature," that is, the attachment to traditions and the past, and the lack of technological progress (Härmänmaa, *Cerca*). However, in his manifesto *Guerrapittura*, namely, "war-painting" (1915), the Futurist painter Giacomo Balla expresses his hate for the Germans during the First World War.

In the early 1930s, Germany had started linking avant-garde art to Communism and Judaism, designating it 'degenerated art'. Together with other futurists, Marinetti openly stood against the Italian racial laws approved by Mussolini in 1938. Thus, Marinetti's dream to make Futurism the national Italian artform was threatened. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, he increasingly took antisemitic positions (Härmänmaa, "Dark Side"). Many artists abandoned Futurism because of its perceived relationship with Fascism throughout the following years. Marinetti unsuccessfully compromised with Mussolini to secure some position for Futurism in the political and cultural apparatus; he maintained his relationship with the regime until the end and joined the Saló Republic in 1943.

### **Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936)**

This section briefly describes Pirandello's position on Fascism, the importance of his work in European art culture of the last century, and how his work is applied in this thesis.

The Italian dramaturg and writer openly joined Fascism and supported Mussolini, and unlike Marinetti, Pirandello embraced the Fascist movement and its ideology. His father supported Garibaldi during Risorgimento, so Pirandello saw in Fascism the realisation of the Italian "myth of national regeneration" described by historian Emilio Gentile. Pirandello was already internationally renowned when he joined Fascism, so he did not need Mussolini's

help for his career—but he was nominated Academic of Italy in 1929 and the Italian government supported his candidature to the Nobel Prize, which he won in 1934. Pirandello's support, in turn, conferred prestige upon the Fascist movement.

However, much like the work of the Futurists and Heidegger, Pirandello's artistic ideas and production clashed with the regime that he supported. His works show a deep pessimism and present sadness and sorrow as the central elements of the human condition, which is fragmented by an intrinsic existential crisis that cannot be solved. With an approach that has much in common with Dada, Pirandello's plays and books depict the struggle between the nonsense and mutability of life and the human need for consistency and safety, as well as exposing bourgeois society as a lie and trap and the victory of "the masks" over reality (Fichera; Bodei; Lanna). The work of Pirandello has been acknowledged to portray the tragic human condition in the challenging panorama of the twentieth century. In this thesis, although not employed extensively, Pirandello informs the discourse on fragmentation and union that characterised the genesis of performance art alongside the European avant-gardes.

### **Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)**

With the same approach employed to discuss Futurism, in this section, I analyse the controversial figure of German philosopher Martin Heidegger in relation to his affiliation with the Nazi party and the impact of his work over time. I also explain which theories by Heidegger I apply to the investigation of performance art and my motivation for such.

Speaking about Heidegger is never easy; on the one hand, he was close to the Nazi party that he joined in 1933 and this helped his career enormously, being appointed Rector of Freiburg University in the same year. On the other hand, he is recognised as one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century. Together with his master Edmund Husserl, who was Jewish, Heidegger was an eminent philosopher in the field of phenomenology, from which I derive the research approach that I adopt in this thesis. However, Maurice Merleau-Ponty is the phenomenologist whom I employ the most in my investigation for his work on the body and its relationship with the world.

Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1926) is the book that did "rock the philosophical world to its foundations" when it was published, and whose philosophical depth and value has been widely recognised (O'Hagan 945). This is the book that gained Heidegger the position as Rector and that has often been associated with Nazi ideology.

“Being-in-the-world” is the key phenomenological concept of *Being and Time* that I draw upon. The concept informs my understanding of performance as an embodied experience that is generated from dynamic relationships which we call “world” or “surrounding reality.” However, as Timothy O’Hagan points out, problems begin when the idea of being-in-the-world leaves the realm of phenomenology and is transferred into historical terms:

From the innocent idea that we find our identities in being together with others, and that this process unfolds in time, we have moved to a conception of a people (a *Volk*) which at once invents and discovers its destiny, as it invents and discovers its history. A people forge itself by “handing down” traditions in “repetition” from generation to generation. This allows Dasein, now identified with the people, to go back into its history and “choose its hero.” It is not hard to see how this vocabulary of people (*Volk*) and hero could all too easily become part of an unphilosophical jargon of political ideology. And that was exactly what happened. (947)

O’Hagan and other scholars have discussed the extent to which Heidegger was complicit in the (mis)appropriation of his work. Answering this question is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.

As with Marinetti, Heidegger’s relationship with Nazism is complicated. He resigned from the rectorate in 1934 yet he remained a powerful figure in Nazi circles. Like Marinetti within Fascism, Heidegger remained a Nazi party member throughout the war, but he retreated from direct involvement with politics. He was eventually sidelined by the rigid characters then dominating the party because his ideas were too extreme, “even anarchic” (O’Hagan 949). When interrogated after the war ended, Heidegger claimed to be a high-standing yet naïve intellectual who accepted the rectorate with the best intentions to avoid a much worse party nomination. The main problem with this claim is that, in the following years, the philosopher kept discussing his personal perspective on National Socialism and he never apologised for joining the Nazis nor morally distanced himself from their atrocities.

“Dwelling” and *alethēia* are the other two key concepts from Heidegger’s philosophy that inform this thesis. The first appears in the seminal essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” a paper that Heidegger presented during a conference in Darmstadt in 1951 that was then

published in 1954. The conference centred on architecture and the spatial issues faced by a destroyed post-war Germany. Jonas Holst defines “Building” as “one of the philosophical texts which have had the most influence on architects in the second half of the 20th century and their way of thinking about architecture” (54).

Conceiving a performance in spatial terms as an ecosystem, I employ the notion of dwelling, in the sense of attuning to places, as foundational to the experience of performance art as embodied, dynamic, and relational. Such a perspective, alongside the notion of the “Fourfold” included in the same essay, contributes to the idea of union explored in this thesis. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological understanding of the body as “our instrument to have a world” (1962) intertwines with Heidegger’s vision of the bridge that allows the landscape to emerge as a place to attune to and, thus, dwell in. This results in the conception of the performing body as the bridge that gathers the elements of the performative ecosystem together and brings the performance process forward as an “offer” for those involved. I refer to the etymological meaning of offer, which is “to bring towards/before” (from Latin *offerre*). As an artist, I perform to offer experiences to the audience, who reciprocates by participating in the work. I synthesise this idea in my conceptualisation of the body’s central position in the figure-eight of performance between space and time (detailed in later chapters).

*Alethēia* is a concept belonging to the Ancient Greek tradition that Heidegger analyses etymologically to explain the phenomenological character of the work of art, whose core is the “unconcealment of Being.” The concept is described in another major work of the philosopher, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971). Drawing upon Barbara Bolt’s application of Heidegger’s concept in her “performative paradigm” (2014), I apply the notion of *alethēia* to study the process by which performance art triggers, discloses, and allows to emerge forces and dynamics among the elements of the work.

## **Conclusions**

The important and delicate question of complicity in Fascism, Nazism, and the two World Wars is foundational in Italian and European history and culture. As an Italian, I have been raised and educated to openly talk about the more disgraceful episodes that have marked my country’s history, to investigate and discuss them. Mussolini’s dictatorship and the Holocaust, for example, are part of compulsory Italian education throughout middle school and high school (from 11 to 18 years old). I could have avoided employing Futurism and Heidegger in this thesis to circumvent any risk and explanation. However, this is not my

imperative. I align with Caroline Tisdal and Angelo Bozzolla, who investigate Futurism and who claim that “the relationship between Futurism and Fascism has embarrassed generations of historians,” because as they emphasise, “to avoid the problem and ignore what happened because it is uncomfortable means to perpetuate the Fascist vision as an acolyte of clowns without brain, and it does not help us to identify the origins and the symptoms of totalitarianism, in politics and in culture, today as well as in the past” (251; my translation from Italian). The position of Futurism, in particular, shows us how complex the historical situation was, and it is important to scrutinise such complexity to understand how people, ideas, and phenomena related to each other.

It is a classic problem of historical research: is it possible to distinguish the man from the work? Is it possible, and morally acceptable, to distinguish between Marinetti the artist/intellectual and the man who was once so close to Mussolini? Is it possible, and morally acceptable, to distinguish between Heidegger the philosopher and Heidegger the man who was part of the German NS? With respect to Heidegger, philosophers are divided between those who make such a distinction and see no connection between *Being and Time* and Heidegger’s political stance, and those who claim that this connection exists, although often concealed behind a terminology that is open to interpretation. Scholars of the first position include Jewish philosophers such as Hannah Arendt and Herbert Marcuse, among others; the second group includes Theodor Adorno, Karl Löwith, and György Lukács, who had Jewish origins as well. I direct the reader to O’Hagan’s discussion on the issue, which includes Ernst Tugendhat’s “purely philosophical” reading of *Being and Time* (954) and Hans Sluga’s focus on Heidegger within the “more general trends of the time” (957).

The conclusion is that I am aware of the historical, cultural, and social contexts to which Marinetti and some Futurists, Pirandello, and Heidegger belonged and operated; I am also informed of their political practices of collusion with Fascism and Nazism. With this in mind, I attempt to employ in my thesis some of their theories and works in non-political and non-ideological terms. I do so by focusing on the artistic and philosophical value of their production, which much scholarship has acknowledged before me, and that has often been deployed in contrast with the political ideologies to which they adhered.

## Chapter One—Performance Art

### 1.1 Introduction

Performance art has been performing *union* throughout its history by branching out and building networks with other art forms and disciplines. Scholars have investigated the capacity of body and performance art to relate to other artistic fields such as video and photography (Goldberg; Marsh, *Performance Ritual*; Merz et al.; Orr, “Space”). Performance art has also been shown to be capable of dialoguing with different realms of research, artistic and not, such as psychology and philosophy (Scheer and Parr) and dance and live art (Grant; Stewart) among others. As well as discussing performance art by using different disciplines as theoretical frameworks, some of these studies employ performance art as a lens through which to investigate such fields. For example, in *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan questions the politics of representation and visibility by examining the possibilities of performance. Betty Nigianni proposes an “anti-historicist attitude towards art and architecture” by understanding some works of Marina Abramović as spatial experiences leading to transformation.

In different ways, and by following different paths, thinkers and artists expand on philosophical methodologies and social and historical research by enacting performance art as a “creative/creating act and event” (Alifuoco). For instance, the work of performance studies and dance scholar Annalaura Alifuoco focuses on the intersection between phenomenology and aesthetics, while performance theorist Edward Scheer approaches philosophy and psychoanalysis through the art of Mike Parr. Art editor and writer Kirstie Beaven retraces the political activism of the last century by investigating some “angry artists” whose works responded to and were fuelled by the major social and cultural movements and events of the 1960s and 70s. In addition to the Beat Generation and Bob Dylan, Beaven discusses the works of Judy Chicago and Valie Export, among others. Australian artists and scholars Jill Orr and Gretel Taylor use the practice of performance art to ascertain a deeper understanding of the intersection between culture, places, and colonial history (Orr, “Space”; Taylor). These works show how performance art, given its deep bond with the contemporaneous, can be an analytical tool through which to investigate historical, cultural, social, and political phenomena.

According to the work of these scholars, performance art has such an active engagement with the world because it is “transformative” (Nigianni), “provocative” (Marsh, *Performance Ritual*) and, thus, capable of questioning and altering the status quo—both

personal perceptions and social structures (Phelan, *Unmarked*; Scheer and Parr). RoseLee Goldberg points out that, since the seventies, performance art has been continuing “to defy definition [and remaining] an “unpredictable and provocative . . . medium for articulating “difference,” in discourses on multiculturalism and globalism.” Renowned performance artists have often endorsed this scholarly position by arguing that performance art is “transformational” for both the performers and the audiences (Abramović, “History”; Fischer-Lichte), that it enables them “to think” (Scheer and Parr) and is “in constant evolution” (Orr qtd. in Geczy and Kelly 304).

The scope of this thesis is to analyse why and how such alterations and provocations happen by investigating the performance process at their core. My work builds on the existing scholarship but also supplements the two main gaps that I identify within it. First, much academic writing examines whether performance art is able to achieve these changes. This means that the current scholarship focuses mainly on describing the effects and the impacts of performance art and less on the process that leads to such outcomes, despite its ontological importance (Abramović, *Walk*; Coogan; Geczy and Kelly; Phelan, *Unmarked*). Second, the theories centring on the processual character of performance art concentrate on performers and audience as both the principal generators and recipients of the experiential performance process. The problem with such an approach is that it over-emphasises the role of the body in performance art and, thus, tends to overlook space and time. I argue that these two agentic elements shape the development of the performance and are more than mere instruments for the artist to manipulate.

Concerning the first gap, I assert that to understand performance art and its potentialities, academic scholarship needs to move from focusing on the impact of a performance and the bodies involved in it and begin to explore them as part of a bigger and more complex wholeness. This necessitates taking a step back and investigating what occurs *during* a performance that makes it so capable of “doing things in the world” (Bolt).

Indeed, if performance art is about the process rather than the result (Abramović, “Performance Art”; Feral), then therein lie its strengths and potentialities.

Considering the second overlooked aspect, the foundational elements of performance art—time, space, and body—must be equally considered as agential elements in the performance process. In this thesis, therefore, I analyse the processual development of a performance while it is happening, from its beginning to its end. I neither consider what happens before the performative event, except for my own performances whose preparation

contributes to the methodology of this thesis, nor its effects after and over time. I study the forces, the energy flows, the dynamics, and the phenomena occurring during a performance that constitute its process in order to give the reader a deeper understanding of this art form, especially how it can offer embodied experiences to those involved. I do so by means of two main analytical tools: conceiving of the performance process as an ecosystem and investigating fragmentation and union as both the forces characterising the process and the lens to analyse it.

The performance process works as an ecosystem in which the elements involved intertwine according to dynamic relationships of mutual influence and exchange. This means, for example, that the various manifestations of the element of space (from the venue of the performance to the spatial themes involved in the work) influence the way in which the performer and the audience experience time through their own bodies. The actions undertaken by those bodies, in turn, affect the way those bodies perceive space and time, and the passage of time and the experience of duration shape the body-space relationship as well. The performance process, therefore, is relational, processual, non-fixed, and non-hierarchical. It may be productively visualised as the “performance figure-eight” that I provide at the end of this section (Figure 1). A further contribution of this thesis is that I apply existing theorisations on space and the ecology of the performance to the conception of its process as a spatial ecosystem, and I emphasise the element of space in response to much greater attention paid to the body (the performer-audience relationship), and time, especially regarding durational works. I provide the reader with a detailed explanation of the performance ecosystem and the role of space in Chapter Three.

Now that we are conceptualising the process of performance art as an ecosystem, we need to understand how we investigate it, in which terms and through which instruments. These are *fragmentation* and *union*. These are not the only productive means to study it, but they are a modality that reveals the complex dynamicity of the performance art process. I argue that this dynamism is what makes this art form capable of actively engaging with the world and, thus, offering embodied experiences to both the performer and the audience.

How does performance art affect those involved and why? What is happening during the development of a piece which makes it so powerful, capable of shifting perspectives, offering experiences, and dialoguing with contemporaneity? “What is at work in the work?” (Heidegger, *Poetry*). As I illustrate in the next section of this chapter, I have identified

fragmentation and union as the two complementary and opposite forces characterising the process of performances, generating and being generated by them. These two elements characterise the network of relationships occurring between space, time, and bodies during the development of the work. Fragmentation and union shape the performance art process as two intrinsic forces that generate tension and, thus, fuel phenomena of movement and change within the performance ecosystem. Drawing from Bolt's theory of the performative and the experiential in combination with Bruno Latour's "actant-network theory" or ANT ("On Actor-Network Theory"), transformation and change are here intended as *reconfiguration* of sensory perceptions, ideas, thoughts, orientation in space, and the notion of time.

Although presented as two complementary and opposite forces, fragmentation and union are not to be understood within a binary structure, and they are not static 'categories' or in rigid opposition. Instead, within the evolution of a performance, fragmentation and union are dynamic forces that are fluid and porous in the plurality of their manifestations and signifiers. They blur, collapse, and dissolve into one another. They are active energies that generate and are generated, fuel and are fuelled by processes; they are manifestations of phenomena that arise, expand, and dissolve.

They are moving forces that dance together, collide and depart, and trace unpredictable paths on platforms of possibilities. In terms of analytical research, fragmentation and union are not limiting labels. These elements are two lenses through which to study the multitude of relationships, networks, movements, phenomena, and forces that run throughout the development of the performative event.

In the realm of this thesis, union generally means "unifying what is apart," and fragmentation means "breaking what is linked and/or continuous." In the next section, I present the various significances of these two concepts through the scholarship that has led me to consider them as being at the core of performance art. Further meanings and manifestation of fragmentation and union, and how they relate to each other within the performative process, emerge from their application to the rest of the scholarship and the analysis of the artworks.

I analyse five artworks to examine the performance process as an ecosystem engaging the forces of fragmentation and union. These are two live performances that I have created for this doctoral project, titled *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected* (2016, 2018) and *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* (2016), the performances *The House With The Ocean View* by Marina Abramović (2002) and *Daydream Island* by Mike Parr (2013), and some works from the *Silueta Series* by Ana Mendieta (1973–80). I have

examined these pieces using a phenomenological approach undertaken within what I call a *practice-led* methodology. Within the practice-led framework, the art-based practice and the theory-based practice synergistically inform the research process to gain new knowledge. The relation between creative and theoretical practice within the performance ecosystem is mutual, processual, non-hierarchical, and agentic. For instance, the scholarship that I study gives essence to the design of a performance, whose outcomes question and/or inform the scholarship that, in turn, contributes to the analysis of the artwork. The methodology is described in detail in Chapter Two.

Each chapter focuses on how an element of the performance ecosystem manifests within the process. Chapter Three is on space, Chapter Four on time, Chapter Five on the body, Chapter Six on the performer-audience relationship, and Chapter Seven on documentation. I discuss these elements by combining together the theories and the artworks. This means that I analyse some moments of the artworks by means of the scholarship that, in turn, is grounded and applied in the phenomenological world through the knowledge offered by the pieces.

I am aware that it may appear contradictory to present the performance process as an ecological wholeness composed of interdependent elements and to then discuss each of them separately. In the realm of a performance, it is not possible to talk about space without considering time and body (Burton qtd. in Geczy and Kelly). I do not *consider* these elements individually, but I *analyse* them individually. This is so because, within the same performative moment, fragmentation and union might occur in terms of space in a completely different way to time or body. For example, in the *Silueta Series*, the removal/absence of Mendieta's body from the site of the work is a form of fragmentation in the body-space relationship that mirrors the fragmented existence of the diasporic artist. Yet this is exactly what allows union as a symbiosis between the artist and "Mother Earth" (Merz et al.; Rosenthal et al.) and the connection between the audience and the artwork (Viora, "To Be").

I aim to show the agency of each element shaping the performance process, and I separate the components of the performative system to understand how they dynamically function together. Paradoxically, but productively, I try to understand "union" by enacting "fragmentation."

## The Performance Figure-Eight

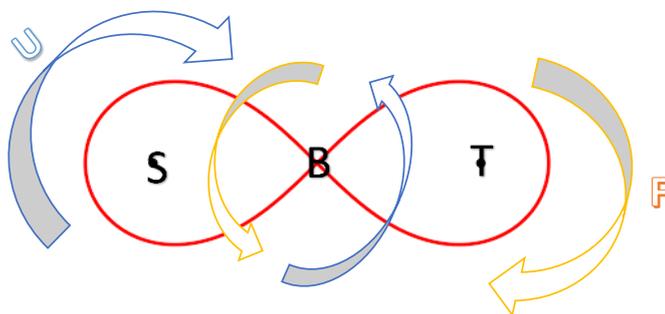


Figure 1. © Angela Viora 2019, The performance figure-eight model

The image of the figure-eight represents the performance art process. Space (S), time (T), and body (B) align and relate to each other on the same level. They interconnect and have equal agency in shaping the process of a performance. The body is the conjunction point in the centre of the figure-eight because those involved in a performance experience space, time, and the process through their own bodies. The ongoing curves of the figure-eight that neither start nor end can be read in any direction because the performance art process is the realm of possibilities. The looping movement of this figure is given by the continuous mutuality of the fragmentation (F) and union (U) forces, which run through the foundational elements of the performance and connect them.

## The Artworks Analysed in the Thesis

In this section, I provide a brief description of the five pieces analysed in this project. In Chapter Two on methodology, I explain the concepts of these works, the reasons I have created or selected them, and their place in the arguments of this thesis. The same chapter provides further details on the creation, documentation, and analysis of the pieces.

### *The Performances Realised for this Project*

*The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected* (2016, 2018) is a durational live performance with an open end that I have created and performed as part of this thesis. I have performed it twice. First, in the Rehearsal Room of the Performing Arts Centre (PAC) at Monash University, Clayton campus, in May 2016. The performance lasted for five hours.

The second time, the performance took place for two and a half hours in the main lobby of the Daegu Art Centre in Daegu, South Korea, in July 2018, as part of *PSi#24*—the Performance Studies International Conference. Instructed assistants were on site to facilitate audience interaction with the work. The performances were photo and video recorded.

This piece is a personal response to the issue of migration that has been increasingly prominent in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East during the last decade. During this work, I lay in stillness on the floor for as long as possible, covered by a white sheet. By doing so, I aimed to embody those iconic images of dead migrants on the Italian and Greek shores. How distant is what is perceived as far? For the entire duration of the performance, the audience members cannot see me, and I cannot see them. My name does not appear anywhere: I am the Foreigner, thus, I have no known identity. I give no instructions, tasks, or guidance to the audiences, who can stay with me for as long as they wish to and in whichever way they want. Visitors are invited to take a pen-marker and write onto the cloth, and my body, their own names and/or anything they want about the Foreigner and the performance. They cannot look underneath the cloth that covers me. Who is the Foreigner? What if you were underneath the sheet? (Fig. 1-12). The videos of the two performances of *The Foreigner* are available at: [vimeo.com/174614351](https://vimeo.com/174614351); [vimeo.com/336497624](https://vimeo.com/336497624) Password: Foreigner\_Daegu18.

*Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* (2016) is a durational live performance with an open end that I have created and performed as part of this thesis. I have performed this piece five times between July and December 2016 in different venues and for various lengths of time, from a minimum of 30 minutes to a maximum of three hours.

The English word “soundscape,” similar to “landscape” gives the element of sound a locative value. If we think of sound as a place, then, what does it look like? This piece questions the privileging of sight by using the whole body as a means of recording a place and the sounds around it.

I sit on a huge sheet of white paper positioned in a specific place. I am blindfolded and I only rely on hearing and touch. I dress completely in white, as is the paper. I hold a piece of black charcoal in both hands and I leave a mark on the sheet any time I hear a sound, on every piece of the surface I can reach. I experience synaesthesia. Therefore, the shape and the intensity of the marks are determined by my perception of the sounds.

Charcoal leaves editable marks, hence, my body can modify the tracks it leaves while moving on the paper and can become marked itself. These marks constitute a map of a specific place and time made through sound and texture instead of sight.

I perform for as long as I can. Visitors are welcome to step onto the paper and interact with me. Visitors are invited to close their eyes and focus on the soundscape in which they are: Are you still in the same place? How does it feel? The video of *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* is available at: [vimeo.com/238534749](https://vimeo.com/238534749).

*The House With The Ocean View* (2002) is a live durational piece by Marina Abramović, performed for twelve days in the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York. For the entire duration of the performance, the artist lived on three suspended platforms installed in the gallery. The structure that hosted Abramovic had minimal furniture and resembled a house. This was connected to the floor by three ladders whose steps were knife-blades. The audience could not access the House area. Abramovic did not speak, eat, leave, write, or do any leisure activity for twelve days. She drank water, dressed and undressed, used the toilet, slept, showered, and moved in front of the audience who could visit the performance during gallery hours. The artist never left the House even when the gallery was closed. By moving at a very slow pace and focusing deeply on every action undertaken, Abramović transformed ordinary activities in ritual ceremonies. She engaged in prolonged gazing with the audience. Her initial aim was to see whether it was possible to engage in an energy exchange with the audience and change the energetic field in the room. As a reflection on the hectic life of the metropolis, and following the 9/11 tragedy, the performance was designed to provide ‘an island of peace’ in the heart of a chaotic city marked by fear, stress, and restlessness (Abramović and Kelly). The artist wore a different colour each day according to the Vedic tradition. The performance was photo and video recorded, and the audience could watch Abramović closely through a telescope placed at the back of the room.

*Daydream Island* is a live work with an open end performed by Mike Parr in 2013 as part of the Performance Space Festival in Sydney. The piece is part of Parr’s series of performances in the last decade that denounce the condition of the asylum seekers detained by the Australian government on Nauru and Manus Island. “Daydream Island” is also the name of a luxurious resort and spa located on a tiny island in the Whitsunday Islands in Queensland. The performance lasted for 80 minutes, according to the time given to the artist by the organisation. For Parr, the term “open end” usually has a temporal significance and means “performing for as long as possible” (Scheer, “Introduction”). The term also refers to the corporeal limits of the artist and the unforeseen outcomes of the work.

Parr seated in a chair in the middle of a stage in a theatre, wearing a colourful shirt, ironically enacting the stereotype of the white-Western tourist. During the first part of the piece, his wife and collaborator Felizitas Parr sewed tiny toys and monsters on to his face by using needle and thread. Parr sometimes grunted in pain, but she continued until his face became an unrecognisable mask. Visual artist Linda Jefferyes then painted Parr's face, including the toys, as if it were an expressionist painting. Eventually, the artist's face became completely camouflaged and matched his Hawaiian shirt. Parr has already had his face sewed up in other performances in solidarity with the unheard asylum seekers, some of whom sewed their lips in protest. The artist and his collaborators gave their backs to the audience and wore black squares in homage to Minimalism. The audience seated in the auditorium saw the performance on a big scale on three mega screens placed at the end of the stage.

At the end of the 2013 performance, Lisa Corsi, the stage-manager of the event, read to the audience 'a statement which quoted Prime Minister Abbott's recent remarks describing any linkage of climate change and increased bushfire activity in Australia as "hogwash" and asked the audience to return to wherever they had come from' (Scheer, "Art,;" Viora, "To Be"). By covering the wounds with the same tropical colours as his shirt, the artist denounced the xenophobic nationalist political discourse that has been used to camouflage what is happening in those refugee camps.

The *Silueta Series* (1973–80) is a set of photo and video documented works created by Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta and produced mainly in Mexico and Iowa. In the works that I analyse in this thesis, the artist imprints her body on to natural elements within the environment, such as sand, earth, snow, trees, grass, ice, and rocks—then she disappears. What the viewers see through photographs and video footages are the traces of her body that was once there. *Silueta*, indeed, means "silhouette" or "figure" in Spanish. Scholars have employed different perspectives to analyse the *Silueta Series*, such as feminism, eco-feminism, ritualism, phenomenology, migration, geography, attending to the role and importance of documentation in live performances and the relationship between performer and audience (Blocker; Merz et al.; Rosenthal et al.; Warchol). Although many scholars have analysed Mendieta's *siluetas* within the field of performance art, I do not call these works "performances" because Mendieta considered herself to be a sculptor rather than a performance artist, referring to her works in the landscape as *Earth/Body Sculptures* (Rosenthal et al.) and she distanced herself from performance art (Landry and Viora; Rosenthal et al.).

In my analyses, the perspective of the artist on their own work is important, and this informs my terminology. When I talk about the *Siluetas Series* and the other pieces analysed in the thesis, I adopt general terms such as works, artworks, or pieces. When specifically discussing the performative character of the *siluetas*, I use the term *action*, which highlights the activation of relationships between body and place as a crucial element of these works. I refer to these works as “performances” to indicate the audience’s experience of them through documentation, which I understand as a performative live event that develops as an ecosystem according to dynamics of fragmentation and union.

## **1.2 Fragmentation and Union**

This section introduces the various sources and approaches that have led to the identification of the forces of fragmentation and union as the foundational elements and analytical tools of the performance art process. Different fields of research confer diverse meanings on fragmentation and union, which I discuss in this and subsequent chapters.

I came to research the notions of fragmentation and union in the second half of my doctoral journey, while investigating the ideas of transformation and change in performance art and on a broader epistemological level. The study of space, time, and body was already established in my research. In history in literature, art and anthropology, each discipline studied different components and meanings of transformation and change. No transformation, shift, or alteration is reached without a passage from one condition to another. I, therefore, focused my investigation on these diverse processes and I identified a common thread: a processual character.

As dynamic evolutions, processes are generated and shaped by forces, and the recurrent forces involved in each process analysed are fragmentation and union, which manifest in multiple ways in each event. And what is performance art if not the happening of its process? (Abramović, “Performance Art”; Coogan; Feral; Nelson). This discovery has led me to shift from researching the transformational potentialities of performance art to considering the notion of process as the very core of the art form. This approach has revealed the performance process to be constituted by fragmentation and union as its driving forces, and the sources which generate the potentialities of a performance. Subsequently, I have gone back to the already established theoretical framework and to the history of performance art and I have re-read these areas through the lens of fragmentation and union. The theoretical framework of this thesis had thus evolved an organic structure.

The first major area to inform this thesis's notions of fragmentation and union is the scholarship on Dadaism and Futurism from the disciplines of history, art, and literature (Bonnett; Gentile; Radice; Rettberg; Tisdall et al.). The European avant-gardes of the twentieth century laid the foundations for the development of performance art as we know it today (Geczy and Kelly; Goldberg; Marsh, *Performance Ritual*). These movements emerged in response to the political and social turmoil characterising the Western world that started at the end of the nineteenth century and culminated in the First World War. Cultural and artistic movements such as Futurism and Dadaism brutally demonstrated the disintegration of the values that had characterised European society until that moment. Thus, they performed fragmentation as revolution and rupture by breaking into the cultural panorama like a hurricane, rupturing its foundations (Bonnett; Goldberg; Rettberg; Tisdall et al.).

According to Luigi Pirandello, such a disruption reflected the fragmentation of identity that “breaks into pieces” within the human condition (Bodei, “Pirandello”). He aligned with the position of French philosophers-psychologists such as Théodule Ribot, Paul Janet, and Pierre Binet who, at the end of the nineteenth century, “destroyed the image of a monolithic Self within an immortal soul” (Bodei, *Destini Personali*, “Pirandello”; my translation from Italian). Having witnessed the horrors of the war, Dada artists such as Max Ernst and Man Ray portray the human body as “fragmented,” “disturbed,” “deformed, merged with a machine, or sliced up” (Rettberg 8). In the fields of anthropology and ritual studies, Arnold van Gennep's schema of the rites of passage theorises fragmentation as “separation,” union as “incorporation,” and reconfiguration as “re-aggregation” (Fischer-Lichte; Turner “Liminal”; Van Gennep). The work of Van Gennep links directly to the idea of “liminality” theorised by Victor Turner (“Betwixt,” “Liminal”) and to the perspective of philosopher and poet Lucretius who, in his masterpiece *De Rerum Natura*, portrays union as “aggregation,” opposite yet complementary to fragmentation as “dissolution” (Carus and Fellin; Sedley). Once I had established fragmentation and union as the foundational forces of the performance process as well as the analytical tools to study it, I returned to the literature review to find other manifestations of these two energies.

In his theorisation of space and dwelling, Martin Heidegger offers a vision of union as gathering and linking together “to let [the landscape] emerge” through the example of the bridge (“Building”). Such a perspective informs the thesis' conceptualisation of the performing body as a bridge that unites and communicates, which is how, I argue, the body artists employed their own bodies in the 1960s and 70s. This operation, however, happened under the aegis of fragmentation when the then-called body art burst into the art scene of that

period. Heidegger's theories on space, together with those of Bruno Latour and Doreen Massey, are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

Comparative analysis of the scholarship of fragmentation and union has shown that these two forces occur within three phenomena: *immanency*, *togetherness*, and *alternation*.

In performance art, and in theory, these three qualities are articulated as:

- **Immanency:** Union and fragmentation occur in the performance process from within, and are not external forces. These forces are determined by the elements involved in the work, such as its time- and site-specificity, and the actions of the performer and audience in relation to each other and to time and space.
- **Togetherness:** No performance or phenomenon analysed in this research contains only union or fragmentation. Although one force sometimes prevails, there are always elements of union and fragmentation: what I call 'togetherness'. For instance, in *Daydream Island* by Mike Parr (2013), the artist cut and wounded his own body before an audience to establish a connection. The *action* of cutting and its outcome is literally fragmentation but the *intentions* and the results concern union. The idea of togetherness is important to avoid binarist conceptualisations of fragmentation and union in performance art.
- **Alternation:** By means of the employed methods of analysis, I have found that fragmentation and union occur together within the performance process in 'alternation': not in blocks of time or fixed percentages. It is not possible to predict in advance why, when, and how union and fragmentation will happen because unpredictability is a feature of performance art. During a performance, fragmentation and union occur together, emerging from within the process and alternating in a dancing movement. Lucretius' atomic theory of coagulation and dissolution illustrates this concept, and this is discussed further in Chapter Three.

### 1.3 Clarifying the Terminology

It is important to clarify the meaning and employment of some terms that recur in this thesis, before proceeding with the analysis.

#### Performance and Performative

*The Experiential Turn: Dorothea von Hantelmann and Barbara Bolt*

Art theorist Anne Marsh asserts that the term *performative* “in the art world is often used as an adjective to denote a performance-like aspect in media that are not performances as such” (*Performance Ritual*). The Oxford Dictionary defines the adjective *performative* as “relating to or of the nature of dramatic or artistic performance.” Art historian and curator, Dorothea von Hantelmann, however, warns us against the common tendency to use the term *performative* to indicate any “performance-like” artwork, because this attitude has led to significant confusion. This is

mainly because it is impossible to clearly define what a performative artwork actually is. As a category it remains stubbornly slippery—and with good reason, because the use of the term is based on a complete twist of the word’s original meaning. (Von Hantelmann)

Von Hantelmann refers to language philosopher John L. Austin’s influential notion of the “performative utterance,” which is “an utterance by means of which the speaker performs a particular act—such as, “I bet,” “I apologise,” “I promise,” or the legal officer who says, I now pronounce you husband and wife.” Under specific circumstances, these words produce realities when they are spoken.

However, Von Hantelmann identifies a difficulty in distinguishing between the language that describes a reality (*constative*) and that produces a reality (*performative*). The same ontological problem concerns artworks in the visual or performing arts. “There is no performative artwork because there is no nonperformative artwork,” she argues, given that “every artwork has a reality-producing dimension.” Therefore, we need to focus not on categories and classes when we speak of “performativity” but on levels of reality production. As I have argued, fragmentation and union are not discrete categories; they are forces that produce signifiers and shape experiences as well as being the lens through which to read the meanings and realities within the performance process.

Von Hantelmann describes how the *experiential turn* in performance art developed from the 1960s onwards, when creating and shaping experiences became foundational to understandings of performance artworks. Von Hantelmann investigates which kind of situations an artwork produces, asking: “How does [the artwork] situate its viewers? What kind of values, conventions, ideologies, and meanings are inscribed into this situation?” According to von Hantelmann, each artwork has and produces meanings and situations, more or less consciously or evidently. Building on von Hantelmann’s work, Barbara Bolt argues that each artwork performs, in the sense that it “does things in the world”; the artwork has an impact on viewers and on broader society, and the work is capable of creating situations and offering experiences.

Building on von Hantelmann’s work, I investigate which kind of experiences a performance can offer to the artist and audience according to the forces generated during the process. I study how the process of a performance develops and works in terms of forces, dynamics, and phenomena. Offering experiences is a strategic *intention* in my artistic practice, and not only a result. The thesis applies von Hantelmann’s conceptualisations to expand upon the experiential and relational character of performance art and supports the agentic role of the audience in the performance process. In later sections of this thesis, I examine the performative and experiential role of documentation by analysing the work of Ana Mendieta.

### *The Performance Studies Perspective: Victor Turner and Richard Schechner*

The discourses on *performance*, *performative*, and *performativity* in this thesis derive from the field of performance studies. The field originated from a convergence of several disciplines but is often associated with the work of anthropologist Victor Turner, and theatre director Richard Schechner (Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*; Schechner, “Victor Turner's Last Adventure”; Schechner and Appel; Turner and Schechner).

Performance studies is “intercultural, inter-generic and inter-disciplinary” and applies the concept of performance to human behaviour beyond the performing arts (*Performance Studies: An Introduction*). From ethnographic studies in different societies and in different contexts, Turner and Schechner draw attention to how events and rituals, as well as daily life, are governed by a code of performance. As a bodily practice that produces meaning, Schechner understands performance as “a broad continuum of human actions” including ritual, play, sports, pop entertainment, performing arts, public and private performance,

collective and solo everyday life performances, the media and the Internet, and so on (*Performance Studies: An Introduction*). From the clothes we wear to the words with which we choose to communicate, performance theory suggests that we are all constantly putting on a performance in our society for ourselves and others. Interpreting performance as an expressive, non-exclusively-artistic social behaviour contributes to a fuller understanding of how people act and react within certain social contexts.

Although performance theory looks at culture as a symbolic and coded reality, it tells us that “the categories of performance are not fixed or static” (*Performance Studies Textbook* 3). This is visible in the history of performance art, where various art forms merged in the avant-garde movements and many pieces of performance art contains elements of other arts. In this thesis, I propose a mode of analysis through which to study the complexity of performance art to understand how it operates in the world. I present a conceptualisation of the process of performance art as an ecosystem whose elements relate to each other according to dynamics of fragmentation and union.

Performance theory offers insights into the role of the audience’s behaviour in shaping the process of the work. People happened upon *Mapping the Sound* and *The Foreigner* in Daegu, at least initially, not as an aware audience; they realised that they were involved in a piece once they stopped and decided to interact with the work. However, as both these works happened in public venues not specifically set up to host live events, visitors had little or no idea of how “they were supposed” to move and act during the performance.

In performance studies terms, the participants’ written feedback reveals that the space of the performance was for many of them a new social context in which they did not know how to behave. The audience feedback and the video documentation of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne show that the participants often relied on looking at each others’ behaviours to decide how to act. This is what I call the *audience-audience relationship*, which I will return to in Chapter Six. The contingency of the encounter with the work is a foundational element of the concept of both these pieces, so I purposely undertook minimal action in order to leave the audience members room to act and affect the work.

I argue, therefore, that the audience’s behaviours become roles: not a pre-established series of actions, but an agentic intervention that actively affects and shapes the process of the event. As von Hantelmann theorises, these actions contribute to the performativity of the artwork, to the attribution of signifiers and the artwork’s effects in the world.

Especially in the case of *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound*, the actions undertaken or not by the members of the public substantially affected my actions as a performer and the development of the work. Consciously or not, the audience members became co-performers. In *Mapping the Sound*, many people onsite, such as the construction workers and the libraries staff, occupied the performance space unknowingly and became co-performers by continuously producing sounds that I incorporated into the performance. This demonstrates the interconnection between the looping performance ecosystem, which

Is nested in one or more larger events or contexts. These events and contexts define the limits of a performance. It may not be easy to say exactly when or where a given larger event or context ends and ordinary life begins. (Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* 245)

#### *Judith Butler's "Performativity"*

Within the realm of critical, feminist, and gender theory, the term “performative” describes the performance of a social or cultural role. In her definition of “performativity,” philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler conceptualises gender not as an expression of what one is, rather as a role that one performs according to imposed hegemonic social conventions and ideologies (Butler; Case). She critiques the idea that certain gendered behaviours are natural and argues that behaviours associated with femininity and masculinity are social construct that people learn to perform through iteration. According to Butler, “gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler qtd. in Case 278). Consequently, gender identity and sexual orientation are not fixed categories but performed acts.

Butler’s main contribution to the theoretical framework of this thesis is her acknowledgement of the fluidity of the performative action, which generates elastic possibilities rather than fixed categories within the network of relationships that is the performance ecosystem.

In general, I use the term “performative” to describe the artistic media and actions that are undertaken as part of the performance by both the artists and the audiences by means of their bodies. As mentioned in the introduction, and in alignment with von Hantelmann, I also employ the term *performative* to refer to the performers’ and audiences’ experiences of the

performance process. This *performative* aspect is particularly important in my analysis of Mendieta's *Siluetas Series*. These works are only available through photography and video, but I argue that the audience's experience of the documentation is a processual, performative, and live phenomenon. This project is informed by Barbara Bolt's definition of "performative" as the agentic power of elements and actions to "do things in the world."

### Fine Arts and Visual Arts

There is ambiguity, within the scholarship, about the use of the terms *fine arts* and *visual arts* in relation to performance art. When discussing the history of performance art, some scholars refer to the fine arts (Allain and Harvie; Marsh, *Performance Ritual*) and some to the visual arts (Pavis). Performance art refers to both, but it is important to note when each is used. Video and photography, for example, belong to the field of the visual arts and did not exist as art forms at the beginning of the twentieth century, during the years of the European avant-gardes, whose work is recognised as the genesis of performance art. In the European academic tradition, the *fine arts* are painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry, developed primarily for aesthetics or beauty. They are distinguished from the "applied arts" that serve some practical function (pottery), and the "decorative arts" that are concerned with the design and manufacture of beautiful objects that are also functional (this group includes interior design, but usually not architecture).

*Visual arts* is a younger term and, in general, refers to those art forms that are object-based and can be experienced through sight. The visual arts group includes the fine arts (except for poetry and music), the applied and decorative arts, plus other art forms developed throughout the twentieth century such as photography, video, filmmaking, fashion design, and more. I use the term "fine arts" to indicate painting and sculpture, and to refer to the origins of performance art in the work of the avant-gardes. The term "visual arts" has been employed since the development of performance art in the 1960s and 70s, when photography and video emerged as recognised artistic media as well. When speaking of video art and painting in the same context, for example, I denote them as "visual arts."

#### **1.4 Performance Art: A Complex and Fertile Field**

It is often easier to say what performance art is not rather than what it is because of its history of interdisciplinarity, emerging from and in countertrend to other art forms yet sharing

features with them. Performance art is neither theatre nor dance, but it dialogues with them and encompasses some of their aspects. Together with theatre, drama, and dance, among others, performance art is one of the performing arts. As we know it today, performance art originated in the work of the European avant-gardes of the twentieth century, which embraced various art forms and saw the emergence of the Dada and Futurist *happenings*. Initially, under the aegis of *body art*, performance art developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s alongside Minimalism and Conceptual Art. The use of the body as the artistic medium and the emphasis on liveness and impermanence offered the artists alternatives to object-based artworks. There was no longer any art object to sell and this was a destabilising element of rupture in the art world because it challenged its market.

Performance art demonstrated fragmentation by breaking with the visual tradition of the fine arts from which it originated. However, many performance art pieces include aspects of the fine and visual arts, and many fine and visual artworks are performative. This kind of union as continuity and commingling among artistic areas manifests clearly in works such as *Interior Scroll* (1975) and *Up to and including her limits* (1976) by Carolee Schneemann, which incorporated poetry and painting in the performative action.

The “drip painting” by Francis Picabia, André Masson, and Max Ernst from the early 1900s anticipated the “action painting” by Jackson Pollock in the 1940s-50s. Almost all the performances investigated in this research are of this kind. *Daydream Island* (2013) by Mike Parr includes live painting and explicit references to Expressionism and Minimalism.

Ana Mendieta produced the works from the *Siluetas Series* as “Earth/Body Sculptures” (1973–80), later framed by many theorists as works of performance art (Blocker; Merz et al.; Rosenthal et al.). Additionally, drawing is part of the live action in my performance *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* (2016). Performance art also links to the *live art* in the UK, which includes several artistic forms. Because performance art’s core elements are time, space, and body, it is in dialogue with time-based art, endurance art, and site-specific art. Because of its qualities of liveness, presence, and ephemerality, performance art belongs to the realm of conceptual art, art forms that consider the concept behind the work to be more important than the finished art object. Due to the commingling of various artistic practices, performance art is today “a broad church” that incorporates a multitude of practices (Coogan)

(

Figure 3).

The following sections describe the historical development of performance art from the fragmentation-and-union perspective, starting with Dada and Futurism and the evolution of performance art from the 1960s onward. The approach does not centre on the chronology of this art form but on the way in which it has developed over time by connecting with the society within which it operates. Emphasis is given to the capacity of performance art to work at the cutting edge of phenomena, where forces and energies intertwine and collide, by bringing fragmentation to union and vice versa. Performance art does so by questioning and disrupting homogeneity and by bridging and gathering together what is diverse and divided. Performance art can do this because it has always been deeply intertwined with the issues of the contemporary world and its state of constant change. The following sections detail how dynamics of fragmentation and union characterise the process of actual performances as well as the development of performance art as an artistic, social, and cultural phenomenon (Figure 2).

Alifuoco describes performance art's qualities in the 1960s and 70s, and the consequent tensions and effects, as an "experiential framework and artistic strategy." Alifuoco suggests that performance art's confrontational qualities came from the dissolution of "the materiality of the art-object." This exposed the "non-seen": the non-representable yet tangible energies and forces occurring in the performative event, "in the frame of a creative and creating event—or happening" (127).

Alifuoco describes *appearance* as emergence and revelation and *dissolution* as dematerialisation. She acknowledges the processuality of performance art as a dynamic event constituted of and manifesting through opposite and complementary forces. This thesis applies Alifuoco's conceptualisations and additionally draws on Lucretius' theorisation of world phenomena through coagulation and dissolution, and Heidegger's theorisation of *alethēia*, the capacity of the work of art to "unconceal" what is "at work in the work" ("Building"). Evolving theorisations across the history of performing art informed its development into an "event that critically dissolves under the conditions of its exposure" (Alifuoco 128).

The constant evolution of performance art is what allows it to be always embedded within contemporaneity. Alifuoco's work also invokes Peggy Phelan's influential theorisation of the ontology of performance as an art form that only lives in the present because it "becomes itself through disappearance" (146). I explore Phelan's position further in Chapter Seven on documentation.

In conclusion, examining and acknowledging how performance art operates on a broader scale within the world contributes to understanding how this art form works in the particularity of its process as a piece of art. The two aspects intertwine, and I discuss them together. The following pages describe how the mutual interaction between elements of fragmentation and union have been characterising the history of performance art according to modalities of immanency, togetherness, and alternation.

This historical discussion on performance art provides the reader with the framework to understand where this thesis is located in current artistic and academic debates.

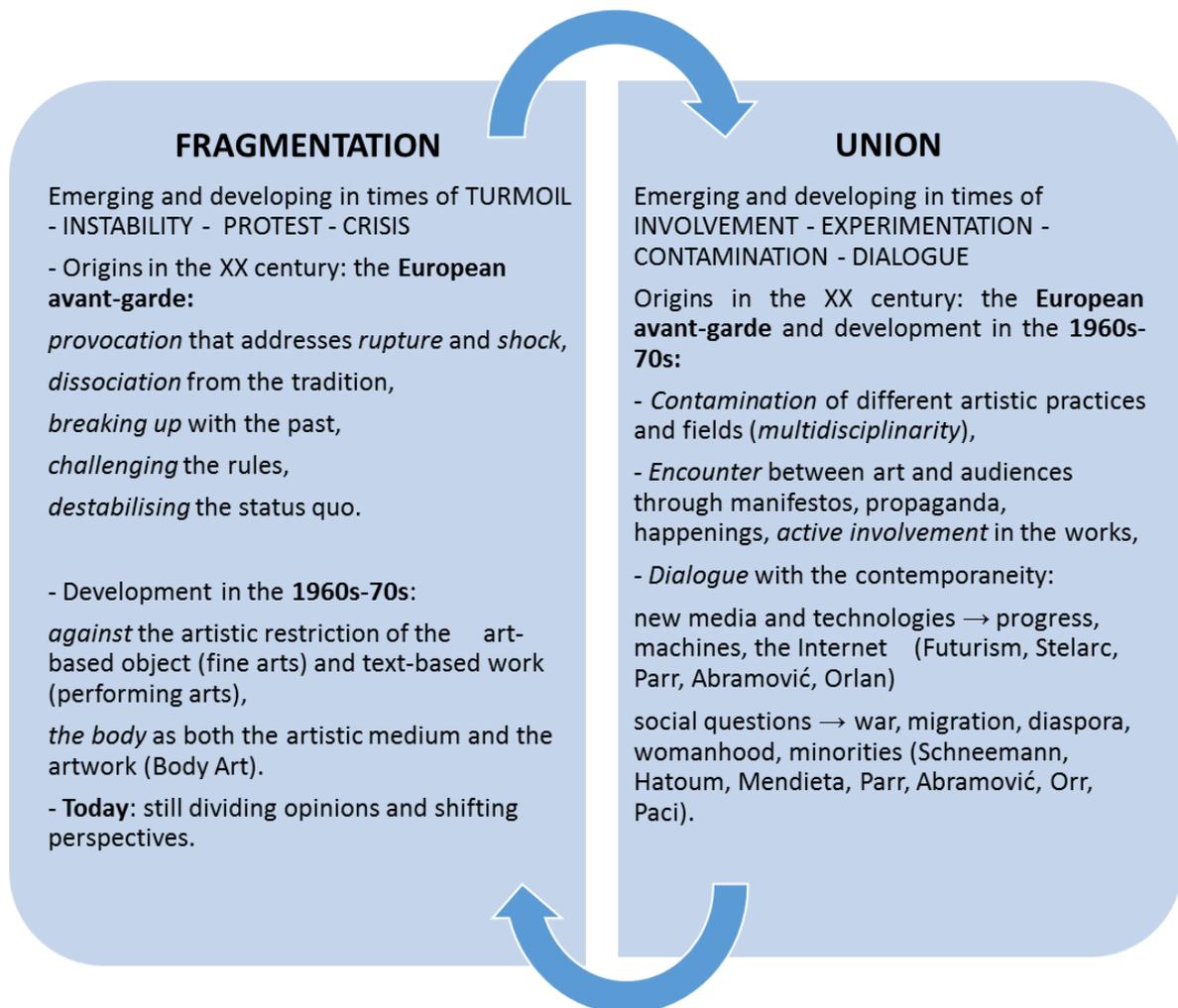


Figure 2. © Angela Viora 2019, Fragmentation and union in performance art



Figure 3. © Angela Viora 2019, Scholarly positions on performance art’s qualities and potentialities

## **1.5 Dada and Futurism: Fragmentation as Revolution Leads to Union as Reconfiguration**

This section expands on the Preamble of this thesis. I introduce the rationale for drawing upon Dadaism and Futurism, and I explain how they inform the analysis. I dedicate significant space to the European avant-gardes because they laid the groundwork for the conceptual and performance art to come.

The fragmentation-and-union analysis shows that many practices and principles of Dadaism and Futurism appear again in body and performance art in subsequent decades, and the study of fragmentation and union in these movements offers us enduring insights into the performance process.

I began studying the revolutionary impact of Futurism and Dadaism on the European art scene of the last century to understand their influence on performance art. By investigating the transformation and revolution pursued and produced by these two movements, I soon become aware of the necessity of exploring how such influence occurred. This shifted the focus of my research from the investigation of the transformative character of performance art to an analysis of the dynamics occurring during its process.

I ask: if those involved in a performance experience shifts and transformation in their perceptions, how does it happen? Drawing on the works of the two main European avantgardes and Latour's theories ("On Actor-Network Theory"), I conceptualise the idea of *processuality* as foundational to change, transformation, revolution, and reconfiguration. Processuality is not merely the subsequential and consequential succession of moments within a phenomenon or performance; it shapes the evolution of a system whose components are intertwined in ongoing dynamics of influence and exchange. I analyse this relational quality intrinsic to processuality in later sections of this thesis.

### Dadaism, 1916-1920

I have researched Dadaism and Futurism to understand the processual and relational dynamics involved in these movements. When they appeared on the European scene, both movements marked a fracture in what had been considered worthy of art status (fragmentation). Although they had common ground, Dadaism and Futurism differed in the reasons, the approaches, and the goals according to which they challenged cultural and social practices. Dada originated after and in response to the atrocities of World War I, denounced

as having deprived the world of any possible sense. The word *dada* itself simultaneously means various things and nothing in different languages. Through what the artists themselves called “anti-art,” the movement adopted a nihilist perspective that included celebrated paradox and non-sense as the only possible meanings of life:

I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things, and in principle I am against manifestoes, as I am also against principles [...] I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense. (Tzara)

Having suffered the destruction of war, these artists were destroyed themselves, disillusioned, and deeply broken. Fragmentation as destabilisation is what they experienced and what they pursued and represented through their works.

