

**APPROPRIATING GESTURE: LIVE ART FOR SALE  
THINKING APPROPRIATION THROUGH THE WORK OF  
LA RIBOT, TINO SEHGAL AND L. NÓBREGA**

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Declaration: I, Teresa Calonje, declare the work presented herein to be my own, and is the thesis upon which I, the candidate, intend to be examined upon.





*Whale-Fishing*, facsimile of a woodcut in the *Cosmographie Universelle* of Thevet, in folio: Paris, 1574. Project Gutenberg. I include this single image for the thesis, inspired by the work of I. Nóbrega.



To my father and mother.

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## Abstract

As Live art is available for sale and acquired by public and private collections, this thesis questions what property adds or does to the opening event of art's occurrence and what relationalities it generates or perpetuates. For something exteriorised to be available for commercial exchange, I argue it first needs to be made a legal and private thing, appropriated and constituted as an object of one's own by an artist. I attempt to unpack what is at stake then, if anything, in the capture of gestures, of a relation in the world in and through the body, by the artist as property-holder; and what modes of relating can take place outside this regime of APPROPRIATION.

I approach these questions from a historical, existential and legal perspective as I look at three particular artists and approach their work in an *ekphratic* manner. La Ribot's *Distinguished pieces*, in production since the early 1990s, are the focus of the first part of the thesis. Here, I intuitively approach the question of the becoming body and the becoming property of the bodily gestures, as the condition for the construction of saleable choreographies. The middle section is occupied by Tino Sehgal's success story and the accommodation of the "constructed situations" within the visual art logic. I consider here the legal and performative technologies at work in the making of the artist and his work. From an exigency to think of a relation otherwise, the last part of this research listens to the *mute-*ilations and screams in I. Nóbrega's actions and explores the possibilities of un-doing or un-wanting the work of art, as object and property. This refusal will demand a radical repositioning of the artist and the self, and so I finish by presenting strategies of withdrawal and rethinking a *m-other* relation to gesture.

## Prologue

From its genesis, Live art has maintained, for some, a rather contentious relation to exosomatic things, to the production of objects and documentation as exteriorities.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1960s and 1970s in America as well as in Europe, different tangible forms and documents, certificates or traces of the event permitted an inscription of the event, as its prosthetic, so it could last in time and circulate in space. These prosthetics could circulate as an extension or double of the event and would be used by artists, critics, scholars, and curators alike to theorise, make sense of, rethink and revisit the events. Dealers and artists made the most of those material things: already in the 1960s, the Parisian art dealer, Iris Clert advised Yves Klein to fabricate his *Zones of Sensibility* as art experiences that could be sold through certificates; Chris Burden produced photography and relics, such as the glass case containing the two nails from his crucifixion to a Volkswagen in 1974; and Carolee Schneeman's *Interior Scroll*, 1975, was photographed by Anthony McCall, and made available for sale in limited editions. The paper scroll that she extracted from her vagina and read during the performance was preserved, owned by an American private collector and now resides in Tate Modern's collection since 2012. What was sold by the artists and dealers was material: documentation, certificates, traces or props. The event of Live art, the encounter, remained in the time and space of the event and was shared with a present public. The decade between the mid 1990s and the early 2000s, however, saw a fundamental shift towards "eventisation" or "event culture".<sup>2</sup> A new hierarchy appeared in the art context in which the lived-experience of the (lost) event would come to be privileged over its textual or media representations. Artists and curators alike returned to seminal events of art history, not only through documentation but furthermore by re-enacting the lived-event of the past. In 1986, in La Havana, Cuba, Tania Bruguera began a series of re-enactments of Ana Mendieta's performances; in 1998, artists

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<sup>1</sup> I am using Live art as an umbrella term that includes performance art, experimental dance and theatre, art forms which manipulate (in the sense that they handle) gestures, the spoken and relations with and between bodies in space and time as a matter at work in the event.

On documentation see Phelan, 1993; Schneider, 2011; Jones and Heathfield, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Lütticken, 2015: 19; Velthuis, 2012: 32.

Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard reenacted David Bowie's concert *A Rock 'N' Roll* from 1973, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; Jeremy Deller reenacted the *Battle of Orgreave*, in 2001; Jens Hoffman curated *A Little Bit of History Repeated* at the Kunstwerke, Berlin, in 2001<sup>3</sup>, restaging seminal performances from the 1960s and 1970s; Iwona Blaswick curated a series of reenactments for "A Short History of Performance", in 2002 at the Whitechapel Gallery, London; the *Life, Once More* exhibition took place at the Witte de With, Rotterdam in 2005.<sup>4</sup> The decade culminated with the opening of Boris Charmatz's *Musée de la danse* or "Dancing museum" in 2009, in Rennes, France.<sup>5</sup> All turned towards and prioritised the live event of occurrence, and constructed a new status for it within the art institution.

The visual arts started to move and dance as dancers slowed down to enter into the space and the structures that had been reserved for material objects.<sup>6</sup> In the early 1990s, choreographer and dancer La Ribot started to sell her short gestures as *Distinguished pieces* to "distinguished proprietors", and in 1994, artist James Lee Byars sold *The Perfect Smile* (1994) to the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, thought to be the first acquisition of a gesture by an art museum. Byars wrote down a handwritten invoice but gave no specific instructions. He did, however, ask for his work to be shown like any other work in the collection.<sup>7</sup> These were isolated experiments. However, from the early 2000s, Live art would be properly established as a new art form of authored property, an event as a product, portable and available for sale, what artist Marcel Broodthaers would have called an "insincere" object of art property.<sup>8</sup> In 2001, FRAC Lorraine, France, acquired its first performance work, it was a performance work by Dora Garcia's *Proxy/Coma* (2001). Instructions for the re-activation of bodies were given out to the director of the space at the time by Béatrice Josse.<sup>9</sup> Tino Sehgal started to produce and sell his "constructed situations" in the early 2000s. He sold to the choreographer Jérôme Bel and collectors Josée and Marc Gensollen, and in 2005 Sehgal's *This is Propaganda* (2002) was Tate Modern's first acquisition of a Live artwork.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.artforum.com/columns/a-little-bit-of-history-repeated-163548/>

<sup>4</sup> Lütticken, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.museedeladanse.org/en.html>

<sup>6</sup> Lepecki, 2006. A long list of dancers and choreographers that would include La Ribot and Tino Sehgal, but also Michael Clark, Pablo Bronstein, Siobhan Davies, Boris Charmatz, Sarah Michelson, Maria Hassabi, Ralph Limon. See also Bishop, 2019; Wookey, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Email correspondence with Barbara Engelbach from the Ludwig Museum, 7 June 2013. See also Ottman and Hollein, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> "The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed [his] mind" said Marcel Broodthaers as he packaged his books and produced an art object *Pense Bête* (1964). Compton, 1980:13.

<sup>9</sup> Calonje, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Both Tate and the Guggenheim museums use the word "constructed situation" to describe Sehgal's practice. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sehgal-this-is-propaganda-t12057>  
<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/tino-sehgal>

These early acquisitions inaugurated a century in which, as Performance art historian and curator Roselee Goldberg has claimed, “performance art has become one of the most highly visible art forms in museums as well as in art biennials and art fairs around the globe.”<sup>11</sup> There has been a clear move towards the lived-experience of “gestures as forms in themselves” not only from a curatorial point of view but also as discrete and knowable objects of property.<sup>12</sup> Live art, as Goldberg remarks, has since become a prominent feature at art fairs and in the commercial circuit. In 2008, I co-curated together with Laura Eldret, a programme of Live works for sale at Zoo Art Fair, including performances by Nina Beier, Reza Aramesh and Giorgio Sadotti. Artists Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci were already selling their short gestures through their dealer Marcelle Alix, Paris. In 2014, Frieze Art Fair in London introduced the “Live” programme. Also during those years, two dancers and artists, Adriano Wilfert Jensen and Simon Asencio, set up Galerie International, an “immaterial gallery” offering Live art as “immaterial objecthood” for sale – their catalogue of works available include a work by choreographer Mårten Spångberg, *Powered by Emotion* (2003).<sup>13</sup> These are a few scattered examples of the thirst for the lived-experience of bodily gestures, situations, encounters, behaviours and choreographies, that are being constructed into new forms of art property and offered and consumed as a good FOR SALE.<sup>14</sup>

What this research struggles with is precisely that capitalisation of the event of gestures, in the field of art and in the market. The intention is, here, to recognise how the distinctions took place, or rather what have been the conditions - technological, existential and political - that have allowed or pushed artists to construct private property distinctly, but still as event. In a similar manner not all Live art practitioners have the same relation to documentation, neither have all the practitioners decided to move into property.<sup>15</sup> However, it is now conceivable and possible to add property on top of the event. In economic terms, it is possible to produce the event, no longer only as service and remunerated as labour, but as a legal and commercial good, an owned object (tangible or intangible) ready for circulation in exchange for money. Unlike a service that disappears as it is delivered, the event as a good or as property is transferable not only once but many times. This research attends to that passage from event to art product, or art property: how has the bodily gesture, being’s engagement to and in the world, become articulated as a durable and portable property and hence made available FOR SALE and included in art collections, which “invariably base their enterprise on a certain notion

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<sup>11</sup> Goldberg, 2018: 7.

<sup>12</sup> Wood, 2018: 116; Jones, 2012: 12.

<sup>13</sup> <https://galerie.international/about/>

<sup>14</sup> I take this capitalisation from La Ribot’s Distinguished piece n°14, N°14, from 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Asked if she would sell her dances, Yvonne Rainer responded “that is another thing (...) It’s a very questionable deal” (Wookey, 2015: 55-56). See also artists Isidoro Valcárcel Medina (2012); and Maria Teresa Hincapié (Segura, 2022; Sánchez, 2022).

of object”?<sup>16</sup> How and in what conditions have the artists worked out that passage from “irrational, unlocalizable, contingent ‘event’ to the legally apprehended thing”?<sup>17</sup> Moreover, what realities and relationalities are being generated as the event and gestures are being fabricated into objects of art and objects of property?

### *The question of ek- and ex-sistence*

Some light can be shed on this passage from gestures towards a certain ‘thingness’, by attending to a single word – existence – spelt or translated slightly differently and hence creating different relationalities. Thinking of existence, or rather of a gesture coming into existence, is thinking of a mode of emerging, of opening towards an exterior world or exterior milieu, terminologies I borrow from both German philosopher Martin Heidegger and French philosopher Bernard Stiegler.<sup>18</sup> The word existence can be understood etymologically, by separating out the two parts of the word: the Greek prefix *ek-* or the Latin *ex-*, and the Indo-European root *sta-* ‘to stand, make, or be firm’.<sup>19</sup> The prefix *ek-* expresses an opening, a taking place moved towards the world, whereas the translation into Latin *ex-* expresses first of all an exit, rather than held in a passage, that is the making of exteriority. What is it to open the event into *ek-sistence*, to hold on to that opening into the world, to maintain it in that space of not yet inside or outside, still undistinguished, bearing yet a little longer a relation to the obscurity, the anonymous, the no-thingness not yet represented in some-thing else? Dance historian Ramsay Burt writes, in his inspiring publication *Ungoverning Dance* (2017), about dance strategies that open new spaces of encounter and the common in an ever more controlled, manipulated and normalised environment. Burt compares the act of art’s opening with the opening of the body of the dancer as she dances. The dancer opens her limbs and torso to the world, opening in an act of generosity and responsibility which could well be close to the definition of *ek-sistence*.<sup>20</sup> So what happens then, in the translation to *ex-sistence*? An exteriority that forgets its relation to the opening, is in its end, a thing appearing, created as a separate existence as an autonomous entity in the exterior milieu, as an exosomatic thing, as Stiegler suggests. It is a making other as another existence outside and separated.

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<sup>16</sup> Rogoff and Sherman, 1994: x.

<sup>17</sup> Best 2004: 64.

<sup>18</sup> See Stiegler, 2014; 2015; Ross, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> See Fédier’s entry on “Existence”: “Le *ex* latin exprime d’abord la sortie, le passage d’un intérieur à un extérieur, alors que le *ek* grec dit avant tout l’ouverture, la manifestation *ek*-statique, bref l’espacement sans dedans ni dehors.” (Fédier, 2013: 467).

<sup>20</sup> Burt, 2017: 236.

I am making a point of using the prefix *ek-* and *ex-* for the stance of art, because both reveal different approaches and modes of understanding the gesture, either as an opening, without the distinction of interior or exterior, or as *ex-sistence* that is, as the making exterior, exteriorisation. In the making other, whatever is brought forth in the opening of the body and the limbs into the world, the act, or *praxis*, collapses into a final product, an artefact, as an other thing that can become an exterior artistic product. *Praxis*, or the act of engaging and participating in the world, becomes the raw material for a new form of completed work. In Greek, again, we observe the concept of the work as “completed work”, the *érgon*, a meaning at the origin of the French word *œuvre*. The notion of *érgon*, a product as *œuvre*, is found in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and is defined as a work undertaken and accomplished by an individual’s soul according to the *logos* and responds to the proper function of the human. Aristotle also relates it to *eudaimonia*, that is ‘happiness’.<sup>21</sup> The artist produces an accomplished work, or *œuvre*, by framing a creative act process as a product, or *poiēsis*.<sup>22</sup> Through *technē*, the making or doing, the act of bringing into appearance of *poiēsis* finds its end, as work of art, made product. The *œuvre* produces both artist-creator and performance art as its own creation, its making. Similarly, what I see occurring in Live art becoming object of art, or *œuvre*, is this shift from practice, *praxis*, or labour, from dancing and acting to becoming an in-formed thing in the world, resulting in a new kind of being-object. Furthermore, making act into object is “caught in a process of filiation” as it constitutes the *œuvre* as much as it constitutes and feeds the accomplished individual soul.<sup>23</sup>

This transition and distinction between a gesture as an opening and gesture as already another thing, in the exterior milieu, is what concerns this thesis and the *ex-* in *ex-propritation* relates to this shift. Following Hannah Arendt’s discussion on property in *The Human Condition* originally published in 1958, before it became a legal and commercial thing, property was a space to shelter and protect the coming into existence of the human being, held in the process of opening to the world, in “the sacredness of the hidden, namely, of birth and death”.<sup>24</sup> *Ex-propritation* made that space of the opening and of the labour of life that Arendt writes about, into a legal and commercial property, and continues to make the elementary conditions for being’s existence in the world into alienated, moveable, portable things that forget their existential use and are exchanged for money. Furthermore, *ex-propritation* relates to the word exchange, which is different to transmission or gift. Transmission, I understand as being closer to the rhythm of life and dance, in that it receives gestures as much as it gives

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<sup>21</sup> Agamben, 2016: 5; see also Kraut, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Tuckwell, 2018, 36-37.

<sup>23</sup> See Louppe in her discussion from dance to *œuvre*, Louppe, 2010: 231.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt, 1998: 62.

them back in body-to-body transmission. Exchange, however which contains the ex- factor, relates to distinct and portable legal and commercial things, it operates the circulation of property and money. Ex-propritation, with a hyphen, suggests that cut in the flow, in the rhythm; some thing being cut off and violently separated in the process of opening to the world. Something is separated and lost on one side but then appropriated, or added to, on the other side. Throughout the thesis the use of the notion of 'ex-propritation' will emphasise the cut and separation (for some) whereas 'APPROPRIATION' will suggest that something is added, taken in, on the other side (for others).<sup>25</sup>

### *Collections and museums*

Museums and institutions acquiring the event of Live art have produced vast amounts of research and publications on and around the issues of exhibiting, acquiring and preserving the event. In 2008, MoMA held conversations with various artists, curators and other agents on the subject of collecting Live art behind closed doors. Tate Modern followed with an, also private, series of meetings on the same questions between 2012 and 2014, which culminated in a published essay by Pip Laurenson and Vivian Van Saaze (2014). The question of the research focused on how the acquisition of the performativity of the event rather than its documentation or objects was reshaping the museum and conservation practices.<sup>26</sup> Tate continued with this endeavour and led another two-year project in collaboration with the Centre for Intermedia at the Department of English at the University of Exeter, called "Performance at Tate: Collecting, Archiving and Sharing Performance and the Performative" (2014 –2016). The outputs include a scholarly online publication, *Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art* with thematic essays and roughly one hundred case studies drawn from Tate's collection and programmes: a huge work of cataloguing all the museum's experiences, programming and acquisition of Live art works. The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis has done a similar job by publishing interviews and commissioned essays online following the acquisitions of Live art works.<sup>27</sup> These are examples of the very generous tasks that make works available to the public in their archival form (from handwritten notes, invoices, agreements, photos, etc) to continue to think and question the place of performance and performativity within history and within institutions. These undertakings are also used to construct the canonical discourse of the museum and fabricate a certain relation with the Live and performativity, and thus have

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<sup>25</sup> The word APPROPRIATION will appear always in capitals, heightened, performed, as it also appears like this in John Locke's manuscripts.

<sup>26</sup> Laurenson and van Saaze, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> <https://walkerart.org/living-collections-catalogue>



little space to question the making of property, the object of property which holds these institutions and their collections together in the first place. Other initiatives have gone a step further, such as the publicly funded confederation “L’Internationale” set up in 2014, grouping together several European art institutions, many having collections with acquired Live art works.<sup>28</sup> As the members of the confederation attempt to imagine future possibilities for the museum, they have looked more closely into its cracks and the question of colonial power that still haunts the acquisition of Live art practices, absorbed, managed and preserved in museums.<sup>29</sup>

### *Thinking through the work of 1, 2, 3 artists*

In 2014, I edited a book, *Live Forever: Collecting Live Art*, and invited different voices, artists, curators and critics to discuss the issues and complexities of the matter. A growing suspicion had already crept in, despite the positive narrative supporting the collecting trend. This academic piece of research picks up where I left off and takes a step back to analyse what happens even before Live art practices are appropriated, added and accumulated in the collections, be it private or public. The act of appropriating, as I mentioned, entails an act of ex-proprietation and it is this point that I begin from, with the help and embodied materiality of three artists: La Ribot (born 1962), Tino Sehgal (born 1976) and Luísa Nóbrega (born 1984). These three artists shape the three chapters of the thesis, and their gestures and practices are used as knots in which I see and attempt to untangle the question of the making of property (in the first two chapters) and its unmaking (in chapter three).

Trained in dance, in the early 1990s, María José Ribot (her artistic name being La Ribot) went solo and started her life-long project on the *Distinguished pieces*. These short pieces, using only her naked body and a few props that could easily fit in a suitcase, moved in and out of the visual art space and its economy.<sup>30</sup> La Ribot framed the pieces as Intellectual Property and sold their *distinguished* ownership to so-called *distinguished* proprietors, inaugurating the possibility of dance becoming that *distinguished* property for exchange. In 2000 she started her relationship with the dealer Soledad Lorenzo, Madrid. However, her funding throughout the project has still been channelled mainly through institutional and public

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<sup>28</sup> MG+MSUM from Ljubljana, the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, MACBA, Barcelona, M-HKA from Antwerp, Salt in Istanbul and Ankara, the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, MSN in Warsaw, the NCAD in Dublin and Valand in Gothenburg.

<sup>29</sup> Zielińska, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Rousier, 2004; Ribot 2007; and her website [https://www.laribot.com/distinguished\\_pieces](https://www.laribot.com/distinguished_pieces)

funding related to theatre and the performing arts economy.<sup>31</sup> Her commercial attempts remain as creative acts, hesitant gestures, playful and profane, toying with the fragments of pieces and with the coming into appearance of the body and its relation to things.

Tino Sehgal became acquainted with Ribot in the late 1990s. They met again in 2001, during a series of talks organised by choreographers Spångberg and Joachim Gerstmeier during the Siemens Kulturexperimente in Stockholm.<sup>32</sup> It was a time in which dance at a European level was rethinking the spaces and structures it was producing and was produced in. Sehgal had only just produced his only dance piece, *Twenty Minutes for the Twentieth Century* (1999). Having seen his work, curator Jens Hoffman encouraged Sehgal to move into the visual space and leave the dance world behind and included one of his pieces *Instead of Allowing Some Thing to Rise Up to Your Face Dancing Bruce and Dan and Other Things* (2000) at the Manifesta, Frankfurt, in 2003.<sup>33</sup> That same year, Sehgal already had what he calls his “constructed situations” available FOR SALE at Frieze Art Fair, London, at the booth of The Wrong Gallery. Since then, he has been collected by all the major museums and major contemporary art private collectors worldwide, and is represented by dealers Jan Mot (Brussels), Esther Schipper (Paris) and Marian Goodman (New York, Paris). Sehgal represents the success story of Live art’s transition into becoming a new form of art property.<sup>34</sup>

2008 was the year during which museums and markets absorbed the Live art event in Europe and the US and the work of Luísa Nóbrega is seen here as a reaction to that movement. Nóbrega produced their first action in Brazil, *Jonah 1* (2008).<sup>35</sup> They walked out of the theatre, covered their eyes and embarked on a journey of several days and nights by boat down the Amazon River and into the ocean, reversing the journey of the colonisers. Nóbrega’s actions engage with disgust and exhaustion through excessive acts of metaphorical self-displacements and disempowerment. Their actions were, in their own words, “always attempts to disappear”.<sup>36</sup> Nóbrega never sold their actions, lived an itinerant life and survived on art residencies and on an income they received from their editorial work for children’s books in Brazil.<sup>37</sup> Around 2017-2018, Luísa embarked in a transition, from Luísa they became the lower

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<sup>31</sup> See Rousier, 2004, and credits in the Distinguished pieces section on her website [www.laribot.com](http://www.laribot.com)

<sup>32</sup> Bringing artists, choreographers and theorists together, including Vito Acconci, Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, Dorothea von Hantelmann, La Ribot, Xavier Leroy, Rebecca Schneider, Tino Sehgal and Gerald Siegmund. See Burt 2017, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Herbert, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> von Hantelmann, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> To address Nóbrega and at their request, I will use the pronouns they/them/their.

<sup>36</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 10 April 2021.

<sup>37</sup> To name a few of Nóbrega’s residencies: at SIM Residency in Reykjavik; at the Nida Art Colony in Neringa, Lithuania; at Izolyatsia, Donetsk, Ukraine, in 2013; at Fortaleza, Brazil, 2013, at POLIN Museum in Warsaw, in 2014; at Casa do Sol, Brazil in 2014; at Delfina Foundation in 2016.

cap letter I. and then became Tom. The less established of the three artists, and comprising a practice that spanned just over a decade, there is very little documentation or writing about Nóbrega. Their website expired in the summer of 2022, and though there are videos available on vimeo, they are difficult to find.<sup>38</sup> One can still find some documentation on Luísa Nóbrega on the online exhibition catalogues and the websites of those organisations that hosted them in their residency programmes. I approach I.'s work precisely at that point in which they seek to disappear, in a withdrawal and a refusal to accommodate to being subject and single artist related to gestures as art and objects.

*Notes on a methodology: on ekphrasis, entanglements and parataxis*

In *Confronting Images* art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman (2004) analyses the use of *ekphrasis*. This is the approach I intend to take towards the art works and actions by Ribot, Sehgal and Nóbrega. Didi-Huberman explains *ekphrasis* by recounting Paul Claudel's description of the little painting by Jan Vermeer, *The Lacemaker* (1665). In response to Claudel's appeal to "Look!" at the details in the painting, Didi-Huberman searched, but however close he looks, he says, "[I] don't see what, according to Claudel, 'everything directs us' toward".<sup>39</sup> As much as one looks at the painting, one cannot see the thread between the lady's fingers nor much of what Claudel describes so precisely and yet so delicately in the painting that hangs in the Louvre Museum. One can see, or attempt to see, what Claudel sees only in an imagined or metaphorical way, rather than in a photographic one. This metaphorical gaze is what Didi-Huberman calls an *ekphratic* account of the works; the very opposite of *describing*, it becomes a way of seeing and reading the works differently. In the labyrinth of shapes, bodies and gestures in front of one's eyes, *ekphrasis* is a waiting for a thread to appear, a thread or a detail that might not even be there, or maybe that others cannot see, or that may appear only much later.<sup>40</sup> As I approach and spend time, fascinated by each of the works and artists' actions, I might not be able to avoid what Didi-Huberman calls the *aporia* of the *ekphrasis* which makes the observations always either "highly debatable, or it is proposed as invisible".<sup>41</sup> In saying something else about them, not as a bard, paid by the patron to sing

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<sup>38</sup> Their website is partially accessible on the Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220707111541/http://www.luisanobrega.com/>  
See also Delfina Foundation vimeo page <https://vimeo.com/180724509>

<sup>39</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2004: 250-251.

<sup>40</sup> On *ekphrasis* see also Mitchell, 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2005: 250.

their glory, but somehow disrespecting their closure, opening them up again, exaggerating, altering them, in my writing, I might well come to “betray” them.<sup>42</sup>

Entangled with this *ekphrasis*, a multitude of voices are invited to take part in the thinking process. I orchestrate various perspectives from different fields, languages and periods, and force them into a dialogue with the works and the artists, that would never have been possible otherwise, but that might open another reading and offer new insights. I do not aspire to write a thesis in existential or political philosophy, neither do I aspire to write a legal dissertation or a socio-political one. However, I do approach the legal, philosophical and even psychoanalytical epistemological fields of investigation, tentatively and carefully in those places where they meet my own questions, especially around questions of property, *technē* and trauma.

Property is a highly complex concept, and this study limits the scope of the term to its Roman heritage and its development within modern philosophy and political science in the hands of the seventeenth century philosopher John Locke. I am interested in the ancient and earliest constructions of legal property, when it subjected bodies and land, and was linked to a certain understanding of the person, distinguished from the non-person. This Roman categorisation of selves and modes of relating permeated Western thought and was modernised in the writing of John Locke and in his theories of property and personhood, only to be appropriated later by the emancipation movement in the US at the end of the nineteenth century. I follow the suggestions from Black critical theorist Stephen Best in his study *Fugitive's Properties* (2004) which focuses on the production of concrete cultural properties and its connection to slavery and emancipation during that same period and draw analogies between the making of emergent property forms – that is, the event of gesture as property - and old property forms of property such as slavery and land. Dance historian Anthea Kraut (2015) also follows Best's thoughts in her study on the development of Intellectual Property rights for dancers. She analyses how both voice and movements that had, until the end of the nineteenth century, been part of the collective and the vernacular, were utilised by the emergent solo dancers to constitute property and themselves as property-holding-subjects. Adding to the work done by Kraut, in the field of art and its interaction of law more specifically, I have sought the advice and have consulted the work of Daniel McClean (2007, 2014) and the thorough study of Judith Ickowicz (2013), analysing the complex interactions between law and contemporary art more generally as well as specifically in a multitude of cases. With them, my objective is to investigate what has been occurring with bodily gestures, language and

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<sup>42</sup> Simon, 2016; Robertson, 2020.

relationalities in the particular context of performance art since the 1990s, and in the work, gestures and positionings of the artists Ribot, Sehgal and Nóbrega.

I understand here the legal construction of property, and of the artist as a *technē*, as an artifice that will lead me into a discussion on technology. I do this mainly through the writings of Bernard Stiegler, channeling Heidegger, Karl Marx and Jacques Derrida. Stiegler's notion of *technē* is intrinsic and constitutive of the human, and comes to compensate a lack, in memory, as *pharmakon*, that is both a remedy for a deficiency, and a poison. Art, and its construction into property, would be for him a retentional tertiary technology or mnemotechnology, distinguished from a secondary one that is the memory still held within the brain and limbs of the body, the opening of memory so to say. Tertiary memory describes and inscribes images on exterior support systems, a canvas or in a contract.<sup>43</sup> As those images come to be created, that is, as these things come to emerge as other, exterior, and autonomous from the body, I deliberate upon separation and exteriorisation, the making of other also through the work of psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994) who influenced the work of Derrida (1986) and of Julia Kristeva (1989). I attend especially to the process of formation and exteriorisation, and the experience of the mouth's empty cavity, that brings about a recognition of the human being as an "empty mouth", always set in relation to existence in separation and as emptiness.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout this amalgam of thoughts and references, I wish to remain an "amateur"<sup>45</sup>, aware I will always be handling these questions as questions, never close enough to be sure, never familiar. My writing at times resembles the literary and rhetorical style of *parataksis*, moving abruptly from one thought or description to another. I take the concept from Françoise Metzger's essay on "The Hands of Simone Weil" (2001), describing Weil's chaotic and sketchy form of writing, the use of juxtapositions and contradictions that shape her thinking, as a search that answers only with another problem that doesn't seem to relate at all, nor does it give an obvious answer. Sometimes without conjunction between clauses, simply placed alongside each other, I move from one concept, historical moment or artwork to the next. There is one connection or many, often left to the reader to relate to, to care for. I keep the 'k' in the word *parataksis*, rather than using the 'x' in order to link the concept to the Greek *ek-sistence* rather than the Latin *ex-*, and to the *ekphratic*, and so to put the emphasis on the fact

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<sup>43</sup> Stiegler in Rossouw, 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Abraham and Torok, 1994: 125-138.

<sup>45</sup> I take this term from Stiegler on professionalism and the automaton in the film Heathfield and Glendinning (2015).

that the use and movement between thoughts and matters will open, I hope, rather than distinguish and enclose fragments of thoughts.

Finally, I would like to note that as a researcher and author, I wish to place myself within the problem, to paraphrase Donna Haraway;<sup>46</sup> to “site-write” as I navigate through these questions in the first person who writes.<sup>47</sup> I come to be seen in the writing through very slight gestures, as I find the right pronouns, through capitalisations and miniaturisations, in bleeds, and as I bring in pebbles, into my mouth and into the text. I allow a certain creativity to intervene in my act of writing to make more evident that it is an act of awaiting rather than an act of inventing and enclosing something in a laboratory jar. I am thinking through and with other authors and artists, in what we have in common, that is the physicality and the voice in which we attempt to live, think and act in the world. I am not trying to interpret or enclose their work, neither am I using them to “invent” anything new. I would rather think of my writing as holding or tending, in a playful manner and haunted by my own ghosts.

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<sup>46</sup> Haraway, 2016: 2.

<sup>47</sup> Jane Rendell, 2010.

## Chapter 1 –

### When gesture becomes form<sup>48</sup>

D.p. n° 26 N° 26 (1997)

Distinguished Proprietor: Ion Munduate

The naked woman appears on stage, a thick Klein blue crayon in her hand, the music of a *pasodoble*, traditionally played during bullfights in Spain, starts playing in the background. She begins to dance to the rhythm of the music while she draws, or rather scribbles on her body, on her face, with the blue crayon. Her movements soon become sharp, fast, erratic; her body dancing and acting as the canvas for her own painting, artifice. Something is being produced and at the same time something violent is insinuated: passion and murder in the artistic act.

La Ribot trained in classical ballet and produced her first piece of choreography *Carita de Angel* in 1985, in Madrid: a twelve-minute piece for three female dancers and, her already evident fetish, a wooden folding chair. She set up a company Bocanada Danza together with dancer Blanco Calvo which operated between 1986 and 1989. In the beginning of the 1990s, Spain was hit by a deep economic crisis which severely affected the cultural sector. The subsequent scarcity of resources gave rise to small format productions, unstable forms of associations and precarious survival among dance practitioners. Leaving the company and going solo meant going small, and a move to a more nimble and minimal production which encouraged, according to dance theorist José-Antonio Sánchez, a stripping back to the body and a questioning of the body and its spaces and structures. On the international stage, dance was inclining toward theory and a 'philosophical turn' was taking place in Dance Studies

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<sup>48</sup> A reference to Harald Szeemann's exhibition "Live in Your Head - When Attitudes Become Form" (1969).

following the work of Derrida and Michel Foucault, specifically concerning the “governed” body of the dancer.<sup>49</sup>

It was in this context that Ribot embarked upon her *Distinguished project* in 1993; a project she has been working on intermittently ever since, concurrently producing other full-length dance pieces and video works. The project is composed of a series of short performative gestures that she calls “*Distinguished pieces*”. The plan is to produce 100 *Distinguished pieces*. By 2023 she had already produced fifty-nine of them grouped together in seven series.<sup>50</sup> She compares the short *distinguished* pieces to the gag, or to the short performances in circuses or music halls, or even commercial adds, screened or performed during intermissions.<sup>51</sup> I like to think of them as little vignettes, short metaphorical fragments or maybe just parables bringing together bodies, words, and things with a certain sense of the carnivalesque. The buffoonery of the pieces derives from her interest in various mechanisms at work in popular culture, from silent films, pin ups and striptease to superheroes and cartoons.<sup>52</sup> The pieces are short, some lasting only a few seconds, others several minutes. They are detached and isolated from each other, and from the one who seems to be gesturing and speaking to them, herself and the body that holds her in place. In much the same way as an archaeologist would number the fragments as they appear, unaware of their content or meaning, the *Distinguished pieces* are placed randomly alongside one another in a series. They are given a number: *Distinguished piece* number 1, 2, etc (that I abbreviate as D.p. n°1, D.p. n°2, etc) even before they receive their distinguished title.<sup>53</sup> La Ribot draws the name of her project from the solo piece for piano *Les Trois Valses distinguées du précieux dégoûté* (1914) by Erik Satie, another artist of fragments, of juxtapositions and radical simplicity. As in Satie’s musical piece, so too Ribot’s pieces humourously depict the isolated and fragmented body in relation to things, body, body parts and prosthetics all brought to the same level.

She started the project working on her own body only, but she later invited dancers Anna Williams in 2002 and Ruth Childs in 2015 to perform the pieces too. Since 2011, with the series *PARAdistinguidas*, she has been inviting other dancers and non-dancers to perform with her in new pieces. The pieces are moveable and have toured in festivals, theatres as well as in art galleries.<sup>54</sup> Ribot put them up for sale from the early 1990s, and has bartered, given

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<sup>49</sup> Brown, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> [https://www.laribot.com/distinguished\\_pieces](https://www.laribot.com/distinguished_pieces)

<sup>51</sup> Calonje 2014: 30-31.

<sup>52</sup> Email correspondence with Ribot, 18 February 2011.

<sup>53</sup> When she presents the pieces in series, she does not perform in order, but randomly, and so am I presenting and traversing them in this thesis.

<sup>54</sup> Festival d’Automne, Paris, International Flemish Mime Festival, Festival National de Nouvelle Dance, Montreal, Museu Serralves, Porto, Lattitudes Contemporaines, Lille, Theatre de la Ville, Paris, Theatre de l’Usine, Geneve,



away and sold twenty-seven *Distinguished pieces* to, as she named them, “*distinguished proprietors*”.<sup>55</sup> She never expected the sales to be financially viable, and her main source of funding has always been from the theatre economy and public funding<sup>56</sup>. Her *distinguished* sale was more of a game than a financial strategy. As she played, however, she flirted with, or speculated on the possibility of another thing, not a dance, not a service, but the Live art event as a constructed legal art property and a commercial good, a fixed and autonomous thing that could be owned and exchanged in the art market. She was represented by the art dealer Soledad Lorenzo, Madrid, until the gallery closed in 2012. In 2000, she decided to cease the sale of the *pieces*, precisely at a time when Performance art and dance were finding their ‘proper’ place within museums and their collections. It is this relation, of Ribot and property, that provides the basis for the chief inquiry of this chapter: How can dance and its gestures be conceived as property for exchange in the market? And what did Ribot do with it? Furthermore, what happens, what is transformed in being’s relation to gestures, movements, to being’s relation to the world in and through the bodily, when gesture is constructed into an owned property or work of art available FOR SALE? I approach her *Distinguished project* as a series of openings that La Ribot ‘improperly’ plays with, involved in a relation to the technologies of capture without quite knowing what to do with them, still held in the process of exteriorisation and capture of gestures, in a discovery that is flimsy and does not quite want to settle fully, yet. This chapter focuses on the instability of her positioning, cracking open, playing but already putting the event at risk, as gestures move into visibility and the stability and duration of the visual art logic.

Despite time and space restrictions, I outline a genealogy of the construction of bodily gestures into property. I take this method from Foucault, who, though not describing the dancing or performing body in art, saw in the body impregnated by history, “a process of subjection in which humanity is forced to participate”.<sup>57</sup> The bodily gestures emanate from an understanding of the body and its relation to the world, it plays precisely in that space of relation in and with self and the world, still held as not yet exteriorised but in an opening. This chapter weaves thoughts with cross-temporal moments of history. From Chinese thought to the emergence of Intellectual Property rights in dance in the early twentieth century and to the

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ICA London, South London Gallery, Galeria Soledad Lorenzo, to name only a few. See Rousier, 2004 and [https://www.laribot.com/distinguished\\_pieces](https://www.laribot.com/distinguished_pieces)

<sup>55</sup> List of Distinguished Proprietors: Daikin Air Conditioners, North Wind, Nacho van Aerssen, Bernardo Laniado-Romero, Rafa Sánchez, Olga Mesa, Juan Dominguez, Lois Keidan, Blanca Calvo, Isabelle Rochat, MalPelo, Marga Guergué, Thierry Spicher, Julia y Pedro Nuñez, Robyn Archer, GAG Comunicación, De Hexe Mathilde Monnier, Ion Munduate, Franko B and Lois Keidan, Mattiew Doze, Arsenic, Víctor Ramos, Jérôme Bel, Arteleku, Soledad Lorenzo, Gerald Siegmund. See Rousier, 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Amongst many others: Theatre de la Ville, Festival d’Automne, Paris, INAEM, Ministry of Culture of Spain, ICA, Live arts, London, Ville de Genève, République et canton de Genève and Pro Helvetia - Swiss Arts Council.

<sup>57</sup> Burt, 2004: 31.

Hospital of La Salpêtrière in Paris, it analyses the exterior milieu in which Live art can possibly be understood as an object of one's own making and an object of property. The *ekphratic* narrations of some of La Ribot's *Distinguished pieces* will be the fine thread that will hold it all together. Through her prompts, I attempt to understand how the bodily gestures are exteriorised, become other exosomatic things in what will seem like a history of the development of technologies of self: 1) in the *logic* of the body, 2) in the inscription of writing and choreography, 3) in the legal construct of a thing, and 4) in early photography, the gestures eventually becoming autonomous fragments of existence that might well be, 5) captured by property or played around with. These five parts as epochal events compose the series of thoughts and make up the chapter, as I strive to answer the question: How have gestures become things that might belong to a subject, and that might be constructed into property? And what modes of relating is this coming into existence as thing and as legal thing producing?

I follow Stiegler's understanding of *technē* as the artifice that takes place in that space of separation, where difference has occurred, when the interior and exterior have been distinguished, the self and the other, the self and the world, cut apart and brought back into relation through *technē*. I use Stiegler's concept of tertiary retentional memory or tertiary mnemotechnologies. Following Edmund Husserl, Stiegler distinguishes tertiary memory from primary and secondary memory, the first retained in the unconscious, the latter in the conscious. Tertiary memory is the process in which retaining the past— and I would add imagining futures - for storage or access “begins to operate *outside* of living organisms themselves, neither in their genes nor in their brains, but in artefacts”.<sup>58</sup> I follow the epochal events of history that Stiegler suggests, which have inaugurated new ages of meaning and produced new realities. These revolutionary events, I also call a series of ‘traumatic’ events, that while they might not have

**bled,**

have indeed marked the body and its gestures, have cut, separated, interrupted rhythms, movements, circuits that tried to flow. Between the cuts, between the separated pieces, left behind by shocks, things have been expropriated, stolen from the process, the rhythm, as “purloined” objects.<sup>59</sup>

The first part of the chapter analyses the body set here as the paradigm of an *aporia* of existence which is brought into appearance and at the same time always related to in

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<sup>58</sup> Bishop and Ross, 2021: 113.

<sup>59</sup> In a nod to Lacan's “purloined letter”, see Payne, 1993: 7.

separation, in distinction and difference. I consider the emergence of the image of the body through several of Ribot's *pieces*, including D.p. n° 1 *Muriéndose la Sirena* (1993), which I will read through two other stories of genesis: the Judeo-Christian account in the garden of Eden and the fairy tale of *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen (originally published in 1837). I confront Western thought and the relation to the body as it comes to appear (already a body-naked) with a Chinese conception of being bodily in the world thanks to the writings of François Jullien (2007) and of Heidegger in the fifties and sixties, in order to explain what particular modes of being in interaction with and in the world are being shaped in and through the – Western – body.

Looking back at the history of dance and a further exteriorisation of gestures as they are drawn out and written down in choreography, in the second part of the chapter, I examine how a relation to the bodily gestures, iterations and movements of dance have been transformed and made into exosomatic things outside the opening of the bodily. I analyse the advent of choreography in light of the discussion on writing as a *pharmakon* that goes back to Plato and that was rethought in the writing of Derrida (2016). What does writing do to dance, what do notations do to gesture? What is the lack in the gestural act that demands a medicine/poison? Ribot did indeed write down her pieces in theory and as Intellectual Property. I argue she did it in a poetic fashion, playing with language rather than codifying it, as in the choreography notations, nonetheless she was still exteriorising her pieces in writing, setting the conditions for the emergence of a legal thing (in Latin *res*). I focus on this coming into writing, as a mnemotechnology, a technique of the spirit. In Stiegler's terms, all technique is an exteriorisation of memory; all exteriorised things hold the memory of past experiences. I approach the technologies that have produced exteriorities, have grammatised dance and gesture outside of the body. Though he does not himself write about dance, I use Stiegler's notion of grammatisation and of his epochal stages in this chapter. Grammatization is the process that transforms currents and continuities, the flux of dancing and living bodily into signs, *grámma* (in Greek) or discrete marks, which means that which is written down in lines and letters, but also means a small weight, a gram or gramme. Writing hence would mean a transformation if not also a reduction of gestures to mathematical terms, to make them suitable for calculation, storage and exchange, and made available for others.<sup>60</sup> I look at the relation between dance and writing, and analyse the effects of writing on the event of dancing and the emergence of the dancer-become-author, existing differently on the stage of the white page and in the movement of the hand that writes as it dances.

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<sup>60</sup> Stiegler, 2014: 53.

Using Ribot's fetish object – the wooden folding chair that appears quite physically all along the project – in a third part of this chapter I contemplate the construction of the notion of body in relation to that of property, both as legal ownership. Although coming from seemingly different registers, the notion of the body and that of property converge, as they both enclose and both depend upon an assumption of thing-ness. They are also constructed notions that share a history, since one of the first things (in Latin *res*) to become property was the body, together with animals and land. I make my way through the concept of property and the history of its making, particularly in its relation to personhood. From Rome, I investigate the conceptualisation of the modern Person and the property of his own body in the writing and social theory of John Locke. To conclude this section, I move forward in time, into the history of the body and dance, and the emancipation movement of the first solo women and black dancers in the early twentieth century, as discussed by Anthea Kraut (2016). In these beginnings it is evident that there was first and foremost a fight to get back some-thing that had been stolen, a fight to reach out and become the Person, to be recognised not as property but as owners of their own body. This struggle is also present in the process of the recognition of dance gestures as property and in the fight for the recognition of gestures as autonomous and ownable artworks, producing new forms of property and enclosures.

In part 4, I reflect upon the use of photography, as prosthetic or artifice to retain memory as fixed and *in-formed* images, and will do so in and around the work of La Ribot, in particular D.p. n°16 *Narcisa* (1996). The relation of Performance art and documentation has been much discussed, and I return to it in more detail in chapter 2.<sup>61</sup> Here, however, I investigate the early developments of photography to illuminate the problematics still present in the twenty-first century. In the early years of photography, in the late nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, photography was used to invent, discover, and at the same time to ex-propriate and retain gestures, not only in dance but also in factories and in medical research in the emerging field of psychology. Through the study of Didi-Huberman, I analyse the events which took place at the Hospital of La Salpêtrière in the late nineteenth century, in Paris, where the most advanced technologies of tertiary retention were used to capture women's gestures. I consider these moments as cuts, the disruption and opening of a wound in the process of care, leaving the *distinguished* women, in a traumatised state. Addressing D.p. n°10 *Hacia donde Volver los Ojos* (1994), I frame this form of exteriorisation, as a condition for the emergence of property, as a split, a violent separation or existential cut that has set the conditions for the possibility of the sale and manipulation of gestures, the condition for the making of property out of the live gestures in the art context.

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<sup>61</sup> Jones, 1997; Auslander, 2006; Jones and Heathfield, 2012.

La Ribot experimented with the sale of gestures, already related to as things, as pieces, of *Distinguished property*, as fragments, from the poetic still on the verge of the emergence of the legal. What else could she do with all that was lying around her and made available? Lament or play? Part 5 concludes the chapter, observing her position as an artist urged to do something, to relate, and her choice of a “childish” relation, playing, and not producing anything, to remain held in the *praxis* (act). I observe her play with things, the artifice of the body and that of property as a childish approach but also foolish, acting as the heroes of an old silent film, inadequate for their times and unable or unwilling to use properly the technologies of capture – framing – at hand.

## Chapter 1 - Part 1 -

### What did you do with your body?<sup>62</sup>

The seven-minute solo work *Socorro! Gloria!* (1991) was a transitional piece Ribot produced as she was going solo and naked.<sup>63</sup> It was set as a prologue to the *Distinguished project* and set several of the means, or tools, that Ribot would use throughout her project: colourful objects of daily life, her wooden chair, her mis-use of language and silence, her body-naked, all interwoven in a somehow never-ending striptease and an already failed lecture. In this piece, as in most of the *Distinguished pieces*, she looks attentively and seriously to the audience. With a straight and blunt gaze, she addresses us in our human melancholic condition. This reference to the melancholic I take from theatre and dance theorist Gerald Siegmund that in turn, he takes from Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin, to speak about Ribot's distinguished woman's relation to her body. I have added the word 'human' to the melancholic in reference to Arendt's concepts of work and labour in relation to the human to which I return throughout this thesis.<sup>64</sup> By bringing work, melancholy and the human together, I infiltrate the notion of *technē* and melancholy as both conditions of the human. As Ribot approaches the body "attentively" and "carefully", "as a field of contested forces" unable to escape the Western tradition – as Siegmund points out "who could?" – she works out the existential principle of being human.<sup>65</sup> Ribot's naked body speaks about what is constituted in it and through it, in that making other of the body in which one is in the world. To use two words again found in Siegmund's essay, the body is the *interface* - that which is placed in the gap in between the parts, for their communication - as well as an *inscription* - that marks, carves out a further separation in the skin and so divides.<sup>66</sup> That otherness, that making of the body as another thing, is what perpetuates melancholy, as a condition, it seems, of being's existence.

Lights go on.

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<sup>62</sup> Word written down on a notebook by a spectator during Ribot's performance of *LaBola*, in Sala Alcalá 31, Madrid, in April 2022.

<sup>63</sup> The body and the solo in Schneider, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Arendt, 1998.

<sup>65</sup> Siegmund, 2004: 83.

<sup>66</sup> Siegmund, 2004: 83.

Beethoven's *Symphony 22* is played in the background as she enters the lit stage. A chair and a microphone stand in the middle. Quiet and deadpan, hesitantly at times, prudent, but determined, she starts removing layers of clothing, coats, shirts, jumpers, a number of tights, a shoe coming out of a bra, several pairs of knickers. As she undresses, always looking at the audience, she approaches from time to time the microphone, implying a hope to express something aloud, but incapable of uttering a single word, as if she had forgotten her lines, or is not quite sure what to say or how. The piece continues for several minutes as she continues to strip, slightly more seductively by the end. Finally, as she removes her ninth pair of knickers, she covers immediately her sex with her arms. Still staring at the audience.

The lights go off.

*Body-naked: becoming image and object of thought*

Spain in the 1980s went through what is called the cultural period of the *destape*, the time of the “uncovering” of bodies, a decade in which the film industry stripped the woman of all the clothes that had covered her during the censorship years of Franco's dictatorship (1939-75). Furthermore, it was the rise of the new commercial television channels such as Telecinco, following the path of Silvio Berlusconi's counterpart channel, which started its life with programmes such as the “Tutti frutti” in which a chorus of six vedettes lightly dressed, would interrupt the programme from time to time to sing and dance a short provocative piece. This programme was then followed by the Benny Hill Show. La Ribot makes reference to these sexualised bodies, in D.p. n°8 *Capricho Mio* (1994) as she measures her body parts not quite fitting the desired body measurement of the 90x60x90cm perfect female body; and again in the D.p.n°38 *Benny's Pin Ups* (2011). She invokes all these bodies from popular culture, pin-ups and burlesque cabaret, but she approaches sexuality as another layer, covering and obstructing what lies under, rather than an uncovering; treating it with irreverence and humour, often with violence, as she does with all the other objects and props that she manipulates. In his essay “Distinction and Humour” (2004), Sánchez places Ribot as much in popular culture as he does in the “humorous” aegis of the writer and philosopher Ramón Gómez de la Serna

and the surrealist Catalan artist, poet and magician Joan Brossa. It is from Brossa's poem that Ribot takes her striptease.<sup>67</sup> They have in common the accumulation of unrelated things, the juxtaposition of different realities bringing apparently impossible random things to happen or to come together, magically, playfully, outside any logic, stumbling again and again with the body naked in the skin as a provocation, a teaser.

By placing her body alongside other things, Ribot neutralises the body, to make the body "unresponsive to erotic projection", to think and manipulate the body as another fragment of stuff.<sup>68</sup> I hesitate to use the verb "to neutralise", as it is a term male critics have used to describe Ribot's body.<sup>69</sup> However, I wonder if this is a further objectification or if not, perhaps, on the contrary, there is in those authors the same attempt to de-signify and approach the body as what we have in common, "the enduring reality" of the being in the body.<sup>70</sup> The task is to think the body before, not gendered or sexualised, but in the physical or materiality, in what holds us in common. She attempts over and over again to strip all layers of cultural signification, as if she wanted to be completely open to the world, before and under the body, but finds herself again and again in the enveloping skin, "body prison"<sup>71</sup> and in a solitude in the world. What is that body we live in, a "body used to cover up"? asks Ribot in another piece - D.p. n°18 *Angelita* (1997) - as she puts on a pair of big rubber wings – what is that skin we are thrown into, as fallen angels?

### *What body?*

Aware of the enormous endeavour already undertaken on the question of the body, I am thinking especially of the work of Jean Luc Nancy *Corpus* (2000) as part of his more ambitious work on the destruction of Christianity - I approach the question of the body humbly and critically again by reading the term in other idioms or through other translations to think with and through the *Distinguished pieces*, about what emerges in the notion of the body as a Western construction. I flesh out once more and again the account of Genesis with the assistance of author and Hebrew translator Annick de Souzennelle, and read another originary

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<sup>67</sup> Joan Brossa, "Diez Numeros de Strip-Tease IX", from *Strip-Tease and Teatro irregular*, Madrid, Pipirijaina, Textos #12, in Rousier, 2004: 59.

<sup>68</sup> Heathfield, 2004: 25.

<sup>69</sup> Heathfield, 2004; Burt, 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Burt, 2004: 29.

<sup>71</sup> An interview with La Ribot in 2003, Live Art Development Agency archive. <https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/projects/la-ribot/>



account in Andersen's children's tale of *The Little Mermaid*.<sup>72</sup> I continue with the idea of the body-naked thanks to the explanations of Jullien in relation to Chinese thought only to return, to some thoughts on the "bodying forth" of *Dasein* in the late writing of Heidegger, part of his greater challenge to Western metaphysics.<sup>73</sup> It appears to be a dizzying path in order to think about the notion of the body as a means of being in existence, an emergence in the world already in separation and already as naked, but hopefully I will point towards a few questions at stake whenever the body is approached.

According to Souzenelle, in the account of Genesis, the first human beings created, Adam and Eve, were brought on to the earth 'nude' which in the Hebrew text appears as *arummim*, the same word used for "union"<sup>74</sup> with God and the "undivided", which was their original state.<sup>75</sup> The word is linked to another word in the passage which is the Hebrew word *aroum* that Souzenelle translates as the "*connaissance du chemin*", and I translate as "being in knowability".<sup>76</sup> She also indicates that there is no word for 'body' in ancient Hebrew, so the word used in Genesis to talk about it is always the combination of the terms "flesh" and "bones"<sup>77</sup>. The 'bones' denote the very intimate and in-depth of being, and 'flesh' is what closes over the bones. In the Hebrew text, 'flesh' is different and prior to the concept of 'skin' which appears only later, after the Fall in which an existential – epochal – transformation takes place. 'Skin' in Hebraic means 'not yet light' as opposed to 'being in the flesh' which means the 'accomplishment of light' and total knowability.<sup>78</sup> Hence the notion of skin - and of nakedness as the body in the skin - appears after Adam and Eve have eaten from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge and becomes synonymous with separation and blinding, as a veil. When they eat the fruit, they are separated from God, full knowledge, and from each other, as they appear as different and naked, skin-covered beings. As they both see themselves naked, they relate in the borders, in the distinctions that separate and blind. Hence, the Fall is a fall into the body, as that which emerges in the space of separation and produces at the same time another space within the skin between each other and through which they are made to relate. Being is separated and in that wound enters a relation to the nakedness of the body.

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<sup>72</sup> Hans Christian Andersen *The Little Mermaid* first published in 1837, trans. J. Hersholt, unpaginated [http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMermaid\\_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMermaid_e.html)

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger and Bauss, 2001.

<sup>74</sup> Souzenelle, 1991: 23, in this section the translations from the Bible are those taken from Souzenelle unless otherwise specified.

<sup>75</sup> Genesis 2: 25.

<sup>76</sup> Genesis 3: 1.

<sup>77</sup> Genesis 2: 23.

<sup>78</sup> Souzenelle, 1991: 22-40.

This split and appearance of the naked body is also the moment in which the pronoun 'I' appears and takes its place, in the Hebrew text, as Souzenelle notes in her translation. Adam is the first one to speak in the first "I", before that they both spoke and were addressed in the plural "we".<sup>79</sup> The distinction opens or awakens an 'I' who sees the other as 'you' and who sees its own self also at a distance, in the skin, in the opaque structure that separates.<sup>80</sup> The awakening of the subject, of self-consciousness, thus happens in the double act of separation from the Creator and in the revelation of one's nakedness, of one's own body-naked and the other's body as different; in the absence of unity, they see themselves as exterior beings, distinct and dislocated, no longer in a united life and they understand the difference of their own self displaced in the body. An understanding of space takes place, an interior and exterior appear. They can now turn towards the other, and a turning-towards-onself is possible. An architectural inside and outside of the Garden of Eden appears, and so they leave the gates and withdraw from the garden of Eden. They both enter the world in their bodies and are given their first pieces of clothing, given to them to cover for the loss of unity. Here I diverge from the original text and translation of Souzennelle, and will think of skin and clothes both as a *technē*, both making up for a loss, always in relation to a failure or lack of completeness, to the absence of complete union or complete knowability. From the lack, being enters into a new relation, compensates for the wound inflicted by a loss of a unity, that did not know an inside or an outside.

Lights on.

**D.p. n°23 Sin Título III (1997)**

**Distinguished proprietor: GAG Comunicación, Madrid**

**A woman appears on stage and stands in front of the audience, naked, holding in her hand and by the neck a rubber chicken, plucked, gutted and de-fleshed. Like one of those toys you give to a pet dog. A chicken only in its skin. Both, she and the chicken – skin – which appears as her miniature *doppelgänger*, face the audience for a few minutes in silence. After a couple of minutes, she shouts out "I don't know what to do" and swings the chicken in the air behind her.**

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<sup>79</sup> The first person 'I' appears in Genesis 3:10; the 'we' in Genesis 3: 2.

<sup>80</sup> Genesis 2: 22.

Lights off.

What is the difference between the two? How do they relate? What has the one to do with the other? The *Distinguished project* acts as a constant struggle - in a never-ending striptease - to reach something other than the skin - hers or the chicken's skin - that awakened the 'I' as different and continues to stick to being. In her later series *Another Distinguée* (2016) she performed a striptease further, down to her skin, with the succession of acts of *acharnement*, that is of skinning. D.p. n°50 *Super Romeo* (2016) and D.p. n°51 *Dark Practices* (2016) are two identical pieces, involving different partners each time in a battle of two, between Ribot and the other *distinguished* man wear tight layers of skin-coloured Lycra. Each of them will take turns at violently cutting the skin of the other, each with a pair of their own scissors in the hand. They cut and tear violently and hide the cut-out pieces of skin/Lycra in the folds of their own body, in their own Lycra, ingesting the others' skin. This gesture is repeated with a background of deafening techno music, slowly removing the different layers of the skin of one gobbled up by the other. Five years later, in the series *Distinguished Anyways* (2021) she reverses the striptease, rather than trying to strip layers of skin off, she tries to make away with the skin by covering it with thick layers of

**red paint,**

to hide, to blur the contours which distinguish between what is hers and what is artifice, between her own body and the other bodies, between the bodies and the bucket on the floor and the bodies from the floor itself. She could have used actual blood to do that, like her contemporaries Ron Athey or Franko B (proprietor of D.p.n° 27 *Another Bloody Mary*, 2000). However, Ribot is working on something different here. It is the body, not the flesh she is cutting, working on or painting. There is no sacrifice of the flesh. Since using

**red paint,**

it is not the flesh that is being hurt, but rather the phenomenon of the body, as an image, a representation, as already an artifice, that she cuts through, opens, tears apart, and which rather than bleeding only pours out

**paint**

**or ink**

from its wounds, from its cut, its openings. Blood is what pours out from the wound made in the flesh. The body unlike the flesh

**bleeds**

**only paint**

**spilled.**

The paint, therefore, art, the artifice, rather than the blood, relates to a history of representation and *technē*, of that which is produced in a lack.

In D.p. n°5 *Eufemia* (1993) a *distinguished* woman in a white dress leans against a wall. A minute goes by, and the woman starts bleeding from her stomach and through the dress. She holds the

**blood**

seems to want to contain the

**bleeding**

with her hands. One notices very

quickly though that the

**blood**

is nothing but

**red paint.**

She looks surprised, as if something were happening that she is not fully aware of. She looks at the audience and looks back at the

**red paint**

that starts rolling down her legs. After a while she removes the trick, a liquid squirter from under the dress and continues to squirt

**blood**

**red paint**

down her legs.

The lights go on.

**D.p. n°1 *Muriéndose la Sirena* (1993)**

**In memory of Chinorris**

**She lies alone on the floor of the stage, her back to the audience, her head covered with a blond wig. Her upper body is naked, and a white sheet covers her waist and legs, suggesting the tail of a fish or of a mermaid washed ashore. She rests at first in a certain peace and silence, but after a few seconds, her stillness is interrupted by small spasmodic**

convulsions that shake her bodily being. The white sheet that covers her starts to slip from her waist, without fully uncovering the legs that lie under. The sound of a garbage van can be heard in the background. The piece is a homage to a dead fish Ribot once saw left behind on the side of the road.<sup>81</sup>

The title, which translated into English means ‘the dying mermaid’, and the *tableau vivant* she performs recall another genesis, found in Andersen’s *The Little Mermaid*. The story not so dissimilar to the biblical narrative, is about the emergence of a young girl into the world in a body that is not a punishment, though, because of a will to know and eat, but is born out of a desire to love, to encounter the other and enter another world. In the tale, the young mermaid sacrifices her hidden life in the darkness of the ocean and of the father’s home, as half animal – a natural life, in Greek *zoē* – to obtain an enhanced life, a fully human existence in the world – the qualitative life, ancient Greeks called *bios*. For this transformation or passage to take place, she sacrifices not only her tongue but also her voice in exchange for those two “awkward props which they call legs”, in exchange for gravity and a closeness to her beloved, who has yet to meet her.<sup>82</sup> As she first emerges from the sea and lies on the shore, she is held in between two worlds. That is where we find Ribot, where she chooses to start the *Distinguished* project, in that space in-between two milieus, on the shore, when the mermaid still has that tail that links her to the ocean and her home, half-animal, half-human body. Ribot and her pieces are maintained in that damp and ambiguous space, in the trembling of a being that is *not yet* standing but that can no longer return to the ocean where it came from: neither from the water nor from the land, yet still caressed by the liquidity, the fluidity of the waves, in the wet sand on which the mermaid lies, half-fish, half-human body. The liquidity still doesn’t reveal any limits, the borders that might distinguish the difference between the two worlds, and her two bodies are still not clear. By remaining in the dampness of the seashore, Ribot’s piece emerges, opens, and at the same time remains for at least a while on the edge of being recognised, “in-formed” and still in the rhythm of the sensuous waves that caress her coming into appearance.<sup>83</sup> Ribot’s body shivers as she emerges, shaken by an energy that does not want to settle. How long before she notices that her voice is gone for ever? How long before she enters fully into another mode of being in that other world?

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<sup>81</sup> Rousier, 2004: 132.

<sup>82</sup> Andersen translated by Hersholt, unpaginated, [http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMermaid\\_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMermaid_e.html)

<sup>83</sup> To ‘in-form’ with the hyphen is a concept I borrow from Fynsk in his chapter on Heidegger and the “free use of the proper”, Fynsk, 1996: 115.

As the story continues, the mermaid wakes up on the shore and sees the split in her body that has produced two legs. She will also come to notice her nakedness, that was not before, or at least she was not aware of it in the darkness of the ocean. She received her legs as prosthetics to walk on the ground and stand straight, finding her status to be recognised as a human being. She had been warned though, “It will hurt, it will feel as if a sharp sword slashed through you”, and if she dances “every step you take will feel as if you were treading upon knife blades so sharp that blood must flow”.<sup>84</sup> Having legs that feel like knives, in her naked body, her voice gone and being out in the world all these things expose her to a danger and vulnerability that she is quick to cover, making a dress out of her own hair: “But she was naked, so she clothed herself in her own long hair”.<sup>85</sup>

I am comparing and confusing Ribot’s body with that of the mermaid to ask why La Ribot would want to become in-formed in the first place, why would gestures, dance want to become form, want to be recognised?<sup>86</sup> Why this move into the solo and out of the collective? What will she give up in exchange for the legs, to stand upon, and in the in-formed body-naked? Status and enjoyment of another existence and reaching out to the other? Would she not rather *morph* into a fish to go back into the sea, the water, as she insinuated in her piece from the same series D.p.n°6, *Ya me gustaría a mi ser pez!* (1993) – meaning ‘I would like to be a fish!’. In that piece, she places one folding chair on top of another, hangs a meter reader from one of the chairs, and places a portable urinal on the floor under the chairs. Dressed in black stilettos, a raincoat, pearl necklaces, a black and red dress, and a snorkelling mask with its tube, she very slowly slips from the top chair to the floor, as a bar of wet soap or a freshly caught fish slipping out of one’s hands, from one open chair onto another chair and onto the ground whilst she smokes a cigarette. But rather than letting the smoke out through the tube, she lets the smoke out into the snorkelling mask. Her gaze becomes fuzzy, blurry as she becomes liquidity again. She ends up falling not in the urinal, she missed that container, instead she falls flat on the ground like a puddle.

### *The bodying of being*

Both a Hellenist and a sinologist Jullien, in his essay “Le Nu Impossible” published in French in 2005, compares the understanding of the body in Western thought and in Hellenic

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<sup>84</sup> Andersen translated by Hersholt, unpaginated, [http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMermaid\\_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMermaid_e.html)

<sup>85</sup> Anderson, translated by Hersholt, unpaginated, [http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMermaid\\_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMermaid_e.html)

<sup>86</sup> Fynsk, 1996: 115.

art to the impossibility of the concept of the body as naked in Chinese thinking and art.<sup>87</sup> I am using the term “nakedness” rather than “nude”, chosen for his 2007 English edition, as another translation because I can see in his use an insistence on the borders of the form (*eidōs*), that make the body in separation and enclosed, delineated. That is what Souzenelle, as seen above, understands as naked body enclosed and enveloped in the skin, exteriorised, in its contours, which is constituted in the gaze of another, or the self as other: a spectacle in its original sense, as that which is being seen from another place. Nakedness implies a gaze, then, a mode of seeing, that I find is closer to Jullien’s approach as he mentions the borders of formal distinctions and draws his examples from Chinese thought, as much as from Chinese art.

