2021

Social Sculpture: A Plastic Process of Mutual Transformation

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http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/16934

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UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

Social Sculpture: A Plastic Process of Mutual Transformation

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Art, Design and Architecture

March 2021

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Michael Bowdidge. On August 2015 I was crossing Uferstudios' patio, introspectively battling with my thoughts on how to leave Berlin and give up my PhD proposal, as I felt no one believed in it. As I began to walk away, Michael, whom I had never met asked me to have a coffee. We spoke about art and my research proposal. He believed in it and since then I have lost count of how many times he has thrown me a rope when I was about to drown. Second and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Anya Lewin who joined Michael and I and worked unsparingly and until the last minute with the same intensity and support, and Dr. Mark Leahy who came in later, helped sew it all up and stayed to the very end.

To both Transart Institute and University of Plymouth, for this research journey, but mainly for so many memories.

To Shelley Sacks, for her knowledge, generosity and kindness.

To Tammy Key, Eileen Karakurt, Caroline Santos, Camila Godoy, and all the Senior Centre participants for their commitment to the project. To Leila Leder Kremer, Susan Carballo and Cherese Crocket, Mary Malm, Kerry Ware, Carlos Devillasante, Jordan Massengale, Thomas Corkett, Oscar Fuentes and Sophie Bonnet.

On a more personal level I would like to offer my thanks as well to Dr. Virginia Hadad who could not have been more encouraging and present at all times and at many levels of life; to my brother Leonardo Fazzio, because he always believes in me, he was there working, brainstorming and collaborating with me to prepare the original proposal and its accompanying exhibition; to my brother Alejandro Fazzio for his encouragement; to my sister, Victoria Fazzio, for reading the drafts many times, let alone making many trips to South Florida to take care of my son, Dante, when I had to travel to fulfill the required residencies, leaving her own daughters to do it. I am particularly indebted to my mother, Victoria Maria Josefina Welf, for coming to Florida from Argentina to help me with Dante and it was in one of those trips that a body of work that is part of the thesis was made. To Simona Nardi Ciancetta for her unconditional support. Last but not least, to Ekaterina Tour for all her generous help during all these years.

I would like to dedicate this work to both my mother and my son.

Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

A programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included eight intensive residencies: Transart Institute: Berlin, Summer Residency 2015; Ney York City, Winter Residency 2016; Berlin, Summer Residency 2016; NYC, Winter 2017; Berlin Summer 2017; Mexico City, Winter 2018; University of Plymouth: Plymouth, UK, Spring 2018, Plymouth, UK, Spring 2019.
The following external institutions were visited for research and consultation purposes: Transart Institute.

Publications:
Action 1, Art Center South Florida , September 2015; *The Tower*, December 2015.
We Play Chalkboard, Casa Seminario 12, Else Foundation Symposium, CDMX 2018.
.
Performance Lectures: *Feminism*, 2018; *Ana Mendieta*, 2018; *Christo and Jean Claude - Surrounded Islands*, 2018, Miami Dade Public Library System.

Presentations at conferences:
Artistic Research Will Eat Itself, Society for Artistic Research exhibition, April 2018, Plymouth.

Word count of main body of thesis: 52,838

Signed

Date: 05/22/2020

Abstract

Joseph Beuys, the originator of the term 'Social Sculpture', stated that the objects he made were stimulators for the formation of thoughts, i.e. that they were intended to mold or to shape thoughts. Beuys believed that the essence of Social Sculpture was to shape and mold the world by working with invisible materials to make new thoughts. His aim was to develop an evolutionary process to share his ideas about the universal nature of plasticity, and thus the ability we all have to constantly transform.

This practice as research PhD explores Social Sculpture as a contemporary process of transformation. The transformation of my practice from the start of my PhD has moved from producing objects in my studio (and then subsequently destroying them), to working with participants of different ages and from different institutions in a variety of settings. Through this journey I expanded my understanding of plasticity and came to recognize that my practice could be understood as 'Social Sculpture Explorations' or 'SSE'.

