

Introduction

This research project foregrounds an investment in affect as having a transformative potential that aesthetic experience mediates. My claim is that in staging an encounter for the viewer, art can engender affects that activate the viewer into a self-transcending dialogue.¹ Here the terms ‘self-transcending’ and ‘dialogue’ stand for the potential of *becoming* through affect and the alternating modes of viewing produced by encounters. Both the *practice* of staging a sculptural encounter and the intrinsic modality of art to *stage* presentation² are catalytic in opening up the potential of affect to alter the viewing subject. This affective embodiment is a *function* that restores a connection to a visceral dynamic substratum that precedes the linguistic structures of subjectivity, a sense of original force that manifests in the altered awareness of what becomes a *visceral* subject.³ This sense of communion with primal vitality feeds the subject and is a privileged site for the aesthetic. As such the aesthetic excavates a *pre-order*, which, transmitted across other spheres, disturbs existing systems of order.

¹ By ‘self-transcending’ I mean an expression (an affective manifestation) through the experiencing subject that taps into something felt as a force or something new, or something common, and felt as transcending the self or reaching out to otherness; by ‘dialogue’ I describe the opening up of a communication. Stephen Zepke, in his reading of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, writes about ‘[t]he overcoming of its [the body’s] own limits’: ‘[T]his path to the absolute requires a rigorous program of experimentation, as experimentation is the way a body, as Deleuze puts it, “transcends its limits in going to the limit of what it can do”.’ Stephen Zepke, *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari*, Routledge, 2005, pp. 59-60. This transformation is also central to the notion of affect: ‘Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension [...]’ In Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 5.

² Alison Ross writes on Jean Luc Nancy: ‘[i]n art meaning is not given but is rather sensuously staged or presented but always underway, so to say, and never complete as a ‘truth’ would be.’ In Nancy’s thought this is the advantage of art over philosophy – a ‘sense’ that is bound to aesthetic presentation. Ross observes: ‘This feature of the arts qualifies them as a ‘“presentation of presentation,”’ [Nancy] but also makes the way they stage presentation a general model for the ontology of sense.’ Alison Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy*, Stanford University Press, 2007, pp. 135-6.

³ Brian Massumi writes in *Parables of the Virtual* on the enteric nervous system as autonomically functioning: ‘Physiologically, what is termed “viscerality” here pertains to the *enteric nervous system*. This is a neuronal network in the gut which “functions independently of control by the brain or spinal cord. [...] It empirically describes one of the ways in which our body thinks with pure feeling before it acts thinkingly.’ Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 265. This pre-linguistic ‘visceral substratum’ manifests in affects. A different account of visceral manifestation as spontaneous instinctual emergence is Julia Kristeva’s ‘semiotic,’ which manifests in the rhythm of language. The ‘visceral’ subject that I propose here points to the possibility of a ‘body-subject’ or a *subject produced by an encounter with a work of art* as an aesthetic model, as opposed to a Cartesian construction of the subject. See also the Glossary [p. 142] for my definition of terms.

In this thesis I will examine the changing reception of the work of art from the centrality of the object to an experience that implicates the viewer in an affective environment. The triadic correlation of agencies that I locate as facilitating this interplay is one of *staging*, *encounter*, and *affect*, which supersedes the typical pattern of artist, artwork and viewer. I will consider the dimensions of these three agencies within the aesthetic event but also in their repercussions within a wider paradigm shift.⁴ The shift of attention from the status of the art object as autonomous entity to the potential of the art encounter to effect changes in the viewer (a renewed understanding of aesthetic *support*)⁵ reconfigures the relationship between the viewing subject and the work of art and departs from the scenarios of both a ‘dematerialized object’ and a ‘decentred viewer.’

In exploring the space of sculpture as expressive of these directions I connect the various turns mapped in recent artistic practices, identified as the social, performative and affective turns, as reflecting a change of the scene of art into a stage of encounter, privileging embodied events over forms of representation. A progressive cultural shift in the recent decades from the idealist configurations of formalism to the immanence of durational or participatory experience marked a turn from object to situation, from autonomy to agency, from what art is to what art does – a renegotiated idea of medium in a post-medium condition.⁶ This shift in art echoes wider historical changes; concurrent with the sea change in thought gradually brought about by post-structuralist theory, it is symptomatic of a social alarm, triggered by the impasses of a general crisis of thought where the resources of rationalist schemes prove inadequate to explain or sustain the conflicting and politically relentless realities of contemporary life. The re-evaluation of affect as a formative force within the subject reflects a wider phenomenon of a ‘withdrawal of meaning,’⁷ as the organising principle of philosophical investigations, manifest across contemporary thought. The aesthetic, through this agency of affect, re-emerges as a source of authenticity, but this is an

⁴ The roles of the affect and the encounter are particularly clear in the trajectories of thought triggered by the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as an *ethico-aesthetic project*.

⁵ The idea of ‘aesthetic support’ is discussed in Shannon Jackson’s *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*, Routledge 2011, p. 30. I will discuss the idea of aesthetic support in relation to medium, prop and heteronomy of space in the second chapter.

⁶ The term was coined by Rosalind Krauss in *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, 2000.

⁷ Alison Ross refers to ‘what is experienced in our epoch as the withdrawal of meaning’ in the context of Jean-Luc Nancy’s questioning of metaphysical thinking. Ross, op. cit., p. 134.

authentic manifestation that is rooted in the culturally inassimilable nucleus of energies that are visceral, violent and unsettling to our habitual modes of interpretation.⁸

In this present moment a speculation coordinated around the transformative forces active within the aesthetic as a site of negotiation of the sentient subject⁹ places a demand on how art affects its viewers – not only on how it reformulates its own self-definition. There is an intense interest across contemporary art in how the work of art can empower its viewer, often realized as a creation of a type of insubordinate, quasi-democratic *space*;¹⁰ but this strategy often fails to explore an aesthetic *function* that is intimately related to aspects of *psychism* of the viewing subject. The encounter that art is called to stage for its viewer opens up the possibilities of a corporeal mode of communication and its contingent realities, but it also attests to a level of being which does not exhaust itself in analytical thought and yet affects thought in a potent way. Within the space of art, these forces mould another subject; a subject produced by an encounter with a work of art is remodelled beyond its subjective boundaries, an elementary re-ordering triggered by vital affects. Recovering affect, and restoring affective *autopoiesis*,¹¹ the aesthetic taps into a primal responsiveness, which needs no mediation, no interpretative structure, to empower the viewer.

In conducting this research project in sculpture I have followed two parallel trajectories: a studio practice that has functioned as a rehearsal of events in staged encounters, and an exploration through writing of the agencies that mould the art encounter. In positing staging as a methodological element that is integral to spatial practices I explore the setup of the physical moment of the encounter of the viewer

⁸ Antonin Artaud's deliberations as a *Theatre of Cruelty* are in the same vein; 'Theatre is the only place in the world, the last group means we still possess of directly affecting the anatomy, and in neurotic, basely sensual periods like the one in which we are immersed, of attacking that base sensuality through physical means it cannot withstand.' Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, Calder Publications, 1970, p. 61.

⁹ Jacques Rancière has termed the radical potential of this aesthetic negotiation a 'redistribution of the sensible' in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Continuum, 2004, pp. 7-45.

¹⁰ A gradual expansion of artistic practice during the last decades has internalized live presence within its structure. In recent sculpture, the creation of stage-like spaces where objects act as agents of a critical dialogue inserts a different type of autonomy – centred on *space* – with political resonances. Andrea Phillips analyzes the 'quasi-democratic' function of recent sculpture in her essay *Prop-objects* from The Showroom Conference in 2007 – see Chapter 2.

¹¹ *Autopoiesis* is a process of self-creation. See also Glossary, p. 140.

with the work of art as an irreducible dimension of artistic practice. Staging is the totality of actions, thoughts and configurations within the making of sculpture and installation that imagine, prepare and set up the spatial encounter of the viewer with the work of art. The term also signifies the idea of the stage or *scene* both as the actual space of the work as well as the aesthetic *event* that takes place for the viewer.

The word *skené*, σκηνή (= scene) in Greek, which literally means ‘tent’ (indicative of the origins of theatre under a makeshift tent), is the equivalent of *stage* in English. It is a word with many meanings: ‘scene’ signifies both space and event.¹² A stage is both an inclusive viewing space and the charged platform where events unfold. The verb *theorein* (a root to both ‘theatre’ and ‘theory’)¹³ signifies ‘to view’; as such a stage is the object of vision, of attendance and encounter. Art as *scene* materializes a dynamic expansion of art into lived space and time. In the expanded scene of contemporary sculpture, a repurposed objecthood is organized into systems of interaction, heteronomy, exchange; this scene models the work of art as rehearsal site for the conditions of appearance of the sensuous, a structuring of the work as a field of forces, a *situation*.¹⁴ Staging in this context involves the viewer: the scene of the work will host the performative and contemplative aspects of the viewer’s experience – the affective assemblages produced by and *producing* the viewer. Staging in this sense mediates this experience, whose dimensions are multiple and dynamic.

It has been an overall object of this study to bring together material and ideas that inform an understanding of the scene of art as it currently develops. In the next three

¹² In the opening of his essay *An Art Scene as Big as the Ritz: The Logic of Scenes*, David Burrows writes: ‘[I]n this sense, art both emerges out of a scene and produces a scene. This plurality is found in the word scene itself, which can refer to a performance *and* the setting of that performance, as well as a stormy or emotional encounter between two or more people and the milieu of a specific group or activity. *A logic of scenes* addresses two aspects of art then: that which captures our attention within an environment (content) and the responses, actions, articulations and statements (expression) which register and shape the sensible (and present specific encounters as art). At no point can either aspect of this equation be privileged as the genetic material of art scenes, indeed *art as scene* is defined through the relation of the two [...] An art scene can be defined as a distribution of presentations: a field of activity marked by affective and intensive encounters but also articulations.’ In Stephen Zepke and Simon O’Sullivan, *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, Edinburgh University Press, 2010, p. 158.

¹³ I draw this etymology from Jonathan Miles’ Glossary (electronic format), pp. 253-256.

¹⁴ In an interview with Robert Linsley titled ‘Around the Episcene,’ the artist Scott Lyall observes: ‘[t]heatre is an innate condition of art, and even stands for the crisis of the disappearance (or structurally negative condition) of the mediums. But scenes—the extroversion of an assemblage towards the audience—are not primarily a form of theatrical spectacle. They are firstly the place of visibility of an embraided or common speech.’ Accessed in April 2012 at <http://abstraction.uwaterloo.ca/ST/AroundTheEpiscene.html>

chapters I will discuss a shift of the aesthetic event to the in-between-ness of the encounter, a renegotiated materiality of sculpture that stages autonomous spaces, and an engineering of aesthetic experience, as exemplified by certain sculptural practices, that taps into an affective re-ordering of the viewing subject. The first chapter of the thesis elaborates the pivotal methodological components of this project. Among them, the ideas of co-created in-between-ness and aesthetic function have been informed by the events witnessed in the performance of certain theatrical genres. Such is the exchange, or *fusion*, between actor and viewer in the performance of Kutiyattam that I narrate,¹⁵ or the insight into the functions at play in ancient Greek tragedy offered in the Translator's Introduction to Euripides' *Medea* by Yorgos Heimonas.¹⁶ These instances manifest the radical affective potential that is latent in the aesthetic experience. The aesthetic events of the dramatic stage also introduce ideas of a medium as means of aesthetic mediation – the in-between dimension of art. I will juxtapose these manifestations to the aesthetic events in the encounter with sculpture, to the spatiotemporal dimension of the activated space that weaves a type of performance that is particular to sculpture and which involves the staging by the artist, the encounter with the work of art and the affect on the viewer.

The second chapter explores the agency of staging in sculpture and installation. Tracing the discussion of theatricality in sculpture, triggered by Michael Fried's 1967 essay *Art and Objecthood*, the chapter identifies staging as an expanded practice that converges the performative quality of contemporary sculpture with the performative dimension of the viewer's affective experience. Visiting a number of essays that highlight the relational and performative patterns inscribed in the multidimensional assemblages of recent sculpture, the chapter revolves around the dynamics that mould an empowering space for the viewer. A position of self-seeing alternates with a space for self-production as modality of this activated space, blending spectatorship with performance. As multiplicity or dispersal of subject positions or as proposal of political autonomy through a restructuring of the sensible, this reinvented sculptural matter resonates heterogeneous spatial and relational spheres in a hybrid, transitional medium-specificity.

¹⁵ See Chapter 1, *Kutiyattam, an encounter*.

¹⁶ Euripides' *Medea*, translated by Yorgos Heimonas, Kastaniotis Editions, Athens 1989, pp. 7-11. See Appendix, Part 1, pp. 112-118 for the Translator's Introduction by Heimonas (my translation from Greek), one of the key references of this thesis.

In the last chapter of the thesis I lay out the origins of this project, the stages of its development and the areas of research through which it unfolded. During this time my studio practice evolved through a series of sculptures, installations, videos and performances. These works interweave scenes of artificial nature, ad hoc constructions and re-enactments of fragmented narratives into staged environments. The spaces are organized around the nexus of the encounter of the viewer with the work, functioning as platforms for encounters. Parallel to these descriptions I elaborate on the methodological components of my practice – a performative encounter with staged spaces, an element of re-enactment and a position of survey within spectatorship – through an account of my encounters with other artists' work. These works manifest a grasp of the inner architecture of the affect and resonate with it through the staging of an encounter. To reinstate the performative in sculpture means to understand sculpture's modality of communication.

CHAPTER ONE

-IN-BETWEEN-NESS-

1. A metaphor and a gap

'It is a language,' they said to us, 'and we're going to learn how it works.' This was the first thing I heard in Art College.¹⁷

A promising statement; yet this kind of metaphor – a cliché often pronounced in various disciplines – raised a set of issues about art. On a basic level, it was a simple way to indicate what it meant to learn the 'vocabulary' of forms, colours and volumes, the 'syntax' of composition – this was a painting studio after all. Learning to articulate these into a structure would then seem to enable a particular meaning-making process, which would be pertinent to the 'language' in question. The claim also seemed to suggest that the art viewer was already equipped with the same 'language' – at least this seemed to be the assumption across art education.

I have used this crude illustration to highlight a question that arises each time the issue of the response to works of art is addressed: how is the aesthetic experience *pre-figured* in the *making* of the work of art? To be asking this is perhaps to assume the metaphor mentioned above, namely that of a natural, inbuilt 'language,' or to claim that an artist foresees the response of the viewer as part of the configuration of the work; I will examine both these assumptions in order to retrieve the traces of intuition that they contain, even if the 'linguistic' frame described above obscures the potentiality of the aesthetic. Despite the fact that aesthetic *reception* as a domain of experience has been traditionally analyzed as separate from the production of the work of art,¹⁸ in the course of this study I will attempt to look at both fields through a single vantage point: the interface of the *encounter*.

¹⁷ This incident took place in the 6th Painting Studio of the Athens School of Fine Arts in September 1993.

¹⁸ In classical philosophy this is the 'third type' of aesthetic theory, namely the '*reception* of the work of art.' The other two are the '*production* or *construction* of the work of art,' and the '*ontology* of the

There is a ‘gap’ that this study addresses – a gap in exploring *affect* as the building block of the encounter with the work of art. This lack is a practical one: it posits the ontology of affect as an uncharted territory in the perception – and production – of art. To address this faculty through a written text would, perhaps, appear to be a contradiction to the terms I have just described – to the nature of affect most of all; but language as a faculty has its own role in the art encounter. Human faculties communicate and interplay; the signifying registers of an encounter can be equally – or more, or less – compelling as the a-signifying registers for the subject that bears them. Yet the interweaving of these registers remains largely unexplored; with this text I will attempt to speculate on both the nature of these responses and on the medium that allows these responses to emerge and connect. ‘Encounter,’ in this context, is a crucial modality of the aesthetic experience, which foregrounds the projection of affect, as opposed to the process of *recognition*, which largely relates to signification.¹⁹ The implications of this prioritization are both subversive, against the normative role of signification, and affirming, in relation to the experiencing subject and its far-ranging field of self-structuring abilities, set in motion by the encounter.

The events of the in-between space of the art encounter are triggered by what Simon O’Sullivan calls the ‘affective-gap’²⁰ – the moment of suspension between encounter and response. The tension of this in-between moment invites a reaction from the viewer, which engenders affects of different origin, kind, intensity and potential. These affects urge the experiencing subject into a joint emotive, corporeal and cognitive response. For Henri Bergson the action triggered by the distance between our body and an object activates what he calls ‘pure memory’ (O’Sullivan describes it as *ontological* memory).²¹ Gilles Deleuze sees in this response the possibility of

work of art.’ I cite this definition from Theodoros Georgiou, *Aesthetic Theory and Modern Art*, (Greek edition, my translation), Futura Editions, Athens, 2001, p. 132.

¹⁹ ‘An object of an encounter is fundamentally different from an object of recognition. With the latter our knowledges, beliefs and values are reconfirmed. We, and the world we inhabit, are reconfirmed as that which we already understood our world and ourselves to be. An object of recognition is then precisely a representation of something always already in place.’ Simon O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.1.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 38. O’Sullivan employs this term in response to Henri Bergson. He further elaborates on it in the passage ‘Bergson: the gap,’ pp. 45-47.

²¹ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, Zone Books, 1991, pp. 71-76. O’Sullivan remarks: ‘It is into this interval that memory, understood as the pure past, enters and as such the possibility of circumnavigating typical responses – of creatively responding to the world. We might say that this is

creative emotion, the release of ‘cosmic Memory,’ which allows the human to attune to ‘the whole movement of creation.’²² In their joint writings (in conjunction with ideas from their individual projects)²³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explored the radical dimension of the art encounter, which allows a different setup of experience for the viewer triggered by affects; their exploration of *affect* and *becoming* sketched a collapse of boundaries and territories and an immanent transformation for what becomes a *Body without Organs*.²⁴

What Deleuze and Guattari offer an insight into, in their exploration of affect and encounter, is the performed act of viewing; in this respect, I will juxtapose Kaja Silverman’s views in her book *World Spectators*. Silverman explores an idea of *care*, the Heideggerian concept of ‘Sorge,’²⁵ as an investment of energy from the viewing subject onto the encountered object, which actively affects the act of seeing and the pattern of our encounter with the world. In Silverman’s analysis the desire of the subject is the agency that allows the aesthetic object to ‘appear’; this charged exchange (as Silverman also speaks of *Intending Objects*)²⁶ forms a ‘libidinal vocabulary’ for the viewing subject, a distinctive, powerful affective *meaning* through which we communicate aesthetically.

This description of the role of affects in allowing the appearance of the aesthetic object bears a resemblance with the phenomenological account of Mikel Dufrenne in his *Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Experience*.²⁷ For Dufrenne it is the spectator’s

the definition of freedom, a disinterestedness which allows access to something bigger, more expansive, than one’s self. It is in this gap then that genuine events emerge.’ O’Sullivan, op. cit., p. 46.

²² Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, Zone Books, 1988, p. 111, as quoted by O’Sullivan, op. cit., p. 46.

²³ The joint writings that I refer to are *A Thousand Plateaus* from *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Continuum, 2004) and *What is Philosophy?* (Verso Books, 2004). From their individual projects, ideas from Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*, (Continuum, 2004) and the ‘construction of subjectivity’ that Guattari explores in *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 1-31, are instrumental to the mapping of the art encounter.

²⁴ The *Body without Organs* is an expression that Deleuze borrowed from Artaud and developed into ‘a kind of aesthetic machine, but its operating field is immanence rather than transcendence. It breaks down the subject/object boundary, tears apart, to use the quote from Guattari again, the ‘ontological iron curtain between being and things’.’ O’ Sullivan, op. cit., p. 116.

²⁵ Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators*, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 24 and in Note 55, p. 154.

²⁶ In the last chapter of *World Spectators* Silverman analyzes the way objects address the perceiving subject. ‘If, as phenomenology teaches us, the subject tends toward objects, the reverse is then apparently equally true. Our subjectivity is objectively intended.’ Ibid. p. 133.

²⁷ Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Experience*, Northwestern University Press, 1973.

reflection and *feeling* that reveals the ‘aesthetic object’ in the work of art,²⁸ differentiating between the two latter terms in order to stress the viewer’s agency and the primacy of feeling as decisive in the art encounter.²⁹ Dufrenne takes the spectator’s point of view in his analysis,³⁰ echoing Heidegger in his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*, where he resists the idea of the artist’s superior role in the work of art and posits the viewer as equal in his/her creative role.³¹ What Dufrenne calls feeling – albeit not ‘merely an emotional’ response – is a variation of the idea of affect that has an active role of extricating the quality which lies at the ‘depth of the aesthetic object.’ Although more classical an account in its terms (the *depth* of the ‘aesthetic object’, for example), Dufrenne advances the centrality of affect both as catalyst for the viewer’s agency of feeling and core quality of the aesthetic object (resonating with Deleuze and Guattari’s description of artworks as ‘*blocs of affects.*’)³² He introduces the idea of an *affective a priori*, which inflects the Kantian idea of ‘schema,’ and in Dufrenne’s words ‘*derives from the subject’s direct intuition.*’³³ Dufrenne’s view resonates with contemporary theory in its description of

²⁸ In his Translator’s Foreword, Edward S. Casey explains this distinction: ‘The work of art is the perduring structural foundation for the aesthetic object. It has a constant being which is not dependent on being experienced, while the aesthetic object exists only as appearance, that is, only as experienced by the spectator.’ Ibid, page xxiii. This description also resonates with Heidegger’s writing on the ‘Thing’ (*Das Ding*): ‘The currently predominant thing-concept, thing as formed matter, is not even derived from the nature of the thing but from the nature of equipment.’ He also wrote: ‘[...] The Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *phusis.*’ In Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, 1971, p. 38 and p. 42.

²⁹ Edward S. Casey summarizes Dufrenne’s thesis in the following passage in his Foreword: ‘The last stage in the full development of perception is one of *reflection* and *feeling*. When perception follows its normal course, it tends to flow into understanding and knowledge by becoming a form of objective reflection. But perception can also veer toward a different sort of reflection which is “sym-pathetic” rather than objectifying and is more closely related to feeling than to understanding. Such reflection clarifies and supports feeling, entering into a dialectical relationship with it. In the process, perception becomes properly aesthetic for it is above all through feeling that the aesthetic object becomes accessible. How so? Feeling, which stems from the depth of the perceiving subject, allows the spectator to respond to the depth of the aesthetic object, that is, to its expressed world. This response is not merely an emotional one but consists in the apprehension or “reading” of the singular affective quality characterizing the expressed world. Through feeling, then, we connect with the aesthetic object’s inherent expressiveness. Dufrenne concludes that “the very height of aesthetic perception is found in the feeling which reveals the expressiveness of the work.”’ Dufrenne, op. cit., p. xxix.

³⁰ Casey points out Dufrenne’s ‘attempt to support the choice of the spectator’s standpoint.’ Ibid. p. xxiii, in Note 17.

³¹ ‘The preservers of a work belong to its createdness with an essentiality equal to that of the creators.’ Martin Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art,’ from *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Perennial Classics, 2001, p. 68.

³² Deleuze and Guattari write: ‘What is preserved – the thing or the work of art – is a *bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects.*’ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, op. cit., p. 164.

³³ Dufrenne, op. cit., p. 448. The Kantian ‘schema’ is ‘a procedure of the judgement which adapts otherwise heterogeneous concepts to the spatial and temporal conditions of intuition.’ Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1995, p. 360.

an a-signifying register (the ‘sym-pathetic’ reflection) and the ‘dialectical relationship’ that the subject finds itself in, within its own responses.³⁴ The participation of the viewer is also a familiar term in more recent art history, even if Dufrenne’s idea is more like a role (an affective co-creation) than physical participation; again Dufrenne’s vision resonates with Heidegger’s description of those who ‘approach the work of art and preserve it in its truth,’³⁵ as the viewer who activates the work.

2. The faculty: the affect

Affects enable the *faculty* we possess to interpret events and objects in body sensations. Every event, and every object, engenders a different sensation. Therefore every encounter contributes to a sensory structure – a history, record, or ‘inner architecture’ of sensations – a ‘sculpture’ of the senses.

This virtual structure is part of our experience. We perceive things physically, we sense the growth of a situation, its imminent explosion, its decline, affectively embodying these changes, these events, enfolding the world in our mind and senses and performing its movements. It is perhaps an intuitive urge, a propensity to know things in order to assess them, to make use of them or to protect ourselves from them. It is a virtual embodiment of a distributed sensation of difference. We all know examples of imagined or remembered sensations; we can instantly visualize, or virtually *sense*, the stroke on a cat’s fur. Memory retrieves the whole manifold of touch, warmth and smell, along with a host of visual impressions; it retrieves affects, it re-enacts them and interweaves them anew with our diverse registers.

Affect/Affection. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L’affect* (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an

³⁴ The ‘sym-pathetic reflection’ with its etymological root of ‘pathos’ (passion) alludes to a visceral connection. The ‘dialectical relationship,’ on the other hand, reflects an idea of self-spectatorship that I will elaborate in the following chapters.

³⁵ This quotation comes from the notes of translator Yannis Tzavaras from the Greek translation of Heidegger’s essay, which I have also used. Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, [translated by Yannis Tzavaras], Dodoni Editions, Athens-Ioannina, 1986, p. 32.

augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies).³⁶

The definition of affect that Brian Massumi appends to his translator's introduction to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* draws qualities akin to sensations, responses, fragments of experience not easy to express in words – as none of these terms can transmit the *prepersonal* character of affect. It is a body that receives and reacts, a state of body reception and body production (as affects are body products). In this context we can appreciate the novelty of Deleuze and Guattari's approach to affect: their turn to the *biological* basis of affect and the foregrounding of its pre-linguistic nature emancipated it from the psychological dimension.³⁷ This approach had conflated affect with *emotion*. An affect may generate an emotion, but affect as (and when) it emerges is not yet an emotion – and in some cases, will not evolve into one. It is rather a minute sensation, a response to anything that enters the field of perception (an affecting body – with 'body' in a broad sense, as Massumi points out). Emotions may *follow* affects, but already on a far more conscious level and of a different composition that is easier to attribute and localize, whereas an affect is an intensity on the body that is hard to pin down in either origin or essence. In his book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, Simon O'Sullivan explores this notion of affect through the writings of Deleuze and Guattari and, through them, their precursors (especially Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson). The nature of affect has also been a particular subject of research for the philosopher Brian Massumi. O'Sullivan remarks:

For Brian Massumi, in his essay 'The Autonomy of Affect'³⁸ [...], affects are likewise understood as passages of intensity, which might resonate with linguistic expression but which strictly speaking are of a different, *and prior, order* [my italics]. For Massumi, as for myself: 'Approaches to the image in its relation to language are incomplete if they operate only on

³⁶ This definition comes from Brian Massumi's 'Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements' in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, op. cit., p. xvii.

³⁷ Susan Best points this out: 'Much of this scholarship, now dubbed part of the 'affective turn', follows the anti-psychological account of affect provided by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. See their explanation of affects as 'non-human becomings of man' in *What is Philosophy?*' In Susan Best, *Visualizing feeling: affect and the feminine avant-garde*, I. B. Tauris, 2011, p. 146.

³⁸ Brian Massumi, 'The Autonomy of Affect', in Paul Patton, *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, Basil Blackwell, 1996, p. 217. Also printed in *Parables of the Virtual*, op. cit., pp. 23-45.

the semantic or semiotic level, however that level is defined (linguistically, logically, narratologically, ideologically, or all of these combinations, as a Symbolic). What they lose, precisely, is the *event* – in favour of structure’ (1996, 220). Massumi identifies the realm of affect as being of increasing importance within ‘media, literary and art theory’ but specifies the problem that there is ‘no cultural- theoretical vocabulary specific to affect’ [...].³⁹

Both Massumi and O’Sullivan stress the impossibility of a vocabulary specific to affect, as this would insert it in language and accord it a somewhat fixed meaning (a representation) and hence, invite its deconstruction.⁴⁰ Despite this impossibility to define affect linguistically, an instinctive affective receptivity is immanent for the viewer in the art encounter; it is through these instinctive affective responses – prior to, parallel with, or on different levels than conscious reflection – that an autopoietic transformation takes place. Art encounters provide the platform for this self-modelling to occur and disclose the potential of affect as the ‘*capacity to affect and be affected*.’⁴¹ The pragmatic conditions whereby a work of art facilitates this disclosure – through the *staging*, as I will argue, on the part of the artist – provide the setup of the encounter itself. If the faculty of imagination can bring things to the realm of thought, the faculty of affect can give them a place in our aesthetic memory and our lived sensation.⁴²

Αἶσθημα (=aesthema) is one of the Greek words for *affect*. ‘Aesthema’ is etymologically related to ‘aesthetic’; it is the core of aesthetic experience, its ground material. *Aesthesis*, a similar word, signifies sensation, or sense experience. Yet both terms are somehow elusive to a more detailed, conceptualized analysis. In his essay ‘The Autonomy of the Affect,’ Brian Massumi describes:

³⁹ O’Sullivan, op. cit. p.170.

⁴⁰ In pages 39-45 of the same volume O’Sullivan gives an alternative account of affect in a way that deviates the urge to represent it, and the subsequent imperative to deconstruct it.

⁴¹ In Gregg and Seigworth, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴² The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey wrote extensively on the poetic imagination: ‘Recollecting is at the same time metamorphosis. This allows us to see the connection between the most elementary processes of psychic life and the highest accomplishments of our creative capacities. [...] And this transformation into something new that transcends what is contained in, or derivable from, lived experience and perception, also affects the connections of representational images. A thinking in images emerges, and in it the imagination attains a new freedom.’ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Poetry and Experience*, Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 240-1.

One of Spinoza's basic definitions of affect is an "affection [in other words an impingement upon] the body, *and at the same time the idea of the affection*" (emphasis added). This starts sounding suspiciously Bergsonian if it is noted that the body, when impinged upon, is described by Spinoza as being in a state of passional suspension in which it exists more outside of itself, more in the abstracted notion of the impinging thing and the abstracted context of that action, than within itself, and if it is noted that the idea in question is not only not conscious but it is not in the first instance in the "mind."⁴³

Massumi points out that affect in Spinoza's definition is an 'impingement' of a corporeal nature. In addition, he notes the displaced character (locality) of affect and the remote (and imaginary) sense of the other. The body virtually engulfs the other, reaches out to it. It is here that the radical collapse of spatial boundaries between 'self' and 'other' are virtually rehearsed by affective projection. Affect reaches out at the same time as it allows in. It is a double movement that follows a body's intuitive pattern of communication; each new encounter connects to previous encounters, a selective process partly dependent on the 'affective' priorities, or histories, of the experiencing subject. This reverberation moulds the singular character of every new encounter and alters, retroactively, the importance of each past encounter – a process that I think of as a '*sculpting of affect.*' The impact of impressions and the singular way that each thing *stands* inside the repository of memory that is structured by and filtered through affects can be more *sensed* than understood. It is hard to attribute any meaning to these 'first-order' intensities, but they accumulate into a totality, contingent to both new and re-emergent encounters, building a structure with its own properties – the bedrock of sensibility. The interplay of memory with affect is one of the most productive features of an encounter with a work of art. One presses itself on the other, creating a relief across one another – a visual impression mutates as the mapping of affects connects encounters.

Over the recent years there has been a proliferation of affect-related studies – dubbed as the *affective turn* – across disciplines ranging from the social sciences and humanities to neurobiology and politics;⁴⁴ these developments reveal an expanding

⁴³ Massumi, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴⁴ This surge of interest has generated relevant material in literature and philosophy but also in conferences and exhibitions. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth contend: 'Undoubtedly the watershed moment for the most recent resurgence of interest and intrigue regarding affect and theories of affect came in 1995 when two essays – one by Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank ("Shame in the

interest in this research area, reflecting the need for a novel way to approach the underlying processes of our lives, a way that advances beyond a linguistic, signifying, *representational* register, to one that is immanent, intuitive, rhizomatic and dispersed in interrelated, interwoven fields of human activity. It also demonstrates that affect can be a 'passe-partout' in conceiving what, at least in the arts, has been suppressed under various dominating theories of criticism or art movements: the quality and the range of this faculty implants an aesthetic aspect to all experience.⁴⁵

In this respect the turn to affect forms a point of convergence for art, social sciences, philosophy and psychoanalysis, enabling a cross-disciplinary dialogue. Likewise there has been a common acknowledgment across these disciplines of the shortcomings in exploring affect.⁴⁶ This increasing interest marks an attention to the processual and experiential registers that affect performs and which record moods, sensations and

Cybernetic Fold”) and one by Brian Massumi (“The Autonomy of Affect”) – were published. [...] These two essays from 1995, along with subsequent work undertaken by their authors, have given substantial shape to the two dominant vectors of affect study in the humanities: Silvan Tomkins’s psychobiology of differential affects (1962) (Sedgwick and Frank) and Gilles Deleuze’s Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities (1988a) (Massumi). Gregg and Seigworth, op. cit. p. 7. Affect also relates to non-representational theory: ‘Affect has strong links with ‘non-representational theory’ and challenges the objectivity of particular forms of representations, instead emphasising their role as artefacts of the research process itself.’ Extract from *Affect Journal*, issue 1, Autumn/Winter 2008, accessed in October 2008 at <http://www.affectjournal.co.uk/>

⁴⁵ Claire Colebrook, in her essay ‘On the Specificity of Affect’ observes: ‘The power of art is ethical: the power not just to present this or that affect, but to bring us to an experience of ‘affectuality’ – or of *the fact that there is* affect. Art is not a judgment on life but an affirmation of life.’ In Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert, *Deleuze and Space*, Edinburgh University Press, 2005, p. 199.

