

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Susan Sontag, in the book *Styles of Radical Will*, calls for a revision of ‘the project of ‘spirituality’ for our era, encouraging intellectual engagement with the reinterpretation of this term through contemporary lenses, new thinking and innovative practices (Sontag 2002, 5). This book engages with this challenge and proposes an interpretation of spirituality through performance and the theoretical lenses of performance studies, post-human theories, religious studies, radical hermeneutics and phenomenology. It proposes performance as an inclusive lens of interpretation able to blur the boundaries culturally set for artistic, religious and scientific planes of existence, to ground the ‘project of ‘spirituality’ in materiality, experimentation, creativity, imagination and the paradoxical.

This is an operation aimed at opening the concept of religion to the ‘study [of] the wide range of experiences to which religious significance has been attributed’ (Taves 2009, 8): in other words, to what is deemed to be religious within the non-religious rather than what is religious because it has been institutionalised as such. As the religious studies scholar Ann Taves argues:

we need to turn our attention to the processes whereby people sometimes ascribe the special characteristics to things that we (scholars) associate with terms such as “religious”, “magical”, “mystical”, “spiritual”, etcetera (ibid).

Hence, by inverting the paradigm, it is conceivable to explore ‘the interaction between psychobiological, social, and cultural-linguistic processes in relation to carefully specified types of experiences’ (ibid), and consider what else within the spectrum of human behaviour can reveal insights into what we understand as spiritual, religious, mystical, numinous, sacred and so on.

I consider theatre and performance to be significant in this regard, as there is a history of artistic experimentation with those areas of practical investigation. This is certainly a vast territory that might include, to mention only a few: the theatre of cruelty as envisaged by Antonin Artaud; the psychomagic rituals conceived by Alejandro Jodorowsky; Michael Harner’s core-shamanism; the Panic Theatre of Fernando Arrabal, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Roland Topor; Jerzy Grotowski’s para-theatre; Richard Schechner’s environmental theatre; the ritualistic practices of Anna Halprin; performance artists such as Marina Abramović, Joseph Beuys, Marcus Coates, John Cage, Linda Montano, Tehching Hsieh, and visual artists such as James Turrell, Wolfgang Laib as well as many others.

Within this broad landscape, I propose to look at performances/ installations inspired and devised specifically around spiritual practices with their origins in religious traditions. So, for example, Chapter 1 focuses on the performance *The Artist is Present* (2010) by Marina Abramović, devised around the mystical practice of reciprocal gazing; Chapter 2 looks at the performance *CAT* by Ansuman Biswas (1998), devised around the practice of Vipassana meditation of the Theravada Buddhist tradition; Chapter 3 focuses on the installation piece *Deer Shelter Skyspace* (2007) by James Turrell, that recalls the architecture of the Quakers' prayer room; Chapter 4 explores the performance *Journey to the Lower World* (2004) by Marcus Coates, devised around shamanic journey practices; and finally Chapter 5 analyses the pieces *Pollen from Hazelnut* (1986) by Wolfgang Laib, who has been inspired by Asian religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism, and has developed a practice for collecting and presenting pollen in gallery spaces. ¹

These artistic interventions are representative of a loose category of practices that I associate with what Susan Sontag, in the essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence', identifies as the *via negativa* in art or a negative 'theology' of art's absence in art (2002, 5). They resonate with religious and mystical literature, but also paradoxically with science and its experimental paradigms. This is due to the artists' engagement with the creative process not as a means of self-expression, but rather, and to different extents, as a means of self-restraint and experimentation with levels of consciousness often associated with spiritual experiences. Art is therefore viewed as 'a vehicle'² for involving spectators/participants into levels of experiences that touch on that liminal space between discovery, experience, creativity and imagination, revealing the performance of those invisible, intangible human and non-human 'others' which are usually excluded from our perceptive fields. These 'others' emerge and enter the perceptive horizon due to a change of practices that by irrupting and disrupting perception, reveal the paradoxical numinosity of reality, leaving spectators and researchers alike puzzled, disconcerted.

This is an artistic attitude that looks at 'sketching out new prescriptions for looking [and] hearing'; at delivering 'a more sensuous experience of art'; and, more generally, at offering modalities for focusing attention on overlooked aspects of reality (Sontag 2002, VI).

Performance and Spirituality

Although there is an increasing body of scholarly work engaging with the question of spirituality and religion in contemporary art, these terms, as the

historian Tomoko Masuzawa points out, are still largely treated within these disciplines as self-evident categories, remaining peculiarly ‘essentialized, un-historicized and un-analyzed’ (Bordowitz, de Duve, Doniger, Elkins, Groys, Masuzawa, Morgan and Worley 2009, 124).³

As Lance Gharavi explains in his introduction to the book *Religion, Theatre, and Performance: Acts of Faith* (2012), in performance and theatre studies the question of religion remains an uncomfortable subject of inquiry (2012, 7). Although historically there is an intimate relationship between performance and religion, the same relationship has also been characterized ‘by long stretches of hostility and mutual suspicion’ (ibid). In performance, theatre and cultural studies, although religions as we know them are cultural constructs that came into being at a certain time and under certain social and political conditions, the study of what constitutes the ‘religious’ and ‘the spiritual’ in contemporary culture remains a *sui generis* subject of inquiry (Gharavi 2012, 15). Therefore, in broad terms, this book proposes to contribute to the project of studying the ‘religious’ within the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘numinous’ in contemporary culture, employing performance as its hermeneutic lens. This entails articulating terminologies and developing ideas on certain ways of doing things, particular processes of apprehension and attitudes that, although often associated with the sphere of religious creeds, when contextualized and conceptualized in terms of performance might reveal a broader and more complex landscape: the horizon of the non-human.