Despite the impact of the Dada movement in subsequent decades, its exponents were not militant, having no political goal to achieve through their art, and they were “as non-aligned as possible” (Rettberg 2), in contrast with the Futurists. Dadaists aimed for “the fragmentation or destruction of all artistic forms”, a hostile response to the existing liberal bourgeois society that they claimed led to the carnage of the First World War (Bonnett 72). The key terms for Dadaism, recurrent in their manifestos, are “fragmentation”, “rejection”, and “abolition”, which are manifestations of the broader disruptive force. Just as Pirandello saw union as “mission impossible” within fragmented human identity (Bodei, “Pirandello”), there was no hope for union as resolution for the Dadaists:

And so Dada was born of a need for independence, of distrust toward unity. Those who are with us preserve their freedom. We recognize no theory . . . Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of destruction to be accomplished. We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned to the hands of bandits, who rend one another and destroy the centuries. (Tzara)

Dada artistic production, however, combines fragmentation, union, and reconfiguration in broader and more nuanced ways than its theoretical claims. The movement united artists internationally after being formally established in Switzerland in 1916 then flourishing in Paris, Berlin, and New York. Similarly to Futurism, Dada performed union by including a variety of art forms from painting to poetry to music to the ‘happenings’ that encompassed them all. Drøtner and Schroder argue that

The relevance of the Dadaist movement is the mingling of ideas and artistic exploration of content and objects already available in culture but reframing them and putting them into new contexts. These artists of the movement . . . used many different expressive sources, often combining them in performances. (58)

The Dada artists performed union by connecting fragments of realities that were already available, and this practice of reconfiguration in performance art informs my theorisations in this thesis. Dadaists did not ‘invent’ anything but offered new perspectives by critiquing and destroying the status quo and rearranging its components. The Dada artists embraced collage as art form, a practice later adopted and developed by the Surrealists. The Dadaists used the collage techniques in paintings, sculptures, poetry, and music. They disassembled artworks and found objects, magazines and photos (fragmentation), words and sounds, and reintegrated them together in new forms. Futurists did the same with language, creating what they named the *Parole in Libertà* (“Words in Freedom”). These processes may be productively conceptualised as instances of *separation*, *transition*, and *reaggregation*: the rites of passage theorised by Arnold van Gennep which I describe in further detail in later sections. Playing with familiar and recognisable elements from the ordinary world to shift perspectives about the way we experience it is an iconic Dadaist practice that is frequently adopted by performance artists as well.

The pieces analysed in this thesis employ everyday objects and materials belonging to our collective culture to work as meaningful signifiers. A clear example is *The House With The Ocean View*, in which Abramović performed daily domestic routines within a house-like setting. The process of *Mapping the Sound* arose from the surrounding soundscape that is experienced through different senses. In *The Foreigner*, I embodied a media image that is for everyone to see. Throughout the performance, this image was re-interpreted by the audience and acquired further meanings. For an Iranian participant, for instance, the motionless body

of the Foreigner covered by a white sheet recalled Iranian funerals, during which the bodies are wrapped in white cloths. Likewise, Parr's *Daydream Island* played with images and clichés from Western culture, beginning with the title. In the *Siluetas Series*, Mendieta employed elements from Santeria and Catholicism such as blood, flowers, and candles—opening the work up to diverse receptions and interpretations.

Dada artist Marcel Duchamp notoriously demonstrated this phenomenon in 1917 when he exhibited a urinal in a museum with the title *Fountain*. Duchamp showed how “a new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions” (Manovich qtd. in Rettberg 6). His argument directed the discussion towards two components of non-fixity: *re-interpretation* and *ephemerality*. Duchamp notably introduced discourse of the agentic role of the audience within the experience of the artwork and influenced the conceptual and performance art movements to come. Duchamp went beyond the Futurist and Dada happenings in which audiences were involved. By exhibiting a urinal in an art gallery and signing it as “R. Mutt,” Duchamp made it clear that the work of art could be no longer understood “as an artefact in isolation from the audience that receives it . . . The audience is as much or more a part of the art as the object itself. It is a performance in which the viewer is one of the players” (Rettberg 4). Paving the way for performance art to come, Duchamp imploded the distinction between audience and artwork. By means of such fragmentation, he achieved union by including the public into the art experience as agents. Inspired by Duchamp's perspective, and additionally drawing upon Frazer Ward's *No Innocent Bystanders*, I argue throughout this thesis that members of the public actively engage in the production of a performance experience and participate in its reception.

The quality of ephemerality, the celebration of impermanence in Dada artworks clearly reflected the precariousness of life that these artists experienced during the war. This principle is evoked in Mendieta's *siluetas*: the silhouettes of this artist, whose life was marked by diasporic non-belonging, symbolically disappeared within the landscape they originated from. Conceived by the artist as “Body/Earth Sculptures”, this series defies the unchanging and perdurable materiality traditionally attributed to sculptural works. The non-fixity of the art praised by Dadaists informed subsequent performance art that posited the ephemeral nature of body and countered the idea of art as a marketable commodity (Phelan, *Unmarked*). The quality of ephemerality also invokes the unsolved question of “re-performance,” which I discuss in detail in the final chapter.

Dada also shaped the evolution of performance art by celebrating chance and randomness as important ways to approach and read the world. Futurists celebrated such elements as well but, unlike the Dadaists, Futurists exalted them as exciting manifestations of chaos and sources of creativity, freedom, and progress. In body and performance art, unpredictability is an important quality of the relational, site- and time-specific character of the work. Many performance artists, myself included, do not rehearse their pieces and/or do not re-perform them. This may be due to the exploration of physical and mental limits (Parr), the intervention of audience members as co-performers (Abramović), or the experience of performance art as research (me), among other reasons. Whatever the motive, vulnerability is the common thread in the acceptance and celebration of the unforeseen.

### Futurism, 1909-1944

One of the crucial differences between Futurism and Dada was the political activism of Futurism and its support for the war. As historian Emilio Gentile explains, Futurism aligned with the “myth of national regeneration” that characterised two other Italian movements, namely, Risorgimento and Fascism. At the end of the nineteenth century and for the first half of the twentieth, Italy was fragmented politically, geographically, economically, and spiritually. While Risorgimento and Fascism aimed to return the country to the glory of its Roman past, Futurism was projected towards a future of progress and improvement. For Marinetti and his followers, the celebration of the past was the cause of Italian stagnation and underdevelopment. They believed that the current cultural, social, and political system had to be destroyed to be regenerated (Marinetti, *Manifest*). Disdain for the conservative bourgeois system and the imperative to subvert it through art was an element common to both Dada and Futurism. Dadaism had no political goals, and fragmentation as destruction was considered a nihilist reflection of the world’s nonsense, but Futurism considered fragmentation to be a strategic means to reach union within an activist plan.

I see a commonality between Dadaist thought and the first task-based performance artworks of the 1960s, in which there was no specific message to deliver to the audience. Like Duchamp’s *Fountain*, performance art challenged the cultural hegemony by existing and being presented as works of bodily art. These include Parr works such as *Push tacks into your leg until a line of tacks is made up your leg* (1973) and *Stuff your nose with bread. Push matches into your nose. Ignite the matches* (1972), whose meaning is to have no meaning at all (Parr). Alongside others, these pieces are of the form of “art by instruction” originally

used in *150 Programmes and Investigations* (Harley et al.). Some of these works were never performed and remained in the form of precise written instructions to undertake (Marsh, “Performance Art—Live”). This is another inheritance of Dadaist practice, which often included written directives on how to make a Dada artwork (Rettberg). The activist spirit of Futurism, however, is closer to more recent performances with a social or political message. Examples include Parr’s pieces from the last decade on the condition of asylum seekers in Australia (to which *Daydream Island* belongs) and *The Foreigner*. These works have parallels with Abramović’s *Balkan Baroque* (1997), a powerful and disturbing performance-installation on the Balkans war. These performances enact fragmentation through strategic shock, rupture, and pain with the intention to communicate a political message.

For the Italian movements, regeneration meant transformation and restoration and implied the passage from a dark past to a better future through a “cathartic revolution” in the present (Gentile). The past meant fragmentation and the future meant union—of the people (nationhood), of bodies (army), of countries (Italy and the rest of Europe), of culture and politics (Futurism as a movement), and art forms (Futurism as an artistic current). Futurists aimed to achieve regeneration through fragmentation by breaking with the past. Revolution and war involve shock, violence, destruction of rules, lives, bodies, and places—in a word, fragmentation. Dada originated as a traumatised response to the carnage of the Great War from the artists who suffered it. The Futurists, however, claimed to have been transformed by the war and turned into superhumans by overcoming the extreme experience of combat (Gentile). Let us try, as scholars, to put aside the fanaticism of this attitude to examine the avant-gardist symbolism of a cathartic revolution; a radical fragmentation undertaken to reach union.

The aggressive futurist spirit is present in Mike Parr’s performance *Cathartic action: social gestus No. 5 (The Arm Chop, 1977)*, during which the artist chopped off his prosthetic arm with an axe to re-enact and overcome the trauma of being born without it. The sudden and violent gesture of the artist enacted fragmentation as an interruption of the quiet and suspended time of the performance. “Unaware that Parr had been born without an arm, many members of the assembled audience were horrified” (Pitt). Through a violent and cathartic gesture performed in the present, Parr attempted to overcome his past to move towards a better future. The raw and painful action undertaken in *Daydream Island*, instead, worked as a reconnection in space and time. By having his face sewn to represent the unheard asylum seekers, Parr aimed to shock audiences and inform them that what they were witnessing in that theatre was happening to other people not far away.

Performing extreme actions in order to reach a higher state of consciousness is an important element in the work of Abramović. Adopting a militant discourse echoing that of the Futurists, the artist has often described herself as a warrior who passes through the extreme experience of endurance art and overcomes physical and mental limits to end up transformed. Abramović talks about discovering and reaching the “True Self” by means of durational performances. This means, for her, reconfiguring her perceptions on a deeper level (Abramović, *Walk*; Abramović, “History”). In *Rhythm 5* (1973), she burnt a giant wooden five-point Communist star in which she laid down after having cut her nails and hair.

This was a gesture of physical and mental purification (fragmentation) addressing the political traditions of her past (union) from which she wanted to distance herself (fragmentation).

Although without violence or pain, in the *Silueta Series*, Mendieta performed a radical fragmentation in space and time by physically removing her own body from the scene: disappearing. The artist placed her persona in the landscape in an attempt to overcome her past marked by exile and diaspora (fragmentation in space and time) and to re-connect to her native land from which she felt cast off (union). The various works from the *Silueta Series* show a progressive merging of Mendieta’s body with the landscape, from overlapping to hiding to totally disappearing, as if the earth had swallowed her. Reconfiguration takes place for the viewers, who are able to dwell in the space left by Mendieta and actively connect to the surrounding landscape due to her disappearance. As I argue in my analyses, there is a co-presence in these artworks of extreme fragmentation as disappearance in space and time and extreme union as a symbiosis between body and space.

## **1.6 After the European Avantgardes: Body Art and Beyond**

Many of the artworks that I have discussed belong to the movement of what was named *body art* of the 1960s and 70s. Inspired by Dada and Futurism, the movement enacted fragmentation by breaking with the past on many levels. First, the movement broke with artistic tradition by using the body as the artistic medium. Second, this approach questioned the value of object-based artwork: there was no artwork to sell, which challenged the art market. Third, the use of the body as a means of protest critiqued societal structures; I am thinking of feminist pieces such as *Interior Scroll* by Carolee Schneemann (1975), the *actions corporelles* performed by Gina Pane, and the several artistic interventions by the Guerrilla

Girls. Fourth, cultural fragmentation was materialised through physical fragmentation, as bodies were deliberately cut, wounded, burnt, and endangered.

I understand the extremism of these gestures as an element of rupture and fragmentation introduced into the established order to precipitate change. This aligns with the revolutionary imperatives of the European avantgardes and with the broader reconfiguration occurring during the performance process. The following section describes the main ways in which performance art, during its development, has been connecting with contemporaneity (union) through radical and innovative approaches that break with the tradition by undertaking disruptive actions that produce shock and shifts of perspective (fragmentation and reconfiguration).

### The Political Qualities of Performance Art and the Participation of the Audiences

Because of the influence of Dada and Futurism in particular, artists have been conscious of the political importance of art and have used it to bring attention to contemporary and historical social issues. This is a quality of union that has allowed performance art to become both a subject to investigate and an instrument of analysis of the contemporary world, as the scholarship on performance art has argued. For example, Carolee Schneemann's 1975 *Interior Scroll* was a response "to an apparent disconnection between women's experiences of their bodies and historical and cultural representations" as well as debates around the acknowledgement of female artists in the art world (Moreland). Influential political performance art also includes Yoko Ono and John Lennon's performance *Bed-In for Peace* to protest the Vietnam War (1969) and Marina Abramović's *Balkan Baroque* on the Balkans war (1997). In *The House With The Ocean View*, Abramović made the audience reflect on the lack of time and the importance of the present in contemporary Western cultures. Jill Orr's *Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters—Goya* referenced the post-September-11 world, the beginning of the war in Iraq, and the question of asylum seekers in Australian detention centres (2002, 2003). This issue is also at the centre of Parr's *Daydream Island*, which challenged the audience position on the situation. My piece *The Foreigner* centred on the migration issue that currently involves Europe, Africa, and the Middle East and aims to explore spatial questions such as the relationship between virtual and corporeal reality, intimacy and public spaces. *Mapping the Sound* inquired into the human experience of place by offering a new sensorial perspective on the surrounding environment.

Direct involvement of the audience in performance is a fundamental aspect of the process that derives from the avant-garde tradition. By drawing the audience into the work, performance art spotlights aspects of our society that may be overlooked. The active participation of the public, whose role goes beyond that of a mere viewer or bystander, was another element of innovation in the artistic practices of the last century (Ward). The involvement of the audience in the artwork marked the collapsing of the conceptual barrier between the artists, the public, and the artworks. Pivotal examples include Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1965) and Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* (1974), during which the audience members were invited to intervene physically on the completely surrendered artists' bodies. Both the performances involved vulnerability, danger, and pain that led to controversial emotions and reactions in the public, whose actions offered insights into "the complicity of the community in acts of torture" (Marsh, "Mike Parr").

The same happened when Mike Parr received electroshocks continuously for six hours by an anonymous Internet crowd in *Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi—Democratic Torture* (2003). The performance revealed the status of the Web and media screens as anaesthetics for coping with the burden of the real and as virtual walls behind which people can hide (Butler and Pitt, *Mike Parr*; Scheer "Art"; Scheer and Parr). *Daydream Island* and *The Foreigner* address these issues as well. Albeit in a less extreme way, *The Foreigner* sees the physical participation and intervention of the audience as a fundamental part of the work.

Performance art can connect with audience members deeply and foster reflections in them without necessarily including shock, violence, or physical pain. This is possible when artists undertake actions that focus on the rituality of everyday life: an example is in *The House With The Ocean View*, during which Abramović lived at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York for 12 days on three lifted platforms, performing daily domestic actions in front of the public. Echoing this process, *Mapping the Sound* happens in public spaces that host ordinary activities such as work, study, and leisure. The piece aims to bring awareness to people of their daily interactions with those places. In both these works, the fragmentation consists of the shift in the spatial perceptions that people experience.

### Performance Art and New Technologies

Performance art engages with contemporaneity and builds networks among realities by employing new media and technologies. Just as Futurists and Dadaists were fascinated by and concerned with machines and industrial progress, so too are contemporary artists engaging

with and interrogating computers, the Internet, and other new technologies. The union that this approach facilitates is tentacular and often grand. Many of Parr's recent performances were webcast live and the audience could give him electroshocks via their internet connection in *Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi—Democratic Torture* (2003). As is common in response to Parr's work, this performance ignited a debate among art critics, scholars, and members of the public and thus performed fragmentation in the art world by dividing opinion. On the one hand, the work was championed as a piece of radical performance art and a necessary medium to reflect Australian immigration policy. On the other hand, some critics considered this performance to be another unnecessary "spectacle of cruelty" in the repertoire of a narcissistic artist (Buckmaster; Frost; James; Marsh, "Mike Parr"; Scheer, "Performance Art").

A major retrospective and performance re-creation of Marina Abramović's work was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) from March 14 to May 31, 2010: the biggest exhibition of performance art in MoMA's history. During the exhibition, Abramović performed *The Artist Is Present*, a 736-hour and 30-minute static, silent piece, in which she sat immobile in the museum's atrium while spectators were invited to take turns sitting opposite her. An unanticipated phenomenon emerged: the performance turned into a massive mediatic event involving Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and other social media. Abramović sat across from 1,545 sitters in total. A support group for the "sitters," called "Sitting with Marina," was established on Facebook, as was the blog "Marina Abramović made me cry." Photographer Marco Anelli portraited every person who sat opposite her. The portraits were published on Flickr, compiled in a book, and featured in an exhibition at the Danziger Gallery in New York. Singer Lady Gaga helped boost Abramović's popularity by appearing during the performance, undertaking the *Abramović Method*, and then releasing the documentation of these experiences on YouTube and other social media. A videogame version of *The Artist Is Present* was launched in 2011.

By being available to new media and new forms of diffusion, these works by Parr and Abramović are both live and mediated. The fleshy body of the artists undertaking and undergoing physical actions both collides with and integrates the immateriality of the virtual. This aspect engages with and challenges the ontological liveness of performance art and, thus, "confound[s] scholars" (Marsh in Butler and Pitt *Mike Parr: Foreign Looking* 173). Such a mediatic intervention operates fragmentation as deconstruction in the settings and the signifiers of performance art, which leads to their reconfiguration. The impact of this phenomenon is visible in the endless debate among scholars about the effects of mediation as

undermining or enhancing the nature and the practice of performance art, which I discuss in Chapter Seven.

One major issue is question of the way in which media and technologies relate to and interfere with the here-and-now corporeal experience of performance art, traditionally considered the very soul of this art form. Is it still performance art if it is mediated and virtualised? If not, what is it? Is it a heightened version of performance art open to further possibilities? I expand on this topic in the last chapter of this thesis on the role of documentation and mediation in performance art. Despite creating forms of fragmentation, employing media and new technologies in live performances also fosters dynamics of union by making this art form accessible to broader audiences and involving them in the work in a way that is agentic and direct despite virtuality.

## **1.7 Performance Art “Does Things in the World”: Reconfiguration Within the Performative Paradigm**

### Performance Art as a Force that Produces Movements in the World

The scholarship discussed so far shows how complex and fertile performance art has been since its emergence as an art form in the 1960s and 70s. In her appraisal of the strength of performance art’s “impact” , Barbara Bolt acknowledges the capacity of the visual and performing arts as instruments of research. I employ Bolt’s theorisation of the “performative paradigm” throughout this thesis. In this section, I explain this theory and apply it to analysis of performance art’s effects in the contemporary world from which it develops and with which it continuously communicates and exchanges.

Art as a force produces movement in concepts and understandings, especially in the realm of art practices, as when the avant-gardes disrupted or exceeded the “norm.” “These movements lead to a reconfiguration of the convention from within rather than outside of convention,” Bolt states (129). Body and performance art of the 1960s and 70s emerged from and operated within the turmoil of the times and the artists created pieces as individual responses to collective situations.

Performance art retains that function today. As the performances investigated in this research demonstrate. This is visible in the more intimate works by Mendieta, who universalised her personal story to in her attempt to reunite with “Mother Earth” (Blocker; Merz et al.; Rosenthal et al.). It is important to remember that this aspiration derived from

Mendieta's experience as a diasporic Cuban girl forced to migrate to the United States, where she struggled to integrate. This phenomenon affects thousands of people, then and now.

According to the principle of *immanency* theorised in this project, performance art operates *within* the contemporary world, challenging established norms and structures by working proximate with them. In *The House With The Ocean View*, for example, Abramović invited her audience to reflect on hectic big-city life by creating a peaceful island of silence and slowness in the heart of New York instead of performing in an isolated location in tranquility. And in *Daydream Island*, Parr pierced the thin line between spectatorship, responsibility, and involvement by performing in a theatrical setting. My performance of *Mapping the Sound* attempted to give body to psychological experiences by performing synaesthesia live within the sonic landscape of public spaces.

Bolt asserts that the paradigm according to which art operates is “performative” because it “does things in the world.” Performance art does so in three important ways that concern time:

1. Performance art produces immediate aesthetic, kinaesthetic, and affective effects in the audience. This is the theorised “experiential turn” (von Hantelmann).
2. Performance art generates impacts on a broader scale over time; performances that were highly criticised when they took place are now considered artistic milestones for their capacity to involve audiences and engage with aspects of society. In the early works by Carolee Schneemann, for example, or the surgery-performances by Orlan, now recognised as pivotal artworks addressing questions of female artists, representation, and embodiment.
3. Acknowledging the importance of the processuality as the heart of performance art, Phelan and Alifuoco argue that a performance only lives in the present, the work disappearing in the process of its disclosure (Alifuoco; Phelan, *Unmarked*).

These influential theorisations of time in performance art are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

### The Fragmentation of Ephemerality as Unifying Continuum

Paradoxically, the ephemerality of performance art facilitates its capacity to continuously renew itself and keep up with times. The genesis of performance art demonstrates that this art

form does not fossilise in history. A constant feature of this art form is its destabilising of traditions. Such constant fragmentation creates a kind of unity between performance art and its context *in time*. An example is *Seven Easy Pieces* by Abramović (2007), an artwork as controversial as it is traditional, and which I analyse further in the last chapter. It is controversial because the artist re-performs seven pivotal performances, five of them created by other artists. Thus, Abramović violates the unicity of the action and the artist, considered one of the sacred principles of performance art. Some of the re-performed works are by artists who have based their practice upon the principle of unrepeatability. Abramović attracted harsh criticism from scholars and fellow artists who questioned whether *Seven Easy Pieces* was actually a piece of performance art, given these parameters. I argued that it exists in the genuine and traditional spirit of performance art, which consists of operating on the edge of what is acceptable to challenge its borders and discover its beyond.

Abramović stated that with her series of performances she endeavoured to foster knowledge of performance art as an autonomous art form, rather than a nebulous basket from which pop culture and the entertainment and fashion industries have stolen without credit.

In this sense, *Seven Easy Pieces* was a response to the contemporary world. Abramović, moreover, chose to perform pieces that many people have never seen live, and that are or poorly or un-documented because “performance art has to live and survive” (Abramović, “Interview”; Santone; Stern). To those who accuse her of betraying the spirit of performance art by re-performing it, the artist asks, “Who made these rules?” (Abramović, *Walk*). She adds that there is nothing worse than artists from the seventies still doing art from the seventies, emphasising the active role of performance art within contemporaneity (Marina Abramović, “Marina Abramović”). To repeat or not is an unsolved dilemma that I constantly deal with as an artist and a researcher, and which I answer differently each time that I create and perform a new piece. I discuss this matter further while investigating the concept of *re-performance* in the final part of the thesis on documentation and mediation.

### An Ontology of Possibilities

The position I have taken so far does not entail diminishing the value of the ephemerality and unrepeatability of performance art. This would be an untenable position given the importance of space and time specificity acknowledged by the scholarship. What I am *not* supporting is the positing of ephemerality as a performance art dogma to be blindly employed *a priori* in the analysis of different works. It is worth refraining from becoming overly attached to

performance art's qualities of ephemerality, immanence, and fluidity by thinking about the development and impact of performance art and not only its manner of execution.

Such a refusal of fixed parameters and the recognition of diverse possibilities as ontological qualities of performance art is compellingly theorised by Bolt . According to the performative paradigm, performance art is capable of reconfiguring the notion of truth as “force and effect” (Bolt) rather than as correspondence and correctness, which is the scientific paradigm. Bolt asks whether the work shifts the way we perceive the world. She argues that we must release the visual and performing arts from the scientific evaluative paradigm in order to understand and value the knowledge generated by these arts. Science-as-research relies on a model in which repetition must produce the same result in order to be validated as true. The work of art, instead, operates according to the “repetition with difference” model, where the truth lies in the forces and effects that characterise the artwork (Bolt). Bolt's theorisations inform my acknowledgement of performance art's engaging actively with the place-world and its potential as a subject and an instrument of research. Having described the features, potentialities, and development of performance art, I will now return to the focus of this project: the analysis of the performance process through fragmentation and union. The next sections further examine these two forces and their manifestations within the performance ecosystem.

### **1.8 The Performance Ecosystem as a Threshold: Where Opposites Meet and Possibilities Arise**

To examine the notion of *reconfiguration* in relation to fragmentation and union, I employ the works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner (Turner, “Betwixt,” “Liminal”; Van Gennep). The field of performance studies has extensively drawn upon the work of Turner and his predecessor van Gennep, particularly for the idea of *liminality*. From the Latin *līmen*, “threshold,” this concept refers to transitional experiences characterising rituals within a various range of cultures.

Erika Fischer-Lichte applies the idea of liminality to the experience of transformation in performance art and her work articulates the relationship between art and life, audience and artwork (Fischer-Lichte). Thinkers and artists often claim that art and real life “blur” and “merge” in body and performance art pieces (Bolt; Carlson; Fischer-Lichte; Goldberg; Klein; Lader; Ward). Blurring and merging, however, imply the loss of distinct features of the elements involved in the process. I argue, instead, that art and life do not indistinctively blend

into one another but collide and coincide during a performance. The simultaneous coexistence of these two dimensions can provoke a sensorial short-circuit among participants. RoseLee Goldberg recalls that, during *The House With The Ocean View* (2002), Abramović made “her world a stage” in which she “transformed ordinary activities into sombre ceremonies” and, as a result, “even the smallest embellishment . . . triggered associations” (Goldberg qtd in Abramovic and Kelly 157). Following this clash, it is our sensations, perceptions, and perspectives that shift, vacillate, blend, and merge during the performance process.

### Not Blurring and Merging but Coexisting and Clashing

Historian James Boyce, in his account of Parr’s performance *Underneath the Bitumen the Artist* (2018), demonstrates that art and life, like fragmentation and union, overlap, juxtapose, and intertwine during a performance but remain distinct. This provokes strife! We, performers and members of the audience, dwell in these two spheres at the same time as funambulists. For Parr’s performance, he lived for three days and nights in a container buried underneath one of the main streets of central Hobart, in Tasmania, as part of the Dark Mofo Winter Festival 2018. The piece is deeply connected to the history of the land, the convict system and Indigenous genocide. Far from being a work on an untold story, Tasmanian Boyce sees the burial performed by Parr “as a witness to the separation of our history from the life we live” (49). In *Daydream Island*, the collision between art and life is loud and shrill because the performance dissipates the illusion that “we can safely separate who we are from what we know” (50). We are forced into awareness like electroshock, the shared yet individual experience of possibilities beginning. Boyce describes Parr’s performance as a place of encounter between history and art without the mediation of “either an artist or a historian” (54).

Boyce shows us that the performance process makes vulnerable not only the artists but also the audience; an agentic quality of the audience within the performative ecosystem, which the next section discusses further. Boyce’s account of Parr’s work begins by humbly declaring: “It is a serious limitation for a historian, but I am increasingly conscious of the limitation of the words” (48). The historian struggles within intertwined limitations: that of the medium that is supposed to set his thoughts free, and that of the impossibility of separating his identity from the history of his own land. The performance process works among and between such limitations by virtue of cycles: from underneath to the surface, from

death in the past to resurrection and a new start, and from a stubborn clinging to “the liberation and learning that [come] with letting go” (53). Each of us can relate to such friction, regardless of the circumstances. Boyce shows us that performance art neither shifts nor blurs the diverse elements involved within its process. Rather, the work allows them to relate by retaining their distinctive diversity: underneath/surface, past/present, dead/living. And it is here that the clash, awareness, and empathy occur—from the encounter between opposing forces in a space with no mediation “that belongs to everyone” (54).

The performance process in action *is* a threshold, the liminal space from which fragmentation and union arise and generate possibilities of experience. Standing in a door frame, on the threshold between two rooms, we can see the two distinguished spaces. They do not merge into one another: we merge into them both simultaneously. Our perception and experience embrace them as one. Within the performance ecosystem, the art/life dilemma makes no sense: although the colliding realities are two, the dimension in which they are experienced is one. This phenomenon is, I think, what the scholarship describes as blurring and merging.

### The Experience of Performance Art as Passage

My use of the idea of *threshold* applied to the performance ecosystem is informed by Stelarc’s definition of bodies as “portals of sensorial experiences” (Stelarc qtd in O’Callaghan), and Enrico G. Castelli’s argument that “experiences are doors” because they are events through which a passage happens (5; my translation from Italian). Castelli describes the etymology of the term *experience*, which is locative: from the Greek verb *peiro*, “to pass through.” Experience is a threshold, a place that hosts a passage. As a door, the experience is a place to pass through to go where we have never been. In the Latin word *expēriōr*, *-pēriōr* invokes danger, proof, challenge, a trial to overcome. Experience is passage (Castelli Gattinara). Castelli’s work has resonances with van Gennep’s, whose schema shows that rituals happen in three phases: separation; passage or transformation; and re-aggregation or incorporation (Turner, “Liminal”; Van Gennep). The second phase, the one in-between, is the threshold.

I argue that threshold, liminality, experience, and passage are spatial concepts. Castelli adds that they are also temporal and dynamic. In Italian, the language in which Castelli writes, people say that they “get through” an experience.

This describes a person who has had experience of something that has been significant for them. To say that they “have got through” an experience that has marked them, Italians commonly use the word *uscirne*, which literally means “to exit from.” There is an entrance, a threshold, and an exit. Likewise, there is a “before,” a “during,” and an “after.” Finally, there is a mark remaining, which indicates that things are not as they were before passing through that door. A reconfiguration has occurred. This is the meaning of experience as a passage that Castelli offers us: a transit. From the Latin *trānsitus*, where *trans* means “beyond” and *situs* means “place” and implies a sense of moving forward from one state to another.

I employ van Gennep’s schema of the “rite of passage,” itself informed by Turner and Fischer-Lichte’s theorisations, to understand the occurrence of fragmentation and union during the performance process (Turner “Liminal”; Van Gennep). In this thesis, I do not intend to expand upon the ritualistic aspect of performance art but I do associate the three phases of ritual with the occurrence of fragmentation and union during a performance. Van Gennep’s informs my project’s articulations of dynamics, flows, and processuality. Van Gennep identifies three phases in a rite of passage: *separation*, *transition*, and *re-aggregation* or *incorporation*. The length and elaboration of these phases vary between diverse cultures rituals of passage. Applying this schema to the investigation of the performance ecosystem, I investigate the general character of each phase as part of an organic process. This does not mean that a performance works like the rites illustrated by van Gennep. First, performances and rites are events belonging to different fields and realities and are experienced according to diverse modalities. Unlike rites that are organised according to precise rules and obligations (Turner, “Liminal”), a piece of performance art is often defined by a lack of control and unanticipated emergent phenomena. I discuss the three phases of ritual below.

- *Phase 1 Separation—Fragmentation*: The subjects of the rituals are physically and/or socially removed from their usual contexts. Space and time also change because the sacred dimension is separated from the profane. Physically, socially, and symbolically, what happens during this phase is a clear departure from the previous state and status through actions of detachment, rupture, and “reversal or inversion of secular things, relationships, and processes” (Turner, “Liminal” 57).

In a performance, the artist marks the beginning of the process through gestures of fragmentation, challenging the status quo, triggering those short-circuits that lead to

the phase of possibilities. For example, this phrase is visible in the dislocation of geographical and cultural perspectives in *The Foreigner*, during which I re-contextualised a media image and embodied it live in public spaces. And in *Mapping the Sound*, I broke the rules by shifting sensorial spaces. During *Daydream Island*, Parr practiced a physical fragmentation when he separates himself from the audience, turning his back on them and having his face butchered by the needle. The performative experience of the *Silueta Series* started when Mendieta removed her own body from the site of the work. Abramović, paradoxically, departs from her daily life by performing daily actions as ceremonies.

Once the performance has started, however, phases of separation and fragmentation recur cyclically within the ecosystem loop each time that an action challenges and subverts the status quo. Each phase of van Gennep's schema manifests on both a general and a particular level during a performance, which I analyse further in subsequent sections on the selected performances.

- *Phase 2 Transition—Fragmentation and Union*: Within rites, this is an intervening and temporary phase during which the subjects undertake new and often disturbing experiences that “partially invert . . . the already consolidated order which constitutes any specific cultural cosmos” (Turner, “Liminal” 73). The bride is no longer a child and nubile but is not yet an adult and a wife. Turner defines this stage as a limbo characterised by the formula “neither/nor.” Being rituals undertaken to achieve specific milestones, he points out that this phase can appear negative because it presents neither the positive known condition of the past nor the positive promises of the future. Performance art does not well align with these qualities of ritual because its significance lies in the processuality rather than the final results. Within the figure-eight relations of the performance ecosystem, the moment of transition is the moment of ‘both/and’ in which the process moves in vortexes and tangents. Forces of fragmentation and union dance together, fuel each other, and generate possibilities of experience. In Mendieta's work, for instance, during this central phase, the fragmentation enacted by disappearing is exactly what makes us, the viewers, step into the work and connect with it. People who wrote on “The Foreigner” entered into the intimacy of touch with me and violated the private space that segregated and protected my body.

In another remarkable instance of this phase, Abramović precariously stood on the threshold of the house before the knife-ladders. The artist was away from the walls that contain her like a nest, but she was not down with the audience. She was standing still on the precipice—how still? For how long? The audience wondered in fear. Abramović could have fallen and injured herself, and at times she appeared weak and about to faint. As fragmentation, this gesture broke the tranquillity of her ritualistically inhabiting the space. As a consequence, the minds of the audience started spinning: they worried for her, they felt her exhaustion, and they even told her telepathically to step back (Abramovic and Kelly; Westcott and Miller). The public connected to the artist on a deeper level: this was union as empathy. The kind of empathy that comes like a shock from that exposure to the human vulnerability of another (Parr and Scheer), vulnerability that we share. Abramović explains that the dangerous and rupturing gesture to stand on the verge (fragmentation) allowed her to remain grounded and connected to the present moment and the surrounding reality of the space (union). That bond with the present was indeed challenged by the prolonged fasting and reclusion undertaken (Birringer). In the end, she did not fall or injure herself, but she could have, and the knife-ladder always beckoned. This is the dimension of possibilities within which dynamics of fragmentation and union generate, spin, collide, and fuel each other. Engaged with these possibilities, the performance offers embodied experiences to live through.

Artists and audiences come to appraise their experience of the performance as positive or negative in relation to their individual expectations of the piece, but the work per se is neither positive nor negative. It is simply what happens in its process. As Robert Nelson points out, performance art is “an art form that consists of nothing but something that happens” (Nelson qtd in Geczy and Kelly 186). Discovering what is going to happen is the call of performance artists. Investigating how and why it happens, according to which modalities and in response to which inputs, is the purpose of this thesis.

- *Phase 3 Reaggregation or Incorporation—Re-union and Reconfiguration*: In the rites of passage, this phase sees the subjects to return to society with their new identity, status, and role. These subjects are still the same human beings (their DNA has not

changed, for example) and the society to which they reconnect is the same as well. The relationship between the subject and the social environment is what has changed: Identity, status, and role, indeed, are relational (Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory,” *Politics*; Massey, “Doreen Massey”, “Global Sense”).

The same phenomenon happens within the performance ecosystem. After having experienced a work, the artists, audiences, and surrounding environment have not transformed. After *The Foreigner*, I am still Angela Viora, the members of the audience have not become other persons, the Daegu Art Factory is still the same place, and the migration question remains unsolved. However, as my analysis shows, the relationships between myself and participants, between time and place, have significantly changed. Following Bolt, I term this phenomenon *reconfiguration*. Better than the more general term “transformation,” *reconfiguration* emphasises the re-arrangements of the relationships among the elements of the performance ecosystem, which have been fragmented (phase one), questioned, challenged, and reversed (phase two). The performance elements reconnect but through new perspectives and within new networks of interrelations. This is the discovery and knowledge offered by performance art: experiences to live through.

### **1.9 Dissolution of Boundaries, Coagulation of Art and Life, “Free Will” and Responsibility: The Performance Ecosystem as Community**

#### Fragmentation as Dissolution and Union as Coagulation: A Fluid Indeterminacy that Generates Tension

*De Rerum Natura* by Lucretius provides a clear example of fragmentation and union occurring according to immanence, togetherness, and alternation (Carus and Fellin; Sedley). In his pivotal work, Lucretius anticipates the atom theory by analysing “the nature of things” in accordance with the principles of *coagulation* or *aggregation* (union) and *dissolution* (fragmentation) of compounds (Odifreddi). These phenomena occur according to perpetual motion characterised by indeterminacy, an unpredictable swerve “at no fixed place or time” that Lucretius calls *clinamen* (Caro et al.; Sedley). The idea of *clinamen* as randomness identifies the unpredictability that characterises performance art, whose outcomes are unforeseen. The unpredictable, continuous and fluid alternation between coagulation and

dissolution in the material world creates tension, much like the tension between union and fragmentation in performance art. Such tension is the driving force of the performance process that generates possibilities, the manifestation of different aspects of the performance at once and as one. During a piece, the simultaneous emergence of fragmentation and union as opposite and complementary forces provokes a sort of perceptive shock that triggers reflections and reactions in those involved.

### Clinamen, Randomness, and Free Will: The Reconfigured Audience

With its foundations in Epicurean theories, scholars have interpreted Lucretius' *clinamen* as "free will" in the sense of physical laws that not dependent on the gods. While acknowledging that Lucretius's concept of free will differs from ours today, I argue for its resonance with contemporary performance art theory such as Frazer Ward's work on the relationship between spectators, public sphere, and artists in *No Innocent Bystanders*. By investigating "what audiences will tolerate in the name of art, and what they will tolerate when something is not designated art" (Klein), Ward's work informs this project in two main ways:

1. Acknowledging the audience as an agentic element embedded into the performance ecosystem;
2. Conceiving possibilities as outcomes of the fragmentation and union figure-eight.

Ward analyses five pivotal works in the history of performance art that "reimagined the audience," reconfiguring the idea and its implications (2). The performances are Vito Acconci's *Claim* (1972) and *Seedbed* (1973), Chris Burden's *Five-Day Locker Piece* and *Shoot* (both 1971), Marina Abramović's *Rhythm Series* (1973–74) and *Lips of Thomas* (1975, 2005), Tsieh Hsieh's five *One Year Performances* (1978–86) and *1986–1999*. Ward states:

These events have remained compelling not only because they set new parameters for risk, the breaking of taboos, or sheer duration, but also because, set in the context of art, they established an interplay between what happened, described in general terms . . . and what happened, considered as art. (3)

While other scholars have described the correspondence between works of 1960s and 70s performance art and the protest culture of the time, Ward focuses on the relation between the artists and their audiences within the context of the work of art to understand “what constitutes a public, and a public discourse” (Klein). Ward initially frames free will as a provocation within performance art, occurring as notions like *public* and *community* collapse (fragmentation). We may productively remember the Duchampian *Fountain*, whose major contribution was demonstrating the agentic role of the audience in attributing meaning to the artwork, making it so. Moreover, questioning the definition of art as the avant-gardes did led to questioning the spaces in which art is installed. On the street, the urinal is just a urinal, but it becomes a masterpiece inside an art gallery. Looking at *Shoot* by Burden, what is the difference between being shot in the arm by a friend in a courtyard and doing it in a museum? As audience members, what do we accept if it comes labelled as “art”?

The collapsing of the boundaries between artists, artworks, and audiences (fragmentation) has led to the union between these elements and the necessity of rethinking art in terms of space and time; its reconfiguration. Space is reconfigured, from the avant-gardist happenings in European squares to works of land art and public art. And time has been reconfigured too because of the performative qualities of Futurist and Dada events; subsequent body and performance art incorporated exploration of liveness as a new aspect of the artistic experience. This was in countertendency to the traditional exhibition of art in the early twentieth century, when art consisted mainly of perdurable paintings and sculptures accessed in museums and art galleries at specific hours. The revolutionary reconfiguration of the artist-audience relationship enacted by early performance artists like the avantgardes concerned the body as well as space and time. For this reason, the equal involvement and importance of all the performance art elements illustrated by the figure-eight applies to the performative process and also to the development of the art form more widely.

### Dissolving Boundaries and Reconfiguring Responsibility

Acconci’s *Claim* (1971) and *Seedbed* (1972) and Abramović’s *The House With The Ocean View* (2002) enact fragmentation by dissolving the boundaries between what is private and commonly hidden and what is public, exposed and sharable. Union as the assimilation of private and public within the performative event generates tension and contrasting reactions among the spectators. As members of such an event, they cannot call themselves out. Ward states that witnessing a performance means being part of a community, which is part of the

dynamic ecosystem. Witnessing is already participating and implies responsibility. Signing the cloth of the *Foreigner* or not and choosing what to write on it are choices that the audiences made and were responsible for. Jennie Klein asserts that, as a community, those present at *Shoot* (1971) failed to stop Burden injuring himself (Klein). However, I ask, did they succeed in fostering the action as art?

This is the same dilemma addressed by Abramović in *Rhythm 0* (1974), during which she let the audience conduct the performance. Some members intervened harshly and dangerously on the artist's body. Others tried to stop them, while some people just watched without action. Those who protected Abramović from her "perpetrators" were sometimes stopped by the watchers. Was this in the name of art, voyeurism, or sadism? And what is the difference here? Burden's and Abramović's artworks reconfigure boundaries and confound perceptions of limits. During *Daydream Island* (2013), a member of the public left the auditorium and approached Parr and his crew, imploring them to stop. The person was ignored by the performers and the rest of the audience. Similarly, a woman witnessing *The Foreigner* in Daegu for its entire length worried for my personal safety. She asked the staff of the venue to check on me several times; I do not remember them checking on me more than we agreed. These performances show that a participant's responsibility directly informs and affects the responsibility of the other participants. The sense of responsibility experienced during a performance derives from the meaning given to the work by those involved. This is why Ward calls the audience a community and why they are part of the performance ecosystem.

Within the framework of this thesis, Ward's argument highlights the agency of the audience involved in the performance ecosystem. Such agency is enacted by decisions, even when the public is not completely aware of them. Audience involvement and participation in the artwork is not new. Futurist and Dada happenings already included it, as well as works of public art, relational art, and street art. However, as Sarah Miller points out,

the radical transformation of the relationship of the audience or spectator to the work of art . . . is perhaps the most defining characteristic of performance practices from the late 1960s, no matter with which artistic lineage the artist chooses to locate their work. (Miller qtd in Geczy and Kelly 82)

The differences between these artistic practices do not lie in the degree of audience involvement or the strategies employed. As Ward argues, the radicalism of performance art is in its sweeping away the segregation of art from life. Union as juxtaposition overcomes fragmentation as division.

Although pivotal and impressive, highly provocative and unpredictable, the avant-gardes happenings often remained in the realm of spectacle. The line that had separated life and art until that moment faded with the arrival of body and performance art in the 1960s and 70s. The performances of this era departed from this spatialisation by employing their own bodies as artistic subjects and media before an audience. The audiences could not escape from what was happening for the simple fact that they chose to be present when those actions took place. Parr's face, sewn up and bleeding, did not appear to belong to "real life" but it *was* so because "performance rejects all illusion" (Feral 171). Parr recalls that "it didn't matter if they [the audience members] walked out, attacked me, or what. The idea of art being remote from you was over" (Marsh, *Body*). What is more real than a living body in the flesh displaying its own vulnerability? Which dimension are we occupying if we can physically act upon this body as an artistic gesture? It is called art but there are blood, tears, sperm, sweat, danger, and pain. There are blood, tears, sperm, sweat, danger, and pain and yet it is called art. This is the liminal threshold on which reconfiguration takes place. This concept of performers and audiences sharing the same space without boundaries is the artist making room for the public through gestures of disappearance. I expand on this concept visible in this project's artworks in Chapter Six.

## **1.10 Conclusion**

In this first chapter, I have presented the arguments of this thesis and their theoretical foundations. My aim is to provide a new perspective through which to analyse and understand performance art. I do so by investigating the performative process, what happens during the unfolding of a piece, exploring the essence of its happening. I argue that the powerful potential of performance art, identified in the existing criticism, lies in the dynamic character of its process, which evolves according to forces of fragmentation and union. These elements occur in performative works and across the historical development of this art form. Fragmentation and union are generated within the performance process (immanency), occur together (togetherness) and do so unpredictably and alternatively (alternation). These are energies that manifest in multiple different ways—in different performances, during the same

performance, and even within the same moment of a performance. The literature review and the artistic examples presented in this chapter show that fragmentation and union are not fixed categories or labels but fluid elements that characterise the process of performance art, as well as being lenses through which to read it.

As energies in action, fragmentation and union generate movement and tensions among the elements involved in a performance: space, body, and time. These foundational elements form relationships of mutual influence and exchange in the performance process, being a dynamic reality hosting forces, energies, and phenomena. The performance process, therefore, operates like an ecosystem in which each element has equal importance and impact on the evolution of the event. The existing scholarship has tended to over-emphasise the body, by studying performance art's effects on artists and audiences, and time within durational works. By focusing on the processual and relational aspects of performance art, I attribute agency to all its elements and their various manifestations; human, living, or not. I emphasise *space* in the concept of the performance process as a place in which things happen. The performance process is a dimension that hosts possibilities; the simultaneous enactment and coexistence of opposing forces and diverse phenomena. This complex fluidity that consists of breaking down what is together (fragmentation) and connecting what is apart (union), ultimately leads people present for performance to experience reconfiguration—of perceptions, thoughts, sensations, ideas, and emotions. My approach to examine this art form is, therefore, phenomenological.

The chapter has discussed the various meanings of fragmentation, union, and reconfiguration through scholarship that encompasses the history of art, performance studies, anthropology, literature, and philosophy. This historicisation tracks the evolution of the process of a performance in an art form that has always been deeply connected with contemporary issues. The theories and artworks upon which I draw show the capacity of performance art to actively do things in the world (Bolt). In the practices of the avantgardes, and in the subsequent 1960s and 1970s movements, performance art has been impacting the artistic, cultural, social, and political spheres from which it sprang. These qualities have fostered this art form becoming an interdisciplinary object and a cross-disciplinary instrument of research. At the same time, performance art continues to resist formal definition and continues to evolve by challenging the status quo and proposing new perspectives through which to look at the world. This thesis aims to offer a method of analysis to understand why and how performance art has this capability.

I have partially introduced the methodology of this thesis in this chapter, and the next chapter explains it in detail. I have studied the performance art process by analysing the scholarship and three artworks by three artists alongside the creation and analysis of two performances of my own. I call this a *practices-led methodology*, which enacts the argument of this thesis by developing as a relational process according to dynamics of fragmentation, union, and reconfiguration shaping the intellectual and creative practice.

## Chapter Two—On Methodology: A Practices-Led Research

### 2.1 Introduction

This is a practice-led doctoral project. The theory-based practice and the art-based practice inform each other and have become deeply intertwined. I say “become” instead of “are” because the development of this project as practice-led has been processual. This is the first important analogy between the process of performance art and the methodology that I have undertaken to study it.

The theory-based practice consists of a theoretical framework derived from different research fields. These are the history of art, performance art, the performing arts, performance studies, space and place studies, philosophy and phenomenology, art history, literature, and anthropology. The theoretical work includes the study of *The House with the Ocean View* by Marina Abramović, *Daydream Island* by Mike Parr, and the *Siluetas Series* by Ana Mendieta. In addition to this, the theory-based practice includes the study of other artists such as Stelarc, Gina Pane, and Jill Orr; the analysis of their works informs certain aspects of this thesis, although it is not the focus.

The creation, the production, and the analysis of the pieces that I designed and performed for this project constitute the creative, art-based practice of my research. These pieces are *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected* (May 2016, July 2018) and *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* (July–December 2016). I have experienced live Parr’s performance *Reading to the End of Time* and the documentation of Mendieta’s *Siluetas Series*. In the case of Mendieta, to experience her work “live” means to experience the documentation of it in person, as I did when I attended her major retrospective *She Got Love* at Castello di Rivoli (IT) in 2013. In that exhibition, I could see the films from which many images of the *siluetas* are taken and the original photographs from the series. My analysis of these works belongs to the creative practice of this thesis as well, and I describe this further in the methods section.

The scope of this chapter is to illustrate how theoretical practice combines with the creative practice of the original artworks in order to offer new perspectives on performance art. By describing this research methodology as *practices-led* in the following section, I illustrate how the theoretical and creative work mutually constitute each other through the research process. The relationship between the two practices is one of equality and mutuality as there is no one more important than the other in shaping this research. Like performance

art, this methodology is dynamic and works as an ecosystem. The second section explains the practice-led process of this thesis using a diagram that illustrates the creative practice of my performances. The third section attends to the exegetical writing, which I conceive of as a bridge that connects the theory-based and art-based practice; they collaborate towards the creation of new sharable knowledge. In this section, I clarify the role of the exegetical writing in describing the artwork as experience and the artwork as research. Additionally, I discuss the University Ethics Policy procedure for undertaking performances in order to explain how artistic practice is conducted as research. The Ethics procedure is important because it informs the creative process of the artistic work and the writing process around it.

The following section discusses how studying other artists' works influences the researcher's creative practice. This aspect of the methodology is important because I investigate my own performances in dialogue with those by Abramović, Mendieta, and Parr. The last section presents the conclusions.

## **2.2 Practices-Led Research: The Artistic Practice and the Theoretical Practice Lead Each Other Through the Spider-Web Research Process**

The scholarly distinction between practice-based and practice-led research in the creative arts can be confusing because scholars often disagree in defining the terms and/or use them interchangeably. Moreover, different universities have different requirements and guidelines for the written and artistic components of creative studies (Elkins; Robson et al. 2). I have developed this thesis as practice-led according to Linda Candy's definition:

Practice-led research is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice. In a doctoral thesis, the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of creative work. The primary focus of the research is to advance knowledge about practice or to advance knowledge within the practice. Such research includes practice as an integral part of its method and often falls within the general area of action research. (3–4)

Candy's definition is one among many, but it is particularly useful. This thesis includes two creative works that are fundamental to the development of the project; they are important because the artistic practice around them engages in continuous mutual exchange with the

theory-based work. Candy herself points out that practice-based and practice-led research share common principles. They share the central focus of the practice understood as generating new knowledge; this differs from pure practice, in which innovation is circumscribed to the individual experience of the creator and the observer (Candy). Practice-based and practice-led projects, instead, aim to contribute knowledge to the wider community on a cultural level more broadly.

As such, creative-practice research (practice-as-research or *PaR*) generates and shares knowledge according to specific criteria within structured processes that are defined and acknowledged by universities; the outcomes of this knowledge are examined and valued according to the same approved structure (Nelson, “Practice-as-Research”; *Practice as Research*). Because of these qualities, this thesis is practice-led because it “leads primarily to new understandings about practice” and within the practice, instead of conceiving the creative artefact as “the basis of the contribution to knowledge,” which is the case of practice-based research (Candy 4).

### New Knowledge as Reconfigured Knowledge

When considering the definition of *practice-led research*, however, I wondered: which practice? The theoretical or the artistic one? Undertaking the theoretical work is a practice as well. This is a practice that involves selecting, studying, and paraphrasing existing theories, combining them, questioning them and expanding upon them; eventually, new theories are created. I see the theoretical work undertaken by the doctoral researcher as akin to the craftsmanship of the sculptor. Like sculpting clay, research involves working with the existing material (clay, words, theories, artworks), assembling its various parts together, shaping and reshaping it, adding and discarding, to create something new. Such a process echoes the fragmentation and union that characterise a performance: the process consists of gathering together diverse theories and approaches and recombining them in different ways; “new” knowledge is reconfigured knowledge. With this in mind, I chose to call the theoretical component of this project “theoretical practice” instead of “theory” alone. In this project, the term *practice-led* refers to the theoretical and creative practices which lead each other through the research process of in a relationship of mutual influence and exchange. A term that may suit this project better is “practices-led research.”

Scholars Hazel Smith and Roger Dean describe “practice-led research” and “led-research practice” as an “iterative cyclic web!” Smith and Dean use the term practice-led

research to refer to the knowledge arising from the creation of the art work *and* from the documentation and theorisation of that work. These two scholars add the complementary term *research-led practice* to suggest that “scholarly research can lead to creative work” (Hazel Smith 7). Robson, Brady, and Hopkins coined the term *live research* to describe the relation between the exegetical and creative artistic work as practices that “inform and shape the aesthetic and voice of the other” (Robson et al. 195). The term *live research* posits the process of research as dynamic and ongoing. An image that well illustrates this way of pursuing new knowledge is that of a spider weaving its web. Spiders build their spider-web in a vacuum while proceeding forward. The web is the path (the thesis), a path that was not there before (new knowledge) and that the spider (the artist-researcher) creates by moving forward, a path that is made by many different threads (the theoretical and artistic work) intertwined together.

The analogy of the spider and its web also productively illustrates the processuality that characterises the development of this thesis as well as its object: the research produces knowledge *and* the research journey *is* the knowledge. This thesis began as a *practice-based* project and it became *practice-led*. I realised that my performances work as the experiential methodology that leads the “thinking through” of the theoretical investigation. It could not be otherwise because this is the nature of performance art to me: exploration and discovery. I perform because I want to know. The performances produced for this thesis are not responses to certain situations and theories, but questions about them. At the very origin of their conception, both *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound* began with the question “What if?”

### **The Practices-Led Research Model**

The diagram of the “practices-led model” (Figure 4) shows how the theory-based practice and the art-based practice encounter each other and work together in this thesis to pursue new knowledge about performance art. The diagram partially follows a sub-sequential order because this has been the process of gaining knowledge for me. This is not a circular diagram in which it is possible to start from anywhere like the “iterative cyclic web model” proposed by Smith and Dean (Hazel Smith 20). Their model applicable to many works of art because it derives from their comparative analysis of several creative research projects ( Figure 5). The diagram that I propose applies to this thesis only.