⁴⁶ In the introduction to her book *Visualizing feeling*, Susan Best notes: ‘This book addresses a methodological blindspot in art history: the interpretation of art’s affective dimension.’ Later also she says: ‘It is worth emphasizing that the neglect of feeling is not specific to art history. Charles Altieri, in his book *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects*, observes a similar methodological oversight in the study of literature. He notes that the emphasis on social and historical context rather than the literary text has led to a ‘tendency to overread for “meaning” while under-reading the specific modes of affective engagement presented by works of art.’ [Quoted from Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) p. 2.] When he explored the work of theorists of emotions he found a similar eagerness to engage with the ‘cognitive and moral dimensions of the topic’. In other words, Altieri argues, affects are consistently brought under the sway of reason; their disruptive power is not investigated.’ Best, op. cit., p. 1 and p. 4 respectively. Likewise, in *The Fabric of Affect*, André Green remarks: ‘Psychoanalysts throughout the world [...] still deplore the absence of a psychoanalytic theory of the affect, despite the many works devoted to the subject.’ André Green, *The Fabric of Affect in the Psychoanalytic Discourse*, Routledge, 1999, p. xv. In the second chapter of his book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, Simon O’Sullivan makes ‘a case for attention to be paid to the affective side of the art experience.’ O’Sullivan, op cit. p. 38. Another view associates affect with the feminine: ‘[t]here is an important question of why “affect” has been so consistently ignored, along with other concepts like emotion and the body, in the dominant traditions of Atlantic modern thought. I think that part of the answer is no doubt, as feminists have argued, the association of women as somehow inferior with the assumption that the sexual difference manifested itself through a series of binary differences: rationality versus emotion, mind versus body, and so forth.’ Laurence Grossberg interviewed by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth in Gregg and Seigworth, op. cit., p. 317.

desires, and also influence actions and decisions. Affect sets the subject in motion; an interaction of responses, singularities, leanings and sensations is constantly at work in the affective life of the subject, converging physiological responses with emotional sensibilities – a unique grafting of the corporeal and the psychic. It is a generic mode of expression of the sentient being.

Affect theory has arisen in reaction to the shortcomings of poststructuralist theory.⁴⁷ As Patricia Clough notes: ‘*Affect and emotion, after all, point just as well as poststructuralism and deconstruction do to the subject’s discontinuity with itself, a discontinuity of the subject’s conscious experience with the non-intentionality of emotion and affect.*’⁴⁸ However, the fundamental difference with poststructuralism is that this sense of discontinuity in the emergence of affect is an affirming manifestation that the subject experiences, an affirmation in the sense of a *unity in difference*.⁴⁹ In his review of ‘*The Affect Theory Reader*,’ Todd Cronan claims that there is a radical element of ‘newness’ across most theses around affect, as for example in Steve D. Brown and Ian Tucker’s essay, who ‘*see affects as affording a “new space of liberty in the ineffable”*’.⁵⁰

The dynamics within affect theory aim to restore the fundamental role that our primary body responses have in our self-structuring, and as such their contribution to our self-awareness. The wider movement inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s project privileges the body as the site of events that define our connectivity with the world and amongst ourselves. Art holds an important place in relation to these forces, which advance an *aesthetic* model of the subject as more compatible with its intuitive nature, more attentive to its creative manifestations, and more promising for its becomings than the conditions established by an unconditional conceptualism.⁵¹ Elizabeth Grosz

⁴⁷ Todd Cronan diagnosed that ‘[t]he tools and principles of poststructuralism were unable to accommodate or even recognize central facts about human experience, those that did not rise (or fall) to the level of signification.’ In Todd Cronan, ‘The Aesthetic Politics of Affect,’ accessed in May 2012 at <http://nonsite.org/review/radically-private-and-pretty-uncoded>. Cronan too locates the surge in affect studies from the mid-1990s onwards.

⁴⁸ Patricia T. Clough, ‘The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine, and Bodies’, in Seigworth and Gregg, op. cit. p. 206, also quoted by Todd Cronan, op. cit. (accessed online).

⁴⁹ Here I allude to a principle of Eastern philosophy; Simon O’Sullivan also links non-representational theory with certain Eastern practices (see Chapter 2: ‘Encountering Objecthood’).

⁵⁰ In Todd Cronan, op. cit. (accessed online).

⁵¹ In this context Charles Altieri remarks: ‘So, ultimately, an aesthetics of the affects also becomes a means of elaborating how there may be profoundly incommensurable perspectives on values that are

observes (in response to Susan Best's thesis) '*Art works affect before they inform, perform or communicate.*'⁵² Art works stage the emergence of affect by becoming springboards for radical encounters.

3. The argument: (the encounter)

In centring my argument on the moment of the encounter with the work of art I attend to the projections from the viewer that invest this moment with particular energies. It is important to understand that both the *anticipation* that precedes the art encounter as well as an aspect of *suddenness* of appearance affect the experience that follows with regard to these projections.⁵³ Given that the majority of art encounters takes place within a specifically purposed spatial context for the exhibition of art that the viewer is conscious of throughout, a state of psychological anticipation in view of encountering works of art prompts a physiological state of suspension, preparing the stage for the surfacing of affects.⁵⁴ Consequently, the sudden appearance of an object or space creates an instant sensory relief propelled by the visual impact, which echoes in the events that follow. What is channelled in the encounter is initially activated by the two conditions described above. The dimension of aesthetic *appearance* in relation to the visual connectivity that is active in the art encounter is particularly relevant to the mode of *knowing* that the aesthetic experience advances, resonating with the subject's response in the sense of 'illuminating' or charged vision that manifests in certain encounters.

nonetheless all necessary if we are to realize various aspects of our human potential. Ironically, this perspective then provides a challenge to the benign imperialism of philosophy's reaching out to the arts only so long as the arts turn out to sustain the hegemony of its modes of reflection.' In Altieri, op. cit. p. 5.

⁵² In Best, op cit., p. iii.

⁵³ Karl Heinz Bohrer remarks: 'The aesthetic reaction that leads to a value judgment is always a synthetic act that can be divided into different phases, the first of which is finally overtaken by the last. We call the first and methodologically most relevant phase "anticipation." We anticipate the final judgement through the process of sympathy. This sympathy is not based on any recognized formal property that carries aesthetic value, nor on the recognition of previously encountered ideas. It is an event between subject and object in which the entire diffuse complexity of the subject comes into play in an anticipatory way.' Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance*, Columbia University Press, 1994. p. 22.

⁵⁴ It does not follow that all gallery or museum environments unvaryingly prompt a 'benign' anticipatory effect in their visitors; what I describe is merely the mode of perception that is signalled for the viewer by these purposely set up environments – which does not rule out responses which are negatively determined precisely because of this framing.

In the case of sculpture and installation, the spatial encounter is the moment and place when invisible and immaterial registers are mapped on the body of the viewer. The object or form of art becomes a medium, which enables the embodiment of new affects that are imminent for the viewer in the encounter. The encounter occurs as an interface between agencies, offering a co-creative model for the aesthetic experience but also a model for a relation between the viewing subject and the work of art; it is a type of connectivity that simultaneously achieves virtual constellations and ontological dispersals as alternating levels of eclipse and appearance of both viewing subject and work of art. This dimension of *in-between-ness*, what is taking place between the work and the viewer, which merges the context of the work with that of the viewing subject, is the *practice* that manifests itself.⁵⁵ Through an ‘engineering’ of an encounter – a *staging* – this in-between space becomes a fertile ground for the performance of a movement where affect links the viewing subject to a repository of unconscious imagery and formless emotion: there is a trace of a ritual ‘clearing’ in the way that the viewer *allows* this.⁵⁶ The shift from a state of absorption to a moment of distanced observation occurs, according to Deleuze, in ‘a speed of absolute survey.’⁵⁷

A physical encounter – of a body to another body, a body to an object, a body to a space – is where a *sense* of the world is restored. This is where the sensibility of the viewing subject acts, responds and produces affect. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze describes the encounter as where ‘*sensibility [...] finds itself before its own limit, the sign, and raises itself to the level of a transcendental exercise: to the “nth” power.*’⁵⁸ This affective ‘alarm’ does not leave the other, more conscious or signifying registers of the aesthetic experience unaffected. Affect transmits to the other faculties its passages of intensity and this in turn intensifies – ‘colours’ – the experience on the

⁵⁵ O’Sullivan remarks: ‘It is here that the ‘in-between’ nature of art practice again becomes important. Art is always situated between the actual and the virtual, in fact we might say operates itself as a kind of ‘actualising-machine’.’ O’Sullivan, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵⁶ O’Sullivan describes a concept of ritual by referring to the poet Georges Bataille: ‘For Bataille the practice of cave painting is specifically ritualistic, involving the creation of a sacred space. [...] Here art operates as a form of play that takes the participant out of mundane consciousness, hence Bataille’s understanding of the Lascaux cave paintings as specifically performative.’ Ibid. p. 47. In his book O’Sullivan makes a case for practices as ‘modern rituals that imaginatively and pragmatically switch the register.’ [Ibid. p. 50]. In the encounter with contemporary art, ‘sacred’ *space* and *performative* viewing suggest a projection by the viewer rather than an inscribed content or form of the artwork – hence I describe the movement of ‘ritual clearing’ as a *spatial* response.

⁵⁷ Quoted by O’Sullivan, Ibid. p. 42.

⁵⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, op. cit., p. 176.

whole. This kind of connection foregrounds affect as a function of sensibility that *interacts* with understanding; not at the level of emergence, since affect occurs pre-linguistically, at the substratum of conscious reflection, but in the recursive reflection that the subject performs upon itself, which places affect in a discursive rank in relation to other qualities of the subject.⁵⁹ In fact this recursive reflection resonates with the *double mode* of viewing produced by encounters in the contemporary sculptural context that I will look into in the second chapter.

I will now juxtapose a dissimilar account of aesthetic constitution in the art encounter to the one laid out above. As I already mentioned, Kaja Silverman produces a different account of affective activity in *World Spectators*. Silverman analyzes a way of looking where an investment of interest, of ‘care,’⁶⁰ is mapped onto particular objects (and creatures) for every subject. She performs this analysis through a phenomenological reading of affect (here it is more in the sense of *care*, especially through Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein*)⁶¹ in conjunction with a psychoanalytic account of the *viewing* subject (Silverman contends ‘[T]o look [...] is to care’)⁶². According to this account, vision (and as such, desire) is directed towards objects and creatures not only to substitute for a fundamental ‘lack’ (a void at the centre of subjectivity),⁶³ but also to allow both subject, and world, to *appear* and so to *be*. ‘Appearance’ and ‘Being’ here are the terms whereby the unconcealment of truth (*a-letheia*) is the condition for the subject to *become*, both *other*, as much as his/herself. The collection of these objects invested with care forms a ‘libidinal’ vocabulary, which is the imprint of subjectivity. Although it does not originate in language (on the contrary, it is the

⁵⁹ Massumi attributes this to the mode of perception, which includes the context of a stimulus: ‘The body doesn’t just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds *contexts*, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated. Intensity is asocial, but not presocial – it *includes* social elements but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning and combines them according to different logic. How could this be so? Only if the *trace* of past actions, *including a trace of their contexts*, were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of mind and out of body understood as qualifiable interiorities, active and passive respectively, direct spirit and dumb matter. Only if past actions and contexts were conserved and repeated, autonomically reactivated but not accomplished; begun but not completed.’ Massumi, op. cit., p. 30.

⁶⁰ Silverman notes: “‘Care’ is a Heideggerian concept, which figures centrally in *Being and Time*. I will be inflecting it here in some quite un-Heideggerian ways.’ Silverman, op. cit., p. 154 (in note 55).

⁶¹ In Silverman’s words: ‘*Dasein* is Heidegger’s word for what I call the subject. [...] *Dasein* signifies “existence” in everyday German, but this is not how Heidegger is using it. He means us to hear the literal meaning which that everyday meaning usually conceals: “there-being,” or – to translate this into more idiomatic English, “being-there”.’ Ibid. p. 31.

⁶² Ibid. p. 73.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 28.

effect of being *born* into language as a primary ‘loss of Being’), this response becomes a ‘language of desire’ that we speak with every meaningful encounter – or, when we address the world in an affective way:

To look is to embed an image within a constantly shifting matrix of unconscious memories, which can render a culturally insignificant object libidinally resonant, or a culturally significant object worthless. When a new perception is brought into the vicinity of those memories which matter most to us at an unconscious level, it too is “lit up” or irradiated, regardless of its status within normative representation. Excluded from that privileged field, value will drain out of it.⁶⁴

The way Silverman describes new perceptions as brought ‘in the vicinity of those memories which matter most to us at an unconscious level’ reflects the way O’Sullivan and Massumi describe the unconscious mapping of the affects and the constant recursive movement that brings the traces of past encounters – and the trace of their context – in connection with new encounters. Theirs, however, is a quite distinct approach: their line of thought that runs through Spinoza and Bergson to Deleuze and Guattari emphasizes affect as the pre-linguistic, pre-personal intensity, passage, force; Silverman’s thought, on the other hand, with its anatomy of vision – the *drive* to see – as intimately related to a loss at the centre of Being (thus, the effect of being *in language* already), is dealing with a different structure of the subject, a level of psychic processes that is already enmeshed in *meaning*. But this discrepancy of levels whereupon each line of thought focuses does not eclipse the striking analogy in what they reveal by dissecting the viewing subject: a-signifying registers *condition* and *manifest* on signifying ones, just as unconscious, charged libidinal memories *map* on conscious memories and actions.

In fact what Silverman describes as the act of seeing is the viewer’s vision that *affects* the encountered object – a condition where a ‘subject’ (enmeshed in language) *becomes* (itself) through affected vision. The libidinal ‘charge’ – released by the subject, mapped on the object – transforms both. Aesthetic appearance becomes a threshold for transformation; it is in this sense that the different accounts juxtaposed here resonate – in how they both point to *a subject produced by an encounter with a work of art*. Liminal responses blend in with more ‘cultured’ elements in the art

⁶⁴ Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Routledge, 1996, p. 3.

encounter, *both* producing affective charge that bounces back on the encounter as recursive feedback loop.⁶⁵

Accordingly, what is also a point of convergence between these trajectories of thought is their mutual understanding of the aesthetic experience as a testing ground for these functions and the role of the work of art as opening up opportunities for both affects and memories to emerge:

One cannot characterize this motility of the look as “agency,” since it resists our conscious attempts to direct it. Here again, we need the assistance of aesthetic texts, which can intervene where we cannot. Such texts abound in visual and rhetorical images which, even before being physically worked over, have the formal and libidinal properties of highly charged unconscious memories. They are consequently capable of moving immediately to a privileged site within the unconscious. At the same time, they are available to conscious scrutiny and interrogation.⁶⁶

In this extract from *The Threshold of the Visible World* Silverman illustrates how a work of art can be a direct experience of affect as much as a conscious reflection. The move from affective charge to conscious reflection, as alternating, oscillating states of the viewer, is a modality of aesthetic experience that appears in both takes – Silverman’s psychoanalytic account and the aesthetics of affect proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. Interestingly, the images that ‘have the formal and libidinal properties of highly charged unconscious memories’ resemble a *floating*, pre-personal intensity that can resonate with different subjects – the ‘pure memory’ that Henri Bergson described as a-personal; what flows into every such moment of disclosing encounter is another resonance between these different genealogies of thought. Silverman’s texts are radical in the way she describes the subject’s *attention* that turns to the object of vision and invests it with the libidinal charge of an unconscious memory, and the *altering* agency that this gaze effects. The objects are lit up, irradiated, as if our desire is projected upon them.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ For a definition of the autopoietic feedback loop see Glossary p. 140.

⁶⁶ Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁶⁷ ‘It is not by responding to the formal parameters of another being at the level of our own objectivity that we communicate with it; were we ever to succeed in synchronizing ourselves in this way with another creature or thing, the result would be a monologue, not a dialogue. We communicate with the world only when we enable its forms to signify – only when we provide the meaning they lack. I say “lack” because phenomenal forms are not simply meaningless signs; they are also signs in search of significance. But it is in fact through an abundance rather than a deficit that phenomenal forms address

In her essay ‘*What if Art Desires to be Interpreted? Remodelling Interpretation after the ‘Encounter-Event’*’⁶⁸ Griselda Pollock explores Bracha Ettinger’s concept of the ‘*matrixial borderspace*’;⁶⁹ Ettinger’s thesis offers an account of an early subject condition that is fundamentally different to the predominant psychoanalytic ‘Oedipal’ structure, positing an aesthetic memory of spatial co-existence *within* difference. Pollock discusses the radical Ettingerian matrixial aesthetic theory as a primary experience of spatial co-poiesis that allows us to experience difference, transformation and becoming, and therefore not only key to understanding the aesthetic encounter, but also a generic experience of difference within subjectivity. In exploring ideas of interpretation and the ‘collaborative’ dimension of art through the Ettingerian ‘encounter-event,’ Pollock remarks: ‘*Many strings are woven across time and space in the event-encounter with which all parties are resonating as well as working to bend affective vibration towards communicable understanding.*’⁷⁰ She thus sees a co-creative potential in the art encounter that interweaves the subjective with the common.⁷¹ Although it is not possible to expand on Pollock’s essay here, it is important that she poses the following question: ‘*Why do we turn away from the earlier models of cultural analysis, and why does contemporary art itself seem more susceptible to affective encounter instead of ideological communication?*’,⁷² which she addresses by positing an inter-subjective (*trans*-subjective in this case), co-poetic encountering of otherness.

us. They are “pregnant” with a beauty to which only a very special kind of human signification can give birth. And only by becoming “ourselves” can we provide that signification.’ Silverman, *World Spectators*, op. cit., p. 143.

⁶⁸ Griselda Pollock, ‘What if Art Desires to be Interpreted? Remodelling Interpretation after the ‘Encounter-Event’,’ presented at the conference *Interpretation, Theory & the Encounter* at Tate Britain on 9 July 2010, accessed in May 2012 at

<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/what-if-art-desires-be-interpreted-remodelling-interpretation>

⁶⁹ Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Pollock explains: ‘Ettinger imagines a different set of potentialities seeded into human subjectivity by the paradox of unknowable difference at the very core of co-emerging subjectivities: difference and co-affectation are indissoluble partners in the formation of this dimension or potentiality in human subjectivity which she names matrixial, which is later subordinated to the post-natal and phallic conditions of subject/object relations, without ever being entirely knocked out.’ Pollock, op. cit., (accessed online).

⁷⁰ Ibid. (accessed online).

⁷¹ There is a resonance here with Jean Luc Nancy’s philosophy. In a foreword to ‘Our World,’ an interview with Nancy by Peter Hallward, Emma Cambell writes: ‘Being is always already “in common” in so far as neither singularity nor finitude has an ontological status independent of its presentation or exposure to others.’ *Angelaki Journal of the theoretical humanities*, Volume 8, Number 2, August 2003, p. 44.

⁷² Pollock, op. cit., (accessed online).

We can thus imagine artistic practice as aiming to create precisely this ‘*bending of affective vibration towards communicable understanding*’ that Pollock describes – as aiming to stage the scene for this transformation. In view of these thoughts, a first level of interaction between a practice of *staging* and the moment of the encounter can be approached: the staging of *presentation* in art is also a staging of *suddenness* – a distinctive temporal modality bound to aesthetic appearance and affective emergence.⁷³ As such aesthetic appearance engenders affective resonances throughout the aesthetic event.

4. The project: (the methodology)

‘*The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche, the lesser psychological causes of which have not been sufficiently investigated.*’⁷⁴ In the opening of *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard alludes to more than a metaphor. What binds sculpture with affect is the effect of a relief: *a sculpting of affect*.

As I have already argued, the practice of *staging the encounter* is an embedded methodology in *situating* a work of art in a space. In my practice I investigate this staging through a further remove (as if to *stage* the staging) in order to observe and explore its modalities, its effect on the viewer as a methodological feature of the work and its implications, as a spatial strategy, for the practice of sculpture and installation.

In the third chapter of this text I describe the line of practice that I have developed in this project, along with some previous works that I see as fundamental origins to this research. During this development, several ‘visual’ models have informed my methodology: I see some of my works as *construction sites*; these are sites where things appear and mutate – where an invisible volition takes form. Another recurring

⁷³ Describing Nietzsche’s phenomenology of appearance based on Greek tragedy, Karl Heinz Bohrer writes: ‘The nature of appearance as phenomenon is the temporal structure of its *suddenness* and is indicated by the repeated expressions relating to the concepts of seeing and sight. It becomes clear that what Nietzsche means is not the submersion of the seeing subject in the contemplation of eternal ideas or essences, but the predominance of what is actually perceived at the moment. The object seen in that way replaces what it represents.’ Bohrer, op. cit., p. 118.

⁷⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, 1992, p. xv.

element is the encounter with a manufactured *landscape*. I will describe this encounter through the figures of the *nature tourist* and the *re-enactor*. In a series of video works and in several performances and installations I have used these roles and personas as storytelling as well as pictorial devices, together with an assemblage of imageries into staged spaces. In other cases I have staged my work as a museum display. All these models set up a series of encounters; the role of each will be studied as this text unfolds.

By staging the encounter I orchestrate objects, moving image and live action into a *mise en scène*. Sculptural objects are organized into scenes (as in *Path*, *Waxworks* and *0 to 3*) or in site-specific encounters (as in *Wax Effigy*).⁷⁵ In composing these assemblages my intention is for the work to engineer an interplay of affects and presentations. At times the work resembles an ever-changing object; the horizon of an encounter is yet another encounter. Things are made of other things, gradually becoming composed, leaving gaps of meaning, which become filled with images. Given that the response from the viewer to these constructed entities is both uncontrollable as much as impossible to map out thoroughly, this project does not purport to prove something in this sense. Rather, the work is a *rehearsal* for an encounter that seeks to ‘target’ affect and to prompt a communicative pattern organised around the affective stimulation.

The affective charge *transforms* the object of perception; here, Kaja Silverman’s insight that I have quoted above is useful as it describes a *landscape* of transformed vision, of a stimulated sensation that enmeshes subject and object. In the next two chapters I will relate this condition to certain cases of works by other visual artists; in these works I have sensed a materialized investigation into the inner architecture of the aesthetic experience – affect being produced and activated into a critical discourse within the context of the experience itself. In encountering these works I have felt an uncanny certainty that the artist who produced them had a deep *knowing* of the nature of affective receptivity produced by encounters, and subsequently how to address it; that they could trigger and stimulate affect with ease – pull its strings as it were – and set the autopoietic agency of the subject as produced by the encounter in action. To go

⁷⁵ See Appendix Part 3, p. 125, for a photographic documentation of these works.

back to my story from Art College, it seems that it is a ‘language’ of affect – again, a sculpting of affect – that visual artists can potentially ‘speak’ fluently (and ‘mould’ encounters); it is their plastic material. This particular ‘knowing’ is materialized in staging the encounter of the viewer with the work. My speculation is that this encounter becomes a rewarding experience when it triggers back on the viewer *a reflection on the production of the experience itself*, those instances that have elicited a particular response, which will continue to echo in a series of reverberations. This exposure of the production of the experience,⁷⁶ as it happens, allows a view of its whole spectrum at once, keyed on the object that first triggered it: a view of a place where phenomena emerge; an awareness of the act of seeing; a spectral sensation, as if simultaneously *in* and *outside* of the viewing subject; the reflection elicits endless appearances. What is *restored* within the work of art is the faculty of entering the world through the image.

The implication between *staging* and *presentation*, in the context of the aesthetic *appearance* and the mode in which it creates affective fields, is catalytic; I believe that a practice that aims to evolve its possibilities towards more *connective* types of aesthetic experience cannot neglect these crucial, central functions.

5. Synkinesis (Notes on Yorgos Heimonas’ *Translator’s Introduction to Euripides’ Medea*)⁷⁷

Yorgos Heimonas’ introduction to his translation of Euripides’ *Medea* illuminates the forces at play within tragedy, offering an insight into the function of *Katharsis*. He performs an anatomy of ancient Greek drama – an ‘anatomy’ par excellence as Heimonas had trained as a doctor and later specialized in Psychiatry and

⁷⁶ ‘Exposure’ is an important term in this research, delineating key conditions of an activated spectatorship. It is an aesthetic function present throughout modernism – the Brechtian theatre being a prime example; the contemporary work of art is driven by the intention to expose itself (as mechanism, material, construction) *and* the mechanisms of the viewer as perceiving subject. The idea of ‘theatricality,’ which I will explore in the next chapter, is relevant in this context: ‘The concept of theatricality has had its place in this model-building [: of interdisciplinary study], most often as an essential quality of heightened communication [...] connoting the conscious arrangement of behaviour and effect.’ In Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, *Theatricality*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 33. Also see Glossary for a definition of ‘theatricality,’ p. 142.

⁷⁷ See my translation of the Greek text in Appendix, Part 1, pp. 112-118.

Neuroglossology in Paris; he has done extensive research on the condition of aphasia and the faculty of speech. In his anatomy of the drama of *Medea* he virtually gazes into the ‘crevices’⁷⁸ between the visible and the invisible, the conscious and the primordial; he offers a *view* of how its *functions* are operating. He reflects on how this medium can move the viewer to such depth: his account points to the primordial *mourning* that tragic speech echoes as the force that stirs the viewer’s repository of formless emotion, *synkinesis*.⁷⁹ Heimonas speaks of the stratification of the viewer’s psychism (the qualities or structures of the psyche) and how these layers respond to the forces at play in tragedy by resonating with them in depth. He is sifting through these layers and unpicking the registers that alert this synkinesis, unravelling the affects and emotions that the medium of tragedy stirs and puts in function. Heimonas stresses the capability of the medium to affect the viewer with the remarkable ease and at the same depth that music so naturally reaches.

At this point a passage I have already cited from Kaja Silverman’s *The Threshold of the Visible World* springs to mind: ‘Such [aesthetic] texts abound in visual and rhetorical images which, even before being physically worked over, have the formal and libidinal properties of highly charged unconscious memories. They are consequently capable of moving immediately to a privileged site within the unconscious.’⁸⁰

The ancient Greek tragic drama stages an encounter with the viewer. It is the effect of a *milieu*, in this case the drama stage, engulfing the audience and impacting on their senses, a *medium*, this tragic logos, resonating profoundly and stirring the viewers’ emotion (in this case *total* emotion, *synkinesis*) and memory, and a *condition*, which overwhelms them and through this state, the represented events are seen in a new light, a new filter, but also *lived with* the hero.⁸¹ Through the events narrated in the dramatic myth and enacted before the viewer on stage, a tale about the finite history

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 112.

⁷⁹ See the Terminology Index for the translation, Part 1, p. 119. The connection between synkinesis and emotion is visible in the etymology of the terms, respectively *syn*+kinesis and *e*+motion. The previous reference to ‘The Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Experience’ in p. 10, Note 30, also reveals the connection of synkinesis with a *sympathetic* response, triggered by ‘pathos’ or passion.

⁸⁰ Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁸¹ I lay stress on this identification effect in my account of the ancient Indian drama *Kutiyattam* (see the next passage).

of the human being appears, bare and merciless. A raw material emanates from the charge of the poignant words that weave its story; this rhythm taps into the viewer's raw, total emotion. Submerged in these events that resonate an uncannily distant memory, the viewer becomes subjected to his/her own *visceral* forces, becoming witness to a primordial urge that emerges embodied, empowered, released, stirred by this distant memory. With its vibration the logos of tragedy disturbs a primitive layer of emotion – bound to the wake of consciousness – alerting the inexplicable, crude reality of the psyche. Forces of terror, fear, passion and vitality emerge and outpour on the viewer's senses, throwing the subject of this lived encounter into the pulsating vein of its own core.⁸² It is the subject's own body conditioning itself that renders this moment of vital being unconditional; this is the root of the ecstatic.

The archaic medium re-enacts a material that stems from a prehistoric spatial condition of the human subject. The logos of tragedy pries open this space which is at the root of being, its 'dark precursor.'⁸³ It *negotiates* these two sides – the visible, rational, and the underlying, formless, raw material. The medium enacts this negotiation in the viewer; Heimonas claims that tragic speech awakens synkinesis because its vitality is bound up with mourning. Tragic speech taps into a deep schism that stigmatizes the human psyche; he describes it as the separation from the *koinon*, the common being, that creates this everlasting wound. In philosophy this schism has acquired various meanings – birth into language, separation from the mother; Heimonas locates it in the birth of death, the ontological rupture that seals the being with sorrow. This sorrow is the 'natural emotion of existence,' in his words.

In using Heimonas' text I am sketching a different account of a subject produced by an encounter with a work of art to the one given by the aesthetics of affect that I previously described. I am juxtaposing these different accounts in order to tease out a

⁸² Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* was organized around these qualities: 'Like the plague, theatre is a powerful appeal through illustration to those powers which return the mind to the origins of its inner struggles. [...] It unravels conflicts, liberates powers, releases potential and if these and the powers are dark, this is not the fault of the plague or theatre, but life.' Artaud, op. cit., p. 20-21.

⁸³ Although Simon O'Sullivan's reference to affects in Deleuze as 'the 'dark precursors' of our conceptual system' [O'Sullivan, op. cit., p. 42.] relates to an entirely different approach to the one I illustrate here, I borrow this phrase to emphasize a manifestation *before* knowledge – or rooted at the wake of consciousness – that is immanent for a subject produced by an encounter with a work of art. In addition, '*precursor*' manifests the particular temporality conveyed by the encounter: a manifestation of an unknowable origin that can still morph into a fragment of sensation or a force.

common element in an aesthetic of visceral-ness: the *a*-signifying registers embodied in the scene of the art encounter trigger an autopoietic *transformation*, and the art encounter produces in the viewer a twofold, oscillating state between affective becoming and conscious reflection. In a sense Heimonas' is an anti-hermeneutic analysis as well, the resonance of tragic logos being the 'pretext' that 'midwives' emotion; the fact that it is speech that becomes this 'lever' offers a quite diverse account of affective manifestation to the one taking place in the encounter with visual art. The charge of the visceral sensation in the experience of tragic drama is diffuse and *conditions* the audience's experience of the drama – as in a *loop* of emotion, from the body back to the text – and this prioritizes sensation over knowledge.

Heimonas points out that the diachronic appeal of tragedy on its audience is a question of the *functions* at play within it, in the sourcing of total emotion from the viewing subject – an affective alarm that performs an unprecedented dip into elementary vitality – and in the movement of katharsis that ensues. Katharsis happens at the apex of this moment; when these forces (which the artistic medium will help channel out) are *activated* and then *tamed*. In the experience of the spectator, only this event of *measure* can reconcile the human being as accounted in tragedy with its visceral forces. Measure signals danger, Heimonas says, it acts as the tight balance that can withhold this uncontrollable material; and he gives us another clue: *synkinesis has no purpose*; it is nature uncontained, that manifests but will not explain itself. And this becomes a parable for culture: measure (and rational thought) cannot contain human nature, but withholds a balance by *protecting* humanity from its brutal sore core – an uncontainable finitude. Art stages the *bend* to see this core that exposes the human being; an aesthetic event is to become witness to the inexplicable pulsation that cannot be dealt with;⁸⁴ it can only be *translated*.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Julia Kristeva spoke of primal pulsations in her account of the *abject*: 'Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be—maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out.' Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 14.

⁸⁵ Again, I am setting up a dialogue of different approaches; here I am alluding to Jacques Rancière and the Brecht/Artaud polarity as expressed in his essay *The Emancipated Spectator*. Rancière sets up a dialogue between these two prevailing trends in theatrical practice, only to conclude the 'debate' by positing the spectator's activated presence as one of *translation* of what is encountered into their own *idiom*. I am juxtaposing these views to present *happenings* for the viewer, which sometimes blend experiences and as such overcome polarities assumed by different theories. Positions are not mutually exclusive – as is manifest, for example, in O'Sullivan's selective use of 'ritual.'