In this iteration of Social Sculpture, plasticity manifests as 'liveliness', the "live" element consists of being fully present in both senses i.e. being in the present time (simultaneously) and being present in space, being there physically. In my work, I perform for and with the camera: I cannot make Social Sculpture without the camera, as it crystallizes the process of making SSE and Its presence opens the space for the self-awareness that making SSE requires to come into being.

While the camera has the potential to be a documentation tool, and performs this role for me, in my work the camera is more than that: it is a presence that offers many possibilities, each of which affects the performance itself. I perform for the camera and with the camera and I understand the camera as an assemblage of all the elements of the exploration with its own agency. Finally, I argue that the objective lens has a subjective quality. That is to say, it functions a little like a subject, at times, even though we tend to think of the camera as being more 'objective' than 'subjective'. This in turn points to the impossible objective of the lens (also known as an objective) to actually be objective.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter I

Research Context & Key Terms

Chapter II

Solo

Chapter III

Participatory

Chapter IV

Family

Chapter V

The Camera, She my Colleague

List of Illustrations
All works by Veronica Fazzio

Of the three metamorphoses of the spirit do I tell you: how the spirit becomes a camel, the camel a lion; and the lion finally a child.

There is much that is difficult for the spirit, that would bear much, and kneels down like a camel wanting to be well loaded. (…)

All these most difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that,

burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into the desert.

In the loneliest desert, however, the second metamorphosis occurs: here the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master of his own desert. (…) the creation of freedom for oneself for new creation—that is within the power of the lion. (…) what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "yes" is needed; the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world.[1]

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, a Book for All and None*, Cambridge University Press, edited by Adrian del Caro, University of Colorado at Boulder, Robert B. Pippin, University of Chicago, 2006, (first published in parts, 1883, 1885 & 1892) pg. 16, 17

Introduction

This thesis, the written document, along with the included videos, is about my journey of becoming a Social Sculpture (after Joseph Beuys) practice-based researcher, and its expected and unexpected outcomes. It is an exploration of Social Sculpture practice, my transformation as an artist, failure as a driving force and the role of the camera in my work. For reasons of clarity and simplicity, I intend to present my project chronologically, which shows an evolutionary transformation in my own artistic practice. At the end of the research, an unexpected finding came up, it was the role of the camera as more than a participant in this practice-based research. The camera proved to be more intimate than just a documentary recording tool and I came to understand the camera as an assemblage with agency.

In 2015, when I began this PhD journey, I chose Nietzsche's "three metamorphoses" as a poetic point of departure for my research. Nietzsche introduces the three metamorphoses in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1878). The Three Metamorphoses and its life changing metaphor influenced my decision to develop this practice-based research project, the first of my career. I knew that my practice was about to change as well as I myself.

In Tim Rayner's article about Nietzsche's three metamorphoses (2010), he describes them in relation to changes in his personal life and his career transformation into a philosopher. In a similar way, I relate Nietzsche's three metamorphoses to changes in my life as an artist. Rayner comments,

> The metamorphoses describe the process of spiritual transformation that characterizes his vision of the flourishing life (…) the story of the three metamorphoses is nothing if not a saga of spiritual transformation. [2]

When I started my PhD process, I aimed to transform my own practice via a rigorous and reflective research process that would lead me to a new stage in my life and my career. Looking back at this from the present, it is clear to me that this process of transformation was reflected by a shift in my practice; I developed from the object maker I was, closed away in my studio, to an object maker who performs actions in which the viewer becomes a participant and plays an active role.

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[2] Tim Rayner, 'Nietzsche's Three Metamorphoses', *Philosophy for Change*, https://philosophyforchange.wordpress.com/2010/02/12/nietzsches-three-metamorphoses/, last accessed 8th March 2020.

What we lose when we transform ourselves, (i.e., what happens to the camel once we become a lion, to the lion when we transform into a child and so on) was investigated through my bodily interactions with material during my live actions during the first body of work in which I produced actions.