The practices-led research diagram has two creative-practice boxes (n. 2 and n. 7) for the two performance pieces created for this project: *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the*

*Sound/Soundscape Portrait*. The diagram can also be applied to the different performances of the *The Foreigner* (Melbourne, 2016; Daegu, 2018) or *Mapping the Sound* (various venues July–December 2016). Indeed, after the last box (n. 9), the diagram goes back to box n. 4 and can potentially continue from there once again by following the arrows.

### How Real-Life Experience Influences the Process of Research

I have numbered some of the boxes to guide the reader through the stages of the knowledge-acquisition process. The diagram starts with the yellow box n. 1, which indicates the focus of the investigation, as for example when it focussed on the human approach to places. The focus is already informed by both real life/personal experience (green box) and theory-based practice (orange box). These elements are not numbered because they can inform the research process at any time. The real life/personal experience box includes diverse experiences. It sometimes refers to my personal experience of the issue of migration as an Italian expat woman. Such a perspective has led me to create and perform *The Foreigner*, whose focus was also informed by theoretical work on the concept of space.

The experience of real life, however, can affect the research process directly without the mediation of the theoretical practice of the research. This was the case in my experience of a durational performance as a member of the audience. In November 2016, I went to Canberra to research a large exhibition of Mike Parr's art titled *Foreign Looking*, curated by Roger Butler and Elspeth Pitt and held at the National Gallery of Australia from August to November 2016. I held the firm belief that performance art is necessary because it reveals human aspects of being in the place-world; my goal was to investigate why and how.

The theory-based practice supported my belief in performance art's necessity: every day, for a week, I visited Parr's exhibition and I studied voluminous material on him and performance art in the museum library. I participated in Parr's live durational piece *Reading to the End of Time* on the last day of my study-away. Four hours of embodied performance were enough to make me change my mind. I stepped out from Parr's performance with the awareness that performance art is not "necessary." This discovery shocked me. Back in Melbourne, in conjunction with the theoretical work of that week, I analysed this experience that shifted my perspective on performance art so radically. I then compared this material with the practices-led knowledge I had gained. Two interrelated concepts emerged clearly: change and transformation. Consequently, I started investigating these two notions by looking at theories and research fields that I had not previously included in the thesis such as

anthropology, literature, and history. Reconfiguration occurred through the live experience of the performance and the theory-based practice shifted in a new direction once again. Understanding this example via the diagram I produced, the real life/personal experience box links to the performance creative practice by means of a curved arrow with two edges, indicating mutual influence. Witnessing a live performance as a member of the audience both personal experience and creative practice in the realm of this research.

*Reading to the End of Time* is part of the creative practice of this thesis because of the impact of this performance on my investigation and because Parr is one of the artists analysed. However, this artwork is not mine and is not a priori related to my own creative practice. Parr's performance is also part of my personal experience because I have experienced it live, unlike *Daydream Island* and *The House with the Ocean View*. The bond between the real life/personal experience area and the creative practice exists also affects my own performances. My personal experience motivates me to create a performance and the outcomes of the work offer me insights into my personal experience from a deeper perspective.

### The Arrows of Consequentiality and Influence: How the Theoretical Practice Informs the Creative Practice

The straight arrows indicate consequentiality between the elements, as the boxes n. 1, n. 2, n. 3, n. 4, and n. 5 show. This means that each stage generates knowledge sub-sequentially and consequentially from the previous one. The curved arrows indicate influence and information. This phenomenon can be present any stage of the process and does not follow consequentiality. For example, the theory-based work informs the art-based practice constantly: the focus of the investigation of a performance, the performance's design and creation, the analysis of its outcomes, and the subsequent research work. For the purpose of explanation, each part of this process is distinguished from the others, but they are all intertwined in the process of knowledge acquisition.

The theoretical practice also informs my experience while performing. During *The Foreigner* in 2016, for instance, I experienced bodily what Marina Abramović describes as “energy exchange” between the performer and the audience (Abramović, “Marina Abramović,” *Walk*; Akers and Dupre; Cosic; MoMA). Before my performance, that concept felt to me like the experience of another performance artist, one articulation among many in the interviews and scholarly literature. While performing *The Foreigner*, those theorisations

came to my mind while I was experiencing them, and I finally realised their significance. A similar thing happened when I performed *Mapping the Sound* at Matheson Library in 2016, during which I was moving and drawing according to the surrounding sonic environment. While performing, I realised that I could not draw and track all the sounds that I was perceiving because I only have two arms while sounds strike me from anywhere. In my performance, I remembered and understood many of the theories that I had studied on the limitations of the body, including Stelarc's idea of "bodies as portals" of experiences (Abrahamsson and Abrahamsson). Although I had performed durational works before, this performance made me perceive my own body as if for the first time. The important point here is that these theories permeated the artistic practice during its process, *while* it was happening, as well as only during the analysis afterwards.

### **How the Creative Practice Informs the Theoretical Practice: Confirming, Confuting, and Delving Deeper**

The performance (n. 2) generates outcomes (n. 3) that are analysed. The analysis (n. 4) generally produces one of two results. First, the outcomes of the performance match with the premises, the hypotheses, and the expectations laid out prior to performing (A). In this case, I proceed to work on the already-known theories that inform the performance (n. 5). Second, the findings that emerge from the artwork do not correspond to its predictions because they are in contradiction with it or are new things that I did not consider before performing (B). When in contradiction, I go back to the leading theories to analyse them from new perspectives or to discard them from my thesis. When the live event provides new findings that differ from the performance framework, I go back to the theoretical work by researching new theories (n. 6). Usually, both of these two outcomes concern a performance, and this is a key aspect of practices-led research.

When I conceived and performed *The Foreigner* in 2016, the focus of my thesis was the investigation of the human relationship with space through site-specific and durational performances. The hypothesis of the first stage of my investigation was that this kind of work can affect the way in which the performer and audience experience the surrounding environment. I hypothesised that this artwork could influence the way in which performer and audience approach and perceive broader spatial issues such as migration, borders, territoriality, and belonging. Through this performance, I also aimed to investigate the

relationship between how people perceive phenomena through the virtual reality of the media screen versus the bodily physical reality. Additionally, the work investigated how visitors felt and behaved in the physical space of the performance occupied by the Foreigner and others. The theoretical framework informing this creative piece included Heidegger's theories on dwelling ("Building Dwelling Thinking"), Edward Casey's concept of place in opposition to space, Bruno Latour's "ANT" theory ("On Actor-Network Theory," *Politics*), and Bryan Bannon's ideas on the human mastery of nature. Within this context, the body was conceived of as a vehicle and time as a tool. The analysis that followed partially confirmed my hypotheses.

The performance leads the participants to reflect on the spatial issues mentioned above. The longer the audience members experienced the work, the more they became aware of their own embodied experience of the surrounding environment, and often their perspective on it shifted. After reaching these preliminary findings, I worked further on the theoretical framework to examine its relationship with the creative practice.

This operation confirmed which theories worked for my project and which did not. I discarded the work of Bryan Bannon because his discourse on nature was no longer serving my work. Instead, I further researched the theories of Heidegger, Casey, and Latour; I explain in detail how these theorists inform the thesis in Chapter Three. The performance findings illuminated some aspects of these theories that had been marginal prior to performing. For instance, Heidegger's work on space and dwelling articulates the bridge as revealing the landscape to humans and offering them a place to dwell ("Building"); before undertaking this project, I had conceived of the performer as the bridge between the artwork and the audience. This idea was confirmed by performing *The Foreigner* in 2016, during which the audience members came to an increasing awareness by personally and bodily experiencing space and spatiality through my presence and actions.

The analysis after the performance consisted of my own experience of the work, the audience's experience reported on the feedback forms, and the photo and video documentation. The findings revealed strong relationality between space, time, and bodies, with my interpretation emphasising the role of the audience in actively shaping the development of the work. This discovery led me back to Heidegger's essay describing his concept of the *Fourfold*: the phenomenon of being-in-the-world as a whole formed by four inseparable elements of earth, sky, humans, and deities ("Building"). This concept has informed my arguments in this thesis in terms of relationality, interdependence, and mutual exchange between performance elements; I discuss this further in Chapter Three.

The relationship between theoretical and creative practices in building new knowledge extends beyond the discoveries made during one performance. The Heideggerian conceptualisation of the Fourfold can be productively analysed alongside Latour's "actant-network theory" in approaching and interpreting environmental systems ("On Actor-Network Theory," *Politics*) which was part of my theoretical framework. Furthermore, I also see resonances between Heidegger's and Latour's ideas and Doreen Massey's work on space as a "dimension of multiplicity" and places as "networks of relationships" (Massey, "Doreen Massey," "Global Sense"). I researched Massey's work after the performances of *Mapping the Sound* and then became one of the theoretical pillars of the research; Massey's theories are discussed in Chapter Three.

These flows of influence confirm the circular model of research theorised by Dean and Smith, who argue that the stages of the research process interlink and overlap in a web-like structure:

At every stage of the cycle [it] is possible to go back to previous stages. So, for example, selection of an idea might instigate a return to the idea/generation stage. Similarly, the investigation/research stage might also result in a revisiting of the generation of ideas and so on. (Hazel Smith 21)

The images on the following pages illustrate this process.

The next section discusses the role of the exegetical writing in shaping the relationship between the written and the creative component of practice-as-research.

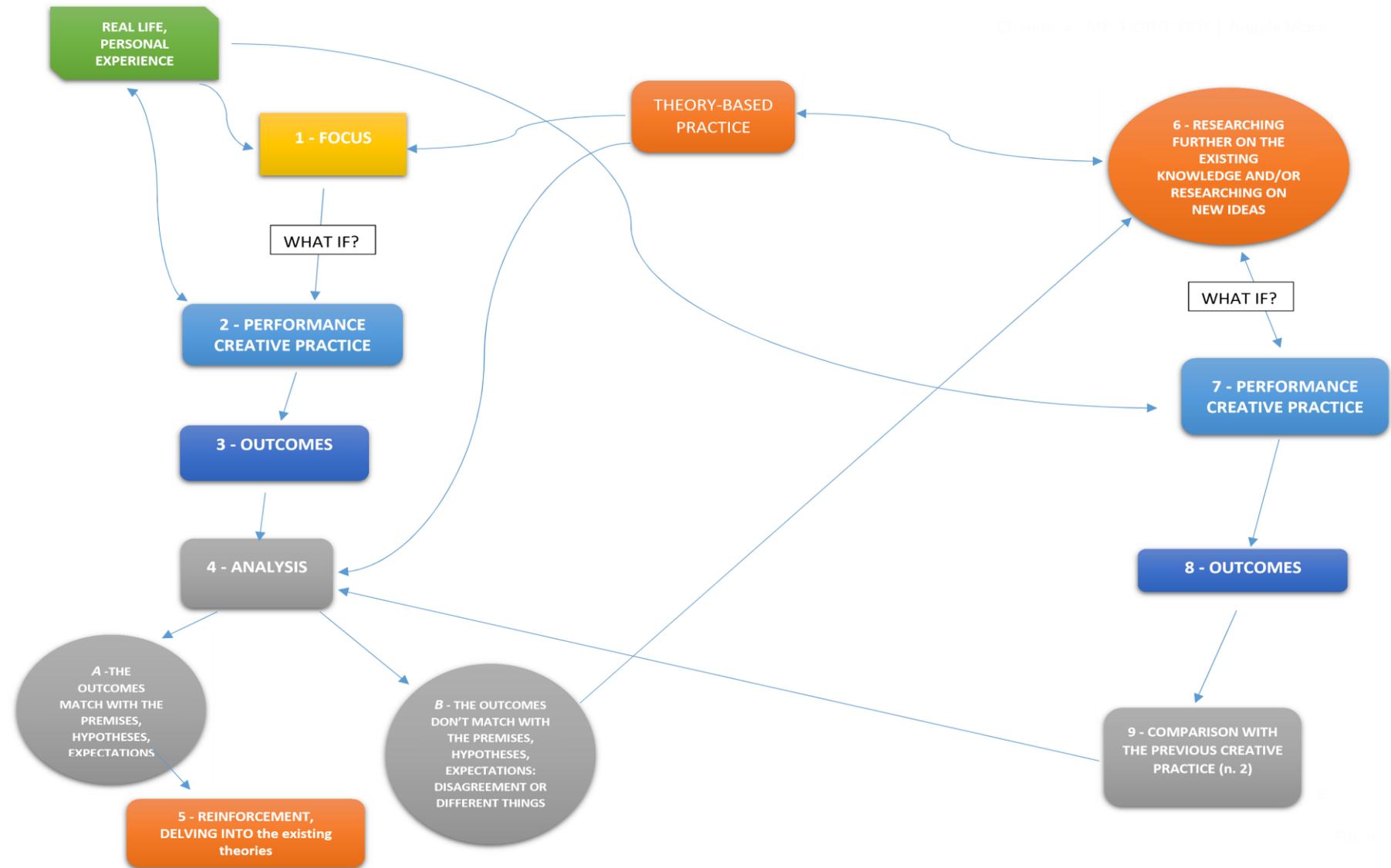


Fig. 4

Figure 4. © Angela Viora 2019, The Practices-led Research model

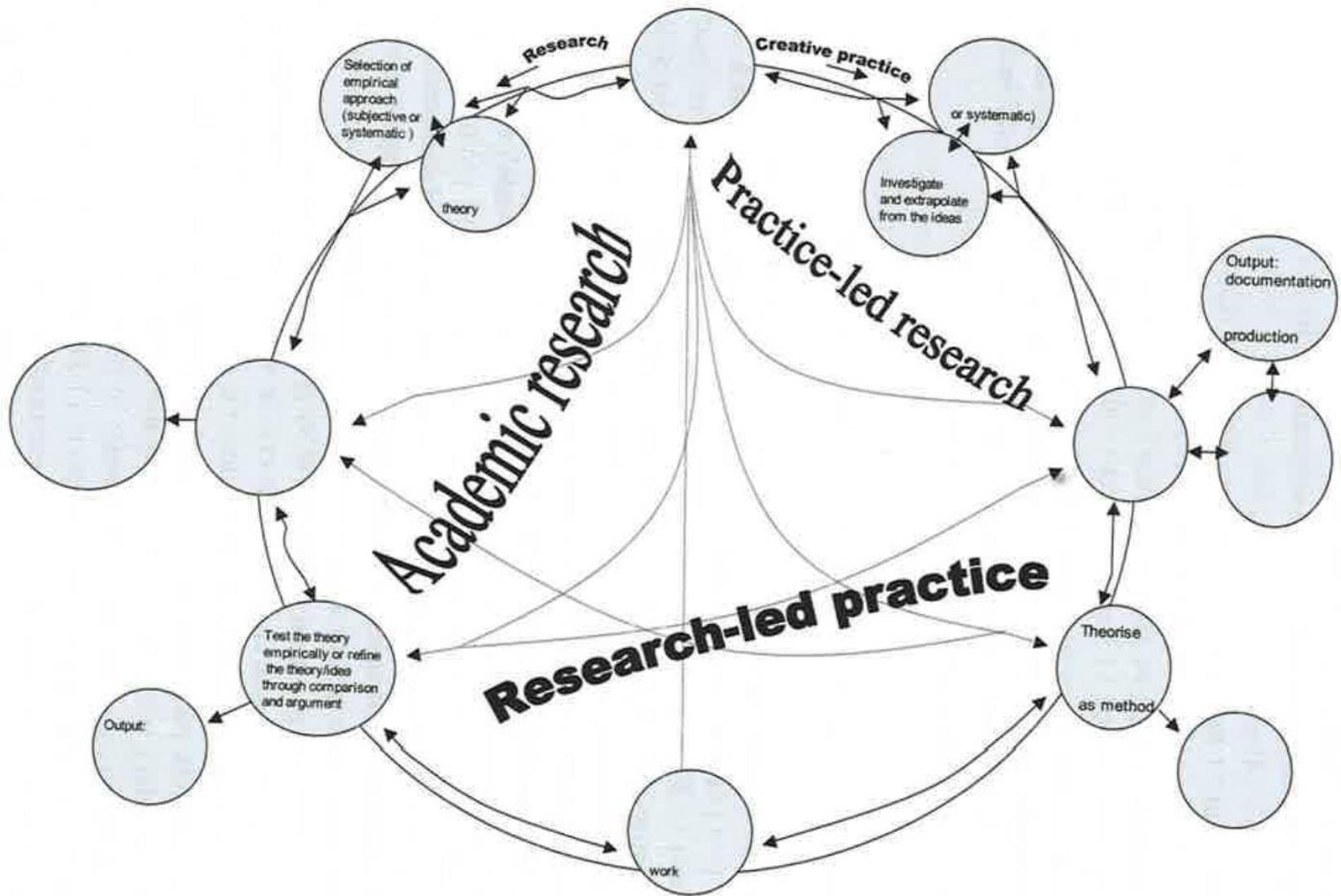


Figure 5. The iterative cyclic web model proposed by Smith and Dean

### **2.3 The Role of the Exegetical Writing as the Bridge Between the Theoretical and the Artistic Practice**

The relationship between the written and the creative component of practice-as-research theses is a question that has been discussed from various perspectives (Elkins; Nelson *Practice as Research*; Robson et al.). The discussion is important in the PaR context, which sees artist-researchers like me struggling with putting into (academic) words the knowledge gained through artistic practice (Barrett and Bolt; Elkins; Robson et al.). The following paragraphs describe the role of the written component in researching and building new knowledge within this project.

The thesis conceives the written component of the exegesis as the bridge between the theoretical and the artistic work. This means that the exegetical writing does not merely describe the art piece, but conveys the collaboration between the theory-based practice and creative-based practice-as-research. The writing allows me to explain the process of practices-led research, how the theoretical investigation nourishes the artistic investigation, and how the artistic practice enacts the theoretical framework of the project. The mutually informed theory-based and art-based practices include the approaches by which I design and set up a performance, the embodied and experiential knowledge gained during the performance, and the account and the analysis of the performance after it has happened. The exegetical writing dialogically connects these three phases of the work and generates what is called an “artistic practice” (Hazel Smith).

In other words, the written part of this thesis firstly hosts the development of the theoretical work. Then, the exegetical writing engages with the creative practice: by “writing around” the performances, I contextualise the emergent knowledge from performance within broader artistic and academic discourses (Robson et al.). In this way, I can share the creative knowledge within the research fields. While I am writing, I read about the writing experiences of other artist-researchers and consider how I might relate to them; by writing on this, I clarify the role of “writing around” my own practice within my research. If thinking, studying, and writing around the performances is part of the artistic practice, then the process instantiates “research-led practice”: the theoretical practice that informs and leads the creative one (Hazel Smith).

## **Writing *Around* the Artistic Practice Rather than About It**

In the academic study of practice-as-research, one of the major issues is producing scholarship that is not merely a report or a substitution of the artworks (Robson et al.). The field has long debated how the concept of the *exegesis* can develop the written component alongside the creative work. This debate is a live one; many artist-researchers continue to question whether the written exegesis is adequate to communicate knowledge gained through artistic practice (Robson et al.).

The issue is common to both practice-based and practice-led research, in which artists are often “suspicious of theories and reticent in discussing their work” (Barrett and Bolt 2). By acknowledging the diversity of approaches beyond the academic definition of the term *exegesis*, scholars such as myself aim to produce knowledge that is not circumscribed by the artistic practice from which it springs. Estelle Barrett argues that the first step towards this understanding is to acknowledge the creative arts as “*a mode of knowledge production*” that “often contradict[s] what is expected of research” (Barrett and Bolt ).

In my case, the struggle is not only expressing the creative-practice knowledge through words; the difficulty is sharing the artistic knowledge according to the requirements of higher-degree academic writing, which has to be developed with a rigorous structure.

The object of research of this thesis is performance art. We know that this is an art form characterised by unpredictability, whose process develops dynamically and cyclically according to variables that can only be only partially predicted. The problem here is the friction—or the abyssal gap?—between the object of investigation, performance art, and the *medium* of investigation, academic writing within a doctoral framework. A piece of performance art does not develop organically in sequential chapters within scholarly language. Rather, as I aim to demonstrate, the elements of a live performance (space, time, and bodies) interrelate during the happening of the work and they generate and define its process. The rhythm, nature, and outcome of such interrelations differs from one performance to another, and one moment to another within the same performance. Alongside the tension in the ontological difference between the written and artistic components of an exegesis, there is difference here in the ways in which the components *develop*—their processes.

The key to resolving this difference is in considering the written and creative components of the exegesis in relation to each other, rather than in opposition. The relation is characterised by processuality; the artistic and written components of the work, mirroring the

creative and the theoretical practice, develop together by interlinking, overlapping, and nurturing each other. This is also how the elements of the performance ecosystem co-occur. I align with the perspective of artist and scholar Cat Hope, who argues that “the exegesis supports the work, but it is not the same as it. It is not the replacement or even the translation . . . It is the writing *around* it, at the edges of it. . .” (Robson et al. 191; my italics). I emphasise the word *around* because such an approach allows me to distinguish between “artwork” (the artistic product) and “artistic practice,” what “goes beyond the physical activities of making artistic products and can include influences, ideas, materials as well as tools and skills” (Labadie). This clarification is crucial to avoid approaching the written exegesis as a report on the creative product. For these reasons, practices-led research does not focus on how words can serve the artwork but how artistic knowledge becomes a sharable and valuable piece of knowledge beyond the factual realisation of the performance.

The “how,” as previously elucidated, is practices-led research, in which the two rivers of theoretical and artistic knowledge merge into a new single stream. The exegetical writing is the riverbed, the medium through which the knowledge is transmitted, tangible and accessible. The written component is not simply a vehicle or container. As with streams of water, the substances present in the riverbed merge with those of the river. This means that the language, tone, style, and voice of writing shape the message. As Marshall McLuhan famously argued, “the medium is the message” (*Medium*): via a symbiotic relationship, the medium influences how the message is perceived. The exegetical writing practice around the performances works as an “exercise in translation [because] the artist-researchers are obliged to interpret their research questions across various language codes and disciplines” (Mercer qtd in Robson et al. 196).

### **Are All These Words Adequate or Even Necessary? The Artwork as an Experience and the Artwork as a Piece of Research**

As an artist turned researcher in this doctoral project, I have often wondered: Are all these words and theorisations on the artworks necessary? I argue that it depends how the artwork is conceived. Namely, it depends whether we understand the artwork as an experience or also as a piece of research. As an artist, I believe that a piece of art that needs many explanatory words to be grasped and felt is an artwork that does not work.

Performance art is an art form that most often relies on liveness and the immediate relationship between the performer and the audience. Let us take the example of my piece *The*

*Foreigner*, performed for the second time in July 2018 during a conference in a public art factory. I provided the audience with only minimal information on the work, hanging some signs near the performance site. As the video documentation shows, most of the audience did not read the signs and had no information on the work, yet they connected to it. The performance made them stop, reflect, and feel; this is visible from the written comments left on the *Foreigner* and the feedback book and some participants provided subsequent oral or email feedback. Many responses to the piece include discussion of its major topics, migration, identity and death. Because I think of *The Foreigner* as an experience to offer and share—my idea of performance art—then the need for copious words to deliver the experience would mean failure to me. The strength of the experience derives from the live processuality of the performance.

But if I approach *The Foreigner* as a piece of scholarly research, I need words to frame it as such. These words are *around* the work, rather than words on and about it. Visitors experiencing *The Foreigner*, live or through documentation, do not know about the philosophical, geographical, and spatial theories behind the work. They know neither the previous performance of the piece that evolved it nor my artistic background that informs it. What the audience members experience is the latest stage of a complex artistic and theoretical process that has shaped the current experience. The exegetical writing explains the process organically as a discovery and shares a piece of research with the research field. The process of the performance develops live and circularly through a web-like pattern, yet the more rigid structure of the doctoral exegesis can nevertheless track the performance process organically through words.

Process is central in performance art. This project is practices-led, a processual method in which the practice and theory lead each other in creating new knowledge. The exegetical writing in this research can bridge the practice and theory by elucidating “the theoretical framework from which [the artistic practice] sprang or was created” and can reveal “the process of how it was made, and even theorise about the methodological issues it pursued, problematized or pioneered” (Robson et al. 194). The knowledge gained through the artistic practice of performance art is made accessible through written words.

I offered the audience many explanatory words for *The Foreigner* when I performed it in 2016 for the first time. This seems to contradict my claims about excessively verbose artworks that do not work. However, I intended that component as a sort of test and using

many words felt necessary as a form of research. Audience members were asked to agree to video and photo recording and to respond to a structured questionnaire; this necessitated visitors reading documents before and after participating in the work. As the following section explains, this experimental approach had pros and cons, and I did not employ it again for the following performances. I have come to understand, nevertheless, that the value of such a method lies in the conception of the performance as a piece of research more than purely as a piece of art.

#### **2.4 The Ethics Application: How the Artistic Practice is Undertaken as Doctoral Research**

The University Ethics Policy for conducting performances involving the participation of the audience informs the creative process of the work and the writing process around it. Although *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound* are considered works of “low-risk” research by Monash University, the processes of obtaining Ethics approval still include consistent writing. Writing for the Ethics application brought me clarity on the planned performances. I had started by writing *about* the artistic practice and I ended up writing *around* it. Negotiating the Ethics process also affected the way in which I organised and performed my pieces.

##### **The Experience of the Artist-Researcher**

Some sections of the Ethics application for *The Foreigner* were visible to the audience in Melbourne in the form of explanatory statements and consent forms to read and sign prior to participating in the work and anonymous feedback forms to submit after having experienced the performance. The explanatory statement described the work and its implications notified them that the performance was photo and video recorded. Despite having these notifications and having signed a consent form, many members of the audiences of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne complained afterwards about the presence of the video cameras recording them; this led me to consider that being aware of the presence of video cameras is different to experiencing being watched and recorded by them. When performing in crowded public spaces, I have surrounded the performance area with signs that warned people that a recorded performance was happening. In *Mapping the Sound* at Monash University’s Matheson Library (October 2016), I performed in the lobby of the second floor, facing the corridor, with a wall behind me. I angled the video cameras towards myself to avoid recording people at distance without their permissions, and because it was not feasible for me to offer digital

editing to render spectators' faces unrecognisable. This aspect affected the video documentation of this performance, which barely shows the interaction of the audience members with the piece.

*The Foreigner* in Melbourne showed me that the feedback forms have a crucial impact on the way a performance can be set up. Asking the audience to respond to a structured questionnaire necessitates their carefully reading several papers before and after participating in the piece. This means that the visitors stepped into the work partially prepared for what they were going to encounter. This aspect complicates my work because I create performance art according to the principles of no-rehearsal, unpredictability, and fostering the unforeseen. For these reasons, I abandoned this pre-participation documentation method in the following performance *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* (September–December 2016) because I wanted the audience to have a more spontaneous experience of the work. Initially, *The Foreigner* took place in a room accessible through a door through which people could choose to enter. By contrast, all the performances of *Mapping the Sound* were purposely set up in open public environments such library lobbies, university corridors or stairs, crossed by people who randomly happened upon the performance.

These examples show how the creative practice was been informed and influenced by previous creative practice. I summarise the process described so far as:

1. The Ethics Policy (theory-based practice) influenced the design and the realisation of the first performance *The Foreigner* (art-based practice):  
theory-based practice → art-based practice  
↓
2. The emergent experience from the realisation of *The Foreigner* then influenced the design and realisation of the second performance *Mapping the Sound*:  
art-based practice → art-based practice

It is evident that writing about the performances for the Ethics application means writing around the artistic practice. The exegetical writing has multiple benefits. It makes the knowledge embedded in the artistic research accessible to readers. The understanding of the “exegesis as enabling” allows artist-researcher “to provide a vital site for reflection” and appreciation of the “knowledge-making processes and outcomes” of their work (Robson et al. 196). As other artist-researchers have also found, writing the exegesis enabled me “to

discover a framework after I produced the creative work [because] the exegesis helped me to explain what I was doing in another language” (Robson et al. 197), and this was also the case for many of my colleagues participating in the Live Research seminar series at Edith Cowan University in 2009. Responding to the Ethics questionnaire had forced me, the artist, to also be a researcher because it had situated the artwork within the research-knowledge framework of a doctoral project, instead of being simply an account of the creative product.

At the same time, the Ethics application helped me to be clear about the pragmatic aspects of my work and to take care of the audiences. Finalising the Ethics requirements to perform a work intended as research can have the merit of taking the artists out of their “bubbles.” As a performance artist who believes in the experiential knowledge gained from the unforeseen, unpredictability, risk, and duration, I had to learn that that might not be the same for everybody and does not have to be an imposition.

### **The Experience of the Audience**

The way in which I set up *The Foreigner* in 2016 according to the Ethics Policy impacted the way in which the audience experienced the performance. The audience members divided into three groups: those in their feedback who made no comment on the written forms, those who were annoyed by them, and those who found them useful. Those who complained spoke of the length of time required to read and complete the forms and resented being “told what to do,”<sup>1</sup> These participants referring to both the rules of the performance and the questionnaire.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that the people who complained about the paper forms spent a considerable amount of time writing their complaint. Other participants welcomed the structured yet open questions guiding their reflections on the performance.

Some of the questions concerned the audience’s experience of space in relation to time, their own body, the presence of the Foreigner, and other people in the room. One person declared that thinking of their experience in these terms made them realise that they had never thought of the concept of space before. For this person, prior to the performance, “space” was an abstract concept related mainly to astronomy (the universe) or chemistry (air).

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<sup>1</sup> The words put in quotation marks while describing the audience’s experience of a performance indicate the quoting of participants’ comment from the feedback forms.

<sup>2</sup> There were no rules for the audience except “you are required to maintain respectful behaviour” and “you cannot look underneath the white sheet.” The interpretation of the performance setting by audience members is an aspect of the work that I discuss in Chapter Six in terms of the *audience-audience relationship*.

The performance and the questions around it made this person realise that space is a broader reality of which they are part. Other participants declared that the written questionnaire helped them to rationalise and articulate their experience of the performance. These people often identified as migrants, and reflecting on the performance through the structured questions made them connect their experience of the artwork with their migrant status:

“I can relate many of my feelings inside the room as not knowing the land’s rules. As a recent migrant, never sure anymore what, where, when and how . . .”

“The performer was alone and exposed in the room as well as migrants in a new land.”

## **2.5 The Eureka Moment: When Writing Around the Work of Other Artists Informs the Practice of the Artist-Researcher**

Writing around the works of other artists influences the artistic practice of the researcher. I have read and written extensively on the artists included in this thesis; in the case of Mendieta, I have also seen live the documented *Silueta Series* in the retrospective *She Got Love* at Castello di Rivoli (IT) in 2013. The theoretical study of art-based practice led me to an important “eureka moment,” the discovery of a common thread between these artists in their performer-audience relationship. In different ways, these artists “disappear” during and within the work. I argue that these artists embody and perform absence and, by doing so, they make room for the public and give them agency in the work. My pieces in this project dialogue with the artworks by Abramović, Parr, and Mendieta and this discovery has allowed me to clarify what my performances aspire to and achieve. This quality has always been there in my artistic practice but I was not able to identify this concept rationally. I have, therefore, applied this perspective to the analysis of the performer-audience relationship within my own works.

The concept of disappearance was already present in my investigation of Ana Mendieta’s *Silueta Series*, which I have presented in a paper during *PSi#22*, the Performance Studies International Conference, in Melbourne in July 2016. The paper’s title was “Dwelling Through Performance Art” and focused on the investigation of space and places that characterised my thesis at the time. The role of the audience became increasingly important

to me by the end of 2016, when I had already performed *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* several times.

The “eureka moment” came when I wrote a paper for the *Performance Research* journal “On Leftovers” issue in 2017. The journal related the concept of *leftovers* in the arts to reconstructing, re-performing, reiterating, and archiving, practices that “have been challenging the realm of the performing arts that otherwise operate under the primacy of presence” (Foellmer and Gough). The article was published with the title “To Be or Not to Be *There*: When the Performer Leaves the Scene and Makes Room for the Audience.” The article analyses the *Siluetta Series* as well as *Daydream Island* by Parr and the performance of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne. I later adopted a similar perspective to the article in producing this thesis, exploring the artist-audience relationship during the performance process.

Whilst the inclusion of Mendieta’s work in this project was present from the beginning, I had been undecided on including Parr’s *Daydream Island* or *Aussie Aussie Aussie Oi Oi Oi* in the 2017 article and in this thesis. Eventually, I chose *Daydream Island* because of its focus on spatiality and the gap between direct bodily experience of reality and virtual reality experienced through the media. By examining Parr’s perspective while analysing it, the resonances with *The Foreigner* emerged. By writing on Parr’s performance, the analysis of my own work became clearer and deeper. The common thread between Mendieta’s piece, Parr’s piece and my own is performing absence: the absence of the body performed by Mendieta, the absence of the human rights performed by Parr, and the absence of identity performed by me. Analysing *The Foreigner* for the article subsequently informed the analysis of *Mapping the Sound*.

The new knowledge gained through the article informs my perspective in this thesis on space, body, time, and the performer-audience relationship. The methodology adopted for the article has informed the practices-led methodology of the broader research. In terms of space, the article has informed my spatial conception of the performance ecosystem as a dimension in which things happen. First in the article, and now in Chapters Three and Six, I strategically use locative terms and I speak of the performers “leaving the scene” and “making room” for the audience who “step into the work” as if it were a location to enter and inhabit—and it is. The performance place is occupied, dwelt in and crossed by the bodies of the performer and the audience, and this influences how the performer-audience relationship may be theorised. Let us think of a performance as a room with people inside, the performer and the audience: it

is a matter of filling, negotiating, and moving in space; if someone becomes smaller, hides, moves back from the centre of the room or leaves it (the performer), there is more space for others to move around and explore, to take up and hold, and to stretch in (the audience).

These bodies, together in the same room, interact with and affect each other by means of their presence and behaviours: this is the “audience-audience relationship” evident, particularly, in *The Foreigner* performed in Melbourne. As I explain further in Chapters Five and Chapter Six, the absence of the performer from the scene is not only physical, as in the case of Mendieta. The disappearance enacted by Abramović, Parr, and I by means of duration and repetition is metaphorical and consists of the dissolution of the centrality of the artist in the work (Goebbels et al.). Consequently, the performance, as a locus of possibilities, is open to the interpretations, projections, and reactions of the audience members who step into the piece and become agentic elements of its process. The process that I have described is an example of productive capacity of research-led practice, where scholarly research affects the production of creative work and/or its analysis (Hazel Smith 7).

## **2.6 A Cooperation of Various Methods for Gathering Data**

The following section describes the various methods used to gather data on the performances that were then analysed. This section explains the choices behind the methods and their advantages and disadvantages. The first part presents the methods adopted in the original pieces created for this project, namely *The Foreigner* (2016, 2018) and *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* (2016). The next sub-section analyses *The House with the Ocean View* by Abramović (2002), *Daydream Island* by Parr (2012), and the *Siluetas Series* by Mendieta (1973-80).

In this section, I also explain the concepts of each artwork and their contributions to the argument of this thesis. This section provides an overview of the different modalities by which I conducted the investigation process as rigorously and comprehensively as I could. Recalling the principles of fragmentation and union, the diverse methods undertaken work together as a cooperative ensemble to facilitate research, analyse phenomena, and produce newly reconfigured knowledge. As in an ecosystem, no method is prioritised over the others, and none is exhaustive. The following sub-section discusses the findings of the research questions applied to the performance pieces.

### **2.6.1 The Original Performances Produced for This Thesis: *The Foreigner* (2016, 2018) and *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* (2016)**

In this section, I detail the concepts of these pieces as constituting the creative practice of practices-led methodology, discussed in terms of fragmentation and union.

*The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected* is a performative response to the migration issue currently involving Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. I have taken an image from the media and I have embodied it live in ordinary public spaces: an unknown body, quiet and still underneath a white cloth. This is the image of the dead migrants on the Italian and Greek shores, whose corpses are covered with white cloths.

I am sensitive to this matter because I was born and raised in Italy; this is, together with Greece, the first place where African and Middle Eastern migrants arrive via sea, alive or dead (Giuffrida). I have been on those coasts in the past and now I see them as a dramatic backdrop on TV and the internet. The situation has made me reflect on migration because I am a migrant myself, albeit in more fortunate circumstances. Because of my background, I feel close to this situation, yet I experience it virtually and from a great distance. This contradiction has prompted me to think about the relationship between myself status as an immigrant in Australia, the refugees in the place that I call home, the physical distance between us, and the paradoxical closeness that links us via TV and the internet in the present. I noticed that the more I was exposed to those media images, the less I was affected by them. Are we becoming anaesthetised to the migration issue?

The performance of *The Foreigner* suggests the following questions:

To whom does the body under the sheet belong?

What would happen if I were to take that image from media screens and perform it in the flesh?

Would people's perception of and relation with that image change its meaning?

What would happen if I were underneath the sheet?

I conceived of and performed *The Foreigner* for the first time in 2016, when my thesis centred on the investigation of the human relationship with space and places through site-specific and durational performances. The piece aimed to explore the gaps between reality and virtuality, the physical and geographical, the cultural and the social, conceived spaces

and experienced places. The work addressed how people occupy a shared and public space and how they react to an unknown and unexpected presence in their environment. However, the focus of the thesis has started shifting after the first performance in 2016 because the live experience of the work had made me realise the agency of the elements of body, time and space within the performance process. From there, I started researching the ecology of performance as relational, acknowledging the agentic role played by the audience in shaping the work. Therefore, I analysed the outcomes of the first and the second performance of *The Foreigner* according to these new discoveries, and the fragmentation-and-union perspective was elaborated in the second part of my candidature.



Figure 6. © Angela Viora 2016, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Monash University Performing Arts Centre (AUS). Ph. Kara Rasmanis for Angela Viora.



Figure 7. © Angela Viora 2018, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Daegu Art Factory (SK). Ph. Peter Burke.

*Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* is another investigation of the human relationship with spatiality. Architect and scholar Juhani Pallasmaa asserts that

in Western culture, sight has historically been regarded as the noblest of the senses and thinking itself thought of in terms of seeing. Already in classical Greek thought, certainty was based on vision and visibility . . . The invention of perspectival representation made the eye the centre point of the perceptual world as well as of the concept of the self. Perspectival representation itself turned the world into a symbolic form, one which not only describes but also conditions perception. (15)

Despite Western culture's emphasis on sight, we know that sound plays a fundamental role in the characterisation and identification of places, and in distinguishing one place from another. For example, let us think of the sounds produced by cars, people, mobile phones, and so on, in the central street of a big city, compared to the sounds that we hear in a forest. The sound

makes the place and the place makes the sound. Close your eyes and you will realise that an ensemble of sounds *is* a place itself, and you are in there. Sound surrounds us as a landscape, as the English term *soundscape* acknowledges. I experience acoustic synaesthesia by “seeing,” with the eyes of my mind, sounds like black marks on a white surface. They have shapes, sizes, and textures. As a landscape, I want to draw what the soundscape looks like through this performance.

Discussing hearing, Anthony D. Barker argues that “the turn toward sensory experience opens new cognitive spaces and creates new exploratory possibilities” through “getting to know a place and rediscover[ing] a variety of soundscapes” (27). Moreover, “sounds play a crucial role in the anticipation, experience and remembering of places . . . and the process of transformation of environments to places” (Barker 27). Thus, sound is not only a place, but also a means of perceiving different aspects of an environment and discovering the many layers that exist in it. This is possible because embodiment facilitates hearing sounds. Unlike sight, which is limited by perspectival perception and the structure of directions, sound touches us (from) everywhere. Describing a soundscape, we can say that we live immersed in sound. Let us think, for instance, of the vibrations of a drum perceived in our stomach. We do not need the sense of hearing to experience that.

As Pallasmaa argues, “all the senses, including vision, are extensions of the tactile sense; the senses are specialisations of skin tissue, and all sensory experiences are modes of touching and thus related to tactility” (10). In *Mapping the Sound*, I highlight the corporeal sense of touch by drawing with charcoal: I perceive and draw sounds through my body that, by moving, edits the signs marked on the paper.

My body, the surrounding environment, and its sounds are deeply interconnected in a mutual and dynamical exchange. As environments themselves, bodyscape, landscape, and soundscape shape the processual ecosystem of the performance according to the dynamics of fragmentation and union. This piece constitutes a dialogue between three different levels: between different places (body, site, and sound), different senses (hearing, touch, and sight), and different disciplines (performance art and drawing). Are you still in the same place? How does it feel?



Figure 8. © Angela Viora 2016, *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*, live performance.  
*Melbourne #47 Festival*, Melbourne City Library (AUS). Ph. Alana Hoggart for E.P.A.

## 2.6.2 Gathering Data and Undertaking Analysis

The following pages present the different methods employed to gather data from these two original performances. The methods span from quantitative to qualitative research and include questionnaires, written feedback, footage, photographs, and objects.

### *Quantitative Research: Semi-structured Questionnaire for the Audience*

I employed a semi-structured anonymous questionnaire for the audience to read and complete during the first performance of *The Foreigner* (2016). According to the Monash University Ethics Policy, the audience members read and signed the explanatory statements before entering the performance space. They filled in the questionnaires once they exited. This method of inquiry presents advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is obtaining precise responses from the audience. The main disadvantage is that reading the explanatory forms before participating in the performance primes the visitors for it and their experience of the work can be influenced. As the written feedback revealed, the structured questions can facilitate or inhibit participants' responses, as they may feel guided or constrained in articulating their experience. Reading and filing papers also takes time away from participation in the performance. Although effective for the research purposes, this method is not ideal for pieces that centre on immediacy and the unforeseen.

### *Qualitative Research*

#### *- Visitors' Non-Structured Written and Oral Feedback*

During both *Mapping the Sound* in 2016 and *The Foreigner* in 2018, the audience members could write any comment or thought freely, anonymously, and in any language, on a blank notebook provided. Those who participated in *The Foreigner* 2018 could also write on the cloth underneath which the artist was performing. In this case, the audience's feedback became part of the performative process itself. This method favours a direct approach to the performance without the mediation of the explanatory forms and questionnaires, which take time to complete. For this reason, the non-structured feedback form is congenial to works that take place in public and busy environments, such as libraries and at conferences. Unlike the quantitative approach, this method offers the public a less mediated encounter with the performance. Without the pre-structured questionnaire, the audience members could provide feedback on certain aspects of the

work that I had not considered before and could inform the research. Such freedom can stimulate the creativity of some people, who left feedback in alternate ways. For example, a person spoke directly to the video camera during *The Foreigner* in Daegu rather than writing down their feedback (2018).

This more unstructured approach, on the one hand, may favour responses by the audience that are not conducive to research purposes: this is the case of general comments and compliments such as “looking good” or “your creativity is amazing, congratulations!” On the other hand, this approach can also reveal things about the work that I could not have anticipated, such as the many responses deriving from the cultural backgrounds of the participants to which the image of the Foreigner relates in different ways. Others asked questions, rather than leaving comments, such as “was it worth it?” and “but what is a Foreigner?”

I perceived these questions as addressed to me: each time I examine the documentation after a performance of mine, I become a member of the audience because I see the work from outside for the first time. In fact, my sight was impaired in both *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound*. These questions from the participants have led me to reflect on my concept of the piece and my reasons for creating and performing it. Moreover, I have realised that the performance evolves beyond the limitations of my own individual perspective by doing things in the world and interacting with that world. Since this is a practice of knowledge, I do not learn from the performance only while performing but also afterwards while analysing it.

Visitors may also not leave any comments at all and, therefore, it is not possible to know about their experience of the performance. Alternatively, they may leave comments in the forms of poems, whose interpretations are subjective. In this latter case, discussions with these participants after the performance are useful. Many audience members of both pieces have reported that the possibility to leave comments in diverse forms and languages has made them feel more comfortable in sharing their feedback. I have relied on native speakers for the translation of those comments written in languages other than English, Italian, or French, which I can translate myself. To avoid bias, I have not asked the same person who wrote a piece of feedback to translate it into English, although they were often able to do so. The people who translated the feedback for me did not participate in the performance and often had no information about it.

*The Foreigner* in Daegu (2018) employed an additional method of inquiry: oral feedback which the audience gave me immediately or several hours after the performance. With the participants' permission, I either recorded some of this feedback or wrote it down. Although I am aware that my written recording of the audience's vocal feedback can be affected by my perspective, I have made an effort to report these responses as accurately as possible. Other participants in the same performance wrote me their feedback via email or Facebook Messenger days after the event took place because they did not feel emotionally prepared to do so during it. I am conscious that the participants might have rationalised their immediate experience of the work in the written feedback that they gave me hours or days later. I have analysed these pieces of feedback with the participants' permission.

- *My Non-Structured Data/Feedback*

My personal written feedback on the work includes written notes, journals, and reports prior to and after performing. The material written before performing concerns the performance's main questions and goals, namely, what I wanted to explore through the piece and how. The hypotheses and expectations that I had about the performance process and its outcomes were also part of this preliminary record. What I write prior to performing constitutes neither a piece of feedback nor proper data of the work because it happens before the performance experience. However, this material belongs to the realm of documentation because it provides official information and evidence of the work. This data reveals its potential in the analysis phase, after the performance happens and my analysis situates the data in relation to each other. There is not always a rigid distinction between the various methods, and this hybrid methodology favours the interaction and collaboration between them.

Soon after performing, I write down my own experience of the work as much as possible. This is a highly febrile and unstructured activity during which I put on paper my thoughts, feelings, and impressions in a stream-of-consciousness form. The purpose of this phase is to record my memories before they fade and, thus, to seize my experience while it is "fresh" and not compromised by the rational and inquisitive mind. This session does not intentionally engage the thesis and its research questions, although it might spontaneously; ideas and clarifications may occur in the form of "eureka moments." I

often consciously try to refrain from searching for confirmations of the research imperatives to avoid interfering with the spontaneousness and genuine outcomes of my experience. If I do not write, I record myself speaking about my experience of the performance. These accounts are useful in the analytical stage of the investigation, when they are compared with the initial hypotheses and expectations. My experience of the performance can sometimes match my initial hypotheses, providing confirmations and proofs. But when the resulting outcomes differ from the initial assumptions, I am dealing with forms of broken expectations. Through a comparative analysis, I compare the outcomes of my personal experience as performer with the audience's experience and the data provided by the recorded documentation (see Figure 1).

- *Recorded Documentation: Photographs and Video Footage*

The following pages explain the practical considerations for photographic and video recording of the two original performances produced during my candidature. Both *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound* were recorded by up to three fixed video cameras to guarantee at least two visual perspectives in the documentation. I preferred fixed video cameras because the presence of a mobile cameraman could have distracted the audience. However, many participants in both performances of *The Foreigner* declared in the written feedback that they were disturbed and inhibited by the presence of the cameras. The video documentation during performance affected audience behaviour and, consequently, the evolution of the work itself. Documentation, therefore, is part of the live process of the performance as an agentic spatial element. The last section of Chapter Two discusses this idea further.

I had more than one person taking pictures during both *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound*. There was always at least one professional photographer or person with competence in visual and performing arts to whom I told what I expected from the documentation; others with no artistic or photographic expertise were also included in taking photos. It is more fruitful to have multiple perspectives on the same work.

Monash University official photographer Kara Rasmanis took several of the pictures of *The Foreigner* in 2016. She also participated in the live event as a member of the audience. As a photographer for the performing arts, she attended to the performer-audience relationship, an aspect of the work that I became more aware of thanks to her

shots (Figure 6). The second and unofficial photographer of the 2016 performance was Jaime Dörner, one of my three assistants, who, unlike Rasmanis, knew the concept of the performance very well. He documented the work for the entire duration of the piece.

Dörner is not a professional photographer and he took the pictures with his smartphone.

I gave him no precise instructions. Although Dörner is a theatre practitioner, and thus aware of the audience's role, his images focus on the Foreigner alone, who looks isolated and suspended within a timeless and spaceless dimension (Figure 10, Figure 11). Dörner did so partially unconsciously. He later explained to me that "loneliness" was the main feeling that *The Foreigner* instilled in him, even when there were ten people in the room. I had no official photographers for *The Foreigner* in Daegu in 2018; therefore, I relied on my three volunteer assistants, who were conference participants as well (Figure 7 and

Figure 12), and a member of the audience who spontaneously took pictures of the performance and passed them onto me afterwards (Figure 13). The photographic results vary and demonstrate varied personal experience of the work. A couple of photographs were taken by the *PSi Conference* official photographer, to whom I never spoke (Figure 14, Figure 15). When it comes to analysing the photographic data, I am conscious that the photo documentation is a subjective source, even from a professional. The differences between these images are visible in the following pages.

Because of these conditions, I had limited control over the photo recording of my works. Because my sight was impaired during both the pieces, I discovered much about the performance through the photographic documentation, instantiating the performative criteria of the unforeseen and vulnerability. Although I aimed to be clear from the beginning about what I wanted from the documentation, I discovered the potentialities of the documentation progressively through the practice-led methodology. When I know what I intend to gain from the pictures, it is necessary to communicate clearly to the photographers what I want them to capture. In terms of how to do so, I trust them and their knowledge of the medium. In this sense, producing the photo and video documentation is a collaboration, and I always credit these people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Captioning these images, I use the formula "Ph. Kara Rasmanis *for* Angela Viora" in the case of a paid collaboration, according to which I hired the photographer/video maker, or when they are paid as an employee by the institution/event within which I perform. For example, Kara Rasmanis took the photographs of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne as part of her role as the official photographer at Monash University. In accordance with Australian Copyright Law (2006), I am the copyright owner of the photographs. Using the "*for* Angela Viora" construction also signifies that I have discussed how to record the performance with them. When it was not a paid collaboration,

*Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* was video recorded differently each time according to the possibilities of the various locations. The footage and the photographs of *Mapping the Sound* during *PSi#23* at Melbourne University (July 2016) capture the audience participation in the performance, who shaped it by intervening directly and deliberately on the sonic environment. The performance was part of a panel in the Performance Studies International Conference. The Chair explained to the audience members that *Mapping the Sound* was a piece of doctoral research and that participating in the work implied being photo and video recorded. Conference staff member Luke Matthews assisted me during the performance and photo and video recorded it (Figure 9, Figure 16). Participants gave me their feedback orally as part of the Q&A session and I wrote it down.

I video recorded *Mapping the Sound* at the Matheson Library (October 2016) with two cameras pointed towards me for ethics reasons. As I have previously described, I gave the audience neither feedback nor explanatory forms. Through warning signs displayed across the library, I gave the attendees notice that a photo and video recorded performance was happening and they could choose not to cross the area. Because I performed in the large and open space of the second-floor lobby, I could not risk accidentally filming a person without their permission. Consequently, the performance footage centres on the performative action and does not show its impact on the audience. Their interaction with the work is nonetheless revealed through their written feedback, photographs, and their footsteps on the paper (Figure 18).

The Melbourne City Library, where I performed three times November–December 2016, for privacy reasons did not give me permission to video record the pieces, and I could not use the security camera recordings. I performed as part of the artistic collective E.P.A. (Environmental Performance Authority) during the performance festival *Melbourne#47—Sensing Melbourne Places*.<sup>4</sup> The recorded documentation consists of photographs taken by

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when the person has taken the photographs willingly and without my instructions, and they have given me the photographs and copyright ownership spontaneously, I credit them (e.g. “Photographs by Panayiota Dementriou”) and inform them about how I intend to use the images. For instance, one of the images taken by Dementriou of *The Foreigner* in Daegu is featured in Stefano Tomassini’s book *Tempo Fermo* (2018). The videos of the pieces have been edited by D.B.Valentine, a scholar and professional video artist whom I hired with the support of Monash University. Dr Valentine and I have worked together on the production of the videos, in accordance with my intentions for the work. I credit this collaboration as “Video editing: D.B.Valentine for Angela Viora.”

<sup>4</sup> *The Environmental Performance Authority* or EPA is a collective of artists from different backgrounds that operates in Australia and whose aim is to work according to the principles of “ecological performance.” The founders and coordinators of EPA are Dr Stuart Grant and artist Peter Fraser. I have collaborated with EPA since the beginning of my doctoral research. More information on EPA’s activities is available at [epaperformance.org/](http://epaperformance.org/)

professional photographer Alice Hutchinson, hired by E.P.A. (Figure 17). Warning signs about a photo recorded performance were placed throughout the library.

I performed in the art gallery of the library among other artworks. Even if not interested in the performance, many people would cross that area, and I could not ask each visitor for permission to use their images for artistic research. For this reason, the resulting photo documentation is a detailed account of the performative action that mostly excludes audience interaction.

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*Melbourne#47—Sensing Melbourne Places* is a site-specific performance festival produced and organised by EPA in 2016 and supported by Monash University and the City of Melbourne. The festival consisted of 47 performances over 30 days and nights taking place in various locations in the city. During *M47*, EPA engaged with everyday places to evoke and arouse sensations, associations, atmospheres and an awareness of their Indigenous and non-Indigenous values. *M47* included dance, movement, live art, music, sound art, video, photography and historical information.



Figure 9. © Angela Viora 2016, *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*, live performance. University of Melbourne (AUS). Ph. Luke Matthews for Angela Viora.



Figure 10. © Angela Viora 2016, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Monash University Performing Arts Centre (AUS). Ph. J.G. Dörner.