In creating a stage for the viewer to encounter their visceral forces – their prehistoric legacy of cruelty – the archaic medium reshapes this abjection in a ritual of communion; it is singing a song about the tale of the human – only through a song can this bloodstained material be tolerated. This is a dimension of art that reaches back into memory, to haul out, with the lever of *synkinesis*, a magma of fear, splitting, to present it to us alive, pulsating. Within this fundamental encounter, a negotiation takes place between formless, violent forces from a primordial layer of consciousness with the forms by means of which the superstructures of our culture regulate our way of being – an encounter between nature and culture. But the potential for the subject to *embody* these forces that are latent in the art encounter is a promise that links the past and the future of art – and Heimonas elsewhere says that art *owes* this vindication to the human being because ‘*someone* [something] *has to owe this*’ to the human being.⁸⁶

Revisiting the ancient texts of Greek tragedy, one is confronted with a sudden realization – a basic condition around the aesthetic; it is a question of *function* that this medium fulfils in its viewer in the encounter that it stages (a quite literal idea of artistic ‘medium’). What we discern is a resonance between the archaic and the present moment, which links *functional* aspects of the artistic medium as conceived and exemplified in the ancient Greek drama, and the possibilities of the contemporary participatory space of art in a post-medium condition.

6. Kutiyattam – an encounter

In the winter of 2006/7 I spent three months in India and Nepal for a field research project.⁸⁷ The greater part of this journey was spent visiting temples and other sites of sculptural interest, exploring the dimension and reception of sculptural space in a non-

⁸⁶ From an unpublished text by Yorgos Heimonas titled ‘The Biography of my Vision,’ reproduced in ‘Lexi’ Magazine, accessed in June 2012 at <http://genesis.ee.auth.gr/dimakis/lexi/163/4.html>

⁸⁷ ‘Encounters with Sculptural Space: Temple Architecture and Performing Arts of India,’ field research funded by the Hellenic Republic Scholarship Foundation (IKY), November 2006 – February 2007.

western cultural and philosophical tradition. At this point I want to turn to a different experience from another part of this trip, which has fuelled my research ever since.

In January 2007, while travelling through India, I spent a few weeks in the state of Kerala in the South. For a long time I had been intrigued to watch its famous theatre performance, offspring of the ancient Sanskrit tradition. Some genres of Sanskrit theatre were originally performed inside temples – a number of them still are – while others have evolved into more secular theatre styles over the last centuries. In the city of Cochin, one of the largest cities of Kerala and a traveller's hub, where several events are regularly organised to introduce the local theatrical tradition to a wider audience, one can watch some of these genres, especially Kathakali (probably the most well-known local dance-drama) performed live.

Soon I realized that the majority of the live performances in Cochin were staged as a kind of local tourist attraction; apart from a vivid, exotic spectacle, they did not offer any particular insight into the character or nature of the drama. They were no doubt spectacular, as most of these genres (and Kathakali quite famously) are performed with actors dressed in ornate voluminous costumes, brightly coloured and laden with a multitude of traditional decorations and accessories, their faces covered in bright, mask-like coloured makeup. But beyond the sheer visual spectacle, the storytelling and narrative actions seemed too crudely enacted – as if overwhelmed under the visual effects.

Already before reaching Cochin I had a first experience of the theatrical legacy of Kerala in the northern district of Kannur, famous for its Theyyam performances. Theyyam is particular for being the only surviving genre stemming from Sanskrit drama that is not performed on a stage. These performances take place in front of shrines inside temples, and they too are richly costumed. However, rather than theatrical happenings, they are expressly ritual. I watched a Theyyam performance in the Parassinikadavu Temple near Kannur. Theyyam performances start before dawn; from the actual location inside the temple, to the congregation (which was solely composed of worshippers and locals), my experience was indeed one of religious ritual rather than theatrical acting. Although different to Kathakali, and witnessed in

its original milieu, this was not a sight that inspired reverence or authenticity; rather it felt like a peculiar, heterogeneous amalgamation of characters and spaces.

After further research into the opportunities to watch Sanskrit theatre, I was informed about the Natana Kairali Centre in Irinjalakuda – a place quite far off the tourist trail. The Natana Kairali Centre is a drama school that ‘teaches, researches and performs traditional performing arts’ and has worked extensively to revive the Sanskrit drama *Kutiyattam*.⁸⁸ I was fortunate to happen upon the festival held there annually, in early January; every evening a different performance was staged, as part of a series of plays depicting tales from the Ramayana.⁸⁹ As part of the festival – and also due to a visit from a group of Butoh dancers from Japan as part of a performing arts exchange programme – there were also day events, demonstrations of the day-to-day training and vocal exercises by the actors of the Centre. These demonstrations offered a rare opportunity to witness the rehearsals – also a rare view because of the bare appearance of the performers without ornament and costumes. But my first encounter was a proper performance, the evening I arrived.

The Kutiyattam play has a special stage, the *Koothambalam*.⁹⁰ In the Natana Kairali Centre this was a tent-like structure with a wooden roof, like a covered outdoor stage,⁹¹ with thick fabric curtains all around. There were chairs for the audience and many of the viewers, including children, also sat on the floor. There were very few objects on the stage – a wooden stool, a tall traditional oil lamp with a thin long leg,⁹² something like a tin bucket containing a kind of fuel or raw material and a few musical instruments – no other backdrops or props. The only lighting on the stage was

⁸⁸ The description comes from a website describing the Natana Kairali Centre, accessed in February 2012: http://web.mac.com/ludwigpesch/Natanakairali_new/Natanakairali.html. Also from this website: ‘Kutiyattam is the oldest surviving Sanskrit Theatre Tradition of India. It has a highly stylized and complex theatre language replete with traditional hand gestures, facial expressions and highly symbolic movements and choreographic patterns. Recently Unesco declared Kutiyattam as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.’ From http://web.mac.com/ludwigpesch/Natanakairali_new/Heritage.html (accessed in February 2012). Also see the Appendix, Part 2, page 123, for a further description.

⁸⁹ The Ramayana is one of the ancient Sanskrit epics, from approximately the 5th to 4th century BC.

⁹⁰ See Kapila Venu’s explanatory text in the Appendix, p. 123, for a further description.

⁹¹ I have already mentioned the etymology of the Greek word for ‘stage,’ *skené*, σκηνή (= scene), which literally means ‘tent.’ See p. 4 of the present text.

⁹² ‘...[t]he placing of an oil lamp on stage during the performance, symbolizing a divine presence.’ From the video *Kutiyattam, Sanskrit Theatre*, UNESCO: Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity – 2008, accessed in November 2011: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00010>

given by the oil lamp, and although dim, its glow gave warm hues to the surrounding space, enveloped in fabrics.



Picture No. 1: ‘*Holding the Yavanika in a Kutiyattam performance at the Ammannur Chachu Chakyar Smaraka Gurukulam.*’ (Courtesy of the Natana Kairali Centre.)

That evening the play opened with music; four male percussionists and two female cymbalists were on stage, at the back and on the side; their drum beats and chimes introduced a steady rhythmic pattern. Another man and a boy – a young student of the school – stood at the centre of the stage, holding up a rectangular fabric like a curtain, behind which a Kutiyattam performer took position. When the curtain dropped an elaborately ornamented actress appeared: she was fixed, knees bent outward, one arm stretched out, the other folded in; this was the opening posture. She started to move slowly, brought the stool behind the oil lamp, and sat down. Then the storytelling began; it was all performed with body motions, the gestures of the hands, the movements of the eyeballs, a host of facial expressions – an endless inventory – speechless. The percussion rhythm dictated tone, intensity and emotion, through an ongoing, gradually changing pattern. The performer’s flexible movements and thin,

fluttering fingers produced stylized kinetic patterns, drawing every event and occurrence narrated in corporeal movement. Every gesture signified images, actions and situations. There was a mathematical precision to everything performed, which gave a minimal feel; objects were described with signs, shapes and sizes, so that soon you could translate gestures, facial expressions and positions in words: sword, king, war, death. In all this abstraction the richness of gestures and expressions seemed to produce an abundant vocabulary, loud and eloquent. The richness of ornament on the performer's body and costume came in stark contrast with the absence of objects and props, most strikingly even, with the absence of speech; yet you felt as if this contrast reinforced the intensity with which those described things and states came alive in the imagination. And not only states and things: you could *see* shifts from one role to another – heroes, gods and humans – narrated through this one body. The only other presence that accompanied this embodied action was that of the musicians, framing the performed action and partaking in its unfolding: the musicians watch the performer closely, they dictate the happenings with their music and together they take us through the narration.

I already said 'embodied action' but here I have to stress this even more: the sight, the experience of that night was the most complete embodiment I ever beheld. The total identity of performer and performed action – the *role* – was astounding. Not only the mastering of the actions performed, in a state of supreme concentration, but also the sense of incarnation of the represented deity by the actor gave out an almost divine *presence* and *merging*. Unexpectedly, without any previous idea or preconception over what I was about to see, I found myself, in the course of the play, thinking that I was literally looking at gods storytelling their ancient tale.

There is something sublime about this degree of embodiment that made this feeling plausible; here I do not think of embodiment in the context of contemporary theatrical practices, but precisely in terms of the strictly structured, formulaic ancient drama that Kutiyattam is, so formal, dense and strict, that it is even more extraordinary how its mastery takes off and reaches such absolute *presence*. I am inclined to think that it is precisely the formulaic boundaries of the discipline that allow a violent amount of energy to surge within such specific bounds.



Picture No. 2: ‘*Aparna Nagiar performing Nangiar Koothu (Performance at the Ammannur Chachu Chakyar Smaraka Gurukulam).*’ (Courtesy of the Natana Kairali Centre.)

On the other hand I felt that this performance could not have taken place in a more ideal environment: the discipline is taught in this school, painstakingly, in the same region and country where it has seamlessly been performed since antiquity; it is still, literally, in its birthplace. And this made the experience of the play all the more genuine, resonant, and ecstatic.

In the essay ‘*What does it mean to “become the character”?*’, Richard Schechner describes:

In all such precise psychophysical moments, the “character” is being created – not in the personality of the actor but as an embodied and projected/energized/living form between actor and audience. These Asian forms assume no “suspension of disbelief,” rather the actor and spectator co-create the figure embodied in the actor as “other.” The “power of presence” manifest in this stage other, while embodied in this particular actor in this particular moment, is not limited to that ego. That dynamic

figure exists between audience and actor, transcending both, pointing beyond itself.⁹³

This is already a model for an art encounter.

At this point in his text Schechner inserts this footnote: ‘*The creation of the figure between audience and actor is a foundation of the rasa aesthetic theory of India [...].*’ Consequently, while browsing the Internet for information on the ‘rasa’ theory, I came across an entry on ‘Indian Aesthetics’: ‘*Of particular concern to Indian drama and literature are the term 'bhava' or the state of mind and rasa (Sanskrit lit. 'juice' or 'essence') referring generally to the emotional flavors/essence crafted into the work by the writer and relished by a 'sensitive spectator' or sahṛdaya or one with positive taste and mind. Rasas are created by bhavas.*’⁹⁴ On the same page there was a photograph of a Kutiyattam actor. This link shows the centrality of this drama in the materialization of this theory – or the root of this theory in the drama, which the theory illustrates; for one thing, it is a unique equivalence, an analogy, of a theory with a practice. It is a theory that *follows* a practice. The viewer witnesses the essence of this ancient theory in Kutiyattam.

The quoted passage from Schechner above coincides with my experience of the Kutiyattam drama. During the play I could almost sense a *linking force* between actor and audience, like a palpable *channel*; at this point the words of Yorgos Heimonas come to my mind: ‘*the “solid body” of tragedy.*’⁹⁵ Schechner’s analysis points to the key to this medium’s power: the convergent *happening* of actor and spectator co-creating the lived form. The dense experience of the spectator is the testimony to this creative medium at play; and the agency of actor and spectator is *meeting* in the being that they sculpt together. This interface became an inspiration for my research on the

⁹³ Richard Schechner, Willa Appel, *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p.144.

⁹⁴ At http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_aesthetics accessed in November 2011. Also: ‘A rasa [...] denotes an essential mental state and is the dominant emotional theme of a work of art or the primary feeling that is evoked in the person that views, reads or hears such a work,’ in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rasa_%28aesthetics%29 accessed in November 2011.

⁹⁵ Yorgos Heimonas, op. cit., p. 112. At this point I have to note that, although I witnessed the Kutiyattam drama many years before reading Heimonas’ analysis of Greek tragedy, on watching the footage that I had made from the performance at Natana Kairali Centre again I could sense this ‘holothymic cataclysm of consciousness’ from total emotion (*synkinesis*) that he describes (Ibid. p. 113) and observe how it affected my experience. I draw the assumption that this is a genuine feature not only of Greek tragedy, but other genres of ancient drama as well.

space of sculpture. I was able to see how this mapping of affective essence – just as crucially as the ‘state of mind’ – is also a key element in the encounter of a viewer with a work of art. After all, this paradigm comes from an encounter within a three-dimensional space as well. And in this paradigm too the dimension of *in-between-ness* – art as medium – is quintessential.

Schechner also writes about ‘*the affective dimension of Asian performance*’: ‘[...] it is in words used as sound and incantation invoking visual imagery by acoustic stress, rhyme, melody, and repetition, rather than literary communication, by which the power to make present the absent is invoked in stage practice.’⁹⁶ This is a key point: the power of evoking *worlds* is a function of the creative medium that does not *represent*, rather pulls out from the repository of (pure) memory and (total) emotion that which *cleanses* (*kathairei*) the viewer–co-creator.

One of the main performers of the Kutiyattam drama in Natana Kairali Centre, actress Kapila Venu, explains the origin, form and principles of Kutiyattam in her essay ‘*Kutiyattam – The theatre form.*’⁹⁷ It is remarkable that in Kutiyattam, the spectator – the subject produced by this encounter – is described as ‘one of good heart.’ This is revealing of the relationship that this embodied action builds, forging an ethico-aesthetic condition that is allusive of the Deleuzoguattarian project. It also relates to the ‘state of mind’ principle of Indian aesthetics, pointing to its essential agency in this creative encounter.

What Kapila Venu describes as the intersection of ‘folk, ritual and martial arts’⁹⁸ in the formation of the classical Sanskrit theatre reflects on the kinesiology of Kutiyattam. A few weeks after I attended the performances in the Natana Kairali Centre I visited the CVN Kalari at Trivandrum, a traditional school for the ancient South Indian martial art of *Kalaripayattu*, to watch a training session. *Kalaripayattu* is an intricate, choreographic martial art with a long tradition across South India. The training of *Kalaripayattu* takes place at dawn – as in every physical and spiritual exercise in India – as the hours before and after dawn is when the practice is held to

⁹⁶ Schechner, op. cit., p. 145. Just to clarify at this point, not all Kutiyattam plays are without speech like the one I have been describing here.

⁹⁷ See Appendix, Part 3, p. 123.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 123.

be most beneficial. The Kalari – the traditional, earthen ground arena where the training takes place – is a specially built space, a few feet below the ground level, where the group of trainees undergo a yearlong, intense training to master the art. I noticed a continuity between the postures, patterns and rhythmic movements of Kalaripayattu and Kutiyattam, which revealed an advanced level of mastery and control in both cases, but also how, through the mastery of the practice the trained actor or athlete gains access to a higher level of concentration, which is crucial in all these areas of physical and spiritual exercise.

What is also lucidly illustrated in Kapila Venu's description is the instrumental role of music in the performance of Kutiyattam: the music follows closely, *sets in motion* the whole action and triggers the 'total emotion' as it follows an unmediated route into the audience's affect. On another occasion too I have witnessed the potent agency of music as part of a happening: in the ritual of 'Anastenaria,' the fire walking ritual,⁹⁹ which I visited in North-east Greece.¹⁰⁰ There, the music was *propelling* the action throughout; its constant, feverish beat brought the participants in ecstasy, a state of trance, in which they performed the ritual.

There is one more occurrence that I would like to cite here before I close my description of the ancient Sanskrit drama Kutiyattam. As I mentioned above, at the time when I visited the Natana Kairali Centre during the Kutiyattam festival of January 2007, a team of Japanese Butoh dancers were attending the festival as part of a performing arts exchange. I later found out that this was the team of Japanese performer Min Tanaka, who was collaborating with the Natana Kairali Centre, and who gave a compelling performance of Butoh at the Centre a few days later.¹⁰¹ Min Tanaka is a legendary figure in Japanese dance and performance and has a long record

⁹⁹ This somewhat outcast ancient ritual (due to its shaky relation to mainstream Orthodox religion in the Balkan area, under whose cause it is disguised) is said to have roots in Dionysian ceremonies. The continued existence of the ritual is a contentious subject; yet its performance, which takes place on fixed dates of the year in remote communities, is a fascinating happening and draws international attention and cultural research. The music performed in the 'Anastenaria' is a cultural legacy in its own right.

¹⁰⁰ This visit was organised by the 2nd Sculpture Studio of the Athens School of Fine Arts (Professor G. Lappas) in May 2002.

¹⁰¹ See the relevant article from The Hindu Times, accessed in February 2012: <http://www.hindu.com/fr/2007/01/12/stories/2007011200580200.htm>

in innovative and inter-cultural projects, as for instance his ‘Body Weather’ project.¹⁰² I discovered that he had collaborated with Félix Guattari in a number of projects: among others, he had performed in Guattari’s ‘La Borde’ Clinic in Paris, and they co-authored the book ‘Zen Fire and Light Speed’, which was published in Japan in 1985. Suddenly I could see a connecting thread running through all these disciplines and cultures, joining practices¹⁰³ on the basis of a different investigation of the physical experience of art: a different mapping of the body, expanded fields of action and a *practical* approach merging subjects in the common ground of co-created experience. My experience in this place could certainly attest so.

¹⁰² ‘Tanaka has evolved the traditional, slow-moving Japanese dance form of Butoh into a new method intended to connect dancers deeply to the space and landscape around them. Like Butoh, Body Weather often depicts cycles of birth, death and renewal, but unlike its predecessor, the primary focus is on the intersections of the dancers' bodies and the environments they inhabit. Each body is conceived as constantly changing, like the weather, in complex relationship to its surroundings, as "physical geographical details [are] experienced with intimacy, like an extension of the body"’ [quoting Tanaka]. From <http://www.slowlab.net/body%20weather%20farm.html> accessed in February 2012.

¹⁰³ As the blog ‘AntiOedipus’ describes: ‘In Butoh there are already a number of features pointing to the Body Without Organs (a.o. multicenteredness, ongoing metamorphosis, equal valuation of all parts of the body, exploration of the ‘ugly, dark and unknown’ faculties of human expression). A tangible connection is the collaboration between Min Tanaka and Félix Guattari that resulted in the publishing of a book (in Japanese, 1985) and in several performances of Min Tanaka at Guattari’s clinic ‘La Borde’ around the same time.’ http://antioedipus.blogspot.com/2005_05_01_archive.html accessed in February 2012.

CHAPTER TWO

-SETTING THE STAGE-

In this chapter I will look into the issues at stake regarding staging as a modality of contemporary sculpture. Through a literature survey I will identify some of the arguments around which staging, theatricality and objecthood are situated in the current discourse. I will initially trace the line of the expanded field of sculpture that runs parallel with Michael Fried's 1967 essay *Art and Objecthood*,¹⁰⁴ the question of theatricality posed by Fried concerning the viewer's *relation* to the object raises questions of theatricality as a *quality of the object*, by now configured in different terms in recent sculptural practice. In the first part of the chapter I draw distinctions between different perceptions of staging and theatricality in sculpture and installation art – the latter performed through a reading of Claire Bishop's *Installation Art*,¹⁰⁵ central to these distinctions is the viewer's experience of the work as object and him/herself as subject in the space of the work – as a shift both in the status of the object and the self-awareness of the subject. In the second and third parts of the chapter I will explore the lines of force mapped in the space of the work by the performative agencies of objects. What is critical in these agencies is an expanded sense of sculpture that is operating through renegotiated ideas of medium and objecthood; as such a sculptural agency that is gestural and intrinsic to the object moulds the scene of the encounter in a relational system that acts as a rehearsal of social space.¹⁰⁶ In the last essay of the chapter I will relate this condition to ideas of props and architectures set out by Andrea Phillips and Jan Verwoert at The Showroom Conference in 2007;¹⁰⁷ these formations of recent sculpture compose spaces that reclaim a critical sense of political autonomy. I will argue that this function poses staging as an agency that empowers objects, spaces, and viewers.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art*, Tate Publishing, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ *Relational Aesthetics* is a term coined by Nicolas Bourriaud in his homonymous book (*Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses Du Reel, 1988). Although I will comment on Bourriaud's text, my use of 'relational' here will signify 'relations' (set up in the space of the work) as well as relations with spheres outside the work.

¹⁰⁷ *Props, Events, Encounters: The Performance of New Sculpture*, The Showroom 4th Annual Conference: Saturday 26 May 2007.

1. Encountering objecthood

In the introduction to *Installation Art* (2005) Claire Bishop describes the ubiquitous use of the term ‘installation’ in any arrangement or setup of an art exhibition, be it ‘installation art’ or the ‘installation of art.’¹⁰⁸ She explains: ‘*What both terms have in common is a desire to heighten the viewer’s awareness of how objects are positioned (installed) in a space, and of our bodily response to this.*’¹⁰⁹

The terms of this sentence reflect Bishop’s phenomenological construction of the spatial encounter with three-dimensional art. These coordinates of the viewer’s experience are strikingly similar to the ones Michael Fried posed as ‘theatrical’ in his essay *Art and Objecthood* in relation to minimalist art (which he calls ‘literalist’): ‘*literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work.*’¹¹⁰ Fried’s argument posited a polarity between art as absorptive, instantaneous confrontation and objecthood as theatrical interaction. The critical difference between what Fried characterizes as theatricality and what Bishop identifies through installation art is in the subject/object relations that they respectively tease out. Fried writes:

[W]hat replaces the object – what does the same job of distancing or isolating the beholder, of making him a subject [...] is the explicitness, that is to say, the sheer persistence, with which the experience presents itself as directed at him from outside (on the turnpike from outside the car) that simultaneously makes him a subject – makes him subject – and establishes the experience itself as something like that of an object, or rather, of objecthood.¹¹¹

In this passage Fried parallels Tony Smith’s description of his ride on the New Jersey Turnpike with the experience of ‘literalist’ art in the manner in which they both ‘distance’ the beholder and how they are ‘directed at him.’ He also describes Smith’s experience as ‘*something like that of an object, or rather, of objecthood;*’ what Fried does here with the object is to transpose objecthood into a state of in-between-ness

¹⁰⁸ Bishop, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Fried, op. cit., p. 153.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 159.

between experience and object – an idea that I will pick up later on in this chapter as a *shift* from art as object to the in-between-ness of an encounter. Fried points out this shift and calls for alertness towards it; by conflating Smith’s experience on the Turnpike with one of an object, he accentuates his argument on the theatricality of Minimalism, where it is a *situation* that configures objecthood.¹¹²

As for the subject, Fried identifies the simultaneous state of the subject of the viewer (Tony Smith in his car on the Turnpike), which simultaneously makes *him a subject* and *makes him subject*. He thus sees the paradoxically twofold situation whereby a viewer becomes subject *to* and subject *of* an experience. Claire Bishop in her conclusion to *Installation Art* further defines this simultaneous condition of the subject to be both ‘viewer and model.’ She cites Dan Graham’s remarks about the minimal and environmental/perceptual art of the 1960s¹¹³ where ‘*the isolated spectator’s “subjective” consciousness-in-itself replaces the art object to be perceived-for-itself; his/her perception is the product of the art. Thus, instead of eliminating the physically present art object, environmental art’s meditative approach creates a secondary, veiled object: the viewer’s consciousness as a subject.*’¹¹⁴ Bishop consequently asks: ‘*[d]oes the viewer’s consciousness become the subject/object, or the subject matter?*’¹¹⁵ She then argues that in installation art the subject becomes simultaneously centred *and* decentred; by being the perceiving subject, and as such *centered* viewer, and at the same time by experiencing a decentring of subjectivity in the way the encounter is staged in installation art, an overlapping occurs that places the subject in both states. This double consciousness echoes Fried’s simultaneous states of the subject – a convergent point in their otherwise very different approaches. What this doubling also reflects is the condition of self-seeing awareness that is latent

¹¹² ‘Everything counts – not as part of the object, but as part of the situation in which its objecthood is established and on which that objecthood at least partly depends’ (Ibid. p. 155). At the same time, Fried seems to offer two different accounts whereby the ‘situation’ of objecthood involves the beholder – one which is ‘distancing’ (what he describes regarding Tony Smith’s experience), and one which is inclusive when he cites Robert Morris: ‘Morris makes this explicit. Whereas in previous art “what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it],” the experience of literalist art is of an object in a *situation* – one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*’ (Ibid. p. 153). This contradiction in Fried’s definition of theatricality in objecthood further complicates his temperamental reading of Tony Smith’s experience, which he dubs as ‘theatre’ (Ibid. p. 159).

¹¹³ Graham refers to “[M]inimal” art as well as environmental/perceptual art (of the kind built by such artists as Robert Irwin or Maria Nordman).’ Dan Graham, *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, MIT Press, 1999, p. 156.

¹¹⁴ Bishop, op. cit. p. 131.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 131.

in the spatial encounter – the *seeing oneself seeing* of an activated spectatorship¹¹⁶ – which, as I will argue, is the *gift* of staging in art.

This spatial encounter stresses the place of the viewer within the space of the work – this space can be thought of as a dynamic receptacle – as the physical relation of the viewing subject to the work, or space, that admits him/her. In fact one of the most stimulating aspects of this pronounced turn of attention of the whole structure of the work of art to the viewing subject and his/her experience, is the investment on the idea of *the body as model* for aesthetic experience.¹¹⁷ Bishop's book analyzes the implications of installation art both as model for an aesthetic experience and as an attempt to materialize, in art, a model for the subject advanced by the theoretical discourse of the second half of the 20th century (namely post-structuralism, phenomenology and psychoanalysis). On the other hand, the terms of the subject in Bishop's formulation of installation art – the '*awareness of the positioning of objects in space*' and the '*bodily response to them*' – fully incorporate contemporary curatorial strategies practiced worldwide. The art gallery or museum offers itself as a testing ground for these coordinates – a receptacle for the receptacle, as it were – in an attempt at a democratic milieu for the art encounter; but the open admittance, in recent decades, of this predominantly large-scale medium in institutions worldwide is symptomatic of a post-war socioeconomic development that saw a redefinition of the art museum as ambitious architectural project in both size and investment – an art project in itself and a marketable point of attraction for wide-ranging audiences. Not only did the new establishment need spacious (and 'spectacular') works in order to be

¹¹⁶ What I propose here in connection to staging as artistic practice promotes (engineers) a state of awareness of the production of experience during an encounter with a work of art. The double perceptual condition of 'seeing yourself seeing' is central to Olafur Eliasson's work, who writes in extent about the *engineering* of this position (see Glossary p. 141). I discuss his work in the next chapter. Eliasson says: '[m]ost institutions forget to let the spectators see themselves seeing' (quoted by Bishop, op. cit., p. 77). There is a productive tension between a state of immersion and one of inspection in his work, as this generates a reflection of the viewer upon the affected body (the transformation) *and* the interaction between perception and response (the mode of perception as *auto-affection*). Eliasson's work is a token of how the subjective position of centredness does not ban a critical attitude.

¹¹⁷ Deleuze suggests this idea as Spinozist: 'What does Spinoza mean when he invites us to take the body as model? It is a matter of showing that the body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it.' In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, City Light Books, 1988, p. 18, quoted by O'Sullivan, op. cit. p. 38. This idea of the 'model' could be seen in relation to the Kantian concept of 'schema' or the idea of an 'affective a priori' that Dufrenne articulates in the *Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Experience*, op. cit., pp. 441-462.

filled, but also its enveloping spaces (an architectural proposition throughout) promoted a porous, osmotic relationship between the two receptacles.¹¹⁸

Donald Preziosi in his essay *Palpable and Mute as a Globed Fruit*¹¹⁹ dissects the problematic that this situation entails. Preziosi asks ‘*how encountering itself might be usefully theorised, more effectively staged, and by implication managed for diverse audiences*’ and suggests how ‘*encountering may be plausibly understood as a particular kind of interpretative activity.*’ In view of these thoughts, the agency of any ‘framing device’ in an expanded sense – any staging of an encounter – becomes part of the context of the object encountered. ‘*If museums are in fact occasions for staging encounters with artefacts or phenomena using a wide variety of means, methods and materials, where both what is staged and the staging itself are productive of knowledge, then a case may also be made that there is little in a museum that is not potentially interpretative whether by design or appropriation.*’ After an extensive survey of how institutions adopt and mimic the inherent ambivalence of art itself (between what is intended and what is received) Preziosi concludes: ‘*The point is that the encounter with objects is always ambivalently ‘aesthetic’ or ‘religious’, the modern distinction between the two being less a question of content and more a matter of how agency is framed relative to what is being experienced or sensed.*’¹²⁰

With the exposure of the ways in which any ‘added’ context affects the presentation and reception of art (to the point where it transforms it politically or ideologically), Preziosi calls for alertness with regard to the inevitable agency of framing: the encounter staged within an art institution adds an even greater degree of ambiguity in the reception of the work than the one inevitably existing due to the uncontrollable relation between intention and reception of the work. Apart from the interference on

¹¹⁸ Rosalind Krauss describes this condition of ‘late capitalist’ museums in her visit at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1990. While the curator Suzanne Pagé guided her around the refurbished galleries, Krauss was struck by the ‘disembodied glow’ of various works by Dan Flavin coming from adjacent spaces. She remarks: ‘We are having this experience, then, not in front of what could be called the art, but in the midst of an oddly grandiloquent yet empty space of which the museum itself, as a building, is somehow the object.’ Quoted by Alex Landrum and Ed Whittaker in *Nonsite to Celebration Park: Essays on Art and the Politics of Space*, edited by Alex Landrum and Edward Whittaker, Antony Rowe Publishing Services, 2008, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Presented at the ‘Interpretation, Theory and the Encounter’ conference at Tate Britain on 9 July 2010, accessed in March 2012 at

<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/11spring/preziosi.shtm>

¹²⁰ Ibid. (accessed online).

each work that Preziosi points out, this extra ‘staging’ alters the experience of works by re-contextualizing them. Installation art, to some degree, may be able to minimize any explicit spatial interference by the identity, at times, of the space of the work with the space of the room where it is exhibited in galleries and museums (when there is virtually no room for any different physical context to intrude). Nevertheless, the very adoption of installation art by museums and art institutions points to another, more complicit idea of appropriation that has to do with the playful, immersive or interactive character of a great deal of such work that has brought popularity to museums as spaces of a (previously absent) degree of entertainment combined with a democratic idea of participation.¹²¹ This is already suggested at the outset of Claire Bishop’s study, where she argues that installation art became the ‘*institutionally approved art form par excellence of the 1990s*’;¹²² due to its physical and psychological particularities, among others its scale, it embraces the viewer in space (an enclosure reminiscent of pre-natal embrace) and offers a durational or often participatory experience with the rewarding dimension of the viewer becoming the center of the piece.¹²³

If one succeeds to screen out institutional interventions and added contextual layers symptomatic of the display of installation art, certain key attributes manifest: this paradigm – where theatricality is the ‘norm’ and specific spatial coordinates resonate with relational types of encounters – invariably involves a staging. This arrangement of objects in space, at first maligned as theatrical, has by now become a widespread practice, an intrinsic feature of installation art and the installation *of* art equally. This is so not only because the viewer’s experience is dependent on this staging, in this particular configuration, but also that apart from the decentred subject, this model of encounter posits a decentred *object* as well; as if the weight of the agency of the artist had shifted, crystallizing not in the object as such but on the encounter of the work with the viewer, staged and engineered (*drawn* and *sculpted*). The existence or the

¹²¹ The question of democracy at the forefront of the artistic avant-garde since the 1960s put forward ideas of open cultural access, perceptual self-determination and the disruption of power structures. An equal amount of debate contests the extent to which we perceive the current western political system as democratic – exemplified in the title of the first Platform of the Documenta 11 in 2002 – *Democracy Unrealized* (resulting in a publication edited by Stefano Boeri, Susanne Ghez, Ute Meta Bauer and Mark Nash by Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002).

¹²² Bishop, op. cit., p. 8.

¹²³ Bishop refers to Julie Reiss and her book *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, MIT Press, 1999 in relation to the idea of centrality of the viewer in installation art.

arrangement of objects (even the *presentation* of the object) is mapped in the space of installation as the *medium*, the means to involve the viewing subject in a joint materialization of the encounter. For example; Mona Hatoum's *Homebound* installation from 2000, in which steel kitchen utensils connected to electrical wires become electrified by the current; here the situation rather than the objects themselves are the nexus of the encounter.

This decentred place of the object is quite different to the idea of the dematerialized object in the conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. That moment and consequent widespread movement, which inflicted a blow both to the established status of the *object* of art and the *space* that accommodated that particular object of art, as both political activism and institutional critique, transposed the work of art from object to several types of gestures, systems, or practices that deconstructed any 'material' form by which an object was bound.¹²⁴ A crucial difference between the dematerialized (and fundamentally anti-aesthetic) object and the decentred object of installation art is that conceptual art gave an unprecedented role to *language*, as either spoken or written text-based elements, as part of the visual or structural forms of its production.¹²⁵ A radical cross-fertilization compared to the norms of mainstream art at the time, this linguistic turn augmented an already looming phenomenon, namely: the tendency to *read* art literally, as text but also as a literal reading of its objects; but also, that the network of references that come with linguistic signification impairs the corporeal. This cross-fertilization would not have been a negative phenomenon per se, given the concurrent radical theories of linguistics, psychoanalysis, feminism and post-structuralism, which in fact gave birth to the 'decentred subject,' introducing critical theory into the discourse of art.¹²⁶ But it appears, in retrospect, to have weakened an already thin connection of visual art to its very nucleus, the body, *aesthesis*, and the corporeal experience as fundamental (and radical) encounter with the world in favour of a more linguistically centred, 'eloquent' expression that was partly a reaction against the imperatives of formalist aesthetics.