The hypothesis proposed is that certain performative artistic practices encourage an interpretation of spirituality and religion that is highly paradoxical and often subversive of unified, monotheistic approaches to how reality is apprehended and perceived, and of binary categorizations of reality that separate matter from spirit, body from soul in discrete, fixed dividing boundaries. In other words, the strategies employed by the artists under scrutiny here are not directed toward the rhetoric of attaining ‘an absolute state of being’ (Sontag 2002, 4), but rather toward a sense of spirituality propelled toward the experience and exploration of the condition of the paradox, understood as a ‘form of speech [or] an element in (...) dialogue’ (Sontag 2002, 11) that resists the reductive simplifications of fixed binary thinking.

From this perspective, it is conceivable to think of a type of performance constructed strategically as theatrical apparatuses resembling both a scientific laboratory and a sacred space within which to experiment with the complex processes of human perception and the multiple layers that the material world seems to reveal to different approaches and instruments of investigation. It is, however, in theatre that Biswas proposes the performative contradiction of an invisible performer; that Abramović plays a

multiplicity of presences, which are embodied and at the same time disembodied; that Turrell allows spectators to conceive light in both its physicality and immateriality; that Laib renders pollen agentic; and where Coates conceives the immanence of animal spirits. It is therefore in theatre that the technologies of the self employed potentially disintegrate in perception 'the ancient notions of solid matter and clear and distinct reason' (Paz 1978, 15-16), creating space for holding their indeterminacy, and the immanence of something 'other' in the unfolding categories set in our daily life. And it is, again, in theatre that the binary opposition between the spiritual and the material is problematized, allowing the possibility of considering a vision of objectivity that is embodied and situated and an idea of transcendence that is immanent and creative.

Thus, the objective is to interpret the notion of spirituality in and through performance, in and through the performativity of 'the body/ies' in theatre, in and through a self torn between aspirations and illusions; in other words, in that space between fiction and reality, chaos and order, the metaphysical and the physical, matter and energies, forces and spirit without feeling compelled to look for a resolution to their apparent contradictions. It is my suggestion that these contradictions are the foundations of the theatrical apparatuses that these artists construct to contain what cannot be otherwise contained. All the performances analysed here deals with these contradiction/s, acknowledging the complex processes of entanglement through which what we call 'the material world' comes into existence in multiplicity, complexity, numinosity, and imagination. As the physicist Karen Barad argues, matter, like meaning:

is not an individually articulated or static entity. Matter is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification; nor is it an uncontested ground for scientific, feminist, or Marxist theories. (...) Matter is not immutable or passive. It does not require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity (2008, 139).

How we engage with such a mutable materiality that shifts forms according to the measures and instruments that we have at our disposal, is a question that deals not only with knowledge production, cognitive process and perception, but also with the notion of the unknown, or better still, the non-yet-known.

The un-known, the body and the script

The American Philosopher John Caputo, building his theories on the work of Michael Foucault and Jacques Derrida, defends the idea that there is no unique, stable truth to be discovered, but rather that the project of

knowledge continuously reminds us of the impossibility of achieving a singular, definitive answer or reaching a final point of arrival (Caputo, *More* 2-3). In his book *More Radical Hermeneutics* he endorses a view of knowledge that resists fixity and permanence and necessarily is embedded in non-knowing (Caputo 2000, 3). However, according to him, it is exactly this sense of impossibility, hovering around the project of knowledge, that renders necessary the application of temporary, shared categorizations of reality, and that at the same time maintains the momentum for further engagement, interpretations and revisions (2000, 5). This is to say that, although a certain kind of structural blindness is always at play, it is the same condition of non-knowing that:

keep[s] us open to innumerable mutations and unforeseeable possibilities, to incalculable ways of being and knowing, doing and seeing, exposed to potentialities of which we cannot presently conceive, to things improbable and incomprehensible, unimaginable and unplannable (Caputo 2000, 6).

From this perspective knowledge requires an on-going research attitude, a continuous development of previous positions through adjustments, (Caputo 2000, 7-8),⁴ as well as a passion for the impossible, the visionary and the 'other'. The task of maintaining this passion alive is an existential quest for the ability to hold exposure and instability; for the will to disentangle from the old instruments through which we know the world and consequently judge it, and for the desire to embrace new ones; for the curiosity to allow the 'other' to enter and transform us; and for the strength to imagine what is not yet manifested amongst the pressures of ordinary life and the constraints of social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Knowing and navigating the world is in fact rarely a neutral undertaking; it is indeed a process that is constantly informed by society as a whole, in its forms of representation and reinforcement, its own values and beliefs, as well as its epistemological apparatuses, ontological belief systems and naturalised assumptions. For example, Michel Foucault focuses on the social apparatuses which configure and perpetuate through specific scripts of individual self-identity and self-judgement collective moral discourses which constitute the binary understanding of what is good or bad, punishable or rewardable, mad or sane, empirical or metaphysical. Foucault attends to the processes through which we embody and are constituted by the discourses that make up our culture, and analyses the apparatuses that this culture has produced to reinforce (and inscribe) its specific scripts on individuals and collectives (Rux 1988, 10-15).

The question of embodying a cultural script is critical for the logic of this book as it is directly related to the function that technologies of the self –

spiritual practices - may have in terms of disentangling the self from some of these given patterns, and the role that performance can play in this regard. Judith Butler, for example, focuses her attention on the question of gender and employs the notion of performativity to argue that gender is performed through the repetition of stylized acts in time (1988, 519). She argues that gender is real only to the extent that it is performed through 'bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds [that in time] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self' (Ibid). She does not deny the factuality of sexuality in the body's materiality, but she re-conceives it as 'distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings' (1988, 520). To become a 'woman' or a 'man' is, accordingly, to conform to a historical script or idea of what a woman or a man culturally comprises, in doing so sustaining and confirming through embodiment and behaviour a culturally inherited script.