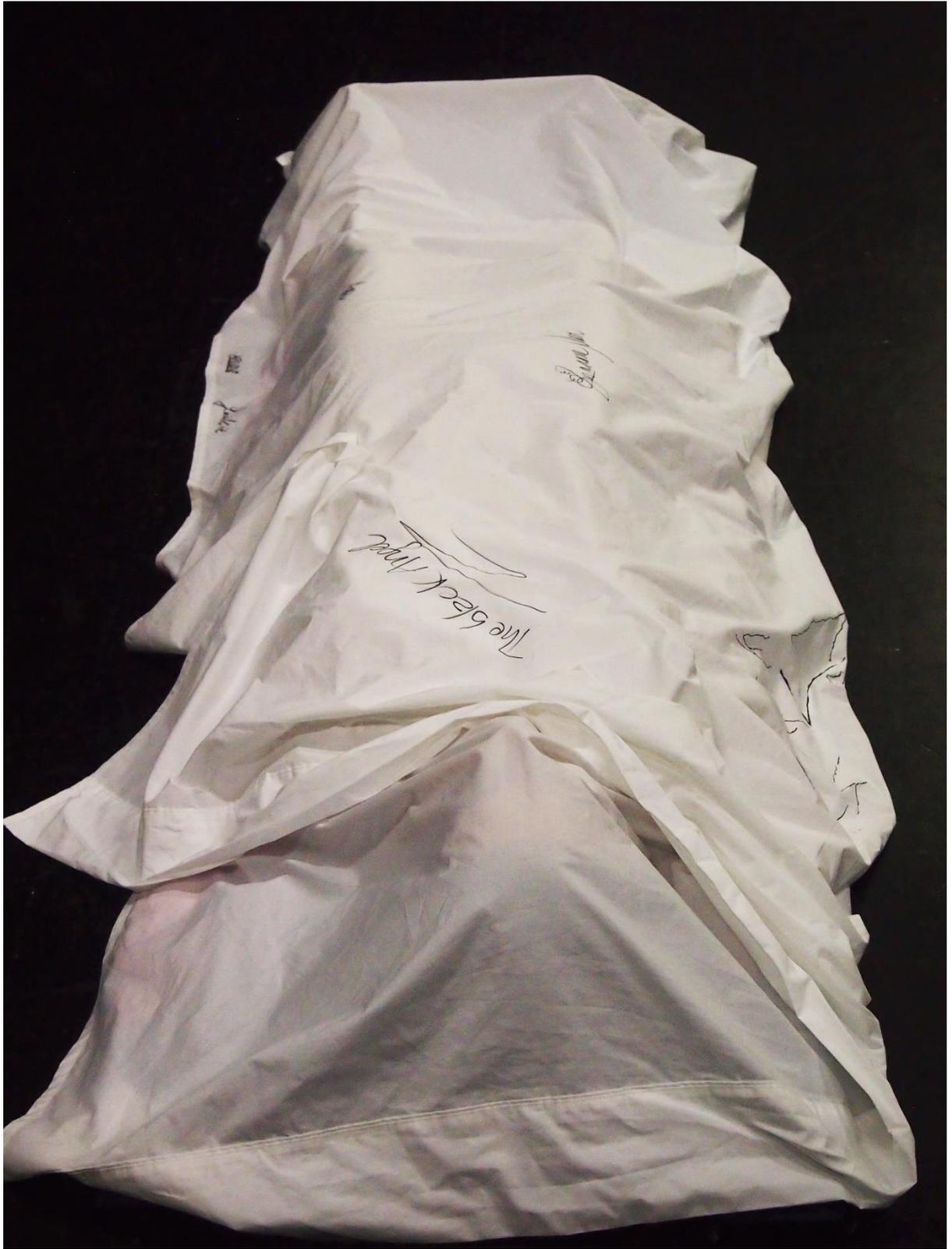


Figure 11. © Angela Viora 2016, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Monash University Performing Arts Centre (AUS). Ph. J. G. Dörner.



Figure 12. © Angela Viora 2018, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance.  
Daegu Art Factory (SK). Ph. Peter Burke.

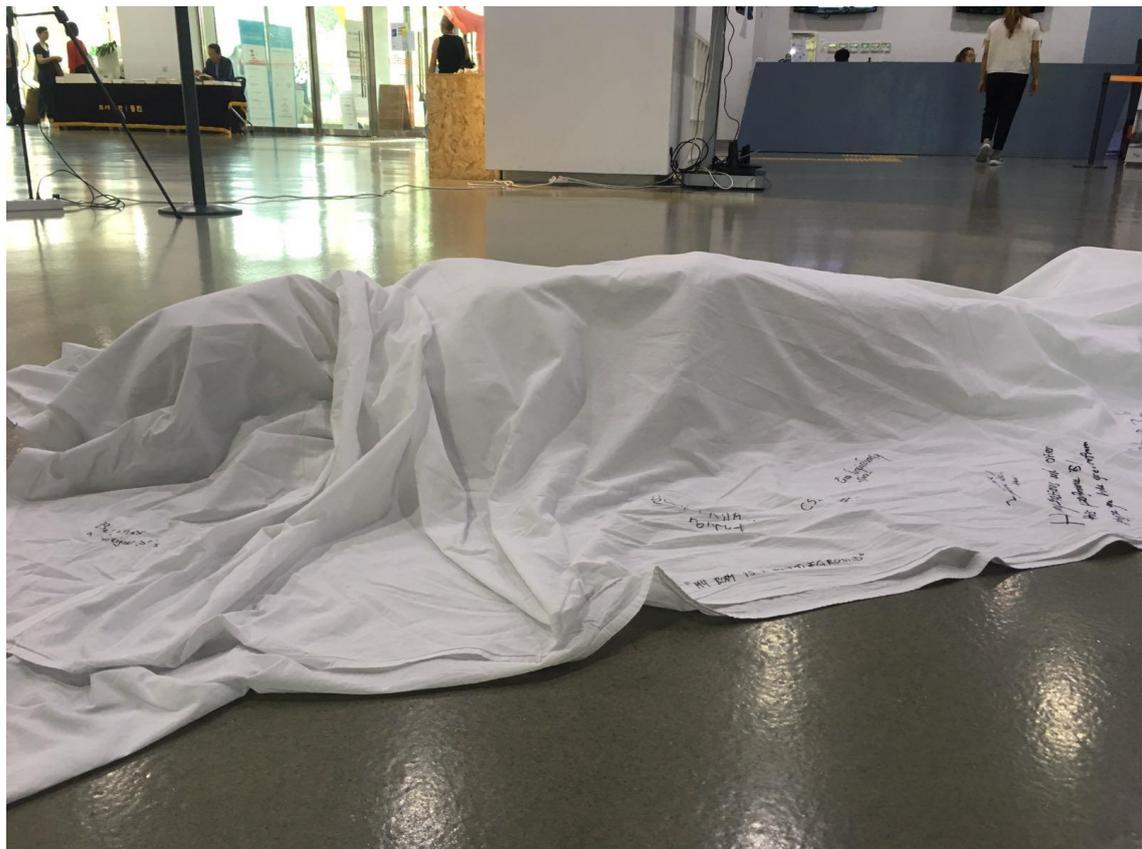


Figure 13. © Angela Viora 2018, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance.  
Daegu Art Factory (SK). Ph. Panayiota Demetriou.



Figure 14. © Angela Viora 2018, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance.  
Daegu Art Factory (SK). ©PSi and Daegu Art Factory Official.



Figure 15. © Angela Viora 2018, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance.  
Daegu Art Factory (SK). ©PSi and Daegu Art Factory Official.



Figure 16. © Angela Viora 2016, *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*, live performance.  
University of Melbourne (AUS). Ph. Luke Matthews for Angela Viora.



Figure 17. © Angela Viora 2016, *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*, live performance.  
*Melbourne #47 Festival*, Melbourne City Library (AUS). Ph. Alice Hutchinson for E.P.A.

- *The Objectified Traces*

The “objectified traces” are those objects that are part of the live event and whose final state reveals important information about the performance and its process. The objectified traces of *The Foreigner* are the cloths underneath which I performed and onto which the audience signed, drew, and wrote. The area of the sheets that the participants chose to write or draw on, and how they did it, reveals their approach to the work. By analysing these objects in combination with other data sources, I discovered that the audience members who wrote or drew on the peripheral areas of the cloth away from the performer’s body were those who felt intimidated by the presence of the Foreigner, the other audience members, or the video cameras.

The objectified traces of *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portraits* are the paper rolls on which I drew during each performance and the clothes that I wore. The writings, signatures, and drawings on *The Foreigner*’s cloths documented the actions of the audience in progress. The traces of *Mapping the Sound*, instead, are testimonies of my performative action. Although I moved and drew by following the surrounding soundscape that the audience contributed to, it is me who ultimately performed on the papers according to my own experience of the sonic environment. I chose charcoal as my drawing medium because it leaves editable marks, both on the papers and on my body. By working with charcoal, I wanted to make visible the connections between the elements of an environment.

The white top and trousers that I wore during each performance became part of the action of mapping the performance process. However, those garments are ephemeral objectified traces because I washed them after each performance. What the clothing recorded can be seen afterwards only through the photographic and video documentation. These clothes have an interesting status in the realms of liveness and process, documentation and records. They exist after each piece and are used for the following one. Like the photographs and videos, they do not vanish once the performance ends. However, the charcoal traces that the clothes carry on them during the performance process *as* the visual manifestation of the process itself follow its transiency. By observing my white clothes becoming marked together with the paper throughout the performance, many members of the audience understood the relationality between space, time, and body upon which the piece expounds.

An influential example of objectified traces is Parr's face in *Daydream Island*. During the performance, one of the artist's co-performers altered his physiognomy by sewing his face up and applying little toys to it. By following these alterations, another co-performer painted Parr's face, which resulted in a sort of Picassian mask. The painted toys remained after the performance, as did the drawn papers of *Mapping the Sound*. Parr unravelled and washed his face once the piece was over, as I washed the charcoal off the white clothes and my body. The objectified traces of both these performances are part of the documentation of the work. At the same time, these traces belong to the live performative process because they not only recorded the actions, but they *were* the actions, even when no longer remaining. Due to their processual *and* archival nature, I classify these performance-objectified traces as "in-progress documentation." There are two main elements which determine the data collection of a performance:

1. The nature of the work itself, which includes the concept, duration, equipment at disposal, and development of the work, especially according to audience participation;
2. The given space of a performance, both in terms of its physical location and the rules around it.

Such elements vary from one performance to another, even of the same piece. I purposely employ a plurality of data-collection methods that differ in structure and outcomes. And herein lies the importance of the combination of and collaboration between diverse methods—providing as extensive an account of the work as possible and displaying the possibilities occurring during the live event.

For example, because the visitors' footprints and drawings are not fully visible in the photographs and video footage of *Mapping the Sound*, records of the audience experience manifest in written feedback in the notebook. When not restricted to being considered merely an archive, documentation can become an experience to live as well. A prominent example of this is the book catalogue of Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View* discussed in the following section and in the final chapter of this thesis.

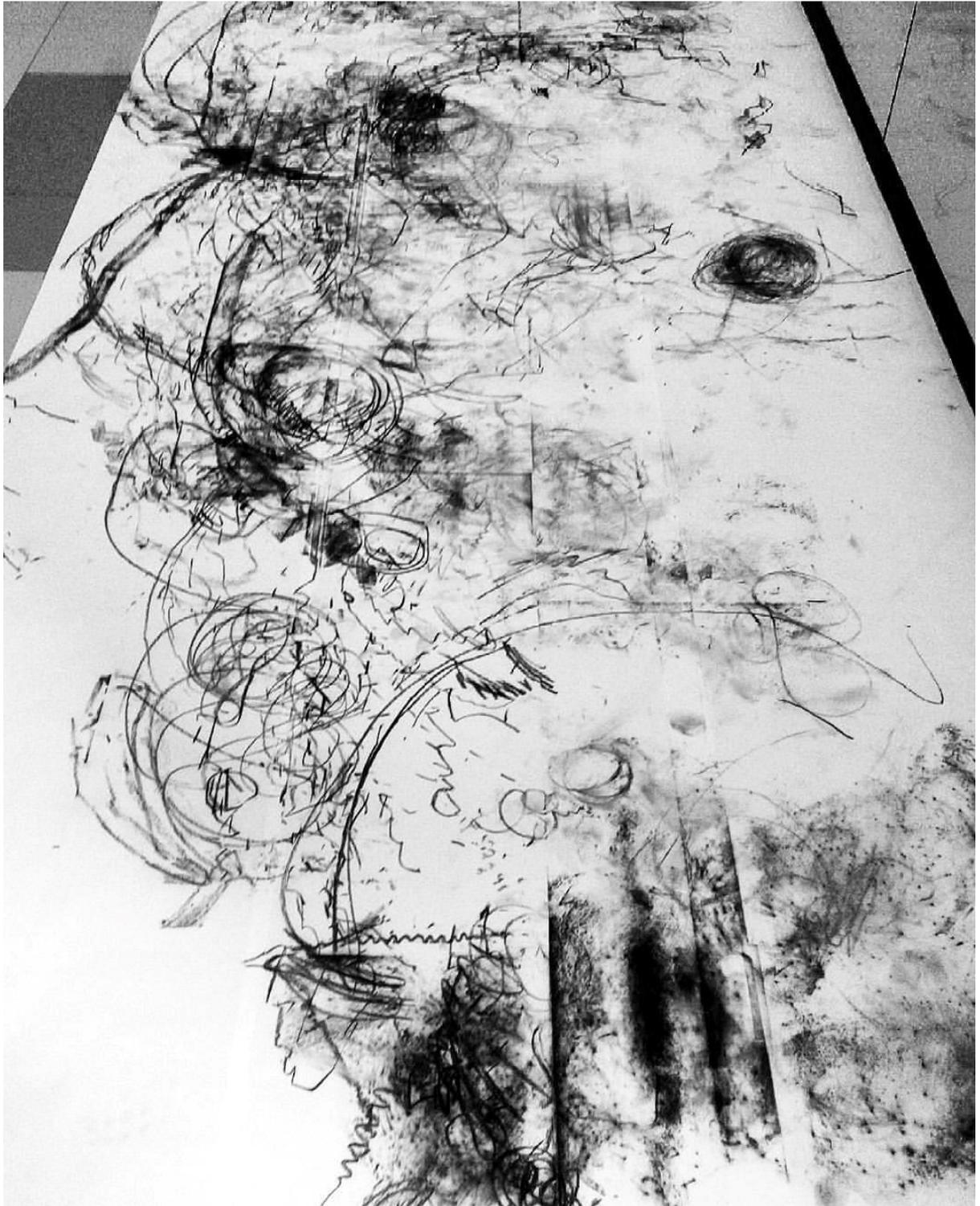


Figure 18. © Angela Viora 2016, *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*. Live performance.  
Sir Louis Matheson Library, Monash University (AUS).

### 2.6.3 The House with the Ocean View by Marina Abramović (2002)

#### *Importance of This Artist and This Performance to The Thesis*

Marina Abramović is considered one of the pioneers of performance art. She started performing in the early 1970s and continues today. She has been foundational to the history and development of this art form, especially durational performances, on which I focus in my creative and intellectual practice. Personally, my interest in performance art started when I discovered the piece *Imponderabilia*, which Abramović performed with Ulay in 1974. Abramović stands out from her colleagues for having brought performance art to mass audiences (Beatrice). Other compelling reasons for researching the work of this artist include her approach to the audience, her focus on performance art as a means of transformation, and her relationship to the media and the changing art world, as discussed in various chapters throughout this thesis.

I have chosen to analyse *The House with the Ocean View* because of the importance of the element of space in this performance, which is more prominent than in other Abramović pieces that focus more on time and body. Like *Daydream Island*, the title is already locative. In line with the practices-led methodology, I did not initially decide that *The House* would be the Abramović performance to analyse. Rather, I came to understand its importance and contribution to the project through the research process. In this sub-section, I describe the main qualities offered by this performance to my doctoral project, and I also discuss them further in the following chapters.

First, *The House* stages performance art in an art gallery. Abramović already did so with *Nightsea Crossing* but, this time, the performance becomes an experience to share and co-create with the audience, who are an integral part of the work. This affirms performance principles like those of Duchamp, but it contrasts with performance art in the 1960s, which flourished outside of official artistic circuits. Second, and recalling Ward's theorisation, Abramović walks the edge between art and life by undertaking daily actions before a public. Third, this piece works as an offer to the audience, which is what I also intend for performance art. Fourth, this status is reached through a durational experience of vulnerability that makes room for the visitors. Fifth, this outcome is so because the artist's body is the vehicle through which the audience members can experience the performance and, thus, put their own bodies at the centre of the figure-eight. Sixth, Abramović's body and actions trigger associations, mirroring, and projections in the public; this aspect is common to

the artworks analysed in this thesis and foundational to the performer-relationship theorised herein. This dynamic allows Abramović to engage in an energy exchange with the audience that charges the entire space of the performance by connecting all its elements together : the performance ecosystem. Finally, the documentation of *The House with the Ocean View* illuminates the relationship between performance art and mediation, as well as demonstrating the performative character of documentation. I discuss these qualities of documentation further in the following pages and in the last chapter of the thesis. The following pages describe the methods I used to analyse *The House with the Ocean View*. To understand this work as deeply as possible, I employed sources referring to both this specific piece and Abramović's art more widely, and I followed the same approach to study the practices of Parr and Mendieta.

### *The Official Catalogue of The Performance*

The main source upon which I draw is the catalogue of the performance *The House with the Ocean View* (Abramovic and Kelly). This is a piece of documentation that I describe as being “for those who were not there.” Abramović provides the reader with a series of frontal photographs of the artist in the House, one for each day, in which she wore a different colour according to the Vedic tradition (Figure 19). The pictures accompany a first-person daily account of the performance in the form of a diary. The catalogue states that the artist watched the video footage of the event and transcribed what she saw with no personal comments or explanations. For example, she wrote, “I rest my hand on the table and I bend over,” without mentioning why (Abramovic and Kelly 179 day 6). As a resource for a research methodology, I want to emphasise the value of video documentation for the artist-researcher. Thanks to the recording, Abramović was able to see herself performing and the audience behaving accordingly. I could do the same thanks to the video recording of my own piece, especially with *The Foreigner*. These examples speak to the importance of documentation of live events as a crucial part of artists' methodologies, even before becoming a testimony for posterity. I expand on the importance of such documentation in Chapter Seven in the debate around liveness, performance documentation, mediation, and re-performance.

The video documentation of *The House with the Ocean View* has allowed Abramović to produce further documentation for us, the audience-readers. The day-by-day account that she has written is a transcription of the video footage that audience-readers cannot watch.

The artist has offered researchers what the camera captured in another form. This allowance is what I discuss in Chapter Seven as “the materiality of documentation,” whose diversity contains various meanings that shape the recipients’ experience in multiple ways. The knowledge gained through the live event is different than that experienced via the video documentation, which differs from reading the book-catalogue and seeing the photographs.

This project adopts the principles of Abramović’s methodology in including diverse methods of data collection, analysis, and knowledge production. The edited video of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne, for instance, portrays a five-hour performance in seven minutes. It is obvious that this film lacks many important moments from the live event but such moments are captured by the photographs and the traces left on the cloth. The written audience feedback constitutes a further perspective on the piece. The percipients of the documentation, therefore, have to experience all these sources in conjunction to have a full sense of the performance.



Figure 19. Marina Abramović, *The House With The Ocean View*, Performance. 12 days  
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2002  
Ph: Steven P. Harris  
Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

#### **2.6.4 Further multimedia material on *The House With the Ocean View* and other performances by Marina Abramović**

The following contextualises Abramović's artistic practices as analysed in extant articles, books, interviews, talks, videos, and photographs.

##### *Live experience—The Abramović Method*

Although I have never seen this artist performing live, I experienced *The Abramović Method* at the Kaldor Public Project in Sydney in 2015 during the exhibition *Marina Abramovic: In Residence* (Abramović, *Marina Abramović: In Residence*). As part of an approved study-trip, I spent three days in the venue during opening hours to undertake the Method completely. Abramović has developed the Method over decades of research on performance and immaterial art, and its exercises relates to her artistic practice. Such exercises focus on breath, motion, stillness, and concentration, and allow an exploration of duration, endurance, and “being present in space and time” (MAI). Other data sources consulted during this study-trip include the catalogue of the event (Abramović, *Marina Abramović: In Residence*) and the live talks by Abramović and resident artists. The experience has allowed me to gain embodied knowledge on performance art informed by Abramović's practice and has fostered a deeper understanding of *The House with the Ocean View*, my own artistic work, and the practices of performance art more widely.

#### **2.6.5 *Daydream Island* by Mike Parr (2013)**

Along with Abramović, Australian Mike Parr is one of the few iconic performance artists from the 1960s who still practise performance art today. An important influence on my own work, Parr creates performance art in the way that I also intend it, namely, as that art form developing from the avant-gardist fine arts and evolving from the traditions of body art, conceptual art, and Minimalism. Like Abramović and other artists I cite, Parr's pieces put the body at the centre of the artistic experience, comprise but a few actions performed through repetition and/or duration for an audience, and invoke vulnerability and the unforeseen. I discovered the work of Parr once I arrived in Australia. While Abramović and Mendieta are more widely known in Europe, it is important to me to study an artist whose practice is inscribed in the same context that I am working in. Performance art, indeed, developed differently in Europe (Marina Abramović, Gina Pane, Joseph Beuys), the United States (Ana

Mendieta, Vito Acconci, Carolee Schneemann), and Australia (Mike Parr, Jill Orr, Stelarc) (Marsh, *Performance Ritual*).

Parr's approach to performance art differs from that of Abramović. These differences, which I discuss throughout the thesis, enrich my investigation by providing multiple perspectives. For example, the two artists have different opinions on reiteration, communication, duration, and the audience-performer relationship. While Abramović is in favour of re-performing artworks with the goal of crediting and preserving performance art, as her project *Seven Easy Pieces* has shown (Abramović et al.; Santone), Parr refuses to re-perform his works in the name of the authenticity of the performative action (Parr and Viora; Scheer and Parr). I examine this matter further in Chapter Seven on documentation, mediation, and re-performance. As I describe in Chapter Four, in her practice, Abramović sets a length of time to perform, and to stop performing early means failing ("Performance Art"). On the contrary, Parr advocates the open-endedness of durational works, namely "performing as long as possible," as he considers the break-down of his physical and mental limits as a "worth-thinking" moment (Parr and Scheer; Parr and Viora).

Both Abramović and Parr use performance art as an instrument to communicate with an audience. Abramović, however, includes the active intervention of the public as part of the action in almost all her works, while this element is less frequent in Parr's practice. Following this, Abramović usually clarifies for her audiences the concept of the work and their tasks; she is also proactive in explaining her practice to others. Parr prefers not to comment on his own works to avoid influencing their reception (Parr and Viora). He maintains this discreet and enigmatic behaviour even when his work is criticised and divides opinion, as happened for his most recent work *Underneath the Bitumen the Artist* in 2018. I see such an approach as part of the open-endedness fostering possibilities that characterise Parr's artistic practice.

Parr's pieces usually centre on the body-time relationship (Parr and Scheer; Scheer, "Introduction"; Scheer and Parr). Beginning with the title, *Daydream Island* emphasises the element of space in the performance process (Figure 20). My work in *The Foreigner* aligns with Parr's practice by "unconcealing" multiple spatial dynamics such as experienced places and evoked space: the theatre in which the performance happens and the refugee camps to which the piece refers. The theatrical setting simultaneously deceives and challenges the viewers' perceptions of the actions performed by Parr and his collaborators onstage. The

performers have their backs to the auditorium, so the public watches the performance on three mega-screens that recall the mediatisation of the asylum seeker issue. *Daydream Island* makes us reflect on whether experiencing such issues through media screens eventually anaesthetises us (Hazou; Marsh, “Mike Parr”; Scheer, “Art”), a question I pose with *The Foreigner*. This spatial arrangement interrogates notions of vicinity by distancing the audience from Parr’s suffering, which is paradoxically amplified by the mediation of the screens.



Figure 20. © Mike Parr 2013, *Daydream Island*, live performance. Carriage Works Festival, Sydney (AUS). Ph. Zan Wimberley for Mike Parr. Courtesy of the artist.

*Scholarship and multimedia material on Daydream Island and Mike Parr's artistic practice*

*Daydream Island* belongs to Parr's performative responses to the Australian asylum seeker detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island and so has resonances with his other performative works such as *Close the Concentration Camp* (2002), *Malewitsch [A Political Arm]* (2002), *Water from the Mouth* (2002), *Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi [UnAustralian]* (2003). I have adopted a variety of methods to analyse *Daydream Island*. First, the scholarship on the performance, as by theorists Ed Scheer and Anne Marsh, which has contextualised Parr's performance art of the last two decades (Geczy and Kelly; Marsh, "Mike Parr"; Scheer, "Art").

Following, the second method of investigation involves examining Parr's broader artistic practice, which started in the 60s-70s with body art pieces and incorporates drawing, engraving, and text-based visual works. Photographs and video footage of *Daydream Island* and other performances constitute another analytical resource deriving from catalogues, books, online databases, and Parr's personal archive (Parr and Viora).

*Foreign Looking: A study-trip to Mike Parr's major exhibition in Canberra.*

*Archival research, interview with the curators, and the experience of a live performance*

I took a one-week study-trip to Canberra in November 2016, where Parr's major exhibition *Foreign Looking* was held at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA). I attended the exhibition five times and I experienced each work and documentation piece thoroughly, taking photographs, notes, and drawings of the artworks and my experience of them. I also had unlimited access to the NGA library and archives, where I studied art catalogues, books, articles, and interviews on Parr's art. I took notes on these sources and transcribed parts of the texts because I could not always photocopy them. I met the curators of *Foreign Looking*, Roger Butler and Elspeth Pitt, whom I interviewed via a written semi-structured questionnaire on Parr's practice ("Is Performance Art Necessary?") and performance art more widely. Finally, on the last day of my research trip, I witnessed Parr's four-hour live performance *Reading for the End of Time*, held in the Gallery gardens. I took notes and made drawings during the performance and discussed it with the curators and I wrote down my experience of the event after I left.

I contacted Mike Parr via email in 2017 to ask him for permission to use an image of *Daydream Island* from the internet in an academic article (Angela Viora). After the article was published, I emailed it to him. Parr generously replied to me and we exchanged a couple of emails in which he gave me further information on the concepts behind *Daydream Island* and his artistic practice more widely (Parr and Viora). He also provided me with further images of the performance from his personal archive.

### **2.6.6 *The Silueta Series* by Ana Mendieta (1973-80)**

The following section describes the methods through which I collected data on Ana Mendieta's most famous artwork, *The Silueta Series*, developed over ten-years (Figure 21). Mendieta's project combines diverse art forms, so I have analysed this series by combining a variety of perspectives and methods from the fine and visual arts and performance art. Mendieta conceived her practice as belonging to painting and sculpture (experimenting with photography and video) rather than to performance art, from which she distanced herself (Landry and Viora; Rosenthal et al.). The works constituting this series, moreover, happened in front a small audience, at most consisting only of a few assistants, and sometimes none at all. Viewers experience the pieces through photo and video documentation. Why, then, analyse the series in a project on the live and dynamic process of performance art?

First, I consider these artworks as embodied actions in the landscape centring on the body-space-time relationship within performance art. Second, I analyse the actions of the natural elements on what remains of Mendieta's body in place in terms of ephemerality, as Mendieta's traces in the landscape were not meant to endure. Mendieta's *siluetas* evoke both union as symbiosis, in the way that they merge with the landscape, and fragmentation as distance, because the artist removed her body from the environment. I analyse the viewer's experience of documentation as the live and dynamic performative process of Mendieta's work in her series. I argue that, by leaving the scene, Mendieta makes the surrounding environment available to our perception and, thus, we can actively step into the work and dwell in it through dynamics of projection and identification. I expand on this perspective in the last chapter of the thesis, drawing also upon Philip Auslander's "performativity of performance documentation" ("Performativity," "Reactivation," "Surrogate Performances"). Finally, although encompassing various artistic media and practices, Mendieta's work must

be understood as a whole that may be “hard to circumscribe within formal definitions” (Merz et al.). The multidisciplinary and elusive character of her performance art is apt for analysis in a project such as mine.

### *The Scholarship on the Silueta Series and the artistic practice of Ana Mendieta*

Mendieta’s artistic practice has to be investigated as a continuum in which each artwork has evolved from the others (Merz et al.). In my research, therefore, I studied academic articles, monographs, exhibition catalogues, and books on the *Silueta Series* and her wider oeuvre.

### *Photographs and video footage*

In my research, I examined photographs of the *Silueta Series* from online databases, printed books and catalogues as well as visual material on her other artworks. Film of the *Silueta Series* is rare and hard to find. I saw some of them during *Ana Mendieta: She Got Love*, a large-scale European retrospective at Castello di Rivoli in Turin (IT) in 2013 curated by Beatrice Merz and Olga Gambari.

### *She Got Love—Ana Mendieta’s retrospective at Castello di Rivoli in Turin (IT, 2013)*

I attended this major exhibition before starting this doctoral project. The knowledge gained at that event informed the present research because it organically showed the full practice of Mendieta’s art, including some pieces that are less known, and infrequently displayed. The catalogue of the exhibition consists of scholarly texts, images, and interviews and constitutes a comprehensive data source for investigation of Mendieta’s work (Merz et al.).

### *E-mail Correspondence with the Galerie Lelong in New York, namely, the Ana Mendieta Estate*

I emailed the Ana Mendieta Estate to ask for permission to insert two images from the *Silueta Series* in an article to be published: *Silueta en Fuego* and one of the *Untitled* works. The estate, via their representative Sarah Landry, agreed and sent me two high-resolution images.

The captions of the *Siluetas* images often vary between sources and this can be confusing. Landry clarified these images by providing me with further information: The images in question are photographs and not stills from films, as some sources mis-state. Moreover, the pictures were taken by Mendieta and there was no audience present during the actions prior to shooting. In countertendency with many sources, Landry asked me not to refer to Mendieta as a performance artist because she dis-identifies as such. In my research, I investigate the *Silueta Series* as “Earth/Body Sculptures” according to the artist’s vision, instead of pieces of performance art (Landry and Viora; Rosenthal et al.). I have also obtained permission to use Mendieta’s images in this thesis.



Figure 21. Ana Mendieta, *Silueta en Fuego*, from the *Silueta Series*, 1976. Still from video.  
© The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, L.L.C. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the methodology according to which I conducted this project, which I call *practices-led*. This approach contributes to the tradition of practice-led research and practice-as-research by theorising the equal importance of artworks and theories and their active collaboration (union) in undertaking research and pursuing “reconfigured” and sharable knowledge. The “practices-led” model mirrors the performance ecosystem that it analyses because it develops according to principles of *equality*, *mutuality*, and *processuality*. I consider the theory a form of “practice,” like the artistic production, because it consists of gathering together diverse theories and approaches and recombining them in different ways, enacting the fragmentation-and-union flows occurring during a performance. In parallel with performance art, the research process produces knowledge *and* the research journey *is* the knowledge; according to this, my thesis became *practice-led* through time.

The “practices-led” is a methodology of reconfiguration, like the knowledge that it produces and the performance process it informs, because it constantly dialogues with the phenomena it produces, constantly evolving. This instantiates Bolt’s concepts within the “performative paradigm”: the capacity of art to “effect ‘movement’ . . . in the social and individual sensorium” through “repetition with difference.” I assert that the potential of the “practices-led” methodology lies in recognising

the generative potential of the ambiguity and the indeterminacy of the aesthetic object and the necessity for ongoing decoding, analysis and translation and [acknowledging] that instruments and objects of research are not passive, but emerge as co-producers in collaborative and, in the case of audiences, participatory approaches that may not be pre-determined at the outset of the research. (Barrett 3)

The “practices-led” model, I argue, furthers productive dynamics of union between the artistic practice and the methodology used to analyse it. Like Bolt’s “performative paradigm,” this methodology is an alternative to the “scientific paradigm” that develops according to the “repetition of the same” (Bolt) which, when applied to art, results in gaps, frictions, and the risk of obscuring the potential of the artwork (fragmentation). As Bolt argues, the “performative paradigm” is applicable to objects across the performing and visual arts, which my *PaR* methodology has certainly exemplified.

Difficulties can arise from the exchange between theoretical and creative practice because of their different natures and processes of development (fragmentation as gap). Drawing a parallel with the performance ecosystem, I argue that exegetical writing is the instrument that bridges the two types of (union as connection): the art-based practice proceeds cyclically, offering embodied and multidimensional knowledge; the theory-based practice develops according to rigorous structures that demand the methodical application of ideas. Acknowledging the capacity of academic writing to put the theoretical practice in a productive relation to the creative work can help those artist-researchers who, like me, often struggle with verbalising the insights gained through the artistic practice in a way that constitutes research and sharable knowledge (reconfiguration).

The Ethics Policy procedures to undertake performances also informed the knowledge-producing capacity of the project: if the exegetical writing situates the artwork within the research-knowledge framework of a doctoral project, then writing for the Ethics application situates the artwork-as-research in the real world, and this brought me clarity about the practical and relational aspects of my performances. The Ethics policies concerning recording performances and audience feedback collection informed the ways that I set up and documented my performances; consequently, this impacted the audience's experience of the live event and my analysis of it afterwards. I conclude that, in the realm of *PaR*, the university policies for undertaking performances as research is not merely an administrative task but, to paraphrase Latour ("On Actor-Network Theory"), an "actant" informing the ecosystem of knowledge production.

Another contribution of the "practices-led" methodology was its fostering the study of the works of other artists and their documentation that informed my artistic practice. In a process of *union* as communion and mutual influence, the study of Abramović's, Parr's, and Mendieta's practices led me to important "eureka moments," the discovery of common threads between their production and mine. I theorised the disappearance of the artist from the centrality of the scene while researching the *Siluetta Series* (art-based practice → theory-based practice) and the documentation and mediation employed in the analysed works by these three artists have informed my own performances, documentation, and analysis (theory-based practice → art-based practice). The presence of technological and recording media in Parr's performance and mine affected the audience's experience of the event and this discovery has informed my research in two major ways: one, the conception of documentation and technological media as agentic elements within the performance

ecosystem, discussed in Chapter Seven, and two, the acknowledgement of the “audience-audience relationship” examined in Chapter Six.

In articulating the “practices-led” methodology, I pay significant attention to the methods that I employed for gathering data on the performances. As part of an ecosystem, no method is prioritised, and none is exhaustive. These methods work together as a cooperative ensemble to facilitate research, analyse phenomena, and produce newly reconfigured knowledge, enacting the principles of fragmentation and union.

The next chapter discusses the agentic role of the element of space within the performance ecosystem.

## Chapter Three—Space

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain how I conceive and employ terms such as *space*, *place*, and *ecosystem* in relation to performance and process. I do so by discussing various theories on spatiality that have informed two important ideas in this thesis. The first significant theory is the importance of space in the experience of performance art. The second is the conception of a performance as a place in which “things happen”: a locus of possibilities whose process develops as an ecosystem. By analysing selected moments from the artworks, this chapter investigates the various manifestations of the element of space within the performance process, including physical and evoked space, place, locus, and so on.

I have argued in Chapter One that the performance process occurs through the interaction between the forces of fragmentation and union. I apply the theorisation of these two forces to the analysis of space within the performance ecosystem. The concept of union is theorised as a “network of relationships” in the works of philosopher Bruno Latour (“On Actor-Network Theory,” *Politics*) and geographer Doreen Massey (“Doreen Massey”, “Global Sense”). For political theorist Jane Bennet, union consists of the “mutual exchange” between agentic elements. Both these understandings are also present in the work of philosophers Edward Casey and Daniel Johnston and other thinkers on space and place whose work informs my research (Casey; Johnston and Casey; Myers). The study of spatiality implies the investigation of the body in space; this is theorised in the phenomenological notion of *attunement* as an element of union that informs various performative practices and research fields, including philosophy (Bannon; Merleau-Ponty), performing arts (Grant; Stewart), and architecture and geography (Diaconu et al.). The examination of the role of space in performance art in this thesis draws on these mutually informed theories.

### 3.2 Some Ideas on Space to Start With

In this thesis, I argue that, firstly, space is not a static container that merely hosts events: Along with time and body, it is an agentic element that shapes the performance process. Performance scholar Laini Burton asserts that “space acts upon bodies as much as bodies act upon space” (Burton qtd in Geczy and Kelly 94). My use of the notion of agency applied to both human and non-human elements within an environment comes from Latour’s *actor-*

*network theory* or AT (“On Actor-Network Theory,” *Politics*) and Bennett’s *thing-power* theory. These thinkers engage with sociology, politics, and environmental issues, and their ecological perspectives inform the notion of union in this project. Both Latour and Bennett conceive space as relational in terms of forces, effects, and networks. They invite us to rethink environments, from forests to social hierarchies, according to the relationships occurring among all their elements, humans and non-human, living and non-living. I draw upon these theories and those of philosophers Brian Bannon and Val Plumwood to conceive of performance as a non-fixed and non-hierarchical space. This means that,

1. The process of a piece, its development and outcomes, are continually reconfigured by the ways in which the performers and audiences relate to the spatial-temporal dimension of the work;
2. All the elements involved in a performance have equal agency in shaping it, from the living human bodies of the participants to the temperature of the room (space) and the duration of the piece (time).

Secondly, it is important to recognise that space, in performance art, is not only the physical venue in which the piece happens. Many spaces are involved in a performance and they are cultural, social, and may even be considered “evoked.” For example, *The Foreigner* performed in Melbourne in a university (2016) took place in different geographical, social, and cultural spaces than the same performance in the Daegu Art Factory during an international conference (2018). *The Foreigner* originated as a reflection of mine on migration issues involving Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. However, during its development, the piece was found to evoke further spatial contexts for each audience member. For instance, in Melbourne, many Australian participants thought of the asylum seekers’ situation on Nauru and Manus Islands; some Filipino participants in Daegu linked the image of the Foreigner to the anonymous corpses of the victims of the drug war that plagues their country; for an American visitor who identified as gay, *The Foreigner* recalled the 2016 Orlando gay-club massacre.

My performing body, therefore, became an instrument of union because it gathered together, in space and time, many different places that were apart until that moment: from the actual venue of the performance to the many geographical and cultural sites evoked by the work. Such places were experienced and, thus, brought forward in the performance by each

participant through their own bodies that carried multiple spaces with them. As I argue in Chapter Five, drawing on Katarina Mattsson's work, each present encounter results from past encounters, namely, from the embodied experiences that we carry within ourselves (Bromseth et al.). This facet of performance led the audience members to engage with dynamics of fragmentation or union; this was evident especially in Daegu because the participants encountered the performance by chance, without being prepared for it.

Union understood as "association and evocation of other realities" made some audience members feel connected to the work and participate in it; this happened to many people who defined themselves as migrants or who had multiple geographical and cultural backgrounds. The same factor, however, was perceived as disturbing by other people who felt "too much involved in the migration question to be able to participate": this was the case of a person from Greece who, like me, currently lives elsewhere; this person observed the performance from a distance but they could not emotionally bear to be involved in it directly.

In Daegu in particular, my performing body acted as a means of both union and fragmentation within the space of the gallery. I performed in the main lobby of the art factory, in a busy spot between the toilets and the lifts, among sculptures and installations. On the one hand, the still and bulky presence of the *Foreigner*, surrounded by two video cameras, interrupted the surrounding unity both visually and physically. The video documentation shows the puzzled surprise of those who happened upon the performance and the curiosity of the people who entered the gallery and saw the *Foreigner* from a distance. On the other hand, several conference participants and gallery visitors later told me that they saw the *Foreigner* while crossing the room or from the stairs but they did not realise that it was a performance, therefore they did not come closer. Due to my stillness, these people thought that I was one of the artworks in the lobby, a sculpture among sculptures: this is union as homogeneity in space. These examples reveal the deep bond between space and body as agentic elements that shape the performance process.

The other artworks analysed in this thesis demonstrate the multiple places simultaneously involved in the performance space. Like *The Foreigner*, Parr's *Daydream Island* examines the migration question: from the theatre in which it takes place, the piece brings on stage the asylum seeker detainment camps on Nauru and Manus Islands. In both these performances, the audience members are caught with no guidance in this convergence of places and they are forced to find their own locality; as a site of reflections and reconfigurations, the work offers them an experience of discovery.

The work of another artist analysed in this thesis reflects her experience of the fragmentation of diaspora when she was only a child: In the *Siluetta Series*, set between Mexico and Iowa, Mendieta attempts to reconnect with her mother country by bringing together elements from Cuban *Santeria* culture and North American Catholicism. Swallowed up into the earth, Mendieta stands in between these two worlds: belonging to them through the symbiosis with the land yet absent, her silhouette disappearing from both.

In another artwork, *The House With The Ocean View* by Abramović, inside and outside are two dimensions constantly at play, during which the Sean Kelly Gallery is transformed into a private yet shared sanctuary in which to find refuge from the bulimic restlessness of the city of New York. Once again, upon entering the gallery, the visitors have to find their own place and tempo in between these two dimensions. Finally, in *Mapping the Sound*, a single place is performed through different senses: The piece compares the corporeal experience of space by means of sight and hearing (and touch), then asks of the audience, are you still in the same place?

Returning to *The Foreigner*, this piece intentionally investigates the unwritten rules of how people occupy public spaces and how they behave in an unknown and unexpected presence. As agentic elements comprising a performing community, the audience members deal with space and time during a piece and then influence each other's behaviour. This phenomenon, which I call the *audience-audience relationship* and discuss in Chapter Six, goes beyond the control of the artists and also characterises the other performances analysed in this thesis.

Following the significance of space in the performance process, another major point of this thesis is that the qualities of relationality and processuality mean that performance is an ecosystem: performance as an environment hosting dynamic relationships of mutual exchange. Ecosystems involve processes generated by relationships and relationships shaped by processes.

The works of Latour and Bennett, geographer Doreen Massey, and philosopher Edward Casey can be used to productively analyse these qualities. Massey acknowledges the intimate and indissoluble bond between space and time as dimensions and speaks of "time-space compression" ("Doreen Massey"). Time is the dimension of succession, and space is that of multiplicity, with space hosting "a pincushion of a million histories . . . A cut through the myriad stories in which we are all living at any one moment" ("Doreen Massey").

Recognising space as a dimension of multiplicity means considering it a dynamic and multidimensional whole environment, crossed by what I call possibilities. Massey defines the specificity of place as a “network of relationships” (“Global Sense”); this perspective has resonance with the relationality theorised by Latour and Bennett, Casey’s theorisations and Heidegger’s articulations of being-placed-in-the-world (*Being*).

Let us think of the *Siluetas Series*, for example. I assert that there are several kinds of spatiality participating in this work, firstly the *non-lieux* of diaspora: “non-place,” anthropologist Marc Augé’s theorisation of those anthropological spaces of transience where human beings remain anonymous and that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as “places” (*Non-Lieux*, “Non-Places,” *Non luoghi*). Other spaces include Mexico and Iowa as the physical sites of the actions that reminded Mendieta of the absent Cuba; then, there are the hollows left by her body in specific spots, and finally, the places where her body went which we will never know. Time crosses all these coexisting places through the action of the natural elements that slowly alter the *siluetas*. As I discuss further in Chapter Six, we the viewers participate in the work by wondering in those landscapes with our eyes and projecting our own thoughts, emotions, and associations onto the concavities left by Mendieta’s body.

There is also the site that we choose to see and dwell in. There is a processual flux during *The Foreigner*, where the performance is experienced differently by each member of the audience who behaves and informs the work in certain ways. In durational works in particular, the same person can experience the performance in several, often contrasting, ways throughout time, which I examine further in Chapter Four. The process that I have described subsequently happens as a wholeness during the performative experience of the work. Therefore, the performance process expands horizontally like a spider-web, rather than vertically and hierarchically. Like in a network, each node leads to other threads that expand through a multiplicity of experiences which I call “possibilities.”

Fourthly, using a phenomenological framework, Edward Casey argues that the Western idea of space is an abstract concept. But *places* are real because the notion of place presupposes an embodied relation with the surrounding environment: Wherever we are, “we are always somewhere,” beginning with our own bodies. But I do not discount the idea of space, which Casey also acknowledges could not be abandoned altogether because the notion is so embedded in Western thought. Rather, I adopt Massey’s conception of space as a dimension (“Doreen Massey”). Casey’s phenomenological theorisation informs my approach

to performance art in this thesis and supports my centring the body in the performance figure-eight as the fulcrum of experience. My view aligns with that of philosopher Mădălina Diaconu and architect Juhani Pallasmaa, who investigate the human experience of specific urban environments through the corporeal senses by presenting a range of sensory methodologies. *Mapping the Sound* enacts these theories by employing the performing body as an instrument to record the specificity of the surrounding environment. Informed by Casey's understandings, the drawings made during this performance are maps of places resulting from the embodied relationships between specific bodies in specific sites and at specific times. *Mapping the Sound* presents not an abstract idea of space but the embodied and phenomenological experience of places. These theoretical and performative examples support the practice of performance art as an instrument to research the human phenomenological experience of being-in-the-world by "including the embodied constitutions of researchers in the process of data generation" (Low), which is the practice-led approach adopted in this thesis.

Fifthly, we come full circle with Martin Heidegger's idea of dwelling, which understands space as something more than an area to occupy. The authentic practice of dwelling emerges from a profound, embodied, and mutual relationship between humans and the surrounding world of which they are part ("Building"). As exemplified in *The Foreigner* and the *Siluetta Series*, I argue that the Heideggerian bridge is instantiated in the performer's body, whose actions trigger processes and gather and connect the elements of the performance space as I explain further in Chapter Five. Additionally, I use Heidegger's notion of *alethēia* to explain the performance art process, which acts in the world by also revealing the forces and dynamics occurring within its own artworks.

### **3.3 The Performance Process as an Ecosystem: Environment and Community**

#### The Performance Ecosystem

The scholarship presented so far has led me to conceive spatiality as a non-fixed and non-hierarchical dimension, within which the elements interlink in a relationship of mutual influence and exchange. I combine these theories to illuminate the processual character of performance art, which is more centred on the performative action than its results (Abramović, *Walk*; Akers and Dupre; Coogan; Marsh, "Performance Art Collaborations"). What emerges is an understanding of the performance piece as an ecosystem, namely a

specific environment within which “things happen” by virtue of movements and forces (Bolt; Scheer and Parr), dynamics of mutual influence and exchange (Bennett), and networks of relationships (Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory”; Massey, “Doreen Massey”). A term originally employed mainly in the field of biology but adopted by Arts and Humanities scholars in recent decades, *ecosystem* refers to a community of “biotic” or living organisms, their physical environment consisting of “abiotic” or nonliving components, and all their interrelationships in a unit of space (Khan; Oxford). While an ecosystem includes the physical environment, a community does not.

In other words, a community is the biotic or living component of an ecosystem; for instance, animals and plants. In addition to this biotic component, the ecosystem also includes an abiotic component, which is the physical environment consisting of elements such as air and the mineral soil (Khan). Within this framework, I also consider space and time as agentic elements (the abiotic components) involved in the performance process (ecosystem) together with the bodies of the performers and the audiences (the community of living organisms). As discussed in Chapter 1, Frazer Ward acknowledges the active role of the audience members within a performance by calling them a “community.”

Like for an ecosystem, the components foundational to a performance are process, energy, matter, moving flows, and relationships. As in an ecosystem, during the performance process, what affects one element of the work consequently impacts the other elements. Time, space, performer, and audience constantly interact and influence each other. Within this spatial dimension that is the performance, union and fragmentation occur and define the process as a locus of possibilities.

### The Performance Art Fourfold

The work of Martin Heidegger contributes to my theorising performance in spatial terms as a complex and dynamic ecosystem whose elements are inseparable. Heidegger’s essay “Building Dwelling Thinking” focuses on how human dwell in places. The philosopher distinguishes between the mere physical occupation of a portion of space and the genuine meaning of dwelling, which he defines as our primary condition as human beings in this world. Dwelling centres on the relationships occurring among the elements present in a place. Heidegger gives us the example of a bridge that crosses a landscape and, by doing so, connects shores, lands, and people. Attuning to a place and, thus, truly dwelling in it, means

setting it free, namely, letting its elements arise and manifest as they are. It is possible to do so in a performance by experiencing how such elements relate to each other. The process of dwelling, therefore, happens under the aegis of union. I link this concept to the theories of Massey, Latour, and Bennett in later sections.

In this section, I connect the notion of *Fourfold* (*das Geviert*) to that of dwelling in relation to performance art. The Fourfold is the central aspect of dwelling and consists of four elements: earth and sky, divinities and mortals. The Fourfold is a kind of fullness, a conception of the place-world as a whole; this unity of the Fourfold cannot be divided into its components, which function and manifest only in relation to each other. Likewise, the performance art process consists of time, space, body, and the performer-audience relationship, which manifest and are experienced as such through the connections occurring between them. It is possible to talk about “the performance art Fourfold” as a manifestation of union consisting of parts: this concept is instantiated in Ana Mendieta’s actions in the landscape. In the *Siluetas Series*, the artist lies down on the earth, under the sky, she receives the natural elements through her mortal body and awaits the divine, that is, symbiosis with the universe, which she calls “Mother Earth” (Merz et al.) (Figure 22).

Mendieta attunes to the place in which she performs until she disappears. Her actions show a complete interrelation, indeed a fusion, between time, space, and body that eventually allows the place to emerge by means of the actions of the natural elements. It is important to notice that the overarching character of the spatial concepts analysed so far, namely *ecosystem*, *dwelling*, and *Fourfold*, is of union. However, Mendieta’s work also instantiates van Gennep’s schema, according to which each process of unification is interrupted and then re-enacted by means of processes of fragmentation. The performance process is a unity that contains multitudes. To reach such a symbiotic union, indeed, the body of the artist performs fragmentation in space. First, this happens as interruption and alteration: Mendieta intervenes in the landscape by digging the figure of her body into the elements or shaping it out from them; through her silhouette, she makes fire, soil, flowers, sand, smoke, and water perform together before us. In this way, the artist marks her presence not only in the place but *as* the place: they become one thing, and this is union as communion and identification.

However, to really achieve union by becoming one with the earth, Mendieta performs the most radical fragmentation between body and space by physically removing herself from the site and, therefore, from the work itself. For her unity to be eternal, she has to leave in the

present moment of such a concurrence (the element of time), and this is the instant that she offers us in the images of the *siluetas*: from now on, that place is for us to reconfigure (Figure 23).

Many participants in *The Foreigner* asserted that their experience of the surrounding environment was determined by the presence of the performer's body within it, exemplifying the body-space relationship within the Fourfold: "The relation body-space can modify/create the space." This understanding allowed room for reflections on one's own body in space: Someone asked, "Am I experiencing a space or am I always creating it? I am asking this because I just realised [that] the space changes in its relationship with the body. I think I can only know the space on/through me, or does it even exist without me?" I return to the concept of the performance Fourfold in Chapter Five to discuss the performing body in terms of the horizon and in relation to space and time.



Figure 22. Ana Mendieta, *Untitled*, from the *Siluetas Series* in Mexico, 1976.  
© The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, L.L.C. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.



Figure 23. Ana Mendieta, *Untitled: Silueta Series*, 1976, still from video.  
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### 3.4 The Performance Process as *Alethēia*: Revealing “What Is at Work in the Work”

In the previous section, I applied the spatial notions of the ecosystem and the Fourfold to explain what the performance process consists of. This section employs Heidegger’s idea of *alethēia* to illustrate how such a process works as a source of experience.

Heidegger employs the Ancient Greek concept of *alethēia* to speculate on “the work of art,” which he conceives both as a symbol and an allegory because it “makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other” (91). Heidegger explains that the work of art is a “thing,” which is not “merely an aggregate of traits, nor an accumulation of properties by which that aggregate arises” but is that thing “around which the properties have assembled . . . something always already there” (93). Building on this idea, in this project, I explore the forces, dynamics, and phenomena occurring during a performance, and I argue that it is not a matter of inventing anything but of revealing. The performance process, indeed, consists of letting emerge and investigating the relationships between its elements “in the sense of *presence*” (93). This means investigating the processes occurring in a performance while it is happening according to its site, time, and body specificity.

I did not create the various soundscapes that I explored in *Mapping the Sound*: they were already there, independently of the performance, and the performance revealed the way that I related to the soundscapes. By sharing my live experience with the audiences, the performance also made them aware of their relationship with the surrounding sonic environment. The idea of “letting emerge,” therefore, can be connected to Heidegger’s concept of dwelling that, I argue, involves attunement to the relationships occurring within the performance ecosystem. As we will see, relationality is fundamental to *alethēia*, as well as to the theories by Latour, Massey, and Bennett considered in this chapter.

What is this *alethēia* that I understand as the way in which the performance art process operates? Heidegger tells us that, because of the historical process of “lost-in-translation,” we now translate *alethēia* as “truth” and truth as “correctness.” However, this term means “unconcealment of the ‘Being of beings’”: it indicates their essence, “an occurring,” a happening of truth “setting itself to work” (102). Barbara Bolt draws upon Heidegger, along with Butler and Derrida, to theorise the “performative paradigm” of the visual and the performing arts according to which the knowledge offered by a work of art results from its specificity. The term “performative” refers here to the capacity of these arts to generate knowledge by *doing* things in the world, rather than by describing the world. Unlike the

scientific paradigm, the knowledge offered by the performative paradigm “emerges from the mutability that is inherent in iterability” (138). Bolt’s perspective allows us to locate the value of performance art in the multiplicity of possibilities enacted by its process, which occurs differently each time, even in the case of the same piece reperformed. In *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound*, this was demonstrated in even my own experience of the piece differing from one event to the other. Performance art does things in the world through possibilities which emerge from processes of disclosure: *alethēia*.