¹²⁴ Concurrently, in 1967, the group of minimalist artists that Michael Fried comments on in his essay were trying to break free from the idea of 'art' itself, but were ending up in the *object*.

¹²⁵ Examples are Alighiero Boetti's postal projects, or his *Classification of the thousand longest rivers in the world*, 1977, and Laurence Wiener's text-based projects.

¹²⁶ Julia Kristeva wrote extensively on the fragmentation of the subject; her psychoanalytic theory of the 'chora' in *Revolution in Poetic Language* brought to light visceral processes that emerge in linguistic expression and disturb the preconception of a unified subject.

However, the notion of a ‘decentred object’ that I previously suggested is not entirely accurate either; I am not referring here to those works where literally no single object or group of objects forms a focal point or where an enveloping space receives the viewer, nor to those environments or assemblages where the objects are part of a bigger picture or situation (as in Mona Hatoum’s aforementioned work). What I am thinking of is a spatial work of a decided sculptural status, a unique object (as in Giuseppe Penone’s *Trees* or Wolfgang Laib’s pollen works) that, despite its distinctive and compelling aesthetic presence, its affective appeal, its beauty, still, paradoxically, is not an *end* in itself – or in the words of Robert Morris ‘[t]he object has not become less important, but less self-important.’¹²⁷ How do we account for the irreversible shift from art as object to art as encounter? Perhaps this comes out of the predicament of the modern subject and the much-lamented denigration of authentic experience that a pervasive state of mediation has inflicted on our senses. Or as if our downfall as subjects from a symbolic ‘centre’ (or from the state of a unified whole) has forever affected the status of the object too, and nothing will convince us of its unity or self-containment either – no matter how sublime. Through a gradual transformation the object of art has altered from an object of cult status to an autonomous object and subsequently to a medium that enables the co-creation of a *situation* (in installation art). This shift has paradoxically thrust the object back in time to the functional status of an in-between *medium* in a process; as such, it has allowed a residue of ritual to re-emerge – a ritual devoid of myth, belief, or ceremony – as the space where we connect and transform, an art encounter as scene of affective becoming.

In what I have just described as a possible ‘return’ of the work of art to the status of the medium – which could be understood as our own tuning into its transitional and transmissive nature – I discern a similarity to the intermediary function and in-between place of the work of art in several Eastern traditions (and the corresponding theorization of its aesthetic status);¹²⁸ this agency of the work incites affect in the viewer (sometimes in an almost visceral reaction) and *conducts* the material that it

¹²⁷ Quoted by Fried, op. cit., p. 154.

¹²⁸ As I have previously noted, the classical Indian aesthetic theory of the *Rasas* is a compelling account of this condition.

represents between them (since this material is mostly figurative).¹²⁹ The intricately sculpted Indian temples, for example, where the phenomenally carved courtyards receive the visitor in a space so intensely dense that it almost has a palpable effect on the viewer's body; still it does not, in its overwhelming material dimension, seem to demand attention *as* a work of art – maybe because it plays its role so well that one need not seek its ontology in more than what it achieves (as transformation, movement, and affect). Here lies a critical point: that any symbol of *stasis*, any ontological fixity, any object *as* object (or representation of an idea) will not *perform* as art anymore – perhaps because it is precisely a performance¹³⁰ that it is asked to be, a means to *affect*; while any *transitional zone*, any embodied affect that is a state of becoming for the viewer is what art has come to stand for.

Simon O'Sullivan in 'Writing on Art (Case Study: *The Buddhist Puja*),' seeks an alternative notion of art as '*a shared project of deterritorialization.*' In the ritual practice of the puja he finds such a model and notes:

The puja is then a zone of transformation. An *aesthetic* zone in which discrete boundaries between subjects, and between subjects and objects are blurred. [...] And so we can understand the puja, like all art, as operating on different registers. It contains moments of figuration – of representation – but this is not its point (there are always those who will *interpret* dreams just as there will always be those who *figure* art as *text*). These moments are also access nodes into/onto something else (the molar aggregates that mask the molecular (the realm of *affects*)).¹³¹

O'Sullivan suggests that a 'project of deterritorialization' in art is where no 'anchoring point' will stabilize the practice (whether that is the object, the figuration, the language or the form). This provides insight into the in-between-ness of the work of art as medium despite its intrinsic symbolic function (as image or figuration). Likewise, an art encounter that is keyed on the object as medium and entry point does not essentially become consumed or fixed in the object qua object or its attributes; on

¹²⁹ I referred to this process of 'affected vision' in the previous chapter in reference to Kaja Silverman.

¹³⁰ With 'performance' here I do not imply 'performance art,' but an *agency* mapped on the space of the work that *sets the viewer in action*, and – as I have repeated regarding the 'double mode' of viewing – becomes *perceived* as such (becomes a mode of address or a *tension* from object to viewer and vice versa). For a further discussion see the following passages and for a definition of terms see the Glossary.

¹³¹ Simon O'Sullivan, 'Writing on Art (Case Study: *The Buddhist Puja*)' in Parallax, 2001, vol. 7, no. 4, 115–121.

the contrary, the object becomes a springboard and thrusts the viewer/participant towards various, dispersed centers of sensation and affect.

2. 'An aesthetic zone' (On *The World as a Stage*)

The exhibition *The World as a Stage* at the Tate Modern in 2008 brought together a selection of artists working across a range of media with a particular interest in performance, theatricality, stage sets and live interaction. In the exhibition catalogue, curator Catherine Wood's essay *Art Meets Theatre: The Middle Zone*¹³² provides an insightful account of why a dialogue between theatre and visual art has such currency in artistic practices today. The title of the essay describes the modalities of this cross-pollination: the *middle*, as the in-between, and the *zone* as a conception of the spatiotemporal dimension in which much of this body of work is materialised.

Wood gives a historical account of the marked resistance expressed by the champions of modernist values against the idea of theatricality in visual art, epitomized in Michael Fried's essay *Art and Objecthood*, but also evident in Bertolt Brecht's warning of a state of degradation as a result of the fusion of disciplines.¹³³ She outlines a genealogy of refutations against theatre's pictoriality, narrativity and figural representation; however, she astutely observes the intrinsic theatricality of the gallery environment, the white cube, which '*represses the theatrical nature of its staging of a neutral blankness as a backdrop for art.*'¹³⁴ In addition, she highlights the pervasive condition of performance and spectatorial relations within contemporary life while pointing to features of theatre that resonate with a re-formulated conception of the art object: '*As a conceptual notion, theatre contains an extreme capacity for dispersal and portability.*'¹³⁵ It appears that several aspects of theatre – and performativity as a general condition – strike a chord with the sensibility and the type of space that visual art increasingly shapes: the social milieu that is enacted in spatial encounters, the

¹³² Catherine Wood, '*Art Meets Theatre: The Middle Zone*', in *The World As A Stage*, Catherine Wood and Jessica Morgan, Tate Publishing, 2007, pp. 18-25.

¹³³ *Ibid.* p. 24.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 19. Wood cites Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube*, an article in *Artforum* in 1976, which analysed the spectatorial conditions of the gallery environment. A subsequent survey on the spectatorial terms of the museum is Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum*, Routledge, 1995.

¹³⁵ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

relational dimension, the viewer as embodied presence. There is a tendency towards a fluid, open-ended relation between the object of art and the viewing subject to which the performative dimension becomes instrumental: a shift of attention from the material status of the object to the events that the work engenders in the viewing subject.

However, this capacious influence, which contributed to artists' needs, over time, to dematerialize the art object, has already been extensively negotiated and configured in the artistic production of the recent decades – and heavily debated as well.¹³⁶ Yet what I believe to be an astute contribution of Wood's essay is not so much the insight into what the performative turn brings to the sculptural object, but her detection of the '*sculptural quality of this total situation*' where '*the actor, the object, the mise-en-scène and the spectator*' all coexist.¹³⁷ Rather than focussing on the theatrical status of the sculptural object the essay highlights the sculptural quality featured in the co-existence of objects and live agents in a space, challenging our perception of this versatile situation and pointing to the fact that our perception is actually the site where these relations are construed. In effect, this is not a one-sided agency; there is a diffusion of aesthetic comportment that essentially blurs these boundaries, supplemented by an allusion to the spatial dimension of social exchange.¹³⁸

In Wood's text, the performative dimension of the object as an expanded approach to art making is explained in several ways: '*Though the artwork itself might include discrete objects or 'pictures', its representational field is always an expanded one. This expanded field is founded upon, or implies, an understanding of the ritualised*

¹³⁶ Apart from a host of writings and articles in direct response to Michael Fried's polemic, as for example Robert Smithson's 'Letter to the Editors' in 1967 (in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, 1996, pp. 66-67), there has been prolific literature on this topic and its misconceptions. For example, see Shannon Jackson's article *Theatre...Again* in *Art Lies Journal*, <http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=1682&issue=60&s=1> where she critiques the misuse of the term 'theatricality,' and her analysis in *Social Works*, op. cit., pp. 17-20.

¹³⁷ Wood, op. cit., p. 23.

¹³⁸ Shannon Jackson, for example, offers a view of the experimentations blending visual and theatrical disciplines: "'Postdramatic theatre'" is Hans-Thies Lehmann's roomy term for a brand of experimentation that resists cathartic narrative, that deconstructs canonical texts, that replaces dramatic characters with sculptural figures, that moves outside of a proscenium space, and that approaches politics from a post-Brechtian stance that re-imagines rather than rejects the signature forms of the culture industry.' In *Social Works*, op. cit., p. 2. A video work by collaborative artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset titled *Drama Queens* from 2008 is a poignant take on the scenic presence of sculpture.

*relationships between people that lend objects or images significance.*¹³⁹ Towards the end of her essay Wood quotes the work of anthropologist David Graeber on the ‘fetish’ in African tribal cultures, the significance of which lies in ‘*the emphasis within those communities on the social contract or oath that was signified by the object over and above the inherent value of the object itself.*’¹⁴⁰ Graeber argued that European traders in the sixteenth century failed to grasp this ‘*ascription of value,*’ obsessed as they were with material commodities and wealth; the status of the object in those cultures had to be perceived differently, and it appeared arbitrary to the unfamiliar eye:

Graeber believes that his revised understanding of the position of the object’s status within social relations points towards a productive understanding of the locus of creativity that ‘is not an aspect of the object at all’, but ‘a dimension of action’¹⁴¹ [...] It was as though everything existed in the middle zone which the Europeans were trying to evacuate; everything was social – nothing fixed, therefore everything was both material and social simultaneously.¹⁴²

These ideas resonate with several aspects of contemporary art, Wood observes, through a renewed ‘*understanding of culture as a contingent and communal process of enactment,*’ as she conclusively notes.¹⁴³ Ideas of enactment and communion are mapped on the space of the work as a human dimension that increasingly gains in importance in artistic practices and manifests both as aesthetic affect and as an embodied encounter for the viewer; the space of the work thus becomes an expansive *stage*. Such a conceptualisation reflects the transitional status of the art object and the ‘transaction’ that art becomes, a shift well documented in several theses on contemporary sculpture.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Wood, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 24.

¹⁴¹ Wood quotes David Graeber from ‘Fetishism as Social Creativity, or Fetishes Are Gods in the Process of Construction’, in *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 5, 2005, p. 425.

¹⁴² Wood, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 25.

¹⁴⁴ Recent publications where these ideas are examined include Anne Ellegood’s *Vitamin 3-D New Perspectives in Sculpture and Installation*, Phaidon Press, 2009; Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman and Massimiliano Gioni’s *Unmonumental – the Object in the 21st Century*, Phaidon Press, 2007; and Johanna Burton and Anne Ellegood’s *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas: Recent Sculpture*, Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, 2007 (the last two titles are the catalogues from the respective exhibitions).

On a theatrical stage, objects become signifiers; as props, or scenic elements, they demonstrate their intended role, they have a palpable verbal agency. Perhaps this is what renders some examples of new sculpture ostensibly theatrical, this ‘loud’ eloquence, this gestural address that almost becomes an act (I am thinking here of examples from the work of Martin Boyce and Tom Burr, or even more explicitly Mike Kelley’s emblematic *Day is Done* multi-media installation at the Gagosian Gallery in 2005). However, sculpture has absorbed and transubstantiated this performativity, this gestural approach and mode of address in such a way that it has become a part of its structure – ‘*part of an artistic experience economy,*’ as Pil and Galia Kollektiv have observed,¹⁴⁵ or ‘*simply its current ‘state of being’.*’¹⁴⁶ What we experience is not an unadulterated theatrical language or structure, but a new objecthood that interferes with our everyday spaces and relations.¹⁴⁷

A common denominator between sculpture and theatre is the spatiotemporal interaction with an audience; the durational character of this presence and the spectatorial relations that emerge intersect these two disciplines. The temporal dimension of the sculptural encounter involves a movement in space – an almost intrinsically performative relation – partially ‘choreographed’ by the spatial coordinates of the work or installation, and the surrounding architecture.¹⁴⁸ This physicality invites responses and registers that often bifurcate: where the viewing subject is phenomenologically aware of his/her encounter with an object or installation (and the distinctive affects that this encounter engenders) but also critically aware of the heterogeneous spheres of discourse inscribed in the aggregation of objects in spaces (a particular ‘blend’ of the aesthetic and conceptual character of contemporary artworks, as I will later describe). While the object addresses us in a raw, fundamental corporeal encounter (even the heavily staged, composite object or

¹⁴⁵ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, *Can Objects Perform?: Agency and Thingliness in Contemporary Sculpture and Installation*, accessed online in March 2012 at <http://www.kollektiv.co.uk/Object%20Orientations.html>

¹⁴⁶ Anne Ellegood quotes Johanna Burton in *Vitamin 3-D*, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ In fact one is tempted to think that, were it not for an emphasis on certain critical texts, such an accentuated parallel between the two disciplines would not have moulded our perception of certain artistic movements (with Minimalism as a prime example, with Fried’s accusation of ‘theatricality’ which overshadowed its pronounced influence from phenomenology).

¹⁴⁸ In his book *On the Total Installation*, Ilya Kabakov writes: ‘[...] we will speak about the “dramatic” direction of the viewer as he moves through the installation, relying, it seems to us, on some general laws of perception of a person who has wound up in a “place unfamiliar to him”, even more so “inside a work of art”. We shall attempt to examine in order those “levers” which this “drama” puts into action, what it utilizes.’ Ilya Kabakov, *On the Total Installation*, Cantz Verlag, 1995, p. 311.

multi-media installation), its staging, its intentional configurations and spawning ramifications engage us in reflections and considerations that span across incongruous spheres of discourse and affective constitutions, re-enacting social situations, experiencing the political ‘clearing’ of non-functional space or, conversely, an institutionally burdened viewing context. But the effect of this bifurcation – the distinctively combined aesthetic and conceptual character of the work of art – rounds up not in split awareness but in composition, in a double view of our affected corporeality and heightened awareness of the scenarios at play. This distinctively dispersed spatial experience enacts a spectral projection of subjectivity that fuses performance and spectatorship.

The paradigm that such spatial encounters bring about marks a shift from the ‘ideal’ and static viewpoint of modernist aesthetics to a multiple, decentred situation with heterogeneous registers that requires the viewer’s presence not as a vague and indeterminate physical interaction but as trigger or rehearsal of what the viewing subject brings into the work. A conception of the work as stage marks a development in the space of the work from fixed picture, disembodied ‘eye’ and autonomous object to a spatiotemporal field of movement, of encounter and performative¹⁴⁹ mapping that converges the agencies of artistic practice with those of an engaged, enacting viewing subject.

The work as stage for an engaged viewer evokes questions of activity and passivity in spectatorship; Wood remarks: *‘In this sense, the work renegotiates not only the status of the art object but also the image plane as a site of activity, in opposition to Guy Debord’s characterisation of the capitalist ‘spectacle’ as ‘alienating screen.’*¹⁵⁰ This renegotiation echoes discussions on art as a democratic platform for participation.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ In my repeated use of the terms ‘performance’ and ‘performative’ I do not attempt to set up an opposition of performance as a *singular* occurrence, and *performative* as repetition of behavioural pattern, but rather make use of the term ‘performative’ as what James Loxley describes ‘the rather general quality something might have by virtue of being a performance.’ James Loxley, *Performativity*, Routledge, 2006, p. 140. See also Glossary, p. 141.

¹⁵⁰ Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁵¹ Although ‘participation’ is a heavily contested term in current art criticism, as a pseudo-political and regularly unrealized dimension of diverse artistic practices, there is an important amount of work where a spatial or conceptual setup for participation is achieved. Examples include the work of art collective Gelitin, Tomas Saraceno and Alfredo Jaar; this participation is literal, for example, in some of Jeremy Deller’s collaborative projects, which are based on material gathered from various communities or social groups and exhibited in the gallery or museum as installation works. Olafur Eliasson says: ‘I

Jacques Rancière's essay *The Emancipated Spectator* explores the issue of 'activated spectatorship.'¹⁵² Rancière presented the two main influences of contemporary theatre – Bertolt Brecht's dialectical theatre and Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty – as two different directions towards the end of 'activating the viewer,' a pursuit at the heart of theatrical debates throughout modernism.¹⁵³ But Rancière's essay overcomes the 'debate' between the two positions by '*challeng[ing] the opposition between viewing and acting*' and by positing the spectator's interpretative activity as an active role, a *translation* into a new '*idiom*': '[...] *who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the 'story' and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators.*'¹⁵⁴

The work as stage proposes a different reception and a different core notion of the artwork;¹⁵⁵ Wood claims that '*for the object, it means testing its status as an encounter against its facticity as a discrete 'thing.*'¹⁵⁶ The object acts upon the viewer as a trigger for motion and affective connectivity; its time and space extend to the experiencing subject with continuity.

think what we're dealing with is what I sometimes call "looped participation," or participation where there is an evaluation of itself as participation. Participating is no problem – going into a shop and buying something is a kind of participation – but it doesn't usually involve evaluation. I think this is the potential of cultural activity. [...] you can model participation and introduce evaluation as an active element in the participation.' In Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Conversation Series*, Walther König Verlag, 2008, p. 47.

¹⁵² Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Verso Books, 2009.

¹⁵³ Rancière writes: 'Theatre accuses itself of rendering spectators passive and thereby betraying its essence as community action. It consequently assigns itself the mission of reversing its effects and expiating its sins by restoring to spectators ownership of their consciousness and their activity. The theatrical stage and performance thus become a vanishing mediation between the evil of spectacle and the virtue of true theatre. They intend to teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators and becoming agents of a collective practice. According to the Brechtian paradigm, theatrical mediation makes them conscious of the social situation that gives rise to it and desirous of acting in order to transform it. According to Artaud's logic, it makes them abandon their position as spectators: rather than being placed in front of a spectacle, they are surrounded by the performance, drawn into the circle of action that restores their collective energy. In both cases, theatre is presented as a mediation striving for its own abolition.' Ibid. p. 7-8. Elsewhere Rancière notes about the two opposing conceptions that 'the practice and the theory of a reformed theatre have often combined them.' Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 22.

¹⁵⁵ With 'work of art' or 'artwork' I describe a condition for expanded sculpture as it develops (see also Glossary, p. 142).

¹⁵⁶ Wood, op. cit., p. 20.

As has been argued elsewhere,¹⁵⁷ this is partly a result of the legacy of performance art still resonant in the space of sculpture today, and as Wood notes, telling of ‘*the extent to which a sense of ‘theatricality’ has, in recent practice, become invested in the perception of the art viewer over and above being a quality of the object itself; a self-reflexive mode carried beyond the parameters of the gallery environment in which it was initiated.*’¹⁵⁸ Again, these are the terms of a situation that invites or incites a politicized spectatorship, an alternative objecthood, and a pervasive relationality. In fact Wood cites RoseLee Goldberg’s analysis of performance and the innovation it brought for objects too, how ‘*it feeds into transitional moments in the development of new painterly or sculptural forms and styles.*’¹⁵⁹ This ‘feed’ facilitates a changing perception of the forces at play in the space of sculpture, which shifts attention from the object as the aesthetic focus of the encounter to the affects conveyed across the space of the work as aesthetic events; this shift of attention is often phrased as what art *does* rather than what it *is*, and although oversimplifying, such a statement echoes the shortcomings of an ontological study regarding the contingent nature of art, by switching the register from overtly formal (or ideological) strategies to manifestations of change and affectuality.

As Martin Herbert observed in his article on *The World as a Stage*, ‘[p]erformativity within art has lately been attended by a modulated definition of theatre – toward putting the viewer “on stage”,’ and he describes the overall project as typical of ‘*the present sea change in reception.*’¹⁶⁰ Herbert also refers to ‘*A Theater without Theater*’, a voluminous exhibition concurrently hosted in the Museu Berardo de Lisboa in 2007, which explored the grafting of visual art and theatre throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first century. The interaction between the two genres, intensified in the early twentieth century by the Constructivists and the Bauhaus, re-emerged in visual art in the 1960s,¹⁶¹ it later became a staple of postmodernism, providing some of the most challenging debates that enabled an understanding of the

¹⁵⁷ See for example Jan Verwoert, *Make the prop talk – on putting performance back into sculpture*, The Showroom Annual 2006/7, p. 30, which I discuss in the following chapters.

¹⁵⁸ Wood, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 23.

¹⁶⁰ Martin Herbert, *The World as Stage*, Artforum, March 2008, accessed online in May 2012 at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_7_46/ai_n31390521/pg_2/?tag=content:col1

¹⁶¹ Rosalind Krauss describes Robert Morris’ 1961 (untitled) performance with a column standing on a stage in ‘Mechanical Ballets: light, motion, theatre,’ in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, op. cit., pp. 201-203.

impasses of formalism, or its lack of correspondence to a changing awareness of the viewing subject. The temporal dimension of the aesthetic experience, the specifically corporeal interaction of the viewer with the work of art as space and situation – as productive encounter – would become a testing ground for the work’s force, and its connection to life; these dimensions became a political necessity in art.

Although critical of the demands that ‘interactive’ works often pose to viewers – which either undermine their freedom of action or seem to imitate a consumerist culture of game-play and divertissement and which, he argues, needs to be reconsidered by artists today – Herbert concludes his double review by claiming that the interest in revisiting such a frequently discussed correlation is that ‘*theatricality in art is a voicing of cultural disquiet*’.¹⁶² It seems clear that the state of ambivalent uncertainty that permeates contemporary life has irreversibly sealed the work of art with a dramatic act.

3. Performative Objects

Issues of a reconfigured objecthood are examined in Pil and Galia Kollektiv’s essay *Can Objects Perform?: Agency and Thingliness in Contemporary Sculpture and Installation*,¹⁶³ which they presented at the Henry Moore Institute as part of the ‘Sculpture and Performance’ conference in 2010. In their essay Pil and Galia Kollektiv raise questions around ‘thingliness’ and objecthood as forces at play within these practices; their distinction between ‘things’ and ‘objects’ is primarily made in connection to their socially referential context as agents within art installations. As such they document our changing encounter with art and reflect a wider discourse concerning the political agency of things and objects in our lives.

A turning point for sculpture was ‘*the staging of an experience for the viewer as performer*,’¹⁶⁴ contested by Michael Fried’s essay *Art and Objecthood* in 1967, as Pil and Galia note. What Fried saw in Minimalism – as in the work of Robert Morris and

¹⁶² Herbert, op. cit. (accessed online).

¹⁶³ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, op. cit., (accessed online).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. (accessed online).

Donald Judd – was a change of paradigm in how the viewer encountered the work of art, which was bound to trigger numerous changes in both the reception of art and the work's status as an object; it signalled a change in what the 'authentic' moment of the art experience was, its dependencies, its locus and its duration that superseded the 'instantaneous' and transcendent nature that the work of art had traditionally been perceived as expressing.¹⁶⁵ This was part of a wider and gradual change that affected both the time and the space of the sculptural object, and which Rosalind Krauss described as the transition into postmodernism in her 1979 essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*.¹⁶⁶

However, Pil and Galia point to the fact that Fried's '[a]rgument has since been inverted by artists and art writers invested in the idea of sculptures as props forming part of an artistic experience economy.'¹⁶⁷ As the authors note, this economy of experience was manifest in the art of the 1990s with 'relational aesthetics' (the term coined by Nicolas Bourriaud in his homonymous book), where the space of art became a place of convivial communion or a framework for human activity; but they subsequently remark: 'More recently, however, there has been a turn away from relationality to 'object-oriented' art, where objects are seen to stage their own theatrical experiences, performing themselves without requiring the activation of a viewer's body.'¹⁶⁸ The authors associate the turn to an 'object-oriented' art with emerging philosophical theories such as 'object-oriented ontology' and the 'Speculative Realism' movement.¹⁶⁹ These theories explore the inherent creativity of matter and the role of nonhuman agents, converging scientific with philosophical investigations in order to suggest an alternative model for thought – exemplified in Bruno Latour's theoretical work. In addition these investigations map the political conveyances that matter negotiates over a global economy.

¹⁶⁵ Grant Kester describes this change of paradigm from a critical and historical perspective in his *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, University of California Press, 2004, pp 46-49 and 50-81.

¹⁶⁶ Rosalind Krauss, *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*, October magazine, spring 1979, p. 30-44.

¹⁶⁷ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, op. cit., (accessed online).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. (accessed online). Here is a far-reaching argument that not only grapples with recent sculpture's object-oriented turn but also indirectly insinuates the failures of the partly exhausted and partly politically unstable project of 'viewer participation' in a considerable amount of art of the recent decades.

¹⁶⁹ Numerous recent publications attest to this trend, such as Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (Duke University Press, 2009) that proposes a concept of 'vital materiality'.

This growing interest in the agencies of objects is increasingly manifest in the space of recent sculpture, where an abundant objecthood, an appearance of assemblage and a perplexing juxtaposition of matter propose a syntax articulated by objects and their inscribed stories. In this context Pil and Galia describe Rachel Harrison's *Huffy Howler* from 2004 and the composite sculptural work of Cathy Wilkes and Isa Genzken. This emphasized objecthood differs substantially from a modernist antecedent where a 'truth to materials' entrenched an autonomous space for the aesthetic object. Instead this present condition, according to Pil and Galia, is '*defining a sculptural anti-aesthetic that asks us to consider the changing nature of our relationship to objects.*'¹⁷⁰ This changing relationship is telling of the political implication of objects across various spheres of life and their gradual extinction in favour of virtual transactions, which bestows on them a renewed, though altered, value. These frictions are mapped in art,¹⁷¹ where objects are recast outside a functional use, or a global exchange of capital. In addition this turn reflects a precarious tension between countless immaterial transactions and the reliance on material product, on objects and their economies. A changing perception effected by these discrepancies is mapped on the factual apprehension of matter and objects; in fact, there could not be more distance between the inherent 'logic' of modernist aesthetics and the post-apocalyptic landscape of contemporary sculpture: these arrangements speak of a pervasive uncertainty, they document an anxiety, their awkwardness echoing the social reality of individual political disability.¹⁷²

'[...] *The proliferation of the scanty art objects described above, situated somewhere between theatrical props waiting to be activated and material phenomena closed to human access, is both a consequence of and a reaction to these developments,*'¹⁷³ the authors note. These works' circumscribed dialectic between the virtual realm of

¹⁷⁰ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, op. cit. (accessed online).

¹⁷¹ This condition is well articulated by Alex Landrum and Ed Whittaker: 'Spatial by availability and boundary, works of art are also sites that represent economic and historical transformations to become the gathering places of individuals and their relations to objects. In this sense, the sites of artworks are also the sites of politics.' Landrum and Whittaker, op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁷² The idea of uncertainty in new sculpture, reverberating a wider discourse concerning the status of the art object, was addressed in Johanna Burton and Anne Ellegood's *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas*, the catalogue to the respective exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, in 2006. The idea of disability echoes Jan Verwoert's remarks on Isa Genzken's 2006 Secession installation (which was untitled), 'a promise of redemption connected to a state of incapacity.' In Verwoert, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁷³ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, op. cit. (accessed online).

global connectivity and material objecthood echoes Peter Osborne's analysis of the 'post-conceptual' phase of the work of art, which converges its intrinsic aesthetic dimension ('*an ineliminable – but radically insufficient – aesthetic dimension*')¹⁷⁴ with the conceptual and distributed character of its materializations (where art tends toward a condition of '*architecturalization*').¹⁷⁵ The issue at stake here is this dialogue between the object as matter and the prevailing conceptual character of the work – not least, as Pil and Galia argue, because a dematerialized art object is no longer inassimilable by the global market, and thus no longer acting as a form of resistance against the commodification and marketization of art; instead, the new object configurations in sculpture aim to subvert the subordination of matter to a logic of incessant production, distribution and consumption.

In Osborne's essay, art absorbs forms of social spatiality in its ontology; Pil and Galia Kollektiv point out that '*it is exactly its potential for staging a social situation that makes contemporary artists interested in sculptural installations. At the same time, as a prop, the object does more than delineate an architecturally determined space, a stage*' (my emphasis).¹⁷⁶ In fact, as a prop, the object straddles two modes of being (the 'partial' status that Andrea Phillips' essay '*Prop-Objects*' describes)¹⁷⁷ that allow it to signify narratives and external discourses rearranged in an aesthetic experience economy while the space of the work becomes an arena that converges an imagination of matter in space and its rehearsal as critique or possibility.¹⁷⁸

These configurations are often conceived or framed as a 'return to theatricality'¹⁷⁹ and as such evoke the discourse of viewer-as-performer and his/her self-aware presence that Michael Fried disparaged in Minimalist art. However, if theatricality were taken to be a property of the object, there are two aspects in the type of spatial arrangement

¹⁷⁴ Peter Osborne, 'Where is the Work of Art? Contemporary Art, Spatialisation and Urban Form', in Landrum and Whittaker, op. cit., p 15. Osborne's essay is cited by Pil and Galia Kollektiv.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p 13. 'Architecturalization' in Osborne's essay is not so much a type of spatial form (though Osborne argues that art is essentially influenced by the general framework of urban form) but a distribution of materializations that art imitates from architecture (the relation between plan and building, for instance).

¹⁷⁶ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, op. cit. (accessed online).

¹⁷⁷ Phillips, op. cit., pp. 26-29.

¹⁷⁸ Jessica Morgan and Catherine Wood have made a similar suggestion in the introduction to *The World as a Stage*, where they frame the exhibition as 'offering the dramatised and staged as a potential critique, rehearsal or analysis of our search for an understanding of our place and position in the world.' Morgan and Wood, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁷⁹ Pil and Galia quote Jan Verwoert from *Make the Prop talk*, op. cit. (accessed online).

that new sculpture demonstrates that oppose this reading (much as there are numerous artists who endorse or invert this criticism).¹⁸⁰ The first of these elements concerns the agency of the object in this spatial confrontation, what Pil and Galia described as ‘[...] *performing themselves without requiring the activation of a viewer’s body*’ (as quoted above). This self-performance alludes to a distinctive quality of the encounter with an object, a quality of physical address conveyed as *enactment* and affecting the viewer into a state of motion propelled by affect (the link to ‘emotion’ is visible here).¹⁸¹ As Johanna Burton observes in ‘*The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas*,’ ‘*Fried’s dismay about anthropomorphism was levied as a critique, but I’ve always found it to describe well the productive tension produced in the space between a three-dimensional thing (it need not be a cube) and a three-dimensional viewer.*’¹⁸² The ‘tension’ that Burton identifies does not necessarily imply or follow an actual movement of the viewer in the space of the work – the implications of which Fried distrusted. Rather, it triggers a *virtual* enactment, an orchestration of affects and cognitive operations that certain sculptural objects or entities instigate in the viewer in a more extrovert (or ‘dramaturgic’) mode while other objects exert this tension in a more self-contained, ‘static’ mode. In short, ‘theatricality’ as adopted by recent sculpture (for want of a specifically ‘sculptural’ terminology, as it appears) describes a *comportment* or tension of the object rather than a typology of response or movement by the viewer.

The second aspect of recent sculptural configurations poses ‘theatricality’ as a quality of the sculptural object (for want of a ‘sculptural’ term as I described above) in terms which are different to the status of a prop or a scenographic asset on a stage.¹⁸³ Jan Verwoert in his essay ‘*Make the Prop talk*’ argued that ‘[s]culpture [...] *becomes a vehicle, through which concepts of ‘relationality’ taken from performance or*

¹⁸⁰ For instance, Anne Ellegood wrote in her essay ‘*Motley Efforts – Sculpture’s Ever-Expanding Field*’: ‘The ‘stage presence’ that Michael Fried so maligned in his widely read and analyzed critique of Minimalism of 1967, ‘Art and Objecthood’, is no longer necessarily a contemplative engagement with time and space but one that wears its flamboyant theatricality with aplomb.’ In Ellegood, *Vitamin 3-D*, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁸¹ As I have previously noted the etymology of ‘synkinesis’, the Greek term for emotion has a common root, pointing to a ‘setting-in-motion’ (from ‘syn’=together and ‘kinesis’=movement).