According to Jullien, the Western approach or thinking of the body emerges from an original confusion in Western ontological thought that understands a coming into existence as the event of coming into and within an exterior form (*eidōs*) as an image. In the Platonic world of ideas, every existence is held in a form, every existence is a being with form, which has made the West accustomed to confusing being as always a being in form – adding to this abstraction the idea seen as an image, projected on the wall, flat, and drawn out. Being itself is an image drawn out within borders, both “*eidōs* and *morphē* with no distinction between them”.<sup>88</sup>

For form, Plotinus uses two words in conjunction with each other, and often even goes so far as to suggest that they can be synonymous: *eidōs*, which is the idea-form — intelligible form, with ontological status, and *morphē*, which designates the contour that circumscribes matter.<sup>89</sup>

Jullien sees the origin of the great dilemma in Greece when *morphē* and *eidōs* came to be caught up in this entanglement. It is from a confusion in the occurring of being as an image that philosophy was born and when the possibility of a naked body in the form, in the skin, was conceivable as a body-image, isolated as a whole and in its parts. Chinese thought is different to Western metaphysics in that it does not conceive form beyond the realm of the sensitive, or the sensuous. Rather than constructing an abstract concept held and alienated from the world and available to the world, being is conceived, according to Jullien, in terms of process, as “an ongoing actualisation of cosmic energy-breath. The notion of ‘matter’ is not

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<sup>87</sup> Jullien, 2007.

<sup>88</sup> Jullien, 2007: 67.

<sup>89</sup> Jullien, 2007: 65.

found in China, and nor is the notion of archetypal ‘form’.<sup>90</sup> Since everything is transformation, wise is he who “does not take his stand on that which has form”.<sup>91</sup> Transformation and transition between the one and the other, the inside and the outside, constitutes Chinese thought and its mode of being in relation to the world, porous and permeable, *e-merging* and *im-merging* at the same time. The notion of a body as such, naked as in within the skin, is then unthinkable. There is no *space* for a body fixed in the form, that creates space around it, that is distinguished and outlined from the world outside of it, that can be analysed in separate parts, autonomous things placed alongside each other, impenetrable, self-sufficient.<sup>92</sup> Unlike in Greek thought, in Chinese thought, according to Jullien, the bodily is always in relation, that is not between distinct parts but “fluid, soft and yielding.”<sup>93</sup>

In the West, the notion that prevailed is that of an anatomical body consisting of a flesh-covered skeleton whose every muscle, tendon, ligament, and so forth is susceptible to analysis, deconstruction, and dissection (as evidenced by art school teaching on the nude, or painters' preparatory drawings).<sup>94</sup>

However, the Chinese bodily is conceived in its “energy, not its anatomy: in exact correspondence to the external world with which it is in a permanent communication”, a movement that breathes in as much as it breathes out.<sup>95</sup> The bodily is a passage or vulnerable means bringing forth being in the world as part of the stream of life. In the form, though, as Jullien implies, the body stagnates, is blocked in its contours, suffocated by being in the skin.

Before I continue to Heidegger’s conceptualization of the body, just a note on the importance of the German philosopher’s thought which for Nancy, as he himself explained in a conversation with choreographer and dancer Mathilde Monnier, is essential to understand contemporary art practices which work on and through the “bodying forth”, that is, existing in the world in the body.<sup>96</sup> Although his thought is difficult to approach for many reasons, I bring Heidegger into dialogue with Jullien and focus particularly on the tension Heidegger saw in the coming into form and his attempt, as he tried to make sense of the bodying of being, to overcome the subject and its object in Western thought.<sup>97</sup> He sought to approach the “bodying

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<sup>90</sup> Jullien, 2007: 67.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Jullien, 2007: 68.

<sup>92</sup> Jullien, 2007: 53.

<sup>93</sup> In chapter 76 and 78, water is also described as soft and weaker, in Laozi, 1982: 221 and 225.

<sup>94</sup> Jullien, 2007, 34.

<sup>95</sup> Jullien, 2007, 34.

<sup>96</sup> Monnier and Nancy, 2002.

<sup>97</sup> Vallega-Neu, 2019.



forth”, the *Dasein*, outside the insufficiencies and limits of Western thought.<sup>98</sup> Heidegger was involved in translating Lao Tzu’s *Tao-Teh-Ching* together with the Chinese scholar Shih-yi Hsiao and this introduction into Chinese thought had a deep impact on his later writings and his search for another mode of understanding being-in-the-world, as well as his concept of *Dasein* that he had already been working on since his 1927 *Being and Time*.<sup>99</sup> In his “Zollikon Seminars”, delivered between 1959 and 1969 to medical doctors and psychiatrists in post-War Germany, he attempted, to think the “bodying forth” through two related notions: the notion of the gesture as well as that of the body. He differentiated the notion of gesture, in German *Gebärde*, from the *Gestellen*, the gathering of things, that was not a movement towards a stability enclosed in limits (he uses the Greek word *pera*, to speak about borders) but a movement or mode of relating that is an ecstatic opening.<sup>100</sup> Gesture would come to be defined as “all comportment of the human being as *being-in-the-world* determined by a bodying forth of the body”.<sup>101</sup> Gesture therefore was a mode of relating that depended on a certain understanding of the body. He used two different German words for the body: *der Körper*, that is the corporeal body-object, different to *der Leibe*, that is the opening of the bodily translated as ‘bodying forth’. This ‘bodying forth’ for Heidegger is neither ‘thing’ nor ‘corporeal’, words that seemed to him to be too charged with the Latin misunderstanding of body within limits. These words are closer to the frenzy of an “ordering that blocks”,<sup>102</sup> as in his concept of *Gestellen*, that he developed in “The Question Concerning Technology” (1954). The *Gestell* gathers, secures and stores all into “utter availability and sheer manipulativity”.<sup>103</sup> The exact and correct, that which has contours and is measurable, becomes calculable, like pebbles used to count and calculate, bringing about a degradation and depreciation of relationality because the point of *Gestellen* is no longer “participation” in the world but control and domination.<sup>104</sup> If the *Gestell*, informs, enframes, refers to a gathering in which “humankind is fitted into the technical-calculative framework”,<sup>105</sup> gesture and the ‘bodying forth’ Heidegger defines as *Gebärde*, as a poetic bearing, a ‘bringing forth’, in the sense of holding, reaching, *main*-taining and giving as one is given and gives a child.<sup>106</sup> The bodying forth seems to make space for being here, rather than occupying or blocking space in the world in the “peculiar relationship of *self*”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Vallega-Neu, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Hsiao, 1987; Xia, 2023.

<sup>100</sup> Heidegger and Boss, 2001.

<sup>101</sup> Heidegger and Boss, 2001: 90-91, original emphasis.

<sup>102</sup> Heidegger, 2010: 236.

<sup>103</sup> Heidegger, 2010: 216.

<sup>104</sup> Heidegger, 2010: 216; Heidegger and Boss, 2001: 104-105.

<sup>105</sup> Fysnk, 1996: 114.

<sup>106</sup> The word *Gebären* is used in modern German for bearing a child.

<sup>107</sup> Heidegger and Boss, 2001: 87.

Heidegger blames this mis-understanding of the body in Western thought on a glitch in the use of the Greek word *morphē* but unlike Jullien later, Heidegger accused the Latin translation, rather than the Greeks themselves, of confusing it with *forma*, that is *eidos*, the image in the Platonic world of Ideas, repeatable, clear and stable. And so, he returns to a translation of *morphē* as that which is not image nor form within its contours. He explains, in the short “Addendum” to the essay on *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1950), that the Greek *morphē* is a bodily occurring of being (in German *Leib*, a word closer to ‘flesh’) that is not to be mistaken with the objective, material limit which closes off the thing in its form, from the Latin *forma*. Rather, *morphē*, which he relates to ‘bodying forth’, is an occurring, a bringing into the open before anything might be captured as a form ‘in-formed’ within rigid and secure limits, “outlines, admitted into the boundary (*pera*)” or calculated.<sup>108</sup> The notion of the body *Körper*, then, I understand, belongs to the order of exteriority, that is, cut out and in-formed within contours, made repeatable and portable, as *calculus*, which in Greek means the small pebbles that compose an abacus, and permits displacements and logical reasoning as well as preservation and transmission of thought in time and spaces.

This brief analysis of the Western body, together with the story of Creation and the emergence of the body in the world in the tale of Andersen, helps us grasp the fabrication and the isolation of the body and the relationalities it produced in Western thought. It sheds light on what happens as the event of gesture is constructed into a thing, in dance and in Live art, and understood in thought first and then as an in-formed thing, object of thought. Western metaphysics sets the framework for thinking, distinguishing images and concepts outside of the mind. This making of images, first conceptually then in writing, is necessary for thought itself:

after all, thought walks one step ahead of itself, must look back upon itself, as it were, to recognise its own movement. (...) Representation quite obviously means to present again (...) it also means to bring before the mind, to display to the eye, to symbolize, to stand in the place of.<sup>109</sup>

This means that bringing to thought or reflection on the body and on gesture, then, is made possible only through image making, that is already a *technē*, a making of an artifice outside or other than the flesh lived through. In a similar way, already thinking dance and re-presenting it in thought and in words, is a *technicisation*, accepting the move into an exterior

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<sup>108</sup> Grene, 1957: 137.

<sup>109</sup> Meltzer, 1987: 10.

milieu, a move that separates and distinguishes an inside and outside space. Dance as it becomes other, or distinguished, falls into the contours of the skin, of the image. What is at stake then as gestures become form, as the bodily gestures in the history of dance and Live art are moved into the realm of thinking and the conceptual, constructed as images of the mind, and soon into muted drawings on the page, identifiable and able to be ordered as things isolated, autonomous, quotable and repeatable? Is there a failure in what Jullien and Heidegger saw in Western metaphysics and in the Western relation to the 'bodying forth' that is being perpetuated as gestures are manipulated into things? How can I think of La Ribot's gestures in the *Distinguished pieces* as openings of the body and at the same time how are they already *pieces*, distinguished forms, placed on the brink, or already fallen into the informed and ordered into sequences, series of images?

A very dim light on.

**D.p. n°46 *Sirènes* (2016)**

**It is no longer Ribot lying on the floor alone-with-herself and trembling. On the floor, the bodies of two interpreters (Juan Lloriente, Thami Manekehla) act as *doppelgängers*, lying down on their side in the same position as the mermaid in 1993. A sheet covers their waists and their legs, a blond wig covers their faces, the same wig used in 1993. One body is set in line with the other, in a mirroring position. They stay still and then tremble as La Ribot appears on the scene, upright on her two legs, wearing a pair of high heels and clothed in a white lab shirt. The mermaid, the artist is transformed into an angel of redemption<sup>110</sup>, some divine creator, or a scientific researcher ready to dissect human samples in her lab, like one of those listening to Heidegger's Zollicon seminars. She carries a pair of scissors and a black marker in her hand and starts to cut one of the white sheets with her scissors along the silhouette of the first body in a straight precise line. She cuts the sheet apart revealing the naked body and when she reaches the end of it, leaving the parts of the sheet on the floor at each side, she goes back to the bodies now**

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<sup>110</sup> In reference to her performance in D.p. n°18 *Angelita* (1997) in which she puts on a pair of angel wings.

completely naked, and draws a line on them with her black marker, following their contours, borders, the same line which she cut through a few seconds earlier. Her action is double: both a cut and a drawing at the same time, opening surely to something new, but still holding and without hiding a certain violence. Her cut, her drawing, the scissors, the marker, is where art emerges and when the body is seen and at the same time is in-formed. The wound separates, cracks open and at the same time designs

draws

paints.

Lights off. Darkness.

## Chapter 1 - Part 2 -

### Writing gesture: from object of thought to *work of the spirit*<sup>111</sup>

In 1995, together with a group of women choreographers, Ribot set up the collective U.V.I., which stands for Urgent Bonding of Ideas but with an acronym which in Spanish is equivalent to A&E, an emergency platform which brought together dancers, musicians and artists working in diverse genres, creating workshops, spaces for research, discussion, improvisations and creative processes.<sup>112</sup> From 1999 till 2001, Blanca Calvo and La Ribot ran a second initiative *Desviaciones*, a hint to Stéphane Mallarmé's *Divagations* (1897), a collection of prose in which he had written so pertinently about modernity, dance and Loïe Fuller.<sup>113</sup> *Desviaciones* invited international artists to present their work and programmed debates and conferences around the questions of dance, body and space. The events took place in the theatre box, Cuarta Pared, in Madrid, with walls painted white, echoing the interest of dancers at the time to escape the spectacle and framework of traditional theatre and move closer to Mallarmé's white sheet paper and to the white art cube. These initiatives opened up new platforms of interdisciplinary dialogue and visibility, and sought to legitimise contemporary dance and performance practices within an international theoretical discourse.<sup>114</sup>

Ribot was part of what in Europe since the late 1980s came to be called the conceptual dance movement, which was moving away from theatrical conventions and the bodies' virtuosity and closer to the intellectual realm.<sup>115</sup> Dancers such as Jérôme Bel, Xavier Leroy, Mårten Spångberg, Vera Mantero, Boris Charmatz, Jonathan Burrows all thought the body, through and in the body. Sánchez names the American dancer Yvonne Rainer as the initiator of this conceptual form of dancing, dancing as a way of thinking, the body as a tool for thinking.<sup>116</sup> Dance's conceptualisation meant that dance as a discipline moved into another

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<sup>111</sup> A literal translation of the words used in French to talk about works of the mind entitled to intellectual property rights, which in French are called *œuvre de l'esprit*.

<sup>112</sup> UVI-La Inesperada, a collective of six choreographers: Mónica Valenciano, Olga Mesa, Elena Córdoba, Blanca Calvo, Ana Buitrago and La Ribot. More on this period in Sánchez, 2006.

<sup>113</sup> Mallarmé, 1935.

<sup>114</sup> Sánchez and Conde-Salazar, 2003.

<sup>115</sup> See Lepecki, 2006; Cvejić, 2015.

<sup>116</sup> Sánchez, 1999.

space, a meta-status, beyond the limitations of sensuous movements or technical abilities. The body was no longer – or not only – moving, the whole body was also thinking; “thinking in movement” as choreographer Rudlof von Laban put it.<sup>117</sup> Conceptual dancers started to spend more time in libraries than in dance studios. Bel spent two years without producing any work but only reading Barthes, Deleuze, and Foucault.<sup>118</sup> Dance was slowing down, often reaching an absolute stand still, as if it were opposing thought to movement; “exhausting”, as dance critic André Lepecki described it.<sup>119</sup> Dance was moving towards horizontality, to the floor and to the paper, as a liberation or emancipation from the vertical world of representation. In lying down conceptual dance presented a ‘still act’, and was made presentation rather than representation.<sup>120</sup> Lepecki commences his essay on La Ribot’s *Panoramix* series from 2003 with a reference to Rosalind Krauss’s essay on “Horizontality” (1997). Krauss’s point in her essay was to destabilise the rituals of vertical high art and she does it by going back to Benjamin and his distinction between the vertical and the horizontal. Benjamin differentiated painting, the vertical, from drawing, that is performed and produced on the horizontal plane. One movement, painting, Benjamin associates with figuration and representation, the other with graphic marking, drawing, writing, “signs”, the area of thinking and the symbolic. That horizontality is the plane of conceptual dance and what Lepecki calls the exhausted dance of bodies.<sup>121</sup> It is on the flat surface of the horizontal, of the signs and marking, and soon of the white floor in the white cube where conceptual dance, choreography and writing came together to escape the spectacular and move to other areas of thinking. Ribot consistently worked on the floor, spreading objects, clothes, and her body on the horizontal, emphasizing the making of another place for the body to spill.<sup>122</sup> But isn’t writing simply another series of cuts, another form of re-presentation and way of holding on to a memory by extracting?

As Sánchez points out in a *mallarméen* twist in the title of his book, “Cuerpos Sobre Blanco” (2003) translated into English as “bodies over white”, bodies have become isolated and space has been opened around them, as letters typed out or lines drawn on the paper, as an object of art hanging on the white wall.<sup>123</sup> In his poem *Un Coup de Dès Jamais n’Abolira le Hasard* (1897), Mallarmé wrote of the broken words spread out on the page as “rien ou

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<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Casini Ropa, 2002: 23.

<sup>118</sup> Burt, 2016: 21.

<sup>119</sup> Lepecki, 2006.

<sup>120</sup> Lepecki, 2006:15.

<sup>121</sup> Lepecki, 2006: 66; Bois and Krauss 1997; Benjamin, 1996: 82.

<sup>122</sup> D.p. n° 27 *Another Bloody Mary* (2000), D.p.n° 30 *Candida Illuminaris* (2000), D.p.n°33 *S Liquide* (2000), and pieces from the fifth series, *Another Distinguée* (2016).

<sup>123</sup> Which relates to the way Ribot installed her props, holding them with brown sellotape on the walls, for the performance of *Panoramix* (1993-2003) which premiered at Tate Modern in 2003 and toured mainly in art venues (Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid, and Centre Pompidou, Paris).

*presqu'un art*”,<sup>124</sup> words suspended in nothingness, held in the risk of becoming art. Mallarmé wrote those words the same year he published *Divagations*, already mentioned, in which one can find his experiments in prose and poetry alongside his writings on dancer Loïe Fuller and ballet. Could we not say the same of the bodily gestures, broken and laid out as nothings, nearly art, as I translate Mallarmé's words into English and into our context, and think about Ribot's bodily gestures held suspended between nothingness and art? Ribot's pieces work in the tension between the nothingness of gesture and the conceptual and artistic, which moves dance closer to the logics of writing and authorship.

What is the shift in the conception of the self and of gesture as dancers think and dance as writing over white? Two main problematics arise as dance entered the world of words and hence of thought understood through the written word. One is that the abstract word, articulated in speech and consolidated and discretised in grammar, comes in to de-scribe the event, often to substitute the event, and ends up by shaping the understanding of the event and the mode of relating to the event of art's occurrence. As dancer and writer Frédéric Pouillaude notices, theory and interpretation in language seems to have become central to dance, and more present, perpetuating a long established hierarchy between the mind and the body, the world of ideas, words and images over encounter and embodiment.<sup>125</sup> Secondly, as the dancer is able to translate bodily gestures into language and into fixed and repeatable and transferable signs, the dancer becomes a thinking subject who speaks, in a Cartesian sense: “I think therefore I am” (*Cogito ergo sum*) – has become “I dance therefore I am”, (*Salto, ergo sum?*). The dancer therefore becomes a dancing subject. ‘Her’ dancing is related to as ‘her’ object of thought and of dance and constitutes ‘her’ subjectivity. From there, the dancer as subject who dances and thinks could well slip into the status of original author, become the origin and owner of her dance as a work of the mind, Intellectual Property, or what the French name refers to as, *œuvres de l'esprit*, works of the spirit. A change then occurs with that which is most intimate and closer to the obscurity of the noetic, the psychic, now understood as emerging from an original and single thinking subject, the dancer as author, and becoming its object.

Dance historian Laurence Louppe (2010) describes how the dance movement was affirming both the choreographer as origin and author at the same time as it was constructing the gestures as a genuine and original work of dance by a thinking subject author. She uses

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<sup>124</sup> From Mallarmé's poem “*Observation relative au Poème*” (c. 1914) in Morel, 2007.

<sup>125</sup> Pouillaude, 2017: 162.

the word *œuvre* to refer to the new dance as work. *Œuvre*, which in French is used to speak about the artefact comes from the Greek word *érgon*, as I have explained in the introduction and is an accomplished work by an individual with reason and the product of a creative process, in Greek *poiēsis* an autonomous thing. *Poiēsis* refers to the product, that is distinguished from the *praxis*, that is an act still in movement. An *œuvre* in dance then as a finished product, would distinguish dancing as an act, *praxis*, from something else, something exterior produced and remaining outside and independent from the act that is a thing, product, *poiēsis*. To produce, then, an act into an *œuvre*, the author/dancer, an individual with reason, needs to produce an exteriority, an exosomatic thing, recognisable and outside herself. About the conceptual dance movement, Louppe notes:

we witnessed an inflated use of the notion of *œuvre* [...] linked to another equally nebulous idea – that of the “auteur”. And this, surprisingly, at the moment when the authorial activity of the choreographer was becoming reduced to putting together purely spectacular ingredients (...) While everywhere else the notion of author had been complicated or contested, we witnessed choreography, on the contrary, take hold of this notion enthusiastically and make a banner of it.<sup>126</sup>

The various workshops and public presentations, discussions, around the question of bodies, dance and thought, endorsed the conceptual dance movement in general and Ribot's work in particular, with theory, and they bore witness to the artistic intentions of the dancers as they presented and interpreted their work, as original creative subjects. Ribot's personal notebooks will also work as traces of the artist's process of creation. In 2004, she produced a publication in two volumes with the Centre National de la Danse and Luc Derycke, edited by Claire Rousier.<sup>127</sup> One of the volumes includes a list of all the *Distinguished pieces* produced until then with a picture to illustrate each one, and captions, as well as commissioned essays by some of her collaborators and theorists (Laurent Goumarre, Heathfield, Lepecki, Sánchez and Siegmund). The second volume acts as a visual story map, a montage of images, bits and pieces assembled from her archive and notebooks representing different reference points from which the pieces emerged.

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<sup>126</sup> Louppe, 2010: 233.

<sup>127</sup> Rousier, 2004.



### *Intellectual work of the spirit*

Adding to this move toward concepts and theory, from the beginning of the *Distinguished project*, she went on to write down what she called a “synopsis” of each of her pieces and went to register each one in the official associations in charge of the protection of Intellectual Property rights of authors: the Sociedad General de Autores Españoles (SGAE) and the Société Suisse des Auteurs (SSA). As an example of a synopsis, this is how her piece D. p n°5 *Eufemia* (1993) is recorded in the SGAE:

**D. p n°5 *Eufemia* (1993)**

**Music: Fernando Lopez-Hermoso**

**“At the back, there appears the woman dressed in white, leaning against the wall. A minute goes by, and she starts bleeding. She takes out the trick, a small liquid squirter, and she commits suicide. End.”**

**Choreography: Maria Jose Ribot**

**Duration: 7.00 minutes<sup>128</sup>**

This short synopsis – especially as the reader can compare it with my ekphratic account above – testifies to an in-betweenness of a gesture placed between the nothing or nearly artwork, to paraphrase Mallarmé, something happening between the poetic and the legal. The Synopsis seems to act as a teaser, a poetic fragment but becomes also a technology of tertiary retention framed within the apparatus of property law. Despite the poetic and playful aspect of the text, the *pieces* or whatever their synopses say about them become objects protected by copyright law, requiring, and tightly dependent on, both an original author and an exterior and fixed work, an *œuvre*.

Copyright is a branch of Intellectual Property that protects the exclusive rights of the author over an “original work of authorship”, in other words, protects a subject’s or author’s use of its own work, *œuvre* as property. It also protects the property from any trespassing, any unauthorised usage by others than the *distinguished* artist/author/proprietor.<sup>129</sup> The Statute of Queen Anne (1710) is considered to be the first copyright law that protected the emergent figure of the individualised literary authors in the rapid development of the printing press, the

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<sup>128</sup> My own translation from Spanish.

<sup>129</sup> See section 16 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/48/section/16>

growing literary market and the abuse of powerful intermediaries.<sup>130</sup> Dance came to be protected much later as it was harder to prove a single original author and to fix dance on an external support, two of the conditions for property. Choreography has been protected by copyright law as a category of “dramatic work” of Intellectual Property in the UK since 1911, while in French law only from 1957, and only in the revision of the Copyright Act of 1976 in the US.<sup>131</sup> Both terms used, the dramatic work and choreography, already imply a relation to the hand, a becoming hand of dance, and a certain fixity. Choreography is defined in law as “the composition and arrangement of dance movements and patterns usually intended to be accompanied by music.”<sup>132</sup>

The records of the *Distinguished pieces* which fix the work as intellectual property, are supposed to act as a safeguard for the pieces not to be reproduced without the artist’s consent. At the same time, they also store the works for a possible dissemination, opening the possibility for the works to be shared outside the mind and the body of the artist, under a licence agreement, and in return for the payment of royalties. However, here is where La Ribot teases the system again. Her synopses registered at the Societies of Authors are short and as bare as a surrealist poem. She hardly gives any specifications on the pieces, nor did she in the early years at the SGAE attach any video or photography. She does not seem to want to share it through the legal channel, and neither does she want to profit from its use by others. The only moment in which the pieces have been reactivated by another, was when she, Ribot, outside the legal apparatus, trained Anna Williams and Ruth Childs using notes, videos, but more so, her own bodily experience of the pieces.<sup>133</sup>

Her synopsis though is “a writing that says nothing”, as Pouillaude wrote of all dance notations, that say nothing or very little about the pieces.<sup>134</sup> Poetic and elusive, they escape a clear, full picture of what the pieces might look like in the event. Rather they remain in the opening of the *gestus* or “cloudy part” as Walter Benjamin wrote about Franz Kafka’s short stories or parables, remaining in the unpretentious space of trying and always failing to translate the unappropriable.<sup>135</sup> However and in spite of this elusiveness, she has produced an exteriority, an exosomatic double, some-thing else, another artifice, *œuvre* or property, and in the doubling, I argue, lays the foundation for the constitution of the legal thing (in Latin *res*)

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<sup>130</sup> Rose, 1993.

<sup>131</sup> Pavis, Waelde and Whatley, 2017.

<sup>132</sup> David and Challis, 2008.

See also The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (CDPA), which is the current act that regulates copyright in the UK, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/48/contents>

<sup>133</sup> Personal conversation with La Ribot, December 2015.

<sup>134</sup> Pouillaude, 2017: 163.

<sup>135</sup> Benjamin, 2007: 129; Hamacher, 1996: 298.

and commercial property. As she writes down in signs and on the paper, she, the author and owner, constitutes *her* object and stabilises some-thing in time, setting the conditions for the possibility of legal framing. She becomes author and produces her gestures as unique, stable and repeatable things and so steps into a new set of relations with the event of art's occurrence, or art-become-thing. She can be quite playful with the legal mechanisms. She is, however, contributing, feeding and constituting her authorship through and in those mechanisms. And by doing so, she entangles her Live art automatically as a legal thing, the legal apparatus consolidating both the concept of art as a thing and the concept of the author.<sup>136</sup>

As a sharp double-edged sword, like the one that threatened to wound the status, the exteriority of the little Mermaid in that other world she was entering, property as an apparatus comes to protect and support gesture and body, to clothe the bodily gestures as they leave the unity with the body and the self and go out into the world. Secondly, property already acts to frame, cut-out or draw out a legal constructed thing. That thing, cut out, will be the ground on which occupation and ex-proprietation can take place, the thingness and groundness that commodification necessitates to produce an exchangeable good. Intellectual Property acts as tertiary retentional support outside the memory and the many spirits that inhabit the body. It might well grant access to others, and it is always a controlled access, by the owner, and thus reinforced the author and subject's authority and power. This is the problematic I seek to analyse: that space between the coming into *ek-sistence*, poetically, still held in a moment of opening, and the passage, produced through ex-proprietation, a making other and making property. In this passage the opening is constructed into property, is enclosed, and is made available for exchange and manipulation by other forces. No-thing can be made exchangeable if it has not been exteriorised first, doubled, represented, in writing, as the basis for the emergence of property. Therefore, Intellectual Property prepares, acts as a first step into the market, closely "follows the lines of commodity production."<sup>137</sup> As Kraut makes clear, commodification necessitates the construction of property, hence artistic property carves the way for legal property and commercial property, all three becoming confused.

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<sup>136</sup> Verwoert, 2003.

<sup>137</sup> Kraut, 2016: 21.

### *Back to choreography and de-scribing gestures*

As just mentioned, dance could only be considered as a work of Intellectual Property once it could produce an exosomatic thing, object or trace of the event of dance, what artist and dramaturg Tim Etchells calls the “agony of fixing”.<sup>138</sup> The first mode of recording was choreography, the writing (in Greek *graphiā*) down of dance (*khoreía*). To be written down, dance needed not so much a dancer, but a hand to write, an author distinguished from the collective and *traditio* (the Latin word for transmission, the handing over) which would interrupt the movement of bodies and fix them into a thing. I return now to the historical event that wrote down dance, and compare it to the use of writing in the advent of Western philosophy to think about the new realities that writing dance opened and the new relationalities that were produced for the body and the self and its relevance for a discussion on *technē*.<sup>139</sup>

Choreographic dance notations were developed during the reign and under the commission of Louis XIV in the last decades of the seventeenth century, as courtly arts and sciences were being codified and the great French Academies were being founded.<sup>140</sup> “*Chorégraphie, ou l'art de décrire la danse*” written by Louis Beauchamp and Raoul-Auger Feuillet and published in 1700, is considered to be one of the earliest dance notation systems.<sup>141</sup> Dancing and simple movements such as walking were for the first time de-scribed, written down and drawn out, traced on paper, for research purposes and as instructions for other bodies, submitting the movements of the body to the regime of signs. A discipline was created. Until then dance had exclusively been passed on through secondary memory, that is the embodied memory, the collective and the ritual, a transmission based upon a constant mimetic repetition, a receiving and a giving back, without any fear of mistranslation or mutation and without interruptions that could stagnate the work and accumulate. Translated and fixed in written words, numbers and lines, in choreography, dance was being retained, kept on hold and reduced to the movement of the extremities; the movement of arms and feet were translated on paper into a series of dots and lines between them, measured and calculated in distances. The apparatus of notations fragmented the movement into steps and displaced and alienated them from the flesh and blood that had danced them, to discrete signs of writing. Dance was being discretised and there was an attempt to reach its grammatisation, that would remain, nonetheless, hard to establish and harder even to decode. It meant, however, a radical epochal trans-formation in the relation to

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<sup>138</sup> Tim Etchells during his lecture “Live Forever” at Tate Modern, London, 25 November 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Franko, 2011.

<sup>140</sup> Thorp, 1998.

<sup>141</sup> Translated as “Choreography, or the Art of Describing the Dance”; for more on this see also Pouillaude, 2017.

gesture, to the bodily and to the self. The transmission of movement was from then on linked to the hand of the author who fixes and gives instruction to the body and other bodies. Its stage could now be a piece of paper, its workspace a desk. The bodies' gestures drew further away from the collective and the ritual and closer to the art of writing and drawing as paradigms.

Beauchamp and Feuillet's notation system soon spread thanks to the printing press. Pierre Rameau collected many of the steps in the first dancing manual *Le Maître à Danser*, 1725.<sup>142</sup> The dancing manual was hardly used, but it still participated in dance's inscription in the history of the written text and theory. Other systems of dance notations have since developed, including the more widely used system developed by von Laban in the early twentieth century. In 1912, the great dancer of the Ballets Russes, Vaslav Nijinsky used the Labanotation system to write his very precise and personal score of *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, his short 10 minute ballet piece based on a poem by Mallarmé.<sup>143</sup> Dancer become author, Nijinsky wrote the piece down not only to ensure the absolute rigour and "correctness" of his work but, as he was already speculating that it would circulate in time and space, he also inaugurated the new possibility of adding ownership over movement, gestures not only lived and danced, but becoming the "own creation" and property, of an author-creator.<sup>144</sup> Dances and gestures were written down not so much to communicate, but rather to in-form the act of dancing as a thing, a dance repeatable and conceptualised, the making of act into a thing, an object of study and of thought. This also intrinsically included the invention of an identified author – "stable, authored art objects for exposure to the critical and commercial judgement of an art world" – and turned out to be quite handy for its construction as property.<sup>145</sup> However, no notation system has been formulated into any obligatory or widely used codified system. There is no alphabet, nor a widely recognised syntax, and body-to-body transmission has remained the main mode of passing on dance.<sup>146</sup> In some way, dance continues to escape grammatisation and capture, at least insofar as it concerns writing.

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<sup>142</sup> Rameau, 1725.

<sup>143</sup> The dance notation was kept by Nijinsky's wife Romola who showed it to the dance scholars Ann Hutchinson Guest and Claudia Jeschke who then worked on it for decades before it was decoded, see Hutchinson and Jeschke, 1991.

<sup>144</sup> In 1916, after seeing his piece danced by Leonide Massine during the American tour, Nijinsky wrote an article to the New York Times on 8 April 1916 complaining. He wrote "the ballet is my own creation", quoted in Launay, 2010: 39. See also Hutchinson and Jeschke, 1991: 18.

<sup>145</sup> Pouillaude, 2017: 115.

<sup>146</sup> Jeschke, 1999; Brandstetter, 2015.

*Art à deux temps*

Lights.

**D.p. n°20 *Manual de uso* (1997)**

**Distinguished proprietor: Thierry Spicher**

**Ribot reads out a set of instructions from a consumer goods manual. As she reads the instructions written by someone else from somewhere else, she tries to put a transparent waterproof suit on, in the most absurd way. The instructions do not seem to relate to the product that she is putting on, that she tries to dress into. Getting dressed is the most elementary know-how. Yet, she seems to have lost it. Is she referring to the intellectually owned dance, gestures, relations, written down and owned by some to be consumed and used by others? Others who seem to have lost any common sense? Who don't even know how to get dressed any more? As she pursues in her attempt to clothe herself, to read the text, the wrong body parts go into the wrong openings, her head goes into the sleeve. She ends the piece, still reading the instructions, each body part in the wrong opening, in a strange contortion. The very mundane act of clothing and her attempt to decipher the written text both brought into the same act, end up oppressing her to the point of leading her to her *death*.**

Lights remain on.

This piece brings together the act of clothing, of protecting, as a supplement, close to the act of reading, the text. Clothing and reading as a single movement. When one looks at the origin of the word 'text' in Spanish *texto*, in Latin, *texere*, one finds a relation between writing and weaving, text and textile, and the Greek word *technē*, all three caught in the same etymological web. As in the piece above, both acts are brought together as one *technē*, into one fabric to protect for a lack, something missing, something withdrawn. Two acts, of clothing and reading, that she will combine as one act again, in a later piece D.p. n°31 *De la Mancha* (2000), in which she lies on the floor, to read and knit, producing a piece of textile/clothing

while, at the same time, she tries to read a passage of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.<sup>147</sup> In the 1997 piece both acts want to cover for a lack: the default of the skin that is not waterproof, and a loss of know-how or *savoir faire* or more precisely, a knowing-how-to-protect.<sup>148</sup> As she tries to overcome both deficiencies, everything becomes extraordinarily complicated, and she ends up performing an absurd death by clothing, or death because of reading, or why not also, a death by *technē*. The piece recalls the Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar's short story, "*No Se Culpe De Nadie*", (translated as 'Don't blame anyone') which narrates in a single claustrophobic paragraph the moment a man tries to put on his jumper, but the simple act becomes tragically absurd, to the point in which, his head stuck in one of the jumper's sleeves, he falls off the balcony of his flat and dies.<sup>149</sup>

Despite its etymological origins relating it to weaving, the word '*text*' went through a transformation in the fourteenth century, and came to mean the written account or, rather, the simple succession of characters. Another epochal event marked the relation to knowledge and the written word, occurred precisely during the time of Cervantes, which was the advent of the printing press. Around the 1430s, Guttenberg's printing technology produced words as a succession of metal movable marks breaking knowledge into the smaller *grammata*, easier to move, portable, like pebbles from an abacus, knowledge became an ever smaller and more detached *calculus*. Concepts and images underwent a further process of grammatisation and in the "becoming-letter" became a series of blocked letters isolated, ordered, stored to be fixed on the paper. No longer related to the gesture of the hand but to the power and automation of the machine, knowledge was reduced to its minimal element, discretised in ever smaller data. It slowly came to insinuate a succession of marks, a compartmentalisation of signs and a different mode of relation. Literature, or rather the text "does not mean anything but that it consists of twenty-six letters".<sup>150</sup>

### *Art of the pharmakon*

Stiegler (2014) called the advent of the printing press another "pharmacological turn" in Western history opening and closing realities and modes of relating. I clarify hereafter the use of the term *pharmakon*, because I consider the writing down of dance, by Beauchamp and Feuillet and later by Rameau and dance's distribution as a literary thing through the printing

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<sup>147</sup> Cervantes, 2003.

<sup>148</sup> Stiegler, 2014: 54-55.

<sup>149</sup> Cortázar, 2016.

<sup>150</sup> Kittler, 1997: 45.

press as a crucial turn in the history of the bodily and gestures made exosomatic. Stiegler, who turns to Plato through Derrida, understands *technē* as a *pharmakon*, meaning a remedy as much as a poison, coming to substitute for a lack or deficiency in human existence. This immediately brings up the question of what then, if anything, is missing in gesture that necessitated a *pharmakon*? What lack does the *pharmakon* come to fill? To think about choreography and writing as *pharmakon*, and of writing as property, hence of property as *pharmakon*, will allow for a later analysis of the phenomenon at the level of psychoanalysis through Kristeva and her understanding of representation as a thing that comes in to fill an absence (of a mother) or the hole of separation.<sup>151</sup>

The notion of *pharmakon* takes us back again to the beginning of Western philosophy and is related directly to the development of writing and its use for the production, storage and dissemination of knowledge. The notion is found in Plato's *Phaedrus*, written in the fourth century B.C. The *Phaedrus* transcribes a long speech by Socrates – he who never wrote – on love and his dialogue with the young Phaedrus. Only a small section is dedicated to the question of the written word in relation to speech, which was a great debate and preoccupation of the time.<sup>152</sup> To those who believe that writing can be a recipe for good memory, a *pharmakon* (274e6), Socrates insists that words should only reside in the soul, and taking that capacity away from the soul could well be a poison, not for the written word, but for the soul itself. He reproaches written words with a lack of life; writing cannot hear, nor can it respond (275d). He goes on to compare writing to painting and outward representation, placing both in the shadows of truth. Writing will always need a reader, the human coming to its aid. Drawn out forms, they are deprived of life and of a parent to protect them, they hold within them their own poison, the silencing of thought, a sort of death. The risk of writing is that of replacing, losing being's secondary retentional memory, the memory still held in the soul – Plato/Socrates did not attend to the memory of the body, but it would also affect a loss of *savoir faire* of the body. Furthermore, it would also separate the word (spoken) from the flesh (the speaker) – alienating the words and isolating the speaker from the community who listens – producing a solitary autonomous author. It is both memory and a particular relation to the past, but also the future of thought understood in dialogue, the shared experience of poetry, that Plato already misses. Their conclusion is then, not to put anything serious, valuable, into writing (276c-278d), and that writing should be used only as a form of play, *paidia* (276d).

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<sup>151</sup> Kristeva 1989, 1998.

<sup>152</sup> Plato and Rowe, 2005.



In his essay "Plato's Pharmacy" (1968), Derrida goes back to the fable Socrates told Phaedrus in that particular dialogue, that is the tale of the Egyptian god of the underworld Theuth who invented the art of writing. He extends through Plato and Theuth the debate into the question of Western logocentricity as a whole.<sup>153</sup> Derrida calls for ambivalence rather than a clear positive or negative meaning of the word *pharmakon*. The written text has opened the space of metaphysics, "both memory (*mneme*) and instruction (*sophia*) have found their remedy (*pharmakon*)."<sup>154</sup> Derrida adds that "it repairs and produces, accumulates and remedies, increases knowledge and reduces forgetfulness."<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, it takes one out of "his proper place and off this customary track", fascinates and charms.<sup>156</sup> His whole text leads the reader out of context, and into other contexts, and is haunted with a "family scene", between the king/Father/God and the son, a family scene which brings about the emergence of writing. Derrida's family, though, is composed only of the Father who speaks and is at the origin of the event of speech and the son, who has left his Father's house and writes, is the text, who continuously plays tricks. Stripped away though, "an orphan or moribund parricide",<sup>157</sup> separated from the father and outside the walls of the city, the provocative and always open text/son - and I add the bodies drawn out, written and informed - might well be playful. They are, though, the means and passages for another type of emergence and engagement in the world and construct and are being constructed "in the form and under cover of a solid object."<sup>158</sup> A reading of the history of choreography from Derrida's perspective and the notion of the *pharmakon*, would suggest that dance and gesture's becoming in-formed and in writing, *grammata*, can be seen as a remedy for memory and wisdom, an opening to decontextualisation, to manipulations and possibilities of distribution as it takes gestures out of the safe walls of the city. Writing displaces being from the present and the presence of the moment of occurrence, of the embodiment of speech and the realm of the Father. Gestures annotated become stored and leave a mark for the foreigner or the future, to revisit, for other spaces and times to access them, confront them, use them. Once exteriorised and fixed, body, the written word, the captured gesture are "deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up"<sup>159</sup> and can also be easily "bandied about indiscriminately (...) ill-treated" as Plato noted, manipulated by others or for one's own immortality, one's own survival and authorship.<sup>160</sup> Writing and lines could well be a playful literary or artistic trick, these can also be used as terrains for other - legal and commercial - cartographies.

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<sup>153</sup> Derrida, 2016.

<sup>154</sup> Derrida, 2016: 96.

<sup>155</sup> Derrida, 2016: 96-97.

<sup>156</sup> Derrida, 2016: 73.

<sup>157</sup> Derrida, 2016: 143.

<sup>158</sup> Derrida, 2016: 74.

<sup>159</sup> Derrida, 2016: 74.

<sup>160</sup> Plato 275E, in Plato and Rowe, 2005.

For Stiegler, tertiary exteriorisation, which is the storage of thought and memory outside the body and the brain, exosomatic, is simply essential for the human: there is no human outside a relation to *technē*, that is, outside the production of artifice, which carries the experiences and memories of the past and engages in a relation to the present and the future. *Technē* constitutes the human. It covers for an existential lack or deficiency, as a remedy to the distinction between an exterior milieu and an interior milieu “that is, his noetic soul, or, spelled otherwise, his psychic apparatus”.<sup>161</sup> In a movement to relate, to survive, to know, to care, to “participate” in the world, the *technē*, the stone knife but also art, temples and writing, take on the function of a supplement, to assist in the passage from *potential* to act.<sup>162</sup> *Technē* then opens the possibilities of the noetic gift that is the human existence and permits the process of ongoing individuation. Hence, the human is always already conceived through and in technology, which marks its existence. The question then is to think *technē* not as a possibility for the human but as the condition for the human. Language is a first form of exteriorisation, transforming thought into the spoken word, given as much as has been received in the first place. A process of symbolisation, language “grants access to the possibility of knowledge as such, because it opens up a transgenerational process collectively conserving, accumulating and hence perpetually stabilizing and transforming the lessons of individual experience.”<sup>163</sup> This is the long-circuit of transindividuation, Stiegler mentions, that binds the human into a long intergenerational and collective process of transindividuation, learning, listening and speaking as a giving and receiving.<sup>164</sup> However, he does also note – and this is where the “symbolic misery” comes in and risks installing itself in the processes – that the risk of “short-circuiting transindividuation” occurs when those technologies of retention are manipulated and reduce potential into *calculability*.<sup>165</sup>

Lights on.

**D.p. n°29 Chair 2000 (2000)**

**Distinguished Proprietor: Arsenic, Lausanne**

**The distinguished woman straps pieces of wood cut out from one of the wooden folding chairs to her own body with tape. Ribot returns to an**

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<sup>161</sup> Ross, 2018: 16.

<sup>162</sup> Stiegler, 2015: 25.

<sup>163</sup> Ross, 2018: 17.

<sup>164</sup> Ross, 2018: 18.

<sup>165</sup> Ross, 2018: 18.

idea that she explored already in D.p. n° 28 *Outsized Baggage* (2000) in which she ties her body like a package, preparing and making it a body available for distribution. Here the chair, that instrument used to rest, becomes an instrument of oppression, in pieces and reassembled to hold the body. The “body-prison” enclosed by a frame, of skin, now dressed, clothed in another envelope that is the wooden pieces, a second layer, another artifice. As she finishes strapping the pieces of wood against her skin, she moves into a ballet position on her tiptoes. Ballet, choreography, eighteenth century, France, what has technology done to bodily gestures? Technologies to rest, to help being stay for a while longer, now into pieces, appear to tighten, enclose and organise her body as a thing, no longer able to move from within but in-framed and available to be moved by powers coming from without.

In the same way that writing did not replace speech, and both modes of language coexist, the *grammatisation* of dance has not replaced the act of dancing in the body nor has it replaced the body-to-body transmission. It has, nonetheless, as writing does to speech, transformed, and maybe packaged being's relation to gestures, bodies and the collective. It has also produced new things – “outsized baggages” portable and ready to go. Dancing obviously preceded both writing and the advent of choreography. Stories and gestures were already passed on, travelling through secondary memory, *traditio*. What then, to repeat the question yet unanswered, is dance's lack that it necessitates a *pharmakon*? The work might well be shared and immortalised, but what might be the side-effects? What has it done to the dancers, those who danced in the rhythm of life? Has dance and gesture lost a rhythm, been short-circuited for the emergence of some-thing other, to be tossed around and exchanged as object of property? Is the discretisation of movements and gestures setting the conditions for a possible automation, standardisation and manipulation of experiences of life, of experiences of existing in the body?

## Chapter 1 - Part 3 -

### Chair and scissors - property and Person

In this section, I use Ribot's wooden folding chair, both as a metaphor and in its physicality, only to become slightly obsessed, as Ribot is, with its mechanics.<sup>166</sup> I propose here to read her chair as *technē*, a fabricated prosthetic and a *pharmakon*, a remedy for the deficiencies of being in the body. I also attempt through and with the chair to think about the ambiguities or contradictions in *technē*. What is the chair, what does it come to substitute, what empty space, lack, does it come to occupy and work through? The folding chair appears already in her pre-distinguished pieces. She used it in her duet *El triste que Nunca os Vido* (1991), a homage to Juana of Castille, known as the Mad Queen, locked up for life in a tower by her husband, Felipe 1<sup>st</sup> of Castille, in the early sixteenth century. In that piece she uses the folding chair as a skirt that she places over her hips, to symbolise the clothes but also the prison, in which the Mad Queen had been locked up. The piece, not coincidentally, was produced as a response to the number of celebrations leading up to the 500th anniversary of the Discovery of America in 1492, taking place at that time in Spain. What was the relation between the disgraced imprisoned mad-woman and the discovery of new worlds - the opening of worlds, discoveries and curiosities far from home that brought about the ex-propriation of lands and bodies? Body, conquest, mapping, writing, flesh, *chair*.

The chair continues to appear from then on constantly in La Ribot's *Distinguished* project. She slides on one (D.p. n°6 *Ya me gustaría a mi ser pez!* 1993), she cuts the chair to pieces and straps the pieces to hold her body together (D.p. n°29 *Chair 2000*) ; she dances with its parts (D.p. n°31 *De la Mancha 2000*), she stands on it (D.p. n°10 *Hacia Donde Volver los ojos*, 1994), she sits on one (D.p. n°25 *Divana*, 1997), she cuts herself with a chair (D.p. n°14, *N°14*, 1996 as I will describe very soon). She accumulates fourteen of them and stacks them up on the *distinguished* woman in D.p. n°37 *Chair 2011* (2011). She makes them physically disappear in D.p. n°40 *The Exchange* (2011) only to replace them with bodies acting as support, on which she leans. The chairs that Ribot uses are wooden folding chairs, normally

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<sup>166</sup> Ribot has also used the chair in other works, such as the installation, *Walk the Chair*, 2010 for instance. See also her documentary *Ribot 2007* in which she is seen selecting her chairs, opening and closing them to test and listen to their mechanics.

used for feasts and temporary communal celebrations and reunions on streets and squares. A portable and miniaturised place to rest as an extension of the legs, a prosthetics from which to see, speak, be in public, the chair holds the body for a while so being can engage in the world for another while. This is all fine, whilst the chair remains open, but what if it shuts? Ribot's chair is also a folding chair that in Spanish is called a *silla de tijera* literally meaning a "scissor chair". The chair folds and as it folds, it can potentially cut, which goes back to the notion of *technē* as *pharmakon*, holding within both a remedy as much as a threat.

**D.p. n° 14 N° 14 (1996)**

**Distinguished proprietor: Lois Keidan**

**La Ribot enters the space, naked, *Körper*. She carries a wooden folding chair in her hand, a FOR SALE sign hangs around her neck. She enters the back of the chair and places it over her hips, clothing her nakedness in it. Standing against a wall, she extends one arm upward in a ballet position. She looks at her audience. She poses for a moment, as a number (14), as another object in a second-hand shop, as home which has become real estate, or body-captured displaced and sold on the market. Perhaps hoping that her chair might become a second skin to protect her nakedness. The FOR SALE sign around her neck prefigures a displacement, the scene of rupture, the traumatic scene of the expropriation, of the making property of the bodies on the market place. After a few seconds she holds the seat of the chair between her hands and starts to compulsively open and shut the chair over her body. The chair becomes a pair of scissors, or the jaws of a crocodile, of a predator devouring its prey. The chair squeaks, the wood bangs, evoking the soundtrack of the knife scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Her body too starts to slip off the wall, the vertical plane. Her face remains deadpan throughout the violent attack, the rape, the expropriation. She ends up on the floor, arms outstretched, chair open, her body suspended in an epileptic arch. Another death scene.**

The scissors and the act of cutting appear again twenty years later, perhaps in response to this piece, in the D.p. n°46 *Sirènes* (2016) mentioned previously. In 2016, La Ribot cuts through the other's skin, with a pair of scissors, in the early piece from 1996 she inflicts the cut, as shocks on her own body. In 1996 she is naked, in the 2016 piece she is dressed as an artist, an inventor or creator in her white shirt, who cuts and discovers at the same time, an act "*à deux pas*".

The word 'chair' carries two meanings that I believe Ribot plays with. In English, chair is that material support on which one can sit to rest. On the other hand if you read the same word in French, a language that Ribot speaks fluently, *chair* refers to the flesh. She is pointing both to the *technē* and to the bodily in the flesh. How do they relate? Flesh and supplement, she places that other chair on her flesh, the folding chair no longer to sit on but to clothe her nakedness. The support mechanism though is not passive, but active, and as a pair of scissors, cuts out the body, separates the body-naked and body-object from the flesh, a mechanism performing compulsively an ontological and legal cut that will draw out the body - object of property - from the flesh and make it available FOR SALE. The flesh - as a *metaxu*, a passage for being's appearance and participation in the world - is cut out by the chair and made other, body-naked, and as it is cut, is wounded and allows for other things, new things, to appear.<sup>167</sup> Can I suggest a link between the chair and property, both *technē*, acting as prosthetics to assist and support some-thing or some-one's survival in time and space? The chair supports the heavy body and serves as a resting place. Property in a similar although abstract way protects the thing in time and through spaces, holding the status of the Person proprietor; both are remedies against the passage of time and the lack of a *proper* space, of a being displaced. Nevertheless, they are at the same time destructive, as they cut through and leave bodies behind.

*Person and Property: technologies of relating and constructing the self*

In Ancient Rome, the body together with the ground beneath its feet are both in-betweens, passages – *metaxu* – for being's engagement in the world that would be expropriated, constructed into a thing of property, establishing a structure of power and domination. The same structure was reinforced centuries later in the conquest of America. Colonialism and imperialism, discovery, conquest and occupation, rest upon a foundation of

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<sup>167</sup> *Metaxu* is a Greek term that refers to a passage or bridge and that I will discuss in more detail through the writings of Simone Weil in chapter 3.

expropriation of bodies and land. Therefore, since I am analysing the making of property, the discovery and expropriation of gestures, an awareness of the historical development of property seems here to be an essential task to understand the conditions in which the artistic and Intellectual Property of Live art have been shaped and the realities they might perpetuate. As Best (2004) implies, the forces at work in constructing old forms of property (land and bodies) are still well at work in the making of new forms of property – although he does not mention Live art, in what concerns this research, gestures and Live art are new forms of property. My intention, hence, is to look back at the split that took place to produce old forms of property for exchange, to try and shed some light on the emergence of gestures and experiences as new forms of property, no longer, or not only, in ‘use’, but conceived as things for exchange.

### *From Greece to Rome*

Martin Bernal notes in his influential afro-centric study of ancient civilisation *Black Athena*, that the prefix *pr-* found in the word ‘property’ was understood in ancient cultures as a “settlement, settled place”. The prefix, according to him, derives from another Indo-European root, which meant to “grow, swell, live” and the “house” linked to family.<sup>168</sup> The word ‘property’ then carries in its roots a sense of place and belonging, of rest and safety. A tool to be in the world, Bernal’s sense of property sounds close to the idea Arendt had of it in *The Human Condition* (1998), which she in turn takes from Ancient Greece and which she considers literally as the ground on which humanity was built. Property was the foundation of people’s existence, a sacred space that served the needs of biological life, in Greek *zoē*. It meant to have one’s own location, life or “place of one’s own”.<sup>169</sup> However the notion of property and of belonging in the world went through an epochal transformation with conquest and occupation, and the development of more impermeable and rigid forms of living, specifically with the rise of the Roman empire and its legal apparatus.

A split occurred gradually during the Roman Republic, which distinguished two types of relations to the same thing. On the one hand was the physical embedded use of a thing, or ‘possession in fact’, in Latin *de facto possession*, on the other was the legal construct of ownership or property, *de jure possession*, set upon that same thing. This distinction of these two different forms of relating towards one same thing would set the foundation of private property as we know it today.<sup>170</sup> Ownership or entitlement of the thing, land or body, becomes

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<sup>168</sup> Bernal, 2020: 275-278.

<sup>169</sup> Arendt, 1998: 70.

<sup>170</sup> Du Plessis, 2015: 187.

a legal set of rights over things which is a different relation, sometimes overlapping, than the embedded bodily experience of use and interaction with the thing, in the flesh. With this legal distinction, the human being was cut through, by law, leaving on one side the body to be owned and on the other, the body to be lived through. The body was defined as a 'thing', *res*, in law and could be in physical 'use', or could be a private thing, that is a private object of property, in Latin *res mancipio*. Independently from its use, some-thing could be made body-property of someone else, an abstract and alienated entity owned (in Latin *dominium*). This produced two modes of relating to bodies as much as to land: in 'use' or in 'property', possessed or owned. According to Roman law, one could live in the *corpus* (Latin for body), but that body was already by law available as a thing, in Latin *res*, and potential property (of the Roman citizen and later of the Person). These categories were in the making and particularly useful during the fifth century BC, as Rome expanded and conquered new provinces, while they searched for and produced new lands from the commons and bodies to be captured. The distinction and categorisation of modes of relating through law, produced a traumatic shock, a seizure, from which came out a thing of property, the exteriorisation or expropriation of one's belonging in the world, left dumb: body and land are not simply a means of belonging, or being in the world in the flux of life but now made into a thing, *res*, potential object of property. Although possession is always physical, embedded in the flesh and from the earth, property is abstract, and moveable, available for exchange between proprietors.

Another entity emerged with legal private property in Roman law, and that is the Person, the holder of property.<sup>171</sup> The Person (*Persona*) is the legal owner of goods, distinguished from the human (*homo*), which finds its origins in the Proto-Italian word for earthling, the Latin *humus*, that which is close to the earth. I delve here into the notion of the Person as it is constituted in the legal event and establishes itself as always different to the human. According to Françoise Létoublon (1994), the notion of the *person* in the beginning of Western philosophical thought - before being linked to the theatrical character of the mask and translated into Latin as *persona* - was in Greece linked to the collective experience of coming face-to-face with others, meeting others and recognising in them another self – encounters that Plato fears to lose with the advent of writing. The later association with the 'mask', as that which covers the face of the dead and the actors face on stage, does not seem attested before the 4th century BC. It is that other meaning that might have permeated into the legal affiliation of *Persona* that as a theatrical mask, can be added as easily as it can be removed to perform in the world. No human being was ever born a *persona* by nature, but a *homo*. One – if a male

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<sup>171</sup> I intentionally use the masculine pronouns he/his as I refer to the Roman and also to Locke's notion of Person later, which I also have decided to keep with the capital P, as it is in the original text *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689).



citizen - was constituted into a Person in a process that was never quite complete and never quite stable. *Persona* came to indicate those who bear legal relations to things. Once a Person, one had a status, a legal and political existence, the right to own land and bodies and the power to reject other categories of living beings as non-persons. The Person in Roman law establishes the status of things, legal entities, and constitutes itself through a certain filiation with those things. For Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito (2012), the concept of Person acts as a blade, a divider separating the juridical capacities from the naturalness and universality of being human. The very mechanism of categorisations of existence and passages between personhood and non-personhood is what has perverted, and is reproduced in relationalities till this day.

### *The Locke-d modern Person*<sup>172</sup>

Still listening to the screeching sound of Ribot's scissor-chair, banging against her body, from Rome I move to the seventeenth century as another epochal moment of radical change in the Western legacy of property rights and in which the modern definition of self is being shaped. The interpretation of Person and property that John Locke developed for the most part in "Of Identity and Diversity" (an essay included in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) and *The Second Treatise* (included in the *Two Treatises of Government* both published in 1689) has been foundational not only for the establishment of modern liberal, capitalist democracies and the understanding of self, but is essential also for our discussion on the APPROPRIATION of gestures, and the lived-experience.<sup>173</sup> In the following section, I draw from Locke's own writings as well as from secondary literature. I also make use explicitly or indirectly of Arendt's analysis in *The Human Condition* and C.B. MacPherson's seminal work *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (1962), subsequently referring to recent works by property historian K-Sue Park (2016; 2021), black theorist Best in *Fugitive's Properties* (2004) and legal scholar Sarah Keenan (2014).

The critical time in which Locke lived, worked and wrote was marked by several events: the Reformation - namely, the ex-propiation of land from the church and the ex-propiation of land from the peasantry; the occupation and mapping out of America's "wastelands";<sup>174</sup> and the development of the printing press. Furthermore, thoughts were circulating as never before, and Locke was influenced by a new scientific relation to experience through the writings of English philosopher Francis Bacon as well as by the theories of French philosopher René

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<sup>172</sup> 'Locke-d' is a pun I take from Keenan, 2014.

<sup>173</sup> Locke, 1997; 1967.

<sup>174</sup> Park, 2016.

Descartes and his new rationalist notion of the subject. In this context, Locke was very much involved in the shaping and articulation of a new ethical and political discourse for imperialist Britain and the emergent ideology of the market, meanwhile framing intellectual and authorial rights and a new understanding of being as a possessive Person.<sup>175</sup>

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke is still very much marked by the Roman categorisation of beings. For Locke, Man is different to Person, and is not born a Person, but a Man simply, just like “children, idiots, savages, and illiterate people” are not Persons, because, as he suggests, they are closer to nature and incapable of thought or consciousness of themselves.<sup>176</sup> Man, as Nature, for Locke, is distinguished but lodged in the same body. However the Person, as different or added to Man, constitutes itself in moments of consciousness and “distant actions”.<sup>177</sup> Consciousness “alone” brings together the Person who is “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself”.<sup>178</sup> The Person then is constituted in the “forensic term, appropriating actions and their merit”, producing itself, as distinct to Man, in the accumulation of conscious thoughts and experiences *had*. Hence, to construct the self as the Person, he APPROPRIATES.<sup>179</sup> Locke defines APPROPRIATION as the act of preserving constantly and repeatedly one’s memories and one’s actions, one’s experiences of the world as *had*, as owned. The understanding of experiences as something that one can retain, accumulate, and reflect on was new, an empiricist approach, much influenced by Bacon, that distinguished Anglo-Saxon philosophy from rationalist French philosophy. What Locke inaugurated was the possibility of the thingness of experience, as something one could have, that can become ‘*mine*’ to ensure the stability of the Person.<sup>180</sup> Such thinking will affect those relations to the world which bring being into participation in the world, that which is common to all, and can from then on be made available as a thing to be *had*. Experience is not only distinguished in form but is made into a thing that can be seized, something that can be owned, retained, accumulated, stored, exchanged and manipulated for the purpose of a heightened form of being, a *distinguished* mode of being, or survival as a Person.

Locke’s concept of Person as seen above is not in being but in *having*, confusing both being and thinking as *having* in one body and in a constant act of APPROPRIATION. Personhood is a self-fabrication that resides entirely in the consciousness of itself and in the

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<sup>175</sup> Rose, 1993: 32-33, on the first copyright on written work in the Statute of Anne, 1709.

<sup>176</sup> Locke, 1997, Book I, chapter 2, § 27: 72.

<sup>177</sup> Locke, 1997, Book II, chapter 27, § 12: 304.

<sup>178</sup> Locke, 1997, Book II, chapter 27, § 11: 303.

<sup>179</sup> Locke, 1997, Book II, chapter 27, § 28: 313.

<sup>180</sup> The ‘mine’ that I emphasise in bold and which will appear in several instances in the thesis makes reference to two other quotes: one is a quote by American philosopher and psychologist William James in Best, 2004: 38, the other is a quote by the French legal scholar Frédéric Zenati, in Ickowicz, 2013: 379.

capacity of the Person to retain experiences and actions as things owned. To preserve one's personhood, then, there is an urge to preserve constantly and repeatedly one's memories and actions, as things *had*, as properties. This was used to justify what Locke was developing at the same time in his political theory in the *Second Treatise* (published as part of the *Two Treatises of Government*), that is the right of APPROPRIATION, which is the other side of what I have been calling the act of ex-proprietation.<sup>181</sup> For Locke, the right of APPROPRIATION, of control and preservation, becomes the structure of support and of power to secure personhood from falling into the natural dismemberment of fragments, the "constantly fleeting particles of matter" that made the human.<sup>182</sup> This argument was used to justify and legitimise the ex-proprietation of land during colonial expansion, but was also used to protect the cause of authors exploited by the monopoly of the printing press back in Europe.<sup>183</sup> Property rights were thus a two-sided coin: protecting the rights of authors on one side of the ocean, whilst ex-proprietating land on the other.

Another revolutionary contribution to the theory of property was that property would be found in the Person, that is in the body. The body inhabited by the Person became one's own, and hence all the engagement of the body of the Person in the world would be an extension of his property. The Person is then a self-possessive or self-appropriating entity and has the capacity, through his body-owned and his conscious, to make property of whatever his body, his hand and his mouth can intervene upon.<sup>184</sup> "Every Man has *Property* in his own *Person*", and then the Person's interventions in the world; "The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands", will hence be considered "something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*".<sup>185</sup> The body became the site of property, and the tool for APPROPRIATION, instigating the "most revolutionary modern contribution to the concept of property, according to which property was not a fixed and firmly located part of the world (...) but, on the contrary, had its source in man himself, in his possession of a body".<sup>186</sup> This was emancipatory and liberating in the sense that property could be made with one's own body by anyone – as long as one was a Person, male and white, over a certain age and of "sound mind". Anyone could produce and reinforce his Person and personhood through the making of his own property. This comes as a provocation to the *pater familias*, the Roman Person and male head of the family, who acquired property in the market or through conquest only, whereas now the author, the modern Person writes and produces one's own new property, in and through one's own

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<sup>181</sup> McPherson, 1962.

<sup>182</sup> Locke, 1997, Book II, chapter 27, § 6.

<sup>183</sup> See Park, 2016, and Keenan, 2014.

<sup>184</sup> Wannewetsch, 2013.

<sup>185</sup> Locke, 1967, Book II, chapter 4, § 27.

<sup>186</sup> Wannewetsch, 2013: 69-70.

body in spite of old forms of authority. I bring the father and the writer figures back here to compare the dynamics with the “family scene” in Derrida in his essay on “Plato’s *Pharmakon*”.<sup>187</sup> “There itself alone”<sup>188</sup>, as McPherson points out about Locke’s Person, but true too about Derrida’s Theuth, a self not owing to anyone or anything, the son, the author, is constituted only by the power of the self to enclose, fabricate property away from the *pater*, in the labour (or dancing) of the body and the mapping out of new lands. Locke uses the notion of “white paper”<sup>189</sup> to speak about the mind, the Person as a cartographer, artist or author drawing and writing one’s own forms, a work of art, on a white canvas, on a white body. In Locke’s Person there is nothing, except that which is written and owned in the body and in hand. There is nothing innate, no father and least so a mother, nothing given or nothing already there but a white slate, a white sheet to draw and write upon. The Person is self-constituted in its own creation made property; the act of creating and making property follow each other closely, to the point of becoming confused, one constituting the other.