The physicist Karen Barad embeds the concept of performativity and the metaphor of the script even further into embodiment and more generally into matter. Drawing from Butler and Foucault's discourses on constructed identities, she links these to the theories of the physicist Niels Bohr to reinforce the theoretical tool of performativity:

for science studies and feminist theory endeavours alike (...) [to] allow matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming (2007, 136).

She challenges the linguistic faith in the power of words to represent pre-existing things and proposes that words are performative in the sense that they do things because they are part of the world with which they engage (2007, 133). Furthermore, she 'provides an understanding of *how* discursive practices matter' (2007, 136), contributing to the idea that not only our perception of things as they are, but also our descriptions of them, are specific material configurations of reality. In other words, thinking, observing, and theorizing are all 'practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being' (Barad 2007, 133). This entails questioning discursive practices that give to language and culture their agency (Barad 2007, 132) but consider matter to be fixed and unimportant in the world's becoming. In this way, therefore, she argues that matter, in its complexity, is an active participant (2007, 136) in the formation of the self and its categories of discrimination. In other words, discourses are specific material configurations and, vice versa, matter in its complexity informs discourses.

Barad's hypothesis is not an isolated research undertaking as other scholars engage with similar issues. For example, the political theorist Jane Bennett argues something similar when she talks about the 'vitality' of matter and

things (2010, viii). Bennett's philosophical account calls for a theory 'of action and responsibility that crosses the human-non human divide' (Bennett 2010, 24), opening the idea of human agency to a complexity of other non-human things (2010, 23). She envisions a concept of agency 'distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field (...) the confederate agency of many striving macro- and micro-actants' (Ibid.).⁵ They include a variety of factors from personal memories, intentions, contentions to intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as many other 'actants such as the air in the room, the noises, the things used such as plastic computer keyboards' (Ibid.), the weather, the clothes worn, the food eaten and their micro-entities.

Following this line of logic, possibilities for self-transformation and discoveries are to be found in subtle, embodied forms of subversive enactments (Butler 1988, 520) that, by manipulating the material elements composing and informing what we know and who we are, aim at breaking the script to which the self is subjected. In this way one encounters what is outside or beneath the culturally known and activates the possibility of discovering a self that is constituted by a plurality of human and non-human relationships. In this context 'the body', in its complex material constituents, acts as a 'super' or 'extra' human tool through which the self can manipulate how the self perceives others (Petersen 2006, 97) and the surrounding environment, as well as the terms through which these relationships come into place and become manifested.

Anna Furse in the essay 'Being Touched, encourages an engagement with the body to 'shift, or at least modulate power relations (...), hierarchies of power, ego, strength, gender and other roles', historically inherited and stored in our bodies (2011, 54). This may also entail the project of reconsidering what the body is, where its boundaries are set and how its material configurations are interpreted. The body, therefore, in its broader material manifestations, becomes the starting point through which to invent and discover a new ecology of relations for the self and the 'other(s)' and from which to reinvent the project of spirituality. In this regard Jane Bennett emphasizes how the cultural assumption of:

an intrinsically inanimate matter may be one of the impediments to the emergence of more ecological and more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption [both within and outside our bodies] (2010, ix).

Bennett's idea of our bodies as assemblages of life forms and forces, and Barad's theory of matter, brought to my attention the fact that, as the Buddhist scholar Alan Wallace argues, introspective traditions such as Buddhism consider ontological relativism to be the fundamental nature of

reality, and that ‘perceptual objects [and their dividedness] exist only relative to the means by which they are perceived or measured’ (2000). The state of *samādhi* is referred to as the state of being self-immersed in the field of indifferentiation where gender, class, nationality lose their meaning and where material distinctiveness dissolves (Wallace 2012) in performativity and multiplicity. This is the state of self-immersion in the proliferation and intricate dance of human and non-human contingencies and conglomerations; and it is the numinosity of this process that this book intends to highlight, as well as a co-mingling that as Bennett argues has become harder and harder to ignore (2010, 31).

Most of the practices employed by the artists chosen for this publication are types of introspective technologies intended to offer to the practicing self or the participants an opening toward this kind of undifferentiated and plural sense of self; they modify, through the manipulation of the body, the modalities by which the self orients itself in the world (Csordas 1994, 5). The attention is often shifted from the performer to the participant and vice versa according to the angle of analysis chosen. This allows a moving interpretative lens that each time produces specific frames of analysis and a more complex understanding of how each technology of the self produces meaning.

Technologies of the self and how the self acknowledges the non-self

In over twenty-five years of historical enquiry into insanity, deviancy, criminality, and sexuality, Foucault concerned himself with technologies of power and domination, ‘whereby the self has been objectified through scientific inquiry (...) and through what he termed “dividing practices”’ (Martin, Gutman and Hutton 1988, 3). However, toward the end of his life, he turned his attention to a different aspect of the self, that is the process of its own self-subjectification.

With both technologies of domination and technologies of self-subjectification we are confronted with technological apparatuses and methodologies that do not necessarily imply the employment of machinery, but rather, from the etymological meaning of the Greek term *tekhnologia*, the application of systematic treatments. It is legitimate, therefore, to consider ‘technology’ in terms of repetitive activities and behaviours: a specific methodical organization and arrangement of activities employed to modify how individuals, and whole societies, perceive themselves.