I need to inform the reader that my native language is Castellano and my family language is Italian. Therefore, many of the English terms I choose have Latin roots. English has a high percentage of vocabulary in two versions, one with an Anglo-Saxon root, and its synonym with Latin root (J. L. Borges[3]). This Latin version often is very similar to Spanish or Italian languages. For example, I would choose *obscure* rather than *dark*, because obscure and *oscuro* have the same Latin root and are familiar to me and perhaps also share a closer meaning.

Similarly, I consider myself a Plastic Artist (*Artista Plastico*) rather than a Visual Artist. In Buenos Aires City's public elementary schools, the art and crafts class are two separate classes: *Actividades Plasticas,* Plastic Activities and *Actividades Practicas,* Practical Activities. The first one is taught by an Art Teacher, often an artist, the second is taught by a teacher with a degree related to technology and/or crafts. I grew up having those classes separated, so to me the term plastic is a term that embodies art and this choice speaks volumes about why I started the journey into Joseph Beuys' theories but especially why my understanding of his *Soziale Plastik* (Social Sculpture) influenced my practice. Another example is provided, in relation to the camera in Chapter V, in which I choose to use the term *objective* (*objetivo)* to refer to the camera lens. Objective is not usually a term used by English speakers to refer to the lens, but it is most common for professional photographers to refer to their objectives in relation to practice. Spanish also uses *lentes (*lens*),* the combination of several lenses makes an objective, therefore I use the term objective because it is more appropriate, because through this project I found myself stepping towards objectivity and the non-human participant of the camera stepping out towards subjectivity, so referring to the lens as an objective within this project particularly helps to articulate the Thesis findings. This topic is further discussed in Chapter V, and in the Conclusion to the thesis.

Note to the reader: all the recorded material (by-products) that is included as part of this thesis is available on my Vimeo page. I suggest to the reader that as they come to a link to pause and watch the by-product.

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[3] Jorge Luis Borges, *Professor Borges: A Course on English Literature*, edited by Martín Arias and Martín Hadis, and translated from the Spanish by Katherine Silver, New Directions, 2013, p. 23.

There is a list of all the by-products at **https://www.veronicafazzio.com/sse-by-products.html**. The password to see them is: **SSEby-pro**.

Social Sculpture

In this thesis I call my work Social Sculpture Explorations, (hereinafter abbreviated to SSE). In *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America,* Joseph Beuys explains Social Sculpture in the following manner:

> My objects are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture ... or of art in general. They should provoke thoughts about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended to the invisible materials used by everyone.
> thinking forms—how we mould our thoughts or
> spoken forms—how we shape our thoughts into words or
> social sculpture—how we mould and shape the world in which we live: sculpture as an evolutionary process; everyone an artist.
> That is why the nature of my sculpture is not fixed and finished. Processes continue in most of them: chemical reactions, fermentations, colour changes, decay, drying up. Everything is in a state of change.[4]

Joseph Beuys emphasized the capacity of plasticity of all art disciplines in many of his interviews and talks. Cambridge Dictionary defines plasticity as follows:

> the quality of being soft enough to make into many different shapes.[5]

The definition of plasticity in biology is

> Plasticity of biological systems occurs to any level of complexity: molecular, cellular, systemic and behavioural and refers to the ability of living organisms to change their 'state' in response to any stimuli and applying the most appropriate, adaptive response. [6]

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[4] Joseph Beuys, *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America,* compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993, p. 19.

[5] 'Plasticity', n.d., *Cambridge Learner's Dictionary*, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/plasticity, accessed 11th February 2020.

[6] Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn (SZN), 'Biological Plasticity', *Research Italy*, https://www.researchitaly.it/en/projects/biological-plasticity/, 2013, accessed 11th February 2020.