Drawing upon Heidegger, I argue that experiencing through performance art is not a matter of correctness, but of activating and revealing—perceptions, thoughts, responses, dynamics, and relationships. To understand the importance of this concept in relation to a performance, we need to recognise that *alethēia* is the answer to the questions: “What happens here? What is at work in the work?” (Heidegger, *Poetry* 121). In this thesis, I ask, “What happens during the process of a performance?” I aim to investigate how performance art does things in the world through processes of fragmentation and union. How does it work?

Heidegger mentions an “arising from” and “going beyond the pure view” in the work of art. This means that, as a process of union, the work of art gathers and connects its elements to go beyond the mere display of them. In the case of performance art, such elements are time, space, and bodies; by linking them together through the artist’s actions, the performance art process reveals the dynamics and the connections among these elements and thus offers a live and embodied experience. The work of art implies “unconcealment,” which is usually enacted by means of processes of fragmentation.

For example, what is revealed in the startled audience’s distress in *The House With The Ocean View* when Abramović dangerously stood above the knife-ladder or balanced precariously between two platforms? That was empathy. Also driven by empathy, a woman approached Parr and his co-performers during *Daydream Island* and begged them to stop that torture. A woman similarly worried for my wellbeing for the duration of *The Foreigner* in Daegu and repeatedly asked the conference staff to check on me. Empathy operates in terms of fragmentation because it detaches the empathising subject from their discrete personal dimensions in the presence of the work. The individual safety of those people worrying for the artists was not at risk but they empathised with the artists’ experiences: By metaphorically leaving their own positions (fragmentation), these subjects moved towards the performers and became connected to the work (union).

And what did my body reveal to me, when my heart-beat increased consistently each time that someone came closer during *The Foreigner* in Melbourne? As I wrote down soon after performing, “rationally, in my mind, I was calm, and I had no fear. I *thought* that I was calm, but my body was telling me another story.” Such a bodily reaction, totally out of my control, revealed to me the energy of union occurring between me and the unknown audience members. At the same time, I experienced such a reaction-revelation in terms of fragmentation as a scission within my sensorial domain. Each time that someone wrote on the cloth, they connected to me and the performance, becoming an active part of it: this is union. But paradoxically, these people also enacted fragmentation by violating my personal space: this is why many people could not write on me. The cloth of the Foreigner worked like a threshold, like both a barrier and a point of contact (Figure 24). During this piece, which I created for exploring human relations with spatiality, I discovered that a performance is a much more complex reality: it is a dynamic and processual network of forces that relate to each other and equally involve all the elements involved.

In conclusion, as an allegory, a symbol, and a thing, a performance goes beyond itself as a work, already visible and present in the triad time-space-body, and reveals the dynamics existing among these elements throughout its process. The work of performance art happens as a process of revelation, which Heidegger calls *alethēia*, “unconcealment of beings.” Josette Féral asserts that performance art offers no illusions, has no representation, and tells no stories *a priori*; yet, through the “manipulation” of body and space, it makes stories arise in the world.



Figure 24. © Angela Viora 2016, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Monash University Performing Arts Centre. (AUS). Ph. Kara Rasmanis for Angela Viora.

### 3.5 Doreen Massey and Edward Casey: Space, Place, and Performance as a Locus of Possibilities

#### A Clarification on the My Approach to the Question of Space in Relation to Ed Scheer's *Spatial Turn*

This section grounds the discussion on relationality and processuality undertaken so far by clarifying how I employ the notions of “space” and “place” in performance art in relation to the work of Doreen Massey and Edward Casey (Casey; Massey, “Doreen Massey,” “A Global Sense”). Both these thinkers contribute to the discussion on space that I track in this thesis by identifying its status as somewhat neglected in their fields of research, geography and continental philosophy, respectively. Casey and Massey see this phenomenon as resulting from the paucity of attention given to space in favour of *time* in Western thought historically. Such a perspective may seem to contradict that of Ed Scheer, who talks about a contemporary “spatial turn” that has risen to prominence in performance studies. Let us clarify these approaches to avoid any confusion. Scheer is correct in identifying a spatial turn in performance studies evidenced in analysis of globality, ecology, territoriality, interculturalism, site-specificity, and so on. Scheer juxtaposes these large-scale “topographical approaches” with the subjective perspective, which centres on “the transitory and privately experienced time of the body” (1).

The scholarly absence in the study of performance art that this thesis aims to rectify consists of the lack of attention to the agency of space and the specificity of its process. The examples which Scheer provides concern the study of performance on a broader scale, in its relationship with the wider world. I focus, instead, on the analysis of the specificity of the performance process in spatial terms. Despite identifying this broad trend, Scheer's position contributes to the overlooking of space in the investigation of performance art; the phenomenon necessitates exploration of the phenomenological experience offered by a singular event in space and time. Scheer identifies a spatial approach on a global level to which he counter-proposes “an ethics of the subjective” based on a “return to the performative of bodies and gestures, in short, a return to a *durational* ethico-aesthetic to foreground the sense of experience over structure” (1). According to this view, the phenomenological investigation of the body analyses the experience of time—but I ask, what about space?

Scheer's perspective aligns with the scholarship on performance art that traditionally centres the elements of time and body through the study of endurance and body art, the questions of liveness and ephemerality, and exploration of corporeal limits; Scheer's is one of the most important voices in this tradition. By drawing upon such scholarship, I intend to offer a contribution to the field of performance art by attending to the element of space and how it operates within the performance process. I do so by incorporating the important contributions on space and place in performance and live art offered by Miwon Kwon (*One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art*), Mike Pearson, Misha Myers and others, and the more recent "spatial thinking" proposed by Laina Burton. My artistic practice embraces these diverse yet related perspectives and focuses on the agentic role of space within the performance process, itself conceived in spatial terms, and the bodily experience of space through the passage of time.

#### Doreen Massey and Edward Casey: On the Possibilities of Space and the Specificity of Place

In this thesis, I employ both the terms *space* and *place* while referring to the performative process because the two components intertwine. Drawing on Massey's and Casey's theories, I use the term *space* to refer to the potentialities of a performance as a live and processual environment within which various dynamics occur: this is the realm of *possibilities*.

*Place* refers to the time, the site, and the body-specificity of a certain performance: the factual realisation of possibilities; this is the realm of *specificity*. Massey defines space and time as "dimensions":

If time is the dimension in which things happen one after the other, it's the dimension of succession, then space is the dimension of things being, existing at the same time: of simultaneity. It's the dimension of *multiplicity*. (Massey, "Doreen Massey"; my italics)

Massey points out that space is not a flat and inert surface that we cross, devoid of time. Rather, space contains time and interweaves with it. According to the performance process figure-eight, we experience such a connection by means of our bodies and senses during a piece. Therefore, when saying "the performance space," I refer to a performance as a space in which many and diverse things can happen, according to the forces of fragmentation and union: this the dimension of possibilities.

For instance, let us think of *The Foreigner* in Daegu (2018). The space of the performance was the Daegu Art Factory as the venue in which the piece took place. This included structural elements such as the size of the location, its lights and temperature, the sounds, the floor, and so on. The performance space also included the way in which the bodies were positioned in the venue and the passage of time. In addition to the geographical space, let us not forget the cultural spaces contributing to the work, brought forward by the location (Daegu, South Korea), the various nationalities of the participants (myself and audience members), and those spaces evoked by the performance in relation to the migration question and the associations triggered in the visitors. The dynamics and phenomena that could potentially arise from this context were infinite. What arose and manifested as constituting the actual development of the work was generated from the relationships occurring among all these elements.

Edward Casey's notion of place offers insights into the central role of the body within the performance figure-eight. From a phenomenological perspective, Casey argues that "space" does not actually exist: it is an abstract construct created by human thinking. What really exists is "place," a defined "somewhere" in which humans always are, firstly with their own bodies. This means that "being placed" is a phenomenon that is not only spatial and geographical, but also philosophical, historical, cultural, and sociological because it informs our condition as human beings-in-the-world. Casey's concept on place as it can be combined with that of Massey is discussed in the next sub-section.

If we think of "space as dimension" in Massey's terms, then Casey's idea of place refers to the actual, individual, and embodied human experience of such a dimension. If the space of the performance as a dimension refers to the myriad possibilities potentially offered by a work, then, the performance as a place is the actual realisation of some of those possibilities while the work is unfolding. The possibilities, once placed in time and space, become experiences lived through the body and constitute the performance process in its time- and site-specificity. When I say that a performance is "a place in which things happen," I have already placed the performative process in a specific spatial and temporal reality. When speaking of performance art works, I refer to a piece of work that is performed by at least one artist, possibly before an audience, in a given place at a certain time. *The Foreigner* as a place manifests through the actions undertaken by the performer and by the different people who entered the Art Factory, who reacted to and participated in the work in many

ways, the dynamics that these behaviours triggered, and so on. The performance as a place is the actual work as we know it. The space of the performance is the environment of the artwork, which becomes a specific place in virtue of what arises from and happens within that environment. *The Foreigner* as a space consists of a still and anonymous body, lying on the floor of a museum and covered with a white cloth on which people can write, surrounded by two video cameras. According to the immanent forces of fragmentation and union, the possibilities become dynamics, the dynamics generate relationships, the relationships produce outcomes, and these phenomena combine into an experience for those involved. The space of the performance is a dimension, the performance-place is a locus of possibilities, and the performative process works as an ecosystem. It is untenable to separate the concepts of space and place within the actual experience of the performance. The term *dimension* indicates depth, while *locus* underlines the specific character of the performance as a phenomenal event happening in the world. The idea of *possibilities* refers to the dynamic character of the ongoing dance between fragmentation and union during the performance process, which continuously generates new reconfigurations in the experience of the participants.

### **3.6 Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett: Agency, Relationships, and Effects**

#### Bruno Latour's Actor–Network Theory (ANT)

This final sub-section and expands on the role of space in conceiving, understanding, and experiencing a performance. Having described the spatiality and the processuality of performance, I now focus on its quality of relationality. I draw on the works of philosopher Bruno Latour (“On Actor-Network Theory,” *Politics*) and political theorist Jane Bennett as they have theorised the study of nature and environment. I apply Latour and Bennett’s thinking to understand the conception of the performance process as an unstable phenomenon that does not operate according to pre-conceived parameters. Rather, the performance process emerges through constant reconfigurations based on the relationships between the elements of the performance, which evolve according to dynamics of fragmentation and union.

In this thesis, I employ Latour’s *actor-network theory* (ANT) that theorises nature and societies. ANT is a research methodology and an approach to social theory that was first developed at the Centre de Sociologie de l’Innovation (CSI) of the École Nationale Supérieure des Mines de Paris in the early 1980s. The main concept in ANT is that objects, ideas, processes, and other forces are just as important as humans in creating complex

relational situations. Humans and non-humans are “actors” in the sense of “actants,” namely, sources of actions (“On Actor-Network Theory”). Latour’s *Politics of Nature* proposes ANT as a new approach to environmental issues based on re-thinking the concept of nature itself. Latour does not propose to create a new kind of nature, just as performance art does not offer a new world to live in: the idea is to reconfigure what is already at stake, to perceive and experience situations through new parameters and from diverse perspectives. According to Latour, the modern world understands the environment by dividing beings into categories and putting them into a rigid categorisation that humans call “nature.” Latour proposes that we stop considering nature as an established order that determines beings. Rather, the opposite process should happen: The totality of beings, seen as elements that interact with each other, determine what nature is. Latour asserts that humankind should consider all beings, human and not, as autonomous and active parts of a system according to the relations existing between them. Because of their agency, Latour calls beings “actors” and asserts that they should all be treated equally; the differences between actors are generated by the network of relations and should not be presupposed.

I apply Latour’s perspective to the study of the performance art process. Like “nature,” a performance is not a hierarchical and static situation based upon rigid categories. As previously discussed, space and time are as important and influential as the performer and the audience within the performance ecosystem. Space and time are “actors,” in Latour’s terms, beings that act in the sense of “action,” with agency, “efficacy” as “source of actions” (*Politics*). They “can do things,” Bennett asserts, affirming Latour’s position; hence, the agentic elements in performance “produce effects” and “alter the course of events”: this is what constitutes the performance process (Bennett viii). Space, time, and body have to be considered each time in the contingency of such a process, which cannot be defined *a priori*, as argued by Bolt . Rather, the way in which time, space, and bodies interconnect determines the performance as such. Bolt cites Derrida and Butler to theorise the production of meaning offered by each iteration as “repetition with *différance*” evident in the different rhythms, processes, and outcomes of the various re-performances of the same piece .

After describing space and time as co-existing dimensions, “time-space compression” (“Global Sense”), Massey defines places as the “networks of relationships” that inform such dimensions. She describes the “sense of place,” the local and the global, as comprising

diverse individuals and social groups and such as jet-setters, refugees, and pensioners. Like places, performances are not static and if they

can be conceptualized in terms of the social interactions which they tie together, then it is also the case that these interactions themselves are not motionless things, frozen in time. They are processes. (“Global Sense”)

As a process, a performance generates from the co-presence of spatial and temporal dimensions. My analysis of the performances presented in this thesis demonstrates that, especially in durational works, the relations among those involved in the work constantly evolve. From boredom to attunement, from excitement to fear, the passage of time allows for a complex spectrum of reactions among the audience members and within each individual involved in the work. Addressing the presence of other people in the room, in addition to the performer, a participant in *The Foreigner* in Melbourne wrote that

it is like watching a performance within the performance. Each person I saw (at least 5) reacted differently to the body [of the Foreigner], some walked around it from a distance, some went straight to the body, each encounter was a different story. I experienced it as a performance within the performance.

Instantiating these relations another way this, writer and cultural critic C. Carr experiencing *The House With The Ocean View* talks about energy moving slower or faster and asserts that “there are definitely different ways of watching” (Abramović and Kelly 149). Her experience of the work changed over time and revealed the processuality of the interactions within a durational performance: “I’m distracted by the man’s energy . . . Or maybe I’m more aware of people energy here” (Abramović and Kelly 150). Carr initially describes the energy of that man disrupting her concentration (fragmentation), then she wonders whether this happens because of an invisible connection, the union between her and the rest of the audience. One of my assistants, who experienced *The Foreigner* in Melbourne from beginning to end, described his experience of duration as changing “from very slow to quick. I guess at the beginning was slow, did not know what to do, then when focussing on the body and the breath of the performer the time went quickly.” Informed by Massey and Latour’s theorisations and the knowledge emergent from my performed artworks, I propose a

conception of performance that is spatial, relational, and processual. The performance ecosystem can productively be understood as a complex of forces, flows, and interconnections to which each person relates differently. As in Bolt's performative paradigm, the experiential knowledge offered by each performance arises from the specificity of its process, whose value lies in the constellation of relationships among its elements "meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (Massey, "Global Sense").

Latour is aware of the difficulties of his theory, which implies looking at the phenomena of nature in a different way every time, and successful applicability is not guaranteed (*Politics*). However, he argues that we should try to adopt the ANT perspective given current environmental problems. He has critiqued phenomenology because of its ostensible anthropocentrism that he argues can lead to categorisation, hyper-separation, and delusions of mastery (*Politics*). However, it could be argued that he cannot escape his human perspective because he is a human being (Bannon; Gammon). Bennett, for example, attempts to explore beyond humankind while being a human being. Other theorists have productively combined Latour's ideas with phenomenology (Bannon), and in this thesis, I draw on Latour's works alongside those of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

Analysing the performance art process is like trying to break a code that is always rearranging itself. I am conscious of my attempt to study the performance art process, so elusive and centred on its specificity, through a phenomenological approach based on the subjective experience of the participants. Similarly, I value acknowledging the agency of non-human elements in a performance from my subjective and human point of view through a phenomenological approach. Despite the potential difficulties of such a combination methodology, in my pursuit of producing new and valuable knowledge, I affirm Bennett's assertion that, while resisting demystification, "one needs, at least for a while, to suspend suspicion and adopt a more open-ended comportment," which can lead to "positive formulations of alternatives, alternatives that will themselves become the objects of later critique and reform" (xv). Elusiveness, unpredictability, and the potentialities intrinsic in risks are essential features of performance art. Scholars need to acknowledge and value these characteristics in theorisations of performance art, and not only in its artistic practice. Bolt's performative paradigm is one example of this important acknowledgement in the theoretical space. Theatre and Performance scholar John Freeman reminds us that approaches to

researching performance have been changing across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries because of the fluid nature of performance that “strives always for change,” is ephemeral, and works with the unforeseen (32). Performance artist Jill Orr supports this view by describing performance art as a practice “in constant evolution” (“Some Thoughts”).

### Jane Bennett’s *Thing Power*

Political theorist Jane Bennett is renowned for her work on nature, ethics, and societies. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, she acknowledges the active participation of nonhuman forces in events by examining the political and theoretical implications of the vital materialism of physical substances and phenomena. For example, she reflects on the vital power of material formations such as landfills, which generate lively streams of chemicals and omega-3 fatty acids that can transform brain chemistry and mood. Bennett’s investigation is informed by the study of theorists who speculated upon the vital force inherent in material forms, such as Lucretius. Bennett theorises a “vital materiality” that runs through and across bodies, both human and nonhuman. She takes from Latour the definition of *actants* and *agency* to define *vitality*, namely “the capacity of things . . . to act as quasi-agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii). Bennett calls this vitality *thing-power*. I argue that this unifying concept is evident in the art of Mendieta, who perceived “one universal energy that runs through everything [and] animate[s] the world.” By “everything,” the artist means humans, insects, spectres, plants, and even the galaxy (Mendieta qtd in Blocker; Merz et al.; Rosenthal et al.).

In light of this vitality, and in alignment with Latour and Massey, Bennett proposes to examine phenomena according to the web of forces affecting situations and events. The effects can involve temperature, chemical alteration, physical perceptions, emotions, and even mood. Likewise, the temperature of the room and its smells and sounds can affect the actions and perceptions of those involved in a performance. These elements are vital and dynamic, even if nonhuman. They have agency in virtue of their complex interrelationships, entanglements, and propensities for affecting and being affected. Bennett’s argument contributes to the recognition of temporal and spatial elements as agentic in determining the performance process.

In scholarly fields that have tended to consider time and space as mere instruments in the hands of the persons involved in performance, one of the original contributions of this

thesis is my analysis of the broader agential forces comprising the performance process beyond the performer. I identify this agential capacity as visible in *Mapping the Sound*, whose development relies upon the surrounding sonic environment. The sounds occurring in the site of the performance, over which I have no control, determined the movements of my body and the drawings that I made; this changed within the same performance and throughout the different events and, in turn, affected the experience of the audience in diverse ways. Eventually, the soundscape shaped the process of this work and determined the audiences' experience of it and my own. As I had hypothesised before performing *Mapping the Sound*, the element of space actively determines the development of a performance, and therefore, the same piece performed in different places result in different performances. This instantiates the “repetition with *différance*” theorised by Bolt .

Another example of agentic space was in *The Foreigner* at the Monash Performing Arts Centre (2016), which I could perform motionless for almost five hours, despite being naked, because the room was warm. The warmth allowed me to remain quite still and, as already mentioned, my stillness triggered different reactions and associations in the audience members in both performances of this piece. The room in which I performed in Melbourne was quiet except for the noise of the heater that pervaded the space. At first, I perceived this petulant sound as disturbing because it interrupted the quietness around me and my attempt to concentrate (fragmentation). But once I accepted this noise that I could not stop as part of the work, it became a rhythm to which I synchronised my breath to remain focused on the performance, an element of union. Some visitors were annoyed by the sensory collision between the persistent sound of the heater and the stillness of my body and that perception gave the performance an atmosphere of suspension and slowness for those visitors. Such an atmosphere was fostered by the minimalism that characterised the small room whose bareness left little space for distraction. By contrast, *The Foreigner* in Daegu happened in a spacious and busy environment whose noise disrupted my concentration and undermined my endurance.

### **3.7 Conclusions**

In this chapter, I examined space as a dimension crossed and informed by people, time, and phenomena. I argue that space is an agentic element comprising the performance process because it informs how a work is performed and received, like time and bodies also do. Space consists of the cultural and social elements that inform the piece, as well as the physical

venue in which it takes place, so the agency of space lies in its multiplicity. Building upon the theories of Latour, Bennett, Massey, and Casey, I presented a conception of the performative process in spatial and non-hierarchical terms by understanding it as an *ecosystem*: a living and dynamic dimension whose agentic elements intertwine in relationships of mutual influence and exchange (union). This conceptualisation contributes to bridging two major gaps in the scholarship on performance art:

1. The significant attention paid to the *body* focuses on the effects of a performance on artists and the audiences, which leads scholars to often read space and time as simple tools manipulated by those involved in the event. Through the analysis of the artworks, I claim that the various manifestations and meanings of space inform both the performers' and the audiences' experience of the work.
2. When investigating the performance process, scholars often study the performer-audience relationship through *body*, and durational works through *time*; The significance of *space* as an "actant" during the performance process is neglected. I claim that correcting this oversight allows scholars to understand how performance art is capable of challenging, impacting, and reconfiguring people and situations.

To explain the performance process as "a place in which things happen," I built upon Massey's conceptualisation of space and time as intertwined dimensions ("Doreen Massey," "Global Sense") to argue that "the space of the performance" is a dimension of *possibilities*, a space in which diverse things happen according to the forces of fragmentation and union. I then drew on Casey to assert that the "performance as a place" refers to the actual enactment of those possibilities according to the subjective and embodied human experience of the performative process: it is the dimension of *specificity*. Therefore, I conclude that the power of performance art lies in its processuality as a "dimension of possibilities" rising from the fragmentation-and-union whirlpool; the performance, then, actively engages with the place-world according to the dynamics of fragmentation and union in distinct phenomena of reconfiguration.

I applied the Heideggerian idea of the *Fourfold* and *dwelling* ("Building") to performance as a dimension to describe the inseparability of space, time, and body that constitutes the unity of the performance ecosystem. Artists and audiences "dwell" in this

dimension and “attune” to the performance process to let the relationships among its elements emerge and manifest in their essence (“Building”); they do so by “giving up to the surrounding environment, directing and being directed by it” (Kwon, “One Place after Another: Notes”). Thus, as *alethēia*, the performance “unconceals” (Heidegger, *Poetry*) forces, energies, dynamics, and the relationships of fragmentation and union occurring between its elements.

The connection among the elements of the performance ecosystem and the complex co-presence of the forces that occur in it are visible in a piece of audience feedback from *The Foreigner* in Melbourne (Figure 25):

I have been in that space before, which I entered in different occasions, and what called my attention in this experience was how a covered body in the middle of the room change the dynamics in the room/space. When I entered, the kinetic of my own body changed, to find the space IN-habited by the covered body and the three cameras make me aware of my own presence, I slowed down, I was aware of my breath, I was aware in the way my feet were placed on the floor. The space at the beginning, as the room, became irrelevant, the offer of a covered body, was so strong that space lost relevance. That was at the beginning, then the silence and the body changed my way of experiencing the room, I was aware of the little noises, the reflection of the light on the floor, textures, etc. . . .

Such a response evinces the relationality characterising the performance process and its grounded site- and time-specificity, which is lived through the body as the locus of sensorial experiences.

The following pages analyse this mutuality from the perspective of time.



Figure 25. © Angela Viora 2016, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Monash University Performing Arts Centre (AUS). Ph. J.G. Dörner

## Chapter Four—Time and Duration

### 4.1. Introduction

Time is a slippery concept to frame. Each definition that applies to it sounds reductive. Time can take a multitude of forms because it can be experienced in multiple ways; in this way, time is reminiscent of water. It is not by chance that philosopher Heraclitus referred to the stream of a river to elaborate his notion of *panta rei*, “everything flows,” and to point out that no moment is the same as another (Graham). Dance and theatre scholar Stefano Tomassini talks about “il fiume del tempo,” namely, “the river of time,” in his investigation of contemporary performances that challenge and rethink constructs of time.

Saint Augustine of Hippo asserted that humans measure the passage of time according to their own perception of it: “When I measure time, this is the effect that I measure” (Agostino; Azimi et al. 363). For the ancient philosopher, time is an extension of the human soul and a reflection of the mind; in fact, “what then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asked it, I know not (I hesitate), and I will be amazed” (Agostino; Azimi et al. 362). This is the approach adopted in this thesis: in performance art, time is the *experience* of time. As with the investigation of the body in Chapter Five, I do not attempt to define what time is, but I explore the various manifestation of “time *as*” within the performance ecosystem. This approach focuses on the agentic role of time in relation to the elements of space and body, in durational works in particular.

According to the multiple expressions of fragmentation and union, time manifests in various modalities during the unfolding of a piece and this creates a spectrum of possibilities to experience. The performance ecosystem develops through time, allowing things to happen: in this sense, the element of duration is the offer. In this chapter, I discuss the various approaches by means of which I understand the meaning of duration, which is a phenomenon to consider within each unique performance process.

Like space, time is a dimension that implies relationality, multitudes, and depth (Massey, “Doreen Massey”): it is a place that one can descend upon and tune into through the embodied experience of performance art. Performance artists and art theorists such as Marina Abramović (*Walk*), Mike Parr, Blair French, and Lana Shalson, among others, acknowledge the capacity of durational art to allow those involved to fly “into rather than out of time” (Geczy and Kelly 139). This is so because, as French observes, durational works “are

inherently inquisitive and speculative—uncertain even—rather than declamatory” (263). In the running river of time, the practice of duration allows those involved to dive under the surface.

This chapter first offers a brief overview of durational works in the history of art to show that there are different ways to perform duration. This section describes the influence of Abramović and Parr on both my artistic practice and this thesis. Second, and following, I pay attention to the relationship between performance art and the notion of time in contemporary society. Body and performance art of the 1960s and 70s challenged the art market by working against the art-object economy; in those days, there were the unsellable bodies of the artists as both artistic subjects and objects that offered ephemeral actions as artworks. Today, durational performance art challenges the *time-market* by offering non-production-oriented actions whose only purpose is to happen. This phenomenon proves once again the capacity of performance art to constantly dialogue with and respond to contemporaneity, as discussed in Chapter One. Within the perspective of the time-market and ephemerality, I investigate the aesthetic of happening that characterises performance art.

I do by discussing what I call the “present-tense space of now” as the circular dimension that opposes the linear conception of the time typical of Western culture. I draw upon Stefano Tomassini’s notion of *tempo fermo*, namely, “fixed time” or “still time” and Robert Nelson’s “ontology of happening.” Whether we look at it from the perspective of “freezing time” proposed by Tomassini or as an event that “be-falls,” as Nelson asserts, the time of the present moment is the dimension in which performer and audience encounter each other in the work, and the audience becomes present to the performance. Such a discussion introduces the third part of the chapter, in which I propose three ways to understand duration in performance art: *performed time*, *experienced as lived-through time*, and *experienced as perceived time*. In addition to these three, a fourth kind of temporality contributes to the understanding of duration: *the time of the performing body*. This perspective builds upon theorisations of time as a dimension consisting of diverse and intersected layers (“Doreen Massey,” “Global Sense”). This approach draws upon various theories on time in conjunction with the outcomes of my performances and the vision of the works by Abramović and Parr. The durational practice of these two artists furthers the notion of duration as slowness and repetition that characterises my artistic production, which is discussed in the final section.

## 4.2 Various Ways to Perform Duration: Short, Long, Task-Based, and Open-End

### Short and Long Duration

The term *durational* applied to a performance puts an emphasis on the element of time as part of the work. Different approaches exist to performing duration in performance art. According to the clock-based perspective, duration consists of the length of time undertaken by the artists to perform their actions: this is the so-called “chronological duration” (Scheer, “Space”). Within the clock-time frame, a performance can be “short durational,” as in the case of *Shoot* by Chris Burden (1971), which lasted for the time of a gunshot; otherwise, a piece can be “long durational” and focusing on the passage of long periods of time, lasting for hours, days, weeks, and even years. Many performances by Marina Abramović and Mike Parr are of this kind, so too are the one-year pieces by Tehching Hsieh; these works fall into the realm of so-called *endurance art* and usually involve stamina, pain, and exhaustion. In this thesis, I analyse Abramović’s *The House With The Ocean View* (2002) that lasted for twelve days non-stop. Long durational performances can be continuous in time yet include breaks; an example is *And for today ... nothing* (1972), during which artist Stuart Brisley lay in a bathtub full of black water, progressively rotten meat, and flies, for two hours a day for two weeks.

I performed *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* each Monday from 12 pm onward over a period of one month at the Melbourne Library (2016).

Influenced by Minimalism and sculpture, many body art pieces from the 60s and 70s were task-based: this means that their duration depended on the actions undertaken, which constituted the concept of the work itself. *Push tacks into your leg until a line of tacks is made up your leg* is a task-based piece performed by Parr in 1973; the performance terminated once the artist had completed the task of, literally, pushing a line of tacks into his own leg. *Daydream Island* (2012), by the same artist, is a more recent example of this kind of performance, although this piece has a broader and clearer reference to social issues.

The piece lasted for 80 minutes, which is a relatively short time for Parr, and saw the artist sitting still while his assistants sewed up and painted his face. 80 minutes was the time given to Parr by the festival hosting the performance, and the artist and his co-performers completed the task within that time. As Abramović explains, performers must always deal with a “given time” and a “given space” in their work (*Walk*).

Open-Endness and Stamina: Union and Fragmentation in the Durational Works of Marina Abramović and Mike Parr

Mike Parr's major contribution to this thesis, in terms of duration, is the open-end approach, which is, "performing for as long as possible" (Parr and Scheer; Scheer and Parr). This means not setting up in advance a precise time to perform for. For Abramović, to stop performing in advance means failure to her (*Walk*, "Interview"). This way to approach time offers unity as an escalation that eventually leads the artist to reach what she calls her "True Self" beyond her physical and mental boundaries ("History"). This experience of deep transformation allows Abramović to enhance her perceptual capacities and to establish a profound energy connection and exchange with the audience (*The Artist Is Present*; "Marina Abramović: An Art"; "History"; "Marina Abramović: The Artist Speaks"). It is important to note that there is no rule to establish how long a long durational piece ought to be. Six hours is the minimum length for Abramović and the artists whom she mentors ("Marina Abramović: Advice to the Young"; *The New York Times*). Despite much research, the reason for this precise period is obscure to me. *Rhythm 0* (1974), one of her first and most renowned performances, lasted for six hours and this might have influenced her subsequent practice. Today, many durational performances last for the opening hours of the galleries and museums in which they take place (Shalson). This is the case of Abramović's *The Artist Is Present* and *The House With The Ocean View*, the latter extending beyond the public visiting hours (fig.26).

My performance of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne had a given time of six hours after which the room was booked for other activities. I had to work around the schedules of the public places that hosted *Mapping the Sound*, such as libraries and universities. Parr performed *Daydream Island* as part of the Carriageworks Festival in Sydney, and 80 minutes was the time that he was given by the organisers of the event.

A clock-time length might not seem that much, yet the performance becomes durational when the action undertaken requires a great amount of control, willpower, and stamina to be performed, even for less than a hour. This is the case of slow-motion pieces, in which tasks are performed at an unnaturally slow pace. Slow-motion walking is an example of this and is a pillar of the Abramović Method, which I undertook.<sup>5</sup> The role of slowness, as a

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<sup>5</sup> In 2015, I took a three-day study trip to the Kaldor Art Project in Sydney. The venue hosted an event called *Marina in Residence* that included an artistic residency, the guided experience of The Abramović Method open

performative practice of duration, is of union between space and body through time. Undertaking actions in slow-motion, like Abramović did in *The House*, allows the artist to become sensitised to each detail of their actions and aware of the surrounding environment. This is so because slowness unveils the relationship between the body performing in slow motion and the space in which those actions happen, and establishes that that body and that space are not two separate entities (Abramović *Marina Abramović : In Residence / Edited by Sophie Forbat*).

The reconfiguration resulting from this practice affects the witnessing audience as well because their attention is drawn “to the sequence of actions that make up each step, ad infinitum” (Linz in Abramović *Marina Abramović : In Residence / Edited by Sophie Forbat* 19). In *The Foreigner*, maintaining stillness for one hour is already challenging, so I endured it by breathing as slowly and deeply as possible.<sup>6</sup> Activities such as slow-motion and stillness can induce the “duration effects,” namely, enhancing the senses and vulnerability in a short time.

These examples address the question of the time experienced during a performance as an alternative form of duration to the chronological time of daily life, which I investigate in the following pages. Regardless of its extended or contained length of time, Scheer tells us that durational art is “an art practice that accentuates the passage of time as a key to understanding the work” (Parr and Scheer 49). Finally, Tania Linz asserts that slow-motion, and I would add stillness, brings our focus inwards “in the marvel of our bodies” and, thus, can “free us from the pressure of destination or purpose. Slow motion . . . exemplifies the old adage that it is the journey, not the destination, that matters” (Abramović, *Marina Abramović: In Residence* 19, 20). This last statement anticipates the next section, in which I discuss the time of the performance as oriented to processes, rather than results, and introduce Robert Nelson’s “ontology of happening.”

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to the public, art talks and symposiums. For three days, I practised the Method over the venue’s opening-hours (10am–5pm) and I attended the talks and symposiums after hours.

<sup>6</sup> I lay down on the floor supine and in stillness during *The Foreigner*. Stillness here means not moving my limbs, my head, my torso, and other extended areas of my body. Throughout the hours, however, I performed micro-movements that were not visible from outside. For instance, I moved my eyes and the tongue in my mouth. I contracted some muscles to foster the blood flood and I moved my face; I wiggled my toes and fingers to prevent cramps. The breathing activity made my chest move constantly and in a more accentuated and visible way during the second part of each performances, namely, when I was fatigued and in pain.

Unlike Abramović, Parr works toward fragmentation. Performing for as long as possible means to consider the savagely unpredictable end of the performance as an important part of its process. Parr understands the break-down of his physical and mental limits as a “worth-thinking” moment that reveals important things about himself, the performance, and the relation between the two (Scheer and Parr).

Let us think of endurance and duration as a rubber band. Abramović stretches out her limits overtime to overcome them with no interruption. She often speaks of the potentialities that a person can develop through durational works as if they were superpowers: “when you feel that you are about to give up and you cannot take it anymore, then the pain disappears and you keep going,” the artist says (“Performance Art”). Abramović aims to stretch the rubber band beyond its supposed elasticity and length.

But Parr, far from displaying the superhuman, “where you perform relentlessly to fill out a brief,” instead undertakes extreme actions and stretches the rubber band towards the point of maximum humanity—intended as frailty and vulnerability—until it breaks (Parr and Scheer 53). Once this happens, “the end of the performance [is] a very unprotected zone and the contents have been stripped of all symbolic order and all kind of manageability, and you’re left with something utterly raw” (Parr and Scheer 54).

There are two other important principles that induce Parr to perform for as long as possible, and which have influenced my practice as a performance artist. First, both Parr and I experience setting a time in advance as a distraction from the performative action. Personally, I am likely to endure less if I consider a specific length of time as a task to fulfil. This happened during *The Foreigner* in Melbourne, which I performed for five hours instead of six. Second, even before starting this doctoral project, I have always considered open-end duration as an ontological feature of performance art in alignment with its unforeseeable nature. Conceiving performance art as a process of discovery, I have always been instinctively interested in what is up next and what the unknown and vulnerability could reveal to me. Researching on Parr has made me recognise in more rational terms the valuable knowledge brought forward by the encounter with the extreme fringes of the performative process when the time of the action comes to an end and the time of revelation begins. Parr states:

[By performing as long as possible] you bring to bear a tremendous *convergence of forces* that take you to a kind of limit state. The fragility and the unmanageability of that, and the eruption of that, becomes a

mechanism for exciting the return of the repressed both for the performer and for the audience. It's this *collision* of the unknowable and the untranslatable, that produces the volatility, the challenge and even the *empathy* of performance. (Parr and Scheer 53; my italics)



Figure 26. Marina Abramović, *The House With The Ocean View*, Performance, 12 days. Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2002. Ph: Steven P. Harris. Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives.

### 4.3 Performance Art and Contemporaneity: Challenging the *Time-Market*

In the 1960s and 70s, performance and body art challenged the art market by working against the objectification of the artwork, because the bodies of the artists operated in contraposition to the art products. Such a practice hosted a paradox: the performance and body artists offered something immaterial like actions by means of something as material as their fleshy bodies. Both the actions and the bodies could not be merchandised.

Today, performance art proves once again to work as a sensitive radar within the contemporary world by challenging the commodification of time. In contemporary Western culture in which “time is money,” namely, production-oriented, highly measured, conceived and experienced as a consumer good, it is possible to talk about the *time-market*. Durational performances challenge this idea by offering time as a sensory and experiential dimension; as such, time is to be simply lived through rather than earned, spent, consumed, and speculated upon. Some of the most common comments on *The Foreigner* by the audience members were impatient complaints, such as “nothing to see here, please move on” or “everything was unbearably slow because there was nothing to do.” Technically, visitors could do more than I could: they could see, move, reflect, talk, even write; all I had to do was remain still for as long as possible and breathe.

I must be honest and say that I had the same attitude as my audiences while witnessing Parr performing *Reading to the End of Time* in 2016. In this piece, the artist focused on reading an edited version of *Camera Lucida* by Roland Barthes for as long as possible, which lasted for four hours non-stop. His entire persona was condensed between the book, the chair, and the table—reading. I felt that Parr could go on without our presence as the public, and I wondered, what am I here for? According to a linear vision of time that is purpose-driven and looks like an arrow constantly moving forward (union), inaction and stillness are disturbing elements that arrest the production chain (fragmentation). From this perspective, time feels wasted if it is not consumed. As Azimi et al. argue:

If humans are put in a circumstance [in] which the passage of time is measured and listless, and along with that, the person faces many dilemmas and hardship, how does the time pass? . . . Such [a] person perceives the reality of time overwhelmingly and tries to find the mysterious secret of it. (Azimi et al. 360)

## The Present-Tense Space of “Now”

As a performance artist working on duration, I thought I would be well-prepared to experience a durational work as an audience member. Witnessing Parr’s performance showed me that I am not. I now identify my then-conflicting feelings as an “unanticipated *tension* between a resolute need to just be in the moment and the anxiety associated with consciously waiting time out” (French 265). Despite enduring fatigue and pain, an artist performing duration has a chosen task to focus on and get through that operates as an anchor. Duration, instead, can be a much more challenging experience for the audience. Stripped of any logic of productivity supported by the comforting clock measurement, durational performances reduce the passage of time to the sole experience of it. Consequently, the audience is left “to confront certain incongruities, even absurdities of conscious existence” with no handholds (French 264).

Such temporal discrepancies, when brought to awareness, question the linear and continuous logic of time typical of Western culture. Robert Nelson conceives such fragmentation as “suspension,” as when Stelarc’s suspended performances become “a metaphor for handling time” (197). The notion of a suspended moment is common to those discourses on durational art that embrace the perspective of the ever-present. One famous example is Abramović and Ulay’s *Nightsea Crossing*, defined by Scheer as a “ground zero performance” for its aesthetic of “freezing time.” This perspective comes from a common perception of time that runs like a stream of water, and the “fixed time” (*tempo fermo*) offered by durational performances interrupts its continuity. Within such a framework, Tomassini includes *The Foreigner* in his investigation of contemporary performances that operate as “a counterpoint to the culture of profit and accomplishment, and the obsessive ideologies of yield and visibility” by transforming “the experience of time as blocked, intensely detained, radically suspended, fixed” (my translation from Italian).<sup>7</sup> The stillness that characterises *Nightsea Crossing* and *The Foreigner*, moreover, inspires a temporal suspension through the motionless image of the artists in contrast with the hectic movement outside the performance space, as is possible to see in the videos of my performance.

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<sup>7</sup> Original: “Come una pratica in contrappunto alla cultura del rendimento e del compimento, e contro le ideologie ossessive del profitto e della visibilità . . . La danza e la performance sono oggi, invece, direttamente impegnate in un dibattito che riguarda le maggiori trasformazioni dell’esperienza del tempo: bloccato, intensamente trattenuto, radicalmente sospeso, fermo.”

Tomassini analyses *The Foreigner* in conjunction with *All* by Maurizio Cattelan (2012), which is an installation consisting of nine sculpture resembling human figures placed on the floor and covered by a white shroud made of Carrara marble . The visual reference between Cattelan’s work and mine is clear and Tomassini theorises another sort of fragmentation, namely, the “material scission” between the lightness of the shroud and the heaviness of the marble in *All*, like the scission between the reality of the cloth covering the Foreigner, reminiscent of a corpse, and what is underneath—a living body, a dead one, or a mannequin? (6). Such fragmentation puzzles the viewers and inculcates doubt in them. Tomassini tells us that doubt, as a condition of the mind, has the power to stop the flow of time, knowledge, and actions .

The present-tense space of “now” offered by *The Foreigner* is a place of doubt. In Daegu, the place was traversed by those who passed near the Foreigner and glanced at it, their feet continuing to move forward and their head turning back for a couple of seconds; some of them stopped or came back, and others did not. Doubt as the place of “now” is the space of those who observed the Foreigner from a distance and did not come closer because they did not know that it was a performance and not a sculpture; finally, it was doubt that drove a young boy to come towards my body and lift the cloth up to see what there was underneath (see video of *The Foreigner* in Daegu). Springing from a place of scission, doubt contains possibilities of fragmentation and union; the experience of reconfiguration of each member of the audience develops according to which possibilities they chose to pursue. These responses to doubt may be seen to instantiate van Gennep’s schema of the three phases of passage that I discussed in Chapter One.

Tomassini’s logic of doubt as a temporal dimension inscribed in the space of the performance applies to the *Siluetas Series* as well. This work consists of images in which Mendieta is physically present in the scene, such as *Imagen de Yagul* (1973, Figure 27) and *Arbol de la Vida* (1976), and in images in which she is not. I chose to analyse the latter because they allow the direct involvement of the audience in the work, as I argue in Chapters Six and Seven. Returning to the question of time, viewers engage with the *siluetas* by wondering: Where is Ana Mendieta? I watch those digs and I am not sure whether she actually left or she has been swallowed by the earth. When the human body emerges from the ground as an additional layer of soil or flowers, I wonder, is she enveloped in there? I start projecting, imagining, and recalling. I know that that fire is extinguished by now and that those waves had erased the *silueta* on the sand before the sun went down, on that day in 1976.

Those waves are probably still there, though. Multiple temporal layers intersect in the *Silueta Series* but my experience of duration of the work, and *in* the work, lasts as long as I dwell in it (Figure 28). This last statement anticipates section 4.4 of this chapter in which I delineate the different temporalities involved in the performative process.

The aesthetic of doubt proposed by Tomassini, furthermore, anticipates Chapter Six on the performer-audience relationship. Both *The Foreigner* and the works of the *Silueta Series*, indeed, foster doubt in the audiences because the performers are not visible to them. This non-visibility works against the neoliberal politics of visibility that is challenged by performance art, as Peggy Phelan argues in *Unmarked*; I expand on the topic in Chapter Seven on performance documentation.

Alternatively, the reconfiguration of the perception of time happens by juxtaposing a circular and fluid conception of duration with the unidirectional image of arrow-like time. It is possible to see that rectilinear and chronological time carries a quality of fragmentation in it because it can be divided into seconds, minutes, hours, and so on. This is what Ed Scheer calls “instantaneity” or “aesthetic of suddenness . . . where time is a series of climactic instants” (“Space” 139). If this is so then, by contrast, the non-linear and mobile conception of time proposed by philosopher Henri Bergson as “real duration” recalls union, because the body experiences it as a “simple flux, a continuity of flowing, a becoming” (369). This is a process-oriented approach that aligns with the understanding of performance as a dynamic ecosystem which is lived through the body as the fulcrum of the experience. Instead of “instantaneity,” Scheer identifies this perspective as “continuity” (“Space” 139).

However, it is also true that the chronological time of Western culture offers us a reassuring sense of unity by being heterogeneous, divided into subsequent units, and unanimously understood. The real duration gathered and perceived by our somatic medium during a performance is, instead, “potentially disruptive to linear time” because it is mutable, subjective and internal, “qualitative[,] multiple and interpenetrating” (Shalson 101).

Along with space and body, the element of time reveals how dynamics of fragmentation and union constantly alternate within the performance ecosystem. Citing neurobiologist Francisco J. Varela, Scheer warns us that duration does not manifest via a binary system. Through, and within, the coexistence of fragmentation and union, instantaneity and continuity, the moment “now” emerges according to “a lived quality that

makes it more than a mere point or temporal location through which an object passes [and rather] more like a space in which we dwell, a space within time itself” (“Space” 148).

In this present-tense space, the possibilities of reconfiguring our experience of time arise from “the immanence of being and the potential to act” (Lee 308). Therefore, I assert that time in durational performance art is infinite, not because of an immortalised ever-presentness of the moment “now,” but because the possibilities offered by the experience of it are endless.



Figure 27. Ana Mendieta, *Imagen de Yagul*, from the *Siluetas Series* in Mexico (1973).

© The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, L.L.C. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.



Figure 28. Ana Mendieta, *Untitled* from the *Siluetas Series* in Mexico (1976).  
© The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, L.L.C. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

## Robert Nelson's "Ontology of Happening" and Letting Go of Time

Returning to the question of the time-market, durational works challenge it because they reveal time as "an alterable construct [that gives] access to other temporalities" which manifests "as plenitude: heterogeneous, informal, and multifaceted" (Heathfield 23). Within the process of durational performances, therefore, notions of time are questionable and the multiple experiences of it are neither measurable nor manipulable, thus, not controllable and merchandisable. Possibilities of time, and in time, emerge constantly and simultaneously in the looping figure-eight and it is not possible to discard some and keep others. Consequently, and second, by being simply something that happens, performance art is nothing but aimless time passing to be witnessed and experienced as such. This is Robert Nelson's argument, which boldly challenges the omnipresent and overrated need to justify any use of our time . In a remarkable etymological journey, Nelson lets others debate time in performance art, whether it is circular or linear; he offers the reader an understanding of performance through what he calls an "ontology of happening," upon which I draw.

In contemporary Western culture, the use of the term *performance* mobilises the notion of time instrumentally involving achievement, purpose and evaluation; but performance art refuses such conceptualisations. In this vein, Phelan argues that performance art is an unmarked practice, which I discuss in the final chapter of the thesis . Examining performance art's relationship with time, Nelson delineates the conditions of performance art, which all have a character of duration. These interconnected conditions are "event," "happening," "what befalls," the "incident" or "case," and the term *performance* itself.

First, an event is not what happens but the potential of a certain outcome to happen.

Within this project, these are possibilities which manifest through the time that takes place in the space of the performance by happening as "falling." This means "befalling," namely, the actualisation of the possibilities brought forward, in the sense of "offered," by the event. Second, in be-falling and coming towards, something happens as arriving: this denotes a movement of time in space and underlines the bond between these two elements in the unfolding of the performance process. Languages hold on to the time-space relationship by means of expressions such as "taking place" in English, "avoir lieu" in French, and "avere luogo" in Italian (literally translatable as "to have place"). These spatial expressions mean

“happening” because things fall somewhere. Nelson, indeed, titles his essay “Falling into Places: How Performance Reflects the Ontology of Happening.”

Third, the befalling together of events constitutes “coincidence.” This reveals the unpredictable dynamism of the performance process, which is not an enclosed bubble, but an ongoing looping flow in relation to the surrounding environment. Finally, the term *performance* expresses its ontological significance as an event that happens through embodied actions as “the physicalised experience of time.” Such a view may be considered phenomenological and so aligns with that of thinkers such as Augustine, who says, “I heard once from a learned man, that the motions of the sun, moon, and stars, constituted time, and I assented not. For why not should the motions of all bodies rather be times?” (Azimi et al. 361). Augustine conceives time as an abstract concept resulting from the events happening in the world. For him, three types of time exist: “the present of the past,” namely, memory; “the present of the present,” which is direct perceptions and intuitions; and “the present of the future” or waiting. The first no longer exists and the last does not yet exist; it follows that the only time that humans can actually have experience of, and measure, is the present of the present. Resonating with Augustine’s conceptualisation of time, Nelson concludes his phenomenological account by arguing that “as a genre of art, performance is its own content” (195). Time in durational performances is an individual, internal, and mutable experience that defies external and prefixed impositions. This concept informs my perspective on diverse forms of duration offered by a performance, which I discuss in the next section.

Contemporary scholarship often employs the term *resistance* to describe how durational aesthetics refrain from chronological and capitalistic constructs of time (Geczy and Kelly; Heathfield; Parr and Scheer; Scheer, “Introduction”; Shalson). This perspective on the idea of resistance, I feel, belongs to the conception of the flux of time as frozen by the ever-presentness of duration, which may inform the audience’s perspective.

On the contrary, my experience as a performance artist suggests to me that it is a matter of letting go of preconceived time structures, rather than resisting them. Resistance implies a constant negotiation with time while, to me, during a performance, the practice of duration consists of forgetting about time constructs. Consequently, time formats make no longer sense and dissolve into the embodied real duration, which is where the dynamics of fragmentation and union take place. From my experience of duration as a performer, this is the process to reach what has been called the “ever-present” or “moment now.” As discussed previously, such a moment is often conceptualised as a frozen and static time, which is

eternal because immortalised in perception through stillness or repetition. This perspective may seem ostensibly opposed to a conceptualisation of performance that is processual and active. As I describe further in the next section, in this project I conceive the “moment now” as dynamic, rather than frozen, because it is “the time of realisation” (Scheer, “Space” 148). The time during which the performer undertakes an action, and the audience receives it as an experience, is an offer “to focus perception into an intensity” that extends beyond time, and thus, challenges and reconfigures the time constructs that we bring into the performance space from outside (Scheer, “Space” 148).

#### **4.4 Three Approaches to Understanding Duration in Performance Art, Plus One**

##### Performed Time, Experienced as Lived Time, and Experienced as Perceived Time

By adopting a phenomenological approach, I distinguish between three types of duration that take place simultaneously during the performance process: *performed time*, *experienced as lived time*, and *experienced as perceived time*. Rather than being simple layers touching each other on the surface, these temporal manifestations overlap and intersect as the threads of a piece of fabric or, less tidily, like a bundle of hair forming curls. It is useful to analyse them separately to see how time operates in terms of fragmentation and union, and to understand the complexity of duration as a dimension.

“Performed time” consists of the chronological length of a performance that can be measured by the clock. For example, *The Foreigner* in Melbourne lasted for five consecutive hours, *The House With The Ocean View* by Abramović lasted for twelve days, and *Daydream Island* by Parr went on for 80 minutes. This is what Scheer calls “chronological time.” Scheer talks about a “durational aesthetic” and the “body chronotope,” referring to “the lived experience of the body engaged in a particular task,” which is how those involved in a performance perceive time through their sensorial apparatus.

Building upon these conceptualisations, I identify two further manifestations of the durational aesthetic. The difference between “experienced time” as “lived through” or “perceived” lies in the performer-audience relationship within the work. The value placed on such a distinction can impact the individual experience of the performance as a collective and shared event and, thus, it can affect its dynamics. James Westcott’s account of his experience of *The House With The Ocean View* is a clear example of this phenomenon. Westcott writes about “My Day 1/Marina’s Day 8” because his experience of the performance began when

the actual piece had already started. Such an experiential gap was remarkable because this work centred on the looping energy exchange between performer and audience. Westcott noticed his “freshness” versus Abramović’s exhaustion after eight days of enduring fasting and confinement. The artist coped with fatigue and pain by taking energy from the audience, as she does in many of her performances (“Performance Art”; *Walk*).

I investigate this element of union between the performer and her audiences in Chapter Six. Within the present context, this example shows us how the union between agentic elements of the ecosystem, such as performer and audience, is reached through fragmentation as a gap in terms of time. This leads us to recognise, first, the intersection of relationships and layers within the performance ecosystem and, second, the agentic role of both the audience and the element of time in actively shaping the work. A moment during *The Foreigner* in Melbourne exemplified this, when a member of the public, a woman, sat next to me and started chanting. She wrote in the feedback form that she chanted for me because she understood the physical harshness of the prolonged stillness and the solitude of the piece. This visitor came during a moment of great exhaustion and pain when I was about to give up: that chant worked as a salve that gave me energy and allowed me to continue to perform.