Foucault identifies four categories of technologies which humanity has historically applied to itself (Foucault 1988, 18):

1. Technologies of production that determine, through the production and the manipulation of things, social order and self-identity;
2. Technologies of sign systems that, through the use of symbols in communicative processes, operate cultural processes of identification;
3. Technologies of power that, through processes of systematic policing, 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to (...) an objectification of the subject';
4. Technologies of the self which allow individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves and attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault 1988, 18).

Systematic treatments related to spiritual practices that can be classified within the category of 'technologies of the self' include engaging for long periods of time in actions such as contemplating the inward and outward movements of the breath, repeating the same mantra or prayer, enduring standing or sitting in stillness, living in isolation and silence, fasting, contemplating the subtle movements of thoughts, repeating the same movement or action for extenuating periods of time, ecstatic dance and so on. Foucault focused his attention on tracing these 'techniques of self-formation from the early Greeks to the Christian age' (Martin, Gutman and Hutton 1988, 5), whereas in the specificity of this context I am looking at techniques originating in religious contexts of various historical periods that are employed by performance artists within the cultural context of contemporary western societies. This implies a need to contextualize these technologies within the discourses of contemporary performance in western countries such as United States and Europe, to examine how they are negotiated in these contexts, and to take into consideration the cultural impact that they have on a sense of self that is highly informed by technological advancement.⁶

In philosophical terms, what constitutes the self in post-industrial societies is debated. Some theorists argue that the self is constructed by social structures that determine its identity and perception; others celebrate the authenticity of self-creativity and agency (Elliott 2010, 13). In terms of methodological approaches there is no settled ground to refer to, as some consider the self an object that can be studied without references to the interpretations that individuals make, while others think that it cannot be adequately studied in isolation from these interpretations (Elliott 2010, 9). Questions of agency and structure, objectivity and subjectivity, are the main sites of contention in relation to a self that, depending on the models employed, can have its horizon of agentic possibilities expanded or shrunk.

Having said this, one can argue that contemporary, post-industrial societies have contributed to postmodern interpretations of a self shattered in multiple directions and negotiated by the interpersonal demands of a multi-layered everyday life (Elliott 2010, 85). The so called 'postmodern self' is in fact without fixed identity, being fragmented and in flux, entangled in an endless process of self-creation by new technological transformations, multiple online identities, consumer lifestyles, and global population movements that construct and deconstruct on a daily basis its own sense of identity. It is the product of an endless number of self-reflections that produce fragmentation, multiplicity and discontinuity.

French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in their collaborative book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, defend fragmentation and the metaphoric idea of schizophrenic identities as forms of resistance to the 'oedipalized territorialities' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, xvii) of institutions such as family, church, school, nation, party. They defend processes of randomness, decentred and disconnected identities, positing a 'multiplicity of selves (...) as possible subjective sources for alternative social arrangements' (Elliott 2010, 148). Furthermore, they argue for a fluctuating condition of existence where 'the self and non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 2). In that space of indeterminacy the so-called schizophrenic self penetrates into the realm of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 35) where representation ceases to be objective and 'becomes subjective, infinite – that is to say, imaginary – [and] effectively los[es] all consistency' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 305).

Nonetheless, the promotion of a deterritorialized self, disconnected from structures and their ideologies, incapable of sympathizing with the values offered by specific familial, religious, national or political belief systems, is viewed by various scholars as disengaging individuals from political involvement. For example Amelia Jones in her book *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (2012), points out how discourses on 'post' identity have reshaped, undermined and obscured:

50 years of intense struggle on the part of civil rights, feminist, and other activists operating under the premises of twentieth-century identity politics (Jones 2002, xx).

The sociologist Anthony Elliott, in his book *Concepts of the Self* (2010), denounces the fact that postmodern defenders of a multiplicity of selves ignore the emotional damage and psychic pain with which schizophrenia is routinely associated (Elliott 2010, 148). He warns that we must be careful in endorsing:

a naïve celebration of the multiplicity of selves, fragmented identities, narcissistic personality disorders and schizophrenia as possible subjective sources for alternative social arrangements (2010, 148).

Having said this, it is worth emphasizing that the question of shattered identities-in-process, proposed by postmodern discourses, are themselves constitutive of a reaction to political and cultural discourses.

In this regard, the psychologist James Hillman argues that we are still guided by a bias toward the one, by the idea that unity is an advance over multiplicity and diversity (1989, 38). Hillman points out that, although the post-industrial self is constantly entangled in multiplicity, the underlining myth informing our sense of self is still constrained within the myth of singularity that is represented in Jungian terms by the archetypal, monotheistic symbol of Christ (1989, 41) or Mohamed, or any other symbolic figure at the root of monotheistic religions. It is the myth of the monotheistic self that, according to Hillman, represents the symbolic script still dominating the conceptions of contemporary self (1989, 41), and fuels our fears and resistance toward multiplicity. Therefore, he proposes a polytheistic psychology of the self capable of reflecting more accurately:

the illusions and entanglements of the soul, even if it satisfies less the popular vision of individuation from chaos to order, from multiplicity to unity, and where the health of wholeness has come to mean the one dominating the many (1989, 40).

He goes on to argue that what constitutes the self should not be found in a monotheistic idea of wholeness but in the process of 'gathering each fragment according to its own principle' (1989, 39).

Hillman's polytheistic self, although resembling the schizophrenic ideal of Deleuze and Guattari, does not aim to deconstruct the myth of Oedipus alone but rather all of the myths underlining monotheistic religions. This is realized, he suggests, by substituting, for example, the archetype of the Virgin Mary with a plurality of mythological figures like Artemis, Persephone, Athena, Aphrodite as more adequate 'psychological backgrounds to the complexity of human nature' (1989, 39). In other words, he targets all those symbols that 'present themselves in descriptions which dominate through unification' (Ibid.), and in doing so impede the emergence of a flexible and plural self, capable of self-transformation and compassionate acts toward others.