I intentionally use the words ‘distinguished’ and ‘distinction’ here in allusion to La Ribot, as in her pieces she highlights precisely the production of distinctions, of something other, when she names them ‘*distinguished*’ and when she starts selling them as ‘*distinguished properties*’ to distinguished Persons. The distinction is made as they are constructed into thingness, by a conscious artist author. I finish this section linking it back to Ribot. Property builds a certain relation to the world, as mechanism, a chair, to hold, to support, but to also to construct the Person. Property and Person act then as a blade, to cut, and an instrument of capture. Cuts on the flesh leaving blood on that side of the ocean, but on this side, producing paint, writing, both to reinforce the mechanism and strengthen the Person.

Lights on.

#### **D.p. n°40 *The Exchange* (2011)**

**A “distinguished woman” enters the stage dressed in white underwear and a white shirt.<sup>190</sup> The stage fills up with people dressed in white. This is the first time La Ribot introduces what she calls ‘extras’ on stage. They had been the audience, the witnesses and act now as those holding the**

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<sup>187</sup> Derrida and Johnson, 2016.

<sup>188</sup> Locke, 1997, Book II, chapter 27, § 1: 296.

<sup>189</sup> Locke, 1997, Book II, chapter 1, § 2: 109.

<sup>190</sup> The terms distinguished and small woman I use here, appear in the SSA registration of this piece. Thank you to Ribot for providing these texts.

work as such, utilised to hold the artist in “distinction”. She calls a “small woman” and asks her to come towards her. With the help of a rope, she performs extreme exercises with her body using the “small woman” as a support. Her exercise could well be ballet warm-up exercises or sadomasochist experimentation. How she relates to her body seems to extend to how she relates to others’ bodies, she inflicts dominion upon both. As the chair disappears others’ bodies are instrumentalised, to maintain the subject. The Person still needs the structure to constitute and support her status, her body standing. While on all fours the “small woman” is asked to stick out her tongue, smile, scream, submit and follow the orders and commands of the “distinguished woman.”

The absence of a physical chair, materiality, in no way has eliminated the need of structures of support to hold the artist as Person. The “small woman,” objectified, is here used to hold the “distinguished” Personhood of the woman: two forms of life, one instrumentalising the other, one greater *dom-inating* the other smaller one. How is one constituted in the other? For how long can she keep her balance and the other hold her breath in this game? What makes it a game and not an abuse of power, of a master over its slave? It can’t only be the pleasure? Sadomasochism might open the possibility of playing with the codes of power relations, however the inversion and fluidity of the roles of power do not neutralise or deactivate the violence, they only make it exchangeable, mobile. The game perpetuates the instrumentalisation of relations, the constituent relation in which one becomes a property-holder-subject, or Person. The Person-constituted-in-relation to dominion, survives in the abusive relation to the other and the world, and does not disappear in the game.

Lights off.

*Another moment in the history of gesture. Dance's first few steps into property*

In the beginning of the twentieth century, when Nijinsky was securing and authoring *L'Après midi d'un Faune* (1912), women dancers and black dancers took up their personal fight for emancipation and freedom from the white male through the APPROPRIATION of the gestures of their bodies and their hands. These were tools that Locke had left available and now at their disposal, the same tools of law and recognition that had been refused to them, and used to dominate and objectify them for centuries. Kraut's meticulously written book *Choreographing Copyright* (2016) analyses the choreographic emancipatory movement in North-America in the early twentieth century, a pioneering movement that shaped choreography as a category of Intellectual Property. Pioneer solo dancers, such as Loïe Fuller, fought for property and through property to gain a publicly acknowledged sense of Personhood and "status as an authorial subject", conscious and entitled to the property of their own selves.<sup>191</sup> They fought for the re-APPROPRIATION of those bodies that had been expropriated from them, made into the property of other Persons, only to make them property again, but their own property this time. They did this with what they had at hand: with their bodies' own interaction with the world now ready to be captured and retained by new mnemotechnologies of the time, photography and the moving image. Such technologies were developed by scientists Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey in the 1880s, with a special interest in the movement of bodies and of the dancer in particular, establishing the beginning of a long and difficult relationship between both the photographer and the dancer, the still image and the event of bodily gestures.

I could well place La Ribot at the end of the line of dancer-choreographers used as case studies in Kraut's book, starting from Fuller all the way to Anna Theresa de Keersmaecker, as I take the reflection further and question what is constituted, what is generated or perpetuated in the making of Live art gestures, no longer only dance, as *distinguished* art property. La Ribot owes a lot to Fuller, so it seems appropriate to consider Fuller's case in particular.<sup>192</sup> In the 1880s and 1890s, Fuller became one of the first pioneers of the solo dance and the first woman-dancer author, together with Isadora Duncan and Ruth St Denis.<sup>193</sup> She 'invented' what would soon be known as her famous *Serpentine dances*, short pieces in which she used fabric and light, without a particular narrative or expression of emotion. They were inserted randomly, incidentally, and without any coherence between and into a variety of larger

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<sup>191</sup> Kraut, 2016: 74.

<sup>192</sup> Ribot, 2014.

<sup>193</sup> Daly, 1995; Schneider, 2002: 91.

dramatic or stage productions. This moving apart and standing alone became for Fuller a political act and part of a wider strategy for the acquisition of subjecthood. La Ribot took her feminine article “La”, as much from famous Spanish bullfighters, as from Fuller, who, in her legal fights for possessive individualism began to bill herself “La Loïe Fuller”. The “La” suggests “the genuine article” in every sense, signifying her status.<sup>194</sup> “La” singles out the individual from the ensemble, the chorus, the anonymous; a modern turn which individuated the dancer as choreographer as well as author, abandoning the ensemble or the collective.

In 1892, Fuller entered the famous legal dispute against Minnie Bemis, a chorus girl who had been re-producing the choreographic sequences and scenography that had made Fuller famous.<sup>195</sup> This dispute was both about distinguishing Fuller as a solo author artist from Bemis, the chorus girl, as much as it was about constructing Fuller’s legitimacy as property holder subject vis-a-vis the male music hall empresario.<sup>196</sup> In an attempt at staking her proprietary claim on the dance as her own creation, the lawyers documented the legal steps Fuller had taken to secure her choreographic composition, registered and stored at the Library of Congress.<sup>197</sup> Adding to the written documentation, Fuller had already been working on the reproduction of her dancing using the most advanced mnemotechnologies of the time: she used lithography and early photographs as early as 1892. These new techniques were more accurate and faster to produce and distribute than choreographic notations, and Fuller was aware that retaining her own image and controlling its distribution could be used strategically to produce herself as creator and proprietor of the dances.<sup>198</sup> Fuller lost her case against Bemis, on the grounds that the *Serpentine Dance* told no story, had no purpose and hence was not eligible for protection as a dramatic composition, which was already considered as a category of work protected by law since 1856. Neither could it enter the category of pantomime, which was also protected as Intellectual Property since 1868. Fuller’s work did not express any feeling or have any “effect” on the spectator and as such could not enter the legal framework! What was it then, only gesture? Fuller’s case however was to be considered a breakthrough in the history of dance and a challenge to modern structures which had established that,

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<sup>194</sup> Kraut, 2015: 51.

<sup>195</sup> Bemis had been hired by the Casino as Fuller’s replacement. Many claim that Fuller’s *Serpentine Dance* had been conceived from traditional Indian skirt dances (Kraut, 2015).

<sup>196</sup> Kraut, 2016: 44.

<sup>197</sup> Kraut, 2016: 67.

<sup>198</sup> Kraut, 2016: 53.

the concrete, bodily aspect of property (the thing owned) is female, while the conceptual, abstract, sovereign dimension is male. *Being* property characterizes the female condition, while *having* it denotes self-owning masculinity.<sup>199</sup>

However, Fuller had attempted to be recognised as a woman author, on the stage of Personhood and Law, in and through a structure of power, that was abstract, and indeed sovereign. A structure in which she insisted on participating in no longer on the female owned side, but on the masculine “self-owning” side this time. What other way was there to be recognised?

Another case in Kraut’s book is that of the black dancer Johnny Hudgins who, unlike Fuller, did win his case, and in 1927 became the first Afro-American dancer to have secured copyright of his choreographies (in England). For this, Hudgins underwent the meticulous collection of photographic images and texts, written by himself in the first person, to build the repertoire of seven pantomime works he claimed were his property and which he gathered in the nineteen-page copyright booklet *Silence*, “JOHNNY HUDGINS own original creation.”<sup>200</sup> He was fighting for the authenticity of his work, for his authorial uniqueness, his originality outside the chorus, that silenced mass of – black - people homogenised into namelessness, without a voice, utilised for the entertainment industry after they had been used on cotton plantations. He was fighting for a name as author of his acts and works and at the same time he was fighting against the ‘savagism’ imposed on black people by the White gaze.<sup>201</sup> By fixing, writing down, cataloguing and publishing his gestures into a book, he was proving he engaged consciously in his acts, their intellectual origin and had control over his body; hence proving to the Person as judge that he too could be a property-holder-subject. His movements were not the natural or instinctual expression of an animated species, or a set of moves innate to black people, they were the work of a thinking being.

The great paradox of this move by those who had been considered non-persons to Personhood, and of the constitution of the nothingness of gestures, or vernacular collective gestures into singled-out, original, new Intellectual Property, was that both actions were working in and validating a structure of recognition that affirmed and strengthened the understanding of being as a single subject and as self-constituted legal entity. Fuller and Hudgins were fighting for recognition as Persons and proprietors of their own body. A recognition and a property that not only had been denied to both, but that had been ‘set upon’

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<sup>199</sup> Law scholar Margaret Davies quoted in Kraut, 2016: 25.

<sup>200</sup> Kraut, 2016: 113.

<sup>201</sup> See Gordon, 2004.



the black human body. In a move toward emancipation, however, they worked within a frame that had dehumanised them in the first place. Desiring what had been constructed precisely to dehumanise them, they still worked within and fed the juridical system that had been used against them.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Best, 2004; Kraut, 2016; Moten, 2015.

## Chapter 1 - Part 4 -

### Shots, shocks, the camera and the production of images

I move the discussion now to another epoch of technological changes, moving from written notation to the visual recording of photography, as it was being developed by Marey and Muybridge, between the 1850's and 1880's. Photography became the medium to fix time and light in the flat frame of a physical image, and subsequently developed into the moving image, in the sequencing of images in analogic film. This is taking a step back from the discussions I analyse in more detail later that emerged in Performance Theory mainly from the writing of Peggy Phelan (1993) and Philip Auslander (1999) on the relation between documentation and the live event of art. I return here to the beginnings of photography and the moving image and their use as an instrument of invention and its impact upon modes of relating, participating, and understanding the world. The art later used by Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin (mainly from 1910s to the early 1930s) was also the one used by Fuller and Hudgins to support their legal cases and inaugurate another era for – modern – dance. No longer did the capture of gestures or movement need a translation into language, a process that goes from what is perceived, in the mind or in front of us, to symbolisation into words: that circuit of symbolisation would now be taken over by machines. Photography can represent, capture and distribute, in detail and quickly in the bidimensionality of the photographic image at the tip of one's finger. The succession of those images in the film would create movement and a different understanding of time. Other fields of innovation outside culture also profited from these technological developments. Following the work already initiated in the US factories by the engineer Frederick Taylor in the 1920s, Frank Gilbreth, an engineer, and his wife and psychologist Lillian Gilbreth used film and a micro-chronometer to record every minute movement of the workers' body, to study, manipulate, and simplify their movements. The point was to find the most efficient way of working in a continuous process on the assembly line or conveyor belt without straining the worker's body. The Gilbreths used Marey's photographic apparatuses, which he had first developed by charting and recording the movement of animals, to analyse, record and manipulate the movement of people. Both Marey and the Gilbreths:

believed that through these ingenious devices, the movements of the body could be analytically decomposed, broken down into its most *discrete* components. A science of the economy of the body could unlock the secrets of human labour power, emancipate working energy, and transform work.<sup>203</sup>

The “*savoir faire*”, the know-hows were being captured, ex-propriated and stored to be analysed by others, and to design new modes of working and moving which is the basis of what Marx described as the process of proletarianization.<sup>204</sup>

Lights go on.

**D.p. n° 25 *Divana* (1997)**

**Distinguished Proprietor: De Hexe Mathilde Monnier,**

La Ribot sits in front of the audience, on stage. Her hair is dyed in International Klein Blue (IKB). She wears an IKB coloured dress with an exaggerated trail and a huge bow at the front. She sits solemnly, as a newly invented diva mimicking “La” Madonna from an Italian fourteenth century painting or a royal sovereign, fixing herself, at least for a while, in history. the wooden chair is her support structure, her pedestal. She takes a little electric fan in one hand that she holds as a sceptre, and a chronometer in the other, as an orb. She times herself doing what might seem like nothing, a stillness to do nothing, a nothingness that could become an object, or someone else’s artwork, exhibiting only her constructed spectacle, her performed sovereignty. She has carefully constructed the framed moment of being seen, preciously measuring her time of exposure, letting herself be stared at, gazed at, constructed as the aesthetic thing. Ready for the shot of the camera, she captures time and enframes image.

By dyeing her hair blue, she makes a direct reference to Yves Klein’s deep blue mixed paint ‘invented’ by the artist and registered as his property

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<sup>203</sup> Rabinach, 1990: 87, my emphasis.

<sup>204</sup> Stiegler, 2014.

in 1960<sup>205</sup> and to his use of the female body as a paintbrush in his *Anthropometries* series (1960), except, she has no canvas on which to paint on, she has only the body as object. Colour and bodies. The staging of herself within a set time, a set zone, also invokes Klein's *Immaterial Zones of Pictorial Sensibility* that he started to sell in 1959, as well as the marketisation of that no-thingness that he enframed within what he called *Zones* and Ribot calls *distinguished pieces*. Her little fan also hints at his work with air. In the latter works the French artist attempted to control, aestheticise and render profitable the natural elements air, water and fire, three of the four elements. Air can be captured within a floor, a ceiling and four walls, as Klein dreamt of in *Air Architecture*, in 1958, or seized in a balloon such as Klein's contemporary Piero Manzoni did in his work *Fiato d'Artista* (1960). La Ribot uses the tip of her finger, the becoming-finger of her hand, to ironically capture with the little fan and the chronometer air and time, that which we breathe in common, to make both into a work of art, framed between shots, constructing herself as their sovereign author and offering a piece for consumption. Air and time.

Lights off.

La Ribot has not only used photography in her work and to document it, but her whole project is marked by a relationship to the photographic image.<sup>206</sup> D.p. n° 25 *Divana* (1997) is about a time (visible in the chronometer), space (in the air of the ventilator) and her appearance in the stage of the world all being framed into a *tableau vivant*, exposed in the lens of camera and between the shots. The moment is captured. Does it mind by whom, and for what? In D.p. n° 2 *Fatelo con me* (1993), she walks without end and chaotically between the walls of the theatre, as if haunted but unable to escape the four frames of the black box and two-dimensionality of the picture. She collaborated with photographer Manuel Vason on the relation between the moving body and the photographic image, which led to "Exposures" (1998 – 2002), a touring exhibition and a publication, a picture of her in D.p. n° 29 *Chair 2000*

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<sup>205</sup> Registered in the French Institute National de la Propriété Industrielle (INPI) although never patented as he died soon after in 1962.

<sup>206</sup> Rousier, 2004, and her documentary from 2007, and various forms of audio-visual documentation on her website [www.laribot.com](http://www.laribot.com)

(2000) featuring on the front cover.<sup>207</sup> The project sought to shake off the fixity of the photographic image with the performativity of the body, but as much as one tries - as Vason points out himself in his recent academic research - one is still held in the contradiction, an opening and at the same time “an ideological dispositive of power and control that distances subject and object and enforces a unique, absolute and finished perspective.”<sup>208</sup>

The shocks in literature and art in writing, representation and photography although violent, do not spill

**blood,**

just

**some paint.** The aim of the next section, is to

argue that despite not bleeding, there is still a violence that cannot be ignored as well as a separation from which something emerges: a piece. This is a necessary violence, perhaps, bearable, but the violent separation in the coming into existence of being in the body and being in the image carry the risk of being mis-handled, of being captured for the self-affirmation and self-constitution of a particular type of being, a Person who survives and affirms itself only in that violence. How then can we relate again to those things which have been violently exteriorised, leaving a wound behind? Assembling, collecting, swallowing, assimilating? I attempt to explain my point through three particular and *distinguished* polaroid pictures, from Ribot's piece D.p. n°16 *Narcisa* (1996), which belongs to the second series *Más Distinguidas* premiered in 1997 and performed together with other relevant pieces which have already discussed such as D.p. n°14 *n°14* and D.p. n°25 *Divana*. D.p. n°14 *n°14* (1996) is still haunting in the background; the shocks of the chair and in the shots of the polaroid performing similar acts on the body. I then go back to the use of photographic experimentations on bodies, further discretisation and ex-propiation of gestures, and focus on the traumatic events at the Hospital of La Salpêtrière, in Paris, at the turn of the century.

Lights go on.

### **D.p. n°16 *Narcisa* (1996)**

**Ribot appears on stage naked with a polaroid camera in her hand. She stands still and shoots her own body, with the camera, performing (metaphorical) wounds, cut-outs, images, pieces of a self-portrait. She takes**

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<sup>207</sup> Vason, 2002.

<sup>208</sup> Vason, 2019: 1.

a shot of her left breast, takes the picture from the machine and with tape sticks it back onto her left breast. She does the same with her right breast and then with her sex. After reassembling the pieces or images onto her body again, she stands still, her arms stretched, as the three polaroid pictures slowly reveal the image, that which was familiar becoming estranged, spectres appearing into visibility as foreign. The body appears as a frame, a support to hold the shattered pieces of body in-formed and in-framed, pieces of what might have been a mirror. In pieces now, the mirror that brought the image, representation, is now fixed in and for time, in the photographic picture. The mirror appears in another piece of that same series D.p.n°17 *Sin Título IV* (1997) in which she lies naked on the floor on her side emulating Diego Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus* (1647). In Ribot's scene it is not the little angel who holds the mirror though, it is the artist herself who holds a round mirror in front of her and rolls it along her side, reflecting several parts of her body as it moves.

Lights off.

Narcissus was a young boy from Greek mythology divulged by the Latin author Ovid. This character committed the sacrilege of seeing himself as different, exteriorising the image of his face in the reflection of the water. Seeing his image on the surface of the water comes as a shock, an opening in the sense of the Greek *epokhē*, as an epochal event, an interruption through which a new way of seeing opens up, new ways of image-ining the self. Exteriorised, made other, he desired obsessively to be reunited with that which had become other, on the surface of the water.

"I am enchanted and I see, but I cannot reach what I see and what enchants me. (...) We are only kept apart by a little water!"<sup>209</sup>

The young boy acknowledges the estrangement and yet again waits and hopes for an intimation that seems impossible. As the relation of a subject and its object, from then on he will always be distinct and constituted in that "unending dialectic exchange."<sup>210</sup> The desire to be reunited, though, grows and risks becoming fixed. It becomes an obsession that will blind him from the rest of the world, from the presence of Echo, for instance, desperately in love

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<sup>209</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book III: 437-473, translated by A. S. Kline  
<https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph3.htm#476975714>

<sup>210</sup> Wilshire, 1991: 287-288.

with him and whom he can barely notice. There is something in the relation between Narcissus and his reflection, though, that is still held in the fluidity, in the blurry contours of the water's ripples and only has the water, its flow, to support it. The rhythm of the water, carrying his reflection, although interrupted for a while does not retain or capture, the flow, as his reflection, stops as quickly as it continues in the movement of receiving and giving.<sup>211</sup> In fact, Narcissus, once he tries to extend his hand to touch his image, finds his death, literally drowned in his own image, swallowed up by his own reflection, in the water.

The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan considered the experience of the child discovering their own reflection as an essential formative phase that he called the "mirror stage".<sup>212</sup> The moment of observing and recognising oneself in the mirror permits a detachment of the child from the parents, and assists in the process of assimilating a separation, and one's own otherness, an exteriorisation. Part of the imaginary organisation of the human, it forms the ego, as other, and turns the child towards a relation to the world, no longer as one, but as another in relation to others. It is an existential as much as a psychological process of becoming other. Now, the photographic image might well confirm the irreparable otherness of our existence, it might also, unlike the reflection in the waters or in the mirror, intervene in the process of exteriorisation or displacement, by interrupting, maybe prematurely, and short-circuiting the formative process. On top of a possible interruption, photography also extracts some-thing out of the existential and psychic process. The *imago* (Latin for 'image') extracts from the process of individuation and makes some-thing, the stagnated image, available, for other circulations and usage. Maybe FOR SALE or for the Person. In D.p. n°16 *Narcisa* (1996), the polaroid as a device shows the passage from movement of light to stillness, still life or *nature morte*, it shows a coming into stagnation of a process, as it is revealed and fixed in the polaroid picture.

In photography the flesh becomes an image, and the body parts appear as quotations. The bodily gestures are made quotable, as Walter Benjamin would say, obsessed as he was with quotations in his own writing and, as he saw it, also in Bertolt Brecht's Epic theatre: works produced entirely with quotations and delivered as an assemblage, a montage.<sup>213</sup> In the same way, in La Ribot's series of *pieces*, the pieces of things are now made available for "montage" on her body, also as a frame to be *had*, no longer fluid or in rhythm with the world. Her skin appears as a white sheet of paper, a sheet where letters – pieces of stuff - are typed out,

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<sup>211</sup> See "The Original Structure of the Work of Art", in Agamben, 1999: 94-102.

<sup>212</sup> Payne, 1993: 26-27.

<sup>213</sup> In his essay "What is Epic Theatre?" in Benjamin, 2007: 151; see also Arendt, 2007.

moveable and isolated signs, ready at hand, fragments - of body pieces. These appear estranged, fixed, isolated, exteriorised pieces, that she regroups, gathers onto the body, the Person who holds. I have not used the word 'selfie' but rather 'self-portrait', because the selfie was not yet a widespread concept in the mid 1990s, but the selfie is that piece of self, a relation to the self, become discretised, furthermore miniaturised as it is made digital, translated into algorithms and data retained, composed and *had*, seized by one or by another (legal) Person, but already available for capture.

Once more I return to the question of art as *technē*, and wish to stress the importance of not falling into the mistake of forgetting, but remembering the tensions that brought technologies, of memory, to work and think its limits. How does the formatting, of that which seems so intimately linked to a process, an engagement of being in the world, affect relations to and in the world and to each other? What is at stake as these passages for beings' opening into the world, become fixed, short-circuited? What happens when objects are extracted from the cuts and made available for circulation in other systems? If *technē* is a means of "bringing forth" in the world, of individuation or opening of the noetic to the world, there are already signs of its destructive power. In what way should we think of Live art as it fabricates gestures and experiences as object-based artworks, as new modes of interruptions and capture, the making of broken pieces of mirror? If the body (in German *Körper*) has been concretised, enframed and in-formed, and owned as property of the Person, how can its bodily gestures possibly resist further ordering and ex-propriation?

Despite writing in different historical contexts, and different intellectual frameworks, Stiegler met Heidegger in his great concern for *technē*, in which human existence is at stake. What Stiegler calls hyper-industrial epoch, an epoch of "symbolic misery", in which we find ourselves since the early 1990s is "doubtless also what Martin Heidegger called "modern technology".<sup>214</sup> According to Stiegler, the 1990s, the decade of D.p. n°14, *n°14* (1996) and of D.p. n° 16 *Narcisa* (1996) was a time "which turns everything to its advantage", and has become a "theatre of loss of participation and the loss of psychic and collective individuation".<sup>215</sup> Stiegler brings together both a Heideggerian understanding of modernity and the Marxist definition of proletarianisation, defining industrialisation as the calculation of all. In the hyper-industrialised society, calculation captures and occupies new spaces of intervention, especially those areas of the *spirits* - according to Stiegler, which are those things that are closer to the noetic, the psychic and harder to grasp. Stiegler recognised the ordering and loss

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<sup>214</sup> Stiegler, 2017: 388.

<sup>215</sup> Stiegler, 2015: 27.



of the tools of work, the occupational know-hows, which have been taken over by the machines and their owners, but also a loss of a “savoir vivre”, living-knowledge.<sup>216</sup> Processes and passages that bring us to existence as humans have been exteriorised and captured as “blocks”, in Heidegger’s terms, manipulated and utilised by industrial and hyper-industrial forces and offered to us again for consumption.<sup>217</sup> Symbolic areas of existence, areas in which being participates and engages in the world, those psychic processes that are formative to the way the child and being relate to others and to the self in separation, those areas have been seized:

what Socrates describes in *Phaedrus*, to wit that the exteriorisation of memory is a loss of memory and of knowledge, is experienced today in our daily lives, in *all the aspects of our existences*”<sup>218</sup>

This short-circuiting, or interruption and capture of processes of individuation is producing traumatic cuts; traumatic because they create wounds and because they paralyse a fundamental process of coming into and engaging in the world. From these wounds

**paint**

**spills**

and property is made, interrupting the rhythm of gift and counter gift, stagnating and ex-propriating gesture, making gesture into an object-being work by an artist, for its self-constitution as author proprietor. Instead of being part of a flow, the making of property becomes a structure to dissipate the Person-artist’s fear of falling, of gravity, of losing personhood and being forgotten.

*Curing Caring Extracting*

Lights go on.

**D.p.n° 10 *Hacia donde volver los ojos (1994)***<sup>219</sup>

**Distinguished proprietor: Rafa Sánchez**

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<sup>216</sup> Stiegler, 2015: 25.

<sup>217</sup> Stiegler, 2015; Heidegger, 2010.

<sup>218</sup> Stiegler, “Anamnesis and Hypomnesis”, original emphasis, <https://arsindustrialis.org/anamnesis-and-hypomnesis>

<sup>219</sup> Translated into English as “Where to turn your eyes?”

She stands on a chair placed by the wall, her naked body folded. She lets her head and torso hang over her legs. She is turned towards herself, but can only see through the space between her legs, emptiness and wall. Legs and wall, which support us, and separate us at the same time. She will stay in that position for the duration of the piece, or for “eternity” as Ribot wrote in the synopsis.<sup>220</sup> Holding a microphone to her mouth, she cries, moans as she swings gently. Moaning is the sound that is heard as one is wordless, speechless but still speaks, from a wound. It is an eternal lamentation as if one finds oneself suspended, exposed always in the impossibility of assimilating a loss, the loss of something intimate torn away, stolen. This piece was inspired by a picture in the newspaper of a patient in a mental health clinic in Split, Croatia, during the Balkan War, “returned from the battlefield grown silent”, speechless.<sup>221</sup> Something has happened in the experience of violence in the First World War, as Benjamin wrote, concerned with the increase in machination, in the experience of the camps in World War II and in the war in the Balkans in the 1990s, that has marked a point of no return.<sup>222</sup>

This significant and poignant piece, with the presence again of the chair, brings us back to consider *technē* not only as an opening, but as an interrupting shock, a violence in relation to the experience of being’s participation in the world more widely. I return to the question of *technē* by remembering what happened in the late nineteenth century at the Hospital of La Salpêtrière, Paris. A discussion on the documentation of hysteria that took place during this period might well contribute, in a small way, to the ongoing discussions around documentation and Live art. Furthermore it reveals what is being wounded, cut, and what is being extracted, as well as who is gaining and who is losing in the use of technologies.

Once just a home for predominantly destitute women escaping poverty and abuse, the Hospital slowly became a laboratory in which the most advanced technologies were used on bodies to observe, discover, and register new mental conditions, such as hysteria. There are many reasons why I return to La Salpêtrière. Ribot was not indifferent to the construction of the mad-woman and the image-ination around such characters. Together with D.p.n° 10, *Hacia*

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<sup>220</sup> “She cries, groans and swings for eternity” (my translation from Spanish) from the records held in the Archive of the SGAE, Madrid.

<sup>221</sup> Benjamin, 2007: 84.

<sup>222</sup> Rowland, 1997.

*donde volver los ojos* (1994), I have already mentioned her early dance piece *El triste que Nunca os Vido* (1991) in which she interprets the mad queen, locked up by King Felipe the 1<sup>st</sup>, and her jerky body on the floor in D.p. n°1 *Muriéndose la Sirena* (1993). In the early 1990s, when Ribot started her *Distinguished project*, Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and his study on the apparatuses of power and the scientific and intellectual interventions on the bodies – especially female – was very much in the mind of intellectuals and conceptual dancers. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben briefly made reference to the historical and iconographic moment of La Salpêtrière which meant for him the beginning of the absolute loss of gesture, before it was to be “irretrievably lost”.<sup>223</sup> A few years after Agamben, Georges Didi-Huberman published *The Invention of Hysteria* (2003) an extensive analysis of the photographic archive of La Salpêtrière's experiments during the last decades of the nineteenth century, and considered the events that took place there to be a fundamental, although atrocious chapter in the history of art.<sup>224</sup>

Gestures of hysteria as well as those of dancers had already been recorded in the late seventeenth century, the first decades of the Enlightenment, when the universe was revealed by the telescope, the secrets of the world were dissected on a forensic table through technologies of systematisation and storage, and choreography was being written and drawn out on the page.<sup>225</sup> La Salpêtrière was to become another event in the period of the end of the nineteenth century, the period of the chronometer and photography, which permitted further, more detailed, closer and intimate extractions of time and its gestures. In the early 1860s, Duchenne de Boulogne pioneered the use of photography in the Hospital to record scientific experiments and analyse facial expressions, leaving an archive of extraordinary images.<sup>226</sup> Patients' smallest twitches, the act of walking, screams, gestures were being captured for scientific experimentation, recorded and stored as images for analysis and for the purpose of healing. The neurologist and psychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot continued along Boulogne's line of experimentation, calling in Albert Londe – who was at the time following the media techniques developed by Muybridge and Marey – to record every jerk and ecstatic gesture of the female patients with the blades of the shutter. Pictures of the patients were taken in a photographic studio set up in the hospital, equipped with an estrade, a bed, and various electric devices. They published their discoveries and the images as their ‘inventions’ in the *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, 1888, following on from “Iconographie

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<sup>223</sup> Agamben, 2000: 49.

<sup>224</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2003: 4.

<sup>225</sup> Arnaud, 2014.

<sup>226</sup> Duchenne de Boulogne, 1862.

photographique de la Salpêtrière” (1876) published a decade earlier producing, storing and distributing a new imagery and imagination around the woman and hysteria.<sup>227</sup>

As seen in the detailed accounts gathered in these publications, the women at the Hospital had in most cases already suffered abuse and violence before coming into the Hospital. They were coming to be protected from those who had harmed them and to be healed and cared for by the doctors. However, those doctors, those “conscious” Men, to use Lockean words, who were supposed to be mediators, means between the unconscious and the conscious, between the women and the world, the interior and exterior milieu, were utilising the women, to record ‘new’ gestures, for scientific and visual experimentation. The patients were used as canvases on which to perform technological “brushstrokes” and produce the photographic as opposed to the metaphorical and symbolic image. The purpose of the doctors and the researchers was to describe the manifestations, classify and map out, bring to reason those movements that, until then, had escaped language or rational understanding. They were ordering what had been observed and sharing the discoveries for the purpose of medical progress. They invented as they discovered new images and objects of thought.

The curious photographic apparatus, or what Didi-Huberman calls “the diabolic instrument of knowledge”<sup>228</sup> used to record the bodies and gestures of the women was inventing as much as it was stealing; “tearing” is the word Didi-Huberman uses, dissecting and tearing something away from reality as it was being discovered.<sup>229</sup> The understanding and the making of new images was becoming confused. And as the doctors and scientists at La Salpêtrière “invented,” they continued to extract, they cut out with the camera, making holes, for an object to emerge.<sup>230</sup> The making of the image, the in-forming, is hence associated with a removal, an ex-propriation of something real from those beings – women - photographed, and from the world which they are part of. Didi-Huberman writes that “inventing is finding or falling right on the shock of the thing, the “thing itself”; *invenire*, coming to it, and perhaps unveiling it. (...) This miracle [of finding/inventing] is always infected” by “a burden, direction, and thus a power.”<sup>231</sup> He posits the camera as an ontological apparatus, the “camera is a wholly philosophical product; it is an instrument of *cogito*.”<sup>232</sup> So close to reality, to exact semblance, it makes believe that it is the self. But it is not a mirror, the perspective is from the scientists and the *imago*; the image of the women, rather than given back to her in a

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<sup>227</sup> Charcot, 1888.

<sup>228</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2003: 91.

<sup>229</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2003: 232.

<sup>230</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2003: 67.

<sup>231</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2003: 27.

<sup>232</sup> Didi-Huberman, 2003: 4.

reflection, is extracted for the scientists' use. The process of formation is interrupted, and the image expropriated. The women are left without a formative process of symbolisation, as "war-amputees" or "war-invalids", as author and psychoanalyst Esther Rashkin points out, carrying "within [them] the vestige of the lost appendage from which [they] have been severed."<sup>233</sup>

Charcot aestheticised even further the expropriation of gestures, and quite literally considered the hospital rather than a place of care, a "living pathology museum".<sup>234</sup> He took the hospital to the next level beyond photography, utilising women as enactors or performers of hysteria and opening his experimentations regularly to the public, during his "Leçons du Mardi". Writers, journalists, social scientists and philosophers, including Henri Bergson, Emile Durkheim, Guy de Maupassant, Edmond de Goncourt, and Sarah Bernhardt visited the Hospital, amongst many others.<sup>235</sup> Sigmund Freud, who would never himself use photography or film during his therapy sessions, studied at the Hospital under Charcot in 1885, where he became fascinated with hysteria.<sup>236</sup> He wrote about Charcot: "He was not a reflective man, not a thinker: he had the nature of an artist—he was, as he himself said, a "visuel," a man who sees."<sup>237</sup> Nor did he seem very interested in healing. With Charcot, the tradition of the annual costume parties held at the Hospital called the "Bal des folles" or "the ball of the madwomen", became a social phenomenon. The Parisian bourgeoisie would be invited and could come and enjoy the spectacle of what Charcot had named the "clownism" of his patients.<sup>238</sup> Jane Avril, the famous dancer of the Moulin Rouge, immortalized by Toulouse-Lautrec, had lived at La Salpêtrière in the 1890s under the care of Charcot.<sup>239</sup> She learnt how to dance in those balls, and took the jerky and dismembered rhythm to the stages of the Parisian cabarets.

Those gestures extracted from La Salpêtrière spread outside the walls, and influenced the *chanteuse épileptique*, translated as "epileptic" singers and dancers of the fashionable Parisian music halls in the 1900s as well as the aesthetic of the *Jugendstil*. As the cultural theorist Rae Beth Gordon (2004) argues, the jerky and convoluted body movements of La Salpêtrière also permeated into the so-called African dances which were in fashion during the same period. Black dancers "modelled their performance style on the tics, grimaces, contortions, and convulsive movements and gestures of epileptics and hysterics "representing

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<sup>233</sup> Rashkin, 1988: 34. See also Kittler (1999) who relates photography and to the military technological developments.

<sup>234</sup> Quoted in Hakosalo 1991: 20.

<sup>235</sup> Micale, 1985.

<sup>236</sup> Auslander, 2008: 9.

<sup>237</sup> Quoted by Didi Huberman 2003: 26.

<sup>238</sup> A term invented by Charcot, Didi-Huberman, 2003: 115.

<sup>239</sup> Avril: 2005.

their savagery to the white gaze.”<sup>240</sup> Soon the iconography of hysteria had become a cultural phenomenon and was heightened by the traumatic effect of World War One. The German Dadaist dancer Valeska Gert - described by Bertolt Brecht as the “ep-pic dancer par excellence” - took upon herself the modern syndrome of the alienating body, in her twisting, turning, spasms and tics.<sup>241</sup> These bodies voluntarily enacted what had been provoked and inflicted with electric shocks and shots of the camera onto the women in the historical Parisian asylum.<sup>242</sup> In La Salpêtrière, and permeated into society, openings, new modes of understanding and seeing, of engaging and thinking the world had come to appear as shocks, violent cuts, inflicted on women – and being in general. These had been absorbed into culture, haunting other spaces and perpetuating their traumatic effect, leaving empty holes behind and at the same time producing traumatic objects, images, fragments of self, experiences of being in the world, aestheticised, utilised, gestures as objects manipulated for other purposes and available for exchange. What else was there left to be done with those objects, images, gestures as glitches, tics, remaining behind?

The lights are on.

#### **D.p. n°37, *Chair 2011* (2011)**

**The woman wearing a thick plastic corset puts on an open wooden folding chair as a skirt, hanging around her hips. With the help of some assistants, who one by one bring in chairs, she places up to fourteen chairs one on top of the other on her body. She makes a link to the D.p. N°14 (1996) but also, and very much in this series from 2011, she relates again to the striptease. In *Socorro Gloria* (1991), she stripped naked, in this piece though in 2011, she dresses, or over-dresses. The chair, the prosthetic that was supposed to help her, to hold her, and clothe her, is here multiplied and layered one on top of the other, as a fetish object impossible to assimilate but still available to be collected, accumulated. At the end of the piece, the chairs form an immense sculpture over her body, lost. The accumulated chairs look like a sheltering shell, like that of a snail, and only her bare legs stick out from underneath it. Standing**

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<sup>240</sup> Gordon, 2004: 270.

<sup>241</sup> Gert, 2004: 75-78.

<sup>242</sup> Gordon, 2004: 270.

dramatically lonely and quiet, the sound of a piano is heard in the background. Instead of relief and protection against a predator, the growing structure around her transmits a feeling of suffocation, of heaviness. The chairs have become a menace to the frail body standing within the structure produced by the chairs; chairs and body ready to collapse at any moment.

## Chapter 1 - Part 5 - Childish or foolish but not quite properly

I have attempted to return to certain histories of the making of gesture as cut out things, available for property and have suggested an analogy between ex-propiation and the traumatic event. This last part of the chapter explores Ribot's position and response as an artist in these conditions, and suggests that "the only appropriate thing" or the only way she seems to be able to work, is at the limits of the proper, by playing, which conveys "the sense of movement as well as amusement".<sup>243</sup> The play gives Ribot room to work, and brings her close to the child, the fool, moving into a relationality with things, found precisely in those expropriated and made property in Roman law and those deprived of Personhood: those "children, idiots, savages, and illiterate people" whom Locke considered as being too close to nature to have any consciousness of the self.<sup>244</sup>

### *Her "distinguished" sale*

As I have already explained, Ribot registered the *Distinguished piece* as choreography or dramatic work in the Society of Authors in Spain and in Switzerland. She constructed and played with another property, which depended somehow on the registered pieces, built upon but not identical to the Intellectual Property. The new property, that she will call *distinguished property*, will work independently and be exchanged under another set of protocols. Thought of as an artistic device, an element of play and of the imagination more than as a financially profitable good, she put them out FOR SALE to what she called "*distinguished proprietors*". Already at the very beginning of the project, for the first series *13 Piezas Distinguidas* performed at the Teatro Pradillo, in Madrid, in 1994, she writes at the bottom of the marketing flyer:

IMPORTANT NOTE: LA RIBOT allows the sponsorship and commissioning of new "Distinguished Pieces" by any physical or juridical entity, public or private, who would

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<sup>243</sup> Words from Benjamin as he thinks of Kafka's use of parables, Benjamin, 2007: 129; see also Payne, 1993: 12.

<sup>244</sup> Locke, 1997, Book I, chapter 2, § 27: 72.



like to become nominative proprietor of one or various pieces. For a *distinguished* price, you and everyone else seeing the piece will know *for ever* that the piece is yours if you commission or sponsor it. You will be added to the *exquisite list* of current patrons:

Distinguished patrons: Nacho Van Aerseen - Cosmopolita

Rafa Sánchez - Hacia donde volver los ojos

Anyone interested in this distinguished offer, please contact the company.<sup>245</sup>

She was offering for sale a right to become a patron, to be named and to be publicly distinguished and visible alongside the title of the piece. However, a patron, a sponsor, is usually engaged with the development of the work, often present before anything has been produced. She indeed often mentions the proprietors as “angels”, and she considered they engaged “in a moral or caring rather than a business relationship with artists”.<sup>246</sup> Yet as she offers them a final product FOR SALE, she ignores the process and focuses on the art object, her gestures and *distinguished* product. She throws both the patron and the work into the commercial arena and into a modern or even a bourgeois relation between each other. “You and everyone else seeing the piece will know for ever that the piece is yours”, she says, emphasising the importance of social recognition. To be recognised in public for their connoisseurship and taste is precisely what the modern collector is looking for: to be *distinguished*.<sup>247</sup> The proprietors received the right to be named together with the right of a personal relationship with the artist. They are kept informed and are invited to any performance of their piece as the piece continues its journey with La Ribot. The copyright of the pieces La Ribot has already registered remains her own legal property. The proprietors will have no rights or capacity to re-produce the work. The actual control and exhibition rights of the *distinguished* artworks, stay with the artist.<sup>248</sup> The possession - meaning the bodily use of the gestures, the touring of the pieces in her body or in anybody *distinguished* by the artist, as much as the authorial property – remain also under her control. The buyers only receive a *distinguished* title and the right to be named “à côté” (on the side) of their own *distinguished* piece in all marketing material or publications.<sup>249</sup>

Some pieces were sold, others given away in exchange for some in-kind support or given to friends and supporters. She gave the choreographer Olga Mesa D.p. n°11 *Sin Título*

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<sup>245</sup> My own translation from Spanish, see archive of the SGAE, flyer attached to the synopsis of D.p.n° 8 *Capricho Mio* (1994).

<sup>246</sup> Velthuis, 2005: 68.

<sup>247</sup> Bourdieu, 1979; see also “The Man of Taste and the Dialectic of the Split” in Agamben 1999, 13-27.

<sup>248</sup> McClean, 2014: 90.

<sup>249</sup> She published a portrait of each one of the proprietors in her book Rousier, 2004.

// in exchange for the jumper that she used in D.p. n°4 *de la vida violenta* (1994). The microphone that she used to amplify her cry was given to her by Rafa Sánchez, singer of the rock band La Union, who got the piece D.p. n°10 *Hacia Donde Volver los Ojos* (1993) in exchange. She sold her first *distinguished* piece for money to her friend and dancer Juan Dominguez at the end of 1994. It was D.p. n°12 *La próxima vez* (1993). At the very beginning she gave out some polaroid pictures to the *distinguished* proprietor (to Isabelle Rochat, to Robyn Archer). She made a super 8 film of D.p. n°14, n°14 (1996) that she gave with the *distinguished property* to Lois Keidan, at the time director of Live arts at The Institute of Contemporary Art, London. To Bernardo Laniado-Romero she gave a VHS.<sup>250</sup> But she soon stopped giving physical stuff as she decided that the images, still and moving images, should remain as documentation and not as art works.<sup>251</sup> She continued to give some pieces away to friends and sold others, and then decided to fix a price for them when she sold D.p. n°26 *N°26* to her friend and artist Ion Munduate in 1997. The price was fixed, again as a creative and signifying act, or play, at 1000 dollars which was the equivalent 150.000 Spanish pesetas, putting the pieces in the awkward position, not quite a commodity as the value of a commodity fluctuates in accordance with the market.

Below is an email from La Ribot to choreographer Jérôme Bel who in 1999 bought D.p. n°31 *De la Mancha* (1997). This is the only formal receipt or certificate that could prove the piece belongs to Bel and is all that remains of the transaction. I decided to keep here the inappropriate language and spelling mistakes of the original email from La Ribot, impossible in any case to translate into English. I do this to highlight the awkwardness of trying to impose a certain language of law, or of business, upon a rather medieval, “out of place”, vernacular language, which is that of gesture.

Anyway, comme tu bien sais, c'est 1000 S, 600 livres esterlines ou 150 .000 pesetas. Tu est a cote de le titre de ta pièce toujours, et chaque fois que tu vais la voir tu serai invitée a u théâtre, espace, galerie ou ne import ou, avec joie. Si un jour, tu vais la revendre, tu dois seulement me dire le nomme de le nouveau propriétaire et voilà, le bussiness, si es que il y a, est pour toi.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Email correspondence with Bernardo Laniado-Romero, 10 January 2016.

<sup>251</sup> Except for the 337 Polaroid pictures taken during the live performances of D.p.n°16 *Narcisa* (1996) which much later she framed and made available for sale *La Ribot, Otra Narcisa* (2003).

<sup>252</sup> Email correspondence between Ribot and Bel, 14 October 1999, that Ribot shared with me on 28 December 2010. Unable to translate the spelling or syntax mistakes, this is a translation into English:

“Anyway, as you know it is 1000 dollars, 600 pounds sterling or 150.000 pesetas. You will be at the side of the title of your piece, always and each time you wish to see it, we will happily invite you to the theatre, space, gallery, or wherever it is shown. If one day you want to re-sell it, you just need to tell me the name of the new proprietor and that is it, the business, if any, is yours.”

The terms of the transaction are simple: she mentions the price, the right to be mentioned, the right to be invited to future performances of the piece, and the resale right, asking him simply to keep her informed of a potential new proprietor. This move towards the market will establish the *distinguished pieces* closer to conceptual art, and the sale of conceptual pieces, linking her work to Yves Klein's *Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility* (1959-62) or Ian Wilson's *Discussions* in the 1970s.<sup>253</sup> The intention as mentioned already, is not to give out a series of instructions for a future reproduction - something artists such as Laurence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth or Robert Barry did expect - but to secure the experience as something other than a service of dancing. Ribot was not only offering a service, performing her work, but was producing something other, *distinguished*. And what distinguishes primarily a service from a good, in economic terms, is that a good is autonomous and can be resold, it is a property, measured and clearly distinguished that can be transferred many times. Hence why she states "if one day you want to re-sell it..." She continues here to construct property attempting in some ironic way to enter a visual art market, moving away from an economy based on ticket sales and public funding. Her approach, though, as the email above and the "synopses" show, is humorous and playful in its endeavour. She takes an ethical position in relation to the pieces of gestures that is purposefully unprofessional. Indeed, rather than a business, properly, the *Distinguished project* in its relation to the world and to the market is a clumsy game, the approach of an amateur, passionate and at the same time unprofessional, not quite familiar with the tools of exchange.<sup>254</sup>

The lights are on.

**D.p. n° 30 Candida Iluminaris, (2000)**

**Distinguished proprietor: Victor Ramos**

**Ribot slowly lays down nineteen objects in a straight line: a hair clip, a blue toy car, a miniature tree, a teddy bear belonging to her son Pablo, an orange toy lorry, another bigger red hair clip, a ventilator that she switches on, a watch, a braid made of her own hair, a sign saying "Do not touch", a pink high heel that she is wearing and takes off to lay it on the ground, her own knickers that again she takes off and lays on the ground, the seat of a wooden**

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<sup>253</sup> These I will analyse in more detail in chapter 2 together with the Artist Contract developed in the 1970s.

<sup>254</sup> Caillois (1958) as I will see later in chapter 3, considered play as a necessary activity of daily life, in that it was a space for the unproductive.

chair, a water meter with a radio attached to it that she switches on, an orange jumper that she takes off, her tights, a big rectangle, and a measuring tape. The line of things ends with her own body stripped naked. She lies there for three minutes, her body as another object, together with air and toys, “lying before and lying ready.”<sup>255</sup>

Lights remain on.

In his essay “The Making of Space in Trisha Brown and La Ribot”, Lepecki uses this piece as an example of conceptual dance’s “slow ontology”, as the dancer, Ribot, enters another rhythm, a slower pace; as she lies flat on the horizontal floor a thickening of space and time takes place.<sup>256</sup> I have already mentioned this move from the vertical to the horizontal above, to this I would like to add another observation: the move from a high place to the low one of the child. As a child, she takes her time in carefully laying down the objects, which have been used in previous pieces and elsewhere. She does this alone, and quietly, just as children do when, with careful attention, they line up whatever they find in the house, toys, kitchen tools or parent’s shoes, and occupy the space on the floor that is closest to them. In her book *Ribot* (2004) makes this comparison as she includes a picture of her son playing and doing exactly the same thing, laying down objects and carefully placing them along a straight line. At the end of the line in *D.p. n°30 Candida Illuminaris* (2000), she adds her own body on the floor, included as another ‘thing’, another object into the game.

Thinking through childhood and the notion of play were important parts of Benjamin’s project of thinking another way of being with things. Benjamin wrote extensively about the cultural and social changes taking place with the modern technological revolution and the “shocks”, interruptions and montages that were taking place at various levels of life. What can be made of all these changes and how to relate to the work, language and one’s own history, or belonging, without losing oneself in it or abusing it, was an underlying preoccupation and tension in his writings.<sup>257</sup> In a short essay from 1929, “Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre”, he weaves together questions of childhood, theatricality and the political.<sup>258</sup> The childish play meant for him another mode of attention that comes through a neutralisation and even destruction of a previous and acquired usage or an understanding of things. In play, the child disenchanters or profanates, in order to assemble in other ways, intimate ways that open

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<sup>255</sup> Heidegger, 2010: 221.

<sup>256</sup> Lepecki, 2006: 65-86.

<sup>257</sup> More on Benjamin and language in Fynsk, 1996: 177-226; Guess, 2010.

<sup>258</sup> Benjamin, 1999: 201-207.

new worlds.<sup>259</sup> He compares the child with what he hopes the artist will be. In the relationship with things, an artist, for Benjamin, as the child, is a receiver of world as much as creator of worlds, and adds,

childhood achievement is always aimed not at the “eternity” of the products but at the “moment” of the gesture. The theatre is the art form of the child because it is ephemeral.<sup>260</sup>

According to him, the child approaches things free from imitation or significations and without pretending to bring anything into a final work, *œuvre* or doctrine, least so an artistic product for any purpose or for survival in history. “Every childhood action and gesture becomes a signal (...) but a signal from another world,” like the gesture of the parable that is a signal not a *sign*, communicating with another world without disregarding the otherness of that world.<sup>261</sup>

Childhood play is incidental, never quite complete, as gesture, it could well be compared to Benjamin’s understanding of the parable that he finds in Kafka’s *gestus*. “Kafka could understand things only in the form of a *gestus*, and this *gestus* which he did not understand constitutes the cloudy part of the parables.”<sup>262</sup> Kafka’s gestures assemble stories and thoughts, characters and events, experimentally putting them together to create a sort of whispered intelligence, “rumour(s) about the true things”.<sup>263</sup> His assembled gestures simply open up new questions, one question leading to the next, never settling but “placeless.” This is the site but also the moment of the unknowing and the incomprehensible held in hesitation before something new, maybe a new message or maybe none, might appear.<sup>264</sup> Benjamin understands *gestus* as the play of a child, as a certain relation to being and language that does not latch on, but cares for that which is completely other, as an “open hole that cannot be closed by logic.”<sup>265</sup> It is from there that the ethical experience is possible and “hope” is not lost.<sup>266</sup> This “open hole” - particularly present in Kafka’s work - Benjamin states, can only be cared for not by the “grown-up”, reassured and pretentious author but by the fool, as only the “fool’s help is real help” or the child’s, both of them lying outside the making of doctrine.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Guess, 2010.

<sup>260</sup> Benjamin, 1999: 204.

<sup>261</sup> Benjamin, 1999: 203-204.

<sup>262</sup> Benjamin, 2007: 129.

<sup>263</sup> Benjamin, 2007: 144.

<sup>264</sup> Hamacher, 1996: 329.

<sup>265</sup> Hamacher, 1996: 348.

<sup>266</sup> Benjamin, 2007: 144.

<sup>267</sup> Benjamin, 2007: 144.

Benjamin saw in the gesture of the child at play and in theatrical performance what he perceived “as the strange place” from which the parables of Kafka emerged and which opened towards a relationship without purpose, or rather that escapes all purpose, anything that could well be grasped or collected by the bourgeois spirit.<sup>268</sup> There is no intention of producing anything that can be instrumentalised, or interpreted or used in this world, but only a reimagining of a relationship with things and others – and, as Ribot places her body there, I add, to bodies - that can open new worlds and care for the openings.

### *Silent fool and the mis-use of language as technē*

The two pieces that inaugurated Ribot’s project, *Socorro Gloria!* (1991) and D.p. n°1 *Muriéndose la Sirena* (1993) were already marked by a certain relation to silence, speech and the voice, a relation and a tension that runs through all the *distinguished* pieces. In *Socorro Gloria!* (1991) Ribot tries but is unable to speak a word, her voice gone. The microphone as a prosthetic supposed to amplify her speech in the room, for everyone to hear, is rendered useless, exposed in its impossibility to amplify, to reach out. But to what? To whom? In D.p. n°1 *Muriéndose la Sirena* (1993), she holds the technology for public speaking in her hand, as she lies on the floor, but the microphone again is useless, she cannot speak through it, having forgotten that the mermaid had already lost her voice. So, what is the point then of using *technē*? Both the speech and the microphone have been rendered *inoperative*. She exposes the very fact that neither of them produces anything. Instead, she accepts or occupies the place of the mute, or the *in-fant*, which etymologically means the one who is not yet in language, without proper speech. Through her silence and inability to speak, she refuses to become a ‘grown up’ or a first Person who speaks; implying the grammatical relation to language that is self-constituting, differentiating the grammatical first Person of the subject, the ‘I’ from the object spoken.

All through the *Distinguished pieces* from 1993 to 2000, Ribot hardly speaks, though sometimes she does attempt to, most of the times using other people’s words, in quotations. In D.p. n°11 *Sin Título II* (1994), she quotes a piece from one of Fernando Pessoa’s alternate authorial names Bernardo Soares from *The Book of Disquiet*, inhabiting the Portuguese poet’s own dispersal.<sup>269</sup> In D.p. n° 13 *de La Mancha* (2000), she quotes Cervantes. Both authors are quoted only as echoes, in fragments, contributing to Ribot’s process of de-Personalisation, or un-powering. In D.p. n°10 *Hacia donde volver los ojos* (1994), speechless, she cries. In D.p.

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<sup>268</sup> Benjamin, 2007: 125.

<sup>269</sup> Pessoa, 2010.

n°20 *Manual de Uso* (1997), she reads and follows instructions without knowing what they are really for and where they will lead her. In D.p. n°23 *Sin título III* (1997), she does not know what to say. In her later series from 2011, *PARAdistinguidas* the only words spoken are commands as the anonymous extras are brought onto the stage in D.p. n°40 *The Exchange* (2011) and D.p. n°42 *Revolución* (2011). In 2016, with the series *Another Distinguée*, she returns to a completely dark, almost hollow muteness. In the sixth series from 2021 *Distinguished Anyways*, in which she covers the bodies with thick paint, she plays once more with a deadly silence and sporadic quotations. Her *distinguished* self is constantly in an absurd and tragic relation to language, in the same way as she is constantly in a humorous and awkward relationship to the body.

Looking at classical ballets, such as *Giselle* or *Swan Lake*, or examples of modern dance such as that of Isadora Duncan or the Ballets Russes' productions one might think that dancers have always been bodies without speech and even without voices.<sup>270</sup> But this again is a modern fabrication. The first ballet recorded without speech or song, the first one also with more women than men, all of them also for the first-time professionals, was a choreography by Pierre Beauchamp with music by Lully entitled *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* in 1681.<sup>271</sup> The seventeenth century, which had led to the emergence of the silent first Person-author and the distinction of the choreographer, was also a time of the silencing of the dancer and the move of dance from the *platea* (or the street) onto the stage. In modernity, the engagement with experience and with others suffered a radical change through aestheticisation, isolating the figure of the emergent author-choreographer from the collective, and separating the body from the voice in the newly emerged figure of the ballerina, for whom speaking and singing were forbidden. The dancer would be restricted to being a body in movement understood as a body at work, a silenced labouring body, a professional female ballerina.

However, I read here Ribot's muteness as coming from another intention, that is to be closer to the in-fant's play and a refusal to become a grown-up and settle in the operation of linguistic subjectification. In her decision to remain as the silent ballerina, or the in-fant, still unable or unwilling to utter proper words of her own, she speaks to the fantasy of Personalisation, of the making of the Person or the subject in language through the making of an object, of its own. She profanates the use of speech as an instrument to construct anything else, or an act that can do things, and instead the pieces play with a certain *mute*-ilation of the

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<sup>270</sup> *Giselle* is a romantic ballet first performed in Paris in 1841 by the Ballet du Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique, no archive of the early productions remain. *Swan Lake* is a ballet to music by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky from 1875–1876 of which no choreography remains.

<sup>271</sup> De Cahussac, 2004: 217-218.

subjectivity of the Person.<sup>272</sup> Without a voice, but also refusing to dance properly, she remains, still, like a fool left alone as the pre-modern collective festivities that brought the hectic dances onto the squares have been forgotten. She stands as the medieval fool who in modern times has lost not only her carnival, the celebration of the flesh, and the place of subversiveness, but her whole world.<sup>273</sup> The carnival, the universal and ambivalent ritualistic feast slowly disappeared with feudal dissolution, that subsequently brought forward the figure of the fool or jester. The time of the carnival over, fools and jesters were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life.<sup>274</sup> Without a carnival, the jester remains as a representation of that which has been lost. Ribot abides in that place, as a melancholic fool, as Siegmund points out, held “under the spell of melancholy”, haunted by a loss.<sup>275</sup> That melancholy she takes and reinvents from Don Quixote, known in Spanish as “*El caballero de la triste figura*” translated into English as the “Knight of the Sad Countenance”, as much as from the actor Keaton, both fools not quite adapted to the development of the technologies of their times.<sup>276</sup> In his essay on the humour in Ribot’s pieces Sánchez (2004) points out to her semblance to Keaton, the great master of the gag and of silent cinema, to whom she seems to be rendering homage with her deadpan face and in D.p. n°2 *Fatelo con me* (1993) or her D.p. n° 9 *La Vaca Sueca* (1994). She takes from the silent movies:

contrast and reversal, unusual, surprising and shocking verbal associations and images, successive, multiple metaphors rapidly shifting in content, character and perspective, and the conflict and fusion of incongruent realities.<sup>277</sup>

La Ribot, like Keaton, represents the tragic human condition of the modern fool as she places herself within that lineage. Not fully invested in the world, the fool or comic can look at the world upside down and always on the edge, in a relation to modern technologies in a clumsy, inefficient way, to highlight what they are: prosthetics. Something was happening then, in the times of El Quixote, the printing press and the beginning of modernity. Something seemed to be happening in the development of the cinema and the capture of the moving image, in factories, and in culture. And something is happening in the 1990s, as Ribot set out the *Distinguished project*. El Quixote, Keaton and Ribot are witnesses of a change in epoch, the emergence of new technologies and new modes of relating to things and to self, which call for an ethical repositioning.

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<sup>272</sup> See a reference to Pessoa and mutilation and dismemberment in Cousineau, 2013: ix.

<sup>273</sup> Bakhtin, 1973. I will be discussing the issue of carnival further in chapter 3.

<sup>274</sup> Buchler, 2003.

<sup>275</sup> Siegmund, 2004: 83.

<sup>276</sup> Cervantes, 2003; Nantell, 1981.

<sup>277</sup> Nantell, 1981: 142.



### *A transition towards professionalisation*

During one of the performances of D.p. n°30 *Candida Illuminaris* (2000), during the *Panoramix* tour in 2003, one of La Ribot's props, lying on the floor during the performance was stolen. Instead of replacing the 'purloined' object by another one, at the following performance of the piece, Ribot decided to replace it with a small piece of cardboard and wrote the date the object had been stolen on it. On that date, the object had become property, a property of Ribot stolen, the theft producing ownership as if the two operations, stealing and ownership, on the one side a loss and on the other an addition, had led to the same outcome, the consolidation of an object of property. In a way, the techno-logical conditions and Ribot had allowed that moment to happen: things had already been laid out on the ground, ready, available for someone to steal, to make property. As this chapter has attempted to explain and analyse, in its transitions and transformation the thing is not property but property needs to take form in the thing, and so the form of things, thingness, becomes a structure for property.

As she strips and organises things, as she places her body-naked on the wet and uncertain ground on the shore, and as she constructs property and plays with it in the construction of a *distinguished* market, Ribot plays with those things, body and *distinguished* property as a joke, irreverently and certainly hesitatingly. Ribot's teasers reveal, though, certain issues. That which I have called a second *distinguished* property is only possible because of the pieces of stuff, exteriorised and made available. She plays with the idea of a distinguished property FOR SALE in the same way as she plays with her body-naked, exhibiting them both as much as she attempts to subvert them, trying to maintain a "not quite yet", never quite settled moment; but for how long? How long until those objects are utilised or stolen?

What happens when some-one, your own Person or some other Person steals the toys which you had used to open worlds poetically and playfully? What happens when the tools which were necessary to help assist in our participation in the world and in the processes of individuation, are stolen and made the property of someone or other, for other ends and objects to be consumed? The bodily gestures of dance have left a place hidden deep in the ocean and the emergent lonely artist has produced a new form of *dominium*, using law as a tool to construct property with what was at hand, that is the body. The risk is to become a grown-up, in Benjamin's sense of the world, or a professional, and no longer play around and discover

as an amateur but steal the object for good, as Stiegler warned.<sup>278</sup> Straight after and on the back of Ribot's experimentations, in the early 2000s, Tino Sehgal started to produce his "constructed situations" and found no tension in his relation to things and objects of property. In Chapter 2 I suggest that since the 2000s we are experiencing a period of normalisation or "professionalisation" in what concerns the relationship between bodily gesture and visual art's institutions and market. That which is being expropriated is being legitimised by institutions and made profitable through the market. In this environment of things enclosed and calculated, legally owned and commercially exchanged, what new or old modes of relating can be expected?

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<sup>278</sup> Heathfield, Glendenning and Stiegler, 2015.

## Chapter 2 –

### Celebrating gesture and experience as objects of art

*As they open the door<sup>279</sup> and I enter, I immediately stumble, by mistake and to my horror, on an artwork drawn on the floor, a chalk circle by Ian Wilson from 1968. The drawing is reproduced via instructions that have already transported the work to other times and spaces. It was Wilson's last material work, after which he decided to stop producing anything material and began to work on conversations as art works. Marc and Josée Gensollen, the owners of the house and of the collection tell me about a conversation they own from Wilson. It took place on May 13, 1999, at number 408 rue Paradis in Marseille: Marc, Josée, and Ian discussed for two hours the meaning of the Absolute. That is all they can tell me about it and all that is included in the artist's certificate that they keep. What makes this encounter, this exchange of ideas or whatever happened in that moment, an own-able work of art and not something else is a key reason as to why the Gensollens, both psychiatrists, are interested in it. That slippage, that passage from a conversation, the beginning of the process of thinking, the process of bringing into language that which was unconscious to the conscious, the emergence into speech, an opening to the other in a listening and response, and how that is all captured into an object and then into artwork is what intrigues me too.*

*As we continue the tour of the house, Marc stops suddenly, bends forward, stands up again and says in a deep voice and strong French accent "What*

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<sup>279</sup> Notes from my first visit to La Fabrique, Marseille, 16 January 2016.

do you think this is about?" He softens his voice "Tino Sehgal, 2003". That was a "constructed situation" followed by the signature of the author and the date of its creation. Then comes the conversation about the work, the interpretations, stories and gossip around what and how it happened. They bought the piece in 2003; Sehgal came to their home and trained the new proprietors, just as a dance piece would be transmitted, gestures still one with the body and passed on from one dancer to the next, without exteriorised choreographic notations. The sale transaction was verbal and the Gensollens hold no material traces of either the transaction or the artwork. They can only perform the piece within the context of their art collection; outside of this the work would cease to be a Tino Sehgal. How is that? We all laugh.

I start with this account of my visit at the private collector's home La Fabrique to place Tino Sehgal's "constructed situation" already in the context of an art collection. The work of the live event, gestures and the lived-experience have come to find their place quite comfortably within the established collections and amongst other recognised visual artists. Another edition of this work is owned by the Kadis Art Foundation. Some works have gone into private collections such as *This is New* (2003) to Matthew Slotover or *Guards Kissing* (2002), to private collectors Javier Lumbreras and Lorena Pérez-Jácome; other works have entered the major art museums worldwide: Tate, London, purchased *This is Propaganada* (2002) in 2005; also in 2005 the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam purchased *Instead of allowing some thing to rise up to your face dancing bruce and dan and other things* (2000). In 2010 Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, acquired *This Situation* (2007) and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. acquired *This You* (2006) in 2018 to name only a few.<sup>280</sup> No longer in that place of hesitation or play, "the messy, impure and historically feminised performance-based arts"<sup>281</sup> infiltrating and provoking the art space and its dynamics, the events of being-in-the-world have not only been solidified, fixed, made private property but have been granted an "almost quasi-stately legitimation"<sup>282</sup> and are paraded in art institutions

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<sup>280</sup> According to one of his dealers, the Esther Schipper gallery as per 2023, his work is also held at Kunsten Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; FNAC, Paris; FRAC Rhône-Alpes, Lyon; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; John Kaldor Family Collection, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen; Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, Montreal; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

<sup>281</sup> Schneider, 2011: 103.