¹⁸² Burton and Ellegood, *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas*, op. cit., p. 16. Johanna Burton’s observation is cited by Trevor Smith in his essay ‘*Sculpture – a minor place*’ in Flood, Hoptman and Gioni, op. cit., p. 185.

¹⁸³ Even the ‘prop-object’ analysed by Andrea Phillips is an ‘actor’ in a wider ‘stage’ – a political arena. Phillips, op. cit., pp. 26-29.

*installation art, can be reformulated.*¹⁸⁴ This reformulation, conceived as a new or expanded dimension of sculpture, allows a renewed understanding of the ‘relational’ pattern of address that the art object moulds. Following David Graeber’s claims on the social consensus represented by the cultural significance of objects,¹⁸⁵ I would argue that several dimensions of the performative role of the sculptural object have been overlooked or misinterpreted; due to an insufficient phraseology in locating artistic agency, and a misdirected attention towards a disciplinary delineation of spectatorial relations, art criticism overstated the case for *theatricality* – a misleading term altogether¹⁸⁶ – when such forces are mapped that reveal an embodied, enacted response that converges object and viewer.

In Pil and Galia’s essay this reformulated platform for sculpture reveals the trouble with the overt claim for physical interactivity that certain works set up for their audience. In museum spaces such gestures are ‘*so wholly subsumed in a touristic experience economy*’¹⁸⁷ that any radical potential they once contained is now tamed, and part of a cultural industry with the pretence of democratic participation. To this the authors counter: ‘*[A] new language of objects is therefore called upon to think their presence without relying on the vicissitudes of ours. Thus, Fried’s theatrical objecthood finds itself in the strange company of Heidegger’s thingliness.*’¹⁸⁸ Latour’s theory, they point out, argues for an alternative approach to objects to that established by correlationism (or their ontological dependence on the perceiving mind), one that turns to the relations between objects and their mutual processes.¹⁸⁹ Consequently, the authors argue that Latour’s theory outruns Heidegger’s mapping of human agency on things, ‘*an ethical, and hence human, position of caring and protecting*’ with its

¹⁸⁴ Verwoert, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁸⁵ David Graeber as quoted in Wood, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁸⁶ See Shannon Jackson’s article *Theatre...Again*, where she illustrates the erroneous assumptions around theatricality. As she notes: ‘I find myself encountering all varieties of experimental work that seem to be reusing the fundamental registers of theatre—duration, embodiment, spectacle, ensemble, text, sound, gesture, situated space, reenactment of an elusive original—and find, once again, that “theatre” is still often the thing that such works actively seek not to be.’ Accessed online in May 2012 at <http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=1682&issue=60&s=1>

¹⁸⁷ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, op. cit. (accessed online).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. (accessed online).

¹⁸⁹ Latour writes: ‘[n]o science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call *non-humans*.’ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 71.

proposition of ‘*a kind of realism to counter post-modern relativism.*’¹⁹⁰ This new understanding of objects assigns agency to both human and nonhuman agents, and offers an insight into the proliferation of ‘material arrangements’ in sculpture and installation, where a dialogue between objects and materials seems to fabricate its own spawning circuit of associations in which the viewer is not only a partial spectator but is not even the organising ‘eye’ that grasps the work as a whole – bespeaking ‘the intelligence of matter,’ as Rachel Jones suggested in her essay ‘*Making Matters.*’ She thus describes ‘[t]he capacity of matter to give form – to spaces and relations as well as new becomings.’¹⁹¹

All these associations are configured by objects, but within a staging determined by artistic practice, a staging somehow eclipsed by the radical propositions of object-oriented theory. As Griselda Pollock has observed, ‘*I am engaged or fascinated or affected only in so far as something happens inter-subjectively for which the mediation is at once material and virtual. This may be misrecognised by investing the screen or carrier with human attributes, suggesting, as is the current fashion in some areas of object theory, that objects do things to us.*’¹⁹² In fact Pil and Galia Kollektiv problematize the application of object-oriented ontology in art, which, far from rehearsing the validity of the theoretical paradigm itself, exposes a humanist projection of properties and compartments to matter by both artists and spectators (and which, I would think, inflects a distant echo of Fried’s critique of ‘anthropomorphism’ with yet another vindicating hue). They frame their essay with a warning against ‘*a generalized, universalizing humanism that disables political action*’ that an unconditional endorsement of the discourse of the ‘creativity of matter’ risks, which, on the other hand ‘*undermines the potential for anti-humanist critique latent in object-oriented philosophy.*’¹⁹³

The ineradicably ‘human context,’ as they observe, is visible in the way contemporary art is framed within art institutions – and in the questionable degree to which such

¹⁹⁰ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, op. cit. (accessed online).

¹⁹¹ Rachel Jones, ‘*Making Matters,*’ an essay for the ‘Material Intelligence’ exhibition at Kettle’s Yard in 2009, accessed in March 2012 at http://www.kettlesyard.co.uk/exhibitions/mi_catalogue/essay_jones.html. This article is cited in Pil and Galia Kollektiv’s essay.

¹⁹² Pollock, op. cit. (accessed online).

¹⁹³ Pil and Galia Kollektiv, op. cit. (accessed online).

fragile, hybridized versions of object assemblages would be ‘recognizable’ as art objects outside these spaces. Such observations as those made by Pil and Galia Kollektiv stress the intentional nature of such configurations and our perception of them as such and point, once again, to the cultural contract over the art object as ‘medium,’¹⁹⁴ which, as raconteur of a virulent humanism or as autonomous zone of unfathomable ‘difference,’ insists on pushing us to the limits of our ideologies and our self-centredness, tricking us into a self-motivated mutation of an ever-expanding subjecthood.

4. Props and architectures

At this point I would like to turn to a speculation on the object of sculpture as a ‘prop’ and a consideration of the changing spatialization of the work of art, as these ideas are explored in a group of essays, which I will respond to here.

The Showroom’s 2007 conference ‘*Props, Events, Encounters: The Performance of New Sculpture*’¹⁹⁵ brought together insightful views on the new directions of sculptural practice in recent years. The conference sought ‘*to examine the emergence of forms in contemporary art in which objects are imbued with a theatrical status, but which avoid a return to Michael Fried’s famous distaste for theatricality in minimalist sculpture.*’¹⁹⁶ Instead, key to grasping these objects’ performative agency is an approach that contextualizes them as a new, hybrid genre into which sculpture mutates in order to render its heterogeneous constellations of ‘mute’ stuff politically insubordinate and socially resonant.

¹⁹⁴ In a Keyword Glossary reference article on ‘objecthood’ from the University of Chicago website, Tony Gibart writes on Raymond Williams: ‘Williams tries to reveal the attempt to partition off art objects from other produced objects as a response by the middle class to the alienation of labor. Therefore, there is nothing intrinsic in the object or in the experience of it that distinguishes it from the other objects produced in society. Rather it is a set of social practices that define and declare the object art.’ Accessed online in April 2012 at <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/objecthood.htm>

¹⁹⁵ *Props, Events, Encounters: The Performance of New Sculpture*, The Showroom 4th Annual Conference: Saturday 26 May 2007. The title of the conference ‘takes its cue from Mike Kelley’s description of the inherent structure at work in the objects that he uses in his performances. He ascribes to these objects a self-governing ordering system that is enacted as they appear in his work, a system that differentiates between objects that stay in the background, contextualising objects and those that will be active within the performance itself.’ From the Showroom website, accessed in March 2012: <http://archive.theshowroom.org/despatch.cgi?art/conference/2007>

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. (accessed online).

These two dimensions were explored in the papers presented by Andrea Phillips and Jan Verwoert as part of the event; both authors examined elements of performance active within newly configured forms of sculpture and installation and the kind of encounter that these objects or spaces stage for the viewer. Phillips' essay '*Prop-objects*'¹⁹⁷ articulates an idea of the contemporary sculptural object as a prop;¹⁹⁸ her argument suggests '*a shift in contemporary art away from the production of discrete, autonomous objects, and towards firstly the production of objects that function instead as props, and secondly the positioning of these props in a certain type of architectural environment.*'¹⁹⁹ Phillips describes the dual nature of the prop-object as a 'partial' quality that does not contain itself in either the conventional idea of the theatrical prop or the autonomous art object; instead, '*there is, as such, a certain type of staging that retains some form of modernist sculptural definition either through design or default.*'²⁰⁰ In this intermediate role the prop-object aspires to a social and political interaction;

Now it is a Brechtian theatre that we see in contemporary prop-objects, one in which we are asked to look crudely, dialectically. A basket of fish, a wooden leg, a cigar, a rag doll, a crown, a rifle – in Epic theatre these objects function to help tell the story and to remind the audience that the actors, the narrative, the action, are part of an everyday political life that they might have a hand in formulating. These are not magical or transformative objects but instead what Bertolt Brecht called gestural or quotable items intended to be identified by the viewer as just that.²⁰¹

The parallel that Phillips draws between 'prop-objects' in contemporary art and the 'gestural' or 'quotable' objects in Brecht's Epic theatre highlights a tendency within recent sculptural practices to organize objects into spatial arrangements that, apart from forming their own internal systems of reference or a dialectical relationship with

¹⁹⁷ Phillips, op. cit., pp. 26-29.

¹⁹⁸ Phillips explains: 'Most traditionally we can think of props in two ways: firstly as the objects used to aid the telling of a story or set of actions in theatre, and secondly as those objects that help hold up or support something else.' She also points to ideas of transportability and property signified by a prop. Ibid. p. 26.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 26.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 26.

²⁰¹ Ibid. p. 27. In Bertolt Brecht's theatrical innovations (originally under 'Epic Theatre' and later as 'Dialectical Theatre'), a principle of 'distancing' the audience through radical changes in acting techniques and stage design aimed to raise an awareness of the actions performed before them without producing illusion; this methodology was epitomised by the *gestus*, the gesture as physical gesture or as attitude.

the architectural and institutional contexts that accommodate them, also act in relation to wider external frameworks, social moments where they can be projected on, which are ‘quoted’ in the objects they are assembled from, in their ‘gestural’ formal organization and the type of ‘distributed’ spatiality they create and inhabit.²⁰² As such they form connections between the potentiality of the non-functional, experimental scene of art and the referents that they as objects bear (often imported as unmodified everyday things). This social reference and mundane worldly presence grafts the self-governing system of the spatial dimension of art with political and relational contexts, bastardising the autonomous status of art objects with dependency, referential functionality, and the whole ‘secular’ medley that our aesthetic ‘formatting’ of the last centuries has cautiously segregated from the realm of art.²⁰³ Nevertheless, the prop-objects of contemporary art that Phillips describes, apart from acting as ‘partial’ props, also only partially transpose themselves to the public realm; this is a deliberate strategy, Phillips argues.

At the same time, Phillips dissociates the condition of the object-as-prop from Rosalind Krauss’ description of the sculptural prop in ‘*Mechanical Ballets: light, motion, theater*’²⁰⁴ or Fried’s criticism of theatricality, because the manner in which the prop-object now acts has a distinctly new pitch:

What is new is the impetus behind what I see as a novel political claim for the prop and its architecture. Rather than carrying with them the contradiction of what Krauss calls the difference between the synthetic and the operational, when placed in view in the gallery or museum, these objects seek to synthesise such a contradiction under the name of an urge to equalise experience.²⁰⁵

Here the prop-object supersedes such distinctions between ‘synthetic’ and ‘operational’, which from a formalist viewpoint would unsettle the purity of the

²⁰² I am thinking here of such artists as Sam Durant, who is described by Sara Reisman as ‘transforming activist gestures into sculptural objects (and vice versa)’ in Flood, Hoptman and Gioni, op. cit., p. 60.

²⁰³ Phillips refers to the modernist fascination with objects and everyday things for their ‘importance in themselves and often for themselves’ and ‘their own sense of organising logic’, which appealed to the modernist aesthetic. Contrary to the condition of the ‘prop-object’ that Phillips suggests in her essay, these features seem to reinforce rather than dissolve autonomy. Phillips, op cit., p. 27.

²⁰⁴ Rosalind Krauss, ‘Mechanical Ballets: light, motion, theater’, in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, op. cit., pp. 201-242.

²⁰⁵ Phillips, op cit., p. 27.

aesthetic medium; the operational mode of the prop-object is embedded in its repurposed objecthood as such, accompanied by an irreversible disillusionment that maps performative agencies in the spatial relations among objects and between objects and viewers, which, in extent, echo the wider scene of public space. Phillips contends,

These actualising and processual capacities of new prop-objects attest to the immersive and performative tendencies of contemporary global art (by which I mean simply art that is made in order to circulate around the globe), in which, in a new formulation, the wish is to produce spaces and times that allude to a certain form of (quasi-) democratic potential.²⁰⁶

On the one hand, this strategy that prop-objects exemplify is voicing the familiar call for the connection of art and life that performative practices sought to establish; the ‘equalising experience’ that Phillips describes as the impetus behind these new configurations in sculpture alludes to those unifying, virtual structures distributed around the world as a generic ‘global language’ based on commodity products, typified architectural environments and the universalized language of technology. At once attentive to the modes of communication established by a worldwide circulation of information networks and products, and responsive to the disguised patronizing of these ostensibly equalising environments, the space of sculpture seeks to unsettle these structures with its ‘non-functional’ presence and to leave things open (hence the ‘partial’ interference with public space). The modus operandi that enables this unsettling is its indeterminate, double role as prop-object that enacts social space in its own premises while retaining a ‘core’ sculptural dimension that prevents its absorption in a space of production or style.²⁰⁷ Phillips argues that the condition of contemporary sculpture acquiring a prop-like quality also indicates a desire to create, within the actual/virtual space of art as receptacle for the viewer, a possibility to produce ‘*modes of living*’ projected on a de-localised, global plane, and the prop is a new scenography to this imagination.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 27.

²⁰⁷ Ina Blom describes the site of “style” as ‘the social site that opens onto the political significance of the relation between aesthetic appearances and personal becoming.’ Ina Blom, *On the Style Site - Art, Sociality, and Media Culture*, Sternberg Press, 2007, p. 190.

²⁰⁸ Phillips, op cit., p. 26.

Prop-objects are mediations that are not an end in themselves – they do not acquire an aesthetic ‘monopoly’ in the art encounter as such; their *role* is not to act as the representational object of theatre (a ‘stand-in’) but to *divert* attention from their objecthood and to produce links to wider assemblages – whether affective, social or performative. In this sense, they disturb our ways of *seeing* the object but remain present in the encounter rather than dematerialize or become indexical signs.²⁰⁹ They are symptomatic of the shift that I have described from art as object to art as encounter. At this point I would like to briefly intersect a few points made by Shannon Jackson in her book *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*; Jackson associates the term ‘prop’ as far back as Plato’s parable of the cave from the *Republic*, as ‘a reminder of the fundamental role of aesthetic support.’²¹⁰ In her analysis of the role and dimension of ‘aesthetic support’ she traces the aesthetic determinations of nineteenth-century idealism as positing that:

[a]rt achieved its greatness to the degree that its representations transcended its material substrate, rising above its raw material and its social apparatus of production. This is one way of casting an early aesthetic opposition between “autonomy” and “heteronomy.”²¹¹

It is the in-between-ness of prop-objects that escapes systematization or any classification even within an artistic industry – they elude a ‘status.’ Phillips describes the unfixed, partial status of prop-objects as a form of resistance against the corruption that cultural forms sustain when they are framed within the circulation networks of the market; she stresses how works of art are increasingly framed by curatorial practices and contextualised into the scene of the international art exhibition

²⁰⁹ In a conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Olafur Eliasson says: ‘Currently, artists are obsessed with dematerializing, recontextualizing, or reevaluating the object. I’m referring to the whole disappearance of the object and everything now being based on relations – the quasi-object. That’s not a problem in itself, but unfortunately museums are moving in the wrong direction. Their approach to it remains highly conservative: they’re trying to institutionalize the object – and not just the object’s physical qualities, but the *experience* of it.’ In Obrist, op. cit., p. 75. The ‘quasi-object’ that Eliasson posits is useful in the context discussed here.

²¹⁰ Jackson says: ‘The use of the word “prop” is particularly resonant for me, as it anticipates the visual art term for pictorial support as well as the theatrical term for the human object world. There is a temporal commitment implied in this holding and this bearing, an “enduring” that will be ongoing. Interestingly, this enduring is also tolerant and resigned; in fact, a tolerating resignation might well be what it means to offer enduring support. To support is to hold up “without opposition or resistance,” implying a kind of promise to bear however unbearable the task becomes. By 1686, more definitions and associations start to augment the social character of the supporting act, ongoing acts whose descriptions use the gerund verb form.’ Jackson, op. cit., p. 30.

²¹¹ Ibid. p. 31.

market. She sees the shift to the prop-object as a reaction against the predominance of the ‘curatorial’ in art and the adjustment of art into the context of its international circulation in large-scale exhibitions. Both frameworks stage particular works in variable locations, making them movable items in the arena of the international art market and into a ‘picture’ of a unified ‘global art’ – and to this extent I would think that the ‘curatorial’ also denotes the artist’s ‘placement’ of their own ‘idiom’ in the wider platform of this international scene. All this testifies to another kind of restriction to the object’s autonomy, as the restricted possibility to experience it independently of the framing devices that engulf it or the value criteria that price it.

In contradistinction to the ideas articulated in Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*, the aesthetic of the prop-object, although at first sight ‘bound’ to objecthood and classical issues of ‘reception,’ paradoxically allows more interpretative freedom; this is due to a problem within relational aesthetics (or at least, as formulated by Bourriaud) of ‘prescribed’ coordinates and interaction by ‘*judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt.*’²¹² Rather than a co-creation of space *or* relations this paradigm seems to represent an imperative, which, in practice, *reproduces* (rather than re-models) a re-enactment of social behaviour and thus impairs (if not patronizes) encounters. As Claire Bishop has argued in her essay ‘*Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*’ (in relation to Umberto Eco’s conception of the ‘open work’):

[i]t is Eco’s contention that every work of art is potentially “open,” since it may produce an unlimited range of possible readings; it is simply the achievement of contemporary art, music, and literature to have foregrounded this fact. Bourriaud misinterprets these arguments by applying them to a specific type of work (those that require literal interaction) and thereby redirects the argument back to artistic intentionality rather than issues of reception.²¹³

In Jan Verwoert’s essay from the same conference, ‘*Make the prop talk – on putting performance back into sculpture*’, Verwoert articulates a return to the medium of sculpture, a sculpture that is now informed by this ‘resistant partiality’ that Phillips proposed, a sculpture that renegotiates a certain ‘economy of experience’:

²¹² Bourriaud, op. cit., p. 112.

²¹³ Claire Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, October Magazine (Fall 2004), p. 62.

The reason why I would suggest that it is necessary to renegotiate the criteria for thinking about medium-specific work is because such work incorporates a specific moment of ‘resistant partiality’, by generating its own temporality, its own memory, and therefore an economy of experience that is significantly different from the economy of experience imposed on us through the current conditions of labour. At the same time, however, I would insist that it is impossible to go back to the ideas and categories that were used traditionally to describe medium-specific work.²¹⁴

Verwoert describes the conditions whereby this new economy of experience is structured as:

[w]ork [...] made by people who are returning to the medium of sculpture using criteria developed in conceptual practices, performance or installation art. As these criteria are applied to sculpture, it becomes a vehicle, through which concepts of ‘relationality’ taken from performance or installation art, can be reformulated. In some cases it seems as if these concepts can even be formulated in a more intense and condensed way in sculpture through both abstraction and work using specific materials than has been possible in certain forms of relational aesthetics.²¹⁵

Verwoert describes a new conception of sculpture – in a post-medium, post-conceptual condition²¹⁶ – informed by the experience generated in performance and installation art, a ‘condensed’ relational agency; why the sculptural object – past its demise and refutation in the 1960s and 70s – should re-emerge as the means through which such a performance would be played out (and as means not only to renegotiate performance by and large but objecthood as well) is attributed to the fluid, versatile status of contemporary sculpture which redefines its legacy of autonomy with new terms, while negotiating its form as a dispersed, architecturalised network of relations and delocalised practices that both employ and boycott the language of global capital. These relations are ‘played out’ in a hybrid type of performative object or sculptural performance that does not represent relations as much as enact spatial experiments.

²¹⁴ Verwoert, op. cit., p. 30.

²¹⁵ Ibid. p. 30.

²¹⁶ As mentioned in footnote No. 6, the ‘post-medium condition’ was coined by Rosalind Krauss. The ‘post-conceptual’ phase of the work of art is articulated in Peter Osborne’s essay ‘Where is the Work of Art?’ in Landrum and Whittaker, op. cit., pp. 13-29.

Both essays provide an insight into a new expression of performativity in the space of sculpture. These ideas shed light on conditions and changes that have been felt intensely in the art production of the last five decades or more; not only that ideas and experiences from performance have irrevocably entered the space of sculpture, but the contemporary sculptural object (the peculiar assemblage of ready-mades, sculpted matter, industrial material, technologies and text) has increasingly come to signify roles and directions mapped in the space between viewer and object, demanding actions and attitudes (political identities), inviting strategically invented responses (neither purely aesthetic nor strictly conceptual), neither entirely located in the space nor in the object (and thus partly disabling the responsive pattern of materiality and phenomenological corporeality) but instead inhabiting a virtual space that grafts objecthood with relationality and thus presents a hybrid that attends to the diverse times and spaces, the *scenes* of dispersed contemporary subjectivity.

This sculptural space where performance, relationality and aesthetics have become inextricably entwined is perplexing for both art criticism and the viewing subject. It presents a challenge; the evaluation of what an object *does* to its audience and by extension to the world that it addresses and in what *ways* it addresses and affects its viewers – these ways being the agent of change in artistic practice. That the relation between the work of art and its viewer is in constant renegotiation is not only a historical reality but also attested by a modified sensuous experience. I am arguing the case for contemporary sculpture that ‘performs’ in terms that transcend theatre, or indeed the condition that Michael Fried warned against in his essay *Art and Objecthood*, which threatened the autonomy of the work of art and its instantaneous (and transcendent) reception. The performance embedded in new sculpture is a condition of expansion, such as a historical phase in its development, one in which the object of sculpture absorbs a social environment and critiques certain modes of spectatorship – and thus imitates the dominant structures and modes of being that permeate contemporary life.

In this context Peter Osborne’s analysis of the post-conceptual phase of the work of art is illuminating. Firstly, Osborne posits that the ‘*spatial specificity*’ of contemporary art is invariably dependent on contemporary urban form (as the

phenomenon of contemporary art itself is ‘*constitutively urban*’);²¹⁷ Then he suggests that its spatialization is conditioned by three mediating practices: *architecturalisation*, *textualisation* and *transnationalisation*.²¹⁸ These three mediating practices are indicative of art’s ‘contemporaneity’ – understood as ‘*its capacity to articulate, reflect upon and transfigure new forms of social experience*’;²¹⁹ they are indicative of the post-conceptual condition of art.²²⁰ It is especially art’s architecturalization, however, that Osborne stresses in relation to its post-conceptual phase (with architecture as a ‘signifier of the social’).²²¹ Architecture exemplifies a distinctive kind of distributed materialization (as in the relation between plan and building) that contemporary art morphs into, specified as the ability of individual artworks to span across spaces, practices and material forms (as in the distribution of a single ‘project’ across sketches, photographs, documentation, video etc. or variable installations of all or combinations of the previous material). This condition illustrates contemporary art’s intrinsically conceptual dimension but also offers insight into an embedded dialectic between aesthetic and conceptual aspects of the work.²²² In these architectural determinations Osborne sees a convergent moment: ‘*They raise the possibility of ‘post-autonomous’ works, or at least, a post-autonomous functioning: works that would partake in the dialectic of autonomy – that is, in the dialectic of art and anti-art within the work – in such a way as to mediate it reflectively with the contradictory social functions of art space, to determinate practical as well as artistic effect.*’²²³

²¹⁷ Ibid. p. 13.

²¹⁸ Ibid. p. 13.

²¹⁹ Ibid. p. 14.

²²⁰ ‘Contemporary art is ‘post’-conceptual to the extent that it registers the historical experience of Conceptual art, as a self-conscious movement, as the experience of the impossibility/fallacy of the *absolutisation* of anti-aesthetic, in conjunction with a recognition of an ineliminably conceptual *aspect to all art.*’ Ibid. p. 15.

²²¹ ‘The term ‘architecture’ is distributed *across* conception and materialisation, in the traditional senses. [...] More generally, architecture stands for a *material organisation of social space in the present* at both conceptual and practical levels. Post-minimalist contemporary art (from ‘object’ to ‘field’) aspires to a *free formation of social space* in this dual imaginary and actual sense. We can see the consequences of this ambiguous architectural spatial form for the ontology of the artwork when we look at the place of architecturalisation in the history of contemporary art. [...] a form of artistic spatiality beyond, yet nonetheless still tied to, ‘objects’.’ Ibid. p. 19. Osborne characterizes art’s relation to architecture as ‘appropriative.’

²²² Osborne’s analysis relates Robert Smithson’s concept of the ‘Nonsite’ (see below) to this dialectic: ‘The specifically spatial aspect of this dialectic of the aesthetic and conceptual was conceived by Robert Smithson, forty years ago, as a dialectic of site and non-site.’ Ibid. p. 15.

²²³ Osborne writes: ‘[...] architectural aspects of contemporary art problematise artistic autonomy insofar as, on Theodor W. Adorno’s account at least, powerlessness is the price of autonomy.’ Ibid. p. 18.

The spatial dimension of contemporary artistic production is explored throughout *Nonsite to Celebration Park: Essays on Art and the Politics of Space*, a collection of essays edited by Alex Landrum and Ed Whittaker. The title of the book denotes an understanding of the spatial condition of art today as the productive zone between Robert Smithson's concept of the 'Nonsite,' as a quality of virtual transversal of representational or social spaces that still resonates across artistic disciplines today²²⁴ and Pierre Huyghe, whose *Streamside Day* video and kinetic installation at the Van Abbe Museum in 2004 deployed the topos of the 'Celebration Park' – a domestic development in the outskirts of New York. In their introduction to the book the editors note: '*Huyghe [...] is also, like Smithson, concerned with the psychology of space. The difference is that Huyghe understands the business of 'immersion' as a total, democratic kind of space and consequently the way that contemporary art spaces are constructed and 'work' as affective environments.*'²²⁵

Staging and the construction of 'affective environments' are currently explored in a number of exhibitions, which address sculpture as productive of a certain kind of empowered space.²²⁶ In *Various Stages*, an exhibition organized by the Kunsthaus Dresden in 2012, a statement reads: '*[T]he exhibition investigates the stage both as an independent sculptural form as well as a place of interaction in which the audience is an integral part. Since every artistic expression is performative in its gesture, an artwork necessarily creates receptive and affective relations.*'²²⁷

²²⁴ In *Nonsite to Celebration Park* the 'Nonsite' is described as 'the place that is not itself.' As described in Landrum and Whittaker's introduction, 'Robert Smithson considered Nonsites as certain sectors of territory that mapped the land-space of the de-natured post industrialised landscape of New Jersey.' Ibid. p. 3.

²²⁵ Ibid. p. 6. This latter observation echoes Phillips' characterization of 'the immersive and performative tendencies of contemporary global art' (Phillips, op. cit., p. 27).

²²⁶ For example the *Affective Turns?* Exhibition at Pepin Moore Gallery in Los Angeles (March/April 2012) organised by Phil Chang. Chang writes: '*[...] affect [...] occupies a crucial point in the inextricable relationship between art and politics. As a noun, affect inhabits the site of the psychological subject (emotions); as a verb, affect refers to effect (actions). Most importantly, as the critic Stephen Shaviro argues, affect is useful in how it functions as a matter of "manner" rather than essence, concerning itself not with what something is but how it is, or, more exactly, how a thing affects and is affected by other things, and hence raising the question of the relation between what it is and what it does.*' From the gallery website, accessed in May 2012 at <http://www.pepinmoore.com/PM/AffectiveTurnsPR.html>

²²⁷ *Various Stages – Bedingte Bühnen* (3 August–14 October 2012), accessed in May 2012 at <http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/terms-of-exhibiting-producing-and-performing-a-three-part-exhibition-series/>. 'Performative,' in this context and as previously described, expresses both the *performed action* of viewing as much as the tension from the object, but this oscillation between performance (as singular event) and performative (as repetition) tends to become absorbed in

In this last sentence the key relations at play within contemporary sculpture come out. The performative expression that is intrinsic in the placing of objects in space and in the way they are directed at the viewer creates artworks as scenes and encounters. As zones of in-between-ness, as agents of an insubordinate materiality, or as autonomous stages for democratic rehearsal, these scenes of encounter involve the viewing subject in a joint speculation on novel spatial, affective and social relations. This distinctively sculptural performativity recasts a sense of expanded objecthood – and departs from the conventional designation of ‘theatricality’ – as an actively discursive medium that admits the subject in its stage. A corporeal and spectatorial self-awareness enables a convergence of political and affective consciousness – insofar as *the political starts in the way we sense things*.²²⁸ This condition is mapped in the simultaneous states of centeredness and de-centeredness – as exemplified in the ventures of installation art, where a conflation of subject positions supersedes rational models of the subject and empowers the subject to rehearse its states of being and becoming.

referencing social space, where a distinction between conditions of performance and performativity are often conflated.

²²⁸ This phrase comes from an accompanying statement for my performance *Case-Study: the Nature Partisan*, which I will outline in the next chapter.



*The material of art is the legacy of inhumanity. All artists want to cure this demonic legacy. But because they are not healers and at the same time because they want, while working on the wound, to announce to their viewers and to themselves their act, they become confused, they are distracted, the cure of the demonic legacy slips away from them, and we end up being but absent-minded stretcher-bearers.*²²⁹

- George Lappas

²²⁹ From an interview with Professor George Lappas in Artnews newspaper on April 30th 2010 (my translation), accessed online in May 2012 at http://www.artnews.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=726:2010-04-30-09-03-13&catid=42:ellineskalitexnes&Itemid=401

CHAPTER THREE

-VIRTUAL SCHEMATA-

In this chapter I will present a series of projects that I realized as part of my research into the dimension of staging in sculpture.²³⁰ I will initially outline certain points of origin that led to consequent stages of my research project in order to trace a genealogy of practice. In a passage through interrelated areas of interest, I investigate conditions of spectatorship in a set of experimentations; a performative encounter with nature inserts questions of role and enactment into an area traditionally linked with aesthetics, grafting the aesthetic with the performative. In the fifth and sixth essays of the chapter I will analyze an element of re-enactment in certain practices that resonates with ideas of repetition and the enactment of memory – as well as a restorative, phenomenological re-appearance that I will elaborate in the seventh essay. I relate the idea of re-enactment to Brian Massumi's concept of reenaction that is active in perception and affect, and the concept of the restorative to Leo Bersani's combined reading of Melanie Klein and Marcel Proust. Parallel to this I will describe my encounters with a number of works by other artists, in particular Olafur Eliasson and James Coleman, which informed my research by offering materialized examples of staged encounters. In the last essay of the chapter I describe my encounter with James Coleman's work *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S.*, where an emergence of memory is triggered through the encounter with the work. This latter work is exemplary in the affective resonances that it creates as staging, mode of operation and imagery.

1. The Raining Room

In the autumn of 2000, I began a degree in sculpture at the studio of George Lappas in the Athens School of Fine Arts. The practice in the studio was carried out through a series of group presentations where the students and tutors convened to discuss new work. In the intervals between each presentation the process would each time be

²³⁰ Due to the limited space available in this thesis a complementary documentation of other works is appended at the end of this volume.

triggered by an exercise, a proposition or sentence that posed a situation that the students grappled with to produce new work and which stimulated particular states of mind. These cycles of exercises ran for the whole duration of the degree; although the students were not confined to them for their projects, they offered a prolific platform to create work and present it to the group whose creative attention was concurrently focused on the same challenge. The ensuing gatherings provided a productive point of intersubjective cross-fertilization for our practice and enabled a particular, affirmative process, which, far from excluding criticism, generated an accelerated evolution and allowed different methodologies to resonate. This process yielded a discipline.

Examples of these exercises are: *the equivalence*, *the street corner*, *the threshold and the reservoir*, *forms of possession*, and the one I will speak of here, *the Being*.

The Being was one of the first exercises that I took part in while attending the studio. My response to it at the time was spurred by a latent preoccupation, in the course of my art education,²³¹ about the way (the relevance, the complexity, the resonance, the *accuracy*) in which artistic practice moulds images, objects and states that portray a *condition*. By ‘portraying’ I did not think of representation as a universal ‘image’ of the human being, rather a genuine encounter with humanity’s need to ‘represent’ (interpret, transubstantiate, understand) its own coordinates from a remove constructed by art. This need, this urge and the documentation of this performance generated affective resonances. Staging an art encounter offers the viewer a platform for an interaction between a specular overview (that includes the viewing subject) and affected sensation (that produces the subject, and loops back to affected vision).