Whatever way we look at it, any engagement with the exploration of the notion of the self in post-industrial societies 'denote[s] a concern with the subjectivity of the individual' (Elliott 2010, 14) and its relation to its social

structures and their political and social operations. The self seems to emerge through a two-way movement, from the outside to the inside and, vice versa, from the inside to the outside:

always subject *to* or *of* something (...), [standing] at the intersection of general truth and shared principles (Mansfield 2000, 3).

However, Mansfield suggests, the question as to whether the nature and the qualities of these principles and truths determine or are determined by the self will continue to be a contested territory (Ibid.).

This two-way process applies as well as to the micro-cosmos of the theatrical apparatuses constructed by the artists under scrutiny here: to the relationships established between the beheld and the beholder, and to the perceptual construct of the self that emerges from each singular performance. However, whether this movement is an ontological fact or a temporary condition given by the specificity of contextual apparatuses remains an open question.

Theatrical apparatuses of experimentation

Theatrical apparatuses of experimentation are understood in this context as operating physical conditions established in such ways that certain aspects of the environment are selected and controlled into systems within which to carry out experiments. According to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, Foucault's notion of apparatus (*dispositif*) is related to his concern with 'what he calls "governmentality" or the "government of men"' (2009, 1). The term 'apparatus' is used to refer to the heterogeneous ensemble of 'discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions' (Foucault 1980, 194) which are employed to govern, direct and control a society. It is possible to summarise Foucault's model in four points: firstly, an apparatus is the network that is established between linguistic and non-linguistic elements; secondly, each apparatus has a 'concrete strategic function and is always located in a power relation'; thirdly, it 'appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge' (Agamben 2009, 2-3); and fourthly, its nature is to have a dominant strategic function (Foucault 1980, 195).

What is particularly interesting here is that, according to Foucault, an apparatus is essentially strategic in manipulating the relations of forces within a specific system (Foucault 1980, 196). These relations can be moved in a particular direction, blocked, stabilized or multiplied in order to accomplish specific objectives (Ibid.) and in accordance with the specific

knowledge from which it is constructed. An apparatus is, therefore, always linked to ‘certain limits of knowledge that arise from [the system] and, to an equal degree, conditions it’ (Ibid.). Both knowledge and apparatuses constitute the specificity of the systems in place and, vice versa, the specificity of the systems influences both knowledge and apparatuses. This is to say that the relation of forces that emerges in a system is produced by a reciprocal loop of influence that re-informs and re-enforces, in time, all of the participative constituents, their perceptions and description of what is real and not real.

Applying this model to performance implies that performances are interpreted as systems controlled through theatrical apparatuses and strategies that maintain and govern the relation of forces between the performer or object of attention and audience, within certain boundaries. In the specificities of the works analysed in this book, the elements that constitute their apparatuses are: the performance or installation space; the performer or object’s presence in relation to participants/spectators; the technology of the self-employed; the management of time and the performance’s rules and regulations. Hence, depending on how these elements are played out and engage with each other, the relations of forces between the performer and the audience will operate differently.

In considering these performances as systems governed through theatrical apparatuses I am suggesting a certain conception of performance that recalls the scientific laboratory: a highly controlled environment where a certain condition is kept stable in order to experiment, in isolation, with the behaviours of certain phenomena. For example, Laib, in presenting pollen under specific circumstances and quantities, reveals certain qualities of the material that would be otherwise imperceptible. Indeed, as it will be extensively explicated in each respective chapter, in their own way, all artists explored here have associations with the scientific laboratory as a metaphor for the experimental paradigm. However, their interventions by employing or being inspired by religious practices are often critical of the dominant scientific model as the only reference for knowledge’s production. Performance is therefore suggested as the locus for experimenting with technologies of the self and types of experiences in introspection, and in ways that are different from both the dominant scientific model and the religious creeds from which the practices of inspiration originated.

It is worth noticing that neuroscientists are currently employing sophisticated technological apparatuses to explore the effects of meditative practices on the brain. However, as neuroscientist Peter Malinowsky argues, to look at images of the brain responding to meditative practices can never be mistaken for the experience itself (2012).⁷ The representation of the experience is wholly different from the embodied experience itself.

Malinowsky admits that the only way to explore the complexity of the realm of experience, as a whole, would be a dialogical model comprehensive of introspective methods, experiential approaches and the third person model of conventional science. Nonetheless, introspective methods and experiential approaches are still perceived as too self-referential and therefore outside the limits of what has been established as a rigorous experimental/scientific approach to knowledge (Malinowsky 2012).

However, feminist philosophers of science are problematizing some of these premises. For example according to Barad, the third person model of western science is not immune to the problem that an apparatus, by containing an action within a closed system, always constitutes ‘specific reconfigurings of the world that (...) iteratively reconfigure spacetime-matter’ (Barad 2017, 142). Consequently, because apparatuses are never neutral, the hypothesis proposed is that the primary epistemological unit of the scientific model is not a fixed ontological reality either. In other words, the existence of the independent entities of observer/subject and observed/object, on which the third person model is based, is, according to Barad, a constructed condition produced by the particular apparatus devised for the specificity of the experiment undertaken (2008, 133). Barad’s main argument suggests that what we understand as reality, with its apparently inherent boundaries and properties, is actually ontologically undetermined. Boundaries between things are temporary and their differences emerge through relation (Ibid.).