This refers to the adaptability of an organ to changes in its environment or differences between its various habitats.[7] The word 'sculpture' in Social Sculpture could be understood as referring to the medium of sculpture itself, the German words Beuys used were *Soziale Plastik*. In German *plastik* means sculpture and *(das) plastik* means plastic arts, so I posit that for Beuys the word plastic in *Soziale Plastik* (Social Sculpture) was used also for its implicit capacity for plasticity in the medium of sculpture. This is based on Beuys' intention of expanding the meaning of sculpture based on all its elements and capacities, especially the capacity of plasticity. Beuys explains that the objects he makes are not sculptures as merely objects, but rather stimulators for the formation of thoughts and to mold thoughts or to shape thoughts. Beuys believed that the essence of Social Sculpture is to shape and mold the world by working with what he called *invisible materials* (thoughts, words, imagination, ideas) to make new thoughts. His aim was to develop an *evolutionary process* to share his idea of plasticity (in its entire arc from material, medium, thinking process), and the ability humans have to be in a constant process of change, to transform, and to mold ourselves.

Founder and Director, Professor Emerita of Social Sculpture and Connective Practice in Oxford Brookes University, Shelley Sacks, also a former Joseph Beuys student and later assistant, writes about Social Sculpture in a text titled *Contemporary Social Sculpture and the Field of Transformation,*

> Flowing into this global stream of insights and commitment is Joseph Beuys' work toward 'a society as a total work of art', and his unswerving conviction about teaching as one of the most important artworks toward this society as a work of art. As Rudolf Steiner before him, he described this as field as 'social art' and added the phrase 'soziale Plastik' (in English 'social sculpture'). This term 'Plastik' highlights our role as 'artists' of our own lives and of social forms. It also emphasises that the forms of our lives and the structures in which we live are not fixed. It reminds us that we can reshape our own lives by working on habits and attitudes, whilst working toward structures that are supportive of all life forms.[8]

Sacks understands that the term *plastik* (German for sculpture*)* highlights that our structures are not fixed and that we can reshape our own lives, which echoes what I posited above regarding the English word *plastic,* as an element of sculpture or art, the capacity to mold and transform. Further Sachs describes Contemporary Social Sculpture as involving

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Shelley Sacks, 'Contemporary Social Sculpture and the Field of Transformation,' in Joachim Kettel ed., *Missing_LINK 2016: Übergangsformen von Kunst und Pädagogik in der Kulturellen Bildung–Künstlerische Kunstpädagogik im Kontext*, Athena, 2017, p. 75.

many experimental social sculpture processes and, interdisciplinary studies on colonialism, meaning making and the question of value, [that] have all interfaced with Beuys's proposals to give rise to many insights and strategies. Such multidimensional and transdisciplinary explorations have also contributed to understanding the difference between 'toolkits' for problem solving and 'plastic' processes for shifts in consciousness.[9]

Sacks refers again to the term plastic, as relating to a process of change or as she states a shift in consciousness, plastic then is a common capacity within both sculpture and transformation. Sacks also adds the concept of connectedness to Contemporary Social Sculpture. In the Social Sculpture Research Unit website under the heading 'Connective Aesthetics and Agents of Change', a text states what connective practices are:

> Our work as agents of change includes connective thinking and practices, which explore the role of imagination and different modes of thought in transformative process.[10]

In the projects discussed in Chapter IV, when I worked with my mother, connectedness was present in all six SSE. Both my mother and I experienced connectedness between each other, the rest of the non-human participants and ourselves, coming together in what I later understood as the camera assemblage (discussed further in Chapter I Key terms, Assemblage, page 36), between our own inner spaces with their invisible materials of memories, thoughts, the space, the garments, the light, the camera. During that body of work we both developed the capacity of connectedness as we dérived (an explanation of this term is in Chapter I, Key terms, Dérive, page 44) through the process.

Shelley Sacks and Wolfgang Zumdick wrote the poem 'The land of connectedness' published in her book *Atlas of the Poetic Continent, Pathways to Ecological Citizenship,* about connectedness, which resonates with my thinking and understanding of the capacity of connectedness.