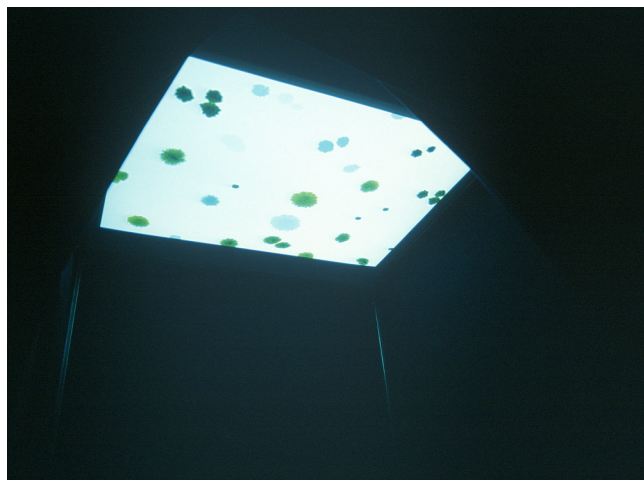
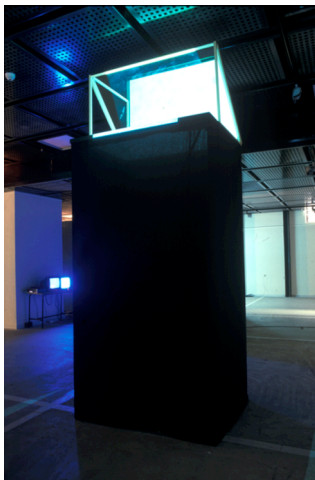
From this almost anthropological viewpoint on the ontology of art, I thought of the human being and its need to create a place, a space in which to be; the primary condition that emerged in my thoughts was the connection to nature, a point of reference that was also latent in my practice. I thought of the activity of *composing* our environment, a continuous operation of *creating one’s own surroundings*²³²

²³¹ See also the description of the ‘language’ problem in the essay ‘A metaphor and a gap’ in the first chapter.

²³² I later came across this notion, which emerged from my work at the time, in the writings of Olafur Eliasson, with whose work I felt a structural affinity. I will describe his practice in the fourth essay of this chapter.

through which we adjust the world to our needs and domesticate it. These resulting customised ‘personal spaces’ had an *aesthetic dimension* of a personal experience; I imagined their subject as a viewer of his/herself, as a self-spectator of a self-made world.²³³

The piece that I made was called *Raining Room*; it was a dark cabin, 2.5 meters tall and 1.3 by 1.3 meters wide, containing a seat for one viewer. The ceiling of the cabin was covered by a screen, on which a video was projected through an angled mirror affixed on top of the structure. The viewer would sit and watch the moving image above his/her head; green drops falling on the ceiling, expanding and disappearing on a bright white surface, in a continuous loop of a virtual, mute rain.



Pictures No. 4 and 5: *Raining Room* and *Raining Room (close-up)*, 2003,²³⁴ Video projection, steel frame, mirror, fabric, screen, seat, dimensions 2,5m x 1,3m x 1,3m.

Raining Room was my first installation work with the topic of nature and its ad hoc re-arrangement. What it triggered in my practice was a configuration, or rather, an imagination of the work as the outcome of an invisible action, or desire, on the part of

²³³ This description of my own process while working with this particular exercise reflects the way in which the exercises functioned as a trigger, rather than a subject: from an abstract notion one would turn towards a personal repository and draw ideas and approaches that were far from being implied or instructed. In what I describe here some of these thoughts preceded and some followed the actual work that I produced; although I lay out these thoughts for their record value in tracing back the early questions of my research, the concern which permeated these questions was more about the *apparition* of the poetic image and therefore, was only met with the work itself.

²³⁴ I made the first version of *Raining Room* in 2001 and a more technically advanced version in 2003 as part of my degree show. The photographs come from this latter installation.

the viewer (the *Being*). This piece was a turning point within the course of my work; its artificial nature and the enclosure as *a space for* the viewer gave rise to ideas about the impact of these spatial conditions on the viewer. Thinking of it in retrospect, it alluded to the personal space that the aesthetic experience builds; and here I locate why it was a springboard for my work and later research: it functioned on both the spatial and the symbolic level – the actual and the virtual – and staged within this intersection an encounter between nature and culture. As I continue with my description I will endeavour to identify the implications of this condition.

2. A few origins

A picture of my father looking out over a landscape in the mountains; it was taken in the early 1970's in north-west Greece where he worked at the time, and where he regularly went hiking in the pristine nature of Epirus. He developed this black and white photograph himself. In doing so he allowed a little less light on his own figure, maybe by holding his finger between the lamp and the emulsified paper; the result was a faint aura around his body. He gazes into the valley that spreads underneath him, his face turned away.

This image, among others that he produced at the time, stayed with me as a faint memory from childhood. When I happened to see it again years later I suddenly recognized that it was something about the turned-away gaze that had made an impression on me. This was not a usual type of image from a family album in the Seventies; nor was it typical hiker's portraiture. Somehow I could sense the staging behind this picture – doubting that he was accompanied on these hikes and that he would turn away from the photographer – how he would place the camera on a stone or a tree and pose.



Picture No. 6: *Dad Wandering*, digitally edited black & white photograph, (courtesy of Evangelos Pasidis).²³⁵

I looked into the photographic genre of outdoor self-portraiture in extent since then. In such pictures the staging is innocent; it reclaims something elevated in an ad hoc manner. Presence, experience and art are all portrayed here. It originates, no doubt, in romantic portraiture;²³⁶ through photography it becomes a testimony to an experience, more than an image from a landscape or a trip. It becomes a gesture within a colloquial language of modernity. When compared to the painterly representation of the sublime experience of nature, laden with historical and socio-political meanings, this plain, unassuming photographic practice seems to reclaim a human moment.

I travelled to the same area in January 2005. During this journey I made a series of photographs and videos toying with the figure of the *Nature Tourist*, as subject of portraiture amid props and objects outdoors. This footage was a documentation of various experimentations combining landscape, objects and the viewer/performer. It

²³⁵ The tint on the photograph is my intervention; I used this image as press material for my performance *Case-Study: the Nature Partisan* in Austria in 2005.

²³⁶ This type of portraiture is characteristic of A K Dolven's work. Andrea Schlieker describes: 'The image of a figure turning its back on the viewer and facing a natural spectacle is of course a topos made familiar by the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich [...] for the celebration of the – in Friedrich's case a deeply religious but also mystical – fusion between man and sublime nature.' Andrea Schlieker, *A K Dolven: Moving Mountain*, Bergen Kunsthall, 2004, p. 11.

featured scenes of domestic surroundings cropping up on a river bank; a table and chair on a road side with a view on snow-capped mountains; drinking tea with porcelain cups in the middle of the countryside; projecting slides on a field at night.



Pictures **No. 7** and **8**: *Voidomatis Scene*, digital photograph, 2005, and *Critique in Canyon*, digital photograph, 2005.

In *Critique in Canyon*, one of the pictures in the series, the viewer depicted in the landscape has turned her face away from the majestic scenery. The experience of nature is now the object of staging, in terms of place (the Vikos Gorge where this is set is one of the most awe-inspiring sceneries in the country), and means (the viewer is reading the ‘manual’ of the sublime, Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*). Serving as footnotes to my research, these experimentations examined the place of the spectator in a contemporary experience of nature. The nature-tourist photographs accentuate the moment of survey that maps the self-reflexivity of spectatorship; through an arrangement of objects contrived in the landscape a three-dimensional element interferes in the iconology of this genre with spatial claims, demanding a collapse of its two-dimensionality.

This was my first research trip, initially triggered by the plan to visit and document the Pavlos Vrellis Greek History Museum in Ioannina – another distant visual memory from my childhood.²³⁷ Created by the sculptor Pavlos Vrellis, the museum represents scenes of Greek history in wax. It is arranged as a passage through themes – around 37 compositions containing 150 wax effigies – portraying famous characters from antiquity to the 20th century, with an emphasis on the Greek revolution in the 19th century – a particular inspiration to Vrellis, who privately built and crafted the museum.²³⁸ I was drawn by the blunt artificiality of these scenes, their acute grotesqueness and extreme theatrical manufacturing, a staging so contrived that it became a contemporary *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a total work of art. At first this leg of the trip seemed to be antipodal to the post-romantic nature-tourist iconology of the landscape photographs. But it turned out that they are thematically interrelated: at the heart of the Vrellis project was a true belief in the convincing appearance of these scenes, although the result of a blatant mise-en-scene; in the nature tourist pictures,

²³⁷ The first museum, which I had visited as a child, was destroyed by fire. The museum was re-opened in its present location in Bizani, 7km south of the city of Ioannina in northwest Greece. The first museum was founded in 1983.

²³⁸ Astonishingly, this massive project is almost entirely the work of the artist himself. Not only the contents of the Museum but literally the building, in all the manual work it involved, was the labour of Vrellis himself. Even the materials contained in the scenes (tree branches, plantation) were brought from the actual locations depicted. I have drawn this information from the website of the Museum: <http://www.vrellis.org/>

the experience of nature was engineered – its immersive, physical quality only existing within the dimension of photography.



Picture No. 9: *Ali Pasa Slaughter (detail)*, from the Pavlos Vrellis Wax Museum, digital photograph, 2005.

At that time I was beginning my research project, and this museum proved to be a unique case study of staged encounters. The building was converted into a labyrinthine network of spaces, where the visitors would ascend and descend dark paths and corridors that would take them through scenes – battles, slaughters, ambushes – in half-lit chambers and cave-like environments. In fact Vrellis treated this large stone building like one unified three-dimensional space, creating a route in its interior, winding the disoriented viewers through the course of Greek history. These tableaux, where real objects and wax effigies muddle the impression between real and artificial, are decidedly grotesque; yet I noticed that the majority of the visitors was enthralled by the scenes and behaved in a reverent way, whispering as they walked around the compound.

Wax figures and museums (wax sculpture in general) were later to play a particular role in my research. But at that time my interest had turned towards the subject of the aesthetic of nature. While delving into its literary background, I was looking at works

of contemporary photography, video and sculpture that evolved the iconology of landscape painting and the ideas behind it, as for example in the work of Mariele Neudecker and A K Dolven. There was a quest for the sublime that these new practices remodelled, but from a double vantage point: the sensibility is re-configured within a mechanism of exposure that does not exclude (or rather, it cannot exclude) the awareness of spectatorship. As such these works advance the experience of double survey intrinsic within this position.

With this speculation I would like to touch upon the performative element in the encounter with landscape implied in these contemporary practices. In the next passage I will explore this element by recounting one of my projects, which I realized a few months after the Epirus trip.

3. Case - Study: the Nature Partisan

In the spring of 2005 I was invited to create a performance piece for the Toihaus Theater in Salzburg, Austria. My piece was going to be one of a series of performances created by visual artists: the idea was conceived by Arthur Zgubic, the stage designer of Toihaus Theater, who curated a series of performances every year where he invited visual artists to produce a performance piece for the theatre. His interest was in how visual artists would deal with the challenge of creating a live performance; this gave them the opportunity to set up a scene, grapple with the theatrical space and make live work (or at times, work that would be enacted in the presence of the audience.)

That year, Zgubic had planned a series with the title '*The Partisans of the Biedermeier*'.²³⁹ Most of the artists that he commissioned were broadly engaged with performance, as in video work and choreography. When I first discussed my work with Arthur I expressed my interest in an analysis of spectatorship through the topic of nature. The concept for the series that he curated – the Biedermeier – marked the middle-class sensibility of central Europe in the first half of the 19th century; the

²³⁹ 'The Partisans of the Biedermeier': a series of performances with visual artists; Curator: Arthur Zgubic; Production: Toihaus - Theater am Mirabellplatz, Salzburg/Austria.

reference was of a highly stylized and, in a way, aestheticized lifestyle. It seemed like a perfect match with the image of the romantic spectator of nature.

The aesthetic sensibility towards nature had been a longstanding preoccupation in my practice: as a portrait of a human condition (as in *Raining Room*) to the challenge of the sublime and notions of role, presence and subjectivity. I was drawn to performance as a medium in which to explore these issues and this platform seemed a fertile ground; the place itself as a landscape – the location of the city in the setting of the nearby Alps – offered a fitting backdrop for the project. I was already thinking in two modes: the space of the theatre, the stage and the spatial coordinates of the black box, and the openness of nature in a most vivid presentation.

I was intrigued by the way that the Austrians related to their landscape. I could sense a particular perception of locality and the environment as defined by the specificity of the mountain landscape and terms of height, distance and view; there was a TV weather forecast programme early in the morning with a 360° view from a camera rotating on a mountain top; there was a kind of spherical view, sometimes a vertical view. The temperature was mapped by altitude rather than map-width coordinates. This spatial mapping was a novel experience, especially since it was a pictorial representation that was stereotypically combined with this mountain-culture. I was coming from a country almost encircled by the sea, yet the illustrations in children's books would feature the Alpine landscape as the icon of utmost natural beauty; the pristine valleys and snow-capped mountains with their idyllic chalets, the plains and forests of central Europe dominated a generic definition of *landscape*. These were powerful visual associations; did this scenery offer itself as a 'formula,' a prototype, or was it a socio-political, historical authority that made this landscape an icon?

I spoke to people from the area about their relationship to nature – among them, a mountain climber and an architect. In the environs of Salzburg there were areas that attested to a cultural construction of nature. Aigen Park was one example; in this

suburb of Salzburg there is a park dating from the 18th century, a landscaped area with brooks, a waterfall and a cave.²⁴⁰



Picture 10: *Aigen Interview*, video still, 2005.

During the three weeks that I spent in the area I travelled around the city exploring the environment and various mountain locations, and made extensive documentation from these outings. This provided valuable visual material for the project as it was shaping. The theatre was a construction site: I could use the equipment, collaborate with the technicians and the film editing team, have music made by the theatre musician, garments made by the costume designer; the space was a versatile platform. Above all, working together with the actors to negotiate the happenings and plan the actions of the performance was key to crystallizing the project and co-creating their roles.

I decided to reproduce the outdoor viewing indoors. Large framed screens were placed on two adjacent sides of the stage, on the left and back side, at a distance of

²⁴⁰ It is said that in this cave many intellectuals and artists of 18th century Salzburg formed gatherings, W. A. Mozart being one of them. *Aigen interview* was filmed in this cave.

less than a meter from the walls; using six wide-angle projectors, a panoramic landscape was projected on the screens. These back-projections were fitted so as to create a continuous image of a scenery; this was a hybrid landscape, which I had digitally edited into a seamless strip, combining postcard-type scenic landscapes together with a scene of a bleak volcanic smoke. Opposite the stage, on the side where the entrance was, three oblong light transparencies depicted a waterfall, a sunset and a seascape. On the fourth side, at the right of the stage, there was a large suspended screen with a video projection; another, round screen, was hanging above the right corner of the stage. Various props were scattered around the space – among others a translucent, backlit tent with a forest-printed fabric, camping gear and gardening tools – which were employed in different actions and ‘tableaux vivants.’

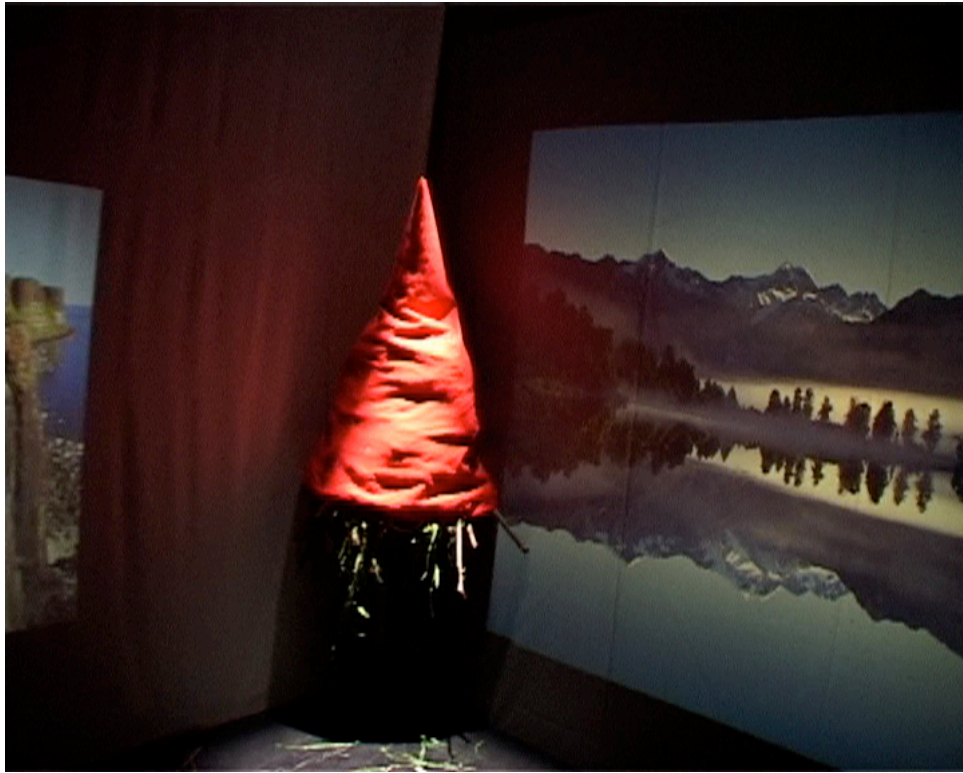


Picture 11: *Partisans – Blue Screen*, video still, from *Case-Study: the Nature Partisan*, 2005.

A triple cinema-style seat, elevated on a plinth, was the starting point of the performance. The audience who came in found the three actors seating there, watching themselves on the video screen watching the landscape: the video was an edit combining animated images of colour-saturated landscapes, footage shot around

Salzburg, clips from the TV weather forecast programme and the figures of the performers shot on blue screen, pasted on the moving image. Live and on screen, they were nature spectators, with local-style costumes denoting peculiar roles, in an in-between positioning between documented (and mutated) landscape and themselves as audience: this was the first tableau.

The audience came into this scene and scattered all around, trying to locate the action and the spots of interest. As soon as the actors started to move, several actions began to alternate: a role-play with three personas that alluded to a domesticated nature-tourist experience, orchestrated as an indoor ‘outdoor viewing’ modified into a DIY landscape. These ‘events’ took place with the aid of natural ‘ingredients’ (soil, tree branches, grass): a mountain-climbing action on a makeshift earth pile, a promenade around the scenery looking at the view, the wrapping of one of the performers into a bundle with grass and twigs, disabling him from his role. The actions were propelled by the music and interrupted by citations. The music (created by Herbert Pascher after discussing the piece together) was a mixture of electronic music with alpine folk tunes. Its changing rhythms signalled changes of chapters and accelerations. The citations were extracts from books, describing natural elements or sceneries: a letter from Franz Schubert to his brother, a sentence from a play by Chekhov, extracts from Jules Supervielle’s poems read from ‘*The Poetics of Space*.’ For a few seconds a video extract from the ‘*Wizard of Oz*’ appeared on the round screen above the stage – where Dorothy invokes ‘*there is no place like home*.’ The actions went on for around 20 minutes; the performance culminated in a call for everyone, all ‘nature lovers,’ to sit down around a tablecloth spread on the floor of the space and have a picnic. As this happened the audience and actors joined in a convivial atmosphere, in the middle of the surrounding projected panorama; this continued well into the evening. This final tableau was a moment that framed an image and sealed the piece. It became the ‘outcome’ of the performance.



Pictures 12 and 13: *An die Ecke* and *Picnic im Toihaus*, video stills, from Case-Study: *the Nature Partisan*, performance, duration 20 min. Toihaus Theater Salzburg, 17 May 2005.

This project introduced useful tools into my research. The personas it devised, the relations and juxtapositions it portrayed, the assemblage of elements and modes of representation – within, outside, live, documented – of actors and objects made up an inventory of references, a network of scenes. It staged a mirror that reflected the *subject* through nature, and the subject reflected a *role*; and that in turn was a *representation* that strove to mutate. The social aspect of the milieu then shed a new light to the whole thing, breaking the illusion. During and after these 3 weeks when I produced *Case-Study: the Nature Partisan*, a stage was set for a dialogue into questions and research areas that emerged through the practice. To this day I view it as a fundamental part of my research, not least because it condensed thoughts and experiences that triggered new relations in my practice. It became a rhizome, a reference, a map and a methodology.

4. Creating one's surroundings

*But a new mode of direct action is emerging, the rebirth of a democratic mode and style, where everyone can create his personal environment out of impersonal subsystems, whether they are new or old, modern or antique.*²⁴¹

Ad hoc (=made for this purpose) is a way to come up with specific solutions corresponding to specific needs. The need of spatial self-determination is one of them, the need of creating one's own surroundings. An alternative arrangement of space can be devised out of existing material, which also serves as a liberating practice, as it functions outside of the mainstream socio-economic order of the production of spaces. There is a proliferation of practices in contemporary artistic production that seem to take after this ad hoc principle, often encountered in the constructed environment of three-dimensional installation or as documented in video works.²⁴² The work of art as an ad hoc configuration addresses several functions; the need to

²⁴¹ Charles Jencks, Nathan Silver, *Adhocism, the case for improvisation*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1972, p. 15.

²⁴² For example, the 5th Berlin Biennial of 2008 presented a number of such works, such as Ania Molska's double screen video *P=W:t (power)*, *W=F*s (work)* of 2007/8 and Kateřina Šedá's installation as part of her project *Over and Over* of 2008, in Skulpturenpark Berlin Zentrum.

shape the world in general and social space in particular, to deconstruct and re-arrange it according to one's needs – visual, spatial or affective – drives different spatial practices.²⁴³ De-territorializing and *re*-territorializing at the same time, this configuration of space becomes a creative language for the maker, and a rehearsal of an emancipatory space for the viewer.²⁴⁴

The connection created between the viewer and the space of the work of art is an area of pronounced interest for the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson. His installation works often address the viewer with their title, which encourages them to own what is happening in the work: '*Your chance encounter*,' '*Your Sun Machine*,' among others.²⁴⁵ This tactic predisposes the viewer towards the personal, corporeal, phenomenological experience of the work as his/her own product. Eliasson's work is centred on the viewer's perception; engaging the viewer with *phenomena-producer* sites, which reconstruct natural phenomena, he creates encounters that stimulate the body in an intensely affective way and at the same time reveal the way the works manipulate this sensation. There is no 'nature versus culture' pseudo-dilemma in his work, for he very transparently shows what his compositions are made of and how they operate, leaving the production of illusion for the viewer to experience as a whole.²⁴⁶ The staging of the encounter is thus exposed and becomes a functional part of the experience.

In this sense Eliasson's *Weather Project* was an exemplary work; the installation that the artist created in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in 2003 had a remarkable impact

²⁴³ This ad hoc activity spans outside the remit of mainstream art – an example being what is generally called 'outsider art.'

²⁴⁴ The work of Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal exemplifies this pursuit: 'Theatre of the Oppressed creates *spaces of liberty* where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it.' The statement by Boal is quoted in Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman. *A Boal Companion – Dialogues on theatre and cultural politics*, Routledge, 2006, p. 125.

²⁴⁵ 'Usually, they [the titles] are accompanied by a possessive pronoun – *your* – that places agency with the (collective) user, who is cast as actor and protagonist in shaping the engagement, performance, negotiation, or, as in this case, the spatio-temporal encounter with the physical world instigated by Eliasson's interventions.' Eve Blau, 'The Third Project,' in *Olafur Eliasson: Your Chance Encounter*, Lars Müller Publishers, 2010, p. 99.

²⁴⁶ Of particular interest are his ideas on the 'immune system' that art is involved in. As Eliasson writes: 'When a 'virus' such as the commodification of our senses attacks us, and the developing identity of the city's life are challenged, the immune system is (or should be) active in restoring a plausible dialogue involving some sense of resistance.' In Susan May, *Olafur Eliasson, The Weather Project*, Tate Publishing, London, 2003, p.137.

on its viewers, quite notably in the way they physically interacted with it. My own encounter with the huge, semi-circular shape, which reflected on the mirror surface that covered the ceiling of the hall, thus producing the image of an artificial sun, was the most direct and most transparent *artificial nature* that I had ever beheld. Its mechanics – the mechanics of an aesthetic experience – were so staged and exposed, at the same time creating a compelling, sublime effect, that they reached a level of methodological perfection. The impact of the artificial weather conditions, which urged the audience to ‘sunbathe’ lying on the ice-cold cement floor or to stand on the mezzanine-level balcony and ‘watch the sunset’ was achieved with an economy of means.

The artificiality of this construction being able to create an authentic impact on the senses – a feeling of the sublime – makes it a study of spectatorship par excellence. Susan May in her essay ‘*Meteorologica*’ writes:

[y]et the implication of transcendent experience at the core of the tradition is disrupted in his work by a deliberate exposure of the apparatus delivering this phenomenal matter. The clear evidence of pumps, piping and lamps purposely draws attention to a crucial aspect of Eliasson’s practice. By making us conscious of the construction so that we perceive the staging behind the representation, he also makes us conscious of the act of perception, of being caught in the moment of awareness.²⁴⁷

Eliasson’s methodology of staging the conditions for an ‘authentic encounter’ through ‘formal devices’²⁴⁸ dissects the viewer’s perception; in the moment of suspension between expectation and encounter he interjects distorted imageries of familiar things, which simultaneously pull the viewer in and distance him/her. In my encounter with the Weather Project, in the first, fleeting seconds that I went through the automatic doors on the level of the Turbine Hall, I had a sudden sense of something odd

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 17. She also remarks: ‘The primacy of the viewer’s body, along with his or her perception, position and orientation, has long maintained a critical role in Eliasson’s work. Altering spatial conditions enables the artist to play with ideas of reality, truth and representation [...] Wind streaming through an interior space or rain showers falling inside a gallery *accord moments of suspension between the expectation of experience and the authentic encounter* [my italics]. It is the interstice between the instinctual action of perception and the logic of comprehension that fascinates Eliasson. Experience is rendered both physiological and psychological in his works through an accentuation of the gap between the rational expectation of an occurrence and its correlation with the visceral experience of it. [...] Yet reality is contingent on the perceiver; it is not a fixed entity but a construct of our psyche, which is then projected back to the world through patterns of conduct and exchange with our surroundings.’ Ibid. pp. 19-20.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 23.

happening, but in its oddness, familiar; something that unwillingly penetrated my senses that I was not able to filter, momentarily. But it was not exactly a disagreeable sensation: rather a sense that something was following an automatic path of perception over which I did not have control. It was, in other words, *a spectatorship of perception*.²⁴⁹ a reciprocal movement between seeing and being affected, and re-enacting the affected vision (and sensation) to *watch it being produced*. Eliasson often stresses his fascination with this self-seeing being ‘aesthetically’ produced. Regarding the particular coordinates of seeing set up in museums, he remarks:

Exercising the integration of the spectator, or rather, the spectating act itself, as part of the museum’s undertaking has shifted the weight from the thing experienced to the experience itself. We stage the artefacts, but more importantly, we stage the way in which the artefacts are perceived. We cultivate nature into landscapes.²⁵⁰

In addition, Eliasson questions not only the act of seeing as culturally mediated, but the positions produced for viewers in encounters. In a conversation with Daniel Birnbaum, Eliasson says:

Olafur Eliasson: [...] In a sense, our spatial history has given us a language with which we see, and this language dominates our way of seeing. Like you say, the pieces discuss whether it’s possible to be a subject, and whether you’re being forced to see in a certain way.

Daniel Birnbaum: At a centre point you can almost get the feeling for a moment that it’s not you looking at the artwork. Sometimes the works are so subtle that they become an inverted visual experience, and it’s the other way round: you’re being seen by the situation. You’re not only a productive, phenomenologically active subject, you’re also produced by the piece. You become that subject-object, that ambiguous space where, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty would say, everything takes place.

Eliasson: I agree; you could even call it a double perspective.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Speaking about institutions’ ‘[c]ommodification of seeing and even of thinking,’ Eliasson says: ‘Since my work is very much about the process of seeing and experiencing yourself rather than the actual work of art, it’s problematic when your way of seeing is formalized through institutional structures – rather than your being encouraged to question your perceptual set-up.’ [In Obrist, op. cit., p. 16]. Here, seeing *spreads* onto the path of perception – a perceptual oscillation – and *witnesses* the *subject produced* by the encounter.

²⁵⁰ Madeleine Grynsztejn, Daniel Birnbaum, Michael Speaks, *Olafur Eliasson*, Phaidon Press, 2002, p. 127.

²⁵¹ Ibid. p. 20. See also Glossary for the ‘self-seeing’ position, p. 141.

The double perspective is not only a critical double-seeing but essentially a *tension* produced when the encounter is thus staged that it accords moments of immersion and collapse of distance and a reflection upon the coordinates of such a *becoming*. This blend reinforces, I think, the possibility of autopoietic transformation that is imminent in sculptural encounters, re-constituting the viewer in the context of this emerging awareness.

An artist who has similarly explored the production mechanics of the sublime in her work is Mariele Neudecker. Neudecker produces works that test the sensibility of the viewer. Her work ‘*Over and Over, Again and Again*’ is a sculpture in three glass cases containing a three-dimensional model of a landscape, alluding to the romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. The object is immersed into an artificial mist that evokes the scenery of those romantic paintings, creating their equivalent in sculptural form, in a miniature scale that toys with ideas of architectural models. The work stages the way our senses are seduced, manipulated into seduction by a circuit of associations, which invariably points to the viewer’s perception. Neudecker and Eliasson are both examples of artists whose strategy of staging an encounter aims to expose how our perceptual response to art works; there is a point where a staging of *experience*, a ‘staging of affect,’ becomes obvious to the viewer – and this moves the register away from merely ‘distancing techniques’ according to the Brechtian paradigm. The ‘double perspective’ that I quote above in Eliasson’s description is a moment of *auto-affect* – of twofold affectivity – produced by encounters.²⁵²

The impact of this staged encounter triggers an affective resonance that accompanies the gradual awareness of the mechanisms that engineer these effects. The implication of natural beauty and the sublime in our affective constitutions crafts the effect of the work with a minor degree of emotional charge: these sculptures resemble disinterested, technological versions of the psychological landscapes that in older epochs consolidated an aesthetic sensibility. The staged encounter opens up a site of

²⁵² ‘*Auto-affect*’ is described by Simon O’Sullivan: ‘[t]his third kind of knowledge, or special kind of thought, that arises from the second, and that collapses distances and operates through leaps and hiatuses, has also a privileged relation with the first, albeit the first seen with clarity and precision (it is if you like ourselves seeing ourselves clearly). The joy produced by this third kind of knowledge is a kind of auto-affect (a beatitude).’ O’Sullivan, op. cit., p. 43.

negotiation between the visual leverage and its affective by-products and the expansive spectatorship that becomes a platform for a self-seeing awareness.

5. Virtual Repetition

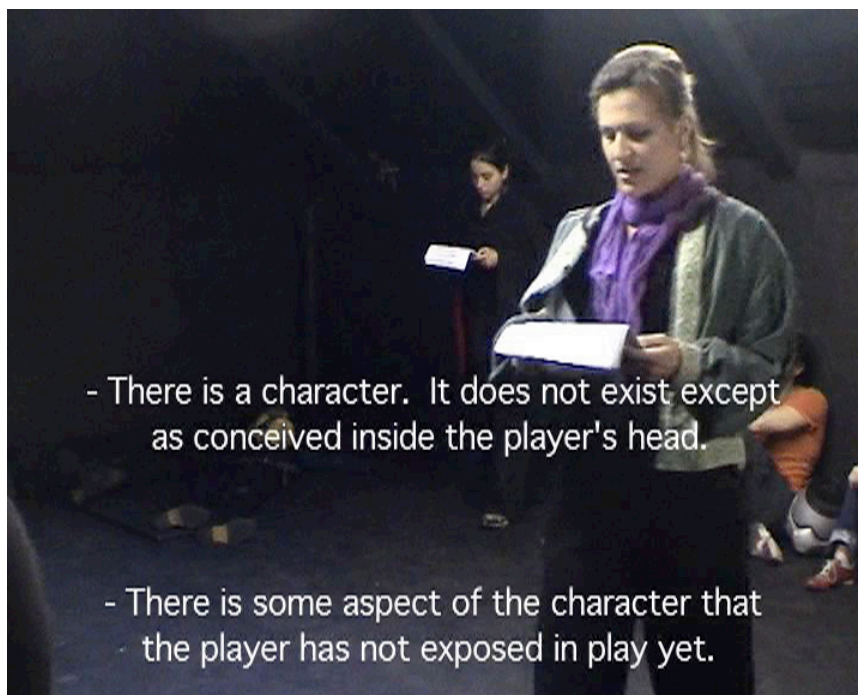
Repetition and reenaction are aspects of the cognitive and affective constitutions of our experience; for Gilles Deleuze, '[a]rt [...] repeats all the repetitions, by virtue of an internal power.'²⁵³ In Brian Massumi's explorations into the biological processes of cognition, *reenaction* is a virtual doubling of an action: '*In what we call thinking, the acting out of the movement is inhibited, resulting in what Bergson calls a "nascent action," or "virtual movement."* [...] *Action is only half the event: action-reenaction; rhythm-reverberation; point, virtual counterpoint.*'²⁵⁴

In art as a site where experience is re-enacted, the act of repeating an experience in order to correct it has strong ritual implications. It is a corrective impulse within cultural activities – a sublimating drive both in making art and engaging with it. It resonates ancient traditions and ceremonies in a function of reparation and exorcism, a regulatory, propitiatory call in advance of the occurrence of events. This function bifurcated into two distinct spheres: art and religion; there are residues of these functions in art. Several contemporary practices, mostly part of a performative game culture, reflect this need to re-enact in order to look anew, to play a role in order to transcend it and to inhabit a virtual environment in order to own it. This trend experiments with immersive experiences, engaging the viewer/participant in activities where interactions of role, place and presence transform the space of the practice, or game, into an imaginary stage.