<sup>282</sup> Sehgal says in his interview with Cofino, 2012.

and art fairs.<sup>283</sup> How has gesture as property been solidified in that way? And as gestures and experiences are celebrated as fully consolidated artworks for the constitution of the artist and to feed the market, what kind of relations can these works propose, imagine or perpetuate? Artist Allan Kaprow once said “a picture has never changed the price of eggs”<sup>284</sup> so what then can a gesture become art work do, what change does it produce?

Trained in dance (Folkwang University of the Arts, in Essen) and in Political Economy (Technical University of Berlin, University of Essen), Sehgal started his career dancing with Jérôme Bel and Xavier Leroy in the 1990s. His first solo work and the last one in which he performed was *Twenty Minutes for the Twentieth Century* (1999), which incorporated dance movements from seminal twentieth century solo dancers. Quite contemptuous towards theatre, its space and its economy, he decided to move away from the dance context and showed *This Is Good* (2001) at the Stedelijk Museum, in a room alongside Marcel Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-Valise* (1935-1941) and works by Jeff Koons and Félix González-Torres, situating his practice within the visual art avant-garde. In 2002, he accepted the invitation of curator Jens Hoffmann to present in Manifesta4. If he had used dance steps from iconic dance figures in his piece in 1999, at Manifesta4 he presented a piece which re-enacted movements and body positions from iconic works by Bruce Nauman and Dan Graham from the 1960-70s. The piece is called *Instead of allowing some thing to rise up to your face dancing bruce and dan and other things* (2000). The show meant his debut and success as “dancer-turned-artist”.<sup>285</sup> Since then, he produces ‘situations’, constructed experiences, encounters, promenades and conversations, orchestrated by the artist and performed by what he prefers to call ‘interpreters’ who sing, dance, speak and walk in loop and always within a visual art context and throughout gallery opening hours.

Some of his works are more sculptural, such as *Kiss* (2003) which involved a couple of interpreters replicating several “kisses” from the history of Western art as a series of *tableaux vivants*, or *This Is So Contemporary* (2003) composed of guards singing and dancing in the art exhibition. Other works are more immersive, constructed situations in the hope of “empowering” a more participatory audience such as *This Progress* (2006) presented and purchased by the Guggenheim Museum, New York, which led the visitors on a walk and engaged them in conversation on the notion of progress,<sup>286</sup> or *This Situation* (2007), in which six interpreters quote various thinkers in order to engage the visitor in conversations about

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<sup>283</sup> I have mentioned a few of the first artists selling the live event of performance in the introduction, such as Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, Tania Bruguera, Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmus.

<sup>284</sup> Kaprow, 2003: 53.

<sup>285</sup> Lütticken, 2015: 91.

<sup>286</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 128-175.

their position within society and society as a whole; *This Variation* (2012), originally created for Documenta13, plunges interpreters and visitors in the dark. Behaviours, sensorial environments, conversations sometimes anecdotal sometimes with philosophical expectations, these are the raw materials that he works with and fabricates into artefacts.

His situations are always constructed as artworks and have found their place in the visual arts thanks to an opening which conceptual dancers and artists and the “relational aesthetic” began demarcating.<sup>287</sup> Already in the 1950s and 60s, dancers such as Simone Forti or Yvonne Rainer were infiltrating the space of art with the body, influencing the work of Robert Morris. Conceptual artists sought to erase the matter of art in which they saw a condensation of the power of artists and the commodified object.<sup>288</sup> Artists such as Yoko Ono, Art and Language, and Lawrence Weiner experimented with art no longer in the dead object but in relation to other fields of knowledge such as poetry, music and dance. In merging different idioms, they were searching for other forms of relating to things and other modes of creating, deviating or exhibiting provocations and thoughts.<sup>289</sup> As Lucy Lippard and John Chandler stated in their article “The Dematerialisation of Art” (1968), art was “losing interest in the physical evolution of the work of art.”<sup>290</sup> The tangible object in art, indeed, in the same way it was being devaluated in the wider market, was becoming obsolete. Artists were more focused on ideas than on the production of physical objects. The intellect was acquiring more value than manual labour or physical work, a trend that was also occurring in the wider market, which had already lost reference to actual material goods, and produced value from information, interests and intentions.<sup>291</sup> As the value of tangible objects had been waning, a thirst for new forms of property - flexible, volatile, ungrounded - including the intangible - seemed capable of sequestering everything that the law, personal intention and the legal language was able to enclose and store. It was not long before those conceptual artists were selling their ideas also enclosed as works and intangible goods; through instructions, certificates and contracts, working more or less successfully with art dealers and within commercial and legal formats, without being aware (or maybe they were) of the “dramatic impact,” of the power of American capitalism infiltrating artistic practices and development.<sup>292</sup>

Following a tendency towards art’s increasing commercialisation already apparent in the 1980s, exemplified by Velthuis through savvy celebrity artists such as Jeff Koons, Takashi

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<sup>287</sup> Bourriaud, 2002.

<sup>288</sup> Newman and Bird, 1999; van Winckel, 2012; Alberro, 2004.

<sup>289</sup> Goldberg, 2011.

<sup>290</sup> Lippard and Chandler, 1997: 42.

<sup>291</sup> Best, 2004.

<sup>292</sup> See interview to Seth Siegelaub by Slyce, 2009: 2.

Murakami, Richard Prince, Maurizio Cattelan, or Damien Hirst,<sup>293</sup> Tino Sehgal is not interested in fighting the market. Neither is he interested in diluting the work of art or challenging the positionality of the artist. He is interested in the relational, and in valorising it precisely through the object-based art market. In this aspect, He is closer to “relational aesthetics”, in that he works with people’s behaviours, movements and interactions as his raw material. Like artists Pierre Huyghe, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Rirkrit Tiravanija, Sehgal works in and with “the sphere of interhuman relationships” and produces new relational situations in the expectation of questioning social behaviours and maybe even generating new social realities.<sup>294</sup> The main interest in relational aesthetics is “intersubjectivity”, or the “être-ensemble” as critic Nicolas Bourriaud proposed.<sup>295</sup> The artists working with relational practices often avoid the art institution or, when working in it, empty it of all objects in the hope of chasing objectification away. Tiravanija, during the 1993 edition of the Venice Biennale, sailed on a boat down the canals serving cups of noodles as an artistic act. *Untitled 1271* (1993), his retrospective at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (2004) consisted of changing the art gallery into a kitchen and canteen to serve Thai food to the visitors. These works do not have an issue with the commodification of art, on the contrary, they work very much within the art market economy. Tiravanija sells his pots and pans together with instructions and recipes.<sup>296</sup> Ohio collector Andy Stillpass, who has acquired several of Tiravanija’s works, insists though that the physical objects are not the point of the work.<sup>297</sup> Rather, what interests Stillpass is the process and development of an experience, lived inside or outside the art space. Here is where Sehgal meets and diverges from artists such as Tiravanija. Not only does he insist in presenting his work always and exclusively in an art environment, he also makes away entirely with the physical object. No physical traces, no objects remain outside the situational encounter. He leaves no written instructions and neither does he permit any audio-visual recording. He does this not to challenge the market but to make “cleaner” work, as a sort of antidote to the excess of stuff and technologies.

Sehgal remembers growing up in Southern Germany amidst the production facilities of IBM, Hewlett Packard and Daimler Benz.<sup>298</sup> During those years, he recognised the proliferation in the production of material things, and so he set himself the target of producing value outside the material and without extracting natural resources. Hence, none of Sehgal’s “constructed situations” manipulate physical objects, nor do they produce any other by-product

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<sup>293</sup> Velthuis, 2012: 19.

<sup>294</sup> Bishop, 2006: 165.

<sup>295</sup> Bishop, 2006: 161.

<sup>296</sup> Thank you to the gallery Chantal Crousel for their information on the work of Tiravanija.

<sup>297</sup> <https://aeqai.org/andy-stillpass/>

<sup>298</sup> Interview with Benhamouhuet, 2016.

or material trace. Instead, he manipulates encounters and behaviours and uses these as the matter for his art. He diverts economic and cultural value from physical objects towards the lived-experience – as object, and it is the lived-experience which acquires monetary value. In his “constructed situations” it is the event of coming together that becomes the object of property, a durable and exterior thing for the market which is exchangeable.

*TS: “no, I don't think the problem is with the market in terms of future life and its possibilities. I would say that transformation of material is a much greater problem. That has nothing to do with the market. (...)*

*While visual art proposes that we can extract material from natural resources and then transform it and then we have a product and that's it, it's there to stay, and thus follows the historically prevalent mode of production; dance transforms actions to obtain a product or artwork and it produces and deproduces this product at the same time.*

*HUO: It doesn't create objects.*

*TS: Yes. It creates meanings and 'things' somehow.*

*HUO : Relations?*

*TS: Yes, always because it's between humans.<sup>299</sup>*

In his public narrative, Sehgal insists that the problem of our times and of the art world is in the physical materiality of the goods produced and stored, the transformation of “material”, of “nature” into supply goods.<sup>300</sup> By making away with the material, then, the problem would be solved. There seems to be no questioning about the new raw material that he might be working with and extracting as he moves away from the “material”, to make the art thing. Neither does he question extraction in itself.

According to art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann in the chapter dedicated to the artist in her book *What to Do with Art* (2010), Sehgal seeks to “demonstrate” that it is possible both to produce art that is socially engaged outside of the material object and at the same time to continue to make it circulate in a market economy.<sup>301</sup> She claims that Sehgal has managed to undo everything that has made up a work of art but still maintain art's social role. She seems, however, to limit the undoing to the material side, without considering the relational. The matter

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<sup>299</sup> Obrist, 2003: unpaginated.

<sup>300</sup> In an artist's statement published in the catalogue to the group show *"I promise it's political"* at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, in 2002, curated by von Hantelmann and Marjorie Jongbloed and which asserted the political competence of art. Quoted in Bishop, 2005.

<sup>301</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 180.



he might have removed, but he has managed to maintain and strengthen both the thingness and structure of the artwork, the technologies that distinguish and those that hold it all in place whilst it can circulate in a market-based economy; a market that, just like his 'situations', both von Hantelmann and Sehgal associate with individuality and a sense of freedom and flexibility.

*"On a very, very basic level I 'm definitely pro market because with the market comes the idea of the individual and the idea of specialisation and I personally like being an individual and choosing my interactions"<sup>302</sup>*

The issue then for von Hantelmann, and for Sehgal, is not APPROPRIATION but reaching an enhanced sense of the individual, and so they fail to question ex-propriation, that is the making of property, of whatever matter it may be formed, and of the Person and its effects on relationalities. Sehgal is pro-propertisation, it is *what* is being made into property, to be added to the self, that is the question for him: is it physical, or intangible matter? And so, what he does is to shift his matter from bronze, marble or clay to conversations, from canvas and oils to a *tableau vivant*, from the tangible things to so called ephemeral or intangible, but the process of producing property remains active. Its form will continue to be an art object, a thing to be *had* and add to the other things that make up the artist as a property-holder-subject and the art collection. Questioning the making any thing into property is another discussion, with implications "too traumatic to be assimilated into the system" to quote theorist Mark Fisher.<sup>303</sup> It would certainly mean putting at risk APPROPRIATIVE modes of relating and even the possibility of artishood or ownership (*dominium*) which is constantly expanding, always searching for other and new things to be *had* in a constant self-constitution of self.

The only "constructed situation" in which Sehgal uses physical objects is *This Entry* (2023), which is an interesting case, precisely because it gently brings back the material instruments and sets them in use. For this piece, Sehgal invited four skilled interpreters to play with their instruments in the exhibition space: a violinist with her violin, a footballer with his football, an artistic cyclist, who can dance with her bike and a singer with her voice. The piece is enchanting and entertaining, almost like a circus stunt. The instruments, violin, ball, bicycle, and voice, are used with great mastery, but playfully, and devices and interpreters seem to be floating. The footballer balances the ball on several parts of his body, and the cyclist plays with her bicycle as if it were a football. The singer sings with the violin and dances with the

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<sup>302</sup> Interview with Confino, 2012.

<sup>303</sup> Fisher, 2009: 18.

footballer. The quartet looks so happy together, singing and dancing in synchrony. At times they smile at the audience, approach a visitor to ask a question or pass the ball to the visitor, as the audience gazes and responds with delight. The bicycle is a technology of the modern era, invented to save time, it changed our relationship to time soon to be calculated in minutes and in seconds. It speeds up travel and lightens the weight of the body – as enhanced prosthetic legs to take us from one place to the other. Cheaper than a horse, cleaner than a car, Sehgal's "constructed situation" makes another use of this technology. 'Use' might not be the right word though for Sehgal, Sehgal does not use but APPROPRIATES. The cyclist does use it, she who dances with it; holds her balance on it, keeps the bike still, suspended on one wheel, in time. She sets the bicycle in use, in words that echo Heidegger, (a philosopher Sehgal himself quotes) in his essay "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954) as he distinguishes a relation that sets in use and opens, opposed to a "setting upon" use, which "blocks" and "controls".<sup>304</sup> Maybe this is what Sehgal intended to illustrate with the piece: not a rejection of objects but a playfulness that happens in that tension between an opening to another use, a relation to things that is not instrumentalised, that has no end in a product, and an appropriative relation to things. Two different modes of relating, the interpreters' and the artist's. The interpreters play between each other and with the object, keeping the balance between gravity and lightness. Their play, though, has been blocked and in-framed as a work of art by Sehgal, "set upon", made into a product by the artist to constitute his subjectivity and offered as a heightened experience to be consumed by the visitor – and ultimately to the contemporary consumer in general. The interpreters physically *use* the objects, they are in *usus* in possession, but the work is owned, is the *dominium*, the private property of the artist, bringing back into discussion the most fundamental distinction in property law: that is between two different forms of relating to things in the world, *usus* and *dominium*. *Dominium* has made play, the enjoyment and astonishment of the childlike use and relationship to things into property.

This chapter seeks to analyse what new areas are conquered and how these are expropriated to make art property, and then question whether Sehgal's art, within this structure, can open any space for the deep transformative potential it promises to its spectators. Can the artwork be the antidote or cure to the excess of the materialist world and offer another mode of relating to the world and to others? This order of things, to present the construction of Sehgal's private property first, and only then go back to the visitors' experience of the "constructed situation" makes evident the dissonance between the actual construction of the work, which happens in private and the work's social promises that are in and for the public.

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<sup>304</sup> Heidegger, 2010: 235-236.

The legal aspect of his work is too often delegated to a second level. However it is constituent of everything that happens outside of it: the *capitalisation* of relationalities, the constitution and preservation of Sehgal as artist and subject and the valorisation of the lived-experience. But does his production of work, *poiēsis*, allow for another future to emerge, be imagined and experienced?

In the first part I consider the ways in which he does produce a thing, in Latin *res* – an intangible but still legal thing, that is already potentially appropriable. The dancer is no longer simply or only in act, in *praxis* – and paid a fee for his doing or dancing – but produces the thingness of his action, produces *poiēsis*, closer to the Greek *homo faber* or ‘man maker’ concerned with producing works (in Greek *operare* or *poiēsis*), things exterior, possibly exchangeable.<sup>305</sup> Arendt, a thinker often quoted by Sehgal although never named, reflected upon the two Greek concepts of *praxis* and *poiēsis*, which effect a mode of being human and of being in relation in the world.<sup>306</sup> She distinguished the product made or realised, the *poiēsis*, from the act of producing or making, *praxis*. Labour for Arendt – and gesture or dance could equally be discussed – “never produce[s] anything but life (...) produces objects only incidentally”.<sup>307</sup> If anything remains, these are only perceived as an accident. Sehgal’s works are not accidents, neither do they play with the idea of property only to leave it unresolved (as seen in *La Ribot*), but he seems to be working in *praxis*, interested in manipulating the labour of life to produce a thing, an object, a final work of art and work of property. I look at the legal and commercial construction of the thing mainly through his contractual sale agreement and secondly through his performance of self, what Ana Vujanović and Bojana Cvejić (2023) have called “*autopoiesis*” or the self-production of the individual subject and artist proprietor.

The second part of the chapter goes back to the work, the lived-experience of encounter, seemingly without technologies in site, but an encounter I argue still haunted by ex-proprietation. In his own narrative, and the narrative that comes from his supporters von Haltenman and the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, and the supporting institutions, his work is portrayed as an antidote to the materialism of the world and its alienations, offered to heal the excess of ex-proprietations produced by modernity and retention technologies that I discussed in the first chapter. He bans the tangible production of material things, as well as any form of audio-visual documentation, and claims another form of being in relation, a new “culture of being”.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> See Arendt, 1998, and Agamben in the chapter “The Cabinet of Wonder”, Agamben, 1999: 28-39.

<sup>306</sup> Sehgal never names or makes reference to the authors he quotes or uses in the works, but visitors and interpreters are often able to identify them, Arendt’s writing is used in *These Associations* (2012) and in *Annlee* (2011) according to interpreter Stupart, 2017, and Hildebrandt, 2018.

<sup>307</sup> Arendt, 1998: 88.

<sup>308</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2014.

However, after analysing his use of bodies as archive and as witnesses and the structures enforced in order to hold the existence of his situations as art objects and his self as artist-proprietor, I raise my suspicions concerning the promise of transformation. In the third part, I weave thoughts on the experiential turn in the minimalist exhibition, with Sehgal's use of the strip club experience as a paradigm, and the immersive industry to discuss the lived-experience already objectified. The chapter finishes with some reflections on Sehgal's *Annlee* (2011) a piece which brings to life the manga character purchased by artists Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe in 1999.

## Chapter 2 - Part 1 -

### Constructing this situation for exchange

Sehgal makes his interpreters sing, dance, talk, and repeat a series of actions repeatedly, in much the same way as a choreographer would work with dancers. However, there is something different in what he does. For his work as 'non-choreographer', he is paid a fee for his labour - and so are the interpreters. So far, his practice does not differ from the dramaturg or the choreographer in theatre and dance. Except that on top of this practice, he produces another legal and artistic thing, another exteriorised thing that is the other side of the coin, not the public one, the public "constructed situation". This exteriorised thing is his exosomatic object, which he constructs within the ritual sale agreement and using the witnesses as support. This is where the work is being produced as a legal object and an artwork. By doing this, he goes a step further, distancing himself from a choreographer to become the proprietor of an art piece, an object which can circulate and be exchanged in a very different manner to Intellectual Property.

I first look at the transformation of dance and bodily gesturing from being a service in the economy of theatre to becoming a good, stable, fixed and exchangeable, present in the art space and circulating within the visual art market. In doing this there is a risk of simplification: the labour market does not exclude the existence of a property market, nor are they both immune to each other. I am not saying either that artists working with the spoken word and gestures should not earn a living. However, I wonder what is transformed in the relation to artistic *praxis* as the artist relates to it not as a service or labour, but foremost as a good made property. What does property do? and what is so horrific, as Keidan noted when seeing a performance by Cool Balducci at a private collector's home, as the event is privatised, constructed as private property?<sup>309</sup> Secondly, I explain the sale agreement which takes place in the legal private ritual between the artist and the buyer and in front of a series of witnesses. Thirdly, I look at the performance of Sehgal outside or on the margins of the "constructed situation", that is at the moment of the sale ritual and in his interviews and public appearances.

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<sup>309</sup> Calonje, 2014: 78.

*From a service provider to a maker, offering ready-made things for a market*

The French choreographer Bel was one, if not the first, to acquire a 'situation' by Sehgal. It was *Instead of allowing some thing to rise up to your face dancing bruce and dan and other thing* (2000). Everything to do with the art market is always veiled with some sort of secrecy, so it is not clear when Bel bought it, but he loaned it to the Manifesta4, in Germany in 2002, meaning it was an early acquisition. Bel also owns works by Pierre Huyghe, Gabriel Orozco and as mentioned previously, owns La Ribot's D.p. n°31 *de la Mancha* (2000).

*I didn't sell a performance to Jérôme Bel; I did sell a piece to him, but it is somehow a visual art work or installation.*

*(...) I sell it to make my living (...) it's not the performance art world, I don't think there is a lot of money there, it's really the dance business (...) In the dance business it's not really a market, it's a market that is somehow sustained by the state. A dance piece can be sold, a solo piece, from about 1500 to 3000. So there is no big difference between a very famous artist and a not so well-known artist. (...) I am not very interested in these matters to be honest. (...) What I sold to Jérôme Bel is a visual art piece (...) so he can show it when he shows his collection (...) I am interested in creating products but by rethinking the notion of a product (...) The piece I sold to Jérôme Bel is a product<sup>310</sup>*

What is striking in Sehgal's declaration is the "extremely curious" distance he takes from dance or performing art, and his insistence in categorising his work as a visual art work.<sup>311</sup> He insists that his situations are products, objects to be exhibited within the visual art context and distributed within that context.<sup>312</sup> He seems also to present the sale of his works as products as being the only alternative to earn a living, which is in itself misleading. As he rightly points out, in the art market there are huge inequalities, and it is not such an easy solution in terms of money. The art market tends to focus on objects, painting and sculpture,

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<sup>310</sup> Interview with Obrist, 2003.

<sup>311</sup> Schneider, 2011: 130; Turbidy, 2014, on the reductionist vision of theatre in early Performance art history.

<sup>312</sup> Sehgal has also used the term "living sculpture" to refer to his works which relates him to the visual arts again. Piero Manzoni in 1961 and Gilbert and George have used the same term since the late 1960s, or Stephen Taylor Woodrow's Living Paintings 1986 are another example of the use of the term. Goldberg, 2011.

and still only a very small minority of artists manage to sell their work in a global art market that totalled \$67.8 billion in 2022.<sup>313</sup> According to Brazilian collector Pedro Barbosa, the art market and the (commercial) art exhibitions that feed from and feed into the art market represent a clear minority of the art produced: “Only 1% is visible, while the huge corpus of art remains hidden” meaning outside the mainstream circuits, and dependent on other support systems.<sup>314</sup> This 1% figure might not be exact but it certainly approximates. It is the group of the celebrity “hot” artists that Velthius speaks about. “More generally, in the majority of galleries in Europe and the United States, works of art continue to sell for modest prices. (...) Their makers need side jobs in order to make ends meet.”<sup>315</sup> Putting a work up FOR SALE then does not ensure entry into the art market, and if it does, it does not guarantee stability or financial return unless the artist reaches the celebrity stage. This prompts the question as to why Sehgal wants to produce things for the art market in the first place.

Many dance practitioners such as Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown since the 1950s-60s and conceptual dancers in the 1990s have already been experimenting in the art space and with its dynamics.<sup>316</sup> Moving into the art space unfolds other possibilities, perspectives and choreographies for dancers and audiences. The art space allows dance to work more flexibly in terms of production scales but also concerning the duration of their works, which can be shorter and shown in loop if necessary or extend in time, throughout gallery opening hours. The visitors can move freely, trickle in and wander around, rarely coming together as a collective but rather as drifters in a shopping mall; as easily as they enter they can also leave immediately if nothing has caught their attention. Furthermore, the art space opens up and makes away with the theatre’s ‘four walls’: the two sides of the stage on the left and the right, both sides most of the time left in the dark, the third is the backstage wall opposite the audience, and the fourth wall is, although imaginary, the separation that still operates between the stage and the audience.<sup>317</sup> The white floor of the art cube allows the dancers to walk, dance, move or speak with the audience, trespassing that fourth wall, and so explore the notion of *platea*<sup>318</sup> or a common shared space of the street festival, of noise and movement, of different perspectives. Dancers such as Bel, Siobhan Davies, Leroy or Ribot, have moved in and out of both the theatrical and the visual art space without creating a hierarchy between both but allowing both spaces to speak of different existential phenomena. They remain however in a theatre economy. What does moving the gestures and social interactions, the

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<sup>313</sup> McAndrew, 2023.

<sup>314</sup> Interview with Maksimov, 2022: unpaginated.

<sup>315</sup> Velthius, 2012: 39.

<sup>316</sup> Trisha Brown for instance performing *Walking on Walls* (1970) or *Locus* (1975) at the Whitney Museum.

<sup>317</sup> Von Held, 2017.

<sup>318</sup> Lin, 2006.

rituals of encounters that Sehgal produces from one economy to the visual art economy, based on the exchange of private property, of objects-to-be-owned for money, do to the art event?<sup>319</sup>

Similar shifts from a service based or patronage economy to a property market-based economy have occurred in art history before. In fact, visual art was only in modern times considered as property. Art historian Michael Baxandall (1988) in his study on the interaction between social behaviour and the production of art in the early Renaissance, notices the transition of artists from working as salaried workers in the court of princes or monarchs, or to being paid for specific commissioned works. The Quattrocento meant the rise of the autonomous artist. The artist separated from a tight relationship with a patron, and their protection to become the modern artist working at a smaller scale and selling their paintings, ready-made for a growing capitalist market. This might have freed the artist from working under the patrons' conditions but left the artist in a precarious situation, in the hands of art dealers and dependent on the trends of a competitive marketplace. Velthuis (2005) gives an evocative example of the transition from patronage to market and its impact on relationalities, as he analyses the transition in the relationship between Vincent Van Gogh and his brother Theo. Theo had been acting more as a patron, sending his brother money regularly until Van Gogh made a point and asked him to buy his works rather than support him as a fatherly figure offering his help as a gift. Van Gogh had felt indebted in this mode of relating to his brother and to his art production.<sup>320</sup> A sale agreement would break that bond. Patronage, though, is not only a gift to the artist, but comprehends the function of art as essential for society as a whole, hence why patrons support it. The complexities are many. In the late 20th century, cinema also shifted towards privatisation, in the sense that it moved to a more private market economy as it moved into the art space and its market. This happened out of a financial as well as a conceptual interest that led film directors who had been producing films for the theatre space and economy to produce video art works, unique and collectable works for the art circuit.<sup>321</sup>

In the early 2000s, professional dancers and choreographers earn their living through their practice, as service providers for society, in as much as the arts and dance are still understood as constructing the public sphere, at the same level as health and education. They receive fees for rehearsals and performances and apply for public and corporate funding for specific projects or for ongoing costs, which resembles a more democratic patronage

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<sup>319</sup> Phillips, 2015: 36.

<sup>320</sup> Velthuis, 2002: 54.

<sup>321</sup> Isaac Julien or Chantal Akerman for instance.



system.<sup>322</sup> Choreographers receive extra fees and funding from inviting or commissioning venues or festivals, who are also heavily subsidised.<sup>323</sup> This links dance to its social “distinctive and separable qualitative function” and still recognises it as a public service in, however, an ever more decreasing welfare state.<sup>324</sup> Despite the amount of work going into processing funding applications and the increased pressure in delivering quantitative targets for productions, which “by their nature, are resistant to quantification” there is still a sense of a giving in dance that does not see the production of work as private property but as a common good.<sup>325</sup>

On top of this system, there is indeed the production of Intellectual Property as mentioned in the first chapter. The choreographer might create Intellectual Property from a work and license the work so it can be shown during a particular period and in a particular place. In exchange for the licence the artist receives royalties, however the money obtained through royalties or licensing is thin, especially for living artists. This is what Sehgal mentions as a sale of a dance piece in the quote above. The license is given out by the owner of the Intellectual Property right or the estate who, after a certain amount of time, normally 70 years after the death of the artist, lose their rights and so the work is given back to public use.

I would like to stop here to return to Intellectual Property. As explained in chapter 1, Intellectual Property offers the possibility for a work to be both protected and shared through a license. It acts as a legal device standing in between two worlds and two modes of relating, the public and the private. However strict the categories and the en-framing, though, Intellectual Property still holds a certain ephemerality, manifesting that property might still be an interruption in a great flow, or rhythm of existence. According to Ickowicz (2013) and Verwoert (2003) the very fact that Intellectual Property is perishable still maintains an “idealist belief” that goes back to eighteenth century thinkers and activists such as Antoine-Augustin Renouard and Pierre Joseph Proudhon, and makes it a different form of property. Unlike real estate, or artworks collected that can be passed on from one generation to the next, in the same family or in an institution, Intellectual Property dissolves. This was an aspect of the new form of property already present in the 1793 French Copyright Law which established an end-date, for the works to return to the commons: “Copyright only temporarily privileges the individual.”<sup>326</sup> It maintained the belief that property could interrupt the circulation, rhythm, and

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<sup>322</sup> Wookey, 2015; Burt, 2017.

<sup>323</sup> Income from ticket sales only amount on average to roughly a third of the theatre’s revenue, see Germain-Thomas, 2017: 66-67.

<sup>324</sup> Phillips, 2011.

<sup>325</sup> Fisher, 2009: 42.

<sup>326</sup> Verwoert, 2003: 187.

the renewal of common knowledge and so had to be preceded by a social contract between the artist and societies, an agreement to give back. If the common knowledge and culture feeds the artist then the artist has to give back to the common sooner or later: “Ideas are given by nature, ideas belong to everyone” and considered to be “natural resources and therefore public property”.<sup>327</sup>

Remnants of this spirit of sharing are still present in contemporary dance practices which explains how Burt considers that dance still holds a privileged relation to the commons. Inspired by the writings of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013), Burt (2017) perceives a more horizontal system of sharing and making in the dance sector, which distinguishes it from the hierarchical property-based system governing the visual arts. Dance, first of all, finds it difficult to define the property to be protected. Dance is still very much based on the radical tradition of improvisation technique and oral and bodily transmission, gestures and movements lived, danced and danced again throughout a rich vernacular history that has been preserved despite and alongside the continued tension with the choreographic notations and documentation. The practice of “stealing steps” that Kraut writes about, is a generous act, not one of taking in the logic of APPROPRIATION, rather it is about a flow: watching others, copying steps and dancing them again and otherwise as part of an ensemble – or *traditio* – only to give the dance and its steps back again.<sup>328</sup> This practice in dance can well be understood as a site of practice of the “commons”.<sup>329</sup> Dancers, at least those dancers from the European scene of the mid-1990s to 2015 that Burt examines, are aware of the common-pool resources as “a knowledge commons” which is embedded rather than indebted and differentiates dance from other art forms: “dance artists share and exchange knowledge rather than jealously keeping it to themselves.”<sup>330</sup> This deep notion of the commons ingrained within the dance tradition – still somewhat permeable in Intellectual Property and the awareness of its expiration – makes dance practitioners particularly concerned with the move from the commons to property, “politically aware, sensitive to and critical of the enclosure of physical or knowledge commons in general”.<sup>331</sup>

Intellectual Property, if at all possible in dance, might still hold traces of the commons, but is also, as argued in the previous chapter, in the making of a legal thing already setting the legal and abstract conditions for the future or immediate production of a good for exchange. It certainly inaugurates another mode of relating. Dance is alert to this problem,

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<sup>327</sup> Verwoert, 2003: 187; Ickowicz; 2013: 62-63.

<sup>328</sup> Kraut, 2015: 127-164.

<sup>329</sup> Kraut, 2015: 135; Burt, 2017.

<sup>330</sup> Burt, 2017: 18-19.

<sup>331</sup> Burt, 2017: 19.

anxious about the capture and enclosure of commons, “repeated, target dispossessions” to the in-forming that make gestures visible and thinkable as an object-to-be-owned.<sup>332</sup> The bodily gesturing of dance already sits within thingness and so is already at risk of becoming property. Going back to Rome, the root of property law, every thing or every *res*, private or common or negated, but still defined as thing, already existed in relation to law and so is already potentially appropriable, already available to the Person who was to take hold of it. The juridical definition of the ‘thing’, *res*, is not already private property but is the condition of *dominium*, and *dominum* is the condition for exchange. Ideas, conversations, gestures, dance could well be defined as a thing belonging to no one. They could be placed somewhere in between the *res communis*, those things which were owned and enjoyed in common and the *res nullius* translated as “things owned by no-one” which included wild animals, abandoned buildings, or the divine things.<sup>333</sup> Neither of these things were private property – yet – but both terms and understandings already include thingness within them. They are already *res*, a juridical thing, and so are equally and always susceptible to becoming private property, in Latin *res propria*.<sup>334</sup> Here in the *res*, thingness is where the object of property, market and the art object, the action or event or common encounter made into a thing, meet. Gestures and experiences become property in their thingness. As the gestures become constant, stable, durable, they assume conditions that are those of legal property and this is what makes them available for a possible privatisation. Art needs first to be proper, or nearly property, that is, it needs to be understood as a proper thing in the legal sense, in-form, stable and durable, so it can then be property of someone, private property, made available and exchangeable for an agreed amount of money.

I have attempted to explain how the move to property is not only financial, nor is it the only alternative for survival, it is an ideological proposition, in the sense that it is prioritising and profiting from a certain mode of understanding the self, the work and the commons. I continue here by explaining how Sehgal produces the objects of property, beyond, but nonetheless on the back of Intellectual Property, in the contract, to understand what those modes of being and relationalities are that his work proposes.

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<sup>332</sup> Harney and Moten, 2013: 17.

<sup>333</sup> Ickowicz, 2013, 70-71; Buckland, 1975.

<sup>334</sup> Buckland, 1975.

### *The contract as a construction site for art and relationships*

I explain here the actual contractual agreement between the artist and the collecting individual or institution. I first describe a “constructed situation” as it enters into the collection and then analyse different sections of the agreement.<sup>335</sup> I take as a case study the acquisition of *This is Exchange* (2003) by the Van Abbemuseum in 2006. The work consists of this:

During an exhibition, a guard approaches a visitor and asks whether they would have a conversation about the market forces of the economy. If a visitor reacts, visitor and interpreter engage in a conversation about the topic. After which, the visitor receives a password to get half of their entrance-fee refunded at the museum’s ticket desk. The visitor can also choose not to react to the question, in which case, they don’t get their money back.<sup>336</sup>

The description spoken out during the acquisition process defines what Sehgal has to offer and what the other party wishes to acquire, that is the work, distinguished as it takes the form of the collectible object, a “solitary status”.<sup>337</sup> Then the price is set, which at the time of the acquisition of this piece must have been around \$70,000 and \$145,000 according to reports on other acquisitions around that time in *The Telegraph* and *The New York Times*.<sup>338</sup> After stipulating the price of the work and its edition number, the sale conditions are explained:

1. Tino Sehgal, or the persons authorised by him to do so, needs to authorise any future iteration of the work. The work can be lent to other museums only with the consent of the artist and under the condition that the authorising person be present at setup.
2. The work must be installed for a period of at least 6 weeks. If the work is going to be exhibited as part of a group exhibit or collection display, then the duration/length of the exhibit or presentation may vary according to the length of the exhibition.

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<sup>335</sup> Information gathered from my visit to the Van Abbe Museum and conversations with the Head of Collections at the time Christiane Berdes, 18 December 2014; notes from my visit to Tate Archive, 24 February 2016. Information on the sale agreement can also be found in Daniel McLean, 2014, and in Kitamura, 2010. See also Laurenson and van Saaze, 2014.

<sup>336</sup> When presented at the Van Abbemuseum in June 2003, about 20% of visitors choose to react to the question and got half of their entrance-fee back. This is reminiscent of John Cage’s performance marathon of Satie’s *Vexations* (1893) in 1963 in New York.

<sup>337</sup> Baudrillard in Elsner and Cardinal, 1994: 8.

<sup>338</sup> According to Gleadell (2013) MoMA New York bought *Kiss* for a knockdown \$70,000 in 2008. According to the New York Times, in 2010 the “constructed situations” sold in editions of four to six (with Sehgal retaining an additional “artist’s proof”) at prices between \$85,000 and \$145,000 a piece (Lubow, 2010).

3. The fee that will be paid to the interpreters, which is usually slightly above the minimum wage.<sup>339</sup>
4. The work may not be published on paper. No photos or films are allowed of the work and it is not allowed to 'publish' / represent the work in any other form. If this does occur, the Van Abbemuseum is obliged to try and take the film(s) or photo(s) out of circulation.
5. If the work is resold this should happen under the same conditions as the first sale. Nothing can be written down nor should it be recorded in any other form.

Sehgal's contract acts first of all as an affirmation of what the work is, *This is Exchange*, its definition and where to find its origin, in the artist, Tino Sehgal. The agreement starts by a recognition or consensus on what the predetermined thing that is going to be exchanged is. Once that thingness is agreed and sealed, the commercial thing is available. Gesture, one would think, is always going to be ephemeral, vulnerable, recognisable maybe but never quite repeatable in exactly the same way, as it is alive and always mutating, embedded and impregnated by bodies and what surrounds them, and always at risk of contamination and even destruction. But Sehgal, by codifying it, making it a thing, has moved it closer to the tangible object, closer to a "diamond" than it might have been to "a soap bubble", to use words from lawyer Gregory S. Alexander in his essay on property and the work of Felix González-Torres.<sup>340</sup> Through the contract, Sehgal constructs the other side of the work, a "diamond" out of a "bubble", or the diamond because of the bubble, that is a property exteriorised, which is not Intellectual Property either, but is an intangible object in itself. The groundlessness of the work, its liquidity, in the sense that it has no solid land, no enclosed body, or physical object that could hold the limits of its property, needs the contract to be produced as some-thing, an illusionary, abstract property. Understood by Best as "a codification of fantasized intentions", the property has now become a legitimate good for sale, both (as I will see hereafter) through contractual law and the performative subject as originator and proprietor.<sup>341</sup>

I examined the making of Intellectual Property as authored works in the previous chapter. Here I briefly address the use of the certificate, another legal tool, only to move to a third more flexible apparatus within the legal *dispositif*, that is the contract, the place where the legal, the economic and the artistic work merge and conflate. As the works were dematerialising in the 1960s and 1970s, but still did not fit any of the narrow rigid categories

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<sup>339</sup> In 2012, for Sehgal's show at Tate Modern, Linda Stupart got paid £8.33 per hour, at the time London's living wage (Stupart, 2017); in 2019, at his show at the Hammer Museum, L.A., Durbule got paid \$33.33 per hour, before taxes (Durbule, 2019).

<sup>340</sup> Alexander, 2017: 468.

<sup>341</sup> Best, 2004: 62.

of Intellectual Property- dramatic, choreographic, graphic, musical, photographic, and so on - artists explored the certificate as a game of words, a language that could contest the materiality of the art object whilst maintaining a frame and its ties to the artist. Klein produced his certificates or *Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility* between 1959 and 1962, with his dealer Iris Clert; Laurence Weiner worked with the New York attorney Jerry Ordovery in the 1960s to certify his textual interventions;<sup>342</sup> Ian Wilson certified his *Discussions* in the 1970s, and Tehching Hsieh asked the lawyer Bob Projansky, who had drafted 'The Artists' Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement' with Seth Siegelau, to certify his one year long performance the *Cage piece* (1978-79). With the waning of the physical matter of art, the certificate became the only material support for the work's existence as well as the only support to hold the artists signature and authorship, which made the actual paper, the material support of the certificate, acquire its own and distinctive monetary value.

The certificate, however, is not an option for Sehgal, not only because it requires a material support, which he refuses to touch, but furthermore because Sehgal is interested in producing futures for himself and the work, and in constructing and cementing enduring relationships with the buyers and with the works. The contract is the most flexible of all legal tools because anything can be defined and any rights and obligations, any relationship can be stipulated as long as the two parties reach a consensus. Sehgal uses the contract then to construct and organise the work at various levels, to control the pace and its space and curate the modes in which the work is encountered and communicated. According to Velthius (2005), the contract permits the production of an object for exchange that will still hold a relation to the personal and to the "spirit of the gift".<sup>343</sup> Unlike a commodity or even the certificate mentioned, once in the world the work moves within the anonymity of market exchange, the contract however is agreed between two named parties. And so, the contract protects the artwork from slipping into the realm of commodification and alienation. It protects it from disappearing as art, as well as from the transformation of art lovers into consumers. Unlike a commodity, art is considered to carry a "saving power", as the poet Friederich Hölderlin wrote and Heidegger rewrote.<sup>344</sup> Maintaining the spirit of the gift in the contract then, as Velthius explains, affirms art in all its power, and imposes a moral obligation to protect and care for the art as a remedy, as a greater good and to protect and support the artist as the creator of those gifts and remedies. This explains the unilateral aspect of the "Artist Contract", and in Sehgal's contract more specifically, as I will see, a contract that indebts not the artist, but the museum and the collector, placing all the obligations on them.

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<sup>342</sup> Buskirk, 2003: 53.

<sup>343</sup> Velthius, 2005: 59.

<sup>344</sup> Heidegger, 2010.

Sehgal does not make recourse to the contract from a situation of scarcity, as the conceptual artists of the 1960s might have done, nor does he use it to play with or challenge the market and law and the art as *pharmakon*. But he will do so in the context of the booming moment of art market expansion, to solidify his work as art work, holding an intrinsic positive value, and his authorship as creator.<sup>345</sup> As Ickowicz points out, the contract is not only used to protect the economic means of the artist, it plays a fundamental role in defining the artistic, the economic and the political aspects behind each work.<sup>346</sup> Contractual law becomes a tool for the artist to work with: to define his product, affirm it as art work and enforce his authority and sovereignty as artist; to exteriorise and demarcate borders as much as to curate a certain mode of being and relating. With the support of law, it becomes the place in which, the artist can create anything as their own creation, and their own work as an art good.<sup>347</sup>

The type of contracts generally used amongst artists, including Sehgal or performance duo Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly,<sup>348</sup> are based on ‘The Artists’ Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement’ also known as the “Artist Contract” developed by the conceptual art curator and dealer Siegelau and lawyer Projansky in the U.S. in 1971.<sup>349</sup> The agreement was developed not to commission art, as contracts have been used in the past and still today, but was offered to the artist to use in order to define the work already made and produce it as artwork and ensure its preservation in time. It was very much a tool to protect the artist and the artworks in what seemed to be a hostile art environment. It was and still is, whenever used, a unilateral contract, meaning that it affirms the intentions of the artist and describes a series of responsibilities and obligations imposed upon the collector, the receiver of the “gift”, whereas there are few or no obligations for the artist, as the one who delivers the good. Under French regulation, artist Daniel Buren had already been experimenting with the contract form as he produced “*Avertissement*”, his own sale agreement designed with Michel Claura in the late 1960s.<sup>350</sup> Here again, this is a unilateral agreement, defining a series of requirements the collector had to satisfy in order for the work to continue to be art and attributed to Buren.<sup>351</sup> Both the “Artist Contract” and the “*Avertissement*” have become widely used as a reference today amongst artists.

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<sup>345</sup> The artist collective Goldin+Senneby playing and interconnecting the financial, the legal and Jill Magid, project with the Barragán Archives, *The Proposal* (2018).

<sup>346</sup> Ickowicz, 2013: 545; see also Buchloh, 1992.

<sup>347</sup> Ickowicz, 2013: 360-361.

<sup>348</sup> Gerard and Kelly sold *Timelining* (2014) to the Guggenheim in 2014, and developed a 75-page contract as part of the acquisition process (Sheets, 2015)

<sup>349</sup> Ickowicz, 2013; Maria Eichhorn, 2009; McClean, 2014.

<sup>350</sup> <https://danielburen.com/bibliographies/2/6>

<sup>351</sup> Ickowicz, 2013: 557-568.

Sehgal's contract is also unilateral, all obligations are on the collectors, and he follows most of the clauses already present in both Sieglaub's and in Buren's agreement, except Seghal does not write anything down, there are no instructions for the future or other people to access. The only support structures are the secondary retentional memory of the selected people present during the verbal agreement. This performativity of the contract does not however pose a threat to property nor to the authority of the artist. The verbal agreement still holds very much within the frame of law, with witnesses to testify for it – among them a notary. Another difference with Buren's contract is that he, Buren, did establish an expiration date for his agreement – fifty years after his death – somewhat retaining a sense of ephemerality and precariousness. Whereas Sehgal, closer to Sieglaub's "Artist Contract", does not have an expiration date for his control over the work, an interesting point that again seeks to distance further the work of art from the commons.

I pay attention now, and in more detail, to some of the clauses in Sehgal's contract: firstly to the - fake - construction of value in the editioning of the work, and then to the dynamics at play in clauses 1, 2 and 5. I discuss a little later the issues around clause 4, on the ban of audio-visual reproductions of the works. As to clause 3, there is indeed a problematic in what concerns the interpreter's remuneration, and the distinction between the physical labour, which is delegated and which Sehgal is clearly differentiating himself from, and the "immaterial" intellectual work which he owns and which goes FOR SALE. A class of performers has emerged who perform for Live artworks' iterations, for artists such as Sehgal, or Dora García or for Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmus, only to name a few examples. I have been using all along the word 'interpreters' to name these workers, I could have used other words such as "other people"<sup>352</sup> or "employees".<sup>353</sup> I could have called them "immaterial labour", but have decided to stick with the name given to them by the artist, "interpreter" only because, unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into the deep problematics of each term and the decision of Sehgal not to call them something else (artists, collaborators, actors or dancers).<sup>354</sup> This creates a stratification already mentioned among those contributing to the work, posing another set of social and political questions that I can only acknowledge here but cannot focus on this time.

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<sup>352</sup> See discussion on this in Schneider 2011 as she discusses Marina Abramovic exhibition "The Artist is Present", 2010, at MoMA (Schneider, 2011: 136).

<sup>353</sup> Schneider quoting Frazer McIvor on the work of Sehgal, in Schneider, 2011: 136.

<sup>354</sup> On the issue of labour in Performance art and contemporary art more widely see Lazzarato, 2010; Osborne, 2008; Roberts, 2015.



Sehgal also produces editions which exist as signifiers only in the contract. His works come usually in editions of 3 or 4 plus an artist proof. He is modelling strategies used to limit access in photography and video, constructing the “value form” itself by producing a fake scarcity.<sup>355</sup> Editions originated from the printing process. The printer would produce a limited number of prints, mainly because the printing surface would deteriorate with use. However, with the development of technologies of mass reproduction in photography, video or digital art works can be reproduced and distributed in an unlimited fashion without the deterioration of the product.<sup>356</sup> This permitted a democratisation of art as it decentralised ownership and diluted originality. In the case of Sehgal, van Saaze assures that it is for the sake of remembrance that the works are limited in editions: one edition for each major institution and each piece performed by various interpreters during the course of the exhibition, this is what she calls “distributed memory.”<sup>357</sup> Sehgal’s instructions are produced and can be reproduced as long as memory and their bodies can hold. For the sake of remembrance though, the editions could well be expanded. However, in artificially limiting the number of editions FOR SALE to 4 or 5 Sehgal is able to create a sense of originality and uniqueness, and still maintain a link between the work and its creator. In limiting rather than opening access to the artwork, the artist creates “cultural distinction”<sup>358</sup> and economic value and distinguishes his work from the product of mass reproduction and distribution.<sup>359</sup> He will also be able to keep a certain control on the iterations and the works’ future lives adding a more personalised relationship to the exchange which might well augment again the economic value of each property. This limitation is part of Sehgal’s creative and curatorial act. He continues to produce and reinforce the binary and hierarchy between mass culture and high art, and distances himself from theatre again here.<sup>360</sup> He produces the scarcity, its exchange value and the artwork as one same thing and distinguishes his events as artworks from any spectacle of mass culture, preventing any suspicion of his work being “levelled down” and considered “mere entertainment”, or simple celebration.<sup>361</sup> Sehgal can afford a celebratory tone only because he has built, constructed the exclusivity, the framework of relationality that makes it a quasi-unique work of art.

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<sup>355</sup> Lütticken, 2022.

<sup>356</sup> In the emerging world of Non Fungible Tokens (NFT), works are divided into fragments, not editions, interchangeable pieces of a single artwork still one and single artwork, but that can be owned by multiple proprietors.

<sup>357</sup> Van Saaze, 2015.

<sup>358</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 154.

<sup>359</sup> Lütticken, 2022: 123.

<sup>360</sup> On his refusal of theatre see in an interview at Art Basel 2015, <https://news.artnet.com/market/tino-sehgal-tina-brown-art-basel-308991>

<sup>361</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 157.

In clause 1, Sehgal makes sure to retain all exhibition rights over the work, normally entitled to a copyright owner, and ensures he retains control over the conditions in which the work is presented at every instance. It is Sehgal or an assistant who keep and exercise this control.<sup>362</sup> Sehgal also must authorise any loan of the piece to third party institutions. Here Sehgal follows the tradition of the ballet's *répétiteur* and more contemporary licensing models in dance. In dance and ballet, because there is no script, it is a dancer acting as a *répétiteur*, a retentional body-archive, who passes on the steps from one generation to the next through body-to-body transmission. The Merce Cunningham Trust, The Pina Bauch Foundation and The George Balanchine Trust all require one of their own *répétiteurs* for any restaging, during rehearsals and to get the work on stage for the première.<sup>363</sup> The *répétiteurs* are contracted and are paid separately, which is an extra cost on top of the trust's license fee. In the same way, it is Sehgal or his assistants who supervise any future iteration of the "constructed situations". Sehgal does not dance himself but directs the rehearsals and the première and then typically will leave the interpreters for the duration of the six weeks of the show. From this first point already Sehgal's sale could be considered a licence of a dramatic or choreographic work. However, the "constructed situation" is intentionally neither of those, neither dance nor drama, but something else, something defined and confined within the contract and the artist.

Clause 2 stipulates that the works must be exhibited for a period of at least 6 weeks, or for the length of the art exhibition it is taking part in (a biennial, or an art fair for instance, might vary in length). The works cannot be shown in any other context than that of the visual arts. With this clause Sehgal becomes curator as much as artist of his work, as he organises as well as, as part of the work, he establishes the framework in which the artwork exists and is approached. He sets the context, the expectations of the viewer and the space for viewing. Outside this context, there is no work. The work is not only about the performers' movement or their singing, neither is the work restricted to the choreography, it is the whole situation constructed and organised by the artist that constitutes the artwork. The constant flow of visitors wandering in and out, the white space of art, sometimes left bare, sometimes in interaction with other artworks, all this construction is part of the situation.<sup>364</sup> Sehgal also controls the time of exhibitions: works must be shown throughout opening hours as living sculptures rather than as traditional theatrical or choreographic pieces as "the thing that comes in the evening and is, like, the happy music."<sup>365</sup> Sehgal's works must be available, always on

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<sup>362</sup> Sehgal's assistants have included Frank Willens and Asad Raza.

<sup>363</sup> <https://www.balanchine.com/licensing-the-ballets> <https://www.pinabausch.org/post/transmission>  
<https://www.mercecunningham.org/licensing/>

<sup>364</sup> For *This Progress* (2006) at the Guggenheim in 2010, the whole rotunda was completely emptied for his installation. In "Carte Blanche to Tino Sehgal" in Palais de Tokyo in 2016, Sehgal selected the works of other artists to place alongside his "constructed situation" becoming the curator as much as an artist.

<sup>365</sup> See interview with Collins, 2012.

view, because in the end his “constructed situations” are objects, ready at all times for the consumer, and for as many consumers as possible.

The last condition of the sale agreement relates to the artist resale rights, which originated in the resale rights of paintings established in the nineteenth century.<sup>366</sup> Sehgal hence prefigures a resale of his “constructed situation”, leading toward the possibility of a secondary market, while ensuring an extension of the artist’s authority after the resale of the work. If the work is resold this should happen under the same conditions as the first sale, with the artist or a representative present at the exchange ritual and a verbal contract should seal the agreement and the original will of the artist proclaimed. This is not the first time that the contract was used to speculate on imagined futures. The “Artist Contract” and Burren’s agreement also stipulated conditions over the resale of the work. In the receipt or certificate of Klein’s *Zones* devised with his dealer Clert, in the bottom left-hand corner there was a small notice that warned the buyer: “This transferable zone can be ceded by its owner only to twice of its initial value”<sup>367</sup>. Failure to do so means that the buyer will lose “his own sensibility.”<sup>368</sup> Whatever distinguished the buyer at first, the sensibility and appreciation of the value of the actions as art risks disappearing if the “zone” does not circulate and increase in value in the market. As Klein makes fairly evident in his certificate, both the connoisseur and the artwork are constituted at the same time, if one increases because of what he/she owns, so does the other increase, and the circle of dependence and increased value never ends!

There is hardly any presence of immaterial art, video, conceptual art, and installation at auctions - although the auction houses have been quick to embrace the sale of NFTs - making up for less than 1%, of the entire secondary market.<sup>369</sup> The secondary market for performance works is non-existent. So, Sehgal’s interest here is not so much in the possibility of some financial return on the royalties attached to the resale of art works, it is the perpetuation of the works’ status as art and a particular mode of existing for them in the future. As far as I am aware, at least one work by Sehgal has already been resold. Bel, who as mentioned earlier acquired *Instead of allowing some thing to rise up to your face dancing bruce and dan and other thing (2000)*, had, by January 2012, already sold it.<sup>370</sup> Neither Bel nor Sehgal responded to my questions regarding this transaction, so I am not sure when or who bought the work and how much was paid for it. These transactions remain private and perpetuate the double nature of the works, the private property, on the one hand, which remains veiled in secrecy and

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<sup>366</sup> Ickowicz, 2013.

<sup>367</sup> <https://www.yvesklein.com/en/ressources/>

<sup>368</sup> “*Le transgresseur s'expose a l'annihilation de sa propre sensibilité*” in Clert, 2003.

<sup>369</sup> Horowitz, 2012.

<sup>370</sup> Email correspondence with Bel, 11 January 2012.

maintains exclusive relationships, the “corner stone of all property” and on the other side, the shared public performance in the art space.<sup>371</sup>

### *Performing his subjectivity and ownership: the other stage*

I would like to insist here on the fact that Sehgal does not interpret his pieces within the public space of the gallery. He does not take shifts throughout the day and weeks of the exhibition. He does not run in the Turbine Hall (*These Associations*, 2012), sing in the dark (*This Variation*, 2012), or juggle for hours with a football (*This Entry*, 2023), neither is it he who walks up the Guggenheim rotunda asking questions to the audience in *This Progress* (2006). The first and only time Sehgal danced one of his works was in 1999. He does perform, however, as the mind and owner, the *capita*, distinguished from the labouring bodies in the space of the performance.<sup>372</sup> According to Dorothy Dubrule, who performed *Selling Out* (2002), at the Hammer Museum in L.A. in 2018, Sehgal comes with an assistant for a couple of days for the training period and then disappears for the rest of the show.<sup>373</sup> According to van Saaze for the “re-performance of *Kiss* in March 2010 at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), the artist was consulted by phone” only.<sup>374</sup> Sehgal instructs in language and delegates to interpreters the materialisation of the performance. “To delegate”, a term coined by Bishop (2012b) to describe certain performance practices, holds within it a notion of space. The prefix ‘de’ in ‘delegate’ means ‘away from’, and implies the act of sending to the outside, commissioning others into the world instead of going oneself. De-legate also holds the word ‘law’ in it, from the Latin *legare*, which contains *lex* (genitive *legis*) meaning that those who are sent are an extension by law of the power of the artist in the world. They represent the artist and his work out in the public. Sehgal hence extends his authority through the use of other bodies as prosthetics.<sup>375</sup> Freed from the task of performing himself in public throughout opening hours and the entire duration of the exhibition, Sehgal does however perform in other spaces, in which the “artist is present”:<sup>376</sup> the private place of the contract and his performance at the periphery of the works, on the stage of the interviews and public talks. Here he performs, traces and secures the contours of the otherwise inconsistent “evanescent property.”<sup>377</sup> The artist’s work is conceptual, in the sense that he produces mental images that are fictive and

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<sup>371</sup> Ickowicz, 2013: 381.

<sup>372</sup> Personal conversation with Dorothy Dubrule, 20 September 2022; see also Agnieszka Gracza in her interpretation of Sehgal’s *These Associations* (2012) at Tate, 2012.

<sup>373</sup> Personal conversation with Dubrule, 20 September 2022.

<sup>374</sup> Van Saaze, 2015: 5.

<sup>375</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/word/delegate>

<sup>376</sup> Title of a performance by Marina Abramovic, 2010, presented at MoMA, New York.

<sup>377</sup> Best, 2004: 270.

need to be constantly re-imagined and enframed in language. Sehgal uses his public appearances, in interviews and in his performance of self, to insist on and confirm the thingness of his actions and his authority, trying hard to make both actually exist in the public imaginary and as a legal thing.

The ability to construct property depends upon the usage of language to command and in-form, in speech or in law, but then even words (on paper or in speech) are not enough to hold property once and for all. The language of law has always been accompanied and supported by its staging: the stage of law and property's performance. A certain mode of behaviour in public and a set of attitudes continue and extend the work of law out in the public space and so "scenes of subjection" are needed to distinguish and affirm the difference and the inter-relationality of the subject-proprietor and the object of property.<sup>378</sup> I take these words from the title of Saidiya Hartman's unsettling book, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), in which she explains the illusionary transitions and the structural stagnation that took place during the Black emancipation movement in the U.S.A. in the nineteenth century. In the book, she identifies and analyses the scenes of torture and brutality against black people that she calls "scenes of subjection," scenes which have always accompanied the constitution of legal property, the ownership of things: "the exercise of power was inseparable from its display because domination depended on demonstrations."<sup>379</sup> As if one went hand in hand with the other, the performance and representation of power were both essential to reproduce domination, *dominium*, that is property. I want to acknowledge the huge distance between the forms of subjection and violence, between "the slaveholder's dominion and the captive's abasement" that Hartman analyses in her book, and those forms of subjecting that I am looking at here, in Sehgal's art making. However, there is a sense of power and *dominium* that still haunts forms of expropriation, of the making of property where there was no-thing. The artist, I argue, acts here a paradigm of those ex-proprative relations, as he reinforces the subject and perpetuates certain "old" forms of APPROPRIATION which still and always haunt, new forms of property in contract law and in the self-production of the artist as owner of his creation.<sup>380</sup> Sehgal has taken and subjected those moments and moved them from one category of being to another, from no-things to property. And his performance outside, or on the borders of the event of the "constructed situation" is a performance of his power as subject-proprietor, objectifying other forms of life, made into objects and goods FOR SALE.

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<sup>378</sup> Hartman, 1997.

<sup>379</sup> Hartman, 1997: 7.

<sup>380</sup> Best, 2004; Moten, 2015.

The illusion of property, or the imag-inary property as I have mentioned above, is performed in the hidden ritual, and to maintain and perpetuate its status it needs to be performed constantly in private and in public. I focus on two spaces in which this performance takes place, 1) during the exchange agreement or ritual which I call the private performance of the “constructed situation” or the exchange ritual, that I consider as being one side of the “constructed situation” or the head side of the coin and, 2) the space of the interview which acts as a *parergon*, a Greek word meaning a secondary by-work, a structure of support exterior to the work but that conditions the work’s existence in the world.<sup>381</sup>

### 1) *The hidden ritual or the private performance*

In *Public Experience/Private Authority*, art critic Martha Buskirk (2017) writes about the instruction based work of Felix González-Torres, and demarcates two stages for the performance and existence of the work: one is the public space of the exhibition and encounter with audiences, and the second is the “intensely private” and behind-the-scenes performance in the space and the context of the legal agreement between the artist and the collector.<sup>382</sup> These two spaces are simply two different perspectives of the same work, one is the intimate milieu of the work, which takes place in a private space where the artist will be present, and the other, as the work breathes out is its public iteration, shared with the wider audience in the gallery spaces.

The private “constructed situation” which is also known as the sale agreement, brings together the artist, who articulates the work in speech as well as the collecting body’s future obligations, a notary, and a certain number of people who receive the oral instructions from Sehgal or his assistant and who act also as witnesses to the transaction. For the acquisition of *This is Exchange* (2003) at the Van Abbemuseum, for instance, Tino Sehgal, the artist, was present with one of his dealers, Jan Mot, together with the notary and his assistant, and several members of museum staff, including the director Charles Esche, Christiane Berndes at the time Head of Collection.<sup>383</sup> No interpreter or member of the public is invited. The group then talks through the oral contract and the specifics of the work. Sehgal leads and ends by reciting the conditions and transfer of rights. The dealer and the director of the collecting institution then shake hands and the deal is done.<sup>384</sup> It is in this moment of the exchange that

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<sup>381</sup> Condorelli, 2009.

<sup>382</sup> Buskirk, 2017: 479.

<sup>383</sup> A list of witnesses for the acquisition of an edition of *Guards Kissing* (2002), by private collectors Javier Lumbreras and Lorena Pérez-Jácome in 2012, can be found here: <https://adrastuscollection.org/tinosehgal2/>

<sup>384</sup> Notes on the acquisition of *This You* (2006) by the Hirshhorn Museum, in Lescaze, 2018.

the event is produced legally as an art property and modes of relating to the work are agreed on in the present and for the future.

Sehgal returns to the oral or ritual to avoid tertiary retentional technologies, to bring the bodies back into action and stimulate their secondary memories, to leave no physical object behind and minimise his carbon footprint. It is not a new procedure. Still today in the bullfighting industry in Spain, for instance, the breeder and the manager of the bullfighting ring agree on the bulls for sale with a simple handshake. In dance, as seen in the previous chapter, dance notations might exist for other purposes, but the dance is mainly and still transmitted from one body to the other body, and so on from one generation of dancers to the next. Sehgal's work is not that of a choreographer, or dancer, but emerges at the level of speech and *logos*, closer maybe to the owner of the corrida bulls, turning us towards the Latin figure of the *pater*, the origin of both speech and of *dominium*.

In her extensive study on the intricacies of law and art relationships, Ickowicz (2013) does not shy in claiming the author-artist as being the extension of the Roman institution of paternal power, the *pater*, the male head of the Roman *domus*, legally entitled to property and authority with the power to control other living beings. So I take a moment here to think about the Latin term *pater* and its relation to the author in order to understand again the shifts occurring in the relationalities these terms imply. The linguist Emile Benveniste distinguishes the Latin *pater* from the Gothic *fadar* (in Greek *phratēr*) in that the Latin *pater* is related to the Person and to the individual, and invokes the notion of the divine, whereas the Gothic word *fadar* recognises a physical and kinship relationship. One is isolated and will be the authority in the *domus*, the household, while the other is understood as being generational, pertaining to the *phratry*, the socially and politically organised tribe, not a white slate or a self-construct but something which is received.<sup>385</sup> Another shift in words and in relationalities, Benveniste explains that both Latin words *auctor* ('author') and *auctoritas* derive from *auger* which in the ancient understanding signifies "he who causes to grow". The author was to develop into the site of the origin "the first to start some activity, who founds, who guarantees, and finally who is the 'author'."<sup>386</sup> In this transition the "abstract *auctoritas* acquired its force" and concentrated on the power of the Person and *pater* over others rather than on promoting growth in others. "Every word pronounced with authority determines a change in the world, it creates something."<sup>387</sup> In the Roman Republic, *auctoritas* was in the hands of very few men who had the power "to bring into existence" and control the distinctions and transitions between forms

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<sup>385</sup> Benveniste, 1973: 169-173.

<sup>386</sup> Benveniste, 1973: 421-422.