Time experienced as actually lived through also determines the individual experience of each participant. The audience’s written feedback from *The Foreigner* in Melbourne clearly shows that, the longer a person stayed in the room participating in the performance, the more the work involved and touched them by fostering reflections and reactions. This is, however, not to be taken as a dogma; we must remember that the experience of the work is deeply informed by the individual background of each person. For instance, a visitor to *The Foreigner* in Melbourne declared that they were in the room for one minute and felt or thought nothing about either space or time. A few others, instead, claimed to be immediately impacted by the image of *The Foreigner* as soon as they stepped into the room; for these ones, the passage of time worked as a progressive attunement to the piece. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, about the various places that each participant carries with them and brought into the performance, Katarina Mattsson talks about the “historicity of encounters” to remind us that experiences and encounters never happen only in the present, but carry past events and memories with them (Bromseth et al. 143). This perspective evokes Augustine’s, in which he explains how past events that no longer exist, such as childhood, can return to existence in the present in the form of evocations and memories. Therefore, it is not the event itself that it is

present, but “the expression of it in the form of images, that have been imprinted like footprints in the soul by means of the senses” (my translation from Italian).<sup>8</sup>

Another temporality is the “perceived time” of the performance, and this occurs for both performers and audiences and can change for each person throughout the process. This type of duration consists of “the subjective, the transitory and the privately experienced time of the body . . . over structure” during the process of a performance (Scheer, “Introduction” 1). I emphasise the expression “over structure” as the collision that may happen between perceived time and the other two kinds of duration. Such a clash is very common in durational works, for both the performer and the audience. I soon lost the sense of (chronological) time during both the performances of *The Foreigner*, after enduring stillness for a while and having my sight impaired. My assistants telling me “one hour has passed” made me realise how fifteen minutes could feel like an hour and vice versa. The same happened to the audience of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne: some members were challenged by the feeling of time never passing that gave them a sense of claustrophobia and impatience; some others, especially those who chose not to look at the clock, experienced time passing “quickly.” The assistants and I, being there for the entire duration of the piece, experienced an extended spectrum of durational perceptions.

I interpret this example as revealing two main phenomena. First, it is difficult to experience one hour as such because it is problematic to define what it means: we can perceive one hour as passing quickly and smoothly, or agonisingly slow. To understand time is to understand the *experience* of it. Second, there is the time-space bond: the audience’s and my experience and perception of time differed from one performance of *The Foreigner* to another, and this had to do with the element of space. *The Foreigner* in Melbourne, indeed, took place in a spare, enclosed, and silent room with minimum distractions, in which people entered and stayed with the purpose of participating in the work. Such an environment bestowed the performance with a suspended atmosphere, where time seemed to be slowed down to attune to the sacred pace of a ritual. As a performer, this atmosphere made my experience of the work highly introspective. The tranquility of the place, given the minimal interference from the space outside, made me easily lose sense of time. Moreover, to endure

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<sup>8</sup> Original: “quando si raccontano avvenimenti passati veri, non si tirano fuori dalla memoria gli avvenimenti in se stessi, ma espressioni formate dalle loro immagini che si sono impresse a guisa di orme nell’animo per mezzo dei sensi.”

stillness, I took slow, deep and full breaths that aligned with the tranquil atmosphere created by the audience; I analyse this last concept in detail in Chapter Six.

The experience of the time of *The Foreigner* in Daegu was of another kind because the place was completely different (Figure 29). Happening in the foyer of a busy art factory, most of the people just happened upon the performance, and they came back and forth, staying with the work only a couple of minutes, sometimes returning—but they did not build a consistent duration around the piece. The spatial questions, concerning and arising from the work, was the element that impacted this audience the most. The assistants and the conference catering staff constituted an exception because they physically occupied the performance space for the entire duration of the piece, which was two and a half hours. While the assistants were busy doing other tasks and moving freely around the art factory, the catering staff stood at the buffet tables and hardly left that position, being distracted from the performance only once, for fifteen minutes, during the coffee break. The catering staff had a durational experience of the performance like that of the audience in Melbourne. As the performer, in Daegu, I perceived time in a less introspective way than in Melbourne, because the place was busy and noisy. On the one hand, this allowed me to have more awareness of clock-time. On the other hand, I was easily distracted by many external stimuli, therefore, it was harder to concentrate on the piece and endure stillness, pain and fatigue. The video of this performance shows the rhythm of the environment as discontinuous, sometimes hectic and sometimes calm, and this clashed with the tempo of my breath, which I attempted to maintain as slow and deep. The examples from *The Foreigner* show the relational unity between the elements of the performance ecosystem: space influenced the rhythm of the piece that, in turn, shaped the performer's and the audience's experience of time; time affected the performance place by determining an atmosphere, which triggered the perceptions and reactions of those involved.

How is it possible to frame the relationships between these three kinds of duration in terms of fragmentation and union? The intersections among them imply a form of unification as connection and mutuality. The differences in their tempos, gaps among their intersections, recall fragmentation. However, instead of ruptures, I see such gaps as fertile spaces from which possibilities arise. Returning to the metaphor that opened this sub-section, this is the space where the needle enters among the threads and the comb insinuates into the curls.

As neuropsychologist Detlev B. Linke explains, “the clash, the collision of rhythms create[s] imagination . . . , i.e. the construction of meanings” (Linke qtd in Goebbels et al. 59). The experiences that generate from that space *befall* in terms of fragmentation as rupture, surprise, and maybe shock. This was the relief of my mind and my muscles underneath *The Foreigner* cloth, when the assistant came and told me that another hour had passed, and it did not feel so long left to go. But it was also the contraction of my mind and my muscles when the opposite happened, and I realised that I still had three hours ahead—Will I be able to make it? In the fissures offered by these three temporalities, one of my assistants faced his shock: he pictured his restlessness in front of the stillness of the Foreigner. Enduring half an hour of “doing nothing” already felt overwhelming for him: “is it going to be like this throughout all the performance?” he worried. Lana Shalson asserts that, in durational performances, “not all minutes or hours measured by the clock are the same . . . Time contracts and expands according to our boredom, absorption, pleasure or discomfort” (102). Shalson’s statement anticipates the conception of the body as *sōma*, involving the senses and thoughts, and in relation to the surrounding environment, which I analyse in Chapter Five.

It has often been argued that durational art gives people time, rather than taking it away as in many other daily activities (Abramović, “Marina Abramović: An Art”). I assert that durational performances offer us an experience of time that reflects ourselves and, thus, allows us to tune inward while participating in something before and around us. There are multiple layers and possibilities that have the potential to manifest during the performance process. This happens because, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, time in performance art is not productivity-oriented but happening-oriented. Therefore, it is a time that is not consumed, but given as befalling inside us.



Figure 29. © Angela Viora 2018, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Daegu Art Factory (SK). © Courtesy the PSi Archive and Daegu Art Factory.

## The Time of the Performing Body

The last of the four types of duration that I theorise is the time of the body, which is not the time perceived *by* and *through* the body, but is the time *performed by* the body: I call such a dimension *the time of the performing body*. This kind of time has its own duration that does not follow the other temporalities, although it happens together with them. This is a dimension that I describe separately because it concerns the agency of the corporeal body, which has its own rhythms and tempos that do not always attune to the performance flow. Moreover, although the time of the performing body interrelates with the other three types of duration, I discuss it apart because it centres on the experience of the performer but not of the audience. This type of duration links to the as-long-as-possible approach, but it is not the same thing as deliberately reaching, enduring, and overcoming one's own limits.

I learnt about the time of the performing body, as a tempo of its own, while performing *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* at the Sir Louis Matheson Library at Monash University in October 2016. The piece was designed to be performed for as long as possible and it lasted for three hours, although I could have continued for longer by virtue of mental and physical stamina. I had to interrupt the performance because of an urgent need to urinate that started soon after the beginning of the piece, which I could no longer ignore after a couple of hours. Because of the nature of the work and the context in which I was performing, urinating in public was not an option. Going to the toilet and coming back to start performing again was not an option either, because I was doing a performance and not a show. Eventually, I managed to endure the need for more than half the piece by focusing on the task, breathing, and moving carefully—but the urgency did not recede.

In contrast to performing *The Foreigner*, in *Mapping the Sound* I understood that needing to urinate is tougher than physical pain to endure and manage. Pain is a manageable, reducible feeling and it is even possible to make it “disappear” for a while through meditation and breathing techniques. Urine is material: it consists of liquids and processes in the body that one has limited control over. Therefore, I interrupted the performance earlier than I wished because of the duration of my performing body, which was not developing in parallel with the other temporalities. This caused me great disappointment and anger because the piece was going well: I was completely attuned to the surrounding environment, I was having a profound experience of knowledge through the piece and in response to its questions, the audience was engaging with the work, and I was not experiencing either pain or fatigue. The

chronological, experienced, and perceived times were aligned harmoniously; according to my stamina and intentions, I could and would have gone on for longer, but I left the performance site abruptly and, for me, the piece was over.

That day, in *Mapping the Sound*, I framed duration according to a purpose-driven logic of expectations, but the time of the performing body has its own logic. In this case, the limits of the body have to be understood from a different perspective: the physical and mental limits as intended by Abramović and Parr, for instance, are partly expected, and reaching them constitutes a fundamental part of the work; therefore, it is possible to be partially prepared to face them in advance. The temporal limits of my performing body that I experienced in *Mapping the Sound*, instead, were limits suddenly imposed on me by the physicality of my own body: during that piece, I felt like I had no power over my somatic centre as it was an entity other than me. I experienced as a failure the “urination limit” and the consequent interruption of the piece, because I felt I could have continued and discovered more through the work and offered more to the audience. Nevertheless, I later understood that this episode embraces the knowledge that comes from vulnerability and the collapsing of barriers, intentions, and resistances implicit to the open-end approach; the discovery of the “time of the performing body” comes exactly from a situation that I initially labelled as a failure.

Further knowledge emerged from the difference between the rhythm of the performing body and that of the soundscape as the investigated subject of the performance (Figure 30). My task was to draw the sounds that I was hearing as I portrayed them in my mind through synaesthesia. Through all the performances of *Mapping the Sound*, I quickly realised how limited the range of movements of my body was compared to the sonic environment around me: while diverse sounds hit me at the same time and from everywhere, I only had two arms and two hands to register them. This is a spatial question that also concerns the elements of time because of the different tempos lived through the body. The rhythm performed by my body in space influenced the experience of the visitors before me, although many of them closed their eyes and had their own experience of the work. For instance, some of those who watched me commented on how differently they would have drawn some sounds; others had a slow and calming experience of the soundscape while watching me but, once they closed their own eyes, they perceived the rhythm of the sonic environment as more agitated. A dancer told me that she could see that I was not a dancer from the way in which I moved in space in terms of rhythm and pace. The dimensions of time

and space are constantly interwoven in a dynamic figure-eight loop that grounds “the body of the artist as the location that determines meaning for the event” (Scheer, “Space” 137).



Figure 30. © Angela Viora 2016, *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*, live performance.

Video still.

#### 4.5 Duration as Slowness and Repetition: A Practice-led Perspective

Why do I pay attention to durational performances, especially long durational ones? The answer to this question is related to my artistic practice. Performance art is for me a practice of knowledge: the more I perform, the more I come to know. As a performance artist, I believe in slowness and repetition: in the first case, I believe in the passage of time that allows things to happen; the performance art process has the time to unfold and allow the dynamics of the ecosystem to surface. Speaking in terms of clock-time, this can happen in one hour or across six hours. I perform for as long as possible, without setting a duration in advance, to give the performance the time that it needs to develop as an experiential event and an offer. Therefore, I refer to my performances as “open-ended” in terms of time. The term *open-end*, however, also refers to the unforeseen qualities of the work, for nobody knows how it is going to develop and finish; this is a common feature of performance art whose pieces are hardly rehearsed.

Open-endedness allows anything that emerges to enter the performance and contribute to its process. For example, attunement and fatigue: on the one hand, as a performer, the more I perform, the more I attune to the piece and connect to time, space, and the audience; time creates space for exchange and discovery. On the other hand, a prolonged performance is likely to bring with it physical and mental pain and exhaustion; unlike other artists, I do not aim for fatigue and suffering to push my boundaries as a central element of my work. However, I acknowledge the importance of the vulnerability that subsequently comes: Abramović rightly asserts that “in order to experience, you have to be vulnerable” (Stiles et al.). This is so because vulnerability is that place in which the defences of our comfort zone, knowledge, and certainty fall like a curtain, and what surfaces are the emotions, perceptions, and visions that we were not aware of. Being vulnerable, in performance art, allows the fragmentation-and-union dance to happen and to bring reconfiguration. Such a process is not mediated; the time to reach vulnerability is already the time of the performance.

Repetition has a double significance in my practice: first, it is the means of building duration during a performance; second, repetition was central to Minimalism, which influenced the history of performance art across the twentieth century. These two aspects are interwoven: performing repetition means focussing on one step at the time, whereas undertaking multiple diverse actions would be dispersive. The repetition of a minimal, in the sense of essential, gesture helps me to concentrate on the performative action and, thus, to enter progressively

and deeply into the work. Instead of happening like hundreds of rivulets of water, running onto a surface, repetition fosters the performance as a focused practice that operates in depth and inward. “Whether understood as a process of healing, of exchanging energy, of finding beauty in the mundane, or of creating community [that] can bring about transformations in perception, affect and human relations that cannot be attained otherwise,” engaging with a single simple activity in a concentrated way, and for an extended period of time, is central to durational performance art (Shalson 103). Duration, as constituted by slowness and repetition in my practice, is an offer to audience members because it allows them to take part in the performance process and to experience it actively.

As for my own individual interest in and experience of performance art, I have previously mentioned that I do not perform durational works to test my physical and mental limits. I commit to durational practices to respond to the various questions from which my performances originate—What if . . .? And I perform to know what happens if I undertake a certain action in specific circumstances. Duration, as repetition and slowness, allows the exploration of these questions to be grounded, to actually exist, by taking place in the world and expanding. The question becomes an idea, the idea becomes a performance, the performance becomes an experience, and the experience turns into knowledge by revealing the many tangents that it can take. As a visitor of *The House With The Ocean View* said, “it is like watching the grass growing” (Westcott and Miller).

Hence, slowness does not necessarily mean to perform a gesture by slowing it down and taking a long time to do it. In this thesis, I propose to understand performance art as an ecosystem that emerges from the relationships among agentic elements. According to such a perspective, the durational significance of slowness lies in finding and attuning to the rhythm of the piece that is determined by the forces and the dynamics involved. In this sense, as Lara Shalson says,

durational performance offers . . . the opportunity to spend time with a single idea or action, and to discover the rich and multi-layered possibilities that can only unfold in this time. (104)

## 4.6 Conclusions

In Chapter Four, I argued that time, in performance art, is the *experience* of time. By conceptualising “time *as*” rather than “time *is*,” I examined how time occurs and manifests within the performance process in relation to space and body, through which the experience

of time as *duration* is shaped. The straightforward chronology of the clock-time perspective evokes union understood as continuous and homogeneous; yet such linearity is divided into fragments containing one another, from centuries to days and seconds. I analysed Abramović's approach to durational works in terms of "union as communion" and Parr's approach to durational works through the concept of "fragmentation as breaking-down." These artists offer approaches to duration that I employ in my own practice such as *open-endedness*, *slowness* and *repetition*, which allow the artist to become one with the performative process and to disappear within it to let the dynamics of the performance emerge, allowing the audience dwell in it.

I argue that these various ways to perform duration offer an alternative experience of time to the chronological time of daily life: purpose-driven and achievement-oriented (*time market*). Performance art offers an alternative because its only purpose is to happen (Nelson) and durational works enhance these alternative experiences of time. Nelson understands this *happening* dynamically as "be-falling" and "suspension," while Tomassini and Scheer interpret the ever-present offered by performance art as a frozen moment that blocks the running clock-time system and provokes contrasting reactions in the audience (fragmentation). Responding to these theories, I conclude that performance art enacts fragmentation in the sensorial perceptions of those involved, who cannot rely on concepts of achievement or profit and find themselves "suspended" in doubt: "Now what?"

Such a fragmentation leads to union because the present moment offered by durational performances is a dimension in which performer and audience encounter each other and the audience becomes present to the work. My analysis of the participants' responses to *The Foreigner*, *Mapping the Sound*, and *The House With The Ocean View* revealed that these works juxtaposed a circular, unstable, and fluid experience of duration with the common, established, and structured linearity of clock-time. The contrast provoked disparate reactions among audience members: it began as an experience of fragmentation but, throughout time, duration led to reconfiguration by uniting those involved with themselves, allowing them to tune inward while participating in something around them.

In conclusion, as a practice of happening, the experience offered by durational works forces the audiences to *renegotiate* their relationship with time, and consequently, with their own body in space. Within this reconfiguration, I identified the enactment of four types of temporality that manifest together within the performance ecosystem (union), albeit

unaligned (fragmentation): *performed time*, *experienced-as-lived time*, *experienced-as-perceived time*, and the *time of the performing body*.

This chapter contributes to the scholarly discussion by showing how time makes the performance space into a dynamic dimension through multiple embodied experiences of duration and reconfiguration.

The following chapter explains how the bodies involved in a performance relate to space and time by determining and being determined by them, which I analyse through application of a phenomenological approach and by employing the analytical tools of fragmentation and union. I then explore the notion of disappearance and offer in Chapter Six, which focuses on the performer-audience relationship.

## Chapter Five—Body

### 5.1. Introduction

In alignment with the scholarship on body art and performance art, I acknowledge the body as an artistic medium and an instrument of research (Banes; Carlson; Cassel Oliver; Coogan; Goldberg; Manzella and Watkins; Marsh, *Body*; Phelan, *Unmarked*; Poli; Scheer and Parr). Chapter One has discussed influential theorisations of this view, and in this chapter, I analyse the multiple manifestations of the body in performance art and the different modes to access it and the surrounding world. I describe the role of the body at the centre of the performance figure-eight from a phenomenological perspective. I investigate the concept of embodiment in performance art in relation to the performative ecosystem through analysis of selected artworks, with a focus on explaining “the body as” during the performance process rather than “the body is.” I conceive the body as an ensemble of multiple intertwined perspectives existing as one.

Such a plurality manifests during the performance process and aligns with the ideas of fragmentation, union, and possibilities foundational to this research.

During a performance, the body works as a means through which the artist and the audience experience space and time as agentic elements. The performer’s body becomes an offer to the audience by means of destabilising actions that involve exposure and vulnerability.

The artists make their own bodies present through corporeal limits and, thus, enable embodiment. In my research, I cite the Ancient Greek idea of body as *sōma* according to the J.G. Dunn’s interpretation, namely, the making present of the whole person within and in relation to a specific environment. The idea of embodiment is hence relational and ecological, in alignment with the interpretation of the performance process as an ecosystem. The experience of embodiment is also mutual because it refers to both the performer’s and the audience’s relational experience of the work. The limits that make the bodies present are porous points of contact rather than points of separation. This conceptualisation is explored in the following section on the performer-audience relationship during the performance process.

### 5.2 The “Bare Necessities” of The Body at the Centre of the Performance Figure-Eight

#### Relationality and Multiplicity of the Body As

This section discusses “the body *as*” in performance art rather than “the body *is*.” The purpose here is not to define the body. Rather, in this thesis I explore how the body manifests itself during a performance and how it works within the performance ecosystem. The scholarly significance in this analysis lies in researching the body’s multiple manners of being, each of which is never the whole truth standing alone. As with time and duration, I claim that the body is a concept consisting of multiple intertwined perspectives existing as one and at once. For instance, my performing body during *The Foreigner* works as the locus of my perceptions in my experience of the performance. At the same time, as I explain in Chapters One and Three, my body as “the Foreigner” is an image referring to migration and other spatial issues and a mirror for the visitors. Abramović’s body, too, “triggers associations” in the audience: for art historian RoseLee Goldberg, the three platforms of the House are a triptych in which the artist, taking a shower before the public, looks like a nude bather from a Renaissance painting (Goldberg qtd in Abramovic and Kelly).

This combined plurality recalls the qualities of fragmentation and union. The different manifestations of the body in space and time refer to separate aspects of the work which unite during the performance through the same unique element, the body. This approach is phenomenological because it reads the manifestations of “our somatic being” in light of “different modes to access” our being and the different “ways in which human beings behave towards themselves” (Böhme 224). Therefore, not only we are always placed somewhere with(in) our own bodies (Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*), but we are also placed in relationships with other bodies. This phenomenological perspective informs three main ideas in this thesis:

1. The concept of relationality among the elements of a performance is the foundational idea to analyse and understand performance;
2. This project acknowledges the importance of the element of space in performance art;
3. This project acknowledges the various manifestations of the body that phenomenological approach theorise; the concept of possibilities as an essential feature of performance art; and fragmentation and union as productive analytical tools through which to read such multiplicity.

Investigating manifestations of the body, rather than trying to define it, can be a valuable scholarly choice. Gernot Böhme argues that

a definition is always a way of fixing something, and a concept is an intervention in the manifold diversity of things and phenomena that freezes them. The defense of the diversity of the particular and, to speak with Adorno, of the nonidentical, is also an aim of phenomenology. (224)

Affirming such methodological principles, in this thesis I understand performance art as a manifestation of possibilities. I do not aim to define or label performance art; rather, I want to explore how it works as a dynamic ensemble of forces and phenomena. By employing diverse approaches and theories on the body, I discuss how this agentic element plays a variety of roles within a performance through its multiple manifestations.

### The Body at The Centre of The Performance Art Figure-Eight

In his essay on painting, Justin Paton claims that painting has to have “a certain nakedness of physical means, a recourse to ‘the bare necessities’” (20). In performance art terms, this is the body. In opposition to Descartes, I embrace the non-dualistic phenomenological conception of the body as perceptually connected to the world and, thus, always “in place” and part of a larger ecosystem (Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*; Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory,” *Politics*; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*). The human condition of being-in-the-world is primarily bodily. When I speak of the body, I also refer to the mind because the mind is “always embodied” in cognitive phenomena (Fischer-Lichte 90). In this sense, the embodied experience of the performance is the experience of presence, which comprehends sensorial perceptions and cognitive associations, physical reactions and mental responses in an ongoing process. This is the temporal dimension of “happening” as “suspension” (Nelson), “freezing time” (Scheer), or *tempo fermo* (Tomassini) that I discussed in the previous chapter. Being placed in specific spatial-temporal dimensions, the body grounds *embodiment*. In this chapter, I examine the potentials of the artist’s body as an agentic element within the performance process. I then describe *embodiment* in detail in the final section while theorising the body in relation to the other parts of the performance ecosystem.

For now, it is sufficient to say that the notion of embodiment is embedded in the understandings of site- and time-specificity because it puts performance art back where it belongs, the place-world, which we experience firstly through our own bodies (Casey,

*Getting Back Into Place*; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*). Within this framework, the processual emerging of possibilities during the performance process is experienced through the body as a medium that allows such an experience to be multidimensional and multisensorial. This is so for both the performer and the audience involved in the work. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty’s influential argument, that “the body is our instrument to *have* a world,” I place the body at the centre of the performance art figure-eight.

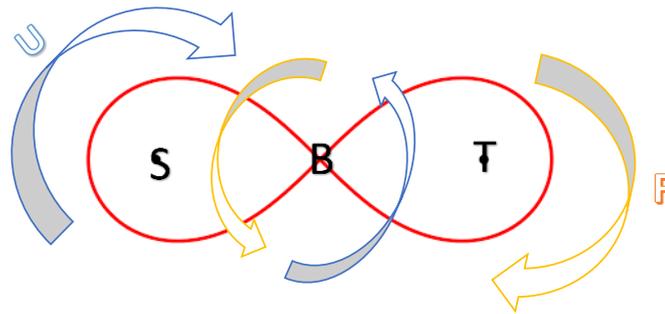


Figure 31. © Angela Viora 2019, The performance figure-eight model

The central position of the body element does not mean that it has more agency than space and time in shaping the performance process: it means that the body is the point of contact between space and time. By means of their own bodies, the performer and the audience involved in a performance live the loop-process fuelled by the merging of the spatial and temporal dimensions. The body is a medium through which we experience space and time, and thus, we have the perception and the idea of them as agentic elements.

The role of the *body as instrument and medium* also informs the analytical aspect of this project. I can speculate on performance art only from the perspective of the body because the elements of space and time are not entities whom I can interview or read. To paraphrase Descartes: I perceive, ergo I am, ergo space and time are—to me.

In terms of embodiment, Erika Fischer-Lichte distinguishes between “presentness” and “presence” during a performance: *presentness* is the condition of being present in space and time; *presence* is the subjective experience of being present, the sensations provoked in the audience by the bringing forth of the artist’s “phenomenal body” (Fischer-Lichte 93-101). The work of Mendieta allows us to understand the difference between presentness and presence while, at the same time, constituting an instructive example of the relationship between these two concepts. In the *Siluetas Series*, Mendieta’s body is not on the scene when we look at the images: therefore, we can no longer talk about her presentness in space and

time. However, such a presentness is recallable in the traces of it: in this way, the phenomenal body of Mendieta performs absence and, thus, creates presence for the viewers, namely, the experience of the artist's body merging with the landscape throughout time. According to the conception of the performance process as an ecosystem, let us not forget that it is thanks to the progressive actions (time) of water, fire, wind, soil (space) and more in relation to Mendieta's body that we can have a performative experience of the *siluetas*. For example, the softness of the sand allowed the artist to imprint her body in it and leave a hollow human shape that the sea then filled in with its water: this makes us, the viewers, see the contour of Mendieta's figure that we can imagine disappearing slowly in the waves.

Presentness also includes the sensations provoked in the artist by the audience members' phenomenal bodies. This is evident in performances that involve the direct participation of the audience, such as *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound*. Both the etymology and the image of "bringing forth" define the body as *offer*: the performer undertakes actions by means of his or her present body and affects or, it is better to say, infects the visitors' present bodies "through perception" (Fischer-Lichte 94).

The actions and reactions of the audience members, in turn, infect the performer's phenomenal field. Each present body perceives the effects of such mutual infection in different ways and at a different density: although shared, the performance is a personal and individual embodied experience, like the subjective "experienced time" of the performance discussed in the previous chapter (section 4.4). The term *to infect* has stronger connotations than *to affect*: the elements of the performance ecosystem not only change but *charge* each other. It is not only a matter of experiencing sensations during a performance; it is about experiencing a reconfiguration of our entire being-in-the-world by means of the performance. I explore such a perspective further in the final section of this chapter, while discussing how bodies become embodied during the performance art process. But first I examine how the artist's body enacts embodiment by undertaking different roles.

## **5.2. The Body of The Artist As . . .**

This section illustrates the different ways in which the artist's body functions and manifests during the performance process as an artistic medium, a trigger of reactions and phenomena, and a catalyst of forces. Fischer-Lichte notes that performance artists from the 1960s worked consistently on the difference between "being a body" and "having a body" as the co-presence of both "the phenomenal and the semiotic body," a body as a flesh construct and a

body as a social construct (Fischer-Lichte 82). In 1974, historian Lea Vergine mapped the then-contemporary trend of body and performance art by talking about *body as language*. This means that the artists used their own bodies to communicate some sort of message or experience because the existing semiotics were considered insufficient for them. Vergine's idea harkens back to Heidegger's interpretation of the work of art, upon which this thesis draws. For the German philosopher, the work of art functions both as a symbol and an allegory because it "makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other" (*Poetry* 91). As Kockelmans puts it,

in the work of art something else is brought together with the thing made. In Greek "to bring together" means *sumballein*; the art work is a symbol.

Examples include the work of artists Mike Parr and Gina Pane, who used "the *body as a site* for exploring ideas around discomfort, experience and empathy" (Johnson; my italics). In the same era, Ketty La Rocca and Carolee Schneemann employed their female bodies to question the patriarchal nature of language, artistic representation, and broader society in the Western world. Such practices continued in subsequent performance art.

In all the works analysed in this thesis, the artists undertake actions through their own bodies as responses to certain situations and to communicate something to audiences. Abramović brings stillness, silence, and a peaceful island to a city plagued by a lack of time and human contact, and the shadow of terrorism after 9/11. Parr's performances, and mine too, are responses to the migration issue that today is becoming increasingly fraught. And Mendieta aspires to a symbiotic reconnection to the land after her diasporic status uprooted her. These pieces create "the possibility for the [artist's] body to function as the object, subject, material, and source of symbolic construction, as well as the product of cultural inscriptions" (Fischer-Lichte 89).

These examples show that, by displaying their nude and bare physicality, the artists go beyond the artwork itself. The artists use their own bodies both as *vehicles* of processes and *symbols* of a broader reality. This is a foundational feature of performance art, which has the "capacity to directly approach the viewer, making an otherwise abstract issue immediately available to their sense perceptions" (Scheer and Parr 98). In both *Daydream Island* and *The Foreigner*, for instance, the three key elements of stillness, invisibility, and

silence worked so powerfully because they were common to both the performers' bodies and the migrants and refugees' bodies that the artists wanted to represent. Parr performed in an ordinary-looking theatrical setting by wearing a recognisable Hawaiian shirt, and by placing my body in space, I attempted to materialise an image from the media: an unknown body underneath a white cloth. Likewise, Abramović's *House with the Ocean View* and Mendieta's *Siluetas* offer and embody an image to which audiences can immediately relate: a house and a generic human silhouette.

The body of the artist, therefore, works for the spectator as an *image* before it is a symbol: an image is presented to a viewer, while a symbol comes from how the viewer perceives that image. In Fischer-Lichte's terms, it is possible to say that the image links to "presentness," while the symbol links to "presence." For instance, the image of *The Foreigner* is for me a symbol of the Europe migration issue, I designed this performance to be a personal reflection on the issue and I offer this perspective to the public. However, the image of a still and anonymous body covered by a white sheet has spoken to audience members in diverse ways according to their own relation to that image: some participants experienced the presence of the Foreigner as a symbol of death and "vanitas" while, for others, it represented their loneliness as immigrants in a foreign land. These diverse interpretations can be argued to demonstrate the status of the artist's body as a mirror on which the audience projects personal ideas, constructs, and emotions. This explains the variety of receptions and interpretations of the performance art pieces: a participant in *The Foreigner* in Melbourne, for instance, declared that "the stillness of the performer's body made me aware of my own restlessness." In the next section, I discuss how these qualities of performance art engage embodiment and encountering.

### Performing the Unexpected Within the Familiar: A Perspective of Fragmentation

In *The Infinity Machine*, Scheer applies the Lacanian conceptualisation of the psyche to analyse Parr's performances (100). According to Lacan, the human psyche is organised according to three intertwined categories: the symbolic, the real, and the imaginary. In *Daydream Island*, the real is Parr's face hidden "behind the walls of the symbolic" when he turns his back to the audience and is shielded by his collaborators working around him (Scheer and Parr 100). The body of *The Foreigner* is made invisible underneath the cloth. Abramović is fully exposed yet unreachable in the House, as the protagonist of a "living

installation” (Abramovic and Kelly), and Mendieta physically left the performance site. What is perceivable through screens (Parr), a hidden and undefined volume (me), a telescope (Abramović), and a human shape sunken in the ground (Mendieta) generates images and gives access to the imaginary: what viewers see in it. According to “the avantgarde perception,” the artist’s body is “a performative image, understood as a metamorphic platform and alterable public space” (Hallensleben 30). As part of the performance ecosystem, the performing body reflects an idea of space that is not fixed and unchangeable, whether the space is the human body or a geographical site. Performance art “enacts possibilities” by means of the body (Fleming 106) and it allows “the ‘lived’ experience of embodied difference.” (McCormack 1824). Performance art facilitates the possibility of being one and the other, being in the liminal space between realities and the potentiality of exceeding binarist thought beyond “that either/or” (Fleming 96).

This is possible because the artists’ bodies provoke short-circuits in the visitors’ sensory fields: they do so by undertaking actions that operate fragmentation as disruption by challenging the viewers’ expectations, yet, these actions happen within a recognisable reality that looks familiar and, thus, creates union as connection between the audience and the work. For instance, Abramović welcomes the audience into a house-like setting and undertakes actions that are part of daily life such as sleeping, drinking, sitting, peeing, and showering. However, the artist intentionally gives these actions an aura of rituality by performing them with surreal precision and slowness; moreover, she neither eats nor speaks nor entertains herself with leisure activities. By looking at her, the audience members see themselves reflecting, moved, challenged, annoyed, crying, lost.

After sitting comfortably in the theatre auditorium, the visitors of *Daydream Island* witness a spectacle of cruelty taking shape on the performer’s face, which is getting sewn and painted. The setting, the clothes worn by Parr and his collaborators, and the result of their actions are full of recognisable references: the Hawaiian t-shirt worn by the artist that reminds us of the stereotypical Western tourist; his face turned into an expressionist painting, and the black squares on the collaborators’ backs cite Minimalism. However, what the performer’s body undergoes is neither expected nor common to a public who is there to visit an art festival. Parr gives his back to the audience, who nonetheless see everything amplified onto three mega-screens that are impossible to ignore. A woman goes down to the stage and implores the performer to stop.

The same process is activated by *The Foreigner*, whose image triggers memories and associations in the audience, but whose body is placed in flesh where it should not be, namely, in accessible spaces rather than on a media screen. *Mapping the Sound* takes place in ordinary public spaces crossed daily by many people, such as libraries and universities; yet, my performing body shows the visitors an alternative way to experience and dwell in such known environments and questions the audience's relationship with those places. Mendieta works with natural elements that are part of collective human knowledge such as water, soil, fire, wind, and so on. Despite the familiarity, we, the viewers, are confronted by these elements and their actions because we are left alone with them: the artist is physically gone, and all she left behind are the traces of her body, which can be ours as well. Paradoxically, this is a mediation with no filter.

### The Performing Body as a Bridge: A Union Perspective

In the previous section, I have described how the artist's body provokes fragmentation as disturbance in the sensory experience of the audience: the artists do so by performing the unusual within realities that may look common and familiar, and the performance develops along an unforeseen path. As discussed previously, fragmentation is present in the plurality of the symbolic manifestations performed by the artist's body, despite unfolding together within the same process (union).

The performer's body, however, operates also in terms of union, which can be theorised via Heidegger's idea of the *bridge* within the landscape. As explained in section 3.4 in Chapter Three, Heidegger's idea of *alethēia* as the "unconcealment of being" informs the conception of process in performance art (*Poetry*). His idea of the Fourfold, whose elements cannot be conceived as separate, contributes to the understanding of a performance as an ecosystem ("Building"). Within the Fourfold, the real meaning of *dwelling* is to preserve and protect places by attuning to them, rather than just occupying them; this happens by setting places free and letting them arise and manifest their features as they are. Similarly, the experience of the performance process is not limited to "being there," but it means to be actively part of a vortex of forces and dynamics that enact reconfiguration. Heidegger gives us the example of a *bridge* in the landscape:

the bridge swings over the stream with power. It does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the

bridge crosses the stream. . . . The bridge gathers to itself, in its own way, earth and sky, divinities and mortals. (“Building”)

The principal function of the bridge is to link and unite: it connects one bank of the river to another, it connects towns and people and then it hosts the movement of people within these various locations; by looking at the bridge, we become aware of the dynamics and the relationships between different elements in the landscape, distances, and movements.

The body of the performer serves the same purpose within the performance ecosystem: as an element of union, the body as a bridge gathers and links together the elements of the performative ecosystem, which are already there, and lets them manifest by virtue of their relationships within the process.

By witnessing the actions undertaken by my performing body in *Mapping the Sound*, the participants became aware of the surrounding soundscape and their own spatial relationship with the broader environment, even though most of them already knew the location well: the elements were “already there.” Such a new awareness developed through a shift from the sense of sight to that of hearing and touch, and my performing body was the bridge that allowed that passage. The Heideggerian idea of the bridge may be productively combined with Stelarc’s conception of bodies as *portals* of sensory experience’ (O’Callaghan 209); as a bridge and a portal, the body in performance art allows a passage, namely, an experience, according to Castelli’s view discussed in Chapter One (section 1.8).

As I have argued, Mendieta’s body enacts union by disappearing because its traces allow the viewers to engage with the work. During *The Foreigner*, my breath acted like a bridge in a double way. Firstly, it connected my body, my *sōma*, with space and time because I could endure stillness and overcome pain while performing by practising breathing exercises and respiratory techniques. In terms of time, the rhythm of my breath gave me a tempo to attune to when I had already lost the chronological sense of time. Being confined underneath the cloth without seeing anything is a challenging experience for the mind and, in this sense, my breath worked as a bridge and an anchor that kept me attached to the present moment, like the metronome constantly wound up by Abramović in *The House with the Ocean View*.

Secondly, breathing deeply during the performance made my chest move up and down, and this allowed many members of the audience to establish a connection between their bodies and the still unknown and invisible body of the Foreigner; these participants declared that they decided to move closer to me, and even write on the cloth, once they noticed my breath

and attuned to it. By focusing on my breath as a bridge between me and them, someone reflected on the universality of the human condition represented by *The Foreigner* because “we all have a body and we all breathe.”

A bridge connects two points in space, and hence it is possible to cross it from two extremities, it is not a one-way road: the bodies of the audience members work as bridges for the performers as well. I explained in Chapter Two (section 2.3) and Chapter Four (section 4.4) how the presence of the participants and their energy during *The Foreigner* helped me to endure pain and fatigue and keep performing; as I said, this is a phenomenon which Abramović has spoken about as “taking energy from the audience” to perform durational pieces (Abramović *Walk*; Akers and Dupre).

In *Mapping the Sound*, the bodies of both the participants and the non-participants created the soundscape upon which I performed, which was my link to the surrounding environment.

It is not possible to speak about a body-to-body relationship in the case of the *Siluetas Series* because Mendieta is not part of the work, which we do not experience as a live event. However, if the traces of her body in the landscape work as a bridge for us, the viewers, because they allow us to metaphorically be part of that process of absence and symbiosis, then, this means that our own presence before the work and our engagement with it—through our senses, thoughts, and feelings—brings that process back to life because we experience it as performative. In this sense, we are the bridges that connect the time and space in which Mendieta undertook the *siluetas* as actions in the contemporary world by means of the present moment of our embodied experience of them. The next chapter expands on this perspective and discusses the bridging role of documentation with respect to the liveness of the event. Returning to where this sub-section began, the experience of the performance as the exploration of possibilities happens by means of the phenomenological body, and these are the “bare necessities” theorised by Paton .

### **5.3 Embodiment Making the Body Present Through Its Limits: Boundaries, Horizons, and Vulnerability**

#### Embodiment as the Mutual Experience of the Horizon

Dancers, performers, body-mind practitioners and people “working with the body” describe the concept of embodiment in various yet similar ways: from “inhabiting” to “the physical

feeling of being alive,” they agree on embodiment being the awareness of one’s own body through the senses (Walsh). Dictionaries explain the term *embodiment* as “a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling” (Oxford) or “the representation or expression of something in a tangible or visible form” (Collins).

Other recurrent words are *manifestation*, *symbol*, and *realisation*. Embodiment is presence: it is the condition of the body that makes itself present to itself in the place-world. From a phenomenological perspective, Casey tells us that the first condition of being embodied is being placed, and Massey claims that the place-world is a spatial-temporal dimension (“Doreen Massey”). Before them, Einstein showed us that “space and time fold into one another” and we cannot consider them separately (Burton 94).

Within this framework, I understand embodiment as becoming present according to the Ancient Greek concept of *sōma*, which has a spectrum of interpretations, and pairs with *sarx*, commonly translated as “flesh.” The term *sōma* refers to the human physical body, the body-mind combination, but it is more than that: it is “the embodiment of the person,” as James D. G. Dunn puts it (56). Dunn’s theorising embodiment within theology can be productively applied to the study of performance art because his analysis of the concept of *sōma* offers us relational and ecological dimensions to the body and embodiment:

it [*sōma*] denotes the person embodied in a particular environment. It is the means by which the person relates to that environment, and vice versa. It is the meaning of living it, of experiencing the environment . . . . It is the embodied “me,” the means by which “I” and the world can act upon each other. (56)

The embodied body as *sōma* does not stand alone: Dunn talks about “corporeality” or “corporateness” to underline that the body is the medium through which humans interact and cooperate with each other and so enables embodiment. Embodiment is, therefore, a relational experience. Describing “the radical concept of presence,” Fischer-Lichte argues that

Through the performer’s presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied minds in a constant process of becoming—he perceives the circulating energy as a transformative and vital energy.

This quality of mutuality between performer and spectator mediated through their bodies is what I call the embodied experience of the performance art process.

This chapter, so far, has described the role of the artist's performing body within the work as part of its internal mechanism. In the following section, I theorise how the performer's body operates in relation to the spectators' bodies within the performance ecosystem via an application of Dunn's and Fischer-Lichte's conceptualisations.

How does the artist's body physically become a medium, a mirror, and a bridge during the development of a performance? How does it practically enter in relation with space, time, and the other bodies involved in the work—the spectators' bodies and the represented or evoked bodies? How does a body become embodied? A performance artist uses his or her own body deliberately and makes it present “as subject and object, in specific relationships to the world” (Birringer 66). In alignment with Fischer-Lichte's concepts of presentness and presence, and Dunn's notion of *sōma*, the body is something that the artist *makes* present. What does that mean? In performance art, a body is made present through its limits. In the following sub-section, I theorise the corporeal limits of the performing body in terms of porous borders. Like the liminality of horizons, these corporeal limits circumscribe yet absorb and blend, delimit yet blur and expand.

### The Limits of the Body as Possibilities: Relationality and Vulnerability in Space and Time

Sebastian Abrahamsson and Paul Simpson argue that what determines the end of one body and the beginning of another one goes beyond the skin. They describe the limits of the body through categories:

1. Limits as temporal, namely the body's finitude, its process of ageing and going towards death. This view has resonances with Heidegger's view of mortals within the Fourfold (*Being*), as well as the effects of temporality and endurance on Abramović's performing body in *The House*, namely, her weight-loss and her exhaustion but also her enhanced sensitivity (Abramovic and Kelly).
2. The limits of the body are also spatial because no-one fluctuates in isolation: we are “always somewhere,” corporeally embedded in that specific spatial-temporal dimension that is the place-world (Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*); the body is part of a dynamic and non-hierarchical environment, as argued by Latour (“On Actor-

Network Theory”), Bennett, and Kwon (“One Place After Another: Notes”). To these theorisations we can add the conception of the body as *sōma*, embodied within an environment among relationships, as well as Mattsson’s theorisation of the encounters between bodies, which I discuss in the next section.

Finally, limits can be understood as capacity, namely “what a body can do,” particularly in regard to pain (Abrahamsson and Simpson 334–335). Limits, in the form of pain and stamina levels, foster union by connecting the performer to their humanity and the performer to the audience. Like Abramović and Parr, Abrahamsson and Simpson acknowledge pain as an instrument of exploration and self-knowledge and a modality for relating to others, what Abramović calls “mirroring” and Parr calls “empathy.” The artists embody their own vulnerability by undertaking actions that involve pain, danger, and stamina: artists do “unto themselves what the spectators [fear] for themselves” (Fischer-Lichte 91). Moreover, as both Féral and Fischer-Lichte point out, these actions occur in no referential context and have no narrative; this means that nothing tempers the directness, the depth, and the ferocity of the actions which the audience are exposed to.

All these elements provide visitors with a powerful experience of the performance from which it is not possible to hide. “How can someone ‘just standing there’ be so excruciating to watch?” Carr asks while watching a distressed Abramović in *The House* (Abramovic and Kelly 154). Phelan answers this question by referring to the body art of the 70s, which explored the physical and mental limits of the body and, thus, brought attention “to the physical and political force of embodiment,” showing that “the relationship between the artist and [their] own body serve[s] as a mirror for the larger drama between the individual and the social more broadly” (Abramovic and Kelly 171).

Bodily limits, therefore, operate in terms of possibilities rather than limitations. By encountering and exploring the limits of their corporeal being-in-the-world, instead of escaping from them, performance artists bring forth “the potential for the unforeseen to emerge” (Abrahamsson and Simpson 334). As I have argued, this is what the body as a bridge does: the corporeal limits that make the body present are liminal spaces because they are both *boundaries* and *thresholds*. As such, the limits of the body are an open and “specific form of relationality” that is fluid, “already blurred and moving in and out of focus”

(Abrahamsson and Simpson 336). As temporal, spatial, and capacious, the limits of the artist's body are borders that put that body in relation with time, space, and other bodies involved in the performance. As edges, the corporeal limits make the body as *sōma* available to exposure and, thus, vulnerable.

Vulnerability is a fundamental concept in performance art because it constitutes the communication channel between space, time, bodies, performer and audience. The corporeal boundaries through which a performing body makes itself present are *horizons*, points “of separation and joining together” that cannot be predicted, fixed, and established in a definitive way (Käll 2). Boundaries are not to be intended only as demarcation “between the ownness of one's body and the otherness of that which is exterior to it, but also a field in which ownness and otherness blend and bleed into one another” (Käll 2).

Drawing on these theorisations as well as those by Heidegger (“Building”) and Massey (“Doreen Massey”), I argue that corporeal frontiers are open fields, temporal-spatial dimensions to dwell in. Citing Stelarc's body suspensions, Phelan argues that the body is a horizon and that “the porous nature of the body, open to the world” is inscribed and defined by the surrounding environment (Abramovic and Kelly 171). Because of its porosity as an element of the processual and non-hierarchical performance ecosystem, “nothing about the body, its functions, its marks, or its sensations can be expected to carry any stable meanings across time and space” (Sheshadri-Cooks qtd in Bromseth et al. 150). Such a porosity is what facilitates relationality and, thus, embodiment.

### Encounters between Embodiments

Bodies, however, are not brought into presence only through encountering their limits within time and space: as Mattsson argues, bodies are marked as such by encountering other bodies (Mattsson in Bromseth et al.). Mattsson's conceptualisation of *encounter* offers insights into the performer-audience relationship, how the audience project on to the artist's body and interpret it; this is an aspect of the performance ecosystem that I discuss further in Chapter Six.

As I argued in Chapters Three (section 3.2) and Four (section 4.4), it is important to note that encounters between bodies never happen only in the present, but carry with them “a historicity of an encounter, which hold traces of broader relationships” (Mattsson in Bromseth et al. 143). Such a historicity triggers associations in the embodied minds during

the performance process. Art historian RoseLee Goldberg sees a Renaissance bather when Abramović takes a shower in *The House* (Abramovic and Kelly), while Italian scholar Stefano Tomassini sees the frontal perspective from the feet of the white cloth of *The Foreigner* (Figure 32, Figure 33) as recalling the shroud that covers Jesus in the fifteenth-century painting *Cristo morto nel sepolcro e tre dolenti* (“The dead Christ and three mourners”) by Andrea Mantegna (Figure 34). These associations emerge because the performance process involves encounters between bodies as *sōma*, as embodied whole persons within complex networks of stories and past experiences. In conclusion, it is possible to say that encounters within a performance are encounters between embodiments; as such, they occur in corporeal relationships of mutual interactions “within a larger and corporate social whole” (Dunn 59).

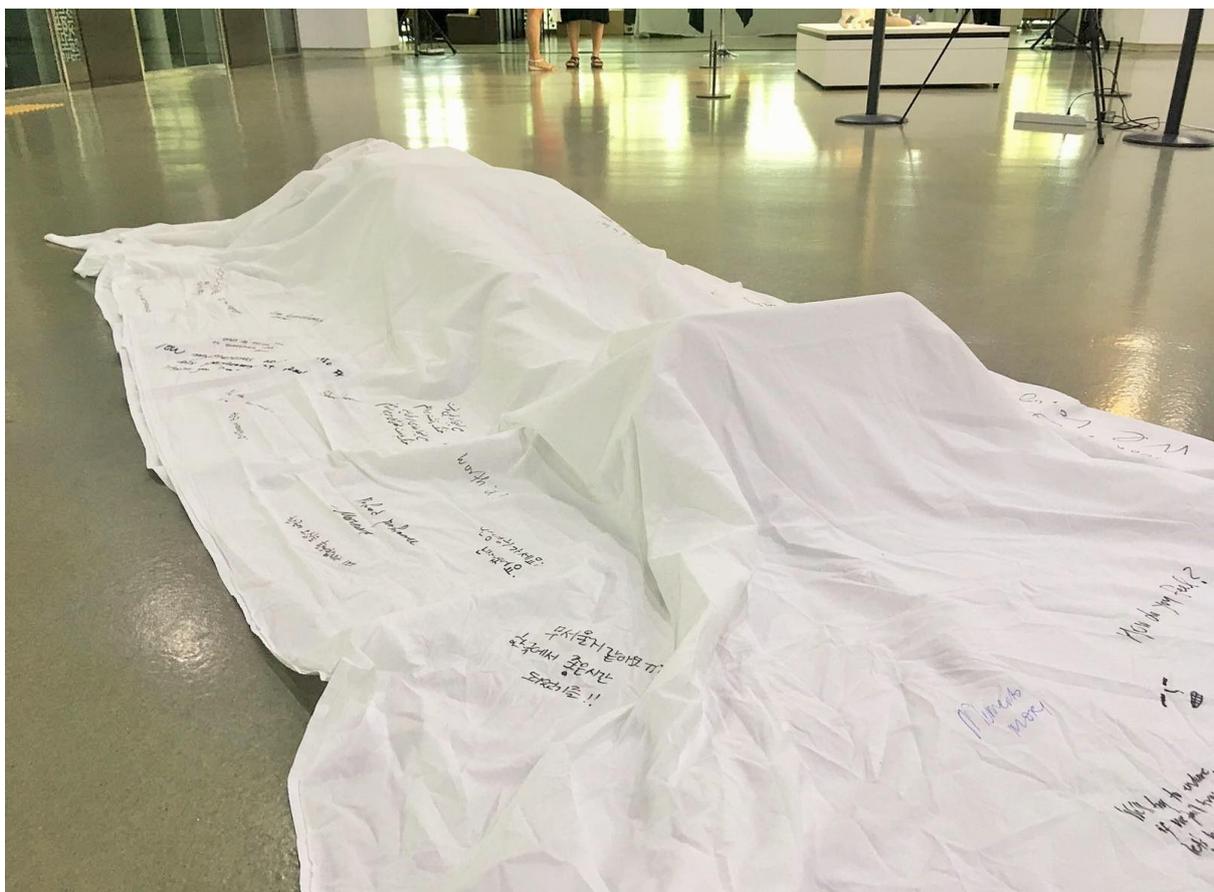


Figure 32. © Angela Viora 2018, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Daegu Art Factory (SK), Ph. Panayiota Demetriou.



Figure 33. © Angela Viora 2016, *The Foreigner–Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance.  
Monash University Performing Arts Centre. (AUS), Ph. J. G. Dörner.



Figure 34. Andrea Mantegna, *Cristo morto nel sepolcro e tre dolenti*, c1483, tempera on canvas

© Courtesy Pinacoteca di Brera, Milano (IT).

## 5.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, I described the role of the body at the centre of the performance figure-eight from a phenomenological perspective as the sensorial fulcrum through which we experience “space” and “time.” I discussed “the body *as*”: the multiple intertwined ways in which the body acts and manifests by means of dynamics of fragmentation and union during the development of a performance, which eventually leads to *possibilities* and reconfiguration. Just as there are many kinds of spatiality and temporality involved in the performance ecosystem, so too are there many bodies: that of the artist, those of the audience members, those referred to in the work, and those evoked by the participants via associations and memories. Acknowledging such multiplicity allows scholars to understand how performance art can act upon the deepest levels of reception in many ways for each person involved and throughout time. For example, the responses to *The Foreigner* varied consistently according to the background and the experiences of each member of the public, yet the image that I offered was the same. This is so according to various qualities of the body:

1. As *sōma*, the body encompasses the physical apparatus, the mind, the emotions and the senses: it is the *embodiment* of the whole persona within an environment, with which the subject engages in relationships of mutual influence and exchange (Dunn). This perspective foregrounds union and evokes Latour’s ecological and relational notion of “actants” (“On Actor-Network Theory”) and, I argue, resonates with Casey’s phenomenology of the body-space bond. These are forms of union.
2. If we are all bodies placed “somewhere” (Casey, “Introduction”), it follows that we are placed in mutual relation to other bodies. I drew upon Mattsson’s theorisation of *encounters* between bodies, which carry with them traces of past and broader relationships (Bromseth et al.). Such a historicity triggers associations in the “embodied minds” (Fischer-Lichte) during the performance process, and contributes to union within the body-time relationship. I supplemented this perspective by combining these ideas with Jones’ theorisation on the body as always and already inscribed in dynamics of representation, which I discuss further in Chapter Seven.

Therefore, being placed in specific spatial-temporal dimensions together other bodies as *sōma*, the body grounds *embodiment* as an ecological, relational, and shared experience. The

perspectives illustrated above develop through union, but I claim that the artists' bodies also enact embodiment via fragmentation by performing unexpected actions within ostensibly familiar contexts. The comfort offered to the audience of the analysed artworks maintained union in their sensorial landscapes, but this apparent ease was soon disrupted by the actions undertaken by the artists (fragmentation), provoking short-circuits in the audience's perception and reception of the piece. Paradoxically, I argued that the artist's body also acts like the Heideggerian *bridge* in the landscape ("Building"), performing union by gathering and connecting the manifestations of space and time, bringing the audience closer to the work. By witnessing Parr's struggle and my stillness, people reflected upon the condition of those detained on Manus and Nauru Islands and on the pressing migration issue; likewise, the audiences of *The House With The Ocean View* and *Mapping the Sound* became aware of their own relationships with time, daily life, and places. As bridges, the artists' bodies perform *alethēia* (Heidegger, *Poetry*) because they unveil relationships and trigger reflections in the viewers; in this sense, these bodies are "bearer[s] of messages" (Vergine), which become symbols of broader realities for each audience member. To fully comprehend how the performance process develops, therefore, we must consider that the *sōma* of the participants act upon the artist and the work as well—through their interpretations, behaviours, and actions.