²⁵³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, op. cit., p. 365.

²⁵⁴ Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, The MIT Press, 2011, pp. 114-115. Massumi describes the concept of 'reenaction' through the research of the philosopher William James, among others: '[M]ore than a hundred years before mirror neurons were discovered, James observed that every perception of a movement directly "awakens in some degree the actual movement" perceived (James 1950, 526). "Every possible feeling," James continues, "produces a movement, and that movement is a movement of the entire organism, and of each of its parts" (372). "A process set up anywhere reverberates everywhere" (381).' Ibid. p. 114.

The 'vlogger' (video blogger)²⁵⁵ is one of these cases. By constructing a virtual persona while often remaining physically invisible – concealing identity traits like sex, race and age – the vlogger constructs an identity through the medium of the moving image and releases it in the open communication of the world wide web. One might say that the 'rhizomatic' connection that Deleuze and Guattari envisioned, or the 'construction of subjectivity' that Guattari explored, are both materialized in this trend – although in peculiar ways.²⁵⁶ Despite the heterogeneous, trivial and often arbitrary material accumulated in this communication super-highway (or maybe, precisely *because* of this heterogeneity), this material horizontally connects virtual fabrications contrived in a spirit of playful experimentation.



²⁵⁵ 'Vlogs' (=video weblogs) are websites where people upload entries in video format. 'Weblog = a website on which visitors can record points of interest or information about themselves or other sites.' The definition comes from the *Penguin Complete English Dictionary*, Penguin, London 2006, p. 1598.

²⁵⁶ The 'rhizome' is a concept employed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, especially in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Guattari analyzed the 'construction of subjectivity' in *Chaosmosis*.



Pictures 14 and 15: *Sacrificing Character Integrity (1 and 2)*, video stills from performance, duration 15 min. From *Chimera* exhibition at 148B Gallery, London, 2006.

In a performance titled *Sacrificing Character Integrity* I used imagery and internet dialogues from virtual gaming platforms and in particular from LARP games (Live Action Role Playing games),²⁵⁷ a type of live role-play where a team of players reenact the actions of the game outdoors, in battles and strategic formations.²⁵⁸ The performance took place as part of a group show in a gallery in London. I converted the space into a black box, covering it with wallpaper throughout, including all its architectural details and protrusions like metal beams, skylight frames and electrical fittings, and painted it black. The only areas that I left uncovered were a few stencilled 'holes' on the wallpaper in the shape of figures – 'Larpers' in scenes of battle. There were two wax dummies on the floor dressed as role-players. The performance took place inside this space; four performers – some dressed in black cloaks like role-players – moved around the space in a circular way without

²⁵⁷ 'A role-playing game (RPG) is a type of game in which players assume the roles of characters and collaboratively create narratives. Gameplay progresses according to a predetermined system of rules and guidelines, within which players may improvise freely. Player choices shape the direction and outcome of role-playing games.' From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role-playing_game, accessed in 2006.

²⁵⁸ See the passage '*The Role Player*' where I describe my experience from witnessing the live game.

interacting or making eye contact with each other; they carried printed texts from which they cited lines from larping blogs, often overlapping with each other's voice, announcing various principles of the game, reiterating the theme of 'character integrity.'

The construction of these roles was a means to re-activate pre-existing dialogues and patterns of relations from virtual, invisible confrontations and to enact them in a new live context. The performance remained stripped of any real game action; what remained was the ongoing negotiation and 'building up' of the identities, the construction of a virtual, improvisational self with its own rules. Its visual residues appeared in the different, disparate materializations of the figures across the space of the work.



Picture 16: *Amarnath*, video still, duration 3 min., 2007.

Amarnath is a video work where layers of virtual roles interlace with fragmented narratives from real events – in this case the ascent to Amarnath cave in Kashmir, a pilgrimage in the Himalayas. A voiceover in Greek, the English subtitles and the alternation of images function at different speeds, leaving gaps and discontinuities of

narrative, as in a virtual roaming from place to place. Wax-modelled mountains are projected with videos of real mountains; a sacrificial scene is projected through broken pieces of mirror, hovering in space and joining, from time to time, as jigsaw pieces into an image; a story of an invisible storyteller haunts disjointed tableaux.

In using imagery and structures from role-playing games, I brought them in relation to my project in two ways; the first was to create encounters within a versatile, virtual stage that would apply the ad hoc principle that I mentioned earlier, a principle of re-territorialization. For example, by describing places and actions the figure of the storyteller inserts an audience – the players themselves – to the game, with the terms of another materiality, those of devising a world in thought. Cyber ‘selves’ is not a new phenomenon, but what it propagates is a tremendous amount of negotiation – a symptom of this democratic realm of wilful participation to war – as well as an exaggerated insistence on the truthfulness of the character; this space is permeated by a sculptural plasticity.

The second quality that I employed is re-enactment; this dimension of role-play (especially live action role-play) mediates a social phenomenon that exceeds the level of a game. As Vanessa Agnew observes in her essay from 2007 *History’s Affective Turn*: ‘[c]ontemporary reenactment is indicative of history’s recent affective turn, i.e. of historical representation characterized by conjectural interpretations of the past, the collapsing of temporalities and an emphasis on affect, individual experience and daily life rather than historical events, structures and processes.’²⁵⁹

Agnew points out that what was thought of in the past as ‘a marginal cultural phenomenon’²⁶⁰ is now – for the last ten years, she argues – an object of study, as a by-product of what is called the ‘Affective Turn.’²⁶¹ In fact the educational or entertainment activities based on historical reenactment and war scenes meets a growing response in various artistic practices: re-enactment as a cultural phenomenon speaks of those virtual places where something happens *again*, and why we need to

²⁵⁹ Vanessa Agnew, *History’s Affective Turn*, published in *Rethinking History – The Journal of Theory and Practice*, Volume 11, Issue 3 September 2007, pp. 299 – 312.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 299.

²⁶¹ On page 14 of the present text I describe the proliferating interest in affect studies. See for example Jean Halley’s *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Duke University Press, 2007.

repeat it.²⁶² On the one hand, this virtual act of empowerment stands for a ‘taking control of things;’ on the other hand, this practice is a way to compensate for a historical evolution of economic conditions, based on ‘good performance,’ which has turned all human relations into a reenactment of behaviour, style and comportments of others. Sven Lütticken, in his essay ‘*An Arena in which to reenact*’ observes that ‘*when performative art attempts to fight repetition with repetition, to break open and recharge the past by duplicating and interrogating our event culture, it is nonetheless part of this very culture.*’²⁶³ Lütticken observes:

Compared to earlier forms of historicism-in-action, the contemporary reenactment puts greater emphasis not only on first-person experience but also on the most extreme act of all, namely fighting in a war. For an everyday life which has become a constant activity of self-performance and thus rather representational, this authentic act of war is substituted which is far removed from acting in the sense of play-acting. And yet it is still turned into a theatrical happening that seems to transpose the pressures of daily life into a form of play.²⁶⁴

In the practice of historical reenactment the player recreates a role within an imaginary time and location; yet the real and the represented coordinates remain in flux throughout the activity, causing fissures to the collective ‘suspension of disbelief.’ Nevertheless these discontinuities become internalized as part of the game, a consensus that acts as a self-mending machine; this is an aspect of reenactment that produces a portrait of anthropological interest. The role player moves within an imaginary space, expressing explicit resistance towards ideological norms by setting his/her own rules to be kept. The role player re-enacts, and in so doing, purges the action into a new present tense, what Lütticken sees as an effort of ‘*bringing back to the work of art a ritual, one of democratic participation.*’²⁶⁵ In the next passage I will be witnessing the unfolding events of a live action role-playing game.

²⁶² Examples of these artists include Omer Fast, Rod Dickinson and Catherine Sullivan, as documented in the collection of essays *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art*, edited by Peggy Phelan, published by Witte de With Museum, Rotterdam in 2005.

²⁶³ Sven Lütticken, op. cit., p. 7.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 39.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 33.

6. The Role Player



Picture 17: *Role Player, digitally edited photograph, 2006.*

As part of my research into role-playing practices I contacted a LARPing team, a team of live action role players, and asked them to attend one of their games. I documented the activities of the day in photographs and video, and at the end of the game spoke to some of them about their experience. I compiled the following passage from my notes from attending the Guildford Branch LARPing team on the 29th October 2006 at Blackwater, Camberley, Hampshire.²⁶⁶ This was the ‘call sheet’ sent out from one of the players about the activities of the day:

Guildford branch are running on the 5th weekend (28th / 29th) of October this month. The adventures will have a distinct Halloween flavour to them. People generally aim to be at the site for 10:30 in the morning. A day consists of two adventures, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. People will be split first thing and one group will monster the first adventure and play the second and the other group the opposite. We

²⁶⁶ The material that I documented and the quoted text reproduced here are courtesy of the Guildford Branch Larping Team.

meet in the car park of the Ely pub off the A30 just outside Blackwater.
Pull up into carpark and we'll be there.

When I arrived at the 'Ely,' the car park was empty of people. The action had already started at the forest nearby. The way in, I was told, was through a hole in the hedge that was bordering the car park. I spotted it and went through, to the other side.

The moment I went through the hole into the forest I was confronted with this scene: they were there, a few meters ahead, dressed up, in a tableau of intact realism: a man dressed in black, hooded, others dressed up as fully equipped warriors, a prisoner in stocks, all frozen in a picture of battle in the woods. This image came up to me like a wall of density, an irreducible truth; a feeling of jumping into another time, or as if I had myself jumped into the tableau. The sudden change was so striking, like a bodily shock, that for a split second I had the feeling that this could *well* be a scene in another time. The wood was quite unchanged; the staging, costumes and performance had momentarily convinced me.

The feeling of crossing to another world soon evaporated, and that original moment remained the most striking sensation of the whole day.

The second thing that I found striking in the presence of the performers in the wood was the way the natural background enveloped the game, blending with it; it revealed the flexibility of the landscape to adjust as a backdrop to any time of reenacted human history.²⁶⁷ Game credibility seemed sustained by the place, and this made it immersive.

There was a Storyteller who was leading the game, which progressed through lengthy negotiations on moves and strategies. Each battle was preceded and followed by an extensive mapping of ideas and organization. When the battles finally happened, there were many deaths, and afterwards, their exorcizing; the Sorcerer, another key role,

²⁶⁷ 'Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock. But it should also be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery.' Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1995, p. 61.

performed rituals each time a warrior ‘died.’ He walked several times in circles around the lying body, summoning spirits with invocations.

There was an extravagant suspension of disbelief; rules of play included shouting ‘Time In’ and ‘Time Out’ to signify when the action was part of the game, or time off the game in order to negotiate. When they held their fist up they were considered invisible and they could run around into the enemies’ campsite. At times they would squat in a particular place until there would be a new direction for the action, determined by constant planning-ahead and decision-making. These ongoing negotiations, which took most of the time between battles, carried on into the evening adventure, most of which took place in the forest in the dark. The darkness made the battles and the general atmosphere dramatic; the mood of the players, I noticed, was very cheerful and energetic throughout the day. It felt like this was their *own time*.

At the end of the day I interviewed Pete, one of the referees, about his experience of having participated in these games and what he thought of this kind of activity. Pete thought it very different to play the live game rather than the tabletop version. He said that there were people who thought they were really living in it and could not tell the game from reality. Olli, another player, said that the visual aspect of the game is not so impressive as the actual experience of playing it.

The whole activity seemed to be a way of taking control, a peculiar combination of visualizing what the image of the action should be, and producing it by *entering that image*. It was a statement about *creating time*; in its amateurism it felt even more liberating and democratic. People do bring their character to this game.

7. To restore

The priority of subjective moments over objective facts, in the context of the aesthetic experience, is a priority of a regulative character. The aesthetic experience embodies an alternative model for rationalizing the everyday experience, to the extent that the cognitive faculties are organized without compulsion or dependence from experiential data.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Georgiou, op. cit., p. 126 (my translation).

The regulative character of the aesthetic experience in Theodoros Georgiou's formulation points to processes taking place in the '*psychic hinterland*,'²⁶⁹ as he calls it, of the individual. Things are set in action and re-enacted as the aesthetic image crosses layers of memory and stratifications of affects, performing internal operations that manifest as regulative – or redemptive – sensations.

Leo Bersani's book *The Culture of Redemption* offers different views on how cultural activities can be redemptive. The first chapter, *Death and Literary Authority/ the Corrective Will* explores a restorative function in art and literature by juxtaposing the writings of Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein. Bersani begins his essay by proposing: '*A crucial assumption in the culture of redemption is that a certain type of repetition of experience in art repairs inherently damaged or valueless experience.*'²⁷⁰

Melanie Klein's concept of the 'restorative phase'²⁷¹ was an early influence in my research project. I first came across her theory in Peter Fuller's *Art and Psychoanalysis*;²⁷² in the second chapter of his book, titled '*The Venus and 'Internal Objects*,' Fuller describes the encounter with the Venus of Milo, which has been a subject of cultural analysis for centuries. The question that triggers the essay is the testimony of viewers encountering the amputated statue of an inexplicably gratifying sensation; Fuller explains this response through Klein's theory of the 'restorative object,' whereby the encounter with the severed body of the statue triggers a cycle of reflections involving a *destruction* and a *remake*. According to the Kleinian theory, the process of the 'remake' functions through cultural sublimations, which symbolically restore the damaged image of subjects or objects that one once identified with;²⁷³ relations of desire in infancy and consequent destructive impulses towards

²⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 127.

²⁷⁰ Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 1.

²⁷¹ In Klein's theory this process in child development grows out of '[...] feelings of guilt which arouse strong tendencies in the child to make good the imaginary damage it has done to its objects.' Melanie Klein, *Love, guilt and reparation: and other works 1921-1945*, Virago Press, 1988, p. 254.

²⁷² Peter Fuller, *Art and Psychoanalysis*, Hogarth Press, 1988, pp. 71-129.

²⁷³ In the essay 'Restitution and Sublimation,' Klein writes (in Footnote No. 3): 'In my '*Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse*' (1929) I have maintained that the person's sense of guilt and desire to restore the damaged object are a universal and fundamental factor in the development of his sublimations.' Klein, op. cit., p. 254.

these desired parts introduce object relations, which mould a pattern in the young subject's relationship with the world.²⁷⁴

There is an implication of death in these internal processes, the 'damaged experience' or destruction, to which the 'remaking' of art is instrumental. Bersani's example in order to illustrate the restitution of experience through art, Proust's novel '*In Search of Lost Time*,' is key. Certain elements prevail throughout this voluminous book: an overall feeling of non-validity of the author's experience as it occurs, as he himself describes, the loose referential relation between experience and its subject, the mortuary hue of the experience – which doesn't seem to achieve any real, lived dimension. What emerges as a predominant function of art – and which Proust attempts by recounting the *Lost Time* – is the re-particularization of the experience, but this time liberated from phenomena and thus made valid. Experience in art is '*divorced from a securely locatable subject of experience*.'²⁷⁵ Bersani draws a parallel between Proustian repetition and Kleinian restoration:

We can see the basis for a return to Proust in this psychoanalytic echo of the Proustian notion of art as a redemptive replication of damaged experience: in both cases, sublimations integrate, unify, and restore. But this restorative activity would make no sense if it were not being performed on earlier or original experience. The very function of art in Proust would be threatened if it introduced us to a world of authentic difference: in an aesthetic of reparation, the artist's life – a life at once 'translated' and made 'more real' – is the only legitimate subject of art.²⁷⁶

The foundation of 'redemptive' art in previous, existing experience – a replaying of that experience – reveals a salient feature of *reenactment*. A material of real events, life once lived but not yet fulfilled, finds expression in a double, a reflection that allows a distancing from and a *remodelling* of reality.²⁷⁷ This vivid idea of

²⁷⁴ 'In Kleinian terms, sublimations are symbolic reparations of damaged experience; they are spectral replications of experience, entirely bound to the shattering and shattered fantasies they repair, but at the same time liberated from those fantasies by virtue of repeating them as knowledge, without affect.' Bersani, op. cit., p. 97.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 11.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 20.

²⁷⁷ Bersani links the thought of Walter Benjamin to this redemptive aesthetic: 'In Benjamin we find the traits most deeply characteristic of this culture: the scrupulous registering of experience in order to annihilate it, and the magical and nihilistic belief that immersion in the most minute details of a material content will not only reduce that content but simultaneously unveil its hidden redemptive double.' Ibid. p. 54.

reenactment that emerges in the first chapter of *The Culture of Redemption* is a ritual performance of life in suspended relations of causality, time and space. Reenactment is a contemporary ritual that redeems personal and collective history and allows a reappearance of phenomena, as the Proustian novel illustrates.²⁷⁸ Through the polemic of reducing reality into its essentials by extracting its truth through art, the novel concludes in the very crude, immediate experience of reality itself: a re-enactment of the pure appearance of phenomena, a world seen from a point of view freed from desire, which haunts the present. Art, in this resurrection, acquires a purely mediating role of re-presenting the crude material of reality: it reenacts the phenomenological experience of the world. In the ritual that art performs the audience is reintegrated into an experience of the world that it could not otherwise assimilate.

8. An encounter with the past – I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S.

*‘To restore to the body its role as meaning producer’*²⁷⁹

As a viewer previously unfamiliar with James Coleman’s work, my encounter with *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S.*²⁸⁰ at the Documenta 11 in Kassel in 2002 was the following:

The work was a slide show with an audio narration as a voiceover. I was confronted with a slide with a grouping of figures in preparation for a photo shoot. The first scene appeared in a blurred shadow, gradually emerging into clarity as if the lens was starting to focus. The figures helped each other dress up in costumes in some of the scenes, while in others they appeared in a hospital environment like a surgery room, which appeared to be adjacent to the previous studio set. The same actors performed different actions in the sets, but a sense of allocated roles was somehow, though

²⁷⁸ In Rod Dickinson and Tom McCarthy’s *Greenwich Degree Zero* (Beaconsfield Gallery, 2006), a fictional change in the outcome of an historical event advanced a sense of ‘compensation’ in art by the chance for a democratic participation in redefining history. This quality also appears as a disjunction, in some practices, between a reconstruction of time and place, as in the bewildering text that accompanies Eran Schaerf’s work *Scenario Data 39*, reproduced in *Life, Once More*, op. cit., p. 9-15.

²⁷⁹ I have devised this phrase out of a sentence from Jean Fisher’s text on James Coleman’s *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S.*: ‘[...] the role of the dead or decaying body whose role as meaning producer is in need of restoration.’ In Michael Govan, *James Coleman: Projected Images 1972-1994*, Dia Center for the Arts, 1995, p. 24.

²⁸⁰ James Coleman’s slide work *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S.* was made in 1994.

vaguely, clear. Their gazes were strikingly fixed on something invisible to the viewer, somehow penetrating inwardly, frozen in their postures with an intensity that was enhanced by the prolonged stillness of the slide projection. From costumes and coloured backdrops there was a shift to the coldness of the seemingly abandoned surgery room, and when the characters entered this otherworldly, out-of-time place, all coherent sequence between actions evaporated and everything became an uncanny, inexplicable yet serene and stoic leap between two dimensions. A stack of old hospital beds and rusty equipment appeared while the dressing and undressing, the persistent staring and the preparations for some operation continued without any clear narrative. A voice was heard at disparate times during the projection, a haunting, childish voice uttering words in whispers and fragmented sentences mysteriously out of joint with the actions on the screen. *'It's hard to make out...the I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S....'*, the voice said. While the characters seemed cut off in their own isolated worlds, the voice-over identified with them all, and at the same time with none.

The film was set, I later read, in a derelict former tuberculosis hospital outside of Dublin; there was an intense theatrical element in this place. The action went on in a dream-like state; enigmatic and compelling, it was discomforting at the same time.

Not too long before visiting the Documenta, I spent some time in hospital for an operation. More than anything else, I remember my thoughts when I came round from the anaesthesia. The experience of anaesthesia had preoccupied me for years before that time, mainly to do with how different degrees of sedation affect the state of the mind. On a previous occasion when I had been sedated I had experienced a peculiar state between vigilance and dreaming, but where the realness of my thoughts was unlike dreaming, somehow not even located in either time or body, yet entrapped in absolute stillness with no sense or memory of embodiment whatsoever. There was a crude actuality about these thoughts, enhanced by the actual body pain. This state was the effect of a semi-anaesthesia, which, although physically painful, was curiously interesting: it was a wholly unfamiliar experience, unlike a dream or a hallucination.

However, the second time that I was sedated for an operation, my long-planned watchfulness and alertness on how my state of consciousness would mutate abruptly receded, plunging me into a state of unconsciousness, an empty gap. As I was waking

up, I had a feeling of emerging into reality from nowhere, from absolute inexistence of memory, not aware of myself yet. In that moment, this was the order of things: what I perceived as the hospital, the operation and the state of recuperation was felt as the rule, a substratum of consciousness, a permanent condition of being, a dimension of normality – as if the state of recovering from being constantly operated upon was part of a biological routine. At the same time the first thought of the world outside, as if looked at through a lens, was the impression of a theatrical play: something acted on a superimposed level. The feeling of the two dimensions co-existing as if they were layers of reality was so powerful that I had an overwhelming feeling that the primary, crude real was the hospital-real and that surgeons were artists.²⁸¹

When I encountered James Coleman's slide projection, this unconscious memory automatically emerged; the adjacent spaces of *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S.* were the stage of an action of an unfixed subject and consciousness. The theatrical and the surgical seemed to embody two dense formulas of experience; the linguistic-representational and the visceral, traumatic. I was surprised to hear that the surgery room was called an 'operating theatre.' I found it ironic.

The projection of my own memory on the work as I described happened long before researching James Coleman's oeuvre. I was intuitively drawn by its qualities; through the slide projection and the non-narrative action the images appeared as if directly drawn from a non-discursive site, an unconscious repository; the theatricality of its style was paradoxically enhancing the feeling of uncanny, unfathomable otherness, rather than fixing identities on the figures and the spaces. The displaced body as mere spectator was the recurrent theme of the work.

*...It's hard to make out the initials...growing still...ex-communicating as we speak...*²⁸²

Coleman's work portrays the conflict between the symbolic order of spoken language as an imposed system of representation and the impetus of claiming a personal truth.

²⁸¹ An interesting analogy is Walter Benjamin's insight that the 'magician' has been replaced by the 'surgeon' in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, from *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, 1969, p. 233.

²⁸² Govan, op. cit., p. 20.

As Jean Fisher remarks: '[...] *it is the abandoned hospital interior itself, with its broken plaster surfaces, obsolete fixtures and machines, which once tyrannized patients, that now takes the role of the dead or decaying body whose role as meaning producer is in need of restoration.*'²⁸³ In Fisher's analysis, the spaces depicted in Coleman's works, which are often stage sets, become the scene of re-integration of the body as agent of meaning.²⁸⁴ The collapse of spatiotemporal coherence in Coleman's work is a strategy for transgressing a linear, representational vocabulary and disrupting automatic responses. It is the meaning-giving body itself whose primacy of response restores its own agency. This, Fisher locates as '*the insistence on our sustained awareness of the phenomenological experience of the work.*'²⁸⁵ This is the measure of resistance expressed from both maker and viewer.

Line of Faith, one of Coleman's projected slide works from 1991, bears a striking visual similarity with live action historical reenactments. It also alludes to tableaux vivants – a genre that stands between painting, photography and performance. One of Coleman's references is Jean Luc Godard's film *Passion* from 1982.²⁸⁶ In *Passion*, we are watching the making of a film production enacting tableaux vivants from famous paintings of Delacroix, Goya and Greco. The actual shooting never reaches accomplishment due to some persistence from the part of the director about insufficient or wrong lighting. Instead, the film wanders around the events outside and in preparation of the film, in complicated and paradoxical situations occurring among the contributors. No importance is given to the actual scenes or the narrative; it seems more likely that what is being shot is the shooting itself. There is something that never becomes realized but the way things are presented to us it seems like we are shifting between different dimensions. This overturns the habitual structure of the film

²⁸³ Ibid. p. 24. Similar ideas are elaborated in *Lapsus Exposure*, a piece from 1993, that suggests in Fisher's words: 'a desire to restore meaning through the physicality of sound and body, through the rhythm of song and dance.' Ibid. p. 26.

²⁸⁴ She says: '[...] the set occupies the metaphorical space of the symbolic order - a relational space where identity is constructed and social relations are played out according to the structure and limitations of the law, figured through its representations. It is the spatiotemporal coherence aimed for by the social order, but placed under strain here, producing cracks in the familiar illusion. [...] In Coleman's manipulations, the set is presented as an allegorical site of production of a restored body - the reconstituted past, the playback that reintegrates the identity of the rock group, the generational reconciliation of the social body. These "bodies" are acknowledged as necessary artifices, but they are restructured according not to a preset pattern of codes but to a pattern subservient to the conditions of their real existence.' Ibid. p. 28.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 28.

²⁸⁶ *Passion*, (1982) Directed by Jean Luc Godard, Switzerland/France, Parafrance Films.

narrative as a linear development with hierarchical positions (protagonist, extra) and the weight of the action is disseminated in unlikely places. This disruption of certainties denies the secure 'ending' of a situation, letting open areas, gaps of meaning that one has to reconstruct. It is opening up the work as a *construction site*.

The atypical narrative structures encountered in James Coleman's work form an affinity with Godard's avant-garde cinema. In Coleman's slide shows the images emerge from an indefinite space – memory, fantasy, or crude worldly material – aided in this apparition by the medium of the slide show. In *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S.*, the explicit element of staging is maybe what affects the situation the most: we are urged into the consensus of a staged action, but once we have accepted its representational language it denies itself as such; the theatre and the operating room are a condition, the limits of the acting body, the depths of a traumatizing interchangeability. The viewer will not be able to decipher these spaces; still, these projected images reach into the substratum of the viewer's visual memory and retrieve a vibrant, pulsating material.

A gateway

Since the 1960s there has been a turn of attention to the viewer's experience as subject matter of art, which set new terms for staging: art stages a situation for the viewer, requiring different modes of engagement and introducing different patterns of connectivity. Yet there are more steps to be taken.

It has been a longstanding project for aesthetics to provide an alternative model for the subject; now we reach the turn where an affective rendering – an affective *re-ordering* – departs from (exhausted) notions of dematerialized object and decentred subject. Rather than collapsing positions of subject or object, spatial or ontological unity, art becomes a testing ground for a transitional encounter co-performed by artist and viewer – a co-created in-between-ness. This encounter presents an opportunity; we collectively create space and model meaning through the re-distribution of the sensible. As such the intersubjective *connectivity* moulded in this space and the *communion* with ineffable fields of vitality through affect become an aesthetic communication. What I have described as a transformative encounter allows a space for self-structuring through these aesthetic manifestations. There is a political dimension to the poetic – or rather, to the *autopoietic* force of the sensible. It is a double reach, then, that I visualize: an encounter that stretches to the distant past and hauls a primal pulse, and one that speeds ahead, shaping a practice of self-creation through extra-systemic functioning.

In this exploration of staging, affect, and the encounter, I have examined the scene of sculpture as a construction site and rehearsal space for a general cultural shift. If sculpture's expanded practice hybridizes social space by becoming an autonomous *stage*, today's 'traumatic' sculptural assemblages reflect the crises of late modernity. A restructuring of sculpture into a scene where performative agencies interact implicates the viewer into a staging where artistic medium is repurposed as aesthetic support and transitional zone. The expanded agency of staging – in contradistinction to a theatrical/scenic notion – spans from an intrinsic modality of art (art stages presentation) to the sculptural modality of situating objects in space.

The platform for a two-fold perspective staged in several recent spatial practices fuses positions of the viewing subject, revealing the potential of the aesthetic for modes of understanding that deviate from normative signification. The autonomic emergence of affect grafts together in the space of the work the biological, the psychic and the cognitive. Its autopoietic agency is connective, co-creative. The modality of art to ‘sculpt’ us through affect meets a diachronic function; we simultaneously *encounter* and *become* through this interconnective function.

APPENDIX

Part 1

Yorgos Heimonas²⁸⁷

Translator's Introduction to Euripides' **Medea**

Kastaniotis Editions, Athens 1989

Translated from Greek by Antigoni Pasidi

Notes on my translation:

I have tried to preserve the original punctuation and typographic style of the text as intact as possible, and added clarification notes either inside the text or as footnotes:

- An asterisk * is the original footnote by the author Y.H.
- What is in a parenthesis () is part of the original text.
- What is in a square bracket [] is my addition to clarify words or the meaning.
- What is in a curly brace { } is the original Greek word/term in the text.
- Where a word or meaning needs clarification I append footnotes.
- Greek words that exist in the English language with a slightly or quite different meaning are either: Preserved in the text (i.e. *eros*), explained in square brackets and then analyzed in the terminology appendix, or: Translated according to meaning/context and then contained in curly braces, to provide the etymological connection.
- English words that have more than one equivalent in Greek are given in English in the text and in the original Greek word in curly braces, to stress the different meaning (in particular with the word 'emotion,' as either *synkinesis* or *synaesthema*, where *synaesthema* can also be 'feeling' or 'sentiment').

²⁸⁷ Yorgos Heimonas (1938-2000) was a Greek novelist, translator and doctor. He studied medicine in Greece and in Paris, where he specialized in psychiatry and neurology. He published his first book in 1960.

1.

THE RAW MATERIALS OF THE TRAGIC^{*}: *materials*, for tragedy gives me the sensation of a solid, pure body; in reality, it concerns basic, elemental life functions of this body.

In other occasions too I have expressed my belief that Katharsis in tragedy isn't, essentially, but a matter of *analogy*, in relation to the complex scheme of extreme disproportion which precedes – if as “disproportion” we consider the deadlock of conflicts which is created during the advancement of the drama between its rival characters, in whichever ideological, moral, psychological burdens they have shouldered and which they refuse, until the end, to lay down. However, it will be difficult to conceive the significance of the strict *symmetrical* movements which balance the elements of this disproportion, of those linear gestures which lead in a natural manner (precisely, with Katharsis) to the final, definitive, to the necessary calmness which will settle on the troubled and *disquieting* situation of the drama, the silence which falls abruptly when the work of art is completed – we'll find this hard to comprehend, if the fundamental regulation which governs and organizes Greek thought and Greek art escapes us: *metron* [measure]. On the condition, that we fully grasp the mode of use, of application of this *metron* from the Greek author – for whom *metron* does not mean compression, prevention, prohibition; above all it signifies danger: to impose metron on that which has no metron.

Greek tragedy is the only – at least so clearly, so *logically* – *logos* [speech] in the history of art that achieves this anxious acrobatics (and collaboration) between *kosmos* [world] and chaos, order and anarchy – indeed while concealing its anxiety undisturbed, behind the large, rough volumes of its constructions. But it is not my intention to go back to the traditional ideas of the apollonian and the dionysian – if we wanted, by simplification, to attribute *metron* [measure] to Apollo and *ametro* [immoderation] to Dionysus; I'd like to move much further ahead and try to detect

^{*} This text (1.), written in greater length, was my address at the V' International Conference of Ancient Greek Drama in Delphi (29 June – 6 July 1989), whose subject was “Tragic logos and today's world theatre.”

certain elementary, raw materials which come into view (and not just that, they function drastically) through the *crevices* which I sense there are in this firm, impressively harmonious synthesis that tragedy is – between the visible, which establishes itself with metron, and the invisible, which glows from deeper within, from that which cannot have metron and will never have form. For I believe that the awe before tragedy derives, in principle, from the constant, though indeed unclear, sensation the viewer has of precisely these crevices.

I discern two elements: the first relates to emotion {synkinesis} – but I mean an outpouring of the emotion as a holothymic²⁸⁸ cataclysm of consciousness and not individual, distinct emotions which are released because of the overwhelming but specific happenings of tragedy; the second element relates to mourning – which, again, I mean as a painful submission, from the beginning, to the accomplished fact [fait accompli]: accomplished fact, not during the “realistic” stream of dreadful events of the tragedy narration – but to some accomplished fact which is already inscribed in consciousness (to which I certainly incorporate the so-called unconscious) and for which the human mourns throughout all his life, experiencing the intrinsic, the natural feeling {synaesthema} of existence – if existence can have a feeling {synaesthema}; melancholy, to which I would however give a much calmer name: sorrow.