<sup>387</sup> Benveniste, 1973: 422.

of existence, between semi-existence and non-existence.<sup>388</sup> As *pater* and *auctoritas* then, as origin and authority, Sehgal speaks out and produces new legal forms of existence, and legal property. And through that production he is empowered as author set upon others, in front of witnesses who listen and see. The pronouns 'THIS' or 'THESE' that Sehgal uses in almost all of his titles,<sup>389</sup> pronounced by the first Person or the *pater* shifts the thing addressed from being unseen or simply a thing into being noticed, pointed at, recognised and constituted in its distinction from no-thing. In this way, he invents the situation from nothing as if a white slate. Thus it is only thanks to the power of this *patria potestas*, the power of the self-constructed as author, that the "constructed situation" becomes artwork.<sup>390</sup>

Sehgal's sale agreement could well find its origin, not so much in The Artist's Contract or Buren's contract, but in the Roman ritual of the *mancipatio*, which literally means to take in hand. During the ritual, things (*res*) were exchanged as private property, *res Mancipi*, and through the ritual distinguished from other things, which did not require a ritual to be transferred or passed on. The solemn ritual of exchange was performed by Roman citizens only, with witnesses, also citizens. The new owner would proclaim his new property out loud and after the exchange of money, the *mancipatio* would be sealed by striking a scale of bronze.<sup>391</sup> This form of ritualised contract in *ius civile* ('civil law') was used to transform the imaginary property into a legal reality and subordinate slaves, free men and women, and certain animals and land.<sup>392</sup> Private property needed a contractual solemn ritual, the *mancipatio*, in order to confirm its private property and acquire another status, that of *res Mancipi*, a thing own-able. It would ensure protection by law and differentiate the *res*, the thing, from the common goods which were used and enjoyed by all. The *res communis* (the common goods such air or water) or *res nullius* (things not yet in property, such as abandoned land or wild animals) would also be called the *res nec Mancipio* meaning that they were things that did not require a formal ritual of *mancipatio* to be transferred, taken into property or occupied (in Latin *occupatio*). If the *res Mancipi* were acquired, ensuring its privacy, the *res nec Mancipio* was simply delivered, passed on, part of a freer circulation of common things, simply part of the tissue of life's exchange. One, the *res Mancipi* is a title of property that can move

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<sup>388</sup> Benveniste, 1973: 423; see also Esposito, 2012.

<sup>389</sup> *This is Good* (2001), *This is New* (2003), *This is Propaganda* (2002), *This is Exchange* (2002), *This is so Contemporary* (2004), *This Variation* (2012), *This Situation* (2007), *This Progress* (2010), *This is Critique* (2008), *This Occupation* (2005), *These Associations* (2012), *This Entry* (2023)

<sup>390</sup> See the use of the pronoun by other artists such as René Magritte, *This is Not a Pipe* (1928) or Broodthaers' labels "This is not a work of art" attached to each representation of an eagle during his 1972 exhibition "Section des Figures" at the Kunsthalle Dusseldorf.

<sup>391</sup> Gaius, Institutes 1.119, translation by Gordon and Robinson and quoted in Tuori, 2008.

<sup>392</sup> Tuori, 2008. The description of the ritual has been transmitted to us in a student manual from the second century BC, Gaius' *Institutes* (c.170 AD) but holds crucial notions and distinctions that had already been shaping ancient Roman Law for several centuries.



around only through the acquisition ritual, exchange. The other *res nec Mancipi* is closely linked with the corporeal use and circulation of the things, i.e. possession. So, for instance, land was both a thing in use, and could be laboured by anyone, but was also property, privately owned through *mancipatio*. The *mancipatio* transferred and confirmed private property and the distinction of things, and *mancipio* was the origin of what later would be called *dominium* during the Republic a concept again that would shape territorial expansion and the use and entitlements of “strangers’ territories.”<sup>393</sup>

The reason why I insist on these “old” terms and their histories, is not only because of the striking formal similarities between the private ritual of the *mancipatio* and Sehgal’s ritualised sale agreements, but because there is still much of its dynamics at work in “new” forms of private property in the twenty-first century, such as Sehgal’s work. Sehgal literally becomes the *Person* authorised to transform that which might have been simply delivered, *traditio*, and enjoyed, as *res nec Mancipio*, to the category of private property needing the ritual of *mancipio*. He takes that which might have been simply part of the public, the common, encounters, experiences, and displaces these to the status of private property. He becomes the legal *pater* transitioning things from one category of being to another, whilst he continues to hold the title and the status within his *Person*. Structures of power and *dominium* are hence perpetuated in the exchange, as the category of thingness is established by the *Person* who becomes simultaneously its author and proprietor. Although he does not make reference to the art situation, Esposito’s study on the *Person* and property construction, defines the *Person* as the one who, in Rome, could control distinctions and transitions between different thresholds within mankind, and the movement between them, between a potential person, the semi-person and the non-person.<sup>394</sup> In the same way, the “so contemporary” artist (a reference here to Sehgal’s piece from 2005) holds the power of judging a thing from no-thing. Originating in the will and the power to speak of the first *Person*, the artist-author creates a thing from the chaos of the unnamed and, at the very instance of creating, APPROPRIATES a work of art from that which is not, from behaviours and modes of relating. Although Ickowicz notes that there was no sense of the subject in Roman law, property law is based on the power of APPROPRIATION, which presents “the relationship of subjectivity itself, by which a subject can say of an object, legal or material, this is *mine*”.<sup>395</sup> In the same way some things can be transformed into being an artwork, art works are also transformed back into no-thingness as many artists can also come to disown their work.<sup>396</sup> Sehgal’s situations are held in that fragile

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<sup>393</sup> Du Plessis, 2015: 187.

<sup>394</sup> Esposito, 2012b: 24.

<sup>395</sup> Ickowicz, 2013: 379, my emphasis and translation.

<sup>396</sup> McClean, 2014.

space, always suspended in an in-between, always having to perform their status and as easily constructed as works of art as they can be denied a name, of a *pater*, and so lose their status or existence as artworks.

## 2) *Interviews and public speech*

Sehgal's presence populates the web. He bans photographs of his works, but inconsistently, in the interviews he is often filmed and photographed himself. Also, the interviews are transcribed. He uses both modern and old technologies of retention for his self image, whilst he bans them for other aspects of life. It is his presence in the first Person, as subject who speaks, which abounds and is constantly and in multiple ways at the same time online. One can access him 24/7 and one can open his image or interviews on several windows on our screens at the same time if one wished to. From newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and art newspapers such as *Artforum* and *The Art Newspaper*, to individual art critics, the interviews are in large supply.<sup>397</sup> Obrist alone, the guru of interviews, by 2017 had already interviewed Sehgal at least eleven times.<sup>398</sup> With a large quantity of interpreters and assistance, executing, supervising and performing "the master's ideas", Sehgal has time now to perform on other stages, to construct his presence and his own reproduction in the media.<sup>399</sup> He moves to another space of performance which is the space open and in between the public performance of the "constructed situation" and the visitor/spectator. Those distances between work produced and receiver or spectator that might otherwise make space for listening and thinking, are occupied, though, by the artist's own interpretations, stories and pictures. The artist, Sehgal becomes present, omnipresent and re-presented in those empty spaces between and in the absence of work. By doing this Sehgal takes over the receiver's process of symbolisation, the process by which the signs offered are interiorised and assimilated by the sensitive, cognitive, and spiritual being that is able – unless traumatised - to make its own associations and then to articulate them. This process is an essential part of the participation and engagement of being with things and the world, and essential too for the spectator. It is a space and process, however, that risks being taken over by the public display of intentions of the artist. Instead, the spaces in between, between the work and the receiver, between the exterior milieu and its interiorisation, become

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<sup>397</sup> I cannot even add all of them in these footnotes. A simple google search of his full name would be enough to prove it.

<sup>398</sup> "My interest, as an artist, is to think about long-term development", Obrist in conversation with Sehgal, introduced by Daiga Rudzāte, 10 February 2017, [https://arterritory.com/en/visual\\_arts/interviews/18523-my\\_interest\\_as\\_an\\_artist\\_is\\_to\\_think\\_about\\_long-term\\_development/](https://arterritory.com/en/visual_arts/interviews/18523-my_interest_as_an_artist_is_to_think_about_long-term_development/)

<sup>399</sup> Velthuis, 2012: 19.

yet another platform to perform the first Person. It becomes another space to occupy and to speak of and from the origin of the work and its intellectual rationale, to expose the creator's intentionality and bring it all to a certain coherence, a unity that can be talked about and rationalised, worthy of bringing into the spotlight. How can one deal with this indulgence, this excess of interpretations in the first Person singular as well as the amount of displays of information? What is the purpose of all this public exposure of the artist's intentions, of his own image?

Another possible cause for his display of self and authority, is that Sehgal's works cannot and do not enter the modality of literary, dramatic or choreographic works protected by Intellectual Property. For this reason, he uses the contractual device as I have explained. On top of that, though, the "constructed situations" are performed by the interpreters, they exist in public and are visible only through the delegated bodies. The artist is nowhere to be seen. The delegated bodies of the interpreters *possess* the work in their bodies, they have lived the work, used it, unlike Sehgal who remains as the brain, and proprietor of the *dominium*, distinguished from the performing bodies in use. The interpreters are nevertheless not the originators of the work, nor are they the legal owners, because the work is in the idea, not in the physical incarnation, and that idea is the imaginary property of Sehgal. Nor are the interpreters to be considered *co-labourators*, but as Sehgal does not labour they might well be considered *elabourators* of the work. To avoid the risk of losing full and exclusive ownership of the works, and in order to confirm its origins in the Person of Sehgal, he uses the interview and his public speech in the public arena to constantly construct and perform his ownership. According to Ickowicz (2013), in all works of collaboration or delegation, be it material or immaterial, the intellectual author must make sure to exercise and perform his power, his "subjection" in the words of Hartman. He must make clear that he is the decision maker and prove in some way that he has been so throughout the entire creative process. Hence the fact that Sehgal is there in the sale contract, demands to be present during the rehearsals and performance and will come back to the piece to perform again his authorship, and perform continuously his authorship through the public discourse, those utterances that produce effects of power. His mere presence in the interviews is already producing and performing that power.

*I'm interested in the transformation of actions (...)*

*I'm interested in the museum as a place for long-term politics. (...)*

*I'm interested in Daniel Buren and Jeff Koons. (...)*

*I'm interested in the transformation of actions (....)<sup>400</sup>*

...

*I'm interested, as I work in this kind of space, to understand what the machine propagates (....)*

*I was interested in whether there can be progress (....)*

*My interest as an artist is to think about long-term development. (....)*

*It's much more interesting to actually experience a specific scenario, (....)*

*The solo show becomes a very interesting moment, because it's filled with my subjectivity and the visitors'. (....)*

*my interest has always been in reconfiguring the ritual of the exhibition.*

*(Conversation with Obrist<sup>401</sup>)*

...

*It struck me as a very interesting thing to rethink how economics could work (....)*

*I was only interested in the visual arts in the sense that it deals with relationships between humans and objects. (....)*

*I am not interested in the connotations of the word theatre (....)*

*Not that I am interested in shocking people (....)*

*Personally, I am interested in proposing different notions of history, presence, eternity. (....)*

*I am very interested in instructions for the performances (....)*

*This body-to-body transmission was an idea I found interesting (....)*

*I am interested in creating products (....)*

*Personally, I am not so interested in this conception of material goods, I have enough of them. (....)*

*I am actually not so interested in performance art. (....)<sup>402</sup>*

All these quotes come from interviews in which Sehgal is asked about his works, and again, I have only selected a few, to show how he presents and affirms his self in the first

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<sup>400</sup>Griffin, 2005.

<sup>401</sup>[https://artterritory.com/en/visual\\_arts/interviews/18523-my\\_interest\\_as\\_an\\_artist\\_is\\_to\\_think\\_about\\_long-term\\_development/](https://artterritory.com/en/visual_arts/interviews/18523-my_interest_as_an_artist_is_to_think_about_long-term_development/)

<sup>402</sup>The verb 'interested' was used 59 times in this interview, Obrist, 2003

Person as the source of intentionality and confirms his self implicitly or explicitly as origin of the work. The performance of self in the interview becomes as much a legal tool, as it proposes or imposes a mode of relating to things and to others, determined by the artist. It also compensates the negation of matter, building the artwork from the outside in techno-language, “in-forming itself into information and securing itself into information.”<sup>403</sup> Language produces the work and is then instrumentalised as a structure of support, a function that profits from a fear of disappearing, or crumbling, a fear of not being work.

According to Rachel Esner and Sandra Kisters in their book *The Mediatization of the Artist* (2017) the self-mediatisation of the artist became a quasi-imperative to survive as artists were no longer producing on commission but making ready-made objects in search of a buyer. Hence, it became somewhat of a necessity for the artist to build their own *persona* in the promotion of their art “to a more or less anonymous audience through exhibitions, competitive venues that necessitated a certain public *imago* in order to stand out from the crowd.”<sup>404</sup> Esner and Kisters see this performance and promotion of the *persona* as a necessity since the late eighteenth century with the diminishing patronage, the rise of the middle class and the increasing dominance of the market in both the production and circulation of art as commodity. Reva Wolf highlights the 1950s as the decade key to the rise of both the figure of the author and the artist interview. With Salvador Dali’s interviews in the 1950s and Andy Warhol seminal magazine *Interview*, founded in 1969, the interview became an art genre in itself. The visual artist takes hold of the medium of speech adding to their work “a different kind of status, as something *more than*, or extra.”<sup>405</sup> The staged nature of the interview situation made it an especially attractive arena in which to explore a performative role, and many artists took advantage of it to build their trademark. Artists became traders, or entrepreneurs, and works became trademark. From the 1960s, the public performance of the artist outside the work and in speech compensated for the negation of matter, and built the artwork from the outside, from its structure, as there was no matter left on which to hold property or create value. Works were “talked” into importance by the artist himself and the art critic.<sup>406</sup> Conversation, interviews and talks utilise language to in-form and frame the works as objects and the artist as the subject, by speaking in the first Person. Language as technology produces the situations as art works and the artist as the first Person speaker and originator. This reminds us of Laurence Louppe’s words quoted in chapter 1, as she notes that whilst everywhere else the notion of author had been “complicated or contested” in dance, and the moving body, and in the visual art world

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<sup>403</sup> Fynsk, 1996: 114.

<sup>404</sup> Esner and Kisters, 2017: 3.

<sup>405</sup> Wolf, 2020: 11.

<sup>406</sup> Van Winkel, 2012: 48; on the construction of the *persona* in art see also Lütticken, 2015.

more general, on the contrary, we can see forms of artistic and subject affirmation, of distinction and constitution of the artist through the construction of their actions, dances and singing as artistic works in language.<sup>407</sup> In no way are these words weightless though. Language as a means to support the work becomes, what Benjamin in his essay “On Language as such and on the Language of Man” (1916) calls a “prattle” or chitchat, the continuation of speech long after everything has been said, long after any communication takes place.<sup>408</sup> The chitchats become the means to construct the spatiality in which the work can exist. In works such as Sehgal’s, those structures become essential. The artist acts not only as producer but also as a preserver, whose voice continues to speak long after the works have finished, in other moments and spaces. The artist cannot let go, but rather continues to speak, discuss, have opinions on and about the work, and “as soon as the thrust into the awesome is parried and captured into the sphere of familiarity and connoisseurship, the art business has begun.”<sup>409</sup> Sehgal constructs situations, as works that have no matter in which to rest, are no-thing alone. The artist needs to talk and perform the work and artist-hood constantly. Sehgal’s omnipresence in the business of his work of art becomes a necessity to ensure the work and its survival. He acts as a translator of the works into another linguistic performance and as he does this, he tames the work, reducing the work to its interpretation. Interpretation imposes the subject and author again on the event, rather than letting the event stand on its own, cut from all ties, open to the world, by withdrawing the interpreter.<sup>410</sup>

I cannot help but finish this section by going back to Arendt, and her critique of the Greek hero immortalised by Homer in the *Iliad*, Achilles, to see what in him is still at work in the construction of the contemporary artist, and in particular in Sehgal’s performance of the self. In her private letters and in some fragments of *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt confronts the paradigmatic character of Achilles with that of the Trojan prince Hector, and disapproves of the former’s attempt to intentionally transform his life and actions into a work of art. She reads Achilles as the proud man of action who tries to make a story out of his life and preserve his integrity. Achilles, “delivers into the narrator’s hands the full significance of his deed, so that it is as though he had not merely enacted the story of his life but at the same time also “made” it.”<sup>411</sup> The man of action becomes thus the maker of his life and of his own spotlight, a “*homo faber*”, who thinks his actions as a making, a fabrication, a thing that comes to an end in the thing itself, a thing enclosed. Part of her wider reflections on politics and action,

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<sup>407</sup> Louppe, 2010: 233.

<sup>408</sup> Benjamin, 1996: 72.

<sup>409</sup> Heidegger, 2010: 125.

<sup>410</sup> Sontag, 1994.

<sup>411</sup> Arendt, 1998: 194.

Arendt saw in the mastery of one's own identity and in the control over one's own stories (as in the character of Achilles) the risk of dissociating oneself from others as well as a risk in relation to experience. And this might well recall some of the aspects of Sehgal's actions examined in this section.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Schoonheim, 2018.

## Chapter 2 - Part 2 -

### What nightmare?<sup>413</sup> Is there no alternative?<sup>414</sup>

To begin the discussion of this section, I need to return to clause 4 of Sehgal's sale agreements, on the prohibition of documentation, which is an imperative on all new collectors and exhibiting institutions. No photos or films are allowed of the "constructed situations" and it is forbidden to publish or represent the work in any other form. If any reproduction does occur - and it is occurring more often now than it was in the early 2000s when he started - the venue, owner, private or institutional, must try and take the films or photos out of circulation.<sup>415</sup> The works can exist and be exchanged only through and in the co-presence of bodies. I take the question of documentation as Sehgal presents it in opposition to the lived-experience to attempt to comprehend what mode of *un-meditated* experiencing and engagement he is offering that might be new or different to modes of engagement outside the exhibition space.

In the oft-quoted essay "The Ontology of Performance: representation without reproduction", Peggy Phelan claims that performance could only "become itself through disappearance".<sup>416</sup> Any exterior image or trace would fix the performance into some-thing, would produce a fixed re-presentation which would immediately create a blockage, and produce a tangible object for circulation among other objects of exchange and other objects of representation.

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. [...] Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> The nightmare here refers to Krauss (1990) and to the character of *Annlee*, as I will explain at the end of the chapter.

<sup>414</sup> I take these words from Margaret Thatcher's pro-market slogan, words which have been reused by Mark Fisher, 2009.

<sup>415</sup> Notes from my visit to the archives of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, and conversation with Christine Berndes, Head of Collection at the time, 18 December 2014.

<sup>416</sup> Phelan, 1993: 146.

<sup>417</sup> Phelan, 1993: 147.



Phelan associates performance with another mode of being in the world, countering the calculative and commercial tendency of a market society, "it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered".<sup>418</sup> Rather than constructing the event into a performance and the artist into the subject, Phelan called to a radical other experience of time and of things, one that would let go, not capture, an experience that would remain in the opening of the event. The resistance to documentation and to representation is therefore a resistance to both the objectification of the event and the constitution of the subject and, at the same time, as if one were always linked to the other, it is a resistance to the *capital*-isation of art. Only in that resistance, Sánchez writes, "the present will always be the present and life will remain radically unproductive."<sup>419</sup> Phelan cracked open a debate on the relation of the event of performance with its documentation. The live event was being prioritised over the document, manifesting a hierarchical tension that goes back to the debate which opened Western philosophy, for example with Plato and the Sophists, on writing in relation to the spoken word. However, for Phelan writing was an acceptable mode of preserving performance. Only writing, Phelan would argue, can hold in that place left empty by performance's evanescence. Writing remembers, as a trace remaining from that hole left empty when the performance is over, without attempting to replace it. Phelan remembers and writes about Sophie Calle's work for instance in that same essay. It is a language, though, that is not instrumentalised for the purpose of regulation and control, not a writing towards preservation, but a writing that stimulates reflexivity and which, as performance, "disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control."<sup>420</sup>

The writing on and of Live art and the whole field of Performance studies has very much worked in and from that tension between production and the un-productive labour, between disappearance and its traces, between the dreams of another mode of relating to the bodily and to time and the capture of the moments again and always as things. For some academics, the capture of performance by technologies of reproduction - writing being one of them - is simply unavoidable; Phelan herself reproduces photographs of a performance by Angelika Fest in the same essay in which she refuses documentation. Are Phelan's claims, then, already a failed attempt to escape the capitalist machinery? Is there no evading the constitution of objects from thoughts? Is the constitution of the bodily, its gestures and its engagement in the world as I have been explaining in the first chapter, as an exteriorised act, with or no longer needing the photographs, always laying the preconditions for a possible ex-

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<sup>418</sup> Phelan, 1993: 148.

<sup>419</sup> Sánchez in the section "The Artist's Stomach" in Calonje, 2014: unpaginated.

<sup>420</sup> Phelan, 1993: 146.

appropriation, the making of product and of property? Sehgal's prohibition of documentation is not in order to undo the subject, neither does he intend to escape the commercial object as Phelan did. Practices that escape the object, Sehgal would say, are "ideologically opposed to me because they want to disassociate themselves from museums and the market and romanticise themselves."<sup>421</sup> His intention, in resisting the world of visual representation, is rather to prioritise the present lived-experience, which is not audio or visual, but somatic. And in doing so, he attempts to ground his works, as Auslander would argue, "in versions of presence which bear the stamp of secularism, psychology or political analysis in the place of religion," presence as healing.<sup>422</sup>

His prohibition of mediatisation has a curative task, to heal the spectator from the traumatic wounds of modernity and offer a new mode of being together, or simply as von Hantelmann noted, he offers a new "culture of being."<sup>423</sup> During rehearsals with interpreters of *This Situation* (2007), Sehgal claimed his work is a "reactivation of ancient forms of collective being, enabling (disturbing) new forms of encounters."<sup>424</sup> He has said also in a lecture on "*New Rituals for the 21st Century*" (2023) that he seeks to challenge the "eye based culture" which, according to him, produced the distancing modern gaze, and instead attempts to enrapture all the participants in an intense, already lost, Dionysian ritual.<sup>425</sup> In the present and in co-presence, the encounter resists perspective and becomes expansive and immersive, something that a reproduction fit for a print or worse still a "kitchen poster" cannot fulfil.<sup>426</sup> His created spaces and organised encounters, which "having muscled everything else off the walls," as Krauss wrote about minimalist installations, make the tangible redundant, lose value, in favour of the lived-experience, leaving the visitors impressed.<sup>427</sup> Two-dimensional pictures, sculpture, and visual documentation do not seem capable of doing that and appear rather "impossibly tiny and inconsequential".<sup>428</sup> Nor can they offer the tertiary or "pervasive qualities" that early twentieth century American pragmatist and philosopher John Dewey considered to be the main characteristic of ameliorative and pure experience and of any engagement with art. The "pervasive qualities", Dewey proposed, are not perceived by the intelligence but are something "capable of immediate enjoyed possession".<sup>429</sup> These qualities enhance and take over, in such a way that they are supposed to unite and "bind together" all

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<sup>421</sup> In an interview with Buck, 2006.

<sup>422</sup> Auslander, 2008: 59.

<sup>423</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2014: unpaginated.

<sup>424</sup> According to Philippe Mairesse who worked as an interpreter in the Palais de Tokyo's iteration of the *This Situation* (2007) in 2016 in Moriceau, Mairesse and Fronda, 2020: unpaginated.

<sup>425</sup> Sehgal, 2023.

<sup>426</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 155.

<sup>427</sup> Krauss, 1990: 3.

<sup>428</sup> Krauss, 1990: 4.

<sup>429</sup> Alexander, 1998: 3.

the constituents participating in what Dewey calls a “situation”.<sup>430</sup> All parts come into a single whole in the immediacy of the moment and so the pervasive experience functions to overcome and unify dualistic oppositions between that of subject/object, culture/nature, art/life, and mental/physical.<sup>431</sup> For Dewey, that experience is pre-reflective and pre-discursive but at the same time, it is the point of departure for qualitative life and thinking: an experience maybe similar to what this spectator experienced as he lived through *These Situations* (at the Palais de Tokyo in November 2016,

*“Facing the performance, we get contaminated by a set of various pulsations that start from the performers’ bodies and steps, invade the space, reverberate from wall to wall, take our bodies and make them move or incorporate the rhythm. Space is a territory, full of vibrations, pulsations, ritornellos. Our experience is bombarded by such rhythms that emanate from others, form groups and encounters, that will bounce and reverberate on the walls, differently according to the positions of each one. While observation preserves what is studied at a distance, the opening of the bodies to rhythms and reverberations allows the physical, human and social geography of the place to enter in us, to be experimented and be lived for a moment.”*<sup>432</sup>

Sehgal takes a stance in relation to the power of mnemotechnics, which bring to visibility and retain at the same time as they steal and transform a relation to that which they fix, and distributes instead a qualitative lived-experience, in the sense of Dewey. However, as he avoids any misuse or abuse of traces or documentation of the work, he is also placing value somewhere else and constructing property from something else, precisely from those “pervasive qualities” of the experience that Dewey writes about. He attempts to avoid the expropriation of the image from the experience of being, at the same time as he constructs cultural and exchange value around the present lived-experience to be consumed and APPROPRIATED, as already distinguished intense and enhanced experience. This leads to two questions which I attempt to address hereafter. Is the live, in Live art but also generally, always bound to mnemotechnics and already an artifice? Subsequently, and linked to the previous question, how can we understand the lived-experience and has a new understanding of the live, despite itself, been the condition of the becoming-object of experience?

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<sup>430</sup> McClelland, 2005: 48.

<sup>431</sup> Wikstrom, 2020.

<sup>432</sup> An account of the experience of Jean-Luc Moriceau as a spectator at Sehgal’s exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in November 2016, Moriceau, Mairesse and Fronda, 2020: unpaginated.

*Dealing with mnemotechnics, the art of memory*

Most art visitors, and Sehgal himself, will remember a time when taking pictures in art galleries was forbidden, and the museum guards would approach and stop you immediately if they saw you with a camera in your hand. It is only in 2008, one year after the presentation of the first iPhone and the Cloud, that museums have lifted the restrictions on the use of cameras.<sup>433</sup> At the time I am writing this thesis, only theatres and strip clubs still forbid photography – which has to do with performer’s rights, and safety, the risk of something being stolen in the image, manipulated, and taken from the event and from the performers. Whatsapp was released in 2009 and since then art institutions have furthermore promoted the use of pictures “suggesting hashtags by which viewers can label their uploaded images to Instagram, Twitter and Flickr.”<sup>434</sup> Sehgal’s artworks have, from the beginning, been troubled and, I argue here, have been shaped by these modes of reproduction and distribution. He might ban institutions from taking pictures, but the web is full of “illegal” reproductions of his pieces by third parties. Furthermore, and what is most relevant is that the value he has placed on the lived-experience is gained only in relation to documentation, or to his non-documentation.

One can find pictures of one of his earliest works, in an article from October 2003, in the printed edition of *The Guardian*. One of the two young children employed to perform and sing the titles and prices of several of Sehgal’s works, on the Wrong Gallery’s booth at Frieze is pictured, just before he falls to the floor and yells: “We don’t think it is appropriate to take pictures of our work!”<sup>435</sup> In 2007, at the Goethe Institute, Sehgal was in conversation with Carey Jewitt, an interpreter at *This objective of that object* (2004) in 2005 at the ICA. At the event, a member of the audience told Sehgal that he had seen a reproduction of one of his pieces online. Sehgal responded, simply by saying that the images had already been removed. I remember checking, and indeed the images were no longer available. Thirteen years later, though, Annet Dekker curated an exhibition “Enduring Liveness: An Imaginary Retrospective of Tino Sehgal’s Constructed Situations” composed exclusively of all the visual documentation found online of three key works by Sehgal: *Kiss* (2002), *This is So Contemporary* (2003) and *This is Propaganda* (2002).<sup>436</sup> Dekker’s point was to open a discussion on the afterlife and performativity of the works circulating online. Sehgal is aware

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<sup>433</sup> See Bishop, 2019: 36-67. Except for the Rijkmuseum initiative in 2015 called #startdrawing which banned cameras and encouraged sketching.

<sup>434</sup> Bishop, 2019: 49.

<sup>435</sup> Searle, 2003: unpaginated.

<sup>436</sup> Dekker, 2018.

at this stage that it is impossible to control third parties, to continue removing pictures, videos and audio recording from circulation and neither can he police the crowds of visitors roaming around and in the exhibition spaces. In 2023, during the performance *This Entry* (2023) at the Witworth Art Gallery in Manchester, I was able, in front of the interpreters and the gallery assistance to have my camera on and capturing without any problem. There is no escape from reproducibility. Sophisticated technologies of capture, storage and distribution have become part of the mode in which we relate to everything within our contemporary societies. Smartphones and social media have become the main mode of engaging with the world. Bishop uses the example of an Ann Imhof's *Faust* (2017) installation at the Venice Biennial, which simulated the imprisonment of representation, in the ghostly presence of the performers behind the glass, sitting on the pedestals and pressing their bodies against the walls. Art spaces, she writes have become "effectively one large touchscreen (...) an apparatus for watching a live performance through a screen."<sup>437</sup> Furthermore, retentional technologies, despite trying to avoid them, have already shaped and forever haunt the relation of being with its life, the live presence already entrapped in the image captured. An attention to and even the notion of lived-experience is only possible because it has already been retained by technologies, and any critique, questioning or playing with the process of representation, within the art context, becomes in-formed and trapped again within the frames and structures of representation, as if there is no way out.

In his book, *Liveness* published in 1999, influenced by the work of Derrida, Auslander argues that the live does not precede or is not without the mediated but that the two are mutually dependent. Phelan's claim that performance should not be retained in documentation is to him already redundant because performance only and always exists precisely in relation to reproduction. Written in a decade of TV, Walkman's and CD's, Auslander explains how the understanding, and appreciation of the lived-experience is a modern concept that emerged as technologies were already colonising spaces of encounter. The live, which he defines as the immediate and the intimate relation to the event and others in a co-presence in time and space, has only been perceived as such in the advent of recording technologies. Technology makes us aware of that no-thing that was lived through, "invents" it as if there had been nothing previous to it. I use the word "invention" here intentionally to link this to the first chapter, and the invention of gestures and of hysteria in *La Salpêtrière*. The invention of a phenomenon – gestures or the experience – is conflated with the capture of it in tertiary retentional memory: invention, exteriorisation and storage becoming one and the same act. The live becomes live because it was already being stored. Retentional technologies old and new have captured

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<sup>437</sup> Bishop, 2019: 55.

experience as a lived-experience and moved experience and the bodily relation in the world into another sphere of consciousness. Another gaze has forever been placed upon them. And so from another space, unnoticed, hidden, the experiences of life have come into our way, as objects, objects framed, or no longer in the need to be framed by retentional technologies. They are forever framed. The frame cannot be undone, so to say. To return to Sehgal's situations, these "situations" as qualitative experiences are made possible as artworks and as an exteriorised thing, *because* of technologies of retention; thanks to photography at La Salpêtrière, as discussed in the previous chapter, that made something called gestures come to be recognised, as an exterior thing, that could be detached, stored and distributed outside the human body. Sehgal's work, then, simply cannot heal just by removing technologies, because his antidote, the lived-experience, carries within it the poison that it is fighting against. Or maybe his ban on reproduction was never meant really to heal as he expected, but only reproduce the lived-experience within an economy of reproduction and of capitalism.

*The body-archive as technologies and called to witness*

Sehgal also bans the exhibiting institution from describing his works in any marketing material. He does not allow written labels in the exhibition space either. He does, however, allow his interpreters, close to what Dan Karlholm (2005-2006) calls the primary public, to share their experiences, as embodied witnesses to the work, as well as the visitors, the secondary public, which outnumbered by far the primary public.<sup>438</sup> And so interviews and first Person testimonies of both types of public continue to feed and populate the web as well as the museum's archives: traces of secondary retentional memory that become tertiary memory, exteriorised and inscribed for storage and distribution beyond the here and now, for other places and epochs to access. The flesh becomes bone, to use a metaphor from Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider, that which was housed in the incarnate flesh slippery and still impregnated with the fluidity and the impermeability of the passing of time is solidified, blocked, to remain: "Flesh can house no memory of bone. Only bone speaks memory of flesh. Flesh is blindspot".<sup>439</sup>

Flesh then, for Schneider, could be transmitted in a rhythm, like the rhythm of a river, like the transmission of dance or vernacular language, outside of grammar. Dance still holds a relation to the embodied secondary memory, a memory which is received, assimilated,

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<sup>438</sup> Karlholm, 2005-2006.

<sup>439</sup> Schneider, 2011: 102.

translated and given back always within an understanding of *traditio*, of that which is received from the past, in the common memory and returned as a common good without retaining anything on the way.<sup>440</sup> Sehgal, however, distances himself again from dance, and the interpreters of Sehgal's situations are not called upon to transmit the pieces, in body-to-body transmission. That bit of the business is quite controlled and contained in the brain and hands of Sehgal and his assistants, another category of experts distinguished from the primary public or interpreters. It is Sehgal and his assistants who are the *répétiteurs* and will go back to check on the works regularly.<sup>441</sup> What the interpreters, the primary public, then are asked to do, rather than transmit the work, is to bring the work into the present and open it in the presence of the secondary public. More often now, the interpreters are invited to continue to perform in language this time, the works after the actual performance – another language than the opening of the limbs, what they say is utilised this time for the construction of something more solid.

*“I recently worked as an 'interpreter', to use the term of art, in This Situation, a work by Tino Sehgal on exhibit at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Montreal throughout most of March and April, 2013. My reasons for signing on to this project are several, .... (Halldór Smith, 2013)*

...

*“Four weeks into Tino Sehgal's These associations at Tate Modern, a man came up to me in front of Liverpool Street Station in London and said: 'Haven't we talked together in the Turbine Hall?' He looked vaguely familiar. 'It's not impossible,' I replied. 'Shall we pursue our conversation?' he asked, playfully. Before I could think of an answer, he was gone. As one of the participants in Sehgal's piece – the final commission in the Unilever Series – I'd had too many conversations with strangers, etc... (Gratza, 2012)*

...

*At work, I pretend to be a museum guard, posting myself behind a wall in the last gallery of a large group exhibition. Whenever a visitor turns the corner and starts to look at the surrounding artworks, my striptease begins. (Dubrule, 2019).*

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<sup>440</sup> More on 'flesh memory' in Schneider, 2011: 6.

<sup>441</sup> The Gensollens recalled a visit of Sehgal in which the artist came back to check they were performing the work *What do you think this is about?* (2003) in the correct way.

These accounts, as Sehgal's interviews, occupy the space of re-presentation. They take the place of the separation, of the emptiness left open when the event has finished. This thesis relies heavily on testimonies, on spoken and written accounts of the works, and on my own experience in the first Person too. My thesis is re-presentation, opening – I hope - the possibility of knowledge production, of reflection and discourse. There is something else, however, at work in the use of these testimonies as Sehgal permits them. They confirm the interpreters as possessors - not proprietors - of an experience had, and uses them as a legal evidence of the work's existence. The stories around the "constructed situation" are the only form of documentation that Sehgal permits. Not only do they serve the purpose of marketing, for the work and for the interpreters, they are also part of the discourse that frames the event as artwork.<sup>442</sup> The interpreters and the visitors, the first and secondary public's function then becomes as essential inside the "constructed situation", that is, in the public moment, as they are outside of the exhibition space. Without their acknowledgement in the form of testimony, the work would not hold as an exteriorised art form. To document their acquisition of Sehgal's *This objective of that object*, (2004) purchased in 2008, the Walker Art Center stores the memories of Simon Glendinning, who interpreted the piece in the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London in 2005; Mathieu Potte-Bonneville, who interpreted the piece at Palais de Tokyo, Paris in 2016; and Lynn Dierks, recounting her experience assisting in the production of *This is Propaganda* (2002) in 2007.<sup>443</sup> Their stories act as documentation and proof of acquisition.

As long as the live-performance has an audience, there is a potential in-forming. Secondary memory is accumulated in the bodies performing and those gazing. That embodied memory can be used and, as any technology, can also be instrumentalised towards an end. Auslander insists that memory is not a "safe haven." More so, he explains, the accounts of visitors, interpreters and of the artist himself "make performance available and useful to the law in other, more comprehensive ways."<sup>444</sup> As the public, primary and secondary, tell their stories they are utilised as witnesses in the legal sense of the word, "pressed into service as a mechanism for the enforcement of law."<sup>445</sup> If those memories were silenced, stored in memory and never retraced again, only then could Live art and its memory resist the regulation and control that Phelan so longed for. But once the memory is retrieved, the pieces become visible again as objects – of memory. As Auslander argues, memories retrieved become available for usage, as evidence is used in a lawsuit trial. First-hand accounts hence become

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<sup>442</sup> Edward Bernays, father of Public Relations, was the first to strategically utilise the personal stories of the ballet dancers to publicise the American tour of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in 1915, a strategy that changed the conception of ballet in the U.S. See also Alberro, 2004.

<sup>443</sup> <https://walkerart.org/collections/artworks/this-objective-of-that-object>

<sup>444</sup> Auslander, 1999: 113.

<sup>445</sup> Auslander, 1999: 113.



available to law and law produces property. Memory is the deep structure of language, and hence is always at risk of becoming the language of law. Language “is brought into the legal discourse as both a policed site and a mechanism of regulation.”<sup>446</sup> The risk is there every time one speaks. Auslander does not cover the case of Performance or Live art in particular, but that of live musical events. Nonetheless, his study is relevant in that it discusses how live-performance is intimately linked to regulation and control especially as he compares it to the legal trials that require evidence or proof of fact, which depend fundamentally, as Performance art does, on the testimony of live witnesses, spectators. In the same way, the art spectator and interpreter are instrumentalised to affirm the event’s existence as object of art in the public space.

*To conclude this section*

In his short story from 1939, Jorge Luis Borges created a character Pierre Menard, an eccentric twentieth century author, who decided to immerse himself completely and radically in the character of the Spanish seventeenth century author of Don Quixote, Don Miguel de Cervantes, in order to write the novel all over again. Menard had to learn Spanish, convert to Catholicism, fight the Moors and the Turks, and “forget the history of Europe from 1602 to 1918, to *be* Miguel de Cervantes.”<sup>447</sup> And still, he wondered if he was not becoming more like the character Don Quixote than like its author, Cervantes, in the impossible task he set himself, in trying to chase the giants who have become the ghosts of modernity. I pick up on this story, to understand in some way Sehgal’s desire to go back to another time, without technologies of retention or capture. Is that an impossible a task? Does he seek a time without writing and a time without documents of any sort, but only the embodied memories never exteriorised? Is he not chasing a pre-human time? Sehgal’s rejection of material exteriorisation, and its tangible fixity, appear to be offering an antidote, to heal what seems to be the negative effects devouring the hyper-industrial society. However, the discretisation of modes of living and seeing the self, has already produced the reification of the experience of life, and Sehgal is only reproducing that discretisation within the art context. There is no need for tangible land or bodies, nor is there any need for the physical matter to make objects anymore. Objectification has already occurred and the subject continues to appropriate it to survive. Expropriation still haunts our existence. But Sehgal does not see that or does not want to face that. He is no fool though. There is no Quixote in him. Instead he sits quite comfortably in the

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<sup>446</sup> Auslander, 1999: 154.

<sup>447</sup> My translation of Borges, 2007: 47.

art establishment and continues to constitute his subjectivity in relation to his works as objects of art. There is no play or hesitation, but rather objectification and commoditisation become the imperative and condition for the art work's existence: "it is essential that the artworks can be sold."<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 159.

## Chapter 2 - Part 3 -

### The enchantment of the fetishised lived-experience or the nightmare of objectification

*I was able to go to Berlin for the Fourth Berlin Biennale, "Of Mice and Men", in 2006. I knew Sehgal's work was showing, had seen him for the first time at the Tate Triennial, so I set out to find his work. I first walked through a park in Mitte in which I experienced a sound/voice installation by Susan Philipsz until I arrived at the old derelict ballroom on the Auguststrasse and there it was: Kiss (2003).<sup>449</sup> I was completely enchanted by the whole thing. Berlin, the ballroom. The smooth movements of the two bodies, wrapping their arms and legs around each other, slowly rolling on the floor and then getting up without a slight effort, or heaviness, only to roll back down, always in a semi or full embrace. It took a little while for me to realise that I was not only looking at an eternal embrace but works of art were hidden between and in the bodies of the two interpreters. They were moving, making love, and would freeze for a second or two like a tableaux vivant, quoting with their bodies, some of the most emblematic kisses that have made up the canon of modern art history.*

*I was suddenly trapped in a decoding or guessing game, trying to guess what movements were artworks, and what gestures were not, and if someone else's artworks, whose? Was the situation constructed to test our eye for art, our connoisseurship, or was it about experiencing one's own ignorance*

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<sup>449</sup> An edition of *Kiss* (2003) was acquired by MoMA in 2008.

*exhibited in the art space? Or was it the consumption of someone else's love affair?*

*Or was it calling me to let go; to cease to search to recognise, distinguish, but simply contemplate the beauty of the bodies' encounter in front of me? To be enraptured by the bodies linked and made into one, interdancing, caught in the rhythm of intertextuality, not a story of authors or works but of gestures transmitted.<sup>450</sup>*

*Then his name was sung: "Kiss, Tino Sehgal, 2003".*

*At one point the couple left and another one came to replace them and the movements continued, were repeated as in a loop. I had already seen Klimt's iconic kiss a few times now, Rodin's, then Brancusi's, and I thought I had recognised one of Koons' "Made in Heaven" embraces. As the time passed, a sense of automatism crept in.*

*I remember trying to find a position in which my heavier and stiffer body could sit comfortably for another while. My attention, distracted, returned on to me, and my immediate surrounding. I hate getting in people's way, so I moved to the edges of the big room. People came in and then left. At one point, I was alone with the couple, a spectator or rather a voyeur invited to gaze at their intimate embrace, their "unbearable lightness."<sup>451</sup> That is what was keeping me there, a desire for intimacy, to be alone with the work, with them, as a third person in the room.*

As I read over this short account of my experience of *Kiss* (2003), I can only notice the writer, the spectator, the first Person of the 'I', the 'I' watching, producing the event as an object of interest, of writing, the first Person 'I' collecting experiences that can be *had*, writing them down. Why has this chapter lured me to speak from and about the first Person of the 'I', the 'I' in between, the 'I' who experiences, the 'I' consuming the experience offered to her, the 'I' who was there, at the right place, at the right time?

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<sup>450</sup> As Arendt would write about histories "with many actors and speakers and yet without any tangible authors" (Arendt 1998: 184). See also Kristeva, 1984.

<sup>451</sup> From the novel by Kundera, 1995.

As much as the works attempt to create a fluid space, of encounters, seek a sense of pervasive co-existence, trying to blur distinctions between the piece and the self, between the self and the others, all is immersed in a constructed lived-experience highly choreographed and layered.<sup>452</sup> The 'I' continues to distinguish itself as subject from the others, from a place from which I see, I am, I feel in relation to others, and to the lived-experience. The work of Sehgal revolves around the experience in the first Person, his production and ownership of the works in the first Person and his delivery of the works to be consumed by visitors who speak and consume it in the first Person 'I'. What is it that seduces you to say 'I'? Is 'I' tempting you to believe you are a unique subject of the encounter and a privileged collector of lived-experiences?

Sehgal might well have said these words to respond to my questions:

*There is developing this kind of boredom with this industrialised, materially orientated society; the idea that you can create yourself through attaching objects to yourself, via consumption. When I was young it was cars, and today it might be smartphones. I always found that boring. I want to transform myself on a deep level.' That seems much more interesting and much more ambitious.*<sup>453</sup>

Sehgal is right to point out that there has been a move since the 1990s both in the wider economy and in art towards other objects, not only tangible but intangible ones, specifically towards the experiential in the first Person which speaks to something closer to the subject's desire. In an article on the experiential turn in art, commissioned by the Walker Art Center, von Hantelmann quotes the German sociologist Gerhard Schulze. Schulze published "The Experience Society", in 1992, to explain the transformations in society no longer looking for the consumption of things but moving towards the consumption of experience, which can respond directly to the individual's need of an enhanced and qualitative subjectivity. In German the word Schulze uses to describe the society and market of experience is *Erlebnis*, this word translates the lived-experience that can circulate and is traded and is different to another German word used for experience that is *Erfahrung*. There is an important difference between the two words and approaches that von Hantelmann forgets to mention in her essay. She seems, however, to be thinking of *Erlebnis*, similar to Schulze, as she writes about experience

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<sup>452</sup> "a fluid and active movement between player and visitor" in von Hantelmann, 2010: 169.

<sup>453</sup> Sehgal's words in interview Confino, 2012.

in the art world and Sehgal's "constructed situations". In 1999, American business consultants Joseph Pine and James Gilmore noted in their publication in *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (2011), that the wider economy has indeed moved from an economy of commodities, to an economy of goods, then to one of services, and since the late 1990s we are in what they call an "economy of experiences", translated in German as *Erlebniskauf*. The commercial value is no longer in the tangible, material product, but in the experience of uniqueness, of participation, that the product or service might inspire in the consumer, in the heightened experience of the consumer's humanity, of themselves as 'subjects'; existential and psychological values confused with commercial value, one profiting from the exploitation of the other. Businesses are encouraged to produce "a personal, memorable" experience and offer 'true' transformative experiences easy to reach with quick "spiritual" returns.<sup>454</sup> Similarly, the art world has moved beyond the materiality of art, and increasingly focuses on the production of those experiences that Schulze and Pine and Gilmore write about. As Lütticken notes in his essay on the work of Sehgal "Progressive Striptease", the modern art institutions, far from being places of storage for material objects have, in fact, become places of lived-experience, heightened moments, following the trend of the "progressive economical spiritualization, of the world", offering unique memorable moments as works of art."<sup>455</sup>

According to art theorist Rosalind Krauss, art museums had already turned towards the lived-experience with the "phenomenological ambitions of Minimalism."<sup>456</sup> She writes about the intense experiences that minimalist artists in the 1960s and 1970s created as they re-organised space, light and the movement of the visitors. These artists, as Sehgal will say many decades later about his own "constructed situations", were interested in reaching the visitor's senses, offering an experience outside or beyond rationality. Krauss identifies the contemporary subject/visitor as the fragmented, ever more detached or dispersed subject in need of experiencing art no longer as simply an isolated object on the wall but to:

experience it along with its interaction with the intensity of the space in which it exists; [the visitor's] need to have a cumulative, serial and crescendo towards the intensity of experience; [the visitor's] need to *have* more and at a larger scale.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Pine and Gilmore: 2011.

<sup>455</sup> Lütticken, 2012: 189.

<sup>456</sup> Krauss, 1990: 8.

<sup>457</sup> Krauss, 1990: 7, my emphasis.

Krauss's description of the visitor's sought out experience in the museums sounds like a combination of Dewey's "pervasive" experience appropriated in a Lockean way. She mentions James Turrell as an example of an artist who has grown in success in this environment and describes the experience he offers as "intensity - a free floating and impersonal feeling dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria," a feeling of unmasterability, a near to spiritual awesomeness, difficult to describe in words.<sup>458</sup>

This turn towards the experiential might explain the growing interest that took place from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s to return to the event of Performance art rather than depending on the documentation of performance.<sup>459</sup> As I have explained in the epilogue to this thesis, artists and curators alike were returning to seminal performances from the 1960s and 1970s, through re-enactments of the original live event. These events privileged the lived event of occurrence, the moment of encounter, over its textual or media representations. This trend or turn is apparent in other spaces and areas of culture and the arts, in the development of blockbuster exhibitions and biennials, Manifestas and hyper-industrialised art spaces for example.<sup>460</sup> These "have much more in common with other [hyper]industrialised areas of leisure - Disneyland say- than with the older, pre-industrial museum", devoted to the conservation of knowledge enclosed within objects.<sup>461</sup> They are dealing with and offering "simulacra experience" as a curiosity, for a "subject in search not of affect but of intensities."<sup>462</sup> The euphoria of the lived moment of experience that Krauss wrote about in the early 1990s, based on exclusivity and uniqueness, has somehow been normalised. Lütticken would write about Sehgal that his success is due to its "perfect compatibility with the temporalized and eventized museum."<sup>463</sup> Sehgal is, in another way to the minimalist artists, trying to produce and offer the immediacy of experience as a "utopian alternative" to that nightmare haunting alienation in everyday life. As Krauss explains about the minimalists, they tried to compensate and resist the "fallen world of mass culture – with its disembodied media images," industrialisation and commodification.<sup>464</sup>

Sehgal too, continues to present his work in the art space as "a gift to the visitor", as an antidote to the modes of relating to humans and to objects outside, and proposes a better

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<sup>458</sup> Krauss, 1990: 12-13.

<sup>459</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2014; and Bishop, 2019, on the performative turn.

<sup>460</sup> Foster, 2003.

<sup>461</sup> Krauss, 1990: 17.

<sup>462</sup> Krauss, 1990: 17.

<sup>463</sup> Lütticken, 2015: 91.

<sup>464</sup> Krauss, 1990: 10.

mode of living.<sup>465</sup> In her essay on the work of Sehgal, von Hantelmann claims that art as an entity contextualised and situated is still capable of connecting and generating social change, of producing “beautiful” relations” and “shaping values in the long term” despite it being a commodity.<sup>466</sup> Obrist has also insisted that the major aspect of Sehgal’s work is its “potential to change the world”, at a social level, but also at a spiritual level.<sup>467</sup> However, they seem to be missing the question: if the minimalist artist, the relational or Performance artist (the artist *tout court*?) are shaped, as Krauss suggests, by the same structural features that produced the nightmares in the first place, structures that are appropriative, how can they possibly offer a remedy?<sup>468</sup> Von Hantelmann (2010) does not see a problem with art’s thingness, as she discusses Theodor Adorno in her essay, but the thingness of the experience offered and *had* in Sehgal’s situations might well be worth exploring. Sehgal does not only *not* question the thingness of his situations, but profits and is constituted in that thingness. How then can one relate to that which has already been entrapped in a dual subject appropriator/object-had dynamics, made into a thing, exteriorised and ex-propriated, reified and given back to us as an object of art? What change might it produce?

Following Stiegler, in the previous chapter, through philosophy, photography and the construction of being’s engagement in the world as property, I have tried to explain how modes of being in the world and in relation have been first exteriorised, made into an exterior thing, and then captured for the construction of the Person, as property-holder-subject. The mistake of a purely celebratory approach to the thingness of art, in the work of Sehgal in particular and its potential to produce a new “culture of being” is that it fails to reflect back on it as a *pharmakon*, with its healing powers but also the risk of poisoning.<sup>469</sup> A closer attention to this matter might reveal the unavoidable tensions within Sehgal’s situations, the traumas and struggles passed on through the larger historical and collective process, traumas from which these experiences and encounters have appeared as things.

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<sup>465</sup> Paramana quotes Sehgal in her account of her experience as an interpreter in *These Associations* (2012) in London, July 2012 (Paramana, 2014: 87). The idea of a better ‘quality of life’ appears often in Sehgal’s interview. See brochure of the exhibition “Artists’ Favourites” 2004, at the ICA, London, and quoted in Lütticken, 2012.

<sup>466</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2014; von Hantelmann, 2010: 153.

<sup>467</sup> Obrist in a documentary produced by ARTE France and Camera Lucida Productions, Live art #6 produced by Heinz Peter Schwerfel, 2018. See also Obrist and Sekutowicz, 2021.

<sup>468</sup> Krauss, 1990: 10; Jameson, 1984.

<sup>469</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2014: unpaginated.



*The stripclub as an allegory: participation and the immersive*

Sehgal used the striptease in one of his early and most controversial works *Selling Out* (2002) in which a museum guard, male or female, dances and undresses as the visitors wander in.<sup>470</sup> He has also used the striptease in interviews to describe what he does in the “constructed situation” and the experience he delivers to the audience. According to Sehgal using the striptease “was a kind of provocative way of saying ‘here are products which don’t use any material resources but they still generate income and GDP.’”<sup>471</sup> This comparison can elucidate the dynamics at play in the art space. It is not so much the striptease as I approached it in the work of La Ribot, when I focused on the relation to the body already as a supplement, and the removal of the layers of signification. Rather than thinking of the lonely body of the stripper, I analyse the experience of encounter that takes place in the strip club, which for Sehgal “forms a perfect model for the future”, as a paradigm for what the art space offers and in particular the “constructed situations”.<sup>472</sup> The situation constructs a mode of relation with and between, on one side, the dancing labourer and, on the other, the gazing spectator; the labourer performing the object of desire, and the visitor, the subject, in erotic attraction, approaching the work in search of intimacy, uniqueness, and the fantasized union. All this in exchange for money.

The strip club situation offers a space of encounter to the visiting client, who can come in whenever and leave whenever, to consume a fantasised moment of intimate encounter with a hyper-sexualised body in movement in front of them. Stripper and academic, Jessica Berson describes the stripper’s dance as a “dance sexy” that entertains, seduces and engages individual audience members visually, verbally and sometimes physically, often to prepare for private dance (lapdance).<sup>473</sup> The dancer may or may not look the client in the eyes, dances for them and might even approach and talk to them. However, the striptease in itself is always a half-way, never quite reaching the sexual union with the other, that is always implied but never achieved. It is maintained in that moment of *not quite yet*, of never quite fulfilled intimacy, desire aroused but an engagement controlled and kept at a safe distance. In the strip club the codes of conduct are very clear: no photography, no touching is allowed. It is not prostitution though. In the strip club, the dancer only simulates “culturally constructed rhythms of lovemaking”, the dancer imagines and is “imagined to be representing actual sexual

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<sup>470</sup> An edition of the work is owned by Marc and Josée Gensollen, Marseille. See controversy on the gender prejudices, especially as addressed by artists Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly and the works they produced in response the video *Kiss Solo* (2012) and the performance *Reusable Parts/Endless Love* (2011). See Freeman, 2017.

<sup>471</sup> Quoted in Confino, 2012. See also Kremer, Hlavajova and Fletcher, 2004: 170.

<sup>472</sup> Lütticken, 2012: 169.

<sup>473</sup> Berson, 2016.

activity.”<sup>474</sup> Both parts remain on their own though, there is no one to make love to. The movements are exaggerated, the body-object keeps moving, whilst the subject aroused is normally still, at a certain distance, gazing and consuming the representation of fantasised intimacy. When asked why people go to a strip club, Berson quotes a client: “because the mixture of artifice and truth in a stripclub can be *intoxicating*: because I believe that some of the dancers really are my friends”.<sup>475</sup> One is paying for the dancer to show an interest in ‘me’, to move closer into an intimate encounter. But the dancer is performing not so much for ‘me’, who remains alone, but for the money, and the distinction between the dancer and ‘me’ is fixed. In the strip club there is never an equal participation in the act.

Unlike the lightening in the strip club, the spotlights are on in the white clean and quiet space of the gallery, there is no music in the background, but as in a strip club the visitors come and go as they please, approached, looked at and talked to by Sehgal’s interpreters in a kind and gentle way. The visitor might stay for a while, others might come back several times, caught in the slightly scopophilic relation to the thing gazed at, taking pleasure in the objectification of the interpreters performing and in the experience at hand.<sup>476</sup> Smell, sight and hearing are stimulated. Touch and taste are still not permitted. In the later, more interactive works such as *This Progress* (2006) or *These Associations* (2012), the spectator is approached by the performing interpreter to enter a conversation; intellect and language here are also activated. In *These Associations* (2012) the interpreters, whilst swirling around in the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall like flocks of birds in the sky, were asked to perform “eye contact” or “intimacy game”, between each other but also with the visitor. From time to time, they would leave their flock to engage in consented or unconsented conversations with the visitors, on topics like belonging, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or a feeling of being overwhelmed.<sup>477</sup> As in the strip club, though, the intimacy or the dialogue is never quite complete, but remains an artificial solitary encounter, “a situation between two people.”<sup>478</sup>

Sehgal (2023) claims that 50% of his pieces are produced by the visitor’s involvement, by an engagement, with interpreter and audience coming together in the same act. However the distinctions between the subject creator and proprietor who offers the experience, the interpreter who dances and the consumers or receivers of the experience are not in the least dissolved. On the contrary, producer and consumer are clearly distinguished and hold the

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<sup>474</sup> Berson, 2016: 7.

<sup>475</sup> From Emile Bauche quoted in Berson, 2016: 1, my emphasis.

<sup>476</sup> Dubrule (2019) mentions feeling uncomfortable during the performance of *Selling Out* (2002), with a “suspicious” guest coming back to the gallery several times and staying for too long.

<sup>477</sup> Stupart, 2017.

<sup>478</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 132.

event as a construction and a place of consumption. Von Hantelmann insists that the power of the situations occur in those very moments in which Sehgal generates “a fluid and active movement between player and visitor”, a fantasy of love making.<sup>479</sup> “This moment when the visitor can speak with my interpreter” - as equals - becomes for him, the centre piece.<sup>480</sup> The “constructed situation” seeks to convey a transformative sense of power to the visitor, “addresses the viewers as potent and responsible individuals (...) the visitor becomes the instance that initiates the taking-place of the work and whose decisions influence and form the course of the work.”<sup>481</sup> This rhetoric, though, is only perpetuating a fiction of equality and unity under which lies the transactional affair of the strip club, in which the artist needs the others and the other’s desire in order for the situations to continue to exist as a consumable work of art. His “constructed situations” promise an encounter or participation in the event but remain, not a representation of participation - as *Kiss* (2003) might have been— but a fantasised, always distanced experience of it, offered for consumption, to be experienced always as a thing desired. It is “offering the alienated subject a glimpse of reconciliation,” suggesting, as Lütticken writes, a world in sync with the subject’s deepest desires.<sup>482</sup> However, it is a desire that is never satisfied in the encounter, but feeds from it, as an object of consumption. In the strip club and in the art space, the visitor does not participate in the act, the love-making act or the act of coming together, but remains in the potential, short-circuited, interrupted, experience of it as a thing, at a distance.

### *The erotics of participation*

The question of participation in the art context has been given much attention.<sup>483</sup> What Bishop coined as Participatory art included socially-orientated artworks that, for political and aesthetic reasons, give the visitor a certain level of involvement in the production process. Works by Thomas Hirschhorn, Jeremy Deller, and more recent works by Tania Bruguera or the Tel Aviv collective Public Movement for instance, attempt to collapse the divide between the creator and the audience, and call for an emancipation of the audience, already assuming that the audience is in the negative position of a passive receiver, needing to be awakened by the artist. Some of Sehgal’s work, especially the more immersive ones, such as *This Progress* (2006) could well sit in this category. However, real participation, as in a move from potential

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<sup>479</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 169.

<sup>480</sup> Interview with Obrist quoted in Van den Brand, 2015.

<sup>481</sup> Von Hantelmann, 2010: 172.

<sup>482</sup> Lütticken, 2023: 24-30.

<sup>483</sup> Bishop, 2012a.

into act of engagement, in these projects is questionable.<sup>484</sup> Participation art sits too well in the neoliberal strategies promoted since the 1990s under the banner of 'social capital' for the development of 'civil society' for it to possibly make any transformative changes.<sup>485</sup> It is part of the neoliberal agenda, to promote a sense of individuality and shape society, the artist being a key agent who is to deliver these spaces of participation and modes of relating as social "depoliticised" goods. Without writing specifically about the contemporary art context Sinha (2005) describes the spaces and modes of relating that the neoliberal agenda promotes as: decentralised, participatory, and open spaces of fluid and flexible encounters and social relations. A series of attributes that could well describe Participatory art, or certain of Sehgal's "situations". Sinha adds that these initiatives promote a certain individualism which together with free choice, in the market, are key elements in what he calls the new social "normalcy".<sup>486</sup> In this context, as Karlhom says about the visitors in the Participatory art context, the only real participation that is possible, on behalf of the audience as much as the artist, is to either remain in or withdraw from the situation.<sup>487</sup> Once in, all is already constructed, they are immersed in a situation and need to accept that they have entered into an apparatus that exists and strengthens with their presence, their so-called 'participation'.

As art critic Katie Kitamura (2010) wrote after her experience of *This Progress* (2006):

everything about our behaviour (whether we are making the art work cry, or merely shouting at it) is already figured into the logic of the work. That is to say, we're taking part in the ideology of the work.<sup>488</sup>

The visitor is still a consumer of a product offered, rather than an equal participating. The possibility of achieving equal participation, and more so to enter into a dialogue or maybe even to destabilise, is at best a question. Rather than being a radical intervention in the hierarchies and structures that govern modern art and the artist, the "constructed situation" remains in control and closed, and clearly stratified. Everyone has different roles and not all have the same value. Sehgal remains the artist and proprietor, his assistants are the qualified experts, the collector preserves the integrity of the work, the interpreters possess it, the visitors receive it in the art space. There is no sign of any openness, no space for vulnerability, no risk of diluting or spilling one into another. So-called participation is to consent or not to the fact that one is being immersed into a situation. It is a take it or leave situation rather than a

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<sup>484</sup> Harvie, 2013.

<sup>485</sup> Sinha, 2005.

<sup>486</sup> Sinha, 2005: 164. See also Harvie, 2013.

<sup>487</sup> Karlhom, 2005: 123.

<sup>488</sup> Kitamura, 2010: unpaginated.

possibility of any fundamental change within it. It is about turning left or right in a maze already set, a maze of sounds and people, already constructed, which one has to navigate, resembling, I argue, the consumption of an immersive situation under someone else's control rather than actual participation.

In his essay "Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, agency and responsibility in immersive theatre", Alston draws on the enmeshment between the neoliberal ideology, the experience economy and the emergence of the immersive experiences in theatre and the performing arts since the 1990s especially in the UK.<sup>489</sup> He describes immersive theatre as an experience that "surrounds audiences within an aesthetic space in which they are frequently, but not always, free to move and/or participate."<sup>490</sup> He is quick to add that the objective of the performance is to offer a lived-experience to a spectator-subject. Alston is writing about companies such as Punchdrunk, but what he describes draws similarities with Sehgal's works, and with a certain experience offered in the large scale temporary exhibitions in which Sehgal's pieces are shown: art fairs, Documentas, Manifestas, art biennials and temporary museum exhibitions. These exhibitions are composed of a succession of multiple spaces and itineraries made available, for a "freed" viewer or browser, to create their own journey.<sup>491</sup> A succession of experiences that are "more chaotic than communicative", the visitor is told that they are "free" to move and make their own choices, to enter and traverse spaces, to move fluidly, the neoliberal ride.<sup>492</sup> However freeing and intense, that movement again is absolutely controlled. No movement will provoke a real change, rather it is trapped in a labyrinth set up by the artist and the producers. In the end it is not so much the freedom of movement that the audiences are looking for, but what Alston argues, is the "ideal experience". Both the immersive practices and Sehgal's situations are rooted in the heightened experience, which arouses the emotions of the audience, called not only to watch, but to move around, speak or even dance with the interpreters, or kick a ball in Sehgal's *This Entry* (2023) in an attempt to bridge the physical gap between the subject that is experiencing and the object experienced. In these constructed spaces and in exchange for their entrance ticket, the visitor receives emotions, an inner impression, always heightened because otherwise unnoticed within the framework of an invisible protocol.

*As I walk through the gallery rooms at the Stedelijk Museum, I could already  
hear the singing coming from somewhere and enchanted as one of the*

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<sup>489</sup> Alston, 2013

<sup>490</sup> Alston 2013: 128.

<sup>491</sup> Foster, 2009, on the asynchronicity of large-scale temporary exhibitions.

<sup>492</sup> Foster, 2006: 192.

*children following the pied piper of Hamelin, I found my way to the room in which This Variation (2012) was taking place. It was a very dark room, so I walked in with my arms stretched out trying to figure out where I was going and who I would find in the way. There are about eight to ten performers in the same dark room singing and swaying around around me with fabulous and funky acapella voices and humming rhythms that move from something resembling Gregorian chanting to gospel to disco, their voices and the sound of their movements in perfect synchronisation.<sup>493</sup> I had the feeling of being in a magic wood in the dark, with elves, spirits surrounding me, I could not see their faces, only hoped they wouldn't touch me. The singing stopped and an interpreter said: "I had a dream...". "I remember..." said another one and she continued to tell the story about a breastfeeding cushion that she liked to hug and snuggle into. The other performers giggled.<sup>494</sup>*

### *The lived-experience*

I have approached experience only intuitively until now, through the sociologists Schulze (2005), in Pine and Gilmore (2011) and in Dewey's writing as well as in chapter 1 in the writings of John Locke. I have approached it always as being's first bodily engagement in the world. Aware of its importance in the history of thought, especially from the empiricists such as Locke or Bacon, but also for G.W.F Hegel and the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, I do not expect to contribute to its philosophical understanding. I hope simply that in approaching the theme, as it were, sideways, the greater question of experience might open up my argument. An approach to etymologies and translation might be helpful to begin with.