In durational works in particular, artists endure pain and fatigue by offering their own bodies to the unpredictability of the performance space and to the inexorable flow of time: they display the temporal, spatial, and capacity limits of their somatic beings (Abrahamsson and Simpson) before and *for* the audience. Applying Stelarc's definition of bodies as "portals of experiences," I assert that the limits of bodies are the threshold on which fragmentation and union act, and where reconfiguration takes place; such limits do not imply limitations, but open up possibilities via vulnerability and so enact embodiment and encounters. This discussion lays the ground for that of the next chapter, in which I expand on how the artists, by performing such limits, allow the audience members to become agentic elements within the performance ecosystem.

## Chapter Six—The Performer-Audience Relationship

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the performer-audience relationship within the performance process. The relationship is spatial, mutual and processual, and develops in terms of presence and absence, fragmentation and union. This chapter draws upon a published article of mine that investigates the performer-audience relationship in terms of leftovers: what remains when the artist leaves the scene during the performance (Viora, “To Be”). I have previously discussed the process of writing that article and its influence on this dissertation in Chapter Two (section 2.6). I argue that the artworks analysed in this thesis enact the disappearance of the artist during the performance process, making room for the audience and allowing its members to actively participate in the work—this is the relationship between the artist and the audience common to these works. By *disappearance*, I mean the displacement of the artist’s centrality theorised by composer and director Heiner Goebbels in his informative work *Aesthetics of Absence*, in which he gives “equal weight to all the . . . means or elements of performance” (xvi). I argue that, through absence, hiding, stillness, vulnerability, and specific and repeated actions, these artists cease to be protagonists of the piece and become vehicles for its process to unfold. As a result, aided by agentic space and time, the audience gradually assumes authority within the performance and becomes an agentic part of it. In this chapter, I examine how such a process of disappearance and inclusion develops according to the dynamics of fragmentation and union.

The multiple disappearances performed by the artist enact fragmentation between space and bodies through time; however, it is through these actions of fragmentation that the artist fosters union between themselves and the audience and between the audience and the performative process. By physically leaving the scene, hiding, maintaining distances, not engaging in eye-contact, and more, the artists perform fragmentation and create gaps in the performance space; those gaps are for the audience to fill, they are an invitation for the participants to step into the event and be part of it. Goebbels says that the departure of the artist from the centre of the scene is a “blank space . . . where intensity is *evoked* and *produced* [because] an audience is eager to bridge distances, to instinctively fill in the gaps” (43). I compare these gaps to the void of the jug theorised by Martin Heidegger, which works as a vessel exactly because of its apparent emptiness (*Poetry*). Heidegger explains that the function of a jug is to hold the liquid that is poured into it, and the jug can do so thanks to its

concave space, rather than to the surface that delimits it. Likewise, I argue in this chapter, it is the withdrawal of the artist that defines this apparently empty space “in order not to remain two-dimensional” (Goebbels et al. 39): the absence of the artist gives depth to the performance space by working as an invitation for the audience to actively participate in it.

The artists make room for the audience in diverse ways. In the *Siluetta Series*, Mendieta literally disappeared and left only the traces of her own presence available through documentation. Both Parr in *Daydream Island* and myself in *The Foreigner* remained physically in the room with the visitors but, in different ways, we hid from them and impeded the direct and mutual visual connection between performer and audience. Although physically and actively central in the scene, Abramović and I, in *Mapping the Sound*, merged with the performance space through repetitive actions; our own individualities became lost in the performative tasks, which were not self-referential activities but offers to the public. As a result, Abramović and I became triggers for associations and mirrors for the people in front of us who united with the work.

But how can the absence of the artist provide space for the audience in an active way within the performance? How can these artists focus on the audience-performer-performance relationship if they disappear or hide? *Mediation* and *intimacy* are the key concepts here. The more the artists mediate contact between the audience and the performer, the more the audience takes space in the work and becomes intimate with it. In the following sections, I articulate the meaning of intimacy as attunement to the performance process by means of dwelling. By leaving the scene, partially or fully, these artists ask the audience: if I am not here, on the scene, how are you going to be in it? By remaining motionless and silent, enduring pain and fatigue, and being at the mercy of what surrounds them, they ask the visitors: what are *you* going to do? The ways in which the audience’s behaviour responds to these questions constitutes the artwork itself because the focus of performance art is the process rather than the results (Abramović "Marina Abramović: An Art Made of Trust, Vulnerability and Connection"; Feral; Goldberg).

In terms of fragmentation and union, we can understand the progressive or total disappearance of the artist from the performance space as fragmentation. This is an irreversible departure for Mendieta and inaccessible hiding for Parr and the Foreigner, while *The House With The Ocean View* and *Mapping the Sound* enact fragmentation via the gradual dissolution of the performers’ centrality in the scene, despite their exposure. As I have argued

in previous sections, by building upon theorists such as Gentile and van Gennep, such a radical force of fragmentation leads to a double union: the agentic involvement of the audience in the performance and the audience's consequent connection to the artist. Such a process can foster the *audience-audience relationship*, the participants' influence on each other, which determines the flow of the performance process beyond the influence of the artist or the structure of the work.

## 6.2 Making Room for the Audience Through Disappearance as Questions

Presence and absence dictate what is left and what is taken. In my analyses, the absence of the artist is not considered a negative idea implying lack or exclusion; rather, the disappearance of the performer uncovers a fertile terrain from which art emerges.

The cloth that covers the body of the Foreigner was an element of fragmentation in the body-space relationship because it worked as a barrier that separated the performer from the audience, preventing them from seeing and knowing me. The prolonged stillness of the Foreigner performed fragmentation in time by clashing with the hectic rhythm of the world around us. In this scenario, silently, the Foreigner asked the audience, if you do not know my identity, what *you* are going to see? If I remain motionless, what are *you* going to do?

Mendieta, by performing fragmentation as an alteration in space, left a hollow of her body in the sand: what is the viewer projecting into it? As I discussed in Chapter Four (section 4.3), Mendieta and I provoke doubt in our audiences by hiding, and as Tomassini argues, this stops the time flow. Theorising the relationship between the artist and the audience, Goebbels asserts that the "refusal of representation" stimulates the audience's awareness:

[I]t is precisely the absence of traditional notions of presence and intensity, an empty centre on stage, which perplexes us, the audience, turning us into sovereign of the experience through this perplexity at the same time. (57)

Perplexity influences the agency of the audience members in the performance ecosystem, visible in how they resolve their confusion.

Parr, on the one hand, enacted fragmentation in space between bodies by giving his back to the audience members and avoiding eye contact: he obstructed the encounters between the *sōma* involved in the performance. On the other hand, the artist overwhelmed the members of

the public by broadcasting his private torture onto mega-screens. Parr had his lips and face sewn up in solidarity with the refugees detained on Manus and Nauru Islands, some of whom sewed their lips together to protest their living conditions (Doherty, “Four Asylum Seekers”; “Nauru Asylum Seekers”). What the visitors saw in front of them was happening to refugees on an island nearby. How is something close made to feel far away? Such a gesture of fragmentation performed by the artist, the perforation of flesh, allowed the evoked bodies of the refugees to be alluded to onstage and be part of the performance process: this is union as connection between disparate bodies, times, and spaces. How did the audience dwell in that space between the auditorium and the screens, between Parr’s performance in the theatre and the asylum seekers on Manus and Nauru Islands? “In what ways can this gulf be traversed?” (Hazou).

The fragmentation in space brought about by the physical distance between Parr and the audience members, that gulf-stage between them, clashed with the connection offered (or imposed?) by the giant screens that could be switched off. Parr hid but the visitors in the auditorium could not. It was exactly within that space of contrasts, between the screens right into their faces and the abyssal stage at their feet, that the members of the public dwelt in reconfiguration as negotiation.

*Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait* showed an alternative way to perceive the surrounding environment, then it invited the audience members to close their eyes and find their own way through the soundscape. The performance asked them, are you still in the same place? When audience members closed their eyes, I disappeared from their view because the piece was not about me. I was simply a medium through which others could experience places differently: the performative action that I undertook was an offer to them.

*The House with the Ocean View* also worked as an offer, this time to the people of New York City. Abramović built an island of peace within a chaotic metropolis and the House in which she lived for twelve days had no walls; it was constantly open to view. The openness of the house allowed a union between the dimension of the performer and those of the gallery and the audience. However, the way in which the house was designed in space recalled fragmentation: the tape on the floor and the knife-ladders kept Abramović physically distant and inaccessible to the participants. The position from which the audience watched the performance recalled the giant screens in *Daydream Island*: it was a frontal view that almost reduced three-dimensional space to the bi-dimensional view of a painting or a TV screen. As in Parr’s piece, the set-up was paradoxical: Abramović was so inaccessible and alone yet so

exposed and available at the same time, which were the qualities ascribed to the Foreigner by a member of the public. Once again, the artist did not move towards the visitors but made them step towards her and each other. Abramović did so by creating a yet-to-be-occupied and apparently empty space for the audience to reach and dwell in; that was the place in which the participants took up the offer of the artists to have their own shared yet individual experience of the work including live reconfiguration.

Goebbels says that “every single performance is a public space—and an invitation. A host who talks all the time about himself, will not live up to this expectation. He won’t even realize how wonderful his guests are” (44). Abramović offers her own body as a catalyst through which to undertake an energy exchange: the visitors, “the Ocean” of the title, nourish the artist with their presence and energies. In turn, through a durational process, the performer returns energy to the audience in an exchange. The piece is not about Abramović showing her own limits, as in some of her earlier body art pieces from the 1970s. Rather, as declared in her documentation, her performance is about the energy flow occurring in space and time between the artist and the audience (Figure 35).



Figure 35. Marina Abramović, *The House With The Ocean View*, Performance. 12 days

Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2002

Ph: Steven P. Harris

© Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

### 6.3 Making Room for the Audience In the Performance: Shared Space Through Dwelling and *Alethēia*

It is necessary to understand the performer-audience relationship within the shared space of the performance. This is a dimension constituted by the action of the performer, their presence (or absence), the visitors and their ways of occupying that space. As I argued in Chapter Three, the space of the performance is a territory that contains within itself all the other kinds of spatiality investigated so far, as well as time and bodies; this is a dimension that is shared, neither fixed nor absolute, to which the artists attune through vulnerability. How does the performer-audience relationship develop within this space?

The answer lies in the notions of *dwelling* and *alethēia* theorised by Martin Heidegger (“Building”; *Poetry*) and discussed in Chapter Three (section 2.3). Rather than occupying a certain portion of space, dwelling means attuning to a place by becoming receptive to it, letting it unfold and manifest; Heidegger illustrates this concept through the example of a bridge in the landscape. As I argued in Chapter Five (section 5.3), in the performances analysed in this project, the body of the artist acts as the Heideggerian bridge that operates in terms of union by connecting the Fourfold elements of the performance.

In this chapter, I argue how such a union happens by means of fragmentation. The artist “leaves the scene” and, thus, gathers together the elements present in the performance space by making room for them. The concept of *alethēia*, namely “unconcealment of beings” (*Poetry*), allows us to understand how the performance art process can “uncover truth by drawing attention to the structures that organise what is called a ‘world’” (Johnston and Casey 149). To unveil and unconceal something, indeed, something else must be taken away: this is the artist. The disappearance of the artist highlights how the audience responds to the encounter with such structures as part of performance-making. Theorising painting, art curator Justin Paton speaks of the absence of the artist (fragmentation) as a vehicle to create intimacy (union) between the painting and the viewer, and to ascribe agency to the latter in experiencing the former. When the viewer is in front of the artwork, the painter is not there; the artist has crucially left the scene and, by doing so, “they ceded authority to . . . a piece of fabric or board spread with colour. This letting go, oddly, is what permits art to visit places normal conversations don’t go” (Paton 18).

Exemplifying this disappearance, Abramović, Parr, Mendieta, and I have partially or totally abandoned a central position in the performance space and, thus, we allow the audience “to listen in” (Paton 18). This is a progressive hand-over from the artist to the action

and the performance space, first, and from the performance space to the audience, then. According to the relational character of the performance ecosystem, the presence and action of the artist affects the audience's experience of the performance; therefore, the absence of the performer means giving authority to the visitors, and their own presence and actions. The performances investigated show that, by leaving the scene, the artists perform fragmentation and activate a liminal space in which the audience members can move at their own pace and become an active part of the work (union).

#### **6.4 Various Ways to Perform Absence**

##### Physical Absence, Anonymity, and Stillness

By considering presence and absence in terms of solids and voids, I understand the absence of the artist as a positive void. This is a void that does not denote something missing but rather is primed to receive what is coming; it is a kind of void that is a potential fulfilment of phenomena and processes that are going to happen within its presence. This is the kind of void articulated by Heidegger through the example of a jug as a vessel, whose void holds by taking and keeping what is poured in: "And yet, is the jug really empty?" (169). In the *Siluetas Series*, Mendieta engages in a symbiotic union with the surrounding environment by imprinting her body into the landscape: sand, earth, snow, trees, grass, ice, and rocks. These interventions in the environment can be seen as manifestations of fragmentation as interruption and alteration. Paradoxically, the artist eventually reaches union as symbiosis and communion with the earth by means of the most radical fragmentation: she disappears. It is exactly through these simultaneous manifestations of fragmentation and union that we, the viewers, overcome the physical distance between us and the action, and we enter the work.

I argue that, if Mendieta stayed there, it would have been a work about her relationship with the sites, and the audience members would have been witnesses rather than participants. This is what Goebbels calls "a dispossession of experience" or "a privatization of the public space" of the performance, "a space defined, described and opened up by a compositional pulse but monopolized by the artist/soloist/conductor [that] means surrendering to *only* one reading, a reduction to *one* emotion, to one set of dynamic choices" (43–44). Instead, Mendieta's absence provides a transformation that goes beyond her own immediate experience of the place. What fills the empty space that remains is the landscape itself through the actions of the natural elements, and how we, the viewers, dwell in it, forcing us to consider our relationship with that environment. Thus, we are given "the

opportunity to define and experience our own difference” (Goebbels et al. 44). By focusing on what is left as a vacuum during the artistic process, and by intending absence as openness and possibility, I compare the hollows left on the ground by Mendieta’s body to the Heideggerian jug. What Mendieta offers to us through documentation are dug silhouettes shaped as human figures into and onto which the viewers can project their own thoughts and feelings; this is a union between the bodies of the audience and the site of the action. Mendieta’s body shape could be ours. Let us imagine this. Let us imagine how the sand and the sea would feel if we were there, as Mendieta was (Figure 36). These thoughts and feelings constitute the “room for the audience” in the performance space. All these wonderings constitute our experience of the piece. The artist makes room for us by disappearing and, in this way, the presence of the body of Ana Mendieta does not hijack our experience of the artwork—to paraphrase Paton, presence becomes ours to make .

I was faithful to the same principle in my performances of *The Foreigner*, during which my name did not appear anywhere, and the audience could not see my person. I did not want the visitors to know my identity as a Caucasian woman in her thirties. Consequently, the public members started imagining and projecting their own thoughts onto the Foreigner and a process of mirroring occurred. Some participants realised their own restlessness by watching the stillness of my body, some saw their own position with respect to the migration issue, and others projected images of death and grief onto the white cloth of the Foreigner (Figure 33). These are all examples of union as identification, recognition, and symbolism. Like with Mendieta’s presence, if I had been visible during this performance, it would have become a work about me, but a foreigner’s identity is unknown.

In the *Siluetas* and *The Foreigner*, stillness serves the same purpose. In a performance, movements are narratives and actions have meanings: they can influence the visitors because they can “tell something” to them. For example, Mendieta often put herself on the ground in the pose of a goddess to highlight her connection with the earth according to ancient myths from her native country (Blocker; Merz et al.; Rosenthal et al.). However, she did not try to detail her *siluetas* and make them recognisable as Ana Mendieta. The silhouettes show a generic and anonymous human shape that could be mine or yours. In designing *The Foreigner*, I acknowledged that it is unknown to whom those bodies on the Italian and Greek shores belong, therefore, they can be anyone’s; they can be yours, the visitor, before them. Those corpses can be me, and this is how the idea of this performance

started for me. It is unknown to whom the performing body of the piece belongs. What if you were underneath the sheet? This is what *The Foreigner* asks. The peculiarity of Mendieta's work, which Warchol describes as "simultaneously performative and static, expressive and stoic, beautiful and haunting, autobiographic and universal", has been very influential on my own practice. Despite the absence and the anonymity of the performing body, both the *Siluetas* and *The Foreigner* express the idea of "body as language" discussed in Chapter Five (section 5.3), that is, a body that becomes a bearer of messages (Vergine). Through the minimal yet profound action of merging her body with the landscape and then taking it away, Mendieta's body becomes the Heideggerian bridge between the viewers and the landscape. Through the shape of her body, which is present but paradoxically absent, we become aware of the site and its elements while they unfold and manifest in their essence. In a process of unification as encounter, attunement, and inclusion, we, the audience members, enter the work with our *sōma*. The meanings imbued in the *Siluetas* and *The Foreigner* derive from what the artists chose to conceal.

Mendieta's physical absence and the anonymity of the *Foreigner* perform fragmentation as distance between the artists and their audiences. The cavities of the *Siluetas* and the cloth of the *Foreigner* impede the audience's ability to fully "reach" Mendieta and me and touch us; in this way, the connection with our audiences does not become an exclusive one-to-one relationship. Such a distance allows the shared space of the performance to remain open to anyone to step into. The gap is for the participants to bridge. Thus, they can ultimately enter in communion with the performance process as agentic elements and they can also encounter other members of the audience: they meet in the common ground of the *siluetas* and the white cloth that covers the *Foreigner*.



Figure 36. Ana Mendieta, *Untitled* from the *Siluetas Series* in Mexico, 1976.  
©The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, L.L.C. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

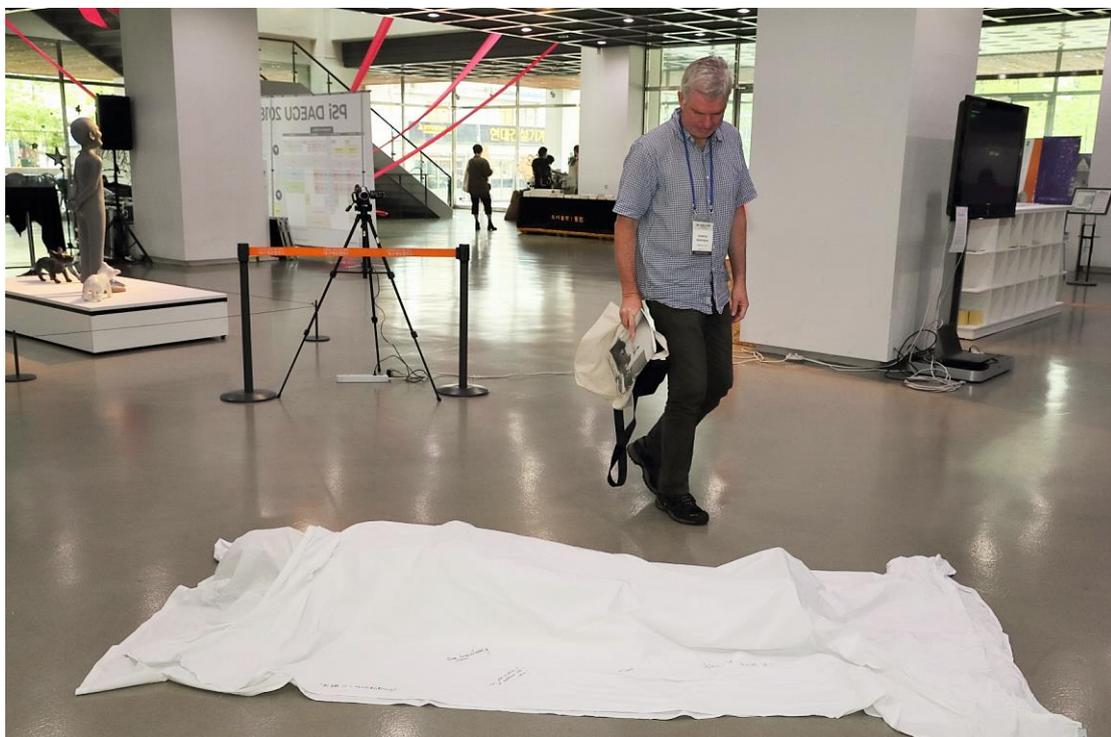


Figure 37. © Angela Viora 2016, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance.  
Daegu Art Factory (SK). © Courtesy *PSi* Archive and Daegu Art Factory.

## Hiding and Mediating

As Warchol points out, “the true power of the Siluetas lies in what Mendieta chooses not to show us.” In *The Foreigner*, I chose to embody the image of those corpses with no identity along Southern European beaches because, when I first saw them, I wondered who was underneath those sheets. Maybe there was a young artist like me? What if I were underneath that sheet? By not revealing the identity of the Foreigner to the audience members, I left an open space in which they could wander and ask themselves the same questions. By attempting to answer such questions, the visitors found their own experience of the performance process.

Mendieta removed her own body from the scene and the work is experienceable through documentation. I attempted to live embody an image from the media, whilst Parr, in *Daydream Island*, put video screens between himself and the audience. His piece represents the conditions faced by asylum seekers and refugees detained in Australia, some of whom sewed their lips in protest. By having his lips and other parts of his face sewn up, in a painful act of physical fragmentation, Parr embodied the physical and psychological suffering that these people have experienced in detention. The wounds (self-)inflicted on the body of the artist recall the raw fragmentation of certain works of body art from the 1960s and 70s. Such acts of fragmentation brought union between Parr and the refugees and then between him, the evoked bodies, and the audience members.

Performances such as *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002) and *Fresh Skin Like A Baby* (2010–13) also saw the artist having his face sewn up in support of the asylum seekers detained by the Australian government on Nauru and Manus Islands. However, in *Daydream Island*, the relationship between audience and performer was more complicated. Parr usually avoids any type of mediated performance experience beyond that of his immediate physical endurance. Yet, this work appears to establish clear spatial boundaries between Parr, who sat in the middle of the stage, and the audience seated in the auditorium, introducing an element of fragmentation in the bodies-space relationship. Such a theatrical setting was further complicated by the fact that Parr and his collaborators turned their back to the public during the performance. The fragmentation was declared. The audience could only see what was happening to the artist on three large high-definition screens placed before them, hanging above the stage (Figure 38, 39). Scheer says that not allowing the audience to directly see what is happening resulted in an “anti-performance, a piece of theatre which negates the experience of the spectator” (Parr and Scheer).

Partially contradicting this claim, I argue that the audience was not excluded from the space of the performance; rather, Parr's presence within the work was mediated. In Latour's terms, his body was an "actant" that was both present and absent, and that situated the audience in an uncomfortable set of relations. In terms of fragmentation and union, the theatrical spatial arrangement potentially put the audience at a distance from Parr's suffering, which was further amplified by the mediation of the screens. The artist was there, in flesh, not far away, and, yet, he was not.

In turning his back to the audience, Parr partially left the scene. *Daydream Island*, like my work in *The Foreigner*, was not about the artist. The work was concerned with what the audience members saw on the video screens, which exposed them to the absent bodies of those who were detained as refugees. The partial absence of the artist turned his transfigured flesh into a symbol of the bodies of those suffering in the Pacific island detention camps. The body of the artist that was not made vulnerable to elicit sympathy from the audience; rather, the audience members were forced into an uncomfortable position, emotionally punctured by the needles that pierced Parr's skin. Applying Stelarc's concepts of union, Parr's performing body, and mine in *The Foreigner*, were portals that allowed the audience to enter the refugee debate from a different perspective, reaching reconfiguration. Like the frame of a portal, the figure of the performing body remains behind once the audience crosses the threshold.



Figure 38, 39. © Mike Parr 2013, *Daydream Island*, live performance. Carriage Works Festival, Sydney (AUS). Ph. Zan Wimberley. Courtesy the artist.

### Eye-contact: Of Gaps and Channels

Avoiding making eye-contact with the audience is another method employed by the performers to disappear from the scene. This happens in *Daydream Island*, *Mapping the Sound*, *The Foreigner* and in the *Siluetas Series*. Refusing the gaze of the viewers and remaining still is for Parr “an attempt to reinforce the factualism of the presentation,” to remain detached from the audience and to conceal the pain experienced (Hazou).

This way, the performance does not become personal but opens to the audience as universal, in the sense that anybody can relate to it. Parr’s detached performing body stands “as a nexus of social relationships” (Garner qtd in Hazou), as do the generic and anonymous human shapes of the *Siluetas* and *The Foreigner*. Avoiding look the audience members in the eyes is a recurrent feature of my performances. As a performative choice, I do not gaze in order to disappear because to see implies to be seen at the same time. I do not want the public to focus on me but on the actions that I perform, which lead them to develop their own experience of the piece. It is also worth noting that the decision to avoid mutual gazing is due, in part, to my being somewhat shy; many different needs inform artistic decisions.

In Heidegger’s terms, I am the bridge, not the landscape (“Building”). While dwelling in a landscape, or in the performance process, we pay attention to it and our relationship with it. We experience the landscape through the bridge, and we are aware of it, we experience its height, shape, and directions, but we do not look down at the bridge while walking, otherwise we miss what surrounds us.

Following *Nightsea Crossing* (1981-87) and anticipating *The Artist is Present* (2010), *The House with the Ocean View* centres on the mutual gaze between Abramović and her public. Unlike Mendieta, Parr, and I, Abramović did not want to disappear before the audience members or detach from them. On the contrary, she wanted to enter the performance process *together with* them. Union as communion and participation is one of the main features in Abramović’s practice. For the other artists, to avoid making eye contact with the audience is a way to disappear and to create that gap into which the viewers can step—it is an element of fragmentation. Abramović, instead, employed mutual gaze as a means of union, to take the public by the hand and dwell together in the performance space. Mendieta, Parr, and I erased our own subjectivity and became a tabula rasa on which the participants could project their own thoughts, emotions, and past experiences. In *The House with the Ocean View*, on the contrary, the audience members entered their own internal landscapes through the channel of

the mutual gaze, which worked on a deep and empathic level. Furthermore, we must remember that being focused on the present moment is a major aspect of Abramović's work that constitutes her offer to the public. Talia Linz reminds us that the mutual gaze fosters such an awareness:

A joint sense of presentness underpins the practice of mutual gazing because really looking into the eyes of another—and not wandering off with our own thoughts or into our interior world—requires being utterly in the present moment (Linz qtd in Abramović, *Marina Abramović: In Residence* 46)

With this in mind, it is possible to say that both the absence of the eye-contact with the public and the employment of it as a performative practice make room for the audience within the performance process. The difference lies in the fact that, by working in terms of fragmentation and creating gaps to fill in, Mendieta, Parr, and I left our audiences alone to find their own way through the performance space. By avoiding eye-contact, Mendieta, Parr, and I provided the participants with neither landmark to refer to, nor tracks to follow. Like Paton's theorising of the painter, we left the scene at the beginning of the piece and our audiences are before the artwork by themselves. Through eye-contact, Abramović made room for them by remaining on the scene. Eventually, she abandoned the centrality of the performance when, progressively, the gazer faced nothing but themselves in her eyes. However, as long as Abramović maintained eye-contact, she never left their side.

### Pain, Vulnerability, and Not-Doing: Surrendering as a Performative Action

Displaying radical vulnerability by undertaking actions that involve pain, danger, and straining stamina is a tool to engage in a genuine relationship with the audience that performance artists know well. This is a way to perform fragmentation to eventually reach union. The vulnerability and fragility of the performer create a silent energy dialogue with the audience because pain and fatigue prevent the performer from acting: what the audience sees is an authentic human process of fragility to which they can relate (Abramović, "Marina Abramović: An Art; Abramović *Walk*; Hazou; Parr and Scheer). Displaying the body at its limits, fragility and unmanageability are ways to "tell the truth" to the audience with no filters, thus inviting them to step into the work.

Displaying human physical limits to involve the audience in the work is a practice central to both Parr's and Abramović's work and is a feature of durational performances. The performing body that endures pain and fatigue highlights dynamics and uncovers truths by triggering reflections, memories and experiences "for exciting the return of the repressed both for the performer and for the audience . . . that produces the empathy of performance" (Parr and Scheer 53). As I argued in Chapter One, this is the cathartic revolution that brings shock and rupture and, eventually, leads to union as reconfiguration. It is worth mentioning that vulnerability was a fundamental part of *The House with the Ocean View* from its conception: Abramović explains that the performance was created for and dedicated to the people of New York who "became vulnerable after 9/11, when they experienced the fragility of life that puts you out of resistance" (Abramovic qtd in Zec).

How do the artists disappear by showing vulnerability? They do so by becoming vulnerable to vulnerability. Surrendering is an active action in the artworks investigated in this research, whereas "active" means that the artists know that surrendering will trigger dynamics that will have consequences. Paradoxically, the performances show that the agency of surrendering comes from *not-doing* actions rather than doing them. The performers give space and agency to the audience through negation. The power given to the audience lies in what the artists chose not to do, which is a way to refrain from taking a central position within the work. For example, the strength of the *Silueta Series* is built upon Mendieta not being there and not performing in front of us. Abramović, Parr, and I endured pain and fatigue in stillness and/or silence in a composed way. Any personal reaction like screaming or moving according to the pain would have highlighted our individuality, and we would have returned to the centre of the scene. Audience members can even "be alienated, intimidated and excluded by overly intense expression" (Goebbels et al. 43). Instead, the artists endured pain and fatigue before the audience, showing that endurance is constituted by both resistance and surrender. In all three pieces, the performers stretched duration to allow the visitors to take their time to relate to the work.

In the fluid and shared territory that is the performance eco-system, the performers move backwards and guarantee the advancement of the audience by "not-doing" as a performative action. Abramović, Parr, and I did not speak. In *Daydream Island* and *The Foreigner*, Parr and I attempted to maintain stillness for as long as possible despite the urge to move due to pain and exhaustion. Under the needles with no anaesthetic, Parr did not scream or writhe.

During *Mapping the Sound*, I did not stand up and stretch, and I tried not to stop drawing, although my body needed to. Inside *The House*, Abramović did not speak, eat, read, dance, run, or do leisure activities for twelve days—and she never left her open cage even when the gallery was closed and nobody was watching her. The performers did not surrender to vulnerability as a self-referential gesture of exhibitionism or masochism; Abramović and Parr, several decades into their ground-breaking careers, do not need to prove that they can perform extremity. As I have previously written, my own artistic research does not centre on pushing my boundaries for my own sake. Surrendering to vulnerability and actively “not-doing” is the means by which these performers offer an experience to the audience. As performance artist Gina Pane said about the extreme actions that she undertook before an audience,

if I open *my* body so that you can look at *your* blood, it is for your love. It is for you, the Other. That's why I care for your presence during my actions.  
(MART; my translation from Italian; my italics)<sup>9</sup>

Within the fluid and stretched dimension of duration, discussed in Chapter Four, the performers undertook only a few actions, and underwent everything else. Thus, they created that receiving void of the jug as a vessel, and each action of the audience that (be)fell into that void did so heavily and echoed. Abramović, Parr, and I did not feign being not in pain or not exhausted; rather, our self-composure showed that we simply surrendered to our own bodies and the circumstances and we employed them as part of the performance process. Such an approach reflects the theatrical work of Goebbels, which incorporates “dispersal and displacement as strategies” that undermine “the dominance of presence” of the performers: challenging expectations of “self-confident soloists—assured of their roles, characters, and bodies” (xv).

In this sense, performance art is always site-specific, according to Miwon Kwon’s definition of it as a kind of art that “gives itself up to the surrounding environment” (“One Place after Another: Notes”): Abramović lost weight and became physically weak while fasting for two weeks; her face showed the exhaustion and her motility was often compromised, but she did not hide, rather, she displayed all this before the audience—plainly

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<sup>9</sup> Original: “Se apro il mio corpo affinché voi possiate guardarci il vostro sangue, è per amore vostro: l’altro. Ecco perché tengo alla Vostra presenza durante le mie azioni.”

and silently. Consequently, the audience members empathised with her and the piece: they engaged in prolonged mutual gazing, they worried for her and attempted to communicate with her telepathically. The horizon between the *sōma* of the artist and her audience, marked by their limits, began vanishing.

Despite grunting in pain, Parr underwent each needle patiently and almost motionless. The artist displayed his body and the bodies that he represents as a wound, literally and metaphorically. The public saw the cruel spectacle of his face maximised onto giant screens and a woman came down to the stage, begging the artist and his co-performers to stop. They ignored her, and she left. When they first encountered the work, the participants of *The Foreigner* were usually preoccupied with their own experience of spatiality and duration. Then they started focusing on the performing body of the Foreigner and the more the clock-time ran, the more they empathised with my experience of spatiality and duration. As I argued in Chapter Five (sections 5.3 and 5.4), empathy is a form of union because it connects the performer and the audience on the level of reception. My audience members realised my struggle when they saw me gasping and they perceived the tension of my muscles underneath the cloth. During the performance in Melbourne, a woman sat next to me and chanted to give me relief because she knew “how hard is to maintain that position for a prolonged time”; another person lay down on the floor “in solidarity and [to] see how the performance felt from your perspective.” In Daegu, someone wrote on my leg “as soft as possible” not to disturb my stillness, and another wished to write on the cloth but refrained because “the body of the Foreigner looks so frail.”

In *Mapping the Sound*, I displayed fatigue from moving and drawing incessantly according to the soundscape. This was a Sisyphean task that forced me to face the limitations of my own body because sounds never stopped hitting me from everywhere, but I could not move in many directions simultaneously. The drawings that increasingly covered the then-white paper show the passage of time. The more I stretched duration, the slower I moved; sometimes I lay on my back or my stomach and I barely drew the sounds. The members of the public could see my struggle and they wondered how they would move and draw those sounds if they were performing. At that moment, in their minds, they stopped wondering and took action: they closed their eyes and surrendered to the soundscape, beginning their own exploration of it; I was no longer there. Whatever the visitors heard, felt, and saw with the eyes of their minds, they no longer needed me. For audience members to step into the time- and site-specificity of the performance and dwell in it, for them to become the bridges of their

own artistic experience, “it is crucial to this intimacy that the artist has left the scene” (Paton 18).

## 6.5 The Audience-Audience Relationship

The agency of the members of the public develops into what I call the *audience-audience relationship*. This refers to the way in which audience members influence each other independent of the performer. I became aware of this phenomenon when I saw the video footage of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne for the first time after the performance. I was stunned; the visitors behaved according to rules that I never gave them. They interacted with the work as if it were a ritual: the participants moved in the room slowly and quietly, like they were entering a sacred space; they did not speak to each other except for a few whispers. They created the atmosphere of rituality about which they later spoke in the feedback forms (Figure 40). Honestly, I never thought about rituality when conceiving and performing this piece. The original video footage of that event also shows that the visitors, upon entering the room, often looked to the behaviour of those who were already there and then moved or acted. Often a participant waited for another person to finish writing on the cloth and then wrote as well, as if the gesture of writing on the Foreigner was a private moment.

*The Foreigner* in Daegu did not have that aura of sacrality, mainly because of the different environment in which the performance took place. As I described in Chapters Three and Four, the lobby of the Daegu Art Factory was noisy and busy. However, the audience members came close to my body, approached it slowly and quietly and whispered to each other. The mutual influence between the audience members happened even on this occasion, albeit differently. From the video and photographic documentation of the performance, it is possible to see that many visitors observed the others in the act of approaching my body and writing. Many audience members saw the Foreigner and stopped by but then shifted their attention to the other people involved in the performance and watched them (Figure 41). Often, these “watchers” did not come close to me and they left when the person whom they were watching left. Many people stopped by to read what the others wrote and came back several times “to read other comments,” as someone wrote in the feedback book—but these people often neither came closer to my performing body nor wrote on it. These audience members were each others’ interest, not me. I cannot be certain but, watching the video footage, I had the feeling that I was invisible to them—absent.

The footage shows that those focused on the Foreigner moved their gaze across the performing body, almost like they were trying to see through the cloth, and they lingered on what looked like a head. The “watchers” instead looked like they were reading the cloth as if it were a piece of paper with nobody underneath.

Two audience members wrote, “I wanted to move you somewhere else . . .” and “this is the face that I wanted to draw on yours,” next to a drawing of a creepy face. These two people were conference participants whom I knew, and they later disclosed to me that they wrote those comments. I asked them why they did not do what they wanted to. The first person told me, “I wasn’t sure if I could actually move you or even touch you because . . . you know . . . nobody else was touching you.” The second person said that she worried that drawing that face on mine could have been “disrespectful” after she read “all the other nice and poetic comments written by others.”



Figure 40. © Angela Viora 2016, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Monash University Performing Arts Centre (AUS), Ph. J.G. Dörner.



Figure 41. © Angela Viora, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance. Daegu Art Factory (SK) © PSi Archive and Daegu Art Factory.

These examples highlight the agentic role of the audience members who become co-performers because they can affect, change, and determine the trajectory of the performance. This is an element of union: the audience of *The Foreigner* became involved in the performance ecosystem with the same level of agency as me. Moreover, these participants connected with each other in the shared experience of the event, developing a mutual audience-audience relationship within the performer-audience relationship. In virtue of the agency gained through the disappearance of the artist, the members of the public can act beyond the initial meanings and rules of the work. In this way, the co-performing audience can themselves make the artist absent by not attending to them or not following the instructions of the work. For example, the explanatory statement of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne stated that visitors could approach me in any way, but instead they influenced each other's behaviour. There is an element of fragmentation in this phenomenon; when the members of the public do not follow the instructions of the work, they "break the rules" as happened during *The House with the Ocean View* when some people crossed the line that separated the audience area from the house. Another example visible in my performance was the moment when a young boy visiting the Daegu Art Factory with other kids, maybe a school-class, left the group, looked around, approached the Foreigner and lifted the cloth.

This boy knew nothing about the work or its rules because he came through the main entrance, where there were no explanatory signs hung up. But he chose not to behave like his peers and other witnesses during the performance: the video shows that his intervention was deliberate and demonstrates significant fragmentation in the homogeneity of the others' behaviour. I suppose that this boy did not expect to find a person underneath the cloth because he immediately jumped back, his mouth wide open and his hand on his chest, with an expression of shock and surprise—this is reconfiguration. The fragmentation also manifested as a form of exclusion when some audience members in Daegu directed their attention primarily to other participants rather than to me.

Van Gennep's schema can be productively applied here to recognise that all these manifestations of union are co-present with dynamics of fragmentation, and this process leads to reconfiguration. Let us review this relationship. The artist disappears (fragmentation) and the audience moves into the performance and acquires agency within it (union between audience and the work). As I earlier described, the audience connects with the performance in several ways, including by connecting with the artist through empathy. Within this unification as a bond, and enacting their agency, the members of the public become co-performers and may act independently from the artist and the initial format of the work; they do so by breaking the rules that they have been given or by "ignoring" the role of the performer. The audience do so as a "community" (Ward) according to the agentic audience-audience relationship. This process eventually reconfigures the performer-audience relationship that evolves alongside the audience-audience relationship. In these relationships within the performance ecosystem, the audience members behave autonomously and unpredictably and they "dictate the trajectory of the performance" (Klein 3). It follows that the presence-authority of the artist in relation to the work becomes secondary or is overshadowed. As the performer of *The Foreigner*, I wonder how much I have chosen to disappear, and to what extent the audience has made me disappear by agentic intervention in the performative process. Conceiving of the space of the performance as a room occupied by the artist and audience members, it is difficult to distinguish whether the artist decentres themselves or the audience displaces them.

Another example of this kind is Abramović's *Rhythm 0* by (1974). In this six-hour piece, the artist allowed her audience to use 72 objects on her as they wished. Together with feathers, honey, and a thorny rose, the set included a loaded gun, a hammer, and various blades. While the artist openly ceded authority to the members of the public, she could not

have imagined how far they would go (Abramović *Walk*; Brockes). Some of them tortured and almost killed her and established a complex audience-audience relationship. Abramović recalls that, after some time, the audience divided into two main groups: the perpetrators, performing dangerous actions on her body, and the defenders, who tried to stop them. Some photographs portray the artist as a doll physically pulled between the two factions.<sup>10</sup> I argue that fragmentation as detachment occurred between the artist and the perpetrators, who acted cruelly on her because they saw her as an object and not as a person, preventing empathy dynamics from occurring. A second group of “protectors” fight the “perpetrators,” attempting to defend Abramović. Of the perpetrators, the performer recalls the man who put the loaded gun into Abramović’s hand, pointing to her neck, and the woman standing behind him and whispering instructions (Abramović, *Walk*; Brockes). There was a third group of people, “the watchers” who neither hurt Abramović nor stopped those who did and limited themselves to observing the other two groups. Ward rightly argues that the audience of *Rhythm 0* acted as a community in which nobody was an innocent bystander; they were co-performers. The work saw the disappearance or diminishment of Abramović as a person as she became an object among other objects. She designed this de-humanisation, but how complicit were the audience in making her disappear, erasing her to the point of injuring and almost killing her? Eventually, the dynamics in the performance space changed again when the gallerist interrupted the piece and Abramović walked among the members of the public; she looked them in the eyes and was a subject again, returned to the centre of the scene. In that moment, many people left quickly, incapable of sustaining the artist’s gaze, because they realised what they just did and could not bear it (Abramović, *Walk*). As previously discussed in section 6.3 of this chapter, eye-contact is a powerful means of union between two people that fosters involvement, defies detachment, and from which it is impossible to hide.

## 6.6 Conclusions

In Chapter Five, I argued that artists and audience members experience fragmentation and union in space and time through their own bodies *and* in relation to the other bodies involved, and this results in the embodied experience of the work. Following, in this chapter, I explored the agency of artists and audiences in receiving, experiencing, and informing such a process.

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<sup>10</sup> This image is available online at the following link:  
[elitereaders.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/performance-artist-stands-still-for-6-hours-4.jpg?x82370](http://elitereaders.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/performance-artist-stands-still-for-6-hours-4.jpg?x82370)

I argued that, by means of acts of fragmentation, the selected artists *disappear* (fragmentation) from the centrality of the scene, and thus, they *make room* for the audience members who step into the work and become agentic elements in it (union). In a process of filled and empty spaces that resembles the fragmentation-and-union polarity, the void left by the artists is a fertile terrain in which the authority of the participants takes root and shapes the performance process. I found resonances between Heidegger's conceptualisation of the jug, whose void allows it to perform its task "as a vessel" (*Poetry*), and the space unoccupied by the artists. Such an apparently empty field is what fosters "intimacy" between the artwork and the audience members (Paton), who can dwell at their own pace in that available centre "from different angles," through "appropriations," "imagination" and "collisions" (Goebbels et al. 59). This perspective is informed by two foundational principles developed in this thesis: first, the spatial conception of the performance process as a locus of possibilities generating from the fragmentation-and-union dance, and second, the performative action as an *offer*, which is a range of possibilities brought forward to be experienced.

The artists perform absence *during* the performance in diverse ways: physical disappearance, anonymity, lack of eye-contact, stillness, repetition, and non-actions. These are manifestations of fragmentation necessary to lead to the final union between the audience members and the artwork, which is a place of doubt and possibilities for the audience to dwell in. Consequently, members of the public do not only "watch" the event, but they actively intervene in the performance and shape its process.

I finally discussed how the members of the public, once they take agency in the performance, can direct its process and overpower the artist. They do so by influencing each other's behaviour and developing what I call the *audience-audience relationship*, which I analysed with respect to my performances. This relationship highlights the relationality and mutuality intrinsic in the performance ecosystem, and the agency of the inanimate elements of space, time, and documentation in acting upon bodies. The presence of documentation media during the performance played a major role in the enactment of the "audience-audience relationship" that I discovered through the video recording of the live event: I became an audience member of my own works and had a totally different experience of the pieces from the one I had while performing. The documentation experience is *performative*: experiencing the documentation of my pieces enriched and reconfigured the understanding that I had of them. As I argued in Chapter Two, that reconfiguration informs the knowledge that I acquired in the theory-based practice and during the live event. The following and final

chapter of this thesis examines the relationship between performance art and documentation, mediation, and reiteration.



Figure 42. Ana Mendieta, *Untitled* from the *Siluetas Series* in Mexico, 1976. Photograph.  
©The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, L.L.C. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

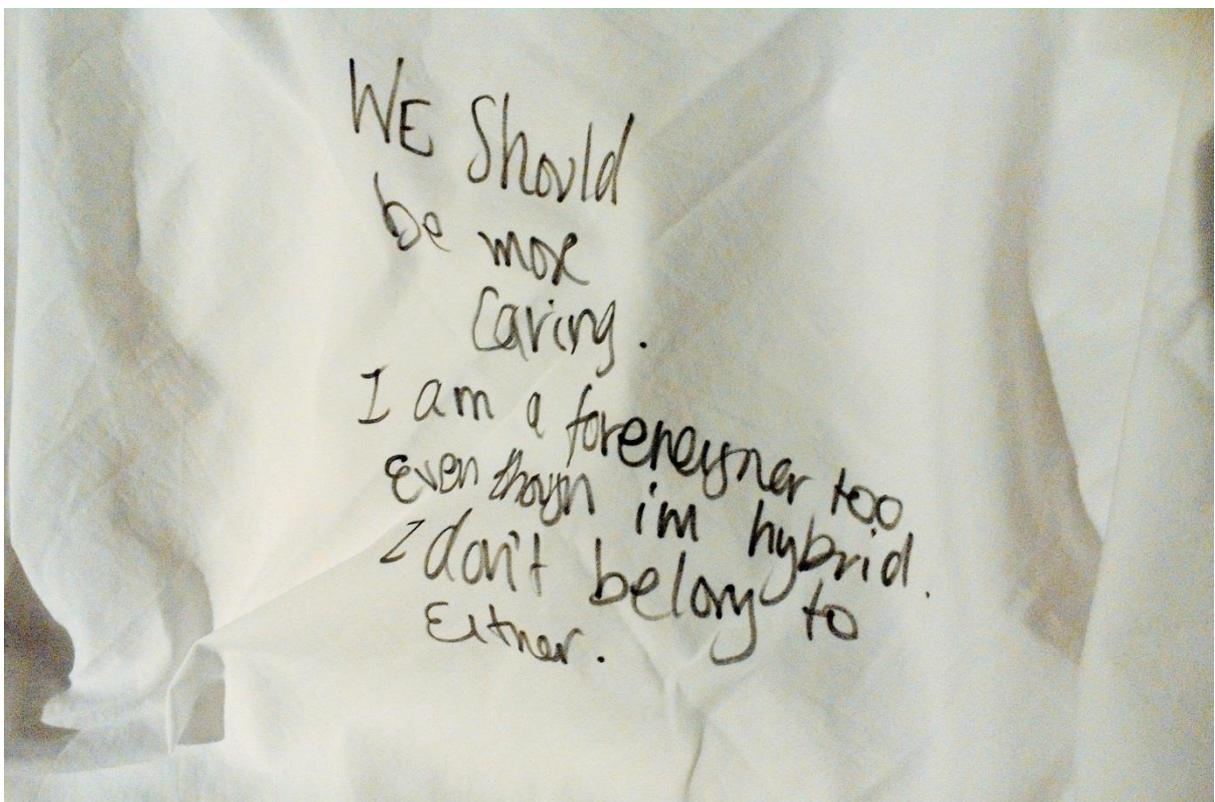


Figure 43. © Angela Viora 2018, *The Foreigner—Unknown Unlabelled Unexpected*, live performance.  
Daegu Art Factory (SK).

## Chapter Seven—Documentation, Mediation, and Re-Performance

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between performance art, documentation, and mediation by analysing the existing scholarship in combination with the selected artworks. In the first part of the chapter, I examine the theorisations of Philip Auslander, Peggy Phelan, Anne Marsh, Amelia Jones, Erika Fischer-Lichte, and Jill Orr on liveness and documentation. Then, I explain where my practice sits in this scholarly field. By means of a phenomenological approach oriented towards relationality and reciprocity, I focus on what documentation and mediation can offer to the performance process, the artist, and the audience, and how diverse media shape the relationship among these elements. Together with space, time, and bodies, I conceive of documentation as an agentic element that is part of the experience of performance art and which manifests in terms of fragmentation and union, leading to reconfiguration.

#### “The Performativity of Performance Documentation”: Understanding Philip Auslander’s Perspective through the Artworks Analysed in the Thesis

This section describes how documentation and mediation are conceived and employed in *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound*. I discuss what I call *the materiality of documentation*, which I discuss further in section 7.3. My background in fine arts has informed my development of this concept; I see each documentation medium, from photography to video to writing, as having its own unique functions and meaning. Just as watercolours offer a different experience from oils, each medium has a specific offer to make to the practice of performance art. With this understanding, I argue that the performativity of documentation and mediation in *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound* develops as *part* of the performance process rather than being a mere account of the event.

The catalogue of *The House With The Ocean View* by Abramović offers a remarkable piece of documentation of the performance which I name “for those who were not there.” Despite acknowledging that the documentation of the performance cannot substitute for the live event, Abramović nevertheless offers a meticulously written account of each day of the piece in the form of an impersonal report accompanied by photographs of the artist in the House. These photographs are taken from a frontal perspective, namely, as the reader was

among the audience. Most importantly, the catalogue provides the reader with instructions on how such documentation should be experienced to have ‘a sense’ of the live performance (Abramovic and Kelly). I explain in section 7.3 that I have adopted this approach for creating the video of *The Foreigner* in Daegu. The example of Abramović reveals us that the documentation of a live event is not a mere still life of it, but it can be an agentic element of the experience of the performance as part of its offer; this applies to both the methodology of the artists, as my practice demonstrates, and to the experience of the audience.

Documentation, indeed, can influence the participants’ experience of the piece once the live event is over. As my performances show, the documentation media can also play an active role during the happening of the live event: the presence of video cameras and other recording devices can influence the audience’s behaviour. My approach to documentation, *experiencing documentation*, means understanding documentation not only as recording and remembering but as experiencing the event. This theorisation is informed by Philip Auslander’s concept of the “performativity of performance documentation” (“Performativity”; “Surrogate Performances”), with Auslander citing J. L. Austin’s definition of performativity to give phenomenological, rather than ontological, authority to documentation:

Documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance. (“Surrogate Performances” 1)

Understanding documentation as performative, as Auslander proposes, means recognising the capacity of the performance documentation “to do things in the world,” which may be considered part of the contemporary “performative paradigm” theorised by Bolt.

Acknowledging the performativity of documentation is particularly important in an analysis of Mendieta’s work, which has always been experienceable exclusively via documentation. Conceived and produced by the artist as a work of sculpture rather than a performance, the *Siluetas Series* paradoxically becomes a performative event for the viewers through the experience of photographs and video footage, as discussed in Chapter Six. Aligning with Auslander, I investigate the liveness of the viewer’s experience of Mendieta’s artwork through the performativity of its documentation. According to the artist’s understanding of her own artistic practice, and upon the request of her estate, I acknowledge that she did not see the *Siluetas Series* as performances and dis-identified with the term

*performance artist* (Landry and Viora; Rosenthal et al.). What I analyse as a performance is the viewer's experience of these artworks as "the enactment of the artist's body" (Jones 18) understood to include forces of fragmentation and union. The *Siluetas Series* offers its audience the live experience of an event that is no longer happening live, and documentation makes this offer possible. Like Mendieta's series, my performances in this project are accessible to subsequent audiences by means of their documentation

*Daydream Island* by Parr includes the intervention of technological mediation, which can become challenging to analyse because it overlaps with the live development of the work. The large screens through which the audience saw in real time what was happening to Parr were part of the live performance. Without those screens, the piece would have been altered. Given this, can we still talk about mediation in this performance? The presence of the screens as part of the work was reinforced by the fact that the audience of *Daydream Island* was present before the performer and the screens at the same time: the performance was not webcast, and they were not physically distant. Scheer describes *Daydream Island* an "anti-performance" which resisted the full participation of the audience, as a form of fragmentation. In contrast to Scheer, I argue that the giant screens performed union between the artist, his audience, and the work itself, by bridging the distance between the partially hidden Parr and the public behind him. I argue that this piece exemplifies Auslander's ("Performativity"; "Surrogate Performances") theorisation of mediation as phenomenological rather than ontological. Far from being mere technological instruments for reproducing reality, the mega screens in *Daydream Island* were agentic elements within the performance process that allowed the audience to become involved in it. Parr had a mobile cameraman and photographer onstage recording the piece, and this added a further layer to the live experience of the event. As examined throughout the thesis, *Daydream Island* involved live actions, mediation, and in-progress documentation in the same performance process.