How does this emotion {synkinesis} function and what is this accomplished fact? In tragedy a descent to the *old* layers of the psyche {psychismos} is taking place, much deeper than the space where those emotions {synaesthemata} which are distributed and in constant preparedness are located – a descent to the undifferentiated, exceptionally strong thymic tensions for which no qualitative, not even categorical, determination can apply: if for example they are positive or negative tendencies of attraction and adaptation towards the encroaching emotional {synkinesiatic} stimulus or, conversely, tendencies of aversion or terror towards it. These latter, particular responses are born in the more superficial levels of emotional {synaesthematic}

²⁸⁸ ‘Holothymic’=all {olon}+thymic. ‘Thymic’, according to Plato, is the part of the psyche that includes its emotional phenomena and those relating to human will – still in use in Modern Greek as ‘thymiko,’ with the same meaning. What Heimomas means here is the totality of these elements – a totality lived by all this part of consciousness.

responsiveness and have a well-discernible and causal relationship to the specific events of the tragedy; consequently, those emotions {synkineses} are qualitatively recognizable as “relative,” and although the viewer seems to be possessed by them, nevertheless (and because of them – how could it be any different?) the emotional {synkinesiac} outcome ends up transforming from qualitative, that is specialized, differentiated, to qualitative, that is liberated, undifferentiated, dissolute. The viewer is now thoroughly {katholika} affected, he suffers pulsating towards all directions because the emotional {synkinesiac} stimulation abandons – or rather traverses, indeed *violently*, the distinct categories of direct psychological responses and stimulates this amorphous emotional {synkinesiac} material deep within, which in its nature is uncontrollable and limitless – as much as indeterminate. The transcendence of an emotion {synaesthema} renders it tragic; for example, Medea’s eros [love](: text 2). In tragedy, thus, we are rather dealing with an immeasurable amount of primordial emotion {synkinesis} than with a quality of an although powerful, yet specified reflexive emotion {synkinesis}: with an emotional {synkinesiac} alarm rather than an emotional {synaesthematic} subjection – and at this moment a phrase by Sophocles springs to my mind: Ἄσκοπος ἄ λῶβα=*destruction {katastrophe} has no purpose*. I distort it: *emotion {synkinesis} has no purpose*. And thereby what I want to say is that emotion {synkinesis} in tragedy, in great art (beyond and behind the schemata [shapes], the *metra*, that define it but also familiarize it – I would say: tame it), this emotion {synkinesis}, which often adopts the characteristics of an obscure, threatening euphoria, remains inexplicable to the end. It cannot but be inexplicable; it has to be inexplicable.

But how does tragedy manage to approach this fortified emotion {synkinesis}, which music only of all arts (with other means, more direct – via other routes, much shorter) has the *ease* to disturb? Thanks to its key, I believe, instrument, – this Mourning that I spoke of.

Mourning is the second raw material, which surrounds drama and invests its heroes. Something much more: there is a diffuse, but impalpable, *eros of mourning* in the atmosphere. (It is self-evident that the mourning of which I speak, a kind of ontological grief, has a very remote connection to the normal grief that justifiably torments the hero because of a death or a humiliation and should not be confused with

it.) Observing the hero very closely, you can feel him resist, refusing to give up – certainly not from the big deed for which he has been called for, but from pain {algos}: he is a *lover of mourning*. You perceive that his mourning has started long before the unjust, the abominable events occurred, which identified him as a merciless instrument (and, at the same time, a poignantly frail victim) of a justice; you become convinced, that parallel to the uncompromising motive of collective moral conscience that dictates and legitimates his inexorable decisions, there functions also a paradox fixation towards a mourning – as if his fate were *mournful* from the start, and not only can he not escape from it, but without it, without its very mourning, he would not be able to be, that is to act. Mourning is his only, as much as his natural situation. Moreover: mourning produces and constantly magnifies his inhuman boldness. And even more: he hedonizes [delights] himself from mourning.

This imperceptible, profound eros of mourning seems to decant to the other characters of the drama as well; they all shift, with the hero at the head, without complaint, obediently, within the dim memory of an irretrievable (and moreover once unavoidable) Fall: this must be the *fait accompli* that I meant earlier – the brutal detachment of individual being {on} from common {koinon} being, namely the birth of death. And from this *fait accompli* germinated the emotion {synkinesis} and took its first, the most purebred form which is a mourning. Ever since, whatever will overwhelm man will be pain. And whatever excavates pain will be hedonic.

So the tragic originates from *prehistoric*, in human's spiritual {pneumatikon}²⁸⁹ journey, – from *propatoric*²⁹⁰ losses and condemnations of his existence; and these propatoric stigmata have not given birth to our Guilt, as we thought, but have eternally sealed us with Mourning.

These invariable, crude functions of tragedy, the total emotion {synkinesis} and the eros of mourning, certainly remain intact – so far as the psyche {psychismos} that still needs them to *cleanse*²⁹¹ itself to the greatest depth of its self-knowing remains

²⁸⁹ See Terminology Appendix for 'pneumatikos.'

²⁹⁰ 'Propatoric Sin' is the Original Sin of Christianity – also implying from time immemorial.

²⁹¹ In the text 'kathairetai,' which has the same root as 'katharsis.'

unaltered too. And for as long as the aesthetic of the *dramatic* will apply at this depth, an aesthetic of *visceral-ness* and ritual (- and the stage director who will neglect these two elements should not even consider that he actually stages a tragedy). Especially today, tragedy acquires perhaps a different authority: denoting, from its birth to eternity, the bloodstained realization of the responsibility that the human being bears against the World {Kosmos} (responsibility: without the demagogic sense of a social, moral, etc, “debt” = *cognitive {gnostic} responsibility*) – today that this responsibility is tested more crucially than ever, Greek tragedy looks like a cave painting that suddenly starts to glow within a new, *oblique {loxos}* lighting.
(- Apollo Loxias?)²⁹²

²⁹² ‘Loxias’ Apollo (*loxos* means slanted, oblique) is one of the many names of Apollo that have been found in ancient texts. It stands for his ambiguous oracles.

2.

THE ORIGIN OF EROS IS BARBARIC. If we fail to see, even glimpse, at some point in this tragedy, the distorted erotic [of love] face of Medea, we won't catch her during the *barbarity* of her erotic stripping – from all expectation from Jason, from all her erotic memories from him, if the time where eros can really be (and only therein) is memory. We won't catch her: she will quickly have faded to the woman who has been insulted {hybris-ed}, to the queen who has been disarmed, to the human, even, *whose eros wasn't rewarded*. But Medea's drama is played out, from its beginning to its end, with a rigidity which is absolutely erotic, that is to say strongly and endlessly *closed*; endlessly: Medea will lead her erotic story to an end, not in order to finish it but to apotheosize it (and to repose it, to secure it) within a terrifying, *barbaric* union. For the purpose of eros is the union by all means and its barbarity whichever act will achieve it.

Medea, twice barbarian – by origin and by eros. It is not accidental.

The tragedy of Medea, this most erotic of all plays ever written, is a text that is nightmarishly dry: in no word of Medea do we hear the slightest erotic sound, the only tenderness that moistens her dry speech is when she speaks of her children. There is only anger; nothing else. With vast anger, but with composure too, she engineers Jason's ruin: she is going to kill his new wife and her father – but she will also kill her children, who are Jason's children. This second decision of hers is taken from the start, the Nurse {Trofos} has realized it straight away, she has already told us before Medea speaks of her plans. What is all this unrestrained annihilation mania of hers – punishment, revenge, justice? pain and “expanded” suicide, where the suicide draws all the beloved ones to his death? And where does it come from – from jealousy, from degradation and humiliation, the panic of exile? from her useless sacrifices, from her futile erotic bravery? All this, one by one, is uttered, or implied, by Medea in front of the Chorus, in front of Jason, in front of us. And it is of course all of this – and foremost her definitive and unjust end. But you feel her withdraw

behind all this, vanishing – only to reappear unbearably visible with the murder of her own children. Now she withdraws deeper and deeper into the darkness that eros is – there must be darkness in eros not to see that the Other is missing, there must have been a lot of darkness in Medea’s *barbaric* eros since Jason never was with her: he is not now and therefore never has been. But she has always been there, she will be there until the end (this *there* reaches up to the specific location of the story even: the drama breaks out when Kreon sends Medea away from the town); she never got out of her darkness – and her ultimate erotic act towards Jason is to oblige him, by force, to meet with her through his pain for his murdered children. She is not to blame, she has no other way, for none other of his feelings {synaesthema} does she find – there is none, for her to use: his pain for the children, is the last, her sole *artifice* {technasma} which will subdue him to the most torturous, the most true (for there is no other truth {aletheia} left from their marriage) of his union with her. She doesn’t care. Jason enters the darkness.

This ascension, at the end, of Medea in the sky, on the chariot with the flying dragons, is a phantasmagoria that the poet suddenly decides to bestow her. It signifies her erotic triumph.

YORGOS HEIMONAS

Terminology Index

- **Metron:** a fundamental principle of Greek thought (typified in the expression *Métron áriston*, = ‘moderation is the best thing,’ or ‘all in good measure’). Its function is illuminated in Heimonas’ analysis (page 1): its role is not one of a restraining *law* but rather the safeguarding, rational thought which regulates the dark, uncontrollable mass of primordial instincts and violent extremities of human nature. Metron symbolizes human reason against the primitive disorder of chaos and passion.
- **Logos:** Logos counts more than 50 meanings in Greek; it is a very expanded notion, used primarily as *speech*, *reason* and **logiké** – logic or sense.
- **Synkinesis / synaesthema:** there is an important distinction between the notions of **synkinesis** and **synaesthema**, mainly as active and passive forms of emotion, respectively. Both Greek words signify affect and emotion, but whereas synkinesis is a composite affect that signifies *movement* (= kinesis, which is also clear in the word *emotion*), synaesthema is a feeling, sentiment or emotion centred on the sensibility that emerges within the subject (etymologically *syn+aesthema* = sensation, affect). In everyday Greek *synkinesis* means becoming moved by something, feeling emotional, usually provoked by somebody’s presence or action. It requires an *agency*; the syn-prefix reveals a *joint* movement. In *synaesthema* this prefix denotes a joint stimulation of the senses.
- **Psychismos:** psyche means soul in Greek. Psychismos is the quality or structure of the human soul, composed of both personal, but also collective characteristics. The distinction between soul (*psyche*) and mind (*pneuma*) can be rigid, pertaining to the principle of trinity of mind, body and soul of human nature; however psyche and pneuma can also coincide as *spirit*, the intangible qualities of human nature. Also see *pneumatikos*.
- **Katholika:** wholly, thoroughly, from ‘olon’= all (root of *holistic*).

- **Eros, erotic:** a pivotal idea in ancient Greek literature, poetry and philosophy. Eros is a principle of love that is often contrasted to death, as life force, but also paralleled to it as a drive. In foreign translation ‘eros’ tends more towards the dimension of ‘sexual love,’ as in the adjective *erotic*. The ancient Greek concept of *eros* combines passion, force, heroism, and love. This meaning remains unchanged in Modern Greek.
- **Hedoné:** delight. Hedoné is closely related to *eros* and opposite to *algos* – an equivalent of the pain/pleasure dualism. Although hedoné alludes to sexual pleasure in Modern Greek, in ancient Greek it has a broad meaning of pleasure – it can be mental pleasure or gratification.
- **On:** being (root of *ontology*).
- **Koinon:** common, shared, general, universal.
- **Pneumatikon:** spiritual as in relating to the spirit (pneuma = mind/intellect) in contrast to the soul (psyche). In this case too the translation of *pneumatikon* into ‘spiritual’ lacks the more prominent dimension of ‘intellectual’, mental (relating to the mind).

Some thoughts on Yorgos Heimonas' Translator's Introduction to Euripides' *Medea*

I discern an analogy between Yorgos Heimonas' analysis of the functions of Greek tragic drama and Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*.

The main character in the *Magic Mountain*, Hans Castorp, is a reserved young man who dwells comfortably in his urban environment and is about to embark on his career. His visit to his consumptive cousin in a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps signals a change of route, which is forever to mark Hans Castorp. His discovery of a different realm there, an altered time, an *addictive* freedom – and soon a discovery of the realm of the body, its laws and functions – has a deep impact on the young man. Curious to learn, he studies the body and the vital processes that cycle from birth to decay. He learns about the dark, impure impulses that the body develops into illness. There is a substratum of pathos that the whole process is based on: desire. On encountering desire himself, in the face of Madame Chauchat, an exotic Russian woman who he hopelessly falls in love with, he encounters the relentless reality of this vital force that casts him into his passion. His mentor Settembrini, an Italian humanist scholar, is trying to reason him, to bring him to recognize the noble pursuit of knowledge, the call of duty that awaits him, the feat of civilization against barbarity. But it is a lost case: Castorp is already ill; he has contracted tuberculosis himself – only so slight an infection as to actually *secure* his residence 'up there' for sometime – but most of all he is physically succumbing to the reality of his instincts, his newly discovered nature. He contemplates time, and in doing so the artificial construct of the everyday, the mundane social reality is exposed before his eyes: everything that he lived before, 'down there,' seems dim and false in relation to the dimensions he discovers 'up here': a time that, deceptive and unfathomable, is the real measure of everything.

When Hans Castorp succumbs, involuntarily, to the passion of his love for Mme Chauchat, he begins to see what has so far been invisible to him and he *lives*, for the first time. His encounter with his own nature is kathartic, and fills him with a *jouissance* that is existential, an emotion of self-awareness. He begins to overturn the fixed beliefs that had once ruled him, and to his delight he finds a sense of things, a sense of time and a sense of nature. He comes to feel the raw, conflicting cycle of life that grows and withers; the beautiful, harmonious schemes that his idealist friend tries

to instil in him are not convincing anymore. Castorp is a man who has experienced loss at a very early age; losing both his parents and growing up in the care of his grandfather, he has a familiarity with death and mourning which he consciously admits that *draws* him to decay. He feels at home with the idea of death: this is what he knows of himself.

Hans Castorp is riveted, up on the Magic Mountain, because he has caught a glimpse of this vein of dirt and exhilaration, passion and pain that exposed his nature to him.

Part 2

Kutiyattam – The theatre form by **Kapila Venu**

Kutiyattam is a theatre form that has the richness and depth acquired from an ancient history and a long and unbroken performance tradition of more than 2000 years.

Koothambalam meaning ‘temple for theatre’ is the exclusively designed venue for the performance of this unique theatre. Actors (Chakyar and Nangiar), musicians, costume and stage specialists (Nambiar) come together to realize the performance.

Performances are usually based on Sanskrit texts and their elaborate interpretations and dramatisation. The actor reigns in Kutiyattam. The ‘performance space’ and ‘performance time’ sets free a well trained actor like a bird to explore the sky. The actor is followed by the accompanying Mizhavu (pot drum) that breathes life into every pulse, movement and emotion.

The craft and techniques of acting are a blend of both elements – high stylisation and folk (daily, rustic, worldly). The actors and musicians undergo several years of intense training and conditioning to master the complex techniques and skill and simultaneously acquire the capability of having the altered existence onstage.

Performances can hardly be time bound. The presentation of a single act of a play can go on for several days and nights, moments can be frozen and explored for hours in an almost meditative relationship between actor and sahrdya (one of good heart, spectator).

The theatre style embraces south India’s indigenous culture of conception and representation as well as the acting technique described in Bharatha’s Natyashastra, the treatise on Indian dramaturgy. Therefore it internalizes both the rigour and vitality of all the folk, ritual and martial arts together with the concepts of classical Sanskrit theatre in India.

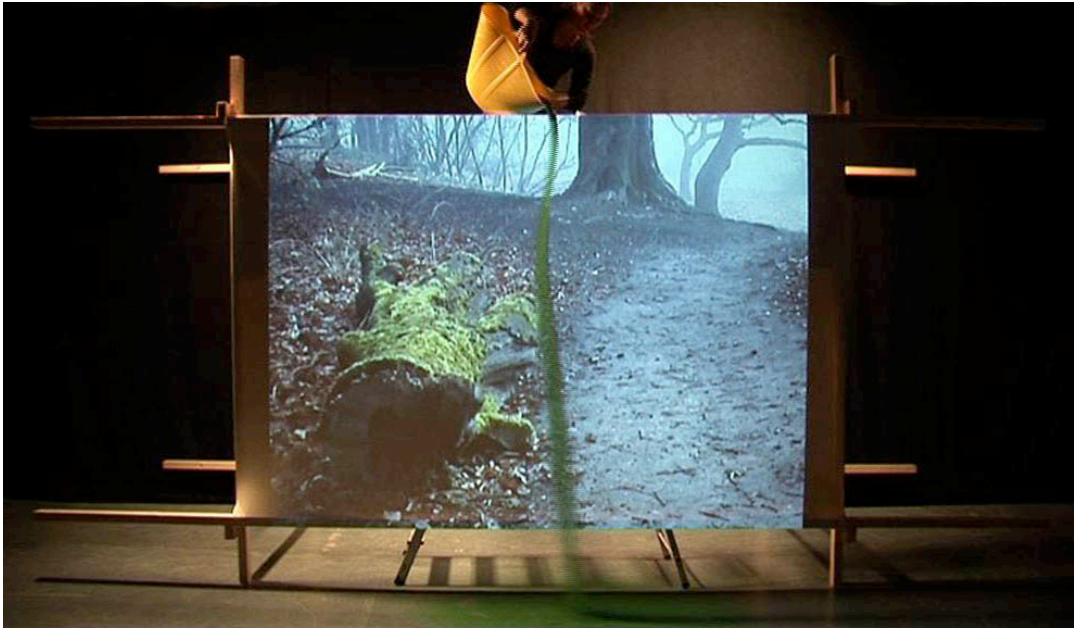
(Accessed in November 2011 at <http://virali.org/training>)



In the city of Bhaktapur in Nepal there is a small Hindu shrine, like a little outdoor temple, housing a small statue of a goddess. Facing the gateway of the shrine is another statue, of an angel bowing in veneration of the enshrined deity. The figure represents the pilgrim and the encounter with the divine. The place of the viewer is rarely represented or included within symbolic or religious western art in three-dimensional form. What we witness is not the object of worship alone but a place of presence.

Part 3

Documentation of Works





Folegandros, 2008; found object



Path, 2006; paper, rubber matting, wax, wood, 4.5 m x 1.5 m x 0.9 m





Waxworks, 2011; wax, oil colour, wood. 4.5 m x 4 m x 3.5 m



Sandworks, 2011; coloured sand, resin, 140 cm x 50 x 25 cm



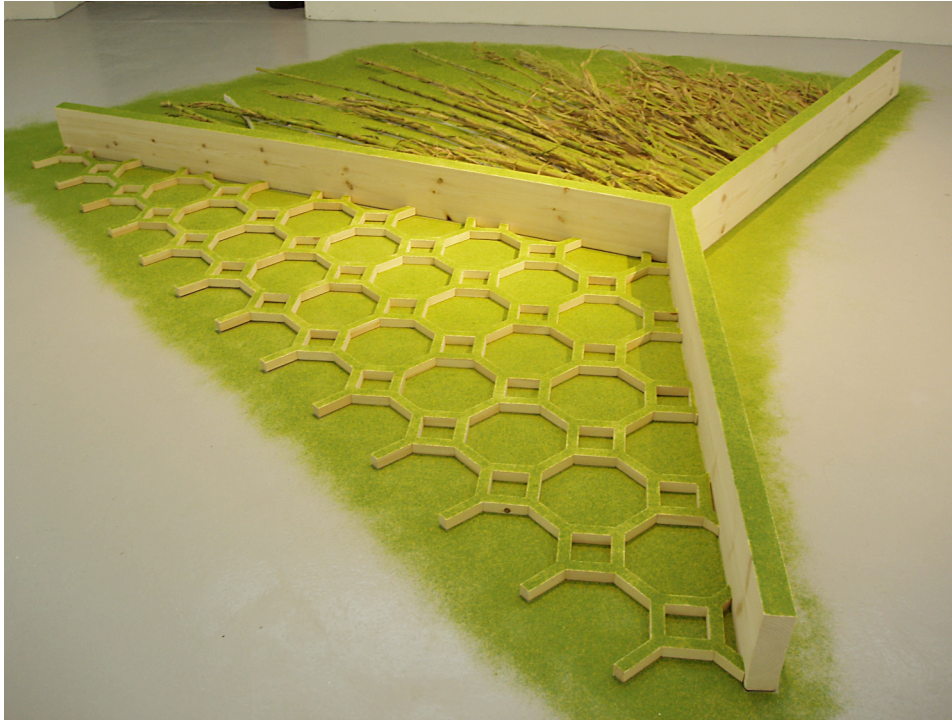
Ornamental, 2005; leaves, thread, acrylic paint, 32 x 29 cm



Twin Towers, 2005; leaves, pins, steel, 100 x 15 x 15 cm



Vikos, 2005; soil, slide projection, 280 x 220 x 180



Pragma, 2006; wood, modelling fibre, bamboo, 200 x 160 x 20 cm

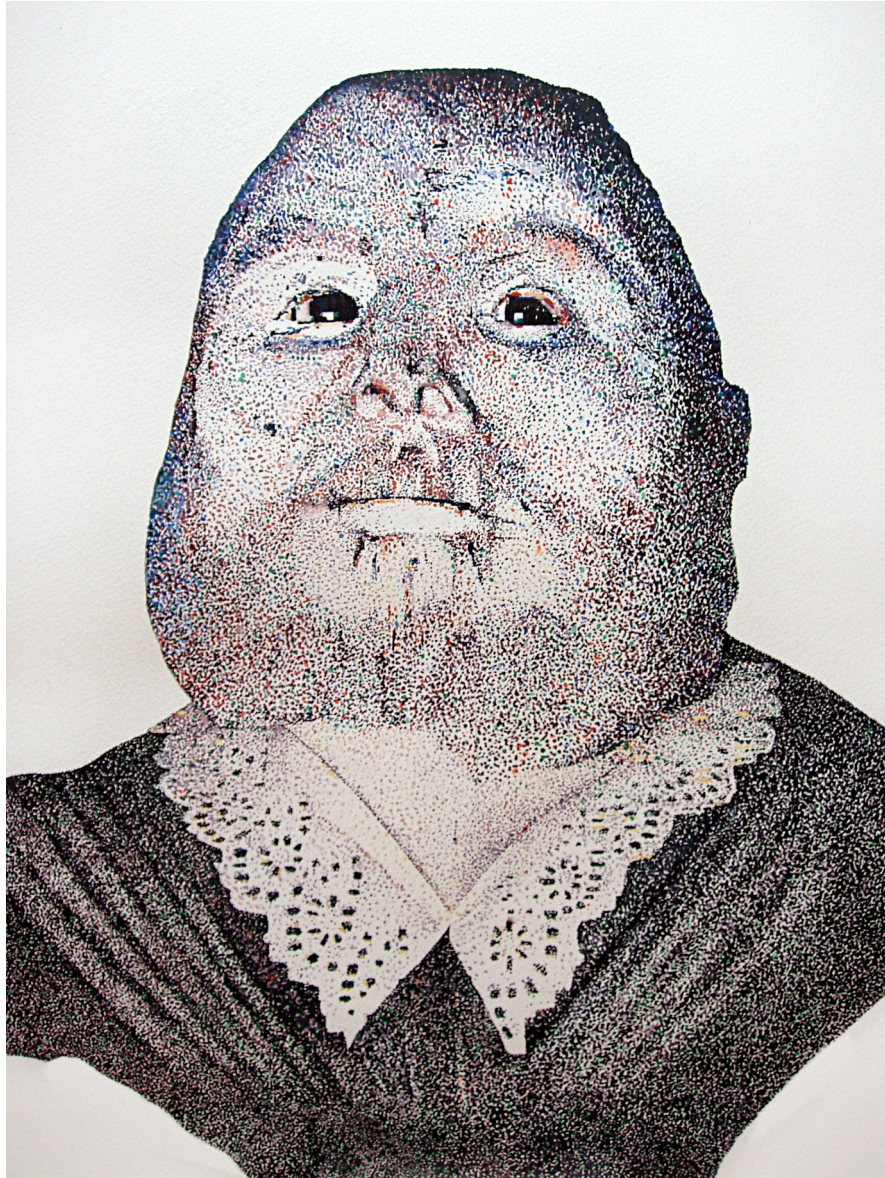


LRPG, 2006; printed transparency, 1.5 m x 75 cm

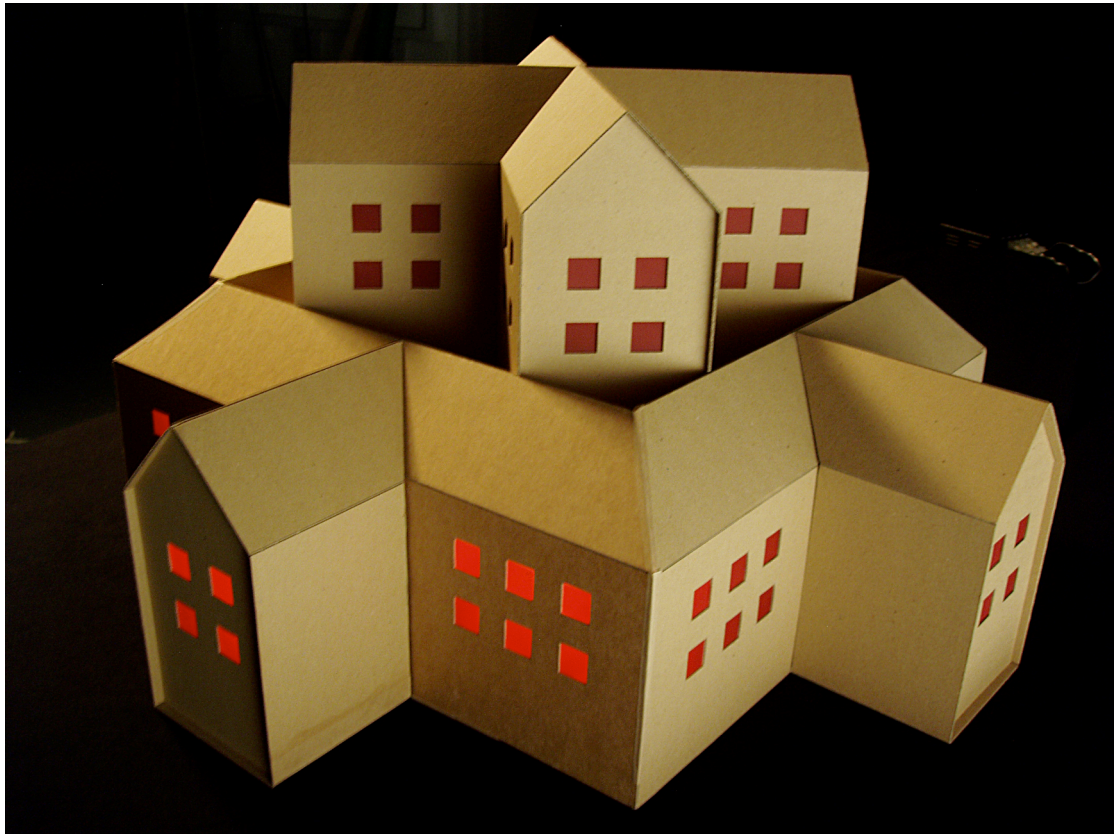




Wax Effigy, 2007; Wax, oil paint, clothes, butterfly. A. Sygros Museum, Athens



Femme à Barbe, 2007; Watercolour, 70 x 100 cm



0 to 3 in Prison, 2008; Performance, 20 min.



12 June 2008; Video, 8 min.

GLOSSARY

- **Autopoiesis**: Jakob Arnoldi describes: ‘*Autopoiesis is [...] a certain form of (self-) organization, that is, a recursive process where the system produces its own elements and integrates them in its own network.*’ [In *Theory, Culture, Society*, Volume 23, Numbers 2/3, March-May 2006, p. 116]. Marvin Carlson writes: ‘*The term was first utilized by the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela to point to the unique self-producing operations of living systems. While all other kinds of machine produce something different from themselves, autopoietic systems are simultaneously producers and products, circular systems that survive by self-generation.*’ [In Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, Routledge, 2008, p. 7]. Erika Fischer-Lichte has written extensively on the **autopoietic feedback loop** that transforms actors, spectators, and the performance itself in performance art and theatre. She writes: ‘*There no longer exists a work of art, independent of its creator and recipient; instead, we are dealing with an event that involves everybody – albeit to different degrees and in different capacities.*’ [Ibid. p. 18]; In his introduction to the book, Carlson writes on autopoiesis: ‘*As a self-organizing system, as opposed to an autonomously created work of art, it continually receives and integrates into that system newly emerging, unplanned, and unpredictable elements form both sides of the loop.*’ [Ibid. p. 8]. Fischer-Lichte, again, writes: ‘*A shift in focus occurred from potentially controlling the system to inducing the specific modes of autopoiesis.*’ [Ibid. p. 39]. A ‘twist’ in this idea of autopoiesis can be read in relation to Brechtian theatre, described by Raymond Williams: ‘*Essentially, what Brecht created, after long experiment, was a dramatic form in which men were shown in the process of producing themselves and their situations. This is, at root, a dialectical form, drawing directly on a Marxist theory of history in which, within given limits, man makes himself.*’ [Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, Oxford University Press, p. 279].

- **Performance**: Peggy Phelan describes performance's ontology as '*representation without reproduction*' [Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, p. 146]. Phelan writes: '*Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.*' [Ibid. p. 146]. At stake in performance is a singular action in present time; as such, performance subverts the capitalist production economy and demands attention to be paid to the present and to bodies as articulating its essence. In the context of my thesis, I use both *performance* and *performativity* to describe tensions between *agents* (objects and viewers) in the space of the work of art.

- **Performativity**: Although performativity implies repetition, '[...] *in performance theory it has been used adjectivally and quite generally to denote the performance aspect of any object or practice under consideration.*' [In Loxley, *Performativity*, op. cit., p. 140]. There is a distinction between a 'performative utterance' (in J. L. Austin's formulation) and *performative action* in performance theory, which signifies '*an adjective that can be applied to the dramatic or theatrical aspects of a situation or object of study.*' [Ibid. p. 169]. Loxley writes: '*Performativity*' would therefore mean only the rather general quality something might have by virtue of being a performance.' [Ibid. p. 140].

- **Self-seeing**: this recurring term is largely established through a notion of simultaneous positions and experiences that converge vision with the production of experience. It is used to describe a distinctive sensation in the affective experience while encountering or moving in the space of the work of sculpture and installation. It is a pivotal term in the writings of Olafur Eliasson, and as such I see it as bound to the mechanics of staging, art as encounter, and what aesthesis such an encounter may produce. Eliasson says:

The reason I think it's important to exercise this double-perspective phenomenon is that our ability to see ourselves

seeing – or to see ourselves in the third person, or actually to step out of ourselves and see the whole set-up with the artefact, the subject and the object – that particular quality also gives us the ability to criticize ourselves. I think this is the final aim: giving the subject a critical position, or the ability to criticize one's own position in this perspective. [In Grynsztejn, Birnbaum, Speaks, *Olafur Eliasson*, op. cit., p. 21].

- **Subject produced by an encounter with a work of art**: an encounter as a transformative and autopoietic experience (see also *autopoiesis*); as such the subject is not *a given* in this term since it is always changing, caught in this move, produced before, during and after, and therefore we cannot speak of *a subject*; a *subject produced by an encounter* is a process. At the same time, what is implied in this transitional term is the possibility of a (paradox) oscillation between states: between affect and becoming (and multiple positions, decentred-ness, in-between-ness) and a self-reflection that includes the act of seeing and the state of becoming as a combined process (a production of one through the other).
- **Work of art**: in the context of this thesis I will be using the phrase 'work of art' to explore spatial works, sculpture and installation; in general with 'work of art' I will be focussing on visual art unless otherwise stated (as for instance, in the context of the chapters where I discuss particular theatrical performances).
- **Theatricality**: '[i]t is a mode of representation or a style of behaviour characterized by histrionic actions, manners, and devices, and hence a practice; yet it is also an interpretative model for describing psychological identity, social ceremonies, communal festivities, and public spectacles, and hence a theoretical concept. It has even attained the status of both an aesthetic and a philosophical system. [...] Thus, to some people, it is that which is quintessentially the theatre, while to others it is the theatre subsumed into the whole world. Apparently the concept is comprehensive of all meanings yet empty of all specific sense.' [Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis, *Theatricality*, op. cit., p. 1]. They also note: 'Binary awareness is crucial to

theatricality, which is understood as “a process that has to do with a ‘gaze’ that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which friction can emerge”. [Ibid. p. 28. The authors quote Josette Féral, ‘Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language,’ *Substance* 31.2/3, p. 97].

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