> They do not tell me that the breath I breathe is the same air that moves in and out of you. They do not tell me that the vibration that enters me as sound is the same vibration that enters you. They do not tell me that the whole world is connected in one huge vibratory field, from the smallest particle to the hugest planet. They do not tell me how delicately balanced everything is in this immense interconnected cosmos; how my thoughts effect you, how my doubts and uncertainties cause disturbances in the invisible pools … [11]

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[9] Ibid, p. 6.
[10] Social Sculpture Research Unit, 'Home', social-sculpture.org, http://www.social-sculpture.org/, 2012, accessed 11th May 2020.
[11] Shelley Sacks and Wolfgang Zumdick, *Atlas of the Poetic Continent: Pathways to Ecological Citizenship*, Temple Lodge, 2013, p. 74.

Connectedness is present in the processes used throughout this practice-as-research PhD. Being aware of connectedness between participants, whether humans, non-humans and entities such as environment, is key in SSE. I explored my practice with solo actions, group participation and finally with more intimate work with family members and it was in this more intimate work that I felt I had awareness of the connectedness which Sacks writes of.

The research bodies of work were made to answer questions of transformation as a practitioner and how far, and who other than the artist could be transformed. For example, could the transformation include the participants, both human and non-human? In the process of the practice as research, and more specifically while applying the method of reflection during editing, I considered many of the works to be failures and I destroyed some pieces. This destruction is sometimes part of the process of re-creating, reflected in Zumdick's explanation of Beuys' Plastic Theory,

> Methodologically, Beuys' plastic theory is based on three elements: the categories of chaos, movement, and form. Movement can either proceed in a creative-constructive way from the chaotic, unformed state through movement toward form. Or it can happen the other way round—as a breaking down process, as a creative-destructive process that propels this form towards its more chaotic state. […] According to Beuys, every sculptural (plastic) process is based on these three categories, irrespective of whether it occurs at a material or spiritual level.[12]

Beuys proposed that it is not that we have to make a form through movement from chaos, he explained that we can also go the other way, from form through movement to chaos. For him it does not matter whether the artist makes forms from chaos or chaos from forms. What matters are the processes, the movement.

Yet, I also questioned if destruction is ever possible if I consider a memory as invisible material. If memory is a form made with invisible material the work is indestructible. It remains as invisible material within the memory, with its capacity of changing new thoughts when I write about the memories of those pieces. The memory of a piece speaks of the failure of that piece to be destroyed. The memory also has the ability to influence future projects, or work in development.

Through this research, memory is the invisible material needed to move dialogically from former to current work, and through memory connectedness in many directions is possible. Some of the possible directions

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[12] Wolfgang Zumdick, *Death Keeps Me Awake*: *Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner Foundations of their Thought*, Spurbuchverlag, 1995, p. 134.

are between the material and the gesture or the action, between the piece and my childhood, between the emotion and the physical material. These connections and aspects of memories, including that of the memory card of the digital camera, emerge through the course of the thesis.

Sculpture was and is for me the main medium through which I understand all other mediums and disciplines in my practice. I always compose and read photography through the principles and elements of three-dimensional design; my background as a sculptor shapes and determines the way in which I see all the other mediums I explore or expand on in my practice. In a similar vein, when I work with sound, the main elements that I think through are material, form, shape and space, as well as, of course, the material's inherent plasticity. Shelly Sacks points out that the role played by imagination in transformative processes and imagination's plastic capacity within Social Sculpture practice are elements of Beuys' extended meaning of art. In her book *Atlas of the Poetic Continent,* she describes these processes in poems:

> … An invisible plastic process
> In us
> and in the world
> no less real than wood or steel
> than facts -
> a sphere
> in which questions are forces
> that guide us
> open up new directions
> allow answers to emerge …[13]

Sacks describes 'fact' as real as 'steel', questions as 'forces' and answers as ways to emerge. Her understanding of the plasticity in the artistic process resonates with my journey of transformation in my practice, in which the matter itself is now less- or non-tangible but as real as my previous objects. I moved from thinking through the elements of a particular material to the understanding of thought 'as' material with plasticity, as when making a sculpture. At that point, writing as part of the research, with words and ideas as invisible materials became closer to making a sculpture.   In fact, in the present my practice is made with invisible materials, questions, memories, imagination and thoughts. The only tangible material works are the by-products (described in Chapter I, Key Terms, By-Products, page 45).