The word 'experience' derives from both the Latin, *experiero* (which means to test, to try, to prove) and two Greek words: *peirô*, *pera* and *peraô* (respectively: crossing, passage, beyond; to pass through) and *pathos*, which comes from Greek *path-*, meaning not only experience but also to 'undergo, suffer'. Again, the Greek and the Latin etymologies offer two slightly different understandings and relations this time with experience as a mode of being in

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<sup>493</sup> The music is composed by the musician Ari Benjamin Meyers.

<sup>494</sup> Personal account of the work at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, 2 March 2019.

the world. Both entail a level of effort, and even suffering, the Latin concepts seem more competitive and the Greek depict it as a passage - related maybe to the *metaxu*. In English there is only one word for 'experience' but the German language conveys a dual sense to the word: on the one hand, experience as *Erfahrung*, which connotes trial and danger and a sense of *pathos*, of sacrifice; and on the other hand *Erlebnis*, which connotes an experience as "lived" – the ordering of sense data through concepts present to consciousness."<sup>495</sup> *Erfahrung* is connected to wisdom, whilst the term *Erlebnis* is related to an "I experiencing", to sensations in the first Person. Alston (2016) uses the word *Erlebnis* as he writes about the lived-experience, as does Schwartz and I suspect von Hantelmann does too, as seen above. It is *Erlebnis* that seems to have become the central pursuit and attraction for spectators, or social individuals now called participants, who no longer contemplate or admire the performance or stage design but value the spectacle in as much as it leaves an inner impression upon them as first Persons experiencing.<sup>496</sup>

In one of his late works, Heidegger distinguishes the existential experience of being (*Erfahrung*) from the lived-experience *had* by the subject (*Erlebnis*) which he associates with machination, related to *technē*, a making towards an end.<sup>497</sup> The end or finality of the lived-experience is, in Heidegger's words, "oneself".<sup>498</sup> *Erlebnis* puts "oneself as the relational center" (...) and is the object of "what humans can bring to themselves and before themselves".<sup>499</sup> *Erlebnis* is therefore the experience made and *had* in the first Person, sensorially heightened, noticed and captured, equally close to us and at the same time always foreign. A very different thinker, Benjamin is also interested, in the early 1930s, in the question of experience which becomes crucial to his own attempt to collapse the distinction between a subject and object, the gaze and the gazed, which recognises an experience as other and thus the possibility of grasping an experience.<sup>500</sup> Experience as wisdom (*Erfahrung*) was becoming lost, Benjamin argues, in the rapid advances of technology and in monstrosities and destruction suffered during the Great War of 1914-1918. In "The Storyteller" written in 1936, he presents experience (*Erfahrung*) in a certain relation to darkness, forgetfulness and death. *Erfahrung*, according to Benjamin, has to "sink" into life, plunge to the depths, darkness, disappear in a way or move out of sight, only then to emerge again, almost by accident, like a pearl that emerges from the bottom of the ocean. This image of the pearl was evoked by Arendt to speak of her friend Benjamin's writings and indeed relating those with this notion of

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<sup>495</sup> Daley, 2007: 26.

<sup>496</sup> Alston, 2016.

<sup>497</sup> See chapter on "The Resonating" in Heidegger, 2012: 85-129.

<sup>498</sup> Heidegger, 2012: 102.

<sup>499</sup> Heidegger, 2012: 102.

<sup>500</sup> "Experience and Poverty" in Benjamin, 1999: 731-36; "The Storyteller. Reflections on the work of Nikolai Leskov" in Benjamin, 2007: 83-109; see also Caygill, 2008.

experience and the idea of wisdom.<sup>501</sup> Radically different to *Erfahrung* is the lived-experience (*Erlebnis*) which corresponds to information, closer to calculated data, and lies in “omnipresence and vividness”, always accessible, at hand, for appropriation and usage.<sup>502</sup>

Sehgal’s encounter delivered throughout the opening hours of the day and repeated over several weeks in the exhibitions might well be close to *Erlebnis*: omnipresent and accessible, intense and had, a lived-experience which concerns being as a subject who feels. According to Alston (2016), the “central characteristic of immersive theatre, might then be defined as that which affects audiences and impresses on an audience’s thought, behaviour, and feeling”, *Erlebnis* essentially produced, manufactured, as *poiēsis* and as a good, and offered FOR SALE.<sup>503</sup> Alston goes on to suggest that what is sold to the visitor is the possibility of acquiring an idealised experience, almost as an uber-experience, that would truly and deeply affect the first person’s thought, behaviour and feelings. This would make us all collectors of experiences, as the Person was for Locke. The experience manipulated is always just a representation of an experience and, as Alston quotes Jill Bennett, should be understood “as *transactive* rather than *communicative*. It often touches us, but it does not necessarily communicate”.<sup>504</sup> That idealised experience is the “telos, or aesthetic goal of participatory activity, and this telos, because of its idealised form, is chased but never secured” a desire of the subject always frustrated.<sup>505</sup> Why frustrated? Because it is swallowed as object-experience, object already ex-propriated, made into thing, consumed and as it is consumed, fails to satiate the desire for more experiences to be *had*.

#### *Last notes on manufactured experiences ready for consumption*

In their study on the performative self and transindividuation, Vujanović and Cvejić (2023) note the use of the sensations and affects, of the intense lived-experiences as *auto-poiēsis*, to build the – contemporary – subject. The somatic and affectionate approach encouraged in museums and produced by artists is part of a strategy to reappropriate a modern and romantic notion of self. The two authors see in this individual self both the legacy of the modern possessive individual coming from Locke and Thomas Hobbes and the romantic obsession with feelings and the authenticity of the human being.<sup>506</sup> They quote Tristan Garcia

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<sup>501</sup> Arendt, 2007: 50-51.

<sup>502</sup> Benjamin, 2007: 93.

<sup>503</sup> Alston, 2016: 6.

<sup>504</sup> Alston, 2016: 22, original emphasis.

<sup>505</sup> Alston, 2016: 7.

<sup>506</sup> Vujanović and Cvejić, 2023: 36-37.



in “*La vie intense*” (2016) – translated as ‘intense life’ – who refers to intensity as an electric current whose charge changes over time.<sup>507</sup> The contemporary subject seems to be living under the intensive experiences, a succession and accumulation of shocks or shots: Electroshocks, perhaps, as those suffered at La Salpêtrière – as described in the first chapter – under modern technologies of interruption and capture. However this time the shocks are presented as positive experiences which one can APPROPRIATE as one’s own: “Experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual or even spiritual level”.<sup>508</sup> The irrational or magical experience is exclusive and can belong only to the individual subject. “To be intensely what one is” in experience reinforces the exclusivity and distinction of the subject in what differentiates it from the others. Inherently personal, experiences lived belong to the subject, and hence constantly produce the ‘intensive’ subject who *has* them and at the same time contributes to a hyper-subjectivity, infinitely expanded because unlimited. This is a narrative that can be read in the marketing as much as it is read in aesthetic practices taking place in the museum space; both marketing and artistic strategies understanding and producing the same “self”, consumer, visitor, us, and offering and feeding a desire for unique memorable and transformational moments as works of art. The risk of these intense experiences, beyond reason, is that they continue to affirm and reinforce the individualistic subject and suffocate reflection only possible by a distance, a separation, an understanding of the self as being empty, in a lack. Instead, the subject is always and constantly fed, filling the gap, by consuming things, as fetishised objects.

The spectre of Locke has not been overcome, and the Person continues to need things to be *had* in order to hold. As seen in the previous chapter, the subject is constituted in relation to that which it *has*, the experience objectified and *had*. We have not escaped the nightmare of the Locke-d Person, quite the opposite, the nightmare has been normalised. Not only have land, bodies and language been APPROPRIATED, but the intangible experience is also now available for enclosure and capture. Tangible objects, though, are considered to be ‘dead stuff’, feelings and emotions on the other hand appear to be alive, they are exciting, and their impression is ‘immediate’, as the experience of intimacy in the strip club. It is not the dead stuff that is interesting any more, but rather these lived-experiences and these are new objects to be APPROPRIATED as *mine*. Cabinets of curiosities are replaced by cabinets of experiences. In constructing encounters, gestures and experiences into a discretised work of art by an artist, the relationship with encounters, gestures and experiences has become a

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<sup>507</sup> Vujanović and Cvejić, 2023: 126.

<sup>508</sup> Vujanović and Cvejić, 2023: 119.

quantitative and calculated one, one that extracts, for one's own survival or hyper-subjectivity. Sehgal has said he does not want to extract from the environment nor add anything to the perverse system of material goods, which has altered the earth's ecosystem. He might not have extracted from the natural environment, but he discreticises and calculates, that is, he blocks that which is closer to us, our first relation to the world through our bodily gestures and experiences of the world: that which engages being in the world, speaking, playing, dancing as well as singing. Whatever is part of being's opening to the world in gesture and language, now "he simply calls *mine*."<sup>509</sup>

In *These Associations* (2012) Sehgal makes his interpreters quote Heidegger's *Memorial Address* delivered in 1955, so it might be worth turning to that text in particular.<sup>510</sup> In his address, the German philosopher urges a return to the earth, a new relation to "ground" as a remedy against the calculation of all things. Calculative thinking, that set the conditions for the emergence of property inherited from Roman law, establishes a relationality which orders towards an end, a thinking and doing that is interested and linked to the constitution and survival of subjectivity, a calculative 'I' who is constituted in the accumulation of lived-experience (*Erlebnis*). By removing the tangible matter, calculation has not waned in any way, and neither will ex-propriation, as calculation of things sets the conditions for ex-propriation, makes the discreticised thing available. Calculation has extended beyond the sciences and accounting, and extended into other/many areas of life, the areas of the spirit. We are not in a post-industrial epoch, although it might seem so, with the manufacturing and the physical object losing value. Rather, as mentioned already, we are, since the beginning of the 1990s, in a hyper-industrial epoch, according to Stiegler, a time of the industrialisation and the potential ex-propriation of all things. This has produced what Stiegler calls "symbolic misery".<sup>511</sup> He defines industrialisation as the calculation of all, and a process which has occupied new spaces of intervention, and has colonised the spirits - those things that cannot be grasped. All things are being industrialised, more areas of human encounters (arts and education) are being captured by apparatuses of exploitation, in a society that continues to be modern, "a society where *calculation* has come to rule through the project of *mathesis universalis* and the domination of nature by technics".<sup>512</sup> Society has left being ex-propriated. Having lost our "*savoir faire*", our know-how lost to the machine, we have also lost our "*savoir vivre*", a way of living and relating, a mode of moving and behaving, and in an attempt to

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<sup>509</sup> William James quoted in Best, 2004: 38.

<sup>510</sup> Heidegger, 1966: 55.

<sup>511</sup> See chapter "Allegory of the Anthill" in Stiegler, 2014: 45-80.

<sup>512</sup> Stiegler, 2014: 47, original emphasis.

apprehend these modes of participating again, we consume them as experiences one can *have*.

*To conclude: a conversation with Annlee (2011)*

I finish this chapter with Annlee, a character in one of Sehgal's "constructed situations". I consider her as a sign and use her as I used the little Mermaid in the first chapter, as a "conceptual *persona*" to help me wrap up the main thoughts I have attempted to convey so far and open again some thoughts that will be activated subsequently in the follow chapter.<sup>513</sup> Annlee is a fictional young girl first conceived and drawn by KWorks, a Japanese company which produces ready-made characters for animation. In 1999, her right of use or copyright was acquired by French artists Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe. They then invited several artists to manipulate the character for artistic purposes. Annlee circulated for a couple of years, and an exhibition of the different works and iterations took place in Kunsthalle Zurich in Switzerland in 2002.<sup>514</sup> In 2003, Parreno and Huyghe decided to close the project by granting the copyrights "back" to Annlee. A lawyer in New York drew up an official contract.<sup>515</sup> This other artistic/legal act was supposed to "liberate" the character from the realms of representations and from the manipulation of the artists so she could never be exploited again. But what emancipation is possible, what freedom can those same apparatuses that were used to produce her in captivity in the first place, offer to her now? What modes of relationality can they open within law, negotiations and calculations? The copyright agreement was settled whilst at the same time, the entire Annlee project, which included all of the artists' contributions, was acquired by the Van Abbemuseum.

Annlee was buried and the project was buried too in the collection, until Sehgal decided to reincarnate her. Like a contemporary Geppetto, he brought the puppet to life in a young girl at the Manchester Art Gallery in 2011 as part of the "11 Rooms" exhibition curated by Obrist and Klaus Biesenbach.<sup>516</sup> The "situation" was then made available FOR SALE at Marian Goodman's booth during the New York edition of Frieze Art Fair in 2013. During the "constructed situation", the young girl is present in the space and speaks to the audience as

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<sup>513</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari developed the philosophical device of the "conceptual persona" in "What is Philosophy?", 1994: 76-77.

<sup>514</sup> Which included all the artists associated to the project: Henri Barande, Francois Curlet, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Pierre Joseph, M/M Paris, Melik Ohanian, Philippe Parreno, Richard Phillips, Joe Scanlan, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Anna-Léna Vaney.

<sup>515</sup> Huyghe and Parreno, 2003.

<sup>516</sup> I make reference to Geppetto from the children's fairytale by Carlo Collodi, "The Adventures of Pinocchio", 1883.

they come in and spend time with her. Her movements and speech are slow, slightly mechanical, as she addresses the visitors.<sup>517</sup> She speaks about Sehgal being too busy, quotes Arendt and asks questions: “Would you rather be too busy or not busy enough?” waits for answers and asks another question “What is the difference between a sign and melancholia?” She waits for answers. After a while she says “okay, take care” and slowly leaves the space.

Most of the people encountering Annlee, might not know her origins and her past, but they will notice something melancholic, something removed in her. Lütticken experienced the piece as “strangely touching: seeing this computer-generated being with its alien eyes is like watching a slave speaking about life as someone’s property—Ann Lee is a virtual serf.”<sup>518</sup> Her presence is somewhat haunting, something in her is still chained. She seems trapped between life and death, between the lived and the mediated experience. Between freedom and the laws of property, growing up or remaining like a little child still chained to the *pater* “who seems very busy”. No longer in the frame of a screen, of the tertiary mnemotechnology, brought to the world of the living, she has also escaped, or so she thinks, the legal agreement according to which she was dead forever, through a “loophole”, as Sehgal’s assistant Raza was proud to declare.<sup>519</sup> However, she is still entangled within the legal and the technological apparatuses which brought her into existence as a thing, entangled within the property-person relation engendered by the contract and which made her available FOR SALE as intellectual property in 1999 and later as a Live art work at Frieze Art Fair in 2013. In what seems to be a promise of freedom and life, she is still marked by the fact that she came into existence already as a thing, already in-formed, always defined in relation to technology and to property, existing only in relation to a creator-owner. She exists as a body ex-propriated and APPROPRIATED by others. Alienated, uprooted, she errs, expecting to be reunited, in a desire for communion (with Sehgal) and communication (with the audience as she addresses it).

As one looks carefully and for a while as she performs in the space and during the opening hours of the exhibition, one notices the spectre of industrialisation and the modern machine creeping into that space of encounter, of being together. Unlike us, the visitors who wander in and out, she will be staying there, repeating the same gestures, the same words again and again.<sup>520</sup> If one forgets that the bodies interpreting and repeating are living beings, one might compare her work to the automated and constant image or music played in loop on

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<sup>517</sup> Hilderbrant, 2018.

<sup>518</sup> Lütticken, 2002: 109.

<sup>519</sup> By Thierry Somers, undated, “A year at the Stedelijk 8/12: Ann Lee: The Casting of a Manga character.” <https://200-percent.com/tino-sehgal-2/>

<sup>520</sup> Dubrule says she performed *Selling Out* (2002) 936 times during the exhibition at the Hammer Museum, Dubrule, 2019.

a compact disc or a DVD.<sup>521</sup> There is no space left in between to breathe. Her gestures are instructions from someone else, she has lost or never had a “*savoir faire*”, a know-how. Is she the paradigm of our contemporary existence, or is she what we all fear to become in the hyper-industrialised society? Like the factory workers on Taylor’s conveyor belt, she needs to keep up production for the wider number of people to access the highly desired product, that piece of experience. Repeatability is a condition of theatre, as well as it is of language, but there is something that numbs the event of the “constructed situation” as it is repeated and delivered under strictly controlled regimes.

The girl asks questions, maybe for help from a “grown-up” audience, to put into words her doubts, to make sense of her existence. But she doesn’t seem to hear the visitors, whose hopeless attempts to speak or to assist her in finding meanings in language changes nothing. It might be that she doesn’t quite know what she is saying, repeating a script many times rehearsed and performed. Maybe there is simply no answer to her questions, but only an eternal separation or misunderstanding. Her words may just be a “slip of the tongue” in the Freudian sense, awaiting to be interpreted, or a provocation, in any case something that might reveal whatever is lying underneath - a collective unconscious. Annlee appears to be a ghostly sign in the somewhat normalised space of the art gallery, a “transgenerational haunting”, carrying and revealing a collective trauma, shocks, short-circuits, passed on and transmitted across several generations until it made the work of art, and the “constructed situation” into art property.<sup>522</sup> In the very fact that she exists as art work, she carries in and with her the trauma of the Little Mermaid, brought into existence in a body, as something distinguished and in-formed, the child coming into existence in and through technology; the trauma of the young girl at La Salpêtrière, a young Jane Avril perhaps, her gestures stolen. The young Annlee carries in her the experience of coming into the world as a traumatic collective amputation.

“What is the difference between a sign and melancholia?” she asks, repeatedly.

A response to the question could be a thesis in itself, but I close the chapter by remaining a little longer with her question, which I sense points towards the malaise that haunts her, and Western society. The semiotic, or the sign, derives from the Greek *sēma* and is a distinctive mark, an exteriorised artifice, trace, index, figuration, Annlee. The image as a form and inscription then is the sign, which has taken the space of separations, and awaits its

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<sup>521</sup> Bishop, 2019.

<sup>522</sup> “Transgenerational haunting” is a notion developed by psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok, 1994: 166-169. I will analyse this notion in more detail in chapter 3.

signification: an artwork taking the place of an emptiness. As it takes the space of the separation between beings, between beings and the world, the sign, Annlee, art, activates the potential of the imagination and meaning. When the external sign triggers the work of the imagination and becomes meaning, it becomes a symbol, assimilated in language. Thought and philosophy emerge.<sup>523</sup> When the sign remains suspended in the potential, never completely assimilated, this is what is called melancholy, an emptiness that makes its place in being when something has been torn away from it, separated, stolen, amputated. Not assumed in language or in the symbolic, because it has been stolen, the sign does not manage to fill up the hole which haunts being constantly without finding a meaning. According to Julia Kristeva, melancholia becomes the symptom of “*asymbolia*” which is the loss of the power to understand signs, or the inability to move from the image to the symbolic.<sup>524</sup> Maybe that is why Annlee is still there, over and over again asking the same questions, unable to assimilate, unable to find answers or meaning, because there was no one there able to ful-fill her empty mouth. To cope with loss, of gestures, experiences, modes of relating to the world made into property, the melancholic being thirsts for objects to cover the wound. This is when philosophy and thought emerge, but also the thing as fetish can emerge at that same moment and take the space of the hole, thought. The “work of art as fetish emerges when the activating sorrow [the process of symbolisation] has been repudiated” or has been ex-propriated.<sup>525</sup> On this note on fetishisation and Annlee’s melancholia, I complete my study of Sehgal, and on another note from Kristeva on repudiation, I move to Nóbrega, and their actions as precisely a mode of rejecting/ejecting thingness.

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<sup>523</sup> Kristeva, 1998: 15; Kristeva, 1989: 6.

<sup>524</sup> Kristeva, 1989: 9.

<sup>525</sup> Kristeva, 1989: 9.

## Chapter 3 –

### Ejections and disappearance in the actions of Nóbrega

Until now I have been looking at the appearance of the thing and its capture as object for the construction of Live art and its circulation in the art world. When gesture, when dance has been captured in an exterior form, ex-propriated, and preserved within the structures and technologies of law and property, when bodily gestures have become object-being, works of art, perpetuating a logic of ownership and instrumentality, how is it possible to open, imagine, another form of relating outside consumption?

In this chapter, I look at Luísa Nóbrega's work between 2008 and 2018 and approach their actions as an attempted a-version of the notion of artist and its work of art. Nóbrega's excessive actions might carry a certain reminiscence of early performances from the 1970s, however the context in the early 2000s is different. In the 1970s, Performance art was still located at the fringes of the institutional establishment, although Brazilian artist Lydia Clark, in 1969, could already prefigure the changes that could easily take place:

At the very moment when the artist *digests the object*, he is digested by society which has already found him a title and a bureaucratic function: he will be the future engineer of leisure, an activity that has no effect whatsoever on the equilibrium of social structures.<sup>526</sup>

Could we possibly read these words again to understand what has happened as Live art has already been fully incorporated, taken-in, as object-like events within collections? In 2008, as mentioned previously, works of Live art had already been fully integrated within the museum: MoMA had just acquired its first Sehgal, *Kiss* (2003); Tate already had a track record

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<sup>526</sup> Quoted in Rolnik, 2007: unpaginated, my emphasis.

and had acquired Sehgal's, *This is Propaganda* (2002), Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin Whispers 5* (2008), Roman Ondak's *Feeling in Good Times* (2003); FRAC Lorraine in France had acquired Dora Garcia's *Proxy/coma* (2001) and Esther Ferrer's *Intime et Personnel* (1967). In this landscape, Nóbrega sought out in a clumsy yet stubborn way – because there is no other way to go about relationality *properly* – to undo the work of art as they undid the artist. It was a political and existential strategy, unable however to escape the self, but rather falling back onto the self and onto and into the body. I read their actions as 'cracks', openings that came from further ruptures in the holes left open.<sup>527</sup>

This chapter hence acts as a rejection, to that which has been analysed in this thesis until now, and presents itself as a way of 'un-doing' what Live art and its artists have achieved as they have gained the status of object of visual art and subject of property and of finding another mode of a relating. More than just playing with a refusal to take-in, Nóbrega ejected. More than from an apathy but in disgust, Nóbrega expelled and dissociated the self both from the disgusting object as much as from the distinguished subject, throwing up both as a deluge.<sup>528</sup> Their actions threw out any desire - imposed - of interiorisation of the object- of property and the Person constituted through it, leaving instead an empty space behind. Rather than constructing anything, resisting any transformation into form, Nóbrega acted from holes left open and empty as if the thing that had come to fill in the hole, had been torn away. They "preferred not to" and acted from a place left empty.

In this chapter, I continue to write about and in the works as an *ekphrasis*. The reader should not expect a detailed description or interpretation of Luísa Nóbrega's actions, but an approach that is closer to a waiting, a waiting for something to emerge as one is writing, expecting nothing, but "a desire without an object."<sup>529</sup> Unlike the approach of an explorer or scientist, I do not attempt to grasp Nóbrega, or 'invent' anything – in reference to La Salpêtrière – but will try to listen to the voices and respond to their actions loaded with my own obsessions and ghosts: de-creation, poverty, nothingness, empty mouths, buried hands, decapitation. In this endeavour I continue to juxtapose, bringing into dialogue, several other voices to reflect on the question of bodily gesture and property and imagine its un-making. The main authors, entangled voices, that inhabit this chapter together with Nóbrega are Weil and Fred Moten. Both Nóbrega and Weil, white women, one Brazilian the other French Jewish, had a clumsy yet stubborn relation to their physical being and creation. Both come together in that refusal

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<sup>527</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 28 November 2020.

<sup>528</sup> Ahmed, 2014.

<sup>529</sup> Weil, 2002: 22.



to accept the subjective power taking over (existence, and art), an aversion to a Person's – artist's – exclusive property and exercise of power and an aversion to others consumption and submission to both. I try to make sense of their determination to withdraw and I pay attention to the means they both struggled with and stumbled over but that in the end never left them (or us), which are the bodily and language.

Black American theorist and poet, Moten appear in what he has in common with Weil and in what I sense joins them both to the actions of Nóbrega: “*consent not to be*”<sup>530</sup> words that Moten (2017) translates from Edouard Glissant's “Poetics of Relation” first published in 1990, which in French read: “*consent à n'être plus un seul*”.<sup>531</sup> Weil used very similar words in her New York diaries from 1942: “to consent not to be in order that they may be” in French “*consentir à ne pas être afin qu'ils soient*”.<sup>532</sup> Moten finishes his sentence with to “consent not to be a *single being*” whilst Weil finished hers by giving space to the others, so that “they may be”. Both foreground a move of the self towards no-thingness and an opening to the other than ‘I’, but both come, move and cry from different places. Hortense J. Spillers and Marlene NourbeSe Philip appear in this chapter as other tongues, and speak in and from blackness, on kinship and the mother. Kristeva leads back to the *khōra*: voices to think about the possibility of another, an ‘ante-relation’ (Moten) to the event of occurrence of art; otherness that takes place in a radical consent not to ‘have’ that which has constituted the Person-subject; a consent to displace the ‘I’s formative power and its objectification and ownership, technologies, as I have been analysing throughout the thesis, which lie at the foundations of the capture of gesture and of experience as things.

In the first part of this chapter, I start by looking at the severing of holes in the constituent body, as a rejection of the very notion of body and of anything that can add more to being. I introduce the notion of hunger, or fasting, as an intentional rejection to interiorise. With Weil and Kafka's “hunger artist”, I examine Nóbrega's rejection to consume, to feed, as the only possible way they had of relating to body and to things as objects.<sup>533</sup> I follow this analysis, by punning with the word head, *capita*, and what it might mean to cut the artist's head off. Nóbrega metaphorically self-inflicted other amputations, that of the hand and then the eyes, leaving holes rather than organs. I attempt to explain these as a negation of all possibility of work-*œuvre*; a process of *mute*-ilating into another mode of relating, in poverty and in darkness – two modes of relating that I explore through Moten. The second part of the chapter

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<sup>530</sup> From Moten's trilogy “Consent not to be a single being” (2017-2018) which includes Moten, 2017.

<sup>531</sup> Glissant, 1990.

<sup>532</sup> My own translation from the original French edition: see Weil, 1970: 213; Weil, 1950: 170.

<sup>533</sup> Kafka, 2007.

continues with the amputations of organs, this time the tongue and the voice given-up. I envision their work as a scream that came out of holes - wounds - inflicted by ex-propriation and left radically open to another language or to the polyphony of others' languages, especially as I approach I.'s ventriloquist endeavour. Exhaustion is presented as the drying up of the metaphysical subject and of its organs, worn out to the limits of the body. I. *mute*-ilated, as in silenced, whatever was left that might have produced an object or constructed the body into subject. I finish the chapter with some notes on the other voices and languages that populated the space that remained empty.

*Notes on my approach to a disappearing artist.*

As other authors grew obsessed with the rebellious artist Vincent Van Gogh's self-mutilation and the hole left open by his cut out ear, and others remain for ever haunted by the spectre of decapitation, so I have become obsessed and haunted by Nóbrega and their wounded body, ever since I met I. at the Delfina Foundation in 2016.<sup>534</sup> As they tried to escape from sight, I found myself writing in the threshold of Luísa and the I.'s loss, forcing them to stay in existence in my writing at least for a bit longer, as a pebble in my

mouth.

With Tom's permission,<sup>535</sup> I carefully write about and with I., as if carefully licking the wounds<sup>536</sup> that they left open, in response to their screams. If I may play with the word, licking in Spanish is translated as *lamer*, which is also to kiss and to caress. It holds the same etymology as the word *lamina*, which on the contrary means a blade, that cuts, like the blades of the scissors in chapter 1 - a word, *lâmina*, which appears again in this chapter linked to an action of Nóbrega and to the tongue. Licking, kissing, and the risk of getting cut come together

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<sup>534</sup> Bataille explored Van Gogh as the sacrificial artist (Irwin, 2002); Artaud saw in the hole in Van Gogh's head the force of the "earth" and the opening of his wounded flesh crying out of nothingness (Rowell: 1996). I recall also here a character dear to me, the character of Mr Dick in Dickens' novel "David Copperfield", published between 1849 and 1850, a character haunted by the decapitation of Charles I and lingering throughout the whole novel in the impossibility of ever finishing his memoirs (Dickens, 1997).

<sup>535</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 27 April 2021: "I give you my full permission to take care of I.'s archive".

<sup>536</sup> I borrow this verb from Katherina Ludwig (2023) and from Stiegler's notion of thinking in French *penser* and *panser*, as a way of healing wounds.

in one word, in one act. However, I will slowly let go of I. and the spaces that appear scattered in the text are a simple testimony to that loss. Those spaces act as pebbles in the mouth, in language, that create holes, but that I seek to keep in there, licking them and playing with the tongue, in the hope of speaking better, but “without power”, to use French author Maurice Blanchot’s words.<sup>537</sup> And, maybe, finding a better language that might speak of, with or through something so foreign.<sup>538</sup>

Their disappearance as Luísa into I. and then into Tom was not a death, but another crack or ‘rupture’ that I approach, tentatively and humbly as a *mute-ation*, or *mute-ilation*, or *mute-ing*, that brings disempowerment, non-language and the wounds into play, to open or allow another relation to take place; to open radically to the “other-than-I” as an act of de-creation, of trying to relate otherwise.<sup>539</sup> I play with the prefix and the word *mute* and *mute-ilation* to speak about the holes that Luísa and then I. metaphorically inflicted on their body during that decade, opening the body to *mi* or *mu*. *Mi*, Hebrew version of the Greek *mu*, is a root word that gives name and origin to words such as mysticism, mystery, *muteness*, mouth, music but also to mud, midst, and mother: all insinuating liquidity, the ungraspable, something outside logic or reason from which some-thing, or rather no-thing as a thing outside thingness can emerge, as in a matrix.<sup>540</sup> It is another creation, another move into *ek-sistence* that might remain in the opening and safe place of the mouth, a mystery that cannot be grasped because there is no-thing at hand to get hold of. Moten adds other possible translations to the utterance *mu* “mu—which has been variously translated from the Japanese translation of the Chinese *wu* as no, not, nought, nonbeing, emptiness, nothingness, nothing, no thing”.<sup>541</sup> All these etymologies are working outside or before the traumatic development of property and Personhood, related to a patriarchal business. And so, rather than a passage into form or a construction of some thing, I search in and through the *mu*-ting actions of Nóbrega, a scream from the mouth, the nothing, towards a *m*-othering. I use the *m*- as another emergence or exteriorisation that is not towards a thing; not APPROPRIATION but as a move back into no-thing, or back into a withdrawal, a *mute-ilation*. It is a *m*-othering not restricted to the female, but as a function. A function that could well be regained in the notion of the *fadar* as seen in Benveniste (1973), regained in the *male*’s *maternal* function within – to paraphrase Spillers. A function which is both opening and feeding, as care, in Stiegler’s reading of *penser* as thinking

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<sup>537</sup> See Fynsk, 1996.

<sup>538</sup> Cha, 2017: 68.

<sup>539</sup> Esposito, 2012; Cha, 2017.

<sup>540</sup> On *mi* and *ma* terminology in Souzenelle, 1984: 21. I relate the word *matrix* to Kristeva’s understanding of *khōra*, also related to the ‘mother’ that I investigate at the end of this chapter (Kristeva, 1984).

<sup>541</sup> Moten 2013: 15.

and healing or at-tending and licking wounds.<sup>542</sup> *M*-othering is not to invent as it does not take, but rather carries the *memories* and is already inhabited by others: *m*-othering tries to understand an opening from the hole of the mouth, a *m*-ovement rather than an arrangement; a *m*-ovement from a common “empty mouth”, metaphorical and physical, into another or other worlds.

*The name. Half a name. Past. Half passed. Forgotten word leaving out a word. Letter. Letter by letter to the letter.*<sup>543</sup>

Until now I have been using Luísa’s proper name together with the surname Nóbrega, but I have done this until now to introduce Nóbrega to the reader, to help the reader comprehend and facilitate further research into Nóbrega’s work. However, following their own intention to have the proper name reduced to “the infinitely small in the order of nothingness”<sup>544</sup> I continue from here on to use only the initial *l*. the letter *L* made headless and miniaturised as a lower capitalised *l*. I use the third Person plural or neutral with the pronouns *they*/*theirs* when writing about this phase. They produced the dissection of their personality as an ‘*unselfing*’.<sup>545</sup> They negated the proper name given to them, and decided to hang on to one letter only, letting the rest fall into the anonymous collective or the neuter. They became *they*, and opened the possibility of a non-first-Person or subject. I am aware of the history of the third Person, explored by the linguist Benveniste and by Blanchot, in notions of evasion and dis-figuring in Emmanuel Levinas and the queerness of its use as a gender neutral pronoun.<sup>546</sup> As I respond here to APPROPRIATION of the event, and continue to think through other concepts such as undoing and poverty I might only be able to glance into the much wider analysis of how these spaces intersect: the search for the *neuter* and the third Person in literature or in the artistic field and its transposition onto the physicality of bodies. I will use the third Person plural, following a conversation with Tom, and to make manifest an exigency – or maybe a self-enforcement – not to be *one*, an act of obedience to let in the other, or others, than ‘*i*’. I take it also as an intentional dispossession, a mode of joining the non-Persons, the nameless, all those outside the constructs of the legal Person-owner and in control of their originality. As if they had wounded their legal and public first Person, they placed themselves on the margins of the ‘*i/you*’ relationship, outside a face-to-face recognition and grammar: “the name ‘*luisa*’

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<sup>542</sup> Spillers, 1987: 80; Ross and Stiegler, 2018.

<sup>543</sup> Hak Yung Cha, 2022: 160.

<sup>544</sup> Weil, 2002: 13.

<sup>545</sup> Philosopher Iris Murdoch’s own translation of the notion of ‘decreation’, in Murdoch, 1998: 337-361.

<sup>546</sup> Esposito, 2012.

was already a ghost”.<sup>547</sup> It is from that place that they cried out. They soon abandoned I. completely and withdrew from I. as a Person and artist. I will strip Luísa from the proper name and will address them as I.

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<sup>547</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 27 November 2020.

## Chapter 3 - Part 1 -

### Being a being because I have a body?<sup>548</sup>

In the early 2000s, I. trained in theatre at the Teatro Escola Celia Helena (Celia Helena's Theatre School) and graduated in Philosophy at the University of Sao Paulo.<sup>549</sup> White Brazilian, they were marked by the history of a country, just stepping out of two decades of dictatorship, and still carrying the stigmas of three hundred years of Portuguese-Christian colonialism and three hundred and fifty years of transatlantic slave trade. As Elliot C. Mason (2020) puts it, the tensions of whiteness and blackness, of white occupation and of the white world-forming Man versus the unmappable slave, are lived and suffered in Brazilian collective thought and culture.<sup>550</sup> Although their work did not make a direct reference to those ghosts, as they pushed the body and language to their limits, I see their actions as being haunted and dealing with the "transgenerational" spectres of the Person and its property, those that produced the traumatic shocks, that expropriated and displaced and left being without possible shelter, homeless, both existentially and physically as I. erred in their body, in their mouth, an alien in the world. I. did not have a permanent residence or place to live, they travelled light and alone, refusing a home that they might consider their own, and instead wandering from art residency to art residency and from friend's sofas to the Amazonian forests. They carried those ghosts with them and attempted to profane the very structures holding the subject-object relation, artist and property, coupled with the dichotomy of the creator-creation.

Not interested in their self-preservation, nor was I. very interested in the survival of their actions. I. never considered the production of object-being works of art neither did they take great care of the documentation.<sup>551</sup> Their actions were passages back to no-thing. Their main source of income was an editorial work for a children's publication based in Sao Paulo and

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<sup>548</sup> Artaud quoted in Rowell, 1996: 17.

<sup>549</sup> <https://izolyatsia.org/residency/2012/luisa-nobrega/#more-25>

<sup>550</sup> Mason writes about this tension in an essay on Heidegger (Mason, 2020). On the Brazilian context, see exhibition "Afro-Atlantic Histories" 2018, at the Museum of Art of Sao Paulo, and the accompanying catalogue Pedrosa, 2021; See also essay by Fonseca, 2021.

<sup>551</sup> Some documentation of Nóbrega's actions are still available <https://vimeo.com/user2436107>

artist residencies, which emphasised their work as labour, as a process not attached to the final production. This is not to say that no-thing was preserved or entered collections. For example, a series of films generated during a residency at Izolyatsia Art Centre in Donetsk in 2012-2013 remained in the collection. This was a requirement, though, from the institution which automatically kept artworks produced during the art residencies and collaborations. Those works in collections are left behind as an excess, by a nomad, one exiled, homeless, who cannot carry weight and tries to travel light; as remainders, never quite theirs but ready to become something else or someone else's. This in no way betrayed the constant a-version as a thread through I.'s work, the rejection to the making of property out of one's body, one's voice, one's single being.

*This is my body*<sup>552</sup>

I am starting this section with a performance for video, probably the only one in this medium in this thesis, an important one nevertheless in I.'s work and for the sake of this thesis as it emphasises the bodying, still hostage, and its consumption. In *This is my body. This is my blood*, (2013) Nóbrega worked with and through religious symbols pushing them to their limits. In this action, they worked very much in line with Grotowski's mobilisation of the sacred and his deep concern with the sacrificial figure of Christ and the missed communion meal, in turn influenced by the work of Antonin Artaud.<sup>553</sup> I. took the act, stretched it and undid its sacrifice and communion, and undid both the spiritual and the political aspect of both. In-framed within the rectangle of a screen, already made into an image, I. stood behind a long table emulating Christian iconography and the painting by Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper* (1495–1498). The white cloth on the table contextualises the action; rather than placed in a room in Jerusalem, Nóbrega's scene took place in front of what seems like an altar table with its white cloth prepared for a Christian service. On the table of sacrifice, a pile of small bread loaves in front of I., stacked up in the shape of a trinitarian triangle. Alone, their head outside of the frame, headless, faceless, for about fifteen minutes, they picked up the loaves of bread and tore them up in pieces until they became only scraps, in a solemn yet transgressive gesture. As the crumbs continued to accumulate on the table, words appeared as subtitles on the screen:

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<sup>552</sup> The title of Nóbrega's action is a quote from Jesus which appears several times in Bible, in Luke 22:19, Matthew 26:26, Mark 14: 22; 1 Corinthians 11: 24. These words are repeated by priests at every mass in memory of Jesus's last supper and death.

<sup>553</sup> On a discussion on Grotowski and the play "Apocalypsis cum Figuris" see Wilshire, 1982: 111-135.

This is my body and this is what I make of it  
My own, quite miserable  
The body and its crooked designs  
I would rather throw them away

In the original text Nóbrega used the Portuguese word *corpo* from the Latin word *corpus*, that in German is *Körper*, as explained in chapter 1, the body-object as opposed to *der Leib*, that is the bodily non-object. *Corpus* is the bodily that became in the limits of its naked skin, an object distinguished from and in relation to a thinking subject. I.'s actions, then, were set out to tear apart and betray that body, constructed, an artifice, constituted in relation to an *ersatz* being that is the subject. As they tore up the bread they tore apart the finitude of the body, on the table of sacrifice, just as Jesus did at his last supper, and the priest does in remembrance of him. The body-naked (*Corpo*) after the Fall, transubstantiated in the bread, and broken in order to give it as food to his disciples. The body-broken offered as sacrifice for a communion. Jesus was performing a sacrificial ritual according to the Jewish tradition. In accordance with the Book of Leviticus, three requirements were necessary for a sacrifice of offering: the altar (the table), the priest (the artist) and the lamb (the body) which needs to be slaughtered, broken, and separated from the skin.<sup>554</sup> However, the sacrifice was not finished until the lamb was eaten. Only in eating, in feeding from the body-broken, body torn, can the sacrifice be assimilated, completed. In the Last Supper, the disciples are those who recognise their hunger, the hole in their being, and feed of the broken-body, to become one again, united in the *pneumatikoi*.<sup>555</sup> I. standing alone in front of the table acted as priest, body-bread, and disciple: the priest, the artist performing obsessively and compulsively as they tore the bread; the "quite miserable body" or bread torn apart; and the disciple, who this time refused to eat the bread, to participate in the communion but remaining rather as an "empty mouth".<sup>556</sup> I. continued to break again, and again, and again the bread, transubstantiated into the "quite miserable" body THIS body-naked, body-object. They tore to see if there was an opening possible, or anything otherwise, a wound under the making of bread, that might bleed or shed a tear and summon the bodily flesh, a flesh which is anterior to corporeality, in which capture is just not possible, not even imagined. But there was nothing but crumbs.

Weil writes about the flesh as a radical vulnerability, "a

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<sup>554</sup> Leviticus: 7.

<sup>555</sup> 1 Corinthians 10: 16.

<sup>556</sup> Abraham and Torok, 1994.



## mark

of existence”.<sup>557</sup> However, this vulnerability, this mark, is only revealed in the opening of a wound, and in refusing to construct anything that might fill it up or cover its empty space. Following Spillers, flesh bears the mark, wounded, cut out, torn out, stolen in “small portions” to make the body.<sup>558</sup> For Moten, as he *transmutes* Spillers into his own words, the flesh is an “insistent previousness”: “flesh is before the body, just as blackness is before whiteness (...) From body to flesh, from world to earth.”<sup>559</sup> I am aware of the complexity of bringing Weil and Moten and I. together, of Moten’s blackness and Weil’s and I.’s whiteness. Whiteness and blackness meet precisely in the construction of property, which “reverberates on both sides of the encounter”, which was made possible in the “hieroglyphic of the flesh”, in the scissors and in the whip, in the construction of the flesh into body-object.<sup>560</sup> Both black and white, Moten and Weil are called to refuse. Blackness *unwants*: “we have to give up everything the war imposes upon us as necessity, as reward, as object of desire” the necessity of being a subject, of taking place, of being in the body.<sup>561</sup> Whiteness “who has carried the disease” and “has everywhere destroyed” seeks to un-do and punishes, in the same act.<sup>562</sup> Breaking again and again the body in different ways, in search of the flesh left open when it was ex-propriated into a body-object, by a subject of power emerging from different places. This is where Weil meets Moten and they both meet I., in my writing, in the resistance to the power of the singular subject ‘I’, taking too much space.

After breaking the body-broken, though, Nóbrega abstained from eating. Refusing to consume the broken-body-object punished and offered, they rejected the banquet and the promise of a communion, of becoming one with the other through the assimilation of the bread. As one eats, one absorbs the substance of that which has been eaten into one’s own substance, hence eating becomes the most intimate form of union. How soft, moist and

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<sup>557</sup> Weil, 2002: 108; see also Kinsella, 2021.

<sup>558</sup> Spillers, 1987: 67.

<sup>559</sup> Moten, 2017: 106.

<sup>560</sup> Spillers, 1987.

<sup>561</sup> Moten, 2020b: unpaginated.

<sup>562</sup> Weil, 2002: 80 and 51.

pleasurable could it have been to the mouth to taste the piece of bread! However, as they did not eat, they dismissed any possible union, and so the sacrifice remained unaccomplished, fell into an emptiness. I.'s action, a tear, a sacrifice in vain remained, without redemption. They did not accept the body-bread, although it was broken. They did not believe in the possibility of a body sacrificed, given up, broken and instead they went hungry acknowledging the hole in being, and decided to dig those holes deeper. Instead of taking the bread, they preferred to swallow stones – incorporating indigestibility into the centre of the body. I. swallowed pebbles in a performance presented as part of their exhibition “It's not good to have a past, even someone else's” at the POLIN Museum Warsaw exhibition in 2014. Alongside a number of photographs of stones, they showed a video of an action in which, again leaving their head out of the frame, they were filmed putting pebbles in their mouth and swallowing them, or so it seems. The Greek orator Demosthenes used the technique of putting pebbles in the mouth to help improve speech. There, however, the pebbles were meant to stay in the mouth. Nóbrega decided to put the pebbles in their mouth to swallow them whole, to make holes in their stomach, precisely because there is no way they can say anything, or maybe there is simply nothing to say. Rather than any attempt to verbalise, their way of relating was to assume an impossibility. Stones, or pebbles, going into their mouth and down their throat, are impossible to digest. Stuck in the body, the only thing they will do, is to increase the size of the void, or the number of holes in the body. According to Adam Lipsyg, in a short unpublished essay he wrote on the exhibition, in this action I. echoes the writing of the Polish poet Paul Celan, who wrote about “the murderous speech” and the crisis of language after the horrors of the Holocaust.<sup>563</sup> Celan refers to “murderous speech” in the “Meridian Speech” in 1960 as a further repressive violence through language that could only be overcome in poetry.<sup>564</sup> The great question after trauma is how to possibly find the language to digest the traumatic events and transform them into words. To digest would mean to assimilate, to dilute, to absorb within the self and so to make the traumatic event disappear and re-appear only in other words.<sup>565</sup> There was, for Celan, as for I., no possible assimilation though, no possible symbolisation of such brutality, no possible representation through language, only the poetic act. By swallowing stones, I. lingered and even deepened the emptiness and depth of the hole; the hole that Hamacher (1985) in his essay on Celan, calls the “barren place opened by a muteness lost in itself”<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Thank you to Nóbrega for sending this text to me, email correspondence, 29 May 2016.

<sup>564</sup> On Celan and language and the “Meridian Speech” see more in Fynsk, 1996, 135-160.

<sup>565</sup> Abraham and Torok, 1994.

<sup>566</sup> Hamacher, 1985: 282.

“white pebble in the mouth

stuck in my  
throat”.<sup>567</sup>

In a Derridean fashion, they seemed to be acting from and in a constant and eternal state of trauma, a trauma always unresolved, interminable, unstable.<sup>568</sup> In a desire to remain in the traumatic emptiness of the hole, they self-inflicted another form of violence, against the self as they swallowed those indigestible stones. They made the holes deeper as an imperative that submitted both life and art to an ethical and existential exigency. With the incorporation of stones, they positioned themselves outside any transformative process, in the impossibility to assimilate the traumatic shocks.<sup>569</sup> The trauma thus remained in them as radically foreign, emerging as a “phantom” haunting from the holes it has made in the body.<sup>570</sup> In Warsaw, they addressed the atrocities of Jewish genocide, however in their actions more generally I see they addressed the traumatic development of the Western body-naked, body-object. Their work spoke of the brutality of capture and objectification and they expressed through the body the refusal of a magical cure, of a possible remedy and even more so of an assimilation of the atrocities of ex-propriation, that produced the ‘I’ and the *mine*, and the violence that brought about the *Körper*, the object, in the first place.

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<sup>567</sup> From his poem “Sibirisch” (Siberian) in Celan, 2005: 89-90.

<sup>568</sup> Derrida, 1986, in response to the work of Abraham and Torok, 1994.

<sup>570</sup> Abraham and Torok, 1994.

### *Hunger and decreation in Weil.*

In Kafka's short parable *The Hunger Artist*, when asked by the circus manager why he had spent his life fasting, the starving artist, at the verge of death, still in the cage and exposed to the public, responded: "Because I had to starve. I can't do anything else."<sup>571</sup> In the early 1920s when Kafka wrote his story in Prague, in Paris, Weil was also going hungry as the only way of existing. She fasted already at the age of five when the First World War broke out. She denied herself chocolate to empathise with the sufferings of the soldiers in the front. When working in a car factory in France, she "refused to eat more than" her fellow labourers could afford and gave away much of her salary and own food to those who did not have enough.<sup>572</sup> She did the same during the French occupation during the Second World War. She rationed her food throughout her whole life. Having been converted to a radical love of Christ and despite a deep reverence for the Eucharist, she even refused to eat his Body. The word "starvation" was mentioned in her death certificate as one of her causes of death in the sanatorium in Kent in 1943. Her fasting became an imperative, because eating, that is, attempting to be fully united and assimilated, was always understood by her to be a violence, a destruction of the other that is consumed, the ego taking up the space of the other. On the contrary, by fasting she gave space for the other rather than occupying it, as an act of decreation, and joined humanity in what we have in common, our "empty mouths" and beings.<sup>573</sup> Even love, for Weil, would demand an absolute denial of self: "one cannot love purely unless one has renounced living".<sup>574</sup> If we fail to remove, she thought, we immediately become cannibals, we consume the other to fill up the space left empty in us and between us. A cannibal satiates its stomach, the empty space in being, by absorbing and destroying the other in all its humanity, making the other an object of desire and an object of consumption.<sup>575</sup> By filling its mouth and stomach, the cannibal forgets both the emptiness of its being and the space between him/her and the other. His action has thus a destructive effect on both the victim *and* on the perpetrator. To avoid becoming a cannibal then, Weil went hungry, dislocating and refusing to accept anything that attempted to take the space left open and empty.

I started with and in hunger to understand better what Weil meant with decreation. She mentions decreation (*décréation*) very briefly in her writings, but it was a significant part of her

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<sup>571</sup> Kafka, 2007: 226-227.

<sup>572</sup> Webb, 2011: 163.

<sup>573</sup> Abraham and Torok, 1994: 128.

<sup>574</sup> Weil, 1950: 250.

<sup>575</sup> Weil, 1950: 249-250.

mode of living.<sup>576</sup> If creation or the creative act is a process of making or bringing into thingness, decreation reverses the passage. The act of decreation is a move backwards, towards no-thingness, leaves an empty space rather than occupies space with a new thing. Weil took the notion of decreation from various sources, all outside philosophy, outside Western metaphysics. In the Kabbalistic tradition she found it in the *tzimtzum*, a term used to explain God's contraction in creation.<sup>577</sup> God created by contracting his infinite divinity to allow a finite space to appear, an empty space to permit existence, something else to exist. Something similar appears in the Greek concept of *kenosis*, taken on in early Christianity by Paul in his letters to the Philippians (2: 7), as he writes about Christ's incarnation and death on the cross; both acts of divine withdrawal to open to or take on humanity. Weil would also find inspiration in the Christian mystics such as Margarita Porete, French mystic from the fourteenth century, or in John of the Cross' writing on "The Dark Night of the Soul" (written between 1577 and 1579). These mystics lived decreation as a way of becoming more Christ-like, by surrendering their human will to the will of God. Weil read both Porete and John of the Cross, as well as the *Bhagavad Gita* where she found another form of self-renunciation.<sup>578</sup> Weil's decreation is a radical political and mystical mobilisation to move out of the way and a voluntarily existential transgression of the self, to become afflicted, no-thing, "malheureux".<sup>579</sup> It renounces an *ersatz* divinity, an ego, that tries to make up for the space left in the absence, or withdrawal of the gods, of her God. In decreation, therefore, the space is left open again and is presented as a space of attention, a space to attend to the hole, the existential separation, from which humanity and nature were created. Her insistence on the negative *de-* becomes a positive engagement in the world: "we participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves."<sup>580</sup> Destruction, she adds, moves things back into no-thingness. She will consent only to that nothingness, as the only space or non-space that can fill the space left open, in the hole of creation, the coming into existence. Nothingness is for her the only blameless "substitute" unlike imaginary creation, which obscures any possibility of relating to or recognising that which lies underneath and covers the holes with the imaginary Person and its property. She refuses to eat, to assimilate those fabrications that come to fill, products of the imagination, and "middle values".<sup>581</sup> They are dangerous fallacies and hence could well be removed. Decreation refuses to take the space left empty, as a divine wound has been left open for human existence, and hunger refuses to eat, refuses to take in the Person that

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<sup>576</sup> Mainly in the manuscripts compiled by her friend and philosopher Gustave Thibon in Weil, 2002.

<sup>577</sup> Blanchot, 1969: 158-159.

<sup>578</sup> A note on Porete appears in Weil's "*Cahiers d'Amérique*" included in Weil, 1950; Carson brings both Weil and Porete together in Carson, 2006, 155-184.

<sup>579</sup> Word often used in Weil, especially in her essay "On Human Personality", in McLellan, 1989: 273-288.

<sup>580</sup> Weil, 2002: 33.

<sup>581</sup> McLellan, 1989: 280.

attempts to cover the wounds of decreation. Rather hunger itself remains in the waiting, in a denial not of self, but of an “imaginary” *ersatz* self that has colonised too much space.

The notion of decreation was part of Weil’s “other-centered ethics” and cannot be understood without her practice of fasting.<sup>582</sup> Both

hunger

and

decreation

in a similar way, were attempts to be and remain in the hole, rejecting to “fill up empty spaces”.<sup>583</sup> Both actions are ethical in that they open to the other, make space to the other than ‘I’, refuse the ‘I’ and the first Person who imposes itself as a procedural reality to cover the divine hole left open by decreation. As she attempted to fast and to decreate herself – although the first seemed easier to her – Weil also sought to partake in the suffering of a humanity that had been ex-proprated. She self-inflicted upon herself the terrible violence that others had suffered. “The force that men wield, the force that subdues men, in the face of which human flesh shrinks”, that force that had been exercised upon others, that she condemned and fought against, as an activist and an author she imposed upon her self and her body.<sup>584</sup> Only after her death by starvation, she became some a sort of unholy saintly figure, “an eruption of the absolute into ordinary history”. Others resented her, found her difficult to bear.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>582</sup> Cha, 2017.

<sup>583</sup> Weil, 2002: 48.

<sup>584</sup> Weil, 2003a: 45.

<sup>585</sup> Carson, 2006: 180. On other reactions to Weil also read T.S. Eliot preface to Weil, 2020, vii-xiv; Bataille’s character Lazare in *Blue of Noon* (2001) is thought to be a caricature of Weil.

*Off with the head... and the right hand!*

I have explained Weil's decreation, not in an attempt to reach God, but maybe to reach I. and Weil, in order to understand their self-erasure, and the act of refusing *technē* to fill up the holes of separation. Weil and I. worked in quite different contexts, but by approaching them, one speaks to the other, and I hope to understand something of what was at work in I.'s own self-denial. I. inflicted several metaphorical amputations on their extremities: head, hand, eyes and tongue: all those means as seen until now in the thesis, in which being is and engages in the world, through which being creates but that have also been used to APPROPRIATE. Forgetting decreation, forgetting that they are *ek-sistential* openings for other worlds and to others, those organs have been made into property of the first Person. They were made *mine* and became an extension of the Person's power in the world. To those organs, I. showed no compassion, already punishing their Person-subject by amputating them. I look at two actions by I. in which they *de-organised* the body, in which they surrendered the organs of power: the head and the hand, that make up the subject.

Commissioned by curator João Paulo Quintella for the festival "Permanence and Destruction", in 2015, Rio de Janeiro, in the action *Lâmina*, which means "blade", I. lay on their back for thirty hours on a wooden structure five meters above the ground on the inside wall of an abandoned manufacturing building, Estampería Metalúrgica Victoria. The body was lying within the walls, whilst their head remained hanging from the edge of the wood and into the frame of a round window, hanging outside the building wall, hence body and head could not be seen together, but only divided, cut out into two pieces.<sup>586</sup> They forced a new slanted perspective onto the visitors, who, in the event of even noticing their presence alongside the monumental installation of artist Daniel de Paula, were forced to look up and to see only from the bottom, already at a distance. Out of sight, and already outside any possible participatory engagement with the visitor, they also worked in an other time. It has been calculated that nowadays the average time a visitor spends with a work of art is fifteen to thirty seconds.<sup>587</sup> How then can any visitor be expected to remain for thirty hours? I. made spectatorship impossible, making ever more apparent the distance that separates the exhaustion of one and the fleetingness of the many. Nóbrega's actions could well be placed in a lineage of other artists of extremes, suffering artist or "hardship art" or "ordeal art" especially those from the

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<sup>586</sup> See exhibition catalogue Quintella, 2015.

<sup>587</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/12/travel/the-art-of-slowness-in-a-museum.html>

According to artist Tania Bruguera: "The time span for looking a video has gone from 10 minutes (that was what curators advised artists) in 2001 to a few seconds in 2013" (Calonje, 2014: 51).

1970s, performance of excess, taking on an extreme situation.<sup>588</sup> Actions must remain wild, and overwhelming, must endanger and destabilise, call for another communication, or maybe no communication or relation whatsoever, because no relation might be possible. Kafka's "hunger-artist" was also soon ignored and abandoned by the public in his cage. In another of Kafka's short stories; "First Sorrow" of a trapeze artist who decides to remain day and night, and day after day on his trapeze, Kafka writes about the reaction to these extraordinary decisions: "this mode of life created no particular difficulty for the world about him; at most it was a minor irritant", "other than that there was silence about him."<sup>589</sup> Having renounced walking with their two feet on the ground, I. became merely some-thing hanging up there, slightly irritating but hardly disturbing, a corpse from one side, a hanging head-portrait from the other side of the wall.

*Lâmina* alludes to religious totemic symbols and Christian images of sainthood. Neither a Christ nor a Joan of Arc, nailed or tied up to the wood of the stake, but at the same time a reminiscence of both, they decided to pull down to a horizontal position of the phallic wood on which one was nailed and the other one was attached and burnt.<sup>590</sup> They left no possible verticality that could attempt to reach the stars or the heavens for a possible redemption. Instead, I. lay on a piece of discarded wood, their neck gently holding head and body together, prepared for a pending execution by decapitation. In Ancient Rome, decapitation was considered a more honourable death than crucifixion or burning and was used as a death penalty for its own citizens, those Persons of the Empire, whilst the later were reserved for slaves.<sup>591</sup> In history, decapitation has been used both as punishment and at the same time as originary event, closing a period and inaugurating a new radical political order.<sup>592</sup> Monarchs, monocephalous sovereigns have been decapitated by sword or by the axe: Charles I and Louis XVI. Until the French revolution started to use the guillotine for a faster, more silent, cleaner, less painful, more equal and more modern execution of a wider part of the population: "*La mécanique tombe comme la foudre, la tête vole, le sang jaillie, l'homme n'est plus!*" – "man is no longer!" exclaimed Dr Guillotin when he presented his machine to the French Assembly in 1789.<sup>593</sup>

As French sociologist and philosopher Georges Bataille intended with the creation of

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<sup>588</sup> Johnson, 2018; Gonzalez Rice, 2016; Phelan, 1993: 150-151.

<sup>589</sup> Kafka, 2007: 208.

<sup>590</sup> Meltzer, 2001a.

<sup>591</sup> Finley, 1998.

<sup>592</sup> Newman, 2020.

<sup>593</sup> "Mechanics falls down like lightning, the head flies off, blood spurts, man is no more!" (Kristeva, 1998: 101, my translation).



the secret society and the magazine called “Acéphale” (headless), the removal of the head would have an emancipatory liberating effect.<sup>594</sup> He conceived the headless being as a non-phallogentric, non-centralised, non-representational new society. His dreams failed though, maybe because only death – by assassination - can follow the ultimate act of decapitation, and although he did himself volunteer, none of the members of the group committed the act in the end – it remained on hold.<sup>595</sup> I.’s head, hanging over the guillotine, in a similar manner awaited for the excessive and spectacular act of decapitation, the annihilation of a regime in which the mind had produced the body and had constructed the artist and its property. The question is what if the blade were to fall, if there were to be no more head to enclose and crown the ‘I’? Would the thinking and speaking first Person singular then cease to be object? The head, though, historically, rarely disappeared, on the contrary it was often used after the decapitation and was paraded upon a stake or on a plate as was John the Baptist’s. It is precisely in decapitation that the head and the body appeared as distinct and as objects. As Michael Newman recalls in the first cameras, the shutter which was raised and lowered to capture the light as image was called a ‘guillotine’, cutting out, leaving the portrait on one side, alienated and made other, ready for collection, and the corpse on the other.<sup>596</sup> The blade, translated as *lâmina* in Portuguese, of the guillotine and of the camera act alike, they capture things as objects.

The alienated head, then, is still at risk of being captured by a subject or by capital. Only now do these words relate: ‘capture’, in its original meaning is the imprisonment of people as heads of a chattel, from the Latin *caputs*, heads calculated for future or immediate use. The Latin word for head is used as the metric standard to count people literally “by head”, *per capita*. People becoming numbers, defaced and degendered, things to be counted, discretised for some utilitarian enterprise, arranged as quantities, breaking any relation outside the logic of accounting. The *capita* becomes the thing, ready at hand for exchange, to be displaced or replaced. If I. had let down the guillotine, would their decapitation have been enough to end the reign of *capital*-ism and its endless and always devouring re-production and accumulation caused and causing ex-propriation, never satiated, never still, in the fear of disappearing? Its preservation depends on constant consumption of things to *have*; “it’s logical consequences the destruction of all living communities” wrote Arendt.<sup>597</sup> “The original sin of capitalism” makes of the no-thing – that which is not yet in words or in the world, home, land, gesture and flesh – real estate, things cut out, chopped off to be potentially exchangeable and consumable,

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<sup>594</sup> Bataille, 1970: 443.

<sup>595</sup> Cameron, 2014: 107.

<sup>596</sup> Newman, 2018: 3.

<sup>597</sup> Arendt, 2017: 137.

ready for monetary exchange, and debt. That which is ex-proprated from its use, gestures, experiences, head, hand, cut off from the life of *zoē* (the physical life) are potentially made into a commodity FOR SALE.<sup>598</sup> However had the shutter or guillotine dropped, I. would not have kept the head, neither were they interested in the body, rather I. simply and radically remained with and in the hole left open in the separation and absence of a head and of a relation to the body. What other disclosure or relation is possible, then, from the hole, where there is no longer an in and out, no longer a relation? How can another relation take place now in and from the hole, the wound?<sup>599</sup> What language does the hole speak in, bleed, or scream in, and who can decipher what it says?

The following section makes its way back to gesture through the metaphor of the hand – the hand that holds and the hand that grasps, and I.'s hands in *Desta* (2014) – to unpack further what in gesture can be at stake as it grasps and is grasped and what can possibly be found as one disarms it. At the First Clay Biennial, Bienal de Barro, in Caruaru, Brazil, in 2014 titled “*Água mole, pedra dura*”, curated by Raphael Fonseca, I. sat at an empty, slightly elevated desk, that looked more like a counter, in an old factory and asked a local artist Priscilla Nobre to bury their right hand into a block of clay.<sup>600</sup> I. then remained there on the chair, for thirty hours, one hand laid flat on the table, the right hand captured and hidden in the clay.<sup>601</sup>

The Biennial title makes reference to the clay activity which made the city of Cararua famous in the country and abroad in the 1940s. Artists such as Mestre Galdino and Mestre Vitalino went back to soil and water, to mud - another word that translates the Portuguese word “barro” – to mould out figures in their hands and through the softness of their fingers. During that same period of the 1930s and 1940s, Cararua also became well-known because of the Caroa factory, in which the Biennial took place. The factory became an emblem of progress for the country. Despite being equipped with the most advanced European machinery, large numbers of workers and families migrated to the city to work in the factory and worked in the processing of the caroá plant - a fibrous plant which literally means “stem with thorn” - for its wider commercialisation as rope, wrappings, nets, textile and so on.<sup>602</sup> The process consisted of separating by hand the fibres of the plant, shredding and beating the plant and then cleaning them. A very different relation to the hand and to work was taking

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<sup>598</sup> Arendt, 1998: 163-165.

<sup>599</sup> Levinas, 1969.

<sup>600</sup> In English the exhibition title is translated as ‘Soft water, hard rock’.

<sup>601</sup> Fonseca, 2014.

<sup>602</sup> Junior, 2019.

place within the factory. Labour submitted to new machinery casting a relationship to time and to things more suited to the inert matter than to beings themselves.<sup>603</sup> Nóbrega comes to conflate the two different types of physical work present in Cararua: the clay artist working from his free will towards an *érgon* and the alienated factory worker in the never-ending labour towards a product never their own. What are they revealing, as both the working hands of one and the labouring body of the other, haunt the actions within that building?