One of the main contributions of Barad’s theory is the neologism of ‘intra-action’ which proposes that things, objects and humans do not have pre-existing relations. This differs from the notion of interaction that necessitates existing entities as a precondition of their relation. Intra-action is, therefore, a coming into relation while becoming into being, a performative process wherein separateness emerges together with material configurations and their meanings (Ibid.). Thus objects and subjects emerge in their meaning through relational processes. These processes entail performing local resolutions or differences, the boundaries of which are set according to the specificity of the resolution constituted. Therefore, these specific conditions/relations allow the emergence of agencies capable of performing other functional, local resolutions and differences on what was previously indeterminate.

Applying this model to the theatrical apparatuses studied here, one can propose that they operate specific, functional, local resolutions within the space in which they are located, constituting specific relational conditions of experimentation between the observer/spectator and the observed/performer. Yet, these apparatuses are constructed to render palpable the indeterminate nature of this relationship by manipulating

perception and therefore destabilizing the fixity of its points of reference. In other words, they open the way for processes of concealment and revelation of perceptual possibilities that:

make visible the invisible, confuse bones with skin, substance with secondary effects (...) violat[ing] the hierarchy of social and corporal spaces distanced into front and back, into illusion and reality (Lyotard 1984, 106).

These are contexts that seem to invite spectators to inhabit and explore the imaginary, the 'other', the unknown, the unexpected, that which

interrupts the customary course of events, (...) removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life [and touches on] the uncertain, [the illogical, the paradoxical] (Gadamer 2004, 69).

Creativity and the *Numen Praesens*

The theologian Rudolf Otto, in his phenomenological analysis of the religious experience, describes this breach of ordinary perception as the encounter with the *numen praesens*, the 'wholly other', an object whose nature, transcending the known, breaks the boundaries of the conceivable and provokes, in the individual or collective encountering it, unique types of emotions (1958, 10). Otto described this in paradoxical terms by employing the Latin *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans* to characterize the numinous experience as a feeling-response bringing and holding together contrasting inner responses such as terror and ecstasy (Luft 2012, 478).

The *mysterium tremendum* is depicted by Otto with dramatic emphasis, for example as 'the awe-aweful' akin to 'religious dread' (1984, 14), the horror of Pan 'with its queer perversion' (Ibid.), the reaction to 'something uncanny', the weird, or the 'tremor', elicited by the encounter with what is regarded as unfamiliar or 'wholly other' (1984, 16).⁸ On the contrary, the *mysterium fascinans* is portrayed as the 'absolute fascination' (Otto 1984, 38) that William James describes as the 'effect of some great orchestra, when all the separate notes have melted into one swelling harmony' (Austin 1962, 66), the bliss, 'the *wonderfulness*' (Austin 1962, 32), 'the rapture and the overabounding' (Austin 1962, 38) feelings experienced by participating in something that lies beyond the singular and that the singular cannot fully possess.

The two feelings described above coexist in Otto's conception of the religious experience and contribute to his illustration of a gentle tide that:

may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul (...) [or] lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicating frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It may (also) become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of - whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible (Otto 1958, 13).

Carl Gustav Jung, one of the most prolific explorers of the idea of the numinous in secular terms, envisages the conceptual and experimental potentialities of the religious experience as conceived by Otto in the advancement of a psychoanalytical understanding of the processes through which individuals and collectives deal with unconscious and conscious contents (1977, 7). His studies are directed toward the psychological processes that lead people to take into great consideration, in their daily lives, the influence of certain dynamic factors conceived by him as 'powers' (1977, 9). These powers, Jung suggested, can be named using different words like spirits, demons, gods, laws, ideas, ideals and may be considered invisible, meta-physical, abstract, or embodied, according to the cultural context in which they are experienced (1977, 5). In other words, Jung conceives of these powers as emerging and acquiring meaning and value according to the belief system in place in a specific context.

As a result, Jung interprets Otto's concept of the 'wholly other' not as an inherent quality of the object encountered by the subject, but rather as a subjective perceptual reaction of the self to the object (Jung 2006, 63-64).

The literary scholar Sabine Coelsch-Foisner, in her analysis of the question of the numinous ethos in literature, endorses this perspective by validating the argument that the spiritual does not depend on supra-sensible entities but rather on a shift in perception or 'a particular frame of mind and manner of apprehension' (2002, 393). In particular she focuses on 'the importance of distinguishing between the transcendent and the transcendental experience' (Ibid.).⁹ In explaining this differentiation, she suggests that contrary to the transcendent, the transcendental constitutes a happening that 'of necessity is tied to the objects [or subjects] of this world' (Ibid.). Nevertheless, she goes on to argue that the self, experiencing something as numinous or 'wholly other', initiates a process of perceptive transformation during which 'the objects of this world' pass from being perceived as something experiential to something transcendent and 'wholly other' (Ibid.).

I propose to describe this process as a cyclical reflexive movement from the outside (stimulus) to the inside (unconscious content) and to the outside again (the external stimulus is perceived differently): a dynamic looping

process of perceptual alteration that transforms the way the subject perceives the self and the surrounding environment.

This idea is analogous to what the historian of religion Mircea Eliade designated in the book *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957) as ‘hierophanies’ or ‘the act of manifestation of the sacred’ (Eliade 1987, 11). He argues that:

by manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself* (...). A sacred stone remains a stone; apparently (or, more precisely, from the profane point of view), nothing distinguishes it from all other stones. But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality (1987, 12).