## **7.2 The Debate Around Performance Documentation: Liveness, Mediation, and Reciprocity**

In line with Phelan, Marsh ("Performance Art"), Abramović, and Orr ("Space"), I acknowledge that documentation cannot offer the same experience as the live event that it records or represents. However, this does not mean that the performance documentation is bereft of the liveness that characterised the work. In this chapter I am to investigate what the documentation of performances can offer to both the artist-researcher and the audiences that

experience it. Understanding documentation as part of the offer of performance art acknowledges the agentic role of the audience within the performance ecosystem and my theorisation of such is part of my contribution to the performance art field. Auslander argues that much performance art documentation derives from the fine arts tradition that centres on the reproduction of the artwork, and its scope is

to make the artist's work available to a larger audience . . . For the most part, scholars and critics use eyewitness accounts to ascertain the characteristics of the performance, not the audience's contribution to the event, and discussions of how a particular audience perceived a particular performance at a particular time and place and what that performance meant to that audience are rare. ("Performativity" 6)

My material and experiential approach to documentation belongs, in Auslander's words, to "the ethnographic tradition of capturing events," that aims "to capture the performance as an 'interactional accomplishment' to which a specific audience and a specific set of performers coming together in specific circumstances make equally significant contributions" ("Performativity" 6).

### Peggy Phelan on Performance Art: Ephemerality and Relationality as Resistance

Peggy Phelan's writing has often been interpreted as critical of performance art documentation. In *Unmarked*, Phelan famously theorises disappearance as an ontological element of performance art, whose ephemerality impedes its being recorded and documented; when this happens, it is no longer performance but something else . However, rather than critiquing the practice of documentation with the intent to diminish its potentialities, I interpret Phelan's work as emphasising performance art's resisting any form of "capture" within labels or definitions, within objectified media, and within a capitalistic system of reproducibility and commercialisation. These are the qualities of body and performance art since their development in the 1960s and 70s. Performance art often exceeds the "politics of visibility," that is, "a politics which seeks empowerment through visibility and exposure" (Phelan, "Performance"). It is important to contextualise Phelan's work within the historical period between the late 1980s and early 90s, in which the Left in New York was focused on the politics of identity and visibility. In *Unmarked*, Phelan argues that the strength of

performance art lies in its vanishing, as I argue of the *Siluetta Series*, whose power of evocation and reconfiguration lies in the fact that Mendieta has left the scene. For Phelan, performance art becomes a model of social and political ways of “being-in-the-world,” promoting the value of immateriality in contradiction with capitalist logics of consumption and accumulation. Phelan’s “disappearance” not only refers to the liveness of the performative event but also to the capacity of this art form to go beyond voyeurism and the “fetishistic will to possession” (*Unmarked* 7). Performance art is processual and relational, rather than object-and-result oriented. As Phelan argues, performance art presents an “economy of intersubjectivity” characterised not by commodified objects but by ephemerality and relationality (7). Phelan’s theorisation of the disappearance of performance informs my account of the disappearance of the performer from the centrality of the scene that I investigate in Chapter Six.

Despite partially contradicting Phelan by affirming the importance of documentation as part of the performance art offer, I do not reject Phelan’s argumentation because the relationship between performance and documentation is not a contest. Responding to criticism of her position in *Unmarked*, Phelan argued that she is not “against” documenting performances:

I was not saying, although I’ve heard people say I *was* saying, that we must not have photographs, videos or sound documentation of performances. I’m quite happy to have those! I teach and I use them all the time. I’m not against technology. But I think when one is showing a video one is showing a video; one is not, as it were, having the performance be re-performed. Video is a different medium and it pursues a different aesthetic. (294)

Having different aesthetics, each medium performs different offers within the artwork; this means that each medium affects the audience’s reception and experience of the piece differently. These are the qualities of “the materiality of documentation,” a concept which I I expand on in the following section.

### Live Performance, Documentation and Mediation: A Phenomenological Perspective

Art historian Anne Marsh has extensively researched the relationship between performance and its documentation, focussing on video. She agrees with Phelan on the impossibility of the

live event being reproduced via the media, but she recognises documentation as “already performative” (“Performance Art—Live” 54). Marsh admits to having earlier supported the “you-have-to-be-there” position in which one has to witness the event live in front of the artist to experience it authentically. She later revised her stance because insisting on presence as a necessary criterion to validate performance art means to undermine, or even exclude, all the work of those scholars who have been written on performances without seeing them (Performance Art” 17). A scholar of performance artists such as Jill Orr and Mike Parr, Anne Marsh rightly identifies the paradox of performance documentation in that

performance art stresses its ephemeral nature but often records this for history in time-based media such as photography, video and film. A fascinating paradox *infects* these media, as each attempts to explicate its relation to the *real world*: the thing in front of the camera, the index and/or the virtual image. (“Performance Art—Live” 55; my italics)

Some scholars remain attached to the political and artistic significance ascribed to the presence and liveness of performance art since the 1960s and 70s. This presence is understood as ontological: performance art *is* liveness and presence, so documentation undermines its being “performance.” According to Fischer-Lichte, this position displays a problematic hyper-separation between live event and documentation (Fischer-Lichte 69) Marsh points out that, despite the debate, performance artists have continued to experiment with media “in ways that confound scholars” (Marsh qtd in Butler and Pitt, *Mike Parr*). Marsh reminds us of the close relationship between performance art and video and photography since the late 1960s, with artists such as Vito Acconci and Jill Orr incorporating these media as performative elements in their practices. Despite being theorised mainly in terms of fragmentation, as separation and incompatibility, performance art and documentation have also developed through forms of union as contamination and exchange. Therefore, the relationship of performance art to documentation is phenomenological rather than ontological, relational rather than dichotomous. This is so because performance art happens in the real world and acts and produces effects within it. Performance art dialogues with, experiments with, and exchanges with other contemporary media, art forms, and disciplines in real time. “The performance art form itself has no rules and is constantly evolving,” Orr asserts (“Some Thoughts” 303). This is the liveness of performance art whose concepts and manifestations go beyond its site- and time-specificity. The ontology of

performance art, the nature of its being, is to be engaging with the real world. This quality is the basis of the scholarship that employs performance art as a lens through which to read social and political phenomena, as in *Unmarked* (Phelan).

### Overcoming Dichotomy: The Phenomenology of Reciprocity

Within this phenomenological frame, I understand documentation and mediation as part of the experiential offer of performance art. Informed by Phelan, Jones, and Auslander's work, this perspective overcomes the binary of liveness-versus-mediation that is necessary in understanding the multiplicity that characterises the experience of performance art.

The liveness/mediation dichotomy results in a sterile debate that will remain unresolved while both factions try "to prove the cultural superiority of one over the other" (Fischer-Lichte 69). When posited as a binary, the liveness/mediation relationship generates similar problems to the separation between nature and culture and humans and non-humans (Bannon; Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory," *Politics*). By drawing upon Latour and Bennett, Marsh ("Performance Art"; "Performance Art—Live"; *Performance Ritual*), Orr ("Some Thoughts"; "Space"), and Fischer-Lichte, I examine how the live event and its documentation relate to each other and what they can mutually offer within the phenomenological experience of performance art.

Scholars have often positioned Phelan—advocating the liveness of performance art—in opposition to Auslander and Jones, who affirm documentation as productive and not undermining the art form's value. I claim that these two perspectives are in a relation of reciprocity, as the looping flow of fragmentation and union within the performance process. According to Phelan, the artists' bodies challenge capitalist logics by enacting alternative values and so not becoming "contaminated." Art historian Amelia Jones claims that the performing body challenges the capitalistic system by enacting

the dispersed, multiplied, specific subjectivities of the late capitalist, postcolonial, postmodern era: subjectivities that are acknowledged to exist always already in relation to the world of other objects and subjects; subjectivities that are always already intersubjective as well as interobjective. (12)

Through the example of body art pieces such as Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975; Figure 44) or Yayoi Kusama's *Self-Portrait* (1967), Jones asserts that it is precisely the representation and documentation of such bodies that reveals and challenges the masculinist, racist, colonialist, classist, and heteronormative character of the societies in which they operate. According to Phelan's interpretation, the artists' bodies challenge capitalism and its outcomes by performing opposite values and, thus, not getting "contaminated" by it; for Jones, these bodies critique capitalism by turning its own language on itself. Jones' view is overtly phenomenological: the performing body, like any cultural product, cannot escape the network of relationships of which it is already part. This perspective has resonances with that of Mattsson, discussed extensively in Chapter Five, who understands the present encounters between bodies as part of a broader system of connections coming from the past (Bromseth et al.). For this reason, it is not possible to aspire to "unmediation" as Phelan does. As Jones argues of Schneemann's performance art:

The female subject is not simply a "figure" in Schneemann's scenario, but a deeply constituted (and never fully coherent) subjectivity in the phenomenological sense, dynamically articulated in relation to others (including me, here and now in my chair), in a continually negotiated exchange of desire and identification. Schneemann plays out the oscillatory exchange between subject- and objectivity, between the masculine position of speaking discourse and the feminine position of being spoken. (13)

In her text, Jones questions whether she would have been able to better experience the sexed subjectivity performed and critiqued by Schneemann and Kusama if she had been there, but she decides she would not. Jones acknowledges that being present at the live event provides a different experience than the one acquired through documentation, but she argues that neither source has the privilege of knowing the performance more truthfully than the other. This is so because the performing body can never circumvent the symbolic mediation the artist's performance and the audience's reception live or via documentation (Jones). The experience of performance, and its reception, is intrinsically intersubjective. For Jones, performative encounters are the manifestation of the intersubjective relationality that the performing body embodies and are present and experienceable in the live event and through documentation. Jones argues that there is no pureness, uniqueness, or self-sufficiency in the live performing

body: the performance is already documentation as representation of before being immortalised by a camera.

Phelan and Jones speak from and towards two different places. Phelan reads the relationship between society and performance art through a political frame that leads her to formulate an aesthetic of disappearance and absence. Instead of emphasising disappearance or absence in performance art, as Phelan does, Jones examines the politics of representation in the intersubjectivity of body art. Jones prefers the term *body art* over *performance art*, because it refers to those works that “took place through an enactment of the artist's body,” regardless of the initial presence of an audience (18).

The following section discusses how the *Siluetas Series* by Mendieta and Jill Orr’s performances for the camera may be considered works that engage with these debates about liveness and documentation in complex ways.



Figure 44. Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, August 29, 1975. Performance. *Women Here & Now*, East Hampton, New York. Photo: Anthony McCall. © The Estate of Carolee Schneemann. Courtesy The Estate of Carolee Schneemann, Galerie Lelong & Co., and P•P•O•W, New York.

## Different forms of Performative Representation and Different Audiences:

### Jill Orr's 'Performances for the Camera' and Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas Series*

Another kind of work that enriches the present discussion is Jill Orr's so-called "performances for the camera." Orr defines the debate around liveness against mediation and documentation as "a fruitless exercise" ("Space"). Her practice distinguishes between diverse forms of performative representation: the live event and the mediated one employ different media, manifest through different aesthetics and offer different experiences, "perhaps no more or less, just different" (Orr, "Some Thoughts" 304). Orr asserts that she has been profoundly touched by performances that she has experienced only through documentation, and I affirm this from my own experience ("Some Thoughts"). Unlike Mendieta's *siluetas*, Orr's performances for the camera are live performances without an audience, staged before a photo and/or video camera. In her creative process, Orr describes herself as "governed by an image" that she has imagined or dreamed (303). By prioritising an image over an audience, the artist can concentrate fully on performing that image, what Jones theorises as representing the symbolic through embodiment. These works are neither records nor enhancements of live events; they are separate pieces, and Orr is well aware of the differences between the two. Unlike Jones, Orr claims that, one needs to be there to experience the offer of a live event "in all its sensorial ambience" because photographs and videos are not live media and "the live moment cannot be reproduced" (Orr 301). As an artist who has performed both live and for the camera since the beginning of her long career, Orr knows that the camera has no peripheral vision and this results in a "flattened reality" (Orr qtd in Marsh, "Performance Art" 15). Video recording and live streaming are often understood as media operating in real time, but in Orr's view, they provide a "sanitised" experience of "the visceral nature of the live event" ("Some Thoughts" 301). Although the "media-specific demands" are different, Orr's pieces for the camera required performing with the same focus as a live performance in order to capture dynamic moments that then became iconic images (Marsh, "Performance Art"). Looking at the image *Bleeding Trees-Mouth* (Figure 45), I can see the focused dynamicity of Orr's action in the tension of her shoulder-muscles and her whole body emerging from (or sinking into?) the ground. In this image, Orr's mouth is wide open in a scream, or a full deep breath, and the soil moves, pushed by the weight of her head and the strength of the action. Having captured its dynamicity, the energy running through Orr's body and the surrounding environment keep activating every time that we, the audience members, look at it. Like Mendieta's *siluetas*, Orr's body performs

liminally in time and space, and its force lies in what the artist does not reveal to us: is Orr emerging from the earth, departing from it in a gesture of fragmentation? Or is she, like Mendieta, uniting with the landscape, her mouth gasping the last breath on the surface? Because of the nature of the documentation, we do not know, and thus, we can dwell in that image and its possibilities, and articulate our own story about it. This is possible because, in Nelson's terms, the body of the artist is suspended between the moment that precedes the action portrayed and the moment that follows it. Like Stelarc hanging from his hooks, we the viewers hang between those moments like pendulums, our thoughts shift, our perceptions expand temporally and spatially, and associations multiply. The performativity of the photographic medium in Orr's and Mendieta's works is more aptly theorised, I argue, in Nelson's concept of *suspension* than in the freezing of time proposed by Scheer and Tomassini. *Suspension* includes the happening of an action, the befalling, and therefore includes the dynamicity of the performance process.

I situate *Bleeding Trees-Mouth* in the context of climate change, an issue to which Orr is sensitive as an artist. This image is warning humankind of an imminent environmental catastrophe, a form of fragmentation that could be avoided if we revise our relationship with planet earth to be one of communion rather than exploitation. Interpretation like this demonstrates how the audience engages in an active and participatory relationship with the artist and the performance process, including through mediation and documentation. This understanding implies that the artist becomes responsible for the audience of the documentation. Auslander asserts that

the actions undertaken by the artist and depicted in the images become available to an audience as performances solely through their documentation, and it is by virtue of presenting the photographs of their actions that the artists frame the depicted actions as performances and assume responsibility to the audience [...] The audience to whom [the artists] assume responsibility is the audience for the documentation, not for the live event. ("Performativity" 6)

Auslander's concept informs my analysis of Mendieta's art. On the one hand, the *Siluetas Series* has been created for the camera rather than an audience, like Orr's performances for the camera. On the other hand, unlike Orr, Mendieta did not conceive this work as a piece of performance or body art, but as "Body/Earth Sculptures" (Rosenthal et al.). I understand the

*siluetas* as an example of what Auslander calls “performed photography,” the documentation which provides a performative experience. The term refers to works that “are not performances at all and the images are not documents . . . but something else, another kind of artwork perhaps . . .” (“Performativity” 3) (Figure 46).



Figure 45. Jill Orr, *Bleeding Trees—mouth*. Performance for the camera.

Photograph: Elizabeth Campbell for Jill Orr. © Jill Orr 1979.





Figure 46. Ana Mendieta, *Silueta en Fuego* from the *Silueta Series* in Mexico, 1976. Stills from video.

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### 7.3 The Materiality of Documentation

As a practitioner, I conceive of documentation as a material to manipulate, whose properties have specific meanings and serve the performance in a certain way: what I term the *materiality of documentation*. This approach comes from my background in visual arts, and is related to the notion of “experiencing documentation” introduced at the beginning of this section. For example, a photograph can capture the quintessence of a movement and frame it forever, and this allows the audience to imagine what came before that gesture, what came after, and what was happening around it. This is what I experience when I look at the images of Orr’s performances for the camera and Mendieta’s *Siluetas Series*; such a phenomenon informs the performer-audience relationship investigated in Chapter Six.

Like painting, photography requires the artist to decide on techniques, size, lighting, and colours. A Polaroid photo, for instance, is a relatively old medium that has a certain aura of memory and intimacy and because of its small size forces the viewer to come close to the image to fully experience it—this is an enclosed encounter. Moreover, Polaroids recall the work of renowned artists such as Nan Goldin or Nobuyoshi Araki, who used this medium to portrait nostalgic, intimate, or voyeuristic atmospheres. In this sense, the “performativity of performance documentation” theorised by Auslander (“Performativity”) lies not only in the audience’s experience of the documented work but also in what each medium has the potential to offer, pass on and evoke to both the artist and the audience. For example, the choice to work with video implies, among other things, working with real-time movements and sequences; the different kinds of transmission offered by this medium allow the artist to make the video experience either private or shared. The large screens employed by Parr in *Daydream Island* offer the audience a collective experience in which private action undergone by the artist is overexposed. In my opinion, this was the intention of the artist, who critiqued the anaesthetised and individualised experience of the television medium by employing and amplifying its languages and structures (Viora, “To Be”).

#### The Catalogue of *The House with the Ocean View*: An Offer to the Audience-Reader

Abramović’s documentation for the readers of *The House with the Ocean View* catalogue firstly consists of a detailed report with “no opinions” and frontal photographs of the artist in the House, one for each day of the performance. The report and the images are preceded by simple and precise instructions on how to experience such documentation. To experience the

work, the reader is advised to either go through the documentation in one long session with no interruption or read one performance in the report per day. The reader experiences rituality, discipline, and duration, which are foundational elements of this piece that the documentation transmits successfully. This catalogue reflects the tendency to union in the communion between the performer and the audience that characterises Abramović's live practice.

I have not seen *The House with the Ocean View* live, but I have undertaken the long-session experience of the catalogue documentation, which required me to practise commitment and endurance. Although I am aware that my experience of the documentation is different to the live event, I acknowledge the materiality and performativity of the documentation with its potential to expand the possibilities of the piece beyond the live event. It is possible to see such an approach in the virtuosity with which Abramović and her collaborators have organised the catalogue. This book has been built as a testimonial of the performance rather than a “dumb” record of it. As Auslander argues:

The performances in the documentary category work differently, at least to an extent, because they generally have a dual existence: they are framed as performances by being presented in galleries or by other means and there is an initial audience to which the performer assumes responsibility as well as a second audience that experiences the performance only through its documentation. (“Performativity” 6)

Many art catalogues follow the chronology of the artist's work or are organised into topics that reflect the artist's aesthetics. The visual documentation of artworks often submits to this logic and share space with the theoretical writings by curators and art critics, which pervade most catalogues. Even in the best-designed book, I often have the feeling of being a still and distant viewer looking through a window, rather than an active participant in the artist's work. I feel that these kinds of books operate like curators' business cards rather than like offers to the readers. When reading these catalogues, I need to sail through a bulk of writings, contributions, and interviews to be by myself in front of the images or other testimonies of the artworks, which are either scattered through the catalogue or squeezed all together in the middle or at the end of the book, far from the writing.

By contrast, the catalogue of *The House with the Ocean View* offers a guided experience of the documented work to the reader of the catalogue who becomes a member of the audience, an *audience-reader*. The catalogue of *The House* shows us that documentation offers an experience to the audience just as the live performance does. Abramović offers the live experience of the documentation of the live event, which differs from the works by Orr and Mendieta. Such an offer is possible because the structure of the catalogue reflects Abramović's approach to live performance art: minimalism, "military" organisation and discipline, and direct involvement of the audience in the work. At the beginning of the catalogue, we find the concept of the piece written by the artist, followed by the report with its simple instructions, then the pictures. Consequently, the audience-reader is not unduly influenced by the perspectives of others on the work. In this way, opening the book is like entering the gallery. The photographs have been taken frontally during the performance when there were few audience members in the gallery. Looking at these pictures is like standing in front of Abramović performing in the House (Figure 47). Once the reader has had their own experience of the documented work, they can read the analysis of the art critics at the end of the catalogue. These writings are not academic theorisations on the performance but pieces of documentation themselves springing from the phenomenological experience of the live event. The performativity of such pieces of documentation resides in their "doing things in the world" (Bolt).

For example, the emotive writing by Peggy Phelan gives the reader a sense of the vulnerability which the audience of the performance felt. Reading these pieces of documentation *after* my experience as an audience-reader has expanded and enriched my own perception of the work instead of tainting it. These scholarly writings enact union by adding layers of meaning to the reader's experience of the documentation and their perceptions of the live performance. If these contributions were placed at the beginning of the book, they may have been disruptive, perhaps leading the reader to have a fragmented experience of the work, negotiating their own perceptions and those of scholars.

The last pages of the catalogue show photographs of the live event taken onsite during the performance. The reader, this time, has a broader view of the gallery space that includes the audience. Thus, for the audience-reader, it is like looking away from Abramović on the platforms and looking around the gallery. There is a photograph that portrays the point of view of the telescope placed at the end of the room, enhancing the artist's features from far away. The photographic series ends with images of the final act of the performance, when

Abramović climbs down and leaves *The House*, welcomed by her audience and helped by the gallerist Sean Kelly and some assistants. The performer puts a robe on, smiling and exhausted, says something to the audience and then leaves. The performance is over, and the audience-reader closes the book.



Figure 47. Marina Abramović, *The House With The Ocean View*, Performance. 12 days

Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2002

Ph: Attilio Maranzano

© Courtesy of the Marina Abramović Archives

*The Documentation of My Performances: In-Progress Research with an Open-End*

As an artist making performances in the context of a PhD, I had to decide from the very beginning whether to document my performances or not, and if so, how. If artists do not document their own work, they might nevertheless need to provide different accounts of it to let others know about it. If the work is documented, the artists have to choose among various media and modalities. These decisions are influenced by the nature of the work and the aesthetic choices related to it, the way in which the artist plans to deliver the documentation afterwards, the artist's financial resources, the possible need for collaborators, and the documentation permissions that may vary from one context to another. Chapter Two, on methodology, offers a detailed illustration of the diverse types of documentation employed in the thesis. I appraise documentation as being a necessary aspect of my research for the following reasons:

1. First, my performances are documented, and the readers of this thesis access them through photographs, video footage, and written feedback. I chose not to re-perform *The Foreigner* or *Mapping the Sound* live for a panel of examiners to avoid the risk of becoming “an actor of myself” (Scheer and Parr) or transforming the performances into what Boyd terms “abstracted empty spectacles” or “superfluous copies” (Boyd 1). I have performed these pieces as research-performances throughout this doctoral project and their role has now come to an end.
2. Second, as explained in Chapter Two, documentation is an essential part of my artistic methodology. In both the pieces created for this project, my sight was impaired while performing. The photo and video recording allowed me to see afterwards the dynamics and the phenomena that occurred together with the actions undertaken by the audiences. I am aware, nonetheless, that my perspective on the piece would have been remained partial even if I could have seen while performing. Amelia Jones affirms the capacity of documentation to deepen and widen the live experience of the event after it is over for both the performer and the audience . Furthermore, I have researched the selected performances by Abramović and Parr through the documentation of them because I could not see those events live, with the exception of Parr's *Reading for the End of Time* (2016).

By saying that the documentation of my performances is part of the research, I do not only refer to its methodological role as an instrument of analysis. Documenting my pieces has been a work in progress, a constant researching and learning, failing and experimenting that continues because I still have a lot to learn. Due to various circumstances, I have not always recorded and documented my performances as I had imagined and wished.

It is also true, however, that I obtained interesting unanticipated results. For instance, some of the photographs of *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound* were taken without precise guidance by my assistants or audience members and these photographers captured some important moments in the performance process that the official photographers missed. Like in the live event, I also value the unforeseen when it comes to documentation. As I explained in Chapter Two, to examine different facets of the work, I rely on a combination of media because each brings a unique point of view to the documented piece. This approach necessitates acknowledging the materiality of documentation and working with it; this use of documentation enacts union as combination. Working in this way allows me to investigate my performances as a researcher as well as an artist because I can experience the work beyond my partial and subjective experience as the performer.

The limitations of documentation and mediation can be constraining but also productive. For example, because of institutional policies, I could not photo or video record the audience of *Mapping the Sound* in most of the places in which I performed it. The visual documentation comprises mainly frontal images of me performing, which offers the viewers a clear idea of what the piece consisted of but prevents them from witnessing the audience interaction with the work. For a long time, I perceived this result as a failure in documenting my work exhaustively. But I realised, through the theoretical research process and editing the documented material, that the photographs of *Mapping the Sound* resemble the frontal images of Abramović in the catalogue of *The House with the Ocean View*. Therefore, the viewers of the photographs and video of my piece see what the audience saw during the live event as if they were in front of me (Figure 48, 49). Like Abramović's catalogue, Mendieta's pictures, and painting as described by Paton, this can allow the viewers "to have the work for themselves." Therefore, the limitations of my documentation, that I initially experienced as impediment and fragmentation, have resulted in a means of union.

The final video of *Mapping the Sound* consists of an assemblage of moments of the various performances. I worked with the video editor to make a five-minute film that conveys the rhythm and the processuality of the piece. Unlike in the video of *The Foreigner*, giving

the viewer a sense of continuity and long duration was not a priority. The video of *Mapping the Sound*, like the live performance, ultimately aims to make the viewers close their eyes and experience the surrounding environment through hearing.



Figure 48, 49. © Angela Viora 2016, *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*, live performance.  
Sir Louis Matheson Library, Monash University (AUS). Ph. Irene Guidotti.

As I argued in Chapter Two, documentation does not consist only of video footage and photographs. The performances created for this thesis also produced the audience's feedback and some objects employed during the pieces which carry traces of the performative process. I knew from the beginning that such objects would also be pieces of documentation, so their materiality was important. For instance, I chose to draw on ordinary and cheap paper in *Mapping the Sound* because the performance explores the daily experience of the human relationship with places. In my view, a more precious form of paper would have implied a special occasion. The same motive informed the choice to perform underneath a white cloth in *The Foreigner* which resembles the generic sheets used to cover the corpses to which the performance refers. In this sense, my approach to the work is of union as coherence: all the elements involved in the performance process, including diverse documentation, need to contribute to what I want to communicate or research through the performance.

While the role of the various documentation media is eventually one of uniting, their presence during the live process can also operate in terms of fragmentation. For example, many members of the audience of the two performances of *The Foreigner* claimed to be annoyed and/or intimidated by the presence of the video cameras. Most of these people stated that they felt inhibited by the fact of being "watched" and recorded—would they have behaved differently without the cameras? How differently? For others, a still body covered by a white cloth and surrounded by video cameras "looked like a crime scene" and this influenced their perception of the performance. According to their written feedback, many visitors understood the tape that I put on the floor during *Mapping the Sound* as a limit not to be crossed, whereas its function was simply to fix the paper to the floor. This is why, throughout five performances of this piece, very few people approached me and only a couple stepped onto the paper on which I was performing (Figure 50).

As described in Chapter Five, the cloth of *The Foreigner* worked in terms of both fragmentation and union. Some people perceived the white sheet as a concealing skin not to be intruded upon or desecrated and consequently felt that they "could not" write on it. For others, on the contrary, that piece of fabric bridged the distance between their corporeal presence and the apparent unreachability of the anonymous and still figure of the Foreigner. Those participants felt that they could approach me closely and sign my body. These examples demonstrate the phenomenological materiality that characterises documentation and makes it an agentic and performing element within the performance process.



Figure 50. © Angela Viora 2016, *Mapping the Sound/Soundscape Portrait*, live performance.  
Sir Louis Matheson Library, Monash University (AUS). Ph. Irene Guidotti.

The Video of *The Foreigner* in Daegu “for those who were not there”

The two videos of *The Foreigner* were created two years apart and they reflect the research that was undertaken in the meantime, including documentation. The video of the performance in Melbourne squeezes five hours into seven minutes, and I created it for the Confirmation Milestone Panel in 2016. I intended to offer the viewers an idea of what the performance consisted of by combining the point of view of three video cameras. The result is a work of video art through which I aimed to give the viewers a sense of duration in a few minutes.

The video of *The Foreigner* in Daegu displays a different approach to documentation and its manipulation. The performance lasted for two and a half hours but the video lasts for 39 minutes. I worked with no time limits; inspired by the catalogue of *The House with the Ocean View*, my goal was to create a sort of performative documentary of the live event for those who were not there. “This can take twenty minutes or two hours, it does not matter,” I informed the video editor. I want to offer to the audience of this video a perspective on the performance that is as close as possible to that of those who entered the gallery and discovered the Foreigner, although I am conscious that the recording does not offer the same experience as the live event. To achieve this aim, I had several strategies:

1. I had two video cameras to record the performance and I purposely kept them in each other’s frame, unlike in the film of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne. Including the other cameras in the frame is not usually a good aesthetic choice, but my goal was to offer an *authentic* view of the work, not a pretty one. The video cameras were important elements of the experience of those who entered the art factory and approached the performance area. Furthermore, by the constant presence of a video camera, the viewers of the film are reminded that to watch means to *be* watched, which is exactly what the audience members experienced in Daegu. The presence of the video cameras provoked various reactions among the gallery visitors: some quickly walked away when they became aware of being recorded; others noticed the cameras when they were already writing on my body and quickly re-focused their gaze on the task, and a few people were comfortable with the recording media. One video camera pointed down at my performing body and the visitors are visible only when they knelt next to me. The other camera, instead, opened its view to what surrounded the Foreigner, including the visitors and part of the venue. I tried to offer both perspectives to the

viewers of the video to give them the most comprehensive experience possible, almost as if they could walk around my performing body. To achieve this, the screen is often divided into two parts, itself analogous to the relationship between fragmentation and union within the performance process.

Unlike the video of *The Foreigner* in Melbourne, the film of the event in Daegu centres on the performer-audience and the audience-audience relationship and includes images of the comments written by participants. The film shows people taking photographs of the Foreigner and other people taking photographs of the audience members, and many of those photographs are included. This enhances the watch-and-be-watched factor and gestures to the thin line between voyeurism and documentation. I recorded the performance and its participants, and I warned the people in the gallery of that by displaying signs. Due to the large public environment in which the performance took place, several people were recorded accidentally. The footage revealed that many visitors of the gallery took pictures of the piece without asking for permission—but did they need to? I was performing in an art gallery and I have also photographed exhibited artworks without permission. The question of permission to photograph is part of the larger debate Ward tracks about what is acceptable and allowed in the name of art (Ward). Documentation, in these circumstances, is *part of* the live action. Moreover, while the camera is a mechanic and instrumentalist eye, ours is not. As Jones (Jones) and Mattsson (Bromseth et.al) argue, in our relationships with documented images, we imbue them with symbolism, meaning, and projected past experiences at the moment in which we encounter them.

2. In this video, I aimed to give the viewer a sense of duration by showing the contrast between the stillness of the Foreigner and the busy environment of the art factory. The multiple kinds of audience intervention marked the rhythm of the performance, which changes throughout its process.

#### **7.4 Re-performance?**

Regarding performing the same piece more than once, I am of this view: no performance is the same as another. Both *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound* revealed to me that reperforming the same piece generates different events, although major similarities occur. Therefore, I use the term *performance* for the individual live event and *piece* for the

conceived artwork. For example, there are two live performances of my piece called *The Foreigner*. The work of research springs from the combined investigation of differences and similarities between the two events. Denying the uniqueness of each performance would go against what my research-performance has taught me, and would also confute Bolt's performative paradigm of "repetition with *différance*" and Heraclitus' notion of *panta rei*, important critical texts on which this thesis draws .

### *Re-performing My Own Pieces*

Marina Abramović is in favour of re-performing artworks with the goal of crediting and preserving performance art, as stated in her 2005 project *Seven Easy Pieces* (Abramović et al., 2007; Santone). Mike Parr, instead, refuses to re-perform his works in order to preserve the authenticity of the performative event (Scheer and Parr, 2009). I have explored and experienced both these perspectives in the performances created for this PhD. Initially, I embraced Abramović's view, because I was attempting to demonstrate that the same piece performed in another space and at another time generates distinctive events. In the case of *Mapping the Sound*, my decision was also circumstantial because I was asked to perform it as part of a performance festival, and the piece had previously been presented during a conference. I had not planned to perform this piece so many times, yet I took every occasion as a research opportunity as part of my doctoral project.

Re-performing *Mapping the Sound* has revealed to me that each enactment of the same piece is a different experience. However, the re-performance of this piece has also clarified to me Parr's position against reiteration for what concerns his own pieces: he speaks from his own experience of the work as the performer, not in absolute terms about the unrepeatability of performance art. Parr is correct in asserting that, by re-performing the same work, the artist risks becoming an actor of him or herself during the performance process (Scheer and Parr). This happened to me while performing *Mapping the Sound* at the Melbourne City Library in 2016 as part of the *Melbourne #47* Performance Festival. On that occasion, I performed the piece for four consecutive Mondays in the same place and at the same time, in the gallery of the Melbourne City Library from 12 pm. I believe that this setting contributed to making me perceive the performance as turning into a show with myself as an entertainer. In a deeply disappointing and discouraging way, I found myself losing focus and out-of-touch with the work and the environment in which I was performing. I became concerned with how the performance looked and what I should do, instead of focusing on the

action and the performance process. Performance art being a matter of discovery and knowledge, it became clear to me that, as a performer, there was nothing left to explore. Such a phenomenon did not happen during the previous performances of this piece that took place at the University of Melbourne in July 2016 (*PSi #22 Conference*) or at the Matheson Library at Monash University in October 2016. Although the work was the same, the context, the site, and the duration differed from one event to another on these two occasions. I performed this work for the second time two years later in a public and more exposed place as part of the *PSi #24 Conference* held in Daegu (SK) in 2018. The aim in recreating the piece was to collect further data on it in a different environment. The structure of the work was the same, except for the audience members not having to give written consent to participate in the piece, and they could write anything they wanted onto the cloth. This experience was noticeably different for me from the previous one. The audience participated in the work differently and I also lived it through a different perspective after two intervening years of research. Although I am satisfied with the re-performance of *The Foreigner* in terms of research, and I would like to further investigate it within more exposed locations, I am not sure that I will do so. This is because, while performing, I have caught myself with expectations of the work that risk acting according to a plot rather than performing through the process. The experience of the Daegu performance was different from the previous one, including several important moments of discovery, but my overall feeling was that I was experiencing everything less intensely because I already knew some aspects of the work. Although this remains a work that is physically and mentally difficult to perform, I was less vulnerable than the first time that I performed it. Therefore, there was less space left for me to have a deep experience of the performative process. I understand the re-enactment of a piece as an evolution of it. When such a development reaches a standstill, as happened for *Mapping the Sound* at the City Library, there is no reason for me to continue to perform the piece.

To conclude, I cannot take a position on re-performing a work that would be generalisable to all performance art. As the examples of Abramović and Parr show, re-performance is a very circumstantial practice: its potentialities and risks depend on the purpose of its enactment and the experience that it offers to both the audience and the artists.

*Marina Abramović and Mike Parr:*

*Re-performing for the First Time and Repetition as Exploration*

Marina Abramović performed her project *Seven Easy Pieces* in 2005 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. For seven consecutive nights, Abramović re-enacted and reinterpreted five pivotal performances by other artists that are considered iconic works in art history, before obtaining permission from the artists or their estates. The pieces were Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974), Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972), Valie Export's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969), Gina Pane's *The Conditioning* (1973), and Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965). Abramović also reperformed her *Lips of Thomas* (1975) and performed for the first time a new piece titled *Entering The Other Side*. Several art critics, curators, and fellow artists criticised Abramović, accusing the work of betraying the ontological ephemerality of performance art and the consequent uniqueness of the performative gesture, which resides in its transiency. Abramović made clear the purpose of *Seven Easy Pieces*: to make important artworks accessible to a large contemporary audience, and to credit their artists, as the pieces had been experienced live only by small audiences and poorly documentation. For her, the re-performance of these works constitutes a sort of embodied archive whose function is to preserve them. These pieces are generally known only among art professionals, but as Abramović claimed in her criticisms, they have been appropriated without credit by mass culture including MTV, advertising and fashion (Abramović, *Walls*). Abramović chose five works that she had not seen live but that had contributed to her development as an artist.

In my approach to the theoretical and ontological debate on the value of re-performance, I focus on what re-performance does in the world. I have not witnessed *Seven Easy Pieces* live and my thoughts on this work come from the artist's statements, scholarship, and photographs taken during the event. With this in mind, I endorse a project such as *Seven Easy Pieces*, which I understand as a real offer to the contemporary public. I also believe that performers could learn much from performing live the works of others, as Abramović did. That would be embodied research as its fullest. Returning to *Seven Easy Pieces*, the reality and the theory clash. Technically, it was the first time that Abramović performed those works by others. Therefore, there is neither repetition nor the risk of acting. Furthermore, I expect that it was the first time that most of the audience of *Seven Easy Pieces* experienced those performances live. Despite, from the art history perspective, presenting a form of reiteration,

Abramović's project does not enact any repetition in the real world, and so does not undermine the value of performance art.

Mike Parr does not perform his pieces twice. He happened, however, to perform the same main action in different pieces: having his face sewn in works such as *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002), *Aussie Aussie Aussie Oi Oi Oi* (2003), *Fresh Skin Like A Baby* (2010–2013), and *Daydream Island* (2013). The action and the body are the same, but time and space are different, and perhaps, this is what makes these pieces different for Parr. The renowned *Bride Series* sees the artist inhabiting public museum and galleries, enduring time and fasting, and walking for as long as his body allowed, as in *Amerika* (2006), *The End of Nature* (1998) and *The White Hybrid (Fading)* (1998). Is this repetition? If yes, how does it relate to the authenticity of the piece that is so important to Parr and many artists and scholars? If this is not repetition, then what is it?

In my practice, I see the reoccurring of the same performative gesture throughout different pieces as a practice of exploration. I speak in particular of *Mapping the Sound*, which is an embodied and phenomenological investigation of places by means of a specific *modus operandi*. Like cartographers and explorers of the past, it is about employing the same instruments to discover new lands.

## 7.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I discussed the relationship between performance art and documentation, mediation, and reiteration. Through a phenomenological approach understanding union as relationality and reciprocity, I examined what documentation can offer to the performance process, the artist and the audience, and how diverse media shape the relationships among these elements. The scholarly discussion often opposes the liveness of performance art to its documentation, focusing on the “hyper-separation” (Fischer-Lichte) of these two elements in what has sometimes been named a “fruitless” (Orr, “Space”) debate. My chapter supplements those scholarly positions by acknowledging the complementarity and relationality of performance art and its documentation.

Like space, time, and bodies, I conceive of documentation as an agentic element that is part of the experience of performance art, manifesting in terms of fragmentation and union, and eventually leading to reconfiguration. I theorise the *materiality of documentation*, according to which each medium has a specific offer to make to the practice of performance

art, and thus, develops as part of the *experience* of the performance process, rather than being a mere account of the event. Such a perspective expands upon Auslander's, which understands documentation as producing events as performances ("Performativity"). The analysis of the artworks and the historical development of performance art, video, and photography shows the reciprocity between live performance and documentation media. As an art form happening in the real world, acting and producing effects within it, performance art always dialogues and exchanges in real time with other media, art forms, and disciplines that belong to the contemporary world: I argue that these are its ontological qualities. I assert that recognising these performative qualities of documentation matters because considering documentation as simply a static capturing of a live experience, somehow inferior to the live event, leads to a narrow and restrictive understanding of documentation that does not do justice to its contributions to the performance artwork and its important role in connecting the audience with the work through time.

As I explained in Chapter Two, the documentation of my performances has a methodological value in this project: as an artist doing research, I was able to investigate my own pieces through their documentation. Without the video footage, photographs, audience feedback, and artefacts, my experience of *The Foreigner* and *Mapping the Sound* would have been only partial because circumscribed to my subjective perspective as the performer whose sight was impaired. I employed these different media as the fragments of a performance that I reconfigure according to what they can offer. In this sense, the notion of documentation expresses its etymological meaning of "lesson," from the Latin *docere*, "to teach."

The contribution of this chapter to the scholarly discussions consists of acknowledging documentation in relation to performance art in phenomenological, rather than ontological, terms. Affirming that the liveness of the event cannot be reproduced (Abramovic and Kelly; Marsh, "Performance Art—Live"; Orr, "Some Thoughts"; Orr, "Space"; Phelan, *Unmarked*) does not necessarily exclude the practice of documentation from the offer brought forward by performance art. I claim that Phelan's theorisation on the ephemerality and disappearance of performance art, despite often being understood as "against" documentation (Phelan, *Unmarked*; Marquard Smith), nevertheless belongs to the approach recognising documentation's worth. Performance art defies the contemporary commodification of time and the politics of visibility by enacting opposite qualities such as impermanence and absence, as I discussed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. Amelia Jones' view is commonly read in contrast to Phelan's, but I claim that they are complementary.

From a perspective that I define as of union, Jones argues that performance art challenges the status quo by re-deploying its own languages and structures via a politics of representation and intersubjectivity that the artists perform through their bodies. I align with Phelan defending the evanescence of the performance process as uncatchable and irreproducible. However, I agree with Jones asserting that such ephemerality cannot be defended as a pure quality happening in a vacuum: as part of the place-world, the body of the artist and the actions that it performs are already inscribed into certain networks of relationships. The experience of the performance and the reception of it is intrinsically intersubjective, as Mattsson asserts (Bromseth et al.) and as the audiences' responses to the selected performances reveal. It follows that no eye is neutral before the performing body, neither during the live event nor through documentation.

As with documentation, many scholars and artists conceive of re-performance as a practice that collides with the supposed ontology of the liveness of performance art. I investigate this question through analysis of the practices of Abramović, Parr, and myself, and I come to the conclusion that I do not have an absolute position with respect to re-performance but, as a practice, I recognise its significance in what it can offer to the experience of performance art.

The following chapter presents the conclusions of this project.

## Conclusions

There are four recurring keywords in this thesis that explain where it sits in the scholarly panorama: *art*, *offer*, *process*, *experience*. The etymological meaning of *art* is “to put into motion,” “to activate,” “to move towards something” (from the Arian root *ar*) and “to move,” “to evoke,” in the sense of “to arouse” and “to convey” (from Sanskritic *rnoti* or *arnoti*). *Art* implies dynamicity, expansion, and relationality; it is not something isolated and uncommunicative. This links to the original meaning of *offering* as “to bring towards and before” (from Latin *offèrre* constituted by *of*, “before, towards” and *fero*, “to bring”), and *process*, from Latin *procèssus*, the past participle of the verb *procèdere*: “to proceed” as “to go, move forward.” *Experience* comes from the Greek *peiro*, “to go through,” “to cross,” and *peirào*, “to try”; in the Latin word *ex-perior*, “-perior” indicates danger, a test to pass (Castelli Gattinara). All these notions have in common spatiality, dynamicity, and relationality, presenting locative and temporal meanings that imply movement and connection, because to move or bring forward implies a starting point and a direction to a destination, as well as a source and a receiver. This is how I conceive of performance art: it is an offer, and I argue that it offers experiences of reconfiguration through dynamics of fragmentation and union, which eventually lead those involved in a performance to discovery and knowledge.

The spatial perspective allows to understand performance art as a practice *happening* in the place-world, whereas “happening” means generating from it and relating to its elements dynamically, through processes, as a developing force in motion. I argue that this is how to conceive of performance art and its potential: not only as an art form existing in the world, a dimension with depths and networks of effects, but as a force acting in the world like the currents move the ocean underneath the surface. So, in this thesis, I have explored the concept of *forces* to understand what forces do in a performance during its evolution. The forces that I identified as driving the happening of performance art are *fragmentation* and *union*: they are opposite, complementary, and mutual, creating the energy whirlpool that makes a performance rise from its site- and time-specificity to act upon the world.

I assert that, in order to study performance art, there needs to be a way to study the *process* of performance art, and the approach described in the thesis allows this to happen. Supplementing much scholarship that investigates the *effects* of a performance, I go back to the *source*, its process, to explore the origins of those effects. Such a perspective is informed by the history of performance art, an artistic practice prioritising its process rather than its

results, in which “artness” consists of the *actions* enacted by the performing bodies, which then become artistic media. Investigating performance art through this approach matters because it facilitates a critical understanding of how this art form engages with the world while it is happening, and thus, how we can employ it as an analytical instrument of research to study social, cultural, and political phenomena. For instance, I performed *The Foreigner* to study people’s responses to an image of migration, embodied live in the public domain. Going beyond its initial scope, the performance revealed broader cultural, political, and social dynamics: from the way in which each person responded to that image differently according to their background and past experiences, to the way in which the audience members related to each other before an unexpected presence in a public context according to unwritten behavioural rules. This was so because of dynamics of fragmentation and union working within and beyond the performance. In this thesis, I describe fragmentation and union as analytical tools to investigate processes, then I applied that to the study of performance art. This approach allows an examination of a performance as a phenomenon among phenomena, evolving in dynamic relationships of mutual influence and exchange, to fully grasp the potential of this art form.

I argue that the performance process has to be understood as an *ecosystem* in which all the elements involved have equal agency and permeability in influencing each other and shaping the development of the event. This position bridges another gap in the scholarship, which focuses on the element of the body in performance art as the main generator and recipient of performative actions, relegating time and space to inanimate implements. Through the analysis of the selected artworks, I claim that bodies do affect space and time; but space and time also affect bodies, often acting beyond the control of performers and audiences. Conceiving of performance art outside the dominion of the artist and the audience (bodies) means that the non-productivist encounter with this art form becomes *experience*, whose significance is ongoing knowledge. Therefore, this approach is about exploring what we can understand through performance art as an experience.

Within this perspective, I applied the fragmentation-and-union analysis to space, time, and body separately (fragmentation), understanding their polyphony during the performative event while acknowledging their individual agency. This investigation was conducted through the analysis of moments during the performance processes of five selected artworks that offer further manifestations of fragmentation and union, revealing the fluid essence of

these two driving energies constituting the dynamicity of performance art; an art form “in constant evolution” (Orr) whose soul and potential lie in the processuality of its “happening” (Nelson). Through a perspective of union, I examined *space* as a dimension crossed and informed by people, time, and phenomena (Chapter Three). I assert that the significance of space as an “actant” (Latour), neglected by much scholarship, allows an understanding of how performance art is capable of challenging and impacting people and reconfiguring situations. Conceiving of the performance process in spatial phenomenological terms, I argue that the power of performance art lies in its processuality as a *dimension of possibilities* (“the space of the performance”) rising from the fragmentation-and-union whirlpool; the performance, then, actively engages with the place-world according to the instantiation of the dynamics of fragmentation and union in distinct phenomena of reconfiguration (“the performance place” as the *dimension of specificity*).

*Time* is a dimension as well, of which multiple manifestations develop within the performance process in relation to space and body, and upon which the “experience of time” as *duration* is shaped (Chapter Four). I argue that performance art offers alternative experiences of time to the chronological and purpose-driven tempo of daily life (*time market*) because its only purpose is to happen (Nelson). Durational works enhance such a collision by enacting fragmentation in the sensorial perceptions of those involved, robbed of the usual instrumentalist and productivist capitalist imperatives. Such a fragmentation leads to union because the present moment offered by durational performances is a dimension in which performer and audience encounter each other and the audience becomes present to the work by tuning inward; eventually, the experience makes the audience members *renegotiate* their own relationship with time, and consequently, with their own bodies in space.

From a phenomenological perspective, I conceive of the *body* as the sensorial fulcrum by means of which we experience “space” and “time” through the looping dance between fragmentation and union (Chapter Five). The body acts and manifests in multiple intertwined ways during the development of a performance, which leads to *possibilities* and reconfiguration. Acknowledging such multiplicity allows us to understand how performance art can act upon the deepest levels of reception in diverse ways for each person involved and throughout time. The body is placed in specific spatial-temporal dimensions together with other bodies as *sōma*, grounding *embodiment* as an ecological, relational, and shared experience. However, this union is enacted by the artists’ bodies via fragmentation through unexpected actions within ostensibly familiar contexts, provoking short-circuits in the

audience's perception and reception of the piece. At the same time, the artist's body acts like the Heideggerian *bridge* in the landscape (Building") by gathering and connecting the manifestations of space and time and bringing the audience closer to the work (union). By displaying the limits of their own bodies before the audience, the artists trigger reflections in the viewers, becoming symbols of broader realities perceived differently by each participant.

To fully comprehend how the performance process develops, therefore, consideration must be given to the interpretations, behaviours, and actions, the *sōma* of the participants which act upon the artist and the work as well. The performer-audience relationship has been explored in this thesis through a perspective of fragmentation: the *disappearance* of the artist from the centrality of the scene during the performance fosters union by *making room* for the audience members, who step into the work and become agentic elements within it (Chapter Six).

Alongside space, time, and bodies, I understand documentation as part of the experience of performance art, rather than simply an account of it, manifesting in terms of fragmentation and union and eventually leading to reconfiguration (Chapter Seven). I theorise the *materiality of documentation*, according to which each medium has a specific offer to make to the performance process, and thus informs the *experience* of it. I describe documentation, mediation, and re-performance in phenomenological terms by describing what these practices can offer to the performance ecosystem. This perspective offers a positive approach to the unresolved and sometimes sterile debate that opposes the liveness of performance art to its documentation, a debate which emphasises the separation of these two elements (fragmentation) that I argue are better theorised as deeply relational (union).

Applying van Gennepe's schema and Emilio Gentile's notion of "cathartic revolution" to this analysis, I argue that the artist's body performs actions of fragmentation in space and time, which disturb the status quo by breaking what is continuous and homogenous ("separation"). It follows a second phase of "transition," in which elements of fragmentation occur in dynamics of union and vice versa, and the audience members gain agency in the performance process; all the elements involved in the ecosystem act upon each other in this stage characterised by *liminality* (Turner, "Liminal"; "Betwixt"). In the final phase, what was experienced in the previous phases is "incorporated" into the sensorial reality of the subject, who now relates differently to space, time, and the other bodies involved in the process (reconfiguration). These stages occur in loops during each moment of a performance because the forces of fragmentation and union occur *together*, emerging from *within* the process and

*alternating* in a looping dance. The coexistence of fragmentation and union enacts diverse dynamics, resulting in multiple experiential phenomena. Therefore, I argue that a performance is “a place in which things happen”: a locus of *possibilities* that leads to experiencing *reconfiguration* in perceptions, thoughts, and emotions. Scholarship focusing on the *effects* of performance art talks about “transformation” while, based on the investigation of the forces behind such impacts, I argue that “reconfiguration” (Bolt) is a more proper term. The analysis of the relationships among the elements of the performance process reveals that a performance does not transform the elements involved in the work but unveils and reconfigures the relationships among them: as *alethēia*, the performance “unconceals” (Heidegger, *Poetry*) forces, energies, dynamics, and the relationships of fragmentation and union occurring between its elements. The thesis itself works in this way by asking “what is at work in the work?” (Heidegger, *Poetry*).

This investigation was conducted by means of a methodology that I call *practices-led*, which mirrors the performance ecosystem by understanding the theoretical and the creative practice according to principles of *equality*, *mutuality*, and *processuality*. This model acknowledges the differences between theory-based and art-based practice (fragmentation) and their equal importance in influencing each other and actively collaborating (union) to undertake research and pursue “reconfigured” and sharable knowledge. I acknowledge academic writing as the bridge that puts these two types of practice in a productive relation (union) within the academic research-knowledge framework; the methods employed for gathering data, as part of an ecosystem, cooperate to analyse phenomena, and thus contribute to scholarly knowledge-building. I assert that the “practices-led methodology” can be applied to other artistic fields of research because it contributes to the tradition of practice-led research and *PaR* by

1. Recognising the embodied processes and procedures of performance practice as means of research that offer insights equal to more traditional modes of inquiry.
2. Acknowledging the theory-based work as also being creative practice that consists of experiencing, gathering together, and reshaping material.
3. Conceiving of the two forms of practice as complementary and in dialogue.
4. Instantiating Bolt’s “performative paradigm” (Bolt) by evolving with the research process and acknowledging the indeterminacy of knowledge-generating.

In this thesis, “bridges” were often mentioned: they need gaps to exist, distances to unite. This is how this project began: not opposing the existing scholarship, to which it is indebted, but bridging gaps that I see in understanding performance art and its significance. Performance art impacts those involved, challenges social and cultural structures, and dialogues with the contemporary world by constantly renewing itself: every time we try to enclose this art form in definitions or practices, it has already moved elsewhere. My goal was to go deep into the viscera of this wild animal to discover where its *force* comes from, so I run with it by analysing its soul, the *process*. I discovered this process to be fuelled by forces of fragmentation and union, porous polarities from which meanings and possibilities arise, making those involved in a performance experience reconfiguration in space and time, through their bodies.

I assert that the other performing arts can benefit from this research: knowing the dynamics connecting the elements involved in an event offers performers and performance-makers insights into the creation of their work, potentially helping them to achieve depth. This thesis certainly dialogues with those practices that empower audiences “to make connection between [the elements] during the course of the performance” (Goebbels et al. xxiii); those practices that are willing to take the risk “by exploring the contents of forms . . . which don’t reach a level of consciousness and hence hold so much power over our perception” (xxiv); those practices that, regardless the artistic form through which they develop, welcome the unforeseen of the performative process as a bearer of experiential knowledge *in fieri*, resulting from their belonging to the place-world.

This thesis has described how the fragmentation-union perspective is applicable to both performance and visual art works. Studying the dynamics arising from the experience of an artwork, be it live or through documentation, leads to recognition of the liveness of mediation, intended as the phenomenology of the artistic medium. This can foster new forms of artistic presentation, reception, and documentation that recognise and *demand* the active involvement of all the elements in the work, as forces with agency and trajectories, so that the experience of art does not stop at its exhibition but, following its etymology, becomes a mutual *offer* between artists and audiences, who encounter each other in the experiential process and then move together towards embodied and shared knowledge. I hope that my research may offer new possibilities to scholars and artists continuing to perform the

necessary work of bringing performance art into a world that needs its enlightening perspectives more than ever.

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