I have already reflected upon the difference between service, a never-ending labour without an object, and the exchange of goods, in which value is placed on the final thing as property of one's own. I stop here to look again at the modes of making with the hand, through Arendt's differentiation between work and labour in her interpretation of the Greek tradition:

The word "labor," understood as a noun, never designates the finished product, the result of labouring, but remains a verbal noun to be classed with the gerund, whereas the product itself is invariably derived from the word for work.<sup>604</sup>

The finished work is the product that remains and goes out into the world, as a monument leaving a trace to be remembered. It has imposed itself over the labour. Work was a higher action of the hands whilst labour was lower, concerned with natural life, life understood as *zoē*, distinguished from life, *bios*, that was the qualitative life that took place outside of the home, in the *polis*: labour "originally arising out of a passionate striving for freedom from necessity and a no less passionate impatience with every effort that left no trace, no monument, no great work worthy of remembrance."<sup>605</sup> This distinction between work and labour is relevant here because it distinguishes the finished work as a sculpture from the never finished labour, without-end, of the labouring body, closer to simple life, *zoē*. As Arendt explains, labour was taken care of by the slaves, because it was considered to respond to animal needs, what humans had in common with other animals. It was part of the physical realm of life. As gestures, especially in Live art, are being transformed or moved from being never-ending labour, a labour without a product of their own, to becoming product or object-being works of art, and property, is there not a forgetting of labour, that leaves no-thing behind and yet is ever so urgent, as "life itself depends upon it"?<sup>606</sup> What is it that Live art, as it produces objects for the market and for collections, is striving for if not life? To differentiate, to distance and to surpass labour? To build monuments? The move towards the object-

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<sup>603</sup> Weil, 2002: 60.

<sup>604</sup> Arendt, 1998: 80.

<sup>605</sup> Arendt, 1998: 81.

<sup>606</sup> Arendt, 1998: 87.

beingness of Live art would then have been a move in search of status, for a higher form of being human, a qualitative life, perpetuating distinctions and hierarchies.

I.'s never-ending stillness and silence at the desk or counter sees another conceptual character appear: Bartleby, the Scrivener, the character created in 1853 by Herman Melville, who responded to his boss's request with his famous "I would prefer not to."<sup>607</sup> All characters, Bartleby, the factory worker, the clay artist, I., come to a stand still here in I.'s act. On strike, they refused to use their hands, refusing to labour as well as refusing performance and dance understood as a "constant state of agitation."<sup>608</sup> I.'s right hand refuses the labour of a clerk, dealing with records and data, or the work of a writer, a researcher, a theorist, working in the arts of the spirit. They also buried any possibility of the work of the hands. Clay, the classic medium for the sculptor here rather than being moulded, captured the hand of the artist-author and creator who had been unable to hold the hand open, to wait, to give back, but rather was APPROPRIATED and continues to APPROPRIATE. This organ, I. buried. It had been rendered in-operative. No product, no thought could take place. Their action can even be thought of as a self-inflicted punishment. Not only on strike, though, they willingly and completely de-activated the hand, as if that organ, the hand, had always been and can only be an instrument to steal, an instrument of power, and so ultimately and always punishable by amputation.<sup>609</sup>

Like speech, the hand is both being and doing, the "living artificer" of man's fortune. It is the organ, in other words, where thought and action are, precisely as Weil would have it, elided; it is the manifestation of work both as that which yields product, through action, and that which reaches conclusions, through thought. <sup>610</sup>

The question of the hand has its own philosophical and artistic traditions.<sup>611</sup> As Derrida recalls, Kant wrote about the relation of touch, which is possible through the hand and its fingers, to inform us about the forms of things, and so is an organ of knowledge.<sup>612</sup> Heidegger wrote about the hand and used it as analogy for the coming into being in "The Anaximander Fragments" (1973-1974). He related the image of the hand (in Greek *cheir*) as a necessity, to *chraō*, which means to handle, or to bring something to use (*Brauch*) and to his notion of gesture (*bruchen* or *Frucht*). The hand delivers something to its essence, delivers to

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<sup>607</sup> Melville, 2014: 15.

<sup>608</sup> Lepecki, 2006: 3.

<sup>609</sup> See Shariah Law and reference in the Koran 5: 38. See also Gospel of Matthew 5: 30.

<sup>610</sup> Meltzer 2001b: 2.

<sup>611</sup> See Meltzer, 2001b; Derrida, 1987. The palm of the hand can hold the house, the family, the skin, as in artist Donald Rodney's piece *In the House of My Father* (1996–1997).

<sup>612</sup> Derrida, 2005: 41-48.

estrangement, as it gives over and at the same time, as it “keep[s] in hand”.<sup>613</sup> The hand appears as open and also as a protector giving a sense of safety. Heidegger brings it close to his idea of *brauchen* (to use): “*Brauch* [use], means: to hand something over to its own essence and, as so present, to keep it in the protecting hand.”<sup>614</sup> The hand then both bears and enjoys, “to take joy in something and so to have it in use”.<sup>615</sup> Quite different but still very much focused on the organ of the hand, for Locke as seen in the first chapter, the hand of the Person was already property and was constitutive. Through the work of the hand, the Person extends property onto nature removing things from a state of nature and making them his property.<sup>616</sup> Rather than bringing into being, the hand captures, and by the hand that reaches out to the world, the conscious self reaches to “something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.”<sup>617</sup> Nóbrega buried all these hands, with theirs, in the grave of dry mud, paralysing at least for a while, the hand that brings to existence and the in-forming clutch of a seizing hand. They deactivated the operation of writing as creation. They impossibilitated the signature of an artist to close and conclude, to fix and author-ise. A work, or *œuvre* is no longer possible. Meanwhile, the other hand, their left one, stayed still, gave no comfort. They could have moved it, but although free to move it, they did nothing. No touching, no caress, no recognition of the other Lock-ed one. Touch can be another form of meeting, of softening the walls, trespassing the borders, but Nóbrega’s could not meet. The hours passed though, and Nóbrega remained there, at the table. They – all- dried out (*épuisa*). No more possibilities, exhausted, remaining as a corpse on the table: “Empty head in captive hand[s].”<sup>618</sup>

Weil struggled in that being bodily in the world, in her writing, in her actions and in her labour on the farms and in the factory, under the submission of the machine and capitalism. But still, she saw in the hand and in the body the idea of

*metaxu,*

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<sup>613</sup> Fynsk, 1996: 104.

<sup>614</sup> Quoted and translated by Agamben, 2016: 47.

<sup>615</sup> Quoted and translated by Agamben, 2016: 47.

<sup>616</sup> Locke, 1967.

<sup>617</sup> Locke, 1967, Book II, chapter 4, § 27.

<sup>618</sup> Deleuze, 1995, 6

that she found in Plato's *Symposium* "both an obstacle and a way to truth."<sup>619</sup> In her notes compiled in *Gravity and Grace* (2002), she writes about those sites of passage that are "sacred", and that relate soul to God, the unknown. Means which are not to be confused with ends, *metaxu* are those intermediaries, spaces or organs that are passages, between the most sacred or hidden and being-in-the-world, between thought and action. Often an impediment, they are like walls between the prisoners' cells, which blind and separate but can also be the only mode of communicating. It demands another language, though, one which requires closer and careful attention, touch. Accepting the means of the bodily as obstacles as well as means for another language, for new openings, liberating the matter from the 'I' who seeks to impose or control what in the end is uncontrollable.

*Un-wanting property, consent to poverty*

From the hand, I turn to a reflection on what it means not to *have*, not to APPROPRIATE, or make property. What might it mean for an artist to refuse to make an artwork as a good that is supposed to add the first Person to being, to add authorship to being? I approach hereafter the question of poverty as an un-wanting, as the refusal of ownership, or the refusal to produce anything that could be own-able, made one's own. And I approach the question from different perspectives, from that of whiteness and of blackness. The question of poverty here is not so much about a poverty in the materials used to create work, as in Fluxus movement or Arte Povera, or Grotowski's 'Poor theatre' which stripped the plays from theatrical excess and the frames of the gaze. It is about poor materials as much as it is about not *having*, poverty as "propertylessness".<sup>620</sup> The double entangled act of refusing property or consenting to remain without property is not to justify further ex-propriation. It is actually to seriously approach a relationality outside or without ownership. It rethinks work without or outside objecthood, that laid down the conditions for the making of property. It is about relating to the event of art as if, despite desires or fears, there was no object to have. Poverty undoes the Person by making the 'I' go hungry. "What is it to be poor in the world? (...) What comes from it?"<sup>621</sup> Where does poverty come from? What is a being that does not want to have? Is it the same as someone who cannot have? What is left when one does not have? What is left when one is disowned of everything, even that which seemed, since Roman times and furthermore in modernity, to be so precious, so desired?

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<sup>619</sup> Metzler, 2001: 624

<sup>620</sup> Arendt, 1998: 61.

<sup>621</sup> Moten, 2013: 776.

I link or associate this consent not to have, **not to** own property, with the notion of *désœuvrement*, as an aversion of the making of work as *œuvre*. *Déseuvrement*, translated as the inoperative or the un-working, is that which takes away, strips art from its work as good, as “*œuvre d’art*”. The notion of “*désœuvrement*” comes from the French word composed of the prefix *de-* which means a cessation, while *œuvre*, comes from the Greek word *érgon*, which, as mentioned in the introduction, is a term and an act that Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* associates with the human and happiness.<sup>622</sup> It is a work, though, that is distinguished from the work of the slaves. The slave works only in the body, labours, and his work then, according to Aristotle, is not *érgon*, is not properly human.<sup>623</sup> *Dés-œuvrer*, to un-work, then, would be the act of depriving the human of the production of any good for the soul and displacing the artist and the subject to the situation of Aristotle’s slave. Denying the good hence affects humanity, no longer able to create thingness, having to rethink its capacities, it is forced outside the determinations of the will and of a certain notion of happiness.

The philosopher Alexander Kojève was the first one to use the French word *désœuvrement* in one of his famous lectures in the 1930s on Hegel and the philosophy of death. Italian philosopher, Agamben sees traces of the *désœuvrement* already in the “inoperative” of *katergein* which in Greek means to render ineffective, or to quite literally take out of the *érgon*. He finds the inoperative in the notion of *hōs mē*, ‘**as not**’ in the letters of Saint Paul as well as in Heidegger’s notion of the “bringing forth” as *poiēsis*, in *use*, as in *Gebärden*.<sup>624</sup> *Poiēsis* in Heidegger is radically different to the fabrication of things or the *érgon*, that was how Arendt (after Aristotle) saw it. The term *désœuvrement* was then taken on by Blanchot.<sup>625</sup> Blanchot associated the inoperativity of ‘worklessness’ with his ethico-political conception of waiting, a being with and in the world without any exercise of power, in an exigency of another relation.<sup>626</sup> In his book *L’Entretien Infini* (1969), in which he includes a powerful essay on Weil, he wrote about how to conceive writing in the absence of the book.

*Écrire, c’est produire l’absence d’œuvre (le désœuvrement). Ou encore: écrire, c’est l’absence d’œuvre telle qu’elle se produit à travers l’œuvre et en la traversant. Écrire comme désœuvrement (au sens actif de ce mot), c’est le jeu insensé, l’aléa entre*

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<sup>622</sup> Kraut, 2022.

<sup>623</sup> Agamben, 2016: 5

<sup>624</sup> On Paul in Agamben see Agamben, 2016: 57.

<sup>625</sup> Agamben “The Human Being without work”, in Agamben, 2016: 3-23; and “Notes on Gestures”, in Agamben, 2000: 49-61.

<sup>626</sup> Fynsk, 1996: 245-271.

*raison et déraison.*<sup>627</sup>

Nancy used the notion of *désœuvrement* tightly linked to the ethics of life in common in *La Communauté Désœuvrée*, translated as *The Inoperative Community* (1991), as a response to Blanchot. The inoperative became one of the main tenets in Agamben's thought (2016). Burt (2017) will translate it into "ungoverning", seeing the potential in contemporary dance. In the first chapter, I also mentioned the work of Pouillaude (2009, 2017), who wrote about the working and possible *unworking* of dance's exteriority. From the non-act, there seems to be a desire to return or to reclaim gesture, a desire to remain in the bodily act, as the *in-operare*, without work. *Des-œuvré* is that which does not make a thing to add to the world. The inoperative is the consent not to have, and rather tears the *opera*, the *œuvre* out of the equation, to allow for another relation in the radical openness and vulnerability of the given.

Moten comes from a radically different place. He does not search, but attempts to remain in another mode of relating, in blackness, that does not take the *érgon* that had been denied to them, the black people: "we have to give up everything the war imposes upon us as necessity, as reward, as object of desire"<sup>628</sup>. He calls exigency to "refuse what has been refused to us (...) to share in the refusal of ownership,"<sup>629</sup> remaining ex-propriated, outside an understanding or construction of self from and in between the subject/owner, or Person/property dynamic. The poetic lecture, *Blackness and Non-performance* (2015) that Moten gave as part of the programme of discussions led by Heathfield and Lepecki at the MoMA brings us straight back within the context of art, its making and its legitimation with the visual art apparatus.<sup>630</sup> The programme's attempt was to question Performance art's relation to time, and to disappearance, and to think about the institutions and structures which might - or might not- frame Live art. It took place at MoMA, at a moment in which the museum was already well into the acquisition of Live art works. They already owned performance works by Allora and Calzadilla, Roman Ondak, Michaelangelo Pistoletto, Guy de Cointet, Ben Vautier, and Tino Sehgal. In this problematical context, Moten looks the legal institution in the eyes and recognises in it the apparatus forever haunted by the traumatic development that brought about the constitution of slavery itself, defining slaves as property and the Person as property holder. During the lecture, he speaks of Betty and the 'scandal' of her act in 1857, wherein

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<sup>627</sup> "To write is to produce the absence of work (worklessness) Also: writing is the absence of the work as it produces itself in the work and through the work. To write as worklessness (in the active sense of the word) is the insane game, the indeterminacy between reason and unreason." My own translation from Blanchot, 1969: 622.

<sup>628</sup> Moten, 2020b, unpaginated.

<sup>629</sup> Moten, 2020b, unpaginated.

<sup>630</sup> The lecture is available online (Moten, 2015) and was also edited into essays in Lepecki 2017: 101-110; and in Moten, 2018: 241-267.



she, a slave woman declared free by the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, decided to return to Tennessee to her owners.<sup>631</sup> Betty decides 'not to', not to take on the fake promises of freedom as understood in legal terms, not to make use of herself as a legal Person. She did not fulfil what was expected of her, that was an invitation to take on subjectivity and freedom within the construct of law. Performance art, then, for Moten would be the act of fulfilling that which is expected, one's obligations within normativity. However, he suggests the notion of *non-performance* which is precisely the refusal to deliver or work towards "everything the war imposes upon us as necessity, as reward, as object of desire".<sup>632</sup> Betty does not want what the brutality of the legal system has to offer, and rather than taking on the Person's power, refuses it and refuses to enter into the dynamics that being a Person presupposes. Moten calls this refusal a practice of "unwanting", "a combination of disavowing, of not wanting, of withholding consent to be a subject and also of refusing the work, of withholding consent to do the work, that is supposed to bring erstwhile subjectivity online".<sup>633</sup>

It is to prefer not to, in silent, or stuttered, or melismatic gestural withdrawal from that subjectivity which is not itself, which is not one, which only shows up as thwarted desire for itself, as the self directed auto-cathexis of chimerical nightmare. This is to say that the experience of subjectivity, which we must keep on learning not to want, which we have to keep on practicing not wanting, as if in endless preparation for a recital that, in so far as it never comes, is always surely present.<sup>634</sup>

As in Weil, there is a sense in Moten's words that the war is driven by the illusions and capitalisation of an idea of an *ersatz* being. Although Weil will use the term Person, and Moten that of the single being or subject, both will attack the Person and the subject in equal terms, from different skins. In her essay from 1937, "Ne recommençons pas la Guerre de Troie", Weil criticises the production of Helen with a capital H, which she considered was a fiction, an imaginary character fabricated, objectified and fetishised to justify the war of Troy, used to cover an absence of motif, of a never-ending, because it has no end.<sup>635</sup> Un-wanting Helen, un-wanting the *ersatz* being which is the Person, the subject, with a capital P, is then the only way of being in this war. Performance art following on with this thought, and to paraphrase Moten and Weil, never really existed, is only just given as a possibility, desired maybe, but a power that has to be "given away". Non-performance "opens up the possibility of another examination of the metaphysics of behaviour and decision" embraces gesture's lost

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<sup>631</sup> Han, 2015.

<sup>632</sup> Moten, 2020b: unpaginated.

<sup>633</sup> Moten in Lepecki, 2017: 105.

<sup>634</sup> Moten, 2015; and Moten, 2017: 105.

<sup>635</sup> Weil, 1979.

infecundity, deactivating any possibility of instrumental operations and refusing to move to the work of art, to add ownership to life.<sup>636</sup> Non-performance refuses to make an artwork that is supposed to add subjectivity into play, to add subject to being, to add authorship to being: “a refusal to decorate, to embellish”, leaving gesture and being “radically inappropriable”, impossible to collect.<sup>637</sup> It remains in the receiving and the giving in which regulation, mastery and property have no place. Giving up artistic self-ownership is then the call to art, a call “art wants to bear but which art also seems to belie in being preacherly”; difficult to bear as it would mean to not want a thing.<sup>638</sup>

In “Notes on a Blue Note on the Gospel of Barbecue”, Moten rethinks blackness and the common and comes back to the idea of refusal and un-wanting as the “hard, preferential option for the poverty of insovereignty, for the poor in spirit we have to make.”<sup>639</sup> Moten takes his idea of poverty from the gospel of the Beatitudes recorded in the gospel of Matthew 5: 3-12 and in Luke 6: 20-23 and picked up by the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez. It does not justify ex-propration, which is brutal and inhuman, it calls for a voluntary poverty as a protest, a refusal to *have*, a consent “to return to the inorganic, before socio-legality”.<sup>640</sup> Poverty, a radical refusal of property, is a way of being otherwise in the world, in the clearing and in the gathering, in openness. In *Blackness and Nothingness* (2013), Moten invokes Heidegger’s understanding of the animal as the being poor in world. For Heidegger the animal cannot apprehend or open itself to the world, because it has no hands, is therefore at the opposite side of the human being who is “world forming”. Moten places blackness precisely in that deprivation of world, of the White Western world still entangled in image and subject formation, and urges attention to that poverty, to pay attention to whatever is left, “a kind of

poetic access

to what it is of the other world that remains unheard, unnoticed, unrecognized in this one”, not of a world of in-formed images and things, but to a black mystical nothingness.<sup>641</sup> Poverty also

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<sup>636</sup> Moten, 2015, 1:02:55.

<sup>637</sup> Moten, 2015, 1:04:39.

<sup>638</sup> Moten, 2020b: unpaginated.

<sup>639</sup> Moten, 2020b: unpaginated.

<sup>640</sup> Moten, 2015, 1:19:15.

<sup>641</sup> Moten, 2013: 776.

blurs the solo, the single being and entangles it in the multiplicities found in the gathering. Without property of one's own, poverty is "a radical sharing, and it's a radical practice of gathering".<sup>642</sup>

### *Poverty in Francis of Assisi and in Paul*

Aware that I have left I. behind only to be able to come back to them from another place – I push further the question of poverty by going back and considering Francis of Assisi's poor use and relation to the world, as white man's practice of un-wanting. In thirteenth century Italy, Francis was a "very small man among other men", wrote Artaud in a poem from 1922 "eternal absent from himself/ Who always walks beside his own path."<sup>643</sup> Francis renounced his properties and inheritance to live a life of poverty, emulating what he believed was the real life of Christ, the Son. He never became a priest, was never called Father, he became a child legally unable to own and only able and permitted to use that which was never his. Within the Roman understanding of property and ownership still influencing the Middle Ages, children belonged to the father, still understood as the *pater potestas*, but also to God in the Person of the Father. Following the dictates of Roman law, in one of his writings to defend and to promote the existence and the practice of the Franciscan Movement, the Franciscan friar Saint Bonaventure in *Apologia Pauperum* (1269) distinguished four modes of relating to things: "ownership, possession, usufruct, and simple use".<sup>644</sup> Of these only one he deemed to be absolutely necessary to human life (*zoē* and, as such, "unrenounceable" which is simple use. The friar minors renounced all forms of rights (in Latin *ius*) and the right of ownership, except permission (in Latin *licentia*) of "the simple and necessary use" of the earthly goods needed for their survival. They accepted the need of consumables such as food or clothes only in the state of extreme necessity but renounced their ownership. Outside extreme necessity they had no legal relationship with things or others. They made a clear distinction between poor use, that is *usus pauper* of consumables used, from a rich use, which was the "right to use and abuse as one's own", that was understood as the Roman notion of property. Poverty sought therefore to invert the Roman formulas of the *animus possidendi* (intention to own) in favour of the "abdication of every right", a negation of an engagement in the world as Person that is turned into a positive act of existence in the world outside APPROPRIATION: "wanting

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<sup>642</sup> Moten, 2020b: unpaginated.

<sup>643</sup> Artaud, 1976: 4.

<sup>644</sup> Agamben, 2013: 124.

to have nothing of one's own as the interior act, and using the thing **as not** one's own as the exterior act".<sup>645</sup>

According to Agamben in *The Highest Poverty* (2013), the institution of the Roman Catholic Church could not come to terms with the Franciscans' stubbornness to renounce any form of ownership, neither was it clear for the Church the difference the Franciscans insisted on between right and use, between ownership and a permission or licence to use. This incomprehension became almost a legal battle, or at least a battle in legal terms and concepts, between the mendicant order, the powerless and dispossessed and the power of Pontifical Rome. The mendicants wanted to have nothing but their lives, open to vulnerability and exposing themselves to their own disappearance. The Franciscans refused that which had been used against being itself, power, to follow not the Person of Christ but to love the life of Christ as a dispossession. They consented to a Christ-like life which was 'self-emptied' in order to be radically open to world and to being, placed in a radical vulnerability. Ultimately, by doing this they were confronting the power of the Church with their vulnerability, questioning modes of being in Christ, and forcing upon the rest of the world and the Church an obligation to care for them, as children, forcing upon the other another mode of relating.

The simple use that the friars permitted themselves was a use "**as not** one's own" which comes straight from the understanding of "poor use" found in the Greek word *chrēstai*, used in the letters of Paul to the people in Corinth.<sup>646</sup> In his letter, Paul defines how the life of Christ should be lived in a community with the formula

*hōs mē*

translated from Greek as "**as not**": "and they that buy, as though they possessed not. And they that use (*chrōmenoi*) this world, **as not** abusing (*katachrōmenoi*) it" also translated "**as not** using [it] as their own."<sup>647</sup> Paul seems to accept the necessity of having, but also

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<sup>645</sup> Bonaventure's "Declaratio Communitatis", quoted in Agamben, 2013: 127.

<sup>646</sup> 1 Corinthians, 7: 29-31.

<sup>647</sup> 1Corinthians, 7: 29-31.

acknowledges already the intrinsic possibility of abuse in every having. Things should be had 'as not'. By negating use as one is using, he offers an insight on the possible risks that can occur in the exercise of use as power. The Greek term *chrēstai* is translated into the Latin Bible as *utor* or *usus* which is closer to "make use of, profit by, take advantage of, enjoy, apply, consume" and is at the root of words such as *usura* related already to the monetisation of things and profit. However, the Greek understanding of *chrēstai* is a *use* that is not instrumental nor transformative, it stands rather on the opposite side of *dominium*. It is not a form of *use* that creates a subject and object, or an active and a passive role but engages in the world without adding anything to being. Rather, *chrēstai* enables a relationship between parts that receive and give in so far as they move, dance and breathe in that relation. In the relation of *chrēstai* such distinctions are rendered inoperative, one does not act on the other. Determined in that relation, of receiving as much as giving, parts are equally vulnerable and permeable.

Poor or simple use, ante-property, is not an absolute annihilation or negation, it does not renounce life, it renounces an appropriative form of relating and the confusion of *being* and *having*. It undoes that conflation and opens a poor and powerless relation to every-thing, making one vulnerable to the rhythms of life and others. How can one possibly relate to others and things 'as not', not negating existence, but radically dispossessing it? For art to enter into this poverty it would have to renounce, refuse its thingness, that which associates it with legal property. This is a task harder to achieve when one produces a physical thing, a painting or a sculpture. It would mean to produce things "except by some accident"<sup>648</sup> or "incidentally"<sup>649</sup> and to be ready to deliver them back to the accident, the unexpected and unintentional, to a possible disappearance. As dance has moved into form, as gestures have become Live art and entered into the category of thingness, and of object-being artwork, it has betrayed its poverty. Live art has enriched being and dance with property and added more property into the world – of art. This move has been an artistic strategy, as I have argued previously, and no accident. Returning to poverty would mean giving up that "constructed situation", the constructed and imaginary property that has been fabricated, putting art and property at risk of disappearance. Person and Property are both constitutive and constituted in the body, imposing and affecting relationalities as if *mine*, hence unmasking and renouncing property and embracing poverty seems – to some – to become an ethical demand.

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<sup>648</sup> Valery, 1960: 553.

<sup>649</sup> Arendt, 1998: 88.

*They gouged the 'I'-s out*

The engulfing waters threatened me,  
the deep surrounded me;  
seaweed was wrapped around my head<sup>650</sup>

Nóbrega's first performance *Jonas* (2008) was part of a wider initiative entitled "The Francisco Expedition" which took five young Brazilian artists by boat along the São Francisco river, that runs along the entire territory of Brazil, from Januária until the mouth of the river, in Piaçabuçu.<sup>651</sup> The project went downstream and reversed the path of the first missionary expeditions of the sixteenth century, inverting that conquest.<sup>652</sup>

On the trip, I. travelled blindfolded for eleven days and only removed the black cloth over their eyes when they got to the sea. The passage was going the other way, from colonisation back to the ocean, from solid ground to the place of the open: tracing the wound of Brazilian history, of political and economical conquest towards the darkness of the no-thingness. During the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, Brazil became both a missionary land, and at the same time received more than half of the slaves shipped globally. Today, most people living in the coastal regions of the São Francisco basin are of predominantly African ancestry, since that region was the main destination of the slave trade to Brazil.<sup>653</sup> The shores of the Atlantic ocean that I. was reaching for, at the *mouth* of the river, symbolised the passage, not only biblically speaking (as the title of the action refers to *The Old Testament*, The Book of Jonah), but the ocean which brought the white colonisers and Jesuit missionaries. That same ocean would become the Middle Passage in which human beings were brought into slavery, into existential death in the hold of the ship or condemned to physical death as they were thrown into the sea.<sup>654</sup> How can one possibly approach, even less gaze, at the horror? With what eyes can one look? By refusing to see they entered a self-imposed disorientation, in order to eliminate all references, all perspectives. No 'I', pronoun left, in order to blur the singular. No perspective, in order to darken the colours around them. I. forced them to be engulfed into the belly of the monster, into the pits that hold the eyeballs, eliminating the frames in which to

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<sup>650</sup> Book of Jonas 2: 4.

<sup>651</sup> The crew was composed of artists I., Julio Meiron, Deyson Gilbert, Márcia Vaitsman, and the biologist Nabor Kisser.

<sup>652</sup> According to Meiron who took part in the project, quoted in the unpublished essay by Priscilla Menezes de Faria "Calibre dos poros contra calibre dos eflúvios". Thank you to Tom Nóbrega for this text sent in an email correspondence, 28 November 2020.

<sup>653</sup> See Sao Francisco river entry in Encyclopedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sao-Francisco-River>

<sup>654</sup> Spillers, 1987; NourbeSe Philip, 2008.

stand or see, no light to orientate the gaze. They plunged - in a symbolic way - into blackness. "A declension", writes Moten, "could be said to have occurred, from subject to object to thing to nothing, that hopefully constitutes a way back into the ground of this physics."<sup>655</sup>

Sight, related also to the eyes of the mind, brought the I, first Person and subject, to see the body as body-naked, in its form, its borders. So, in refusing to see, they refused the eyes as organs of possible destruction, renouncing the act of seeing as an in-forming. Western thought has a philosophical relation to light and to shadows ever since Plato's Allegory of the cave in the Republic written around 375 B.C. After a long period of the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, Petrarch used the image of the 'light' in his Apologia in 1367 to praise the modern subject which would slowly emerge again into thinking. The notion of bringing things into consciousness happened in the light of seeing. The Renaissance recovered the light of ancient Greece through Roman culture and thought. Between 1629 and 1633, Descartes developed his meditations on metaphysics in close correspondence with his experimentations and discoveries in the area of optics and light in *The World, or Treatise on Light*. Colour and light became the preoccupation of modernity, struggling through a night that they experienced in quite a different way to us. We can only imagine the darkness as we write from our computers, our cities of light, in the possibility of being constantly 'enlightened'! So, what is the artist of the twenty-first century doing as they intentionally submerge in darkness? In darkness, one does not know where to put one's feet, extending arms in the fear of bumping into something. The visual references that help us stand straight and find stability are no longer there, all reference points are gone. As one loses a frame of seeing, one loses one's own situatedness in the world and takes "space as the vertigo of space".<sup>656</sup> Losing stability, making oneself vulnerable, rethinking as one denies that body in-formed, under the gaze and point of view. There is no light to distinguish, to orient the gaze, only moving eyeballs without any focus: de-centered ethics, no-body there. The darkness requires both another form of attention that is somatic, silent, to better hear what lies around and trust in touch as a grounding sense. It asks for an attunement, a porous receptivity. Smells and sounds affect that somatic surface. In darkness, one becomes open to being affected in and by the ante-body before the light, before its borders, before its skin was recognised as clothing, borders that protect, borders that enclose. The flesh is left vulnerable.

I. "gouged out" their eyes once more in *soberba e penitencia ou os sapatos vermelhos*

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<sup>655</sup> Moten, 2017: 106.

<sup>656</sup> Blanchot quoted in Fynsk, 1996: 239.

translated as “pride and penance or the red shoes”, 2010.<sup>657</sup> This time their sin was pride. But pride in the face of what? Of being at the centre? Of seeing? Of eating? Of all three? In this action, they played with dizziness and further disorientation. They covered their eyes and danced around in circles, a movement half-way between the dance of a whirling dervish who attempts to let go of reason in order to reach a spiritual dimension, and the play of a child, blindfolded, turning on the self and then left to find their space and others. Losing support or any references became here a dance in itself, a dance of dizziness, at the risk of falling or in the hope of finding another structure to hold. As they continued to turn I. continued to face upwards, their covered eyes towards the sky. They looked in vain for the stars that guide in the night, those lights in the darkness. Neither could I. ever see the few surviving fireflies that still glitter in the dark during the mating season, shining from an act of love, instead they stared and danced in nothingness.<sup>658</sup>

Several white artists have worked before with darkness, from Rudolph von Laban dancing through the night at Mount Ascona in the summer of 1917 to Pina Bausch dancing with her eyes shut in *Café Müller* (1978), to Emmanuel Huynh’s solo piece *Mua* (1999), made of immobility, silence and darkness: artists who, rather than letting things appear, for which light or sight is qualifying and constitutive, would sink things into darkness. Recently, more artists and choreographers are using darkness. I have mentioned Sehgal’s “constructed situation” which set the audience in darkness, *This Variation* (2012). Márten Spångberg also produced a seven-hour piece performed in the darkness of the night, *Natten* (2016). Lepecki dedicated a chapter of his book *Singularities* (2016) to analyse Mette Ingvarsten, Mette Edvardsen, Xavier Leroy, Manuel Pelmus and Marcelo Evelin works in and on darkness, weaving in the thoughts of Didi-Huberman and Moten. The issue in the examples laid out by Lepecki and that we find in I. too, is that it is still a darkness that is constructed and self-inflicted by the will of an artist and presented in a public sphere for others to witness. A darkness constructed by an artist and seen by spectators brings about the *aporia*, or simply the contamination of darkness by the gaze of the eyes and of the mind, in the contingencies of appearing and existing in the body. It becomes a movement back onto the self. In art making and the works analysed by Lepecki, darkness is a fabricated darkness coming from an artist’s will and delivered to the audience, rather than a given un-intentional obscurity, received as a nocturnal thickness. The night is an utterly obligatory *other*, a radical and terrible escape,

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<sup>657</sup> <https://vimeo.com/user2436107>

<sup>658</sup> I make a quick and poetic reference to Didi-Huberman (2009) because Nóbrega recommended the book during our first meetings in 2016, London.



“getting out of being by a new path.”<sup>659</sup>

Lepecki finishes the book by urging a political rescue of the spectator and a return to the historico-political task of storytelling. But what has failed and is failing again? Is it that the work and the Person of the artist are yet to be plunged into the darkness of the ocean, to be forgotten? To paraphrase what Blanchot said about literature, in negating the day, artists and their space of appearance are reconstructing the day.<sup>660</sup> Blanchot is absent, hidden, from Lepecki’s book, and so is the notion of the ‘neuter’ that Blanchot associated with the night and darkness: that other darkness, as the ‘other night’ that is not the night of day: “An experience that is properly nocturnal, that is the very experience of night”.<sup>661</sup> It is in that night, Blanchot’s first night, that one finds the heart of the night, where neither power nor glory can be found, but only the experience of the impossibility. “It is not the night, but what haunts the night”<sup>662</sup> and it is in that place in what haunts, that the limit of our existence is at stake, and where literary language communicates.<sup>663</sup> If Blanchot says it about literature, I would like to say about I. that in their attempt to detach from the Person-author and creator, thingness, Live art, their gestures become the impossibility of gesture, the simple recognition that one cannot move into the unintentional, the indeterminate. An artist, as Blanchot’s author, abides or maybe just wanders into that “simple powerlessness to cease to be”, only from there can they continue to work and write.<sup>664</sup> Darkness cannot come into appearance, into consciousness, cannot even be named, as when it is named, it is already light. The artwork even with the lights off is always an artwork, darkness has no effect on it, but is simply another scenography. In depriving themselves of the light but at the same time being seen in a body or showing up as a work in full light, art performs but a

“tragic effort”

and, as Blanchot will say about literature, learns nothing more than the impossibility of overcoming itself.<sup>665</sup> It is not a negation, it is the affirmation at the heart of art, or writing, to which art needs to attend. Darkness is already and

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<sup>659</sup> Levinas, 2003: 73.

<sup>660</sup> Fynsk, 1996: 235.

<sup>661</sup> Blanchot quoted in Farbman, 2008: 54.

<sup>662</sup> Blanchot quoted in Fynsk, 1996: 232.

<sup>663</sup> Fynsk, 1996: 230.

<sup>664</sup> Quoted in Fynsk, 1996: 236.

<sup>665</sup> Blanchot in Fynsk, 1996: 235.

absolutely uncontrollable but necessary, un-makeable and a need, a hidden ante-space, for an-other relation outside world, to the no-thing, to the no-body. Darkness would then be that space for the no-thing, or “noth-ing” in order for another existence to be possible, another relationality, already betrayed as one writes or speaks about it.

### *Play and exhaustion*

I have investigated the white artist's body broken, the metaphorical *mute*-ilation of their organs of power as well as the concepts of decreation as *désœuvrement* and poverty and finally the question of darkness in an era of over-exposure to lights. As I. self-inflicted these privations, these *mute*-ilations on the body, consenting to the destruction of the self, they nevertheless did not manage to disappear, their presence on the contrary was ever more provocative. They remained as a *mute*-ilated, yet exhibited “tragic” artist. They renounced life but at the same time were sublimated, or rather fetishised as another object never assimilated, withdrawing but still evermore present in the gaze of a spectator. It is the body sacrificed but exposed, or in the case of I. it is the extenuated, undone body emptied, fully exposed as such.

Before I reflect on exhaustion, I first wish to approach I.'s actions as play, again as unproductive. I have explored the question of play already through Benjamin in chapter 1, and here I do it again from another perspective which is that of Roger Caillois *Les Jeux et Les Hommes: le masque et le vertige* (1958). A student of Marcel Mauss and friend and collaborator of Bataille, with whom he founded and ran the magazine *Acéphale* (1936-37), Caillois took a great interest in an understanding of the human being rooted in the visceral and the instinctual, especially in the use of games as rituals in the daily life of various cultures. He found in the ecstatic games and sacred rituals, that which the art of representation had repressed, limited and sacrificed and reclaimed festivals and games as sacred rituals, so that society might be liberated, to transgress forms of productive representation. The different modes of playful rituals contained forms of subverting the established structures of power needed for a society to develop. Furthermore, they are fundamentally unproductive. Games as much as religious rituals are acts of suspension of ordinary time and law, enclosed spaces outside the world and life, that combine a serious attention to their own rules as well as an ecstatic abandonment. Caillois distinguished various categories of play: *agōn* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation), and *ilinx* (vertigo). I., I notice, made use of two types of them and so I focus on these: *agōn*, games that involve competition within set rules, and entail levels of endurance and *ilinx*, from the Greek word dizziness, which includes games that

search for vertigo and surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure or shock. Children spinning in the dark for instance is *ilinx*. Caillois notices that the purpose of *ilinx* is to “destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind.”<sup>666</sup>

I. plays *agōn* in works such as *lâmina* or *destra* (2014) or in *conference or how to avoid a deluge* (2011) in which they follow strict instructions, repeating them over and over again until it becomes too painful or they get exhausted. But *agōn* is normally played between two people or more, a competition as to who can do more, be faster, stronger or cleverer. In I.’s case though, they were alone with their own selves, nothing outside of them, which made the game become *ilinx*. Without any reference, without any structure or anyone else, without a second Person “you” to hold on to or play with or against, there was no end but vertigo and their own exhaustion. For the action *conference or how to avoid a deluge* (2011), for example, they wrote and followed these rules:

all the time, while I speak, I fill and drink several glasses of water, I am not allowed to stop neither talking neither drinking water - I must alternate both actions as much as possible, minimising the intervals. Each time my body pours whatever kind of fluid, either vomit, lees, saliva, urine, tear or sweat, I must hit my head on the table.<sup>667</sup>

These are the instructions they followed as they pushed the body to a constant state of nausea and constant vomiting, expelling the liquidity that over-poured in excess, a chaos that surpassed the body and its limits. Water is the first image of chaos, of un-creation, that they poured down the throat but could not take in, vomiting it out again. The body again and again, refusing to take, not only the redemptive bread, not the impossible stone, but the liquidity this time, the waters that also satiate, quench the thirst, but are, here, a deluge, that drowned, and punished people for their sins. They became an image of horror, a grotesque figure, swallowing, vomiting, peeing, trespassing the enclosures of the skin and interrupting any possibility of *logos*, extending the action to exhaustion.

It is worth stopping a moment here briefly, to analyse the differences if any, or if clearly defined, between the game of endurance, close to *agōn*, but solitary, and exhaustion, terms often confused. Both prolong an action in time and both suffer a level of pain, nevertheless, they generate different modes of being: one constitutes, the other is about undoing the subject, or emptying being of *enérgeia* which in Greek is operation. The difference might come from

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<sup>666</sup> Caillois, 1958: 65.

<sup>667</sup> Text saved from her expired website [www.luisanobrega.com](http://www.luisanobrega.com)

the level of intentionality. Serbian artist Marina Abramović's actions, for instance, are stretched actions in time, prolonging a gesture or hanging on to a gesture over several hours and sometimes days, often subjecting the body to extreme dangers. Examples are her collaborative work with Ulay, *Breathing in / Breathing out* (1977) or *The Other: Rest Energy* (1980), in which the couple hold a bow and an arrow between each other, stretched and pointing towards Abramović's heart. In *Rhythm 10* (1973), one of her earlier works, she stabbed a knife in the spaces left in between her open fingers, those spaces through which gesture slips out of the hand, and does it compulsively. The artist needs to be hyper alert and aware and in control of her capacities. As she succeeds in the task, the self has gained a strong feeling of achievement and survival.<sup>668</sup> Repetition of this act of self-inflicting and at the same time escaping violence upon one's own body generates, as the artist would say, "enormous power".<sup>669</sup> As dance theorist Cvejić points out "the ordeal of undergoing a test of endurance at the risk of losing one's life carries the trophy of survival and a hardened sense of a guarantee of life".<sup>670</sup> Vujanović and Cvejić would relate these games as *agōn* to Foucault's "truth-game" in which the individual subject voluntarily exercises these forces upon her/there selves to produce a heightened self or subject. They write:

these are specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves and thus produce rather than discover truth. Thus, experience is neither true nor false, but a fiction, something constructed in reflection after it has been a reality.<sup>671</sup>

'Endurance' carries within it the word, *indurare*, the Latin word for hardening. It hardens then as the subject heightens existence, always in the fear of not performing subjectivity enough. Exhaustion, on the other hand, drains, dries subjectivity out of existence. It does not come from the will of a moving subject, but from an extreme fatigue and pain, the pain of Weil's "*malheureux*", the pain that Artaud suffered, a

sickness that affects the soul in its deepest reality and that infects its manifestations: the poison of being. A veritable paralysis. A sickness that deprives you of speech, of memory, that uproots your thinking.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>668</sup> Kountouriotis, 2017: 89-90.

<sup>669</sup> Abramović, 2014: 512.

<sup>670</sup> Cvejić, undated, "Notes for a Society of Performance: On Dance, Sports, Museums, and Their Users": 5 available online <https://www.atosdefala.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AdF14>

<sup>671</sup> Vujanović and Cvejić, 2022: 124.

<sup>672</sup> Artaud, 1965: 21.

The will cannot play any part. There is just nothing left, bringing about another form of language that is not speech, that is between gesture and thought. Nothing can possibly be possessed.

The game of exhaustion in *I.* is a decomposition of self, rather than a production of self, but still somewhere in between the intentional and the unintentional. The decomposition does not only diminish, but erases the 'I', shrinks the subject as much as it's object, affecting the limits of both and all possibility of their survival. It is difficult here, though, to move from the unintentional alienating exhaustion that takes root in the malaise, the afflicted and the slave, to the intentional exhaustion self-fabricated in the work of art or literature. This is a problem that we have already raised in the discussion on decreation, darkness and the impossibility of the artist, in the very fact that they remained framed despite themselves, trying to reach the unintentional in an act. But the intentional can only reveal further the issues and questions present in the unintentional. The latter has been deprived of every power whatsoever, and the other has the power of abdicating, of attempting at least to erase or maybe only to rethink the power relation between subject-object, putting both in danger but still on hold.

*I.* gestures at the desk in the first action *I* analysed breaking the breads, and in *destra* (2014), and in both they ended the actions exhausted, lying flat on the table. These recall what Deleuze writes about in his essay "The Exhausted" (1995), in which he unpacks the question of exhaustion in relation to potentiality through Beckett's writing, his characters, and his use of language and theatrical space. Deleuze sees in Beckett not an abstract author content with proclaiming the death of the 'I' but an author capable of showing how to do it, still though on a stage. " 'How it is' how to make an inventory (mistakes included) how the *I* decomposes, stench and agony included."<sup>673</sup> The notion of exhausted, *épuisé*, is different to the tired because "the tired has only exhausted realisations, while the exhausted exhausts all the possible."<sup>674</sup> If tiredness is a state that being suffers, and in that suffering nothing understood as object can be possible or even desired, exhaustion for Beckett and Deleuze refuses and deprives us of any possible of a realisation. Hence exhaustion presupposes not only the disappearance of the object but also the slow disappearance of the subject.<sup>675</sup> He points to several ways in which exhaustion can be reached within the text and in the space: by forming exhaustive series of things and words; by drying up the flow of voice; extenuating the potentiality of space and dissipating the power of the image.<sup>676</sup> The first relates to the

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<sup>673</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 5.

<sup>674</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 5.

<sup>675</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 5.

<sup>676</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 11-12.

disjunctive, abrupt, jerky accumulation and disposition of words and things, “where enumeration replaces propositions, and combinatorial relations replace syntactic relations.”<sup>677</sup> This reminds us of the juxtapositions, fragmentation and the non-narrative, of modern machines. Secondly, “when you exhaust the possible with words, you trim and chop atoms, and when you exhaust the words themselves, you dry up the flow” and keep silence.<sup>678</sup> Deleuze continues with his third proposition which is to dissolve the material surface of the text, expanding the holes, and hiatuses in the text, “to welcome something coming from outside or elsewhere.”<sup>679</sup> Bearing holes and disengaging them from memory and reason, rather than remaining in words “burdened with calculations, memories and stories.”<sup>680</sup> The flow and wind of other voices can then run through. Stretching the holes and tears in language, which “no longer relates to objects that can be enumerated and combined, nor to transmitted voices, but to immanent limits that never cease to move about”, like the wind.<sup>681</sup> Finally, the difficult task of dissipating the image, “retaining nothing of the personal, or of the rational, and ascending into the indefinite.”<sup>682</sup> For Deleuze, though, no other event can occur in exhaustion: “to exhaust space is to extenuate its potentiality through rendering any meeting impossible”, just like the scream that makes the communication impossible and that unsettles the *polis*.<sup>683</sup> What sort of relationality can be imagined then in exhaustion?

*Notes to conclude this mute-ilation.*

I am juxtaposing these thoughts with the work of I. to elucidate what they were doing. They were, intentionally or not, drying out both the artist and its property, as they approached the game, darkness and exhaustion as other forms of relating, which have no place for property, but take the use of things to its limits, as these actions are repeated without end or extended and stretched to excess. Not as a cassette or a DVD played in loop without deterioration, they repeated the same instructions precisely to stretch the *de-generation* in time. The actions appear like mythological punishments on the organs of power and the ‘I’. Punishments eternally repeating themselves, although not inflicted by gods in I.’s case, but by the self, as an imperative, as the only way of being in the world. Like Prometheus in Hesiod's *Theogony* punished for stealing fire for mankind and subsequently chained to the

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<sup>677</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 7.

<sup>678</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 7.

<sup>679</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 8.

<sup>680</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 9.

<sup>681</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 8.

<sup>682</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 9.

<sup>683</sup> Deleuze, 1995: 13.

Caucasus. An eagle came and devoured his liver during the day, the liver would regenerate every night, and so be devoured again, day after day, eternally. In a similar way, I. performed a suspended decapitation that never seemed to find its end, awaiting, they amputated the artist's hand because it had stolen art as property, they gouged their eyes out because they had seen, and in seeing might have brought into form. They were punished to dance without limits, and punished to drink, to swallow or attempt to assimilate liquidity and language, but rather they were condemned to always be emptied out. No rest was to be found, but only the chaotic never-ending repetition, that affects being, overwhelmed by a limitless eternity.

## Chapter 3 - Part 2 -

### Tongues, lamentation and ventriloquism: being-*otherwise* without a voice

The hand, the head, the eyes gone, they pierced through the boundaries produced by the enveloping skin, and metaphorically dislocated the limbs. They hungered, creating a number of holes in the body, challenging the limits of its objectness and disarming the constituted subject. Emanating from the wounds left open by an exteriorisation that does not want to heal, from the hollowness in the flesh, I listen to those screams or guttural sounds of the voice as another mode of ante-language that does not originate in a single subject, neither is it grammatical, but it is an opening of the mouth, of the flesh uttering *otherwise* as the body has been dis-*organised*, severed. This section focuses on the voice as that which comes out of the empty holes, of the hungry stomach, of the “empty mouth”, a term I borrow from Abraham and Torok (1994), which needs to be understood as a void in the double function of the mouth: eating and speaking, deprived of food and words. Nóbrega’s actions are examined as a mode of remaining in the hole that does not construct but that falls back into the hole. In the last section I try to figure out who speaks when one gives up the voice - of the first Person subject who has spoken too much and for too long- as a political act of withdrawal.

I. was born with an ear impediment but realised that they did not “speak properly” only at the age of 21.<sup>684</sup> They related to the sound of the world through hearing prosthetics that received, amplified and projected the noise and silences around them back into their ear. This conditioned their speech, as one learns how to speak through mimesis. When they spoke, their voice seemed difficult to project, producing a sound that did not seem to belong to them. Both the sounds coming in, and those expelled sounded oddly foreign, **as not**, *hōs mē*, their own. They seemed to come from a distance, from a foreign tongue or land. Their own voice seemed to be an acousmatic voice. “It seems that the voice pertains to the wrong body, or doesn’t fit the body at all, or disjoints the body from which it emanates”, writes Mladen Dollar.<sup>685</sup> The

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<sup>684</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 10 April 2021.

<sup>685</sup> Dollar, 2006: 60



coupling of the voice and the mouth were not evident which created further disjunctions in their being and dys-synchronicity which made more evident the fact that they were a voice operator – *opera* – making their voice, rather than simply living through it. At one point a friend gave their voice-creature a name: *evol*. And *evol* still laments to this day, though in another tune.<sup>686</sup>

The technologies of audio-recording and replaying that they used in their practice provided the tools to distance the body even further and in different directions from the voice. Not only did Nóbrega's voice seem to come from somewhere else, but they also refused the organ's power to speak out loud. Speaking, using one's voice, is a move into signification as much as it is a passage from me into the world, therefore to renounce speech puts being-in-the-world at stake. Refusing to be at home with the sound of the voice, always alienated and so the voice also wanders, like the mythological character Echo punished by Hera, in a sort of homelessness, without body and without location in the world. I gave their voice away, as another amputation, a physical and symbolical one, with the emotional, political and legal consequence that this entails. Steven Connor writes that "voice is not something I have or am, I do my voice, the voice is an event."<sup>687</sup> One's voice has been thought to belong and express the most intimate and unique self, recognised by the lover in intimacy and the event of one's opening in the world. The voice is also connected with speech, which they gave away too, connected to political agency, to the life in the *polis*, and politics.

This section listens attentively and carefully to the holes of the severed body, not the feminine or sexual orifice, but more specifically here what psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok (1994) called the "empty mouth". I will try to translate in words what it means to refuse to satiate the mouth either with food or with a tongue, which as the French word for tongue, *langue*, makes clear means both the physical tongue in the mouth but also the metaphorical tongue, language. While they further de-constructed the artist, I metaphorically cut their tongue out too, negating any game of tongues and the articulation of words. In dialogue with the action that opened this chapter, *This is my body*, I write about the action *oskar or clash and resistance* (2010) as another rejection of the possible communion and the prolonged wordless scream also in their experimentations with the artist and musician Pontogor. In the final section, I discuss their work with other voices and ghosts, all of us taking over that single voice that they lost, undoing the notion of an original single author – a proprietor of an Intellectual Property, making space to other voices. In relation to their Ventriloquist project and the work *Tsununami*

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<sup>686</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 13 January 2024.

<sup>687</sup> Connor, 2000: 4.

(2016) in which they juxtaposed different languages, in a process of gathering, in the quest for ghosts during a residency at the Hilda Hilst's home in 2014, I. opens the question of intertextuality challenging the single being-author. I end the chapter, now with Tom, not with a withdrawal but in a dislocation.<sup>688</sup>

*"Community of empty mouths"*<sup>689</sup>

The body, the eyes and the hands have, so far, been the focus as the organs of APPROPRIATION in the thesis. Locke-ing things into property. Now through their Portuguese mother tongue and my English foreign language, I analyse how I. doubted and averted language as speech. As seen in previous chapters, especially in the use of language by Sehgal, language can be instrumentalised as a technology to produce being's subject in the world, within the grammar of law and speaking one's own story in the public realm. There is another language, however, that exists outside speech and the construction of a logic of property because it does not have words and comes from a wound that is left open, empty, with no-thing there, no re-presentation to fill it up, as "utterance, which is to say the force of speech without, or in excess of, its recognisable and regularising forms."<sup>690</sup> In this part of the thesis, the cry emerges as a mode of engaging in the world from the holes left open by the exteriorisations, as flesh became body, and home became property, and a hole opens even further and wider by I.'s refusal to be compensated or filled up by any-thing.

Already in the 1970s something was happening with mouths, ingestion, scream and silence: Samuel Beckett filmed the mouth piece *Not I* (1972), artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha filmed her *Mouth to Mouth* piece in 1975, a close up of her lips forming an O shape, the sound of liquidities in the background. In I.'s home country Brazil, the works of Lygia Clark's *Cannibalism* (1973) and *Baba Antropofagia* (1973) and Anna Maria Maiolino's film *In-Out Antropofagia* (1973) link the mouth, its swallowing and vomiting with a type of behaviour or relation in and to the world.<sup>691</sup> In Maiolino's film *In-Out Antropofagia* (1973), the two mouths try to speak, but are unable to articulate a word because they are obstructed by indigestible things: a raw egg or multicoloured strings are placed inside the mouth and become objects interfering with communication. Both Clark and Maiolino's works allude to the modernist poet

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<sup>688</sup> The concept of gathering here comes from Moten, 2020b; and intertextuality comes from Kristeva (1986) and will be examined at the end of this chapter.

<sup>689</sup> Abraham and Torok, 1994: 128.

<sup>690</sup> Connor, 2000: 33.

<sup>691</sup> See De Zegher, 1996; 2002.

and novelist Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" from 1928, but whereas Andrade's was a call to appropriate an act of devouring and digesting of the foreign and the familiar into something new, there is something in the two artists' works which interpellate a potential of interiorising.<sup>692</sup>

The decade of the seventies was also the time in which the psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok were working on their patients and developing their concept of trauma and "empty mouths". I would like to return here to read them again in order to think of the hole, and the relation of scream to both the wound and to hunger. Refusing to fill or feed the mouth and stomach, I remained in the hole and called out, screaming from the wound, from the separations and exteriorisations that bring us into existence, but that have also been expropriated by powers, of the Person and the subject. I see the psychoanalytical approach to the event of coming into existence as a radically different emergence to that of the birth of the *homo* and that of the *Person* within the *domus* of the master and subjected to the *pater familias*, a space of categorisations of existence always in relation to dynamics of ownership (chapter 2). If the Roman tradition – and Derrida (1981) as seen in chapter 1 – saw the origin of the Person in a "family scene" which focuses on the relation between a *pater* owner and a poor Son, confined between the walls of the city and of law, I suggest with Spiller's (1987) analysis of motherhood, physical kinship and engendering and with Abraham and Torok (1994) and later Kristeva (1984), to look at the process of coming into *ek-sistence* and movement, through another "family scene" which starts with the mother and the in-fant, rather than the father and the son. The emergence I am analysing here is an exteriorisation in relation to a movement of coming into being, before the construction of property and the power relations constructed around the Person or non-person. The hole is what we all have in common as "empty mouths", beings left with holes after a series of separations.

According to the psychoanalysts, the in-dividual is gradually defined "by a constant process of differentiation or "division" from a more primary union: the mother".<sup>693</sup> Exteriorisation and loss is then a condition for existence. As one is first separated, in that coming out of the mother, holes start to take place in our being. The first cry out of the hole is that of a baby, stripped from unity with the mother, a body separated in order to *be* and suddenly brought into relation. Removed, stripped from a union, a hole comes to make space in her being and the baby cries because she is empty. The mother compensates for the separation and ensure the continuation of life (*zoē*) by filling the "empty mouth" with her breast

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<sup>692</sup> Andrade, "Cannibal Manifesto", 1928. [https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Andrade\\_Cannibalistic\\_Manifesto.pdf](https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Andrade_Cannibalistic_Manifesto.pdf)

<sup>693</sup> Rashkin 1988: 34.

and the empty stomach with her breastmilk. At a second stage of separation to become other than the mother, exterior, the in-fant, still not yet in speech, will be separated from the breast and will feed the hole or "empty mouth" with the words given by the mother-tongue. Only in this process of thinking and verbalising, that Abraham and Torok called "introjection", can the separations and loss be transformed into a bearable aspect of life and so continue a process of detachment, exteriorisation, from union to a forward-looking quest for individuation.<sup>694</sup> The coming into existence produces holes, empty spaces, as wounds and exteriorised things, things made other. The individual is brought into a vital relation, from her first existence, in and from the wounds, from the holes, towards the other, that which is made exterior - the mother being that first made-other. Individuation, for Abraham and Torok, the broadening or the movement of the individual towards the other and the world takes place in this series of constant separations, wounds.

Now, what I have been arguing throughout the thesis through the works of art, is that those exteriorisations, processes of symbolisation that are part of a process of existence, have been interrupted and made into property, movements that have been cut by the scissors, the shutter, the whip and the codification of law, producing trauma. Trauma then is a suspension of movement and of symbolisation, in an impossibility of finding words for a violent cut experienced, that has put life at risk. At the Hospital of La Salpêtrière, the process of symbolisation was

guillotined

by the shutter of the camera and stolen by the scientist, leaving the women with their mouths empty, traumatised. In the case of Sehgal, I have also argued that he constructs situations with experiences, a first relation or engagement of being in the world, which is being APPROPRIATED and made into property, interrupting the rhythm of exteriorisation and interiorisation. The process of interiorisation, symbolisation, is mediated by the artist producer of experiences, as if we had lost our "*savoir-penser*", words that I borrow again from Stiegler. The French philosopher wrote about hyper-industrialised society, where we have lost our *savoir-faire* or "know-how" and the

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<sup>694</sup> Rashkin, 1988.

*savoir-vivre,*

“know-how to live” to discretisation and have been reduced to calculation.<sup>695</sup> Later, he added that we have also lost a “*savoir panser*”, the capacity to think as a form of caring, or tending the wounds, of licking, in other words, feeding the “empty mouth”. Two actions that Stiegler finds united in the etymology of the old French word *penser*:

For *penser, to think*, previously meant *soigner, to care, to treat* “*Panser* first means ‘to care for, to feed (a horse),’ the meaning of ‘feeding’ coming from the influence of another verb *panser*, meaning ‘to nourish, to fill the belly/rumen’ (from *panse*)<sup>696</sup>

One does not only carry the personal wounds experienced in their singular lives, though, one also carries the holes inflicted by transgenerational wounds, which are passed on from one generation to the next. Abraham and Torok write about a “transgenerational haunting” which suggests that a collective trauma can be passed on to the individual or collectivity and be transmitted across several generations.<sup>697</sup> This is the trauma that I have been concerned about and that is the focus of my research, which Moten called “the subject’s long developmental nightmare, it’s contrafantastical trauma.”<sup>698</sup> The series of traumatic collective amputations that have made up the events and stories of Western culture, I see, hear, think, and dare to write are still very much present in I.’s holes and screams and still haunt art today

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<sup>695</sup> Stiegler, 2015: 25.

<sup>696</sup> Ross and Stiegler, 2018: 215.

<sup>697</sup> Abraham and Torok, 1994, 166-169.

<sup>698</sup> Words that appear again, in another version of the paper in Moten, “Some Propositions on Blackness, Phenomenology, and (Non) Performance”, in Lepecki, 2017: 101-111.

in its relation to life and the body. Nóbrega rejected covering the nightmares with representations or things, but consented to leave them as empty holes, leaving the stomach and the mouth empty, so some others or simply the wound can continue to cry from them. They placed their selves in the place of ex-proprietation, of those that have been deprived of food or bandages, because the flow in the “community of empty mouths” has been disrupted,<sup>699</sup> because there was no one there to feed the mouth or heal the wounds, something was stolen, captured in the process of making sense, by the APPROPRIATIVE-subject-proprietor.

I. insisted on fasting when they refused to eat the bread-body-broken, remaining hollow, in the “empty mouth”. They starved during those thirty hours on the wooden plank or sitting at the desk in the empty factory, or when they vomited during the *conference or how to avoid a deluge*, 2011, or when they swallowed pebbles in Warsaw in 2014. They tried to swallow again in *eject, rewind* (2012), this time it was a tape from a cassette of other voices, but they vomited it out again, both voices and the technology. In this action, they conflated ejection with rejection. I. sat at a table with an analogical cassette player and some scissors in front of them.<sup>700</sup> As the cassette player was playing, they cut out the magnetic tape from another cassette, put it slowly into their mouth and chewed it, ruminating on the recorded voices’ haunting materiality. They then tried to swallow, in the same way they had swallowed pebbles. They continued until their throat could not take any more and had to spit it all out in a bowl left on the side of the table. I. repeated, for an hour and fifteen minutes the impossible task of swallowing over and over again, in loop. Their action attempted to take-in, assimilate those voices that had been exteriorised, alienated, captured and stored on the tape, mnemotechnology left as the only support, to hold in, the now unlocatable and homeless voices. Could that be done by swallowing the technologies that alienated the voices in the first place? By swallowing the voice as object? Fascinating as much as menacing, technologies of recording and storing are used to distribute voices in time and space, a time measured and calculated. This alienated thing is what they put in their mouth as if those sounds recorded on it, could feed them. However, rather than feed, they performed the impossibility of an interiorisation, the impossibility of acquiring a language that could make sense. As they tried to absorb the uprooted voices, pausing their hunger strike to consume the technology that exteriorised and alienated language in the first place, the process of interiorisation or

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<sup>699</sup> Abraham and Torok, 1994: 128.

<sup>700</sup> Presented as part of the exhibition *City as Process*, curated by Raphael Fonseca, in Ekaterinburgo, Rússia, 2012. [https://issuu.com/raphaelfonseca9/docs/registros\\_da\\_exposicao\\_city\\_as\\_a\\_pr](https://issuu.com/raphaelfonseca9/docs/registros_da_exposicao_city_as_a_pr)

symbolisation failed, and kept failing, over and over again. Their attempt to swallow the words only created an internal pressure and the opening of the oesophagus cleared the passage for an emptying out of the mouth, an outpouring of tape and voices. They vomited them; I tried again though, trapped in the loop, trying to assume, to assimilate the grammar of words spoken, of exosomatic voices, recorded, made other, objects, only to eject them. The technologies, the industrialisation of voice, exteriorisation and alienating the symbolic, cannot be assimilated – at least not in that way. I swallowed and yet as they vomited, they made clear the absolute impossibility of assimilation, or maybe their absolute repulsion to the thought of an assimilation, their imperious necessity to reject any assimilation and leave the holes of expropriation empty. Having realised that both consuming and speaking objectifies and hardens that which is consumed or spoken of, they neither ate nor spoke, creating that double emptiness in the mouth without food to survive or words to speak in the world. Emptiness can do nothing then but to exhale the scream, as an excess that is poured out, refusing to interiorise, and without producing anything but an unbearable prolonged lament, calling for another relationality outside consumption and grammatical language.

### *Tongues*

A tapering, blunt-tipped, muscular, soft and fleshy organ describes

- (a) the penis.
- (b) the tongue.
- (c) neither of the above
- (d) both of the above

In man the tongue is

- (a) the principle organ of taste.
- (b) the principal organ of articulate speech.
- (c) the principal organ of oppression and exploitation
- (d) all the above

The tongue imposes a relation to the world that dominates and imposes its place<sup>701</sup>.

These lines from NourbeSe Philip's anthology "She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks" (1989), speak from blackness. However, I approach them by simply touching or holding them with care for a moment. NourbeSe Philip's powerful mis-use of the legal

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<sup>701</sup> Thank you to Katharina Ludwig for sharing this collection of poems with me. NourbeSe Philip, 1989: 33.

linguistic apparatuses of domination and subjection, that have been the language and performance of property, and have ripped out, stolen, marked the flesh, together with the notion of mother and the mother-tongue in Spillers writing from 1987 help elucidate what rejection of tongues we find in I.'s actions. I expect to make visible from blackness the wound that has been suffered in the traumatic development of the making of property, through the static legal encoding that made slavery, and that has been transferred, immovable, as a ghost, from one generation to the next, still haunting any relation to property and new forms of expropriation. In the compositions that make up her collection of poetry, NourbeSe Philip makes use of the *jurisdictional* traces, that have been assimilated in the structures of power and subjugation, and of the vocabulary of patriarchy that has stolen a relation to the mouth of *mother* (land) that feeds.<sup>702</sup> In slavery, the mother tongue has been replaced by Man's/the foreign tongue: the "overseer's whip" which imposes and dominates.<sup>703</sup> In the collection of fragmented poems, NourbeSe Philip takes on this jurisdictional and scientific language, as the foreign tongue, made up of contractual and regulatory words that shaped slavery and colonialism. She takes on these linguistic registers to reveal both the weapon and the wounds, the power and the holes that they have produced, in bodies and mouths.

In the enumeration above, the tongue is not that of the mother, is not the mother's tongue which appears in another of NourbeSe Philip's poems from "Discourse on the Logic of Language".<sup>704</sup> The tongue in the discourse of grammar and law, is not the mother's tongue that licks the babe all over its body. Neither is it the daughter's tongue in the tiny mouth open by the mother, the little tongue that touches gently and silently the finger and the breath of the mother, "her mother's mother, and all their mothers before".<sup>705</sup> The mother's tongue has been ripped out of the slave, already displaced in the diaspora, physically and metaphysically dismembered and mutilated. The white trader and master ensured "the destruction of the African name, of kin, of linguistic, and ritual connections"<sup>706</sup> instead, tongue and kinship were replaced, "invaded at any given and arbitrary moment"<sup>707</sup> by the "overseer's whip which will open the flesh and the language of oppression and property that "will most certainly kill us".<sup>708</sup> According to Spillers, in the slave trade, kinship was intentionally dispersed and unrecognised. Recognising kinship relations would entail an affectionate sense of belonging, that had to be undermined in order for property, legal and white to proliferate. In captivity, African female and African male were separated to avoid amongst them any "desire that engenders future" as

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<sup>702</sup> Moten uses that word to speak about Philip's writing (Moten, 2018: 252).