The philosopher Drew Dalton, in his book *Longing for the Other, Levinas and Metaphysical Desire* (2009), endorses this perspective and provides further insights into the characteristics of the spiritual experience, with particular interest in the relationship between the self and the numinous object. Developing further Otto’s discourse around the idea of the numinous object as ‘wholly other’, he points out, as others have done before him, that it is the self who conceives an object of this world as something ‘wholly other’ and transcendental. However, in returning to Otto’s idea that the object is also the carrier of an ‘overplus’ of meaning (1958, 230), he aims to emphasize the function of the object. Indeed, he proposes that it is the object that actually carries the overplus of meaning or excess of value, and is thus the initiator of the numinous experience. Therefore, this overplus held by the object expressing ‘too muchness’ (Ibid.) explodes the borders and limits of the ordered systems within which the self has set reality.

Nonetheless, according to Dalton this overplus of meaning should not be interpreted as supernatural, but rather in terms of creativity and within culture (2009, 234). He argues that the numinous/spiritual experience is the locus and the fulcrum of the creative process ‘forged in the fires of the beyond being’ (Ibid.). Creativity emerges, he suggests, from a:

breach within the phenomenal realm through which a new conception of that realm can be formulated. That is, as the tie within being to that which lies beyond being, the numinous seems to cast the phenomenal realm in a new light (Ibid.).

In proposing the hypothesis that the religious/spiritual experience is the fulcrum of the creative process, Dalton also suggests a potential numinous value for the artistic object/presence/event (2009, 230-234). In doing so, he establishes a direct connection between creativity and numinosity, art and experimentation, letting the borders of their given categorizations blur, and

enabling the possibility for a third dimension of encounter to emerge (2009, 230).

Homi Bhabha, in the essay 'Aura and Agora: On Negotiating Rapture and Speaking Between', effectively describes this condition in terms of a ceasura in everyday life between experience and knowing (1996, 8). He emphasizes its paradoxical qualities as the condition of a self experiencing the non-self, an experience that interrupts and breaks the processes of negotiation that characterize everyday life (1996, 10). He goes on to describe it as a state that has

the capacity to reveal, [manifests in the ordinary] the almost impossible, attenuate limit where aura and agora overlap (...) in the unresolvable "side-by-sideness" of insight and insouciance in that uneasy space and time in *between* birth and death [that] opens a [different] space of survival (1996, 9).

This type of emotion, suspending judgement, disrupts the capacity of the self to orient her/himself through the establishment of the binary opposites of good and bad, right and wrong, inside and outside, sacred and secular, reasonable and unreasonable, self and other.

This is a sense of affective totality that occurs in a loop, in cycles of arising perceptual, emotional conditions within which the spectator and their object of reference lose certainty in space and time. According to the psychologist Ciarán Benson, this phenomenon is the perspective offered by certain attitudes and creative *modus operandi* of contemporary art that are included in the 'negative path' undertaken by the artists analysed here. Benson refers to this artistic attitude as the perspective of the 'no points of view' (2001, 192-204). In his book *The Cultural Psychology of Self: Place, Morality and Art in Human Worlds* (2001), Benson argues that the modalities by which our psychological sense of being is located spatially and temporally depend on a series of doubled coordinates, such as:

up/down, front/back, above/below, inside/outside, on/off, here/there, towards/away and now/then, but also I/you, us/them, is/is not, have/not have, yours/mine and for/against (2001, 194).

He goes on to suggest that the modalities by which the coordinates and boundaries of self and other, and where each begins and ends, are determined and constructed 'by our use of metaphors based on our language for physical location' (2001, 194). In a similar fashion to Bhabha, Benson regards the arts as one of the core mediators of the perceptual processes through which the self knows and positions the other in relation to itself. According to him, the arts are the most 'accomplished metaphorical

realm created by human beings' (Ibid.) through which the individual self arrives at a mutual agreement with other selves not only about how and where their reciprocal boundaries are set, but also about how alternative perspectives and propositions can be found and created (2001, 195).

Benson leads the reader through the fascinating journey of how spatial metaphors, such as medieval pictorial space or the development of linear perspective in the Renaissance, were coherently grounded in experiences that were physical, social and cultural (2001, 195-197).¹⁰ He goes on to propose contemporary developments of the 'no point of view' experience, and explains its cultural implications by looking specifically at the work of the artist James Turrell who, by exploring sensory deprivation in architecture, shifts the twofoldness of the pictorial to the 'twofoldness of perception' (2001, 199), rendering perceptible the experience of witnessing the processes through which we see.

The condition of a self becoming conscious of its own perceptual processes, through which objects of this world acquire appearances, forms and eventually meaning, entails a shift in the focus of attention in regard to the coordinates through which the self looks for physical location from the outside to the inside (Benson 2001, 193). In other words, in this process the perceptual motor field, by which the self orients itself in a specific context where the dichotomies of I/you, inside/outside permeate the relationship between the subject and the object, is affected and destabilized. This shift occurs when a self immerses itself in introspective processes aimed at calibrating and manipulating the complex human biological apparatus of perception.

When the apparatus is shifted in its complex material configurations, a new vision is potentially able to reach consciousness and reveal what was previously unknown within the known. Each of the performances analysed here reveal different possibilities for aspects of the real to emerge in difference and complexity. Each of them offer a different ecological order that in their specificities hold ontological and epistemological significance in modifying the position that the self occupies within the hierarchy of the possible.

The spiritual emerges as intrinsically dependent on knowledge, the models established to achieve it, and their destabilizations. These models are linked to the apparatuses employed that in turn also determine what self-knowledge is, its boundaries and limitations. It depends on the networks of communication, its cultural and social instruments and technologies of interpretation, whether self-knowledge, introspection and its introspective models of investigation have any place in the project of knowing, and if indeed the dimension of the spiritual has any value and role within it.