<sup>703</sup> NourbeSe Philip, 1989: 33.

<sup>704</sup> NourbeSe Philip, 1989: 30-33.

<sup>705</sup> NourbeSe Philip, 1989: 32.

<sup>706</sup> Spillers, 1987: 73.

<sup>707</sup> Spillers, 1987: 74.

<sup>708</sup> Spillers, 1987: 68.



well as future belongings.<sup>709</sup> Ex-propriated from belonging, slaves could be atomised and accounted as chattel. Denied blood links to the tongue (as language and as metaphor) of a mother and of a father, “finding themselves in the situation of being orphans” alone-in-the-world, kinless-ness becomes a requirement for the making of property.<sup>710</sup> Hence the female body was made available, at hand, for capture by the white master, the foreign tongue, hungry for reproduction, not as the engendering of futures, but for reproduction and accumulation of enslaved bodies. And so, the mother tongue has been ripped out in a violent act of expropriation of mother land and mother’s breath, leaving open the “

hieroglyphics

of the

flesh

”.<sup>711</sup> The flesh is here the place or non-place, the wound in which the opening, the coming into existence meets ex-propriation. Maybe the hole in the mouth was there before the tongue grew in the first place, the hole being necessary for the tongue to appear, for an opening to something else, an empty mouth without a tongue permitting the tongue as other to emerge as world. A tongue given by a mother, to replace her absence and allow for a distinguished other to take place. An opening of another world. The wound, the hole is both the ontological opening of world, and at the same time an agonising vulnerability inflicted, always at risk of occupation, of force and more violence.

The connection between displacement, the loss of the tongue and rape insinuated in NourbeSe Philip – the violent penetration of the penis, and the tongue, “the violation of body and mind”<sup>712</sup> – is found in ancient mythology, as recorded by Ovid, in Book VI of *The*

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<sup>709</sup> Spillers, 1987: 73.

<sup>710</sup> Claude Meillassoux quoted in Spillers, 1987: 74.

<sup>711</sup> Spillers, 1987: 67.

<sup>712</sup> Spillers, 1987: 68.

*Metamorphoses*, in the story of the extraordinary Philomela, her rape and the loss of her tongue. Philomela had been taken away from her father's house, captured and expropriated, she was raped, locked up between walls and had her tongue cut out by Tereus. Ovid narrates the moment in which her tongue, uprooted, still trembled on the ground. "Her tongue's root was left quivering, while the rest of it lay on the dark soil, vibrating and trembling, and, as though it were the tail of a mutilated snake moving, it writhed, as if, in dying, it was searching for some sign of her."<sup>713</sup> Orphan, a tongue, cut off, fallen out of the hole looking for the root of its being, the breath of the *m-other*, the radical. I dare to bring Spillers, NourbeSe Philip and Philomela alongside I. to think one more time and differently about the empty hole in the black and in the white women. Can the flesh be found in the wounding of whiteness? Has the topographical construction of the body also stolen a white flesh? I. severed and ripped apart their body and any notion of belonging in their work, figuratively remaining in a violence suffered by the expropriated, like Philomela, paralysing that organ of speech, *mute*-ilating body and language. In the fear of being occupied by the master-Person or property I. took up the space left open in the throat without its tongue, a cry without articulation. What is it, however, that can be generated?

The cry is an opening left by the absence of a tongue. Is it the absence of the caressing lick of a mother's tongue? The absence of the "tender labour of gesture", as Connor puts it, of the tongue, the palate, and lips together?<sup>714</sup> Deprived of the first tongue that is the m-others replaced by a physical violence, a shock in the asylum (at the Hospital of La Salpêtrière), mechanical (in the machinery of the factory), or the whip (in the plantations), without blood or with blood spilling from the wound, being is left with an "empty mouth" and an open wound. Weil wrote of the *malheureux* – in English translated as the "afflicted" – as the uprooted, exploited, without past or the possibility of a future,<sup>715</sup> recognised only as a corpse, moving matter: "They are like someone whose tongue has been cut out and forgets the fact"; the traumatised being?<sup>716</sup> The afflicted are "by nature inarticulate", outside any determination of proper language and law, for as much as they cry, they aren't heard.<sup>717</sup> Nor can they be understood by magistrates or those highly educated people incapable of hearing the unthinkable, they do not speak the same language.<sup>718</sup> The language of law is a foreign tongue and is incapable of hearing the afflicted.

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<sup>713</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, verses 549-570, thought to have been written in the eighth century B.C., tr. Anthony S. Kline, online <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/trans/Metamorph6.htm#480077268>

<sup>714</sup> Connor, 2000: 10.

<sup>715</sup> Similar words used by Spillers, of black diaspora and displacement of kinship "with neither past nor future" Spillers, 1987: 66.

<sup>716</sup> Weil in her essay "On Human Personality", McLellan, 1989: 285.

<sup>717</sup> Weil in McLellan, 1989: 281

<sup>718</sup> Weil in in McLellan, 1989: 285; and Moten 2020a.

## HANDLE WITH CARE

During the action *oskar or clash and resistance* (2010), I. sat on a chair at a table, three wine glasses a quarter full of water in front of them. The action consisted of trying to shatter the glasses with nothing else but their wailing voice. The shrieking scream lasted about two hours and a half, and still the glasses did not break. The first iteration of the piece in October 2010 at Trapolim's *Plataforma de encontro com a arte da performance* (Platform for the art of performance), took place in a ballet room in Vitoria, Espirito Santo, Brazil. The table in front of them looked more like an altar table and a mirror covered the whole wall behind them giving a sense of immensity and infinity to the space. At another recurrence of the work, performed during the Festival Periferias in a main square of the city of Huesca, Spain, 2011, the table in front of I. looked more like a worktable but they avoided the walls completely this time, performing in the infinity of the open air.

Sitting at the table, a Western spectator would have expected I. to change the water into wine or maybe even just to drink the water that was in the glasses. An obvious reference in Christian iconography and the biblical narratives of Jesus transforming water into wine during the wedding of Cana and then the wine into his blood in the last supper, to share in communion with his disciples.<sup>719</sup> Transubstantiation takes place as the same matter changes into another substance, a passage of the wine from being non-symbol, or simply the work of the human, to becoming the blood of Christ, and subsequently offered as a promise of communion, of a new covenant, the intimate union of Creator and Creation. I. though, again refused to drink, neither master nor disciple, they instead profaned the possibility of communion with a prolonged scream attempting to break the transubstantiation. As I return to the kenotic creation that Weil writes about, I would like to compare it here with the relation of the artist creator and its creation, until now seen as an APPROPRIATIVE relation in order to understand some-thing of I.'s positionality as an artist or non-artist. As they took the place of the creator in this action, sitting at the table, they decided neither to transform nor to transubstantiate, but to remain in the scream. No words did anything, no language or hands moved anything into existence or into one or another category of being. The hands were rendered inoperative. They were unavailable to fabricate or take hold, or even to care or

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<sup>719</sup> See gospels of John 2: 1-11 and Matthew 26:17-30; and gospels of Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-20; and John 13:1-30.

caress. I. engaged with the matter on the table with their voice that acted as the only energy and attempted to make vibrate the glass at the risk of breaking, destroying, them. Another communion scene, another rejection, they also went thirsty, as they went hungry in the Supper of the bread. I. refused to drink and as they remained in the visceral overstretching scream, they also denied the possibility of symbolisation, of moving from trauma to words, from separation to assimilation. They did not accept the water offered by a father.

The words HANDLE WITH CARE in the title to this section are those often seen on removal boxes together with the sign of a wine glass between two hands on a white background, which brings us back to the hand as an instrument of care, and at the same time a clumsy organ that can break as it handles. How can the voice rather than the hands be involved in care? In another curious twist of tongues, a search of the etymology of the word “care” one finds it comes from the old high German word *chara* which also means a lament, a wailing, a prolonged high-pitched cry of pain, grief, or anger. Only in the mid sixteenth century was the word “care” used in English for the opposite meaning, for fondness, inclination, the stretching out to the other, or

tendering.

The lamentation is that which comes with a sudden need to relate, a cry from the desert, that is difficult to care for, *panser*. Screaming to heal, a healing would make life more bearable though and so the scream would have nowhere to scream from or into, no hole, no space. Holding without breaking, thinking without producing knowledge, speaking without destroying, working without fabricating objects, anything that could add to being the subject and its properties, without hands, care is now suspended in a lamentation as the only mode of relating in the world, in the single tone, or pitch.

The action *oskar* was inspired by the main character from Gunther Grass' novel *The Tin Drum* originally published in 1959.<sup>720</sup> At the age of three, Oskar decided to stop growing, as a

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<sup>720</sup> Grass, 2017.

mode of resistance to the grown-up world. Worried about the situation, his parents take him to Doctor Hollatz. In one of his visits, Oskar notices on the shelves of the doctor's room, glass jars filled with preserved animals and embryos. All of sudden the boy starts to emit a shriek in such a piercing way that the glass containers burst and the bodies or pieces of bodies, spill out.<sup>721</sup> His scream cracks open those contained and preserved dead bodies, the precious work of scientific progress that is as much about naming and recording as it is about preserving and storing forms of life for some other usage. I. attempts the same endeavour, to break the containers which hold, only using the voice. To do that though, they had to listen with care and attention, they had to try to reach a tone that would resonate with the glass and had to keep the same tone throughout. The crystal glass is most likely to break if the sound emitted reaches the same pitch as that emitted by the glass, at some point the glass can respond in vibration to the sound of the voice, bringing them into a relationship that is in a listening and responding, as a choir or an orchestra working together. The game they played hence called for a careful attunement that starts by a listening, a dialogue through ear and voice with the glasses and the sound that these may emit. They tried four times, but never reached a moment of coincidence that would break the glass, the distinction between the inside and the outside, the sacred - wine - and the profane. At one point though, the exercise of attunement becomes more like an arm-wrestling competition between matter and voice, that can only finish with the exhaustion or destruction of one of the parts, flattened, for the victory of the other. Quite an impossible task, already set to fail, unless the point from the beginning was exhaustion rather than to break the glasses.

*"What's The Matter, Don't You Speak Greek?"*<sup>722</sup>

Alongside and entwined with their performative practice, I. worked with their inarticulate voice in collaboration with a collective of contemporary electronic musicians, Al Revés with whom in 2006 she recorded the album *menagerie*.<sup>723</sup> Later, they collaborated on several occasions with sound and performance artist Pontogor, with whom I. worked on the multi-channel sound installation at the Factory in Caruaru in 2015 to which I return to in the following section of this chapter on polyphony, and they produced an album *DEITA TUA NUCA NO MEU CRIADO MUDO* (2015).<sup>724</sup> I. performed with Pontogor in the piece "NÃO FAÇO

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<sup>721</sup> See also Malchow, 2021.

<sup>722</sup> From Carson's "Cassandra Float Can" in Carson, 2016: unpaginated.

<sup>723</sup> [www.alreves.org](http://www.alreves.org)

<sup>724</sup> My translation into English: "lay your back on my mute servant".

IDEIA DE QUANTOS DEDOS TENHO” for the exhibition “Creature” (2016).<sup>725</sup> In this action, planned to last about three hours, Pontogor and I. sat on the floor in front of a concert piano turning their backs to the front of another piano, an upright piano placed in an angle with the horizontal one. Both Pontogor and I. played each on one piano both sitting on the floor side by side of each other. The action sounded like an improvised response to each other, meeting at some points and diverging at others. Pontogor played a tune, I. pressed the piano keys with their fingers, without a particular key or melody, as they wailed without words in a non-linear and uncertain fashion. The sounds they emitted were unpredictable, it had no rhythm. “*evol* was constantly moving, whirling, trembling, shaking, playing, with many ups and downs and twists and turns”.<sup>726</sup> I. used the wind coming out of their lungs, their mouth, and at the same time, hammered the keys with their fingers: two different bodily relations to sound, one, *evol*, emerged from the space made hollow inside the body ; the other, hit the matter with the extremities of their physical body matter, the fingers that compose the hand.

The scream is that breath of air that comes out of the lungs, up the trachea and opens the throat through the larynx where the vocal cords vibrate to create the sound. Just like a trachea, the ancient instrument of the flute or *aulos* lets the air blow through it to produce music. In Ancient Greece, the flute, originally made out of a reed, associated with liquidity, abundant flow, was an instrument of excess, in Greek *hubris*, without transcription, unproductive, exaggerated and offensive to nature and its order. The flute was exhaled by Dionysus, in contrast to the lyre which needs to be plucked, and which belonged to Apollo, the god of the plastic arts, maker of images. Both in the flute and in lamentation there was the intrusion of something foreign and horrific that challenged the order of the Greek *polis* and the *logos*. In her book *The Mourning Voice: An essay on Greek Tragedy* (2002) which explores tragedy from the point of view of its sound in the *polis*, Nicole Loraux associates the flute with the oriental and foreign, incorporated within the mourning rituals in Greek tragedy. In the lament, grief replaced the *logos*, and became the uncontrollable unarticulated cry, not a musical composition but a piercing and unpleasant sound extended in an “aiai” or “elegy of always” in the Greek *threnos*, ‘wailing’.<sup>727</sup> The lament is the suspension of an act, or rather a non-act, as gesture in a state of stubbornness that sticks to being, a without-end in a way, waiting but without an object, that reclaims an eternity for itself. I.’s actions never had a specific, in-framed, beginning or end – sometimes it would go on for thirty hours, other times

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<sup>725</sup> Translated into English as ‘i have no idea how many fingers i have’. The event was part of the exhibition “Criatura” curated by Pontogor and Janaína Wagner, at the Oficina Cultural Oswald de Andrade.

<sup>726</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 15 January 2024.

<sup>727</sup> On lament see also Alexiou, 2002.

24 hours, in each case they stretched a single gesture in what seemed like an impossible time. This stretching out of an eternal time, persistent and forever unstable, the without-end of the cry of lamentation, ends up intoxicating the human being, who can no longer face the contingencies of the world, nor the contingencies of grammatical and signifying language. In Greece, the lament could cause shuddering horror in those who heard it, and so, as the *aulos*, had to be banished from the city.<sup>728</sup> The sound of the lyre alone could remain within its walls to produce lyrical poetry, a succession of interrupted measured notes joined one after the other as letters in words and words in sentences, that produce *logos*, knowing.

Following on from Loraux (2002), the grief and cry of the prophetess in Delphi is also kept outside the city walls, bound by a cry, the “aiai” suspended vowels, the *vocale* without end.<sup>729</sup> Both grief and the cry are unproductive and stretch towards a notion of the eternal, a time and space of the gods, an Otherness that is so other that it has no end or limit, it is completely strange. As humans join in that eternal moment in the cry, and hold on to it in lamentation, or taste it in the prophet’s corporeality, the great danger is for them to absorb some of that eternal breath, and become neurotic or saintly as “an eruption of the absolute into ordinary history”.<sup>730</sup> One not only relates to that meta-language coming from afar, but runs the risk of trying to take it in, incorporating it, letting that otherness make space in the empty lungs and empty mouth. In I.’s durational works, as well as the durational works of artists such as Marina Abramovic, Stuart Brisley, Tehching Hsieh, Linda Montano, or Kerry Trengove, there is something in that stretching of time to the point of almost “too much to take”, touching a never-ending time, closer to some-thing eternal, outside the epochal of history, or the contingencies of the bodily. These prolonged actions leave behind any possible object, and exceed and stretch towards a time of the gods, another “without end” that is outside or without bodies, that is “an elegy of always” not as a passage but remaining there, in the lamentation. They stagnate in the too much of performance or labour without end, or maybe without a rhythm, without an end in the product/work, but failing also to meet the contingencies of human physicality.

The voice that cries is only open to the wind, and its flow precedes the articulated word produced by the tongue. Without a tongue, one cannot pronounce a consonant. Only a controlled movement of the tongue, like a finger plucking the lyre or pressing the key of the piano, interrupts the airflow, makes the consonant and builds up articulation. Without consonants there are no syllables, no words, no sentences, no grammar, no metered verse.

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<sup>728</sup> Loraux, 2002: 116, footnote 93.

<sup>729</sup> Loraux, 2002; see also Carson, 1995.

<sup>730</sup> Carson, 2006: 180.

In the beginning of the art of writing, the vowels were left for the performance in the oral speech, and only consonants were recorded. The earliest written records that we know of are by Sumerians of Mesopotamia's cuneiform tablets.<sup>731</sup> With a cut of reed the ancient scribes made wedged shaped marks into tablets of mud at the same time as lands became agricultural grounds for farming. Cuneiform became the prosthetic memory for business and land control measures, that is, as Stiegler concurs, related to list making, or accounting.<sup>732</sup> In the early Semitic cultures, in the Phoenician and Hebrew societies only consonants were recorded, the pronunciation of the vowels could only be transmitted from word to mouth. The consonant belonged to writing, the quantitative and calculable, that which could be stored, whereas the vowels belonged to the oral, the verbal rhythm of the voices, spoken and heard in common.<sup>733</sup> All that was sacred, the divine utterance of God, *EUOAI*. His name was only composed of vowels, of wind, and pronounced only once a year by the high priest. As I have already mentioned in the first chapter, through Stiegler, writing and – I add now the power of the consonant – was the great technological revolution that inaugurated Western thinking and the “developmental nightmare” that Moten refers to. With the inclusion of vowels in script, writing became more sophisticated, thoughts were exteriorised, separated from their origin and the mouth that uttered them, became other, distanced and plainly there.<sup>734</sup>

If the becoming art and writing is an opening and engagement with and in world, these openings are also a place of decision, an interrogation of positionality. I.'s scream responds to this opening by resisting grammatisation: they screamed to tear open and introduce a liquidity that challenges the contours of the form. *HANDLING WITH CARE* calls for a return of the unwritten vowels or the vocality that was not written down, the scream always foreign that disturbed the *polis*. The danger is that they also forgot they could speak. They have lost the possibility of holding on to the limits of the re-presentation, to transform the winds into words that set a tone to thought, as inhaling and exhaling sets the rhythm of breathing. To bring into words is a relation to the world that is not only a filling up, that is not only or always *APPROPRIATIVE*, but can be understood as a giving back, feeding the world as much as it feeds from the world, not for that forgetting the “empty mouth”. On the other hand, their abject body became an ever more haunting presence as it sought out to erase itself, stumbling with their own self, “constantly drawing attention to itself”, and to that body.<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>731</sup> [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W\\_1989-0130-4](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1989-0130-4)

<sup>732</sup> Sleigh-Johnson, 2022.

<sup>733</sup> Lehmann, 2012.

<sup>734</sup> See chapter 1 on this question in the writing of Plato, Derrida and Stiegler.

<sup>735</sup> Metzger, 2001b: 624.



### *Ventriloquism or how to give up one's voice*

In the following section, I go back to the idea of the solo dancer, introduced in the first chapter, and see I. once more as a reaction to the “single being”, that opens to an unending entanglement of multiplicities. This is an opening to the many ghosts of the past that continue to transpire in the events of art's occurrence. Around 2012, I. worked on a series of actions exploring ventriloquism, and was more interested in the dummy, or ventriloqual figure than in its activator, the ventriloquist. They did not want to be the master creator, who commands with the tongue although his lips do not open. They placed themselves instead in the place of expropriation, on the side of those, as Weil described, “*malheureux*” or ex-propriated, whose tongue had been cut out. The ventriloqual dummy has no voice of his own, but to escape the solitude of no one to speak with, makes space within, and becomes inhabited by others' voices, the origins of which are nowhere to be seen. Ventriloqual dummy or prophetess receiving the spirits of the gods or ghosts, I. worked to re-imagine modes of relating alone and modes of subverting the single voice of power, of the monolithic Person with words of its own, in proper relation to language. In accepting the voice from nowhere and refusing to possess an origin or voice of one's own, I. incapacitated the subject to *do* anything with words, and if anything was done, it was done “as if it were not theirs.”<sup>736</sup> So, there is no possibility of original work of authorship, which could grant exclusive rights of a creator over its property neither did they allow possession, that other more physical mode of relating, a possession that is about living, using, enjoying a voice in the *phusis*, in the physical body, outside of property or ownership

In 2012, during a residency at Nuveum, Rural art residency, in Brazil, I. spent various weeks in complete silence communicating only through pre-recorded tracks that they could play on a small digital recorder whenever they had to say something, the recorded voice acting as their prosthetic voice. Also in 2012, they produced *ventriloquist or what if my voice was a machine*, during a residency at Izolyatsia, Donetsk.<sup>737</sup> For 41 days, they communicated exclusively through a traditional TTS (Text-to-speech) voice synthesizer. I. wrote the words out, and the synthesizer spoke the words. The female voice of the synthesizer was named Heather.

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<sup>736</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:30b.

<sup>737</sup> The project was part of the *Turborealism (Breaking Ground)* presented as part of the final projects of IZOLYATSIA's 2012 summer residency: Paul Chaney, Elise Florenty & Marcel Türkowsky, Daniel Malone, Luísa Nobrega and Alexey Salmons.

“I wish I could sing. I wish I could scream. IIIIOOOOYYIYIYIQUQUQUQUTRAIAIA”<sup>738</sup>

After the 41 days in complete silence, in which she only communicated through Heather, as they started to speak again, I. hardly recognised their own voice: “I feel that my voice is somehow a little bit Greek!”, they said. *Falando grego*, in Portuguese, is an idiomatic expression which means one does not understand what someone is saying. Others will not understand either. It was not Greek I. was speaking, neither did it sound native Portuguese or English or Ukrainian, their individuality wanted and was to become saturated with different “accents”.<sup>739</sup> Neither did I.’s voice belong to them, neither was it Heather’s. They were speaking from a hole left behind; a hole full of noise, of accents, of other’s voices, stories and unconsciousness.

Their words and the Portuguese expression *falando grego* evoke the Trojan princess Cassandra, brought back in the poetry of Carson (2016), the most beautiful of Priam’s daughter’s condemned to utter “nonlinear, nonnarrative” words that were not really hers and who no one listened to or understood.<sup>740</sup> As she spoke, Cassandra’s sacerdotal language considerably resembled *glossolalia*, the phenomena of speaking in an unrecognisable language, “her first sounds are only cries of pain, grammatically unarticulated, followed by riddling puns and questions”<sup>741</sup>

“OTOTOTOI POPOI DA”<sup>742</sup>

Both her utterance and her long silences, physical and metaphysical are thought to be a symptom of madness.<sup>743</sup> At one point, the chorus of men, who spoke a clear and precise language and who represent everything that Athens wanted to be, asked Cassandra: “What’s the matter, don’t you speak Greek?”<sup>744</sup> How can those speaking in Greek metric come to perceive, even understand the Trojan utterances, and her silence? As Weil wrote somewhere else, they, those trapped in the walls of proper language, are unable “to glance at what is

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<sup>738</sup> Words spoken by Heather says Heather, and recorded by Nóbrega as apart of the *ventriloquist or what if my voice was a machine* (2012).

<sup>739</sup> Voloshinov, 1973: 23, thought to be written with or by Bakhtin. See also Taylor, 1995.

<sup>740</sup> Carson “Cassandra Float Can”, in Carson, 2016, unpaginated, and Aeschylus, Agamnenon, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0004%3Acard%3D104>

<sup>741</sup> Schein ,1982: 13.

<sup>742</sup> Carson “Cassandra Float Can”, in Carson, 2016: unpaginated,

<sup>743</sup> She is on stage but utterly ignored for about 170 lines, then neglected for about 80 more, and then silent for about another 40 lines. See Schein, 1982.

<sup>744</sup> “Cassandra Float Can”, in Carson, 2016: unpaginated.

outside”, unable to relate to affliction and truth.<sup>745</sup> Communication fails and affliction and truth are “eternally condemned to stand speechless in our presence”.<sup>746</sup>

In a thorough study on the history and forms of ventriloquism, Connor (2000) points out that ventriloquism by its etymology refers to *ventus*, stomach or belly, and *loquor*, to speak. The word was first used to refer to the prophets in Ancient Greece, or the prophetess Cassandra whose voices did not come from their own belly, but from the winds in the depths of the earth’s bowels, in the caves, or by the banks of the water, where prophets and prophetesses received the otherwise silent or at least unvoiced and non-logical voice of the gods. Unless cursed by Apollo as Cassandra was, the prophetess usually made sense of these non-logical sounds, transforming them into poetry or prose, albeit often misleadingly cryptic. Connor goes through a history of the prophetess in Ancient Greece and Rome, and the fascination with the process whereby gods would speak through the woman as a mouthpiece, a means. According to Connor, there was a belief that the woman breathed the ‘mephitic vapour’ or *pneuma enthousiastikon* that exhaled from the depths of the earth’s hole and transformed the divine frenzy into language. The woman inhales the “playing winds”, and as she digests and exhales, that earthly wordlessness produces voice and language. Later, Virgil suggested that those suspicious voices “always only scatter and diffuse meaning, rather than trusting, those voices on the contrary disturb and disorder the breezes as playing winds, to multiply, sieve, diffuse, create labyrinths.”<sup>747</sup>

In the work *Still* (2012), I. took the place of the prophetess or a sybil, sitting on a chair by a cliff in front of the sea.<sup>748</sup> Their eyes closed, the windstorm raged against their body. The plan was to remain there for 24 hours, holding a metronome on their lap. I. was placed in the crack of the ocean, like the prophetess by the banks of Acheron or the river Kokutos, waiting for a destructive flood or a dramatic storm, or to receive the voices of those lost to the ocean floor.<sup>749</sup> They waited to be occupied by gods or by ghosts, the voices of the commons, or of a collective unconscious, those lost in the waters or those hiding in the skies, all in the same way endlessly and infinitely absent. Such voices are always haunting, never quite ours, but a *verborragia* of spirits ready to be taken in, either assimilated if we accept to be fed from them and be transformed radically, or incorporate again as trauma, in which case they will simply continue to haunt. I. could not complete the action and instead was removed and brought back

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<sup>745</sup> Weil in McLellan, 1989: 283.

<sup>746</sup> Weil in McLellan, 1989: 283.

<sup>747</sup> Connor, 2000: 60.

<sup>748</sup> <https://vimeo.com/42931770>

<sup>749</sup> Loraux, 2002: 80.

to solid ground. For how long, though could they have stayed there, in the open of the ocean? Without coming back to the word, to language, how long can they have remained in the never-ending silence or lament without walls, or support, in the aversion of a Latinised form of language and property?

*Tsunami or what does a deluge sound like?*

In 2013, I. spent some weeks trying to speak in tongues and listening to others during a residency in Fortaleza, Brazil, during which they attended daily cults in a charismatic episcopal communities. There they experienced glossolalic prayer considered to be the incorporation of the divine presence within the body.<sup>750</sup> I. was as much interested in the concept of being inhabited by voices, by the complete other, as they were in the act of listening, understood as an obedience:

I think that there is also a relationship between this almost inhuman speech and perfect listening. Because it is a listening that is not conscious of what is being said but obeys to the voices.

## Listening

is the first form of obedience.<sup>751</sup>

An obedience, in the case of I.'s actions with their voice, surrenders the will to the completely other as an obligation. A completely other voice, whose source remains unknown, could subordinate their actions. Had they spoken then, or had they acted then, it would not have been their own actions, neither would it have been their words, I. was only being the instrument for the voice and actions of spirits. The act of obedience attacks straight at the core, of what it is to be a Person, an APPROPRIATIVE individual. If, as Locke explained, being a Person was

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<sup>750</sup> Baker, 1995.

<sup>751</sup> Nóbrega interview with Isabel Waquil, 15 April 2013. <http://www.subterranea.art.br/>

the control of the body and its capacities, and consciousness, the Person owes nothing to anyone.<sup>752</sup> So I., as they gave away their voice and obeyed to voices from nowhere, subtracted the “abstract free individual in all his (un)holiness” and the free will that precedes the construction of intellectual and private property.<sup>753</sup>

They worked on obedience and on the inhabitation of voices again during the three month residency at the Delfina Foundation in London, in 2016. I. took it upon themselves to learn other languages, in this case two languages seemingly antithetical to each other: sign language and classical singing. The residency culminated in a group show in which I. presented *Tsunami* (2016). For the performance they sat on the steps of the building’s back staircase, not quite a place but a placeless space of transition. From there, they set themselves a multi-channel task: to read the sign language projected in a film in front of them – a film of a deaf woman telling the story of how she survived a tsunami – whilst copying the signs with their hands; and to listen to a piece for soprano and piano, “*C’est l’extase langoureuse*” by French composer Claude Debussy with words from the poem by Paul Verlaine,<sup>754</sup> through some headphones, and sing along to it. Four acts all at once: two acts of receiving (watching the sign language and listening to the music) and two acts of incarnating both the sign language and the opera. They did this in loop for about eight hours. I have used the term multi-channel to describe the endeavour, because of its relation to technology and to them as medium, as a hollow passage for the projection of something else. The action resonated with a work that they produced with Pontogor *Deus Diabo Homem* (2015) for the exhibition “Permanence and Destruction”, in Rio de Janeiro, in 2015. In an empty swimming pool a three channel installation piece by Pontogor was projecting, 1) I.’s voice in a guttural wordless sound piece called “Deus” (God), 2) a second composition “Devil” played by Pontogor on the guitar, using only tritones, intervals between musical notes banned by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages and lastly, 3) “Man”, composed of small harmonic excerpts from a piece by Johann Sebastian Bach performed on an organ.<sup>755</sup>

In London, I. embodied all the channels themselves and acted them out compulsively. They recovered their hands to draw signs, returning to a hieroglyphic communication, non-verbal and symbolic, except that it made away with the mud, and the pictures were not carved

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<sup>752</sup> MacPherson, 2011: 263.

<sup>753</sup> Moten, 2018: 257.

<sup>754</sup> “*C’est l’extase langoureuse*” is an 1885 piece by Debussy from a poem by Verlaine from *Ariettes oubliées* published in 1874.

<sup>755</sup> Quintella, 2015: 10-11.

out, but drawn in the air by the hands.<sup>756</sup> They juxtaposed the signs with lyrical singing in the highest human vocal register, that is the soprano voice. They concentrated on listening as much as they did on copying the pitches and the intonations of the voice, so difficult to follow, the raw voice without words transcending meaning or whatever might be articulated in language, the languid moment after sexual rapture. Three characters: Nóbrega sitting on the steps, the soprano behind, the deaf woman in front. Split in different actions, collapsed into one body: the body sitting on the staircases watching and listening, the voice singing the soprano, and the hands imitating the deaf woman. They wove in one body the different languages and different voices, in a polyphony that escaped the monologue. In another trinity, “a new form of inclusive disjunction”,<sup>757</sup> they tested the distance and relationship of the three Persons in

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work to crack open the single into the chaos of the many. Once you can fit three you can fit many more. It is not only Debussy that they sung, they also sung his friend Verlaine and with Verlaine, his lover Rimbaud.

*“Therefore we are”*<sup>758</sup>

As seen in the analysis of the work and appropriation in Sehgal, the question of participation and the impossibility of dialogism is raised by some art practices that claim to be participatory. Art as technology of power has failed to plunge the author into anonymity or dissolve the distinction between creator-subject and creation-object and constituted work. Borders between work, creation, and the addressees or audience, the rest of society, have not been dissolved. They have remained on hold, rather than “in the hold” of the ship, as Moten might argue following Wilderson (2020). The work of Sehgal, for instance, ends up being like a stifling monologue, appropriated to constitute the artist, relativising or even

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<sup>756</sup> Ferrara, 2019.

<sup>757</sup> See Deleuze as he looks at the use of audio-visual technology in the work of Beckett (Deleuze, 1995: 16).

<sup>758</sup> Kristeva, 1986: 45.

cancelling the many voices, the multiplicity of tongues that build every moment from within and from without.

I approach hereafter the carnivalesque and decentralising tendency of Mikhail Bakhtin, that Kristeva later found in dialogism and intertextuality, and extend some of those thoughts to the bodily gestures this thesis has been concerned about; to understand art **as not** one's own, but rather still carrying the many voices and gestures of the past and possibilities of futures outside capture. I am aware that by doing this, I risk an approach that might well be utopian, hard to translate into flesh, or maybe impossible to translate into the flesh without the use of other forces and further violence. It is nevertheless a reflection needed to respond to current forces and imagine other futures. Bakhtin's use of the carnival for instance in his literary analysis has been somewhat contested as being historically inaccurate, partial or misleading.<sup>759</sup> Many of the negative aspects of the carnival, such as the violence and rape that took place in those moments of excess, have been overlooked in Bakhtin's writing on the carnivalesque, revealing the complexity and difficulty of applying what belongs to the literary sphere onto bodies. Bakhtin saw in the literary phenomenon of "dialogism" in the text a carnivalesque potential for the world; a form of living and acting in the world otherwise. A form of living that, like the text, would turn things "upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it."<sup>760</sup>

His notion of dialogism finds its origin in the carnivalesque derived from the medieval and early Renaissance religious celebrations, an evolution of Dionysian festivities, which took place around the main Christian liturgical feasts, on streets and squares. They were accompanied by dances, masquerades and disguises, reversing identities, gender distinctions, social classes and roles.<sup>761</sup> It was not limited to the liturgical feasts though, rather it extended to popular culture in the Medieval ages more widely. For Bakhtin, the carnival transgressed hierarchies, logic and the monologist. It was popular, noisy and *undistinguished*.<sup>762</sup> Bakhtin picks up on the folkloric polyphony and the irreverence of the carnival spirit. Laughter and the grotesque were essential elements of the carnival. Laughter overcomes fear and universalises, while the grotesque, which is the body incomplete and excessive, focuses on the porosity of the body full of orifices, those openings in which the

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<sup>759</sup> More on this in Taylor, 1995.

<sup>760</sup> Bakhtin, 1981: 23.

<sup>761</sup> For more on the fool and the carnival see Buchler (2003); see also Lin (2006) for an emphasis on the communal and participation aspects in medieval theatrical spectacle in which watching might have been a form of participation in no way divisive but participatory.

<sup>762</sup> A hint here at La Ribot's *Distinguished pieces*.

inside and the outside world meet and are no longer undistinguished. The carnival that Bakhtin saw in medieval society and in François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, published in the mid-sixteenth century, served to illustrate what Bakhtin meant by dialogism: a never-ending openness, a receiving and a giving in the text, as "an essentially social phenomenon, a locus of interaction between speaking subjects and the context within which they find themselves."<sup>763</sup> For Bakhtin, the popular carnivalesque is always in dialogue and ambivalent, never quite stable, it is, as the grotesque body, always in a becoming. The words, as society, are not closed or isolated, but are openings. And the text, as the human being, is composed by the stories and ghosts of both the addresser and the addressee, the giver and the receiver, in relation always and constantly "with the utterances surrounding it and to all of the sedimented meanings generated through its past performances."<sup>764</sup>

Kristeva first introduced the work of Bakhtin in her essay 'Word, Dialogue, Novel', published in *Semiotikè*, in 1969.<sup>765</sup> The subversive political effects of Bakhtin's notions of "dialogism" and the "carnavalesque" in literary texts and its social and political implications, resonated with Kristeva's work at the time. In the carnival spirit, "a foreign discourse is constantly present" by which she means that there is no word that belongs to anyone, each word being an intersection of others, "escapes linearity (law)" and "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."<sup>766</sup> Dialogism brings the dialogue of different voices, distant and in relation, back into the text that – as explained in chapter 1 – had been fragmented into pieces, calculations and alienated blocks. It brings the texture back into the text, the text back to the generational web. This is what she called "intertextuality": the text as the space of resistance to stable signification and a tissue of resistance against the capture of the symbolic.<sup>767</sup> Intertextuality calls, then, for the erasure of the imaginary-constructed-modern author and a return to a decentralising polyglottic dialogism. Instead of an author, she writes about a negative space of genesis, a space reduced to nothingness – as decreation – as the only place from which to labour, speak, write and act within a great tissue of intertextuality.

I make my way back to gesture through Kristeva's notion of intertextuality as I think about a common act, a *traditio*, a rhythm in which the bodies are never interrupted or enclosed in quotation marks. In intertextuality, citation stands on the other side of the quotation as gesture stands on the other side of art property, aware that there is nothing one can consider

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<sup>763</sup> Taylor, 1995: 62.

<sup>764</sup> Taylor, 1995: 62.

<sup>765</sup> Kristeva, 1986.

<sup>766</sup> Kristeva, 1986: 49 and 37.

<sup>767</sup> Allen, 2000: 33.



properly as one's own, but always already given in a rhythm, a movement. Here there is no forgetting the ensemble, or a whole, or life, passed on from one thought to another, in which one's beginning and the other's end are undefined and any property has no place. In an essay by dance theorist Isabelle Launay (2010) on the European early-twentieth century turn of dance toward a modern regime of artistic and Intellectual Property, the author writes of dance as the inter-textual form *par excellence*. Dance, she argues, was always citational, taken over, translated, reinvented, in a "mosaic of citations" as she quotes Kristeva.<sup>768</sup> Whereas the citation is a setting in motion, a setting in *use* or *chrestai* **as not** one's own, the notation is written down, as a fixed quotation, is conceived for the stabilisation of "correctness", for the preservation and survival of the creator as author. In polyphony there is nothing like a single author-subject, nothing distinguished as solely one's own, that could add subject to being, but rather a "therefore we are."<sup>769</sup> Because there is gesture, "therefore we are". The works, gestures and texts, in their own turn, are heard, recognised as openings, as a set of relations in the world, that are neither transcendental nor fabricated but open, seen and held as though they were not things one owns, but there to be given. This is not a legal formula, it is a state of mind to find one's place, a place that should not mean a property. It is about holding the gesture, handled with care, as gesture, in the rhythm of *traditio*, rather than approaching it through the capturing hand of the Person-author.

### *Traditio*

originally means a surrender, a delivery of possession. It is about receiving as much as it is about passing on, rhythmically. Agamben uses of the notion of rhythm, that he takes from the poet Friedrich Hölderlin, to understand the structure of art, not as in Heidegger's *Gestell*, which is the sum of the parts, but as the flow of water in the river, with splits and stops, "incessant flow of instants that, coming from the future, sinks into the past" (...), "which gives and at the same time hides its gift".<sup>770</sup> Gregory Nagy, a specialist in archaic Greek poetry and oral tradition, calls that rhythm a poetics of *mouvance*: "the process of

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<sup>768</sup> Launay, 2010: 26.

<sup>769</sup> Kristeva, 1986: 45.

<sup>770</sup> Agamben, 1999: 99.

recomposition-in-performance as actually recognised by a living oral tradition, where the recognition implies the paradox of immediate change without ultimate change”.<sup>771</sup> It moves, stops, and doesn’t cease to move. Orality and mute-ation composed a storytelling without authors, always in a movement of receiving and giving, in a constant dialogue that subverts any possibility of the monolithic lonely Person. In gesture, as Kristeva states somewhere else and about literature, “speech affronts death, measuring itself against another discourse; this dialogue counts the *person* out”.<sup>772</sup> Lisa Robertson associated orality with the vernacular language, intrinsically grammarless, as that which comes from the commons, “a vernacular does not produce or even make.”<sup>773</sup> The vernacular accepts transformations, mistranslations and amnesia, until the advent of the Person and the fiction of Property, of choreography as a textual mark and its different inscriptions in mnemotechnologies of sound and image enclosed, fixed and stored it, making it appropriable and legally own-able.

Scholars have coined the term intertextuality outside Western literature also. Kembreu McLeod used the concept of intertextuality to speak about Afro-American dance and music in conflict with a particular way of understanding authorship and ownership that originated in Western Enlightenment and Romanticist thought.<sup>774</sup> Blackness goes further, if each text is “social space”, so is jazz and dance. “The point is the blur itself, the celebration of mass, the playing of mass, as a phenomenon of indistinctness, of indiscretion”.<sup>775</sup> It is Moten who speaks about the social space:

It’s a deeper way of looking at it. To say that it’s a social space is to say that stuff is going on: people, things, are meeting there and interacting, rubbing off one another, brushing against one another.<sup>776</sup>

All these examples, the bodies of dancers, the vernacular and blackness move in the same rhythm. Which brings me, to finish, to the Greek *zoē*, and the biological rhythm of life. What Kristeva did with intertextuality and the negative space of genesis was to bring both concepts back to something, very near, very intimate. She relates both sites of symbolisation to the notion of the semiotic *khōra*, a concept she had worked on in “*Revolution in poetic language*”, which appears as a space for another form of genesis, covered with the membranes of a certain intertextuality.<sup>777</sup> She borrows the spatial and temporal concept of the

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<sup>771</sup> Nagy, 1996: 25.

<sup>772</sup> Kristeva, 1986: 52, original emphasis.

<sup>773</sup> Robertson, 2012: 82.

<sup>774</sup> McLeod, 2001.

<sup>775</sup> Moten, 2017: 244.

<sup>776</sup> Harney and Moten, 2013: 108.

<sup>777</sup> Kristeva, 1984.

*khōra* or *chora* from the ancient and obscure *khōra*, the third space that appears in Plato's *Timaeus* and conflates it with another matrix, the *chorion*, which refers back to a technical term this time, from the field of biology: "embryology that specifically defines the bodily site of the first signifying processes of the fetus", the semiotic space of *m*-othering, of separation and exteriorisation of another.<sup>778</sup> This is where Kristeva finds the site of Plato's *khōra* which he admits is "difficult and obscure" to define.<sup>779</sup> The *khōra*, Plato's and the motherly space and tissue of becoming, appear as the non-defined place of the *matrix*, and the place of the origin of becoming and signifying, in and from what Plato called the "midst". Plato suggests a place, outside the walls of the *polis*, of *logos* in which nothingness and thingness are not yet differentiated or named, in which all things are received but do not yet have a form or are not yet in-formed: the place of both separation and the pre-symbolic. Plato also uses the name of *matrix*, or mother, and "nurse of becoming." It is a site in which the being is carried. From that generative and signifying site, existence emerges as separate. Kristeva compares the *khōra* to a psychic space in which the newly born child emerges before entering signification, the world of the symbol. This process, though, is not limited to birth, as seen in Abraham and Torok (1994), neither to the *mother*, it is a constant process of life, about an engagement in the world conceived in psychic stages of separation, of making other, in a constant *m*-othering as *metaxu*, in passages.

In a 2014 project, I. stayed for a month in Casa do Sol, where poet and writer Hilda Hilst,<sup>38</sup> had moved to in the late 1960s and where she spent the rest of her life. There, in the 1970s, Hilst experimented with electronic voice phenomena (EVP) and became fascinated and obsessed with searching for voices from the dead in recordings, mainly from the radio. She was particularly searching for the voice of her dead mother. She used analogue tapes and played back and slowed down the speed to listen more carefully, a practice that was developed by Konstantin Raudive and Friedrich Jürgenson in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>780</sup> She did hear voices and heard the voices of her mother. During their residency, I. used the same ghost-chasing technics as Hilst. During the night, I. would record sounds and radio transmissions, and during the day they would manipulate the tapes, play backwards, slow them down and play them again, paying attention and hoping to hear other voices. According to Jürgenson and Raudive, one ought to expect the voices from the dead to be polyglot and never in grammar, maybe in intertextuality. If something is heard, it is usually confused or weak and requires a close ear and extreme attention to try and figure out what it is saying. For

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<sup>778</sup> Payne, 1993: 169. See also Plato's *Timaeus* in Cornford, 1937.

<sup>779</sup> Payne, 1993: 167.

<sup>780</sup> Dotto, 2019: 59.

weeks I. put themselves in the enigma, erasing their selves to hear from the hole. But what multiplicity of ghosts were they expecting to hear? What would come out of the hole? Maybe Hilda's voice? Maybe her lost mother's voice? Would it be the nightmare of Locke again? Was it in the interstices of these other voices that Tom started to speak and make space?

“... She did not want to be a woman. She wanted to disappear”<sup>781</sup>

At the end of that decade of 2008-2018, uninterested in their self-preservation I. performed a final crack on the voice, a metaphorical crack but this time also a physical one, which needs to be approached with great tenderness and an exigent *care*. What had been taking place in the actions, would take place in their body. I cannot speak here to the singular specificities of their gender transition, this is not the place to attend to those complexities nor am I the right Person to do so. I have listened to the cracks already occurring in their voice, in the *mute-*ilations happening in their actions, that attempted to open access to another relation, to a living otherwise. I. found Tom in April 2017 during a residency in Senegal whilst playing on the drums.<sup>782</sup> A beat, a single beat. Tom in Portuguese means “tune”. They were searching for another tune to be in the world, rather than in a proper name, simply in a lower tone. In 2018, they started to take Female-to-male hormone medication to let another voice occupy the already severed body. They intentionally went through puberty, with all that it entails. They made more evident the fact that they were inhabited by a voice, *evol*, that took another body, Tom, taking some time to be recognised. Through the testosterone treatment the body hair increased and hairs appeared on the face, the jaw and shoulders enlarged, fat was redistributed, and the body slowly started to feel somewhat less alien. The voice significantly deepened, and they started discovering different ways of speaking and singing, in the strangeness of being open to polyphonic possibilities. Tom calls his transition a “biographical rupture”, a “space between dying and being born again.” He quoted Dante Alighieri's poem from *The Divine Comedy*, completed in 1321: “For I had wandered off from the straight path”.<sup>783</sup>

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<sup>781</sup> Carson, 2006: 223.

<sup>782</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 10 April 2021.

<sup>783</sup> Email correspondence with Tom Nóbrega, 10 April 2021. In which they quote Dante's *Inferno*. Canto I: 3.

## Epilogue

What is happening in the art context, as more gestures and experiences are fabricated and framed as private objects of art property ready FOR SALE, seems to be a manifestation of a wider contemporary tendency. Experiences and gestures – but also education, areas of the *psyche*, and modes of communication – those passages or *metaxu* that engage being in the world and with the other continue to be occupied and constructed into legal and commercial capital, enclosed and owned by some for consumption by others. As Stiegler pointed out, the hyper-industrialised epoch seems to have lost the mastery of its own limits and the control of its potential toxicity as it takes over more areas to be exploited.<sup>784</sup> Within this context, this thesis has explored three ethical positions *vis-à-vis* the event of gesture and the creative act: play, APPROPRIATION and ejection. In her *Distinguished project*, Ribot has worked in and through the nakedness of the body, playing with the *distinguished* property as another thing, stable and portable, an artifice constructed and added on top or onto the event. With his “constructed situations”, Sehgal has successfully incorporated the event of gesture and the lived-experience into the logic of art and its market and in doing so has confirmed a mode of being in the world that is constituted and survives on the accumulation of experiences as things to be had. Disgusted, I.’s actions have acted as a rejection, ejecting from the holes of a severed body the evermore APPROPRIATIVE tendencies in relation to the self and its gesturing into the world.

The first chapter began with a reflection on the construction of the bodily and bodily gestures into thingness, through different epochal events which transformed the *distinguished* bodily gestures into potential and actual property. I analysed how the bodily gestures and dance entered the logic of language and theory, as they came to be de-scribed and written down by the author on the horizontal plane of the page in the seventeenth century; and the use and development of photography, with its shots, and cuts, which as scissors or as the guillotine, have produced new things as well opening wounds. I approached these epochal events as traumatic in the sense that they came to interrupt a rhythm. They cut short formative processes and made images, dislocated and stolen, invented and legally APPROPRIATED

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<sup>784</sup> Stiegler, 2014: 2015.

for the benefit and survival of the Person, the artist and the circulation of new objects of property and of curiosity. The wider notion of property constituted historically on territorial expansions but that no longer needs grounds or physical objects as support, has taken centre stage in the thesis. Property has been analysed as a *technē*, a technology to constitute the Person or subject as much as it has constituted the artist, as a creator who generates new things in the world, but who has also captured whatever has been generated as objects of property. Hence the artist has become a producer of legal things, whilst interrupting the process and rhythm of giving and receiving. It might be that art has forgotten to attend again to the rhythms, the long circuits, or generational processes which every being could recognise as we are all generated beings as much as we are generators. We have all been separated, made exterior at least once – at birth.

My approach to the theory of property in the first two chapters has been but a glimpse into the complexities and the enormous amount of research from different fields on the question. I had to take the risk, though, as I approached such big questions and decided to focus on epochs that have a particular relation to the body: the Roman constitution of private property, Locke's prescriptive writings in the seventeenth century and the emancipation movement of the solo dancers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The danger is that my viewpoint is partial, ever falling short of taking in the full picture, dislocating things out of their historical, social and political contexts. This is a risk that many authors decide to take though; I am thinking particularly of Arendt as she wrote about the Greek *oikos*, or Bakhtin as he wrote about the medieval carnival. Nonetheless, we need to be aware of these failures, must attend to these distances, humbly and critically, so as to continue to write, dance and draw other possible worlds and other futures. Ribot decided to approach all the big questions of property, body, nakedness, and thingness, as the matter of her work, and played with the existential in and through the material: nakedness, body and property, alongside a shoe, an electric fan, some goggles, etc., her own body. I have dared to play too, although maybe in a more tragic way, and only on paper, with thoughts, authors, historical events and real and imaginary characters that I have placed among and in between her *pieces*. If I had to name and make space for those, I would do it as she did it in *D.p. n°30 Candida Illuminaris* (2000) placing them randomly one next to the other along a line, hoping to get it straight:

**Ribot's body, an instruction booklet, a chronometer, a camera, a children's picture book of the Little Mermaid, a wooden folding chair, Toulouse Lautrec's poster of Jane Avril, a poison hemlock, a copy of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, an angel, a stripper, a piece of skin-coloured**

Lycra, Adam, my body, a polaroid photo of Ribot's left breast, a copy of Nijinsky's article in the *New York Times* from the 8 April 1916, a pot of red paint, a piece of a wooden chair, a remedy pill, Eve, a white page, Fuller, a white lab shirt, Ribot's book from 2004, Narcissus, a photograph by Albert Londe of a woman from La Salpêtrière.

However, instead of using the things that emerge from cracks, separation, instead of accumulating more images, I am still haunted by the banging sound of the chair against her body and the shots of the camera at La Salpêtrière. And so, I prefer to look at the interruptions, stay in the cut and with the paint/art that spills out from the cuts, and perform small seizures in the text to make it

bleed

red

paint.

I insist that it is paint, an artifice, that emerges from these cuts and that produces representation, art and writing. The cuts are existential cuts that, although violent (indeed they are) do not kill, or maybe they do but slowly. The openings are still wounds that cry and paint, write, never properly, still slightly liquid. I wonder as I write if the cuts in the flesh, those that do bleed blood, those that do kill, might not need another different language to speak, not paint, not writing, but another mode of tending them, maybe outside representation and without prosthetic.

Without it being quite my intention at the start, in the second chapter, Sehgal has ended up being engulfed by the characters of the *homo faber*, the *pater* and the Roman Person. I analysed his "constructed situation" and his way of moving things and nothings into categories of existence, gestures, encounters, and experiences into becoming art objects, thanks to the use of the contract and a constant and overwhelming performance of the self as subject and author. I navigated as best I could through the overwhelming amount of interpretations and representations found online, coming from him directly and from those who have witnessed and consumed his situations in the first Person, either as delegated interpreters or as spectators. The chapter is very much a response to those testimonies and to the affirmation and confirmation of those encounters as objects of art.

The public narrative coming from artists and institutions continues to claim that the art world can be an agent for social change and emancipation. However, the art world as an exterior milieu of becoming and relation seems to be perpetuating power relations and

mechanisms of distinction as a means to reproduce cultural and economic value. The construction of property and the never-ending consumption of things and forms of relating is not something that many in the art world, including Sehgal are concerned about. What can possibly change then if self-constitutive distinctions and the divisions between property-holders, property and consumers are maintained? Experiences, encounters, and gestures have become raw material to produce new property. The passages for being's engagement in the world, Weil's "earthly blessings"<sup>785</sup> are being considered and used in the wider experience economy as new wastelands with "no in-closure" waiting to be occupied and mapped out for further occupation, to form nothingness into something.<sup>786</sup> The phenomenon of experience is being discretised and entrapped into artistic and legal property, and made available as *mine*<sup>787</sup>, for the constitution, the *auto-poiēsis*, of an ever more intense self, whilst it keeps fuelling capitalism.<sup>788</sup> More recently, artists and institutions are becoming interested in notions of the common and the religious as an antidote to individualism and fragmentation, APPROPRIATING areas of the noetic, the psychic, or the interior milieu. But can the artwork, its artist and its property, and the structures that hold and monumentalise both, continue to take over new spaces and be a remedy for our interior needs? Can art continue to "invent" new things, new forms of property, or does it simply need to be rethought constantly, as a *metaxu*, as a passage from and to, where? The only remedy and only change necessary then seems to be a radical re-positioning, a consent on behalf of the artwork and the artist to undo their powers and *status quo*, as Andrea Phillips argues, a consent "to give up the manufacture of property-object."<sup>789</sup>

Readers might have noticed the capitalisation of the first Person pronouns in this second chapter and the use of first-hand accounts. Having been educated in a school system that never allowed students to use the first Person when writing dialectic essays, I find it interesting to see how contemporary critics and particularly Performance art writers so often place their testimony in the first Person at the centre of their writing.<sup>790</sup> I have found it difficult myself to avoid. The pronouns in the second and third chapters have become part of a constitutive performative act of the selves. In chapter 2, I have highlighted the first Person of the singular whilst it has been the third Person of the plural or neuter that I have emphasised in Nóbrega's chapter. In Sehgal chapter, I have augmented the 'I' in the same way I capitalised APPROPRIATION and the word Person, from Locke onwards. Pronouns and the

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<sup>785</sup> Weil, 2002: 147.

<sup>786</sup> Park, 2016: 33.

<sup>787</sup> Best, 2004: 38 and my own translation of Ickowicz, 2013: 379.

<sup>788</sup> Vujanović and Cvejić, 2002.

<sup>789</sup> Phillips, 2015: 47.

<sup>790</sup> Herbert, 2022.



capitalisations appear as tricks to emphasise, following Weil, the new ‘Helens’ in the wars of power of our time.<sup>791</sup> The act of augmenting or minimising, though, is still an act enforced that comes from someone, or somewhere. As we try to renounce force, it seems that we keep stumbling on the same stones. In the end the question continues to be about a positioning and behaviour of the self, in the body and in language, both coming in to cover the wounds in the flesh.

In the third chapter, I have approached I.’s actions together with another of my obsessions which is Weil, her writing and her life. I have forced both of them back to the centre for a while to try and make sense of their “indescribable stubbornness” not to be, in order for others or the plural to be, both caught between and in acts of the sacrificial excess or the withdrawal.<sup>792</sup> Unsettled by their self-effacement, by the holes they both produced in their bodies, I have attempted to translate those holes into writing, to approach them tenderly with a hand that can also touch, caress, make the borders of the skin, the body, porous again, not as a wall that blinds but as a membrane, a passage, to communicate.<sup>793</sup> I attempted to communicate this with a tongue, in Spanish *lengua*, meaning both tongue and language, and used my tongue, not as a whip nor as a *lámina* but to think and care, as Stiegler uses thinking and caring, *penser* and *panser*.<sup>794</sup> To tend, is to care, to attend, is to pay attention, to listen carefully. In order to listen, though, I need to be quiet, not disappear but if I want to lick someone’s wounds, I cannot have my mouth full either. Licking in Spanish, *lamiendo*, is as NourbeSe Philip put it, like a mother’s tongue that licks the babe, a way of a caring for the wounds of separation.<sup>795</sup> Licking off that first sac, to open gently what is underneath. Licking to heal the wounds without filling them up. The final chapter has been a tentative one, intending to carefully listen into the holes of both decreation and ex-propriation.<sup>796</sup> How and where does a desire to undo, to decreate meet the ex-propriated, the *malheureux*, the blackness? I have thought through this from a place of whiteness, and from the other place that is blackness, both haunted, although in different ways, by the making of property and Personhood. The *one* trying to deconstruct the single subject, guilty of its sins, vomiting out both subject and its object in disgust; the *others* remaining in the “inhabitation of the hold” of the ship.<sup>797</sup> Both in a refusal and “hard, preferential option for the poverty of insovereignty,”<sup>798</sup> refusing to accept, or unwanting to accommodate ownership and the sovereign subject.

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<sup>791</sup> Weil, 1979 .

<sup>792</sup> McLellan, 1989: 6; Irwin, 2002.

<sup>793</sup> Weil, 2002: 145.

<sup>794</sup> Ross and Stiegler, 2018.

<sup>795</sup> NourbeSe Philip, 1989: 32.

<sup>796</sup> Spillers, 1987.

<sup>797</sup> Moten, 2013: 751.

<sup>798</sup> Moten, 2020b: unpaginated.

I have already mentioned the metaphorical disappearance of Luísa - which was the primary focus of my third chapter – and the real disappearance of Weil. As I. became lowercase, trying to dissolve, I realised that I. and my first Person 'I', the capital of 'i' had become conflated. I. had drawn into me, with Weil hiding in there too. I have indeed been haunted by them and was hoping to let them go, so they could remain as Weil wanted to, simply as characters from "a book read in childhood".<sup>799</sup> However they seem to have remained stuck to me, or in me. They were always clumsy and even in this final act, they remain here. I have kept them in my mouth, as many other moments and questions of this chapter. Finally, I decided, to leave them for another moment there, in my mouth, in the text, as

pebbles.

### Pebbles

without attempting to swallow them as Nóbrega did, rather I have played with them, in the mouth with the tongue. I have licked them and with them still in the mouth, tried to speak differently, finding other words, maybe another language, still holding and playing with them for a little longer, as a *m-othering*.<sup>800</sup>

Staying, sheltered, "in" the mouth as the pre-dialectic  
as a pre-position

through  
in  
with

the mouth

Close to the *phusis*,  
close to earth,

I mean "in" the mouth,  
"in" the *empty mouth*

That is given, unintentional, and that we are forced to relate  
to  
in  
out  
with  
through

I hope to have brought a new perspective on the works of each of three artists, especially on the work of I. now out of sight, but who remains in here in some poetic way. By interlacing and sometimes juxtaposing the three artists together with other voices, sources, I

<sup>799</sup> Weil wrote this in her letter to Thibon as she gave him her notebooks and manuscripts. Weil, 2002: xiii.

<sup>800</sup> Thank you, to dear Bridget, for pushing me to include the pebbles in my text. The same pebbles I put in my mouth during a performance lecture I gave as I read Weil, as part of the "Exquisite Corpse" programme, 28 February 2020, at Goldsmiths University.

have tried to contribute to the discussion on APPROPRIATION and gesture and on the acquisition and accumulation of the Live art in visual art collections: raising new questions and opening answers around the constitution of the bodily gestures as property and the artist as property-holder-subject. I hope, too, that I have given another flavour and another set of words and concepts to the discussion on decreation, *ungoverning* or *désœuvrement* in dance and in the arts.<sup>801</sup> The only partial conclusion that I have drawn is that the possibilities of making property available FOR SALE out of the bodily gestures and relationalities perpetuates an APPROPRIATIVE understanding of self, always in need of more to *have*, and leaving other areas of existence ex-propriated, as "war-amputees".<sup>802</sup> There is an urge to rethink art as *technē*, as a remedy as much as in its potential toxicity, and rethink the constructions and performances of selves, as artifices.

All three artists are living, while technology in the last decade keeps developing at an unprecedented pace, which makes this thesis already part of Art History! In recent years, La Ribot has stopped performing solo and has gathered the Laribot *Ensemble*. She has a new art dealer, Max Estrella in Madrid, and her pieces might well be up FOR SALE again soon. One of the *distinguished* pieces D.p.n°33 *S Liquide* (2000) has come to be part, albeit accidentally, of a major art collection, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, thanks to the bequest of former art dealer Soledad Lorenzo, legitimising Ribot's art property within the museum.<sup>803</sup> Tino Sehgal continues to try and work in and against the increasing pressure of social media and the museums and spectators increasing use of these platforms within the art context. Whilst other Performance artists such as Abramović are choosing to embrace new technologies such as virtual reality, Sehgal has been moving to areas of healing and well-being closer to the religious with the Therme Art Program.<sup>804</sup> My interest in the actions of Luísa in 2016 was part of the my wider research on decreation as I was trying to figure out how and if it is at all possible for an artist to intentionally create acts of undoing. Or is it not always held in the same *aporia* as the *désœuvrement*, the inoperative? Then, Tom emerged as another creative twist which opened up further questions and contradictions; What happens as decreation, as undoing leaves the page, leaves the world of representation and is acted in and onto the physical bodies? My initial approach, though, did not originate from a gender or queer perspective, but was about an existential, political and creative undoing. Hence the terminologies and genealogies I have used are not from one

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<sup>801</sup> Weil, 2002; Burt, 2017; Pouillaude, 2017.

<sup>802</sup> Rashkin, 1988: 34.

<sup>803</sup> Phillips, 2015: 36. Personal conversation with La Ribot, March 2017.

<sup>804</sup> Marina Abramović, *The Life* (2019) a 19-minute performance realised through volumetric capture and sold at Christie's in 2020. Sehgal at the Hildegard von Bingen Wellbeing Culture Symposium, in 2022 hosted by Therme Art. <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/wellbeingcultureforum/>

single idiom or frame of thinking but rather traverses them, uses one and the other, allowing the historical and metaphysical and political and linguistic to blur and collapse. However, if one understands the proprietor and the subject in all its senses as the business and the “site of the masculine”, I trust this thesis can contribute to other readings and epistemologies.<sup>805</sup>

If separation and exteriorisation is part of existing, then the problem might not be the pronouns but the space in between, what do I/you/they/we do “with” that space? Maybe the first, second, third pronouns, Persons are not the problem, as Carson, Porete, Weil write. Maybe it is not about the verbs either, what we do/undo/create/decreate/

“withness is the problem”<sup>806</sup>

*symballein.*

Feed, speak, lick it,  
before letting go, *as not.*

Perhaps there is a way to relate to a *fadar* without the *pater potestas*, but as a generational being, the Person has occupied its space as a foreign intervention. Maybe as I suggested in the last chapter, we should rethink generation as a *m-othering*, in the openness and in the vulnerability of *ek-sistence*. This is closer to the rhythm of life and death, to the labour of the flesh, that has been and continues to be exploited and ex-propriated, by the power of capital. An *ek-sistence* closer to the labour of life and death, rather than to the logics of the art world which hold objects of painting and sculpture as its benchmarks. This thesis has sought to rethink body and property again: in the flesh that is *ante*-body, in the opening that is before property. An *ante*-property which might be understood no longer as a set enclosure or capture, not as legal construct, not as thingness, but as an opening, as *metaxu*, from and in which *ek-sistence* is delivered, in a constant flow, a labour of life, in the receiving as much as in the giving.

To think the artistic act as any act as a *m-othering*

As *metaxu*,

*as not*

a matrix,

Related to the mud, the soil of the *humus*

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<sup>805</sup> Metzger, 2001: 9.

<sup>806</sup> Carson, 2006: 169.

In which it is difficult to trace any borders, to distinguish what is mine and what is not.

In which the lines are drawn out only for a while before they disappear again in the moist,

openings not carved in the stone, but that still draw  
a *m-othering* emerging from the holes of the earth, that remain open  
art that could remember where it came from

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- "Letter to S" contribution to Goldsmiths PhD Publication 2021. London: Goldsmiths, University of London, 2021. 56
- "Singing to Simone" contribution to the "Religion and Art" symposium hosted by the Art Research Programme, Department of Art at Goldsmiths, University of London, November 2020 (online)
- "Reading Simone Weil On Human Personality with pebbles in my mouth", part of "Exquisite Corpses" led by Murat Adash, Dominique Baron-Bonarjee, Teresa Calonje, at Goldsmiths, University of London, 28 February 2020
- "In conversation with Jenny Doussan on screaming as gesture", as part of SCREAMING (SCREAM SCREAM) O VOID O, Goldsmiths, University in London, November 2018
- Scripting Prophecies, Part 1, Performance and workshop with Teresa Calonje, Giulia Damiani and Barbara Mahlke, at Goldsmiths University in London, 2017. Document #3 - 6 October 2017
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