To expand this point further I refer to the theologian and religious studies scholar Melissa Raphael, and particularly her book *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness* (1997), which by articulating a feminist perspective of Otto's conception of the numinous argues for a feminist approach to the processes by which the world is apprehended. Raphael pays attention to Otto's emphasis on the differentiation between religious morality and the spiritual experience (1997, 8-10). More specifically, she employs an etymological approach to look at the term 'holy' and the meanings it has historically acquired in its various cultural developments and interpretations. Otto, for example, points out that, although the term holy 'is a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion' (1958, 5), it has been applied by transference to the sphere of ethics. In Otto's view, this is an interpretative misunderstanding of the meaning of 'holy', which originally 'in Latin and Greek, in Semitic and other ancient languages, denote[d] first and foremost *only* [an] overplus' of meaning (Ibid.). This overplus of meaning is always and inevitably situated somewhere beyond the rational and moral interpretation of the 'completely good', often associated with the idea of divine (*numen*).

Departing from this aspect of Otto's theory, Raphael reclaims a non-rational, non-discursive, non-linear, non-masculinist sense of the spiritual that is different from the fixed, often dogmatic schematization and moralization offered by religious creeds (1997, 8). She proposes a feminist sense that finds fertile ground in Otto's conception of paradox and its complex and unsettling configurations of meaning-making (1996, 34). In doing so she problematizes interpretations tending to corral and order the spiritual within defined codes of behaviour informed by controlling, patriarchal, authoritative intentions, proposing instead an intuitive and feminine approach to the spiritual and consequently to its interpretations.

This is a perspective that opens the spiritual to the pluralities of interpretations and experiences that this book aims to provide: the disclosing of opportunities for the spiritual and the numinous to occur in processes of transformation and persistent nomadism. Each of the theatrical apparatuses analyzed in the next chapters will determine the territories occupied by the known and the unknown according to their specificities, each time shifting and relocating the boundaries of what is contextualized here as the domain of the spiritual. Every single chapter is therefore a journey into a specific contextualization of this domain, a possible conceptual shape for this slippery territory to dwell. However, none of this journeys represents an arrival, but rather a temporary beginning from which hopefully new generative locations will emerge.

1 Both Deer Shelter Skyspace and Pollen from Hazelnut are installations that involve a degree of performance elements, and are therefore considered here within the paradigm of performance.

2 Here I refer to the theories developed by Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) whereby art is conceived as ‘a practical means and also the form for processes of a spiritual nature’ (<http://www.grotowski.net/en/encyclopedia/art-vehicle>)

3 In the last twenty years a growing body of scholarship dedicated to the relationship between the religious and the secular in art and performance has emerged together with an increasing interest in related topics. For example, in 2009 the Institute for the Study of Performance and Spirituality was established with its related online journal *Performance and Spirituality*. In the same year the New York-based journal of performance and art *PAJ* dedicated an entire section to this subject entitled “Art and the Spiritual”; and in 2011 at the IFTR Osaka conference, the ‘Performance, Religion and Spirituality Working Group’ had its founding meeting. In 2017 the international academic journal *Performance, Religion and Spirituality* launched its inaugural issue and the Centre for Performance Philosophy hosted the event: *Spirit in a Materialist World: Bergson, Laban & the immanent spiritual*. Examples of recent publications on these subjects include: Jung Yoon (2010) *Spirituality in Contemporary Art : The Idea of the Numinous*; Morgan, David Ed. (2010) *Religion and material culture: the matter of belief*; Gharavi, Lance Ed. (2012) *Religion, theatre, and performance: acts of faith*; James Elkins and David Morgan Eds. (2009); Claire Chambers, Simon W. Du Toit and Joshua Edelman Eds. (2013) *Performing Religion in Public*; and Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe (2013) *Observing Theatre: Spirituality and Subjectivity in the Performing Art*. Donnalee Dox (2016) *Reckoning with Spirit in the Paradigm of Performance*. Claire Maria Chambers (2017) *Performance Studies and Negative Epistemology: Performance Apophatics*.

4 Here Caputo refers to Derrida’s sense of the secret as the irreducibility of ‘the other’ who always ‘sits in the spot we can never occupy, speaks from the point of view we cannot inhabit, presides over a secret we cannot share. (...) [This] means that the absolute secret, the structural not-knowing, enters into and is the condition of the “other”’ (Caputo, 2000, p. 8).

5 An ‘actant is neither an object nor a subject but an “intervener” (...). Which by virtue of its particular location (...) makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event.’ Actant is a ‘substitute for what in a more [human] subject-centered vocabulary is called agent’ (Bennett, 2010, p. 9).

6 In this case I am referring to machinery and electronic equipment.

7 Peter Malinowsky is involved in the Meditation and Mindfulness Research Group at Liverpool John Moores University (<http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/mindfulness/>).

8 Here Otto acknowledges the mythology of Pan as the pagan roots of the *mysterium tremendum* in western consciousness.

9 Transcendent: adj. ‘beyond or above the range of normal or physical human experience’, ‘surpassing the ordinary’, ‘existing apart from and not subject to the limitations of the material universe’.

Transcendental: adj. ‘relating to the spiritual realm (...) (in Kantian philosophy) presupposed in and necessary to experience.’ *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. Continually updated at <http://www.oed.com/>.

10 In this regard the scholar Robert Wicks reminds the reader that Foucault in his book *The Order of Things* (1973) argued, similarly, that the famous painting *Las Meninas* (1656) by Diego Velazquez clearly displayed the mode of representation that dominated the thought of the 17th and 18th centuries (Wicks 2001, pp.199-213).

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