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[13] Shelley Sacks and Wolfgang Zumdick, *Atlas of the Poetic Continent: Pathways to Ecological Citizenship*, Temple Lodge, 2013, p. 10.

Joseph Beuys posited that sculpture could only be made by transforming the artist first, based on an understanding of the capacity for plasticity that humans have. As he said during his last speech before he died:

> The expanded concept of art is not a theory but rather an approach that says that the inner eye is a lot more important than external images which arise no matter what. More appropriate for the creation of good external images (…) is that the inner image — that is, the thinking, the imaginative perception and the feeling — has the same kind of quality that is necessary for any good image.[14]

I decided to follow Beuys and call my practice Social Sculpture. I chose to adopt Beuys' term Social Sculpture because the term implies the plasticity rooted in thinking through materials rather than through situations. Social Sculpture is the practice of shaping the world with invisible materials in a similar manner to the way in which I was re-shaping myself as an artist and becoming a researcher. In *Death Keeps Me Awake,* Beuys posits:

> Of course I wanted to provoke, but not in the sense that I simply set out to do just anything absurd. Instead I have said that I must be able to provoke with a material, by means of which I can then show—through a series of contextual steps—that such a material is meaningful.[15]

I used Social Sculpture (and what Beuys terms its 'invisible materials') to create transformation in individuals and the world. My focus was primarily on the materials (invisible or otherwise) and the process of transformation for the piece's participants. Materials and the environment are participants as well. When I refer to participants, I include humans and non-humans. In the processes described in this thesis non-material aspects, including language, communication and connection, are also central to the development of the SSEs. Cara Jordan, considering the practices of Beuys, writes:

> Art could only be produced by the mind through human thought. The physical manifestation of thought is speech, through the physical motions of the body and the sound waves emitted and received between two people in communication. This plastic quality of speech, as well as the ability of thought to shape social structures, became his concept of Social Sculpture.[16]

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[14] Wolfgang Zumdick, *Death Keeps Me Awake*: *Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner Foundations of their Thought*, Spurbuchverlag, 1995, p. 134.

[15] ibid, p. 133.

[16] Cara M. Jordan, *Joseph Beuys and Social Sculpture in the United States,* PhD Thesis, Graduate Center CUNY 2017,available at https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/1731, p. 82, accessed 11th January 2018.

These physical aspects are key to transformation, and in my SSEs I am aware of the interrelation between these different elements, material, physical, bodily, emotional and others. The definition of Social Sculpture at the Social Sculpture Research Unit website reads:

> Social Sculpture can be understood as a multidimensional field of transformation (...)
> Our projects, processes and pedagogies can all be seen as laboratories of transformation.[17]

The SSE process that I practice is focused on processes, transformation, plasticity and connectedness of all the participants, human, non-human, animated and in-animated entities. In the following sections I will articulate some of the methods used in this thesis and explain how I managed any ethical concerns, before presenting an outline of the chapter structure of the thesis.

Methodology

'Each tale has its own technique' J. L. Borges

The following is the introduction to the methods used throughout this research. My intention is to give the reader the evolutionary process that took place from the beginning of this project and how the methodology evolved. The methodology in my research is a means of organizing and understanding the methods.

I will articulate how this assemblage (term described in detail as it relates to this project in Chapter I, page 36) of methods operates through a process of experimentation, reflection and evaluation. I have been examining, as I go along, the utility and usefulness of these different approaches. I will explain how the methodology evolved and how the methods fit with, describe, augment and articulate my practice-based research methodology. There may be a certain awkwardness in explaining this in an 'as it happened' manner, but it allows for the evolution in the process to be clearly shown.

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[17] Social Sculpture Research Unit, 'Our Methodologies,' social-sculpture.org, http://www.social-sculpture.org/category/our-focus/our-methodologies/, 2012, accessed 6th February 2020.

The methodology used in my project at the beginning of the research was based on Nietzsche's triangulation. Nietzsche proposes the use of diverse approaches in order to increase knowledge, which echoes the often interdisciplinary nature of practice-based research.

> Gaining knowledge requires the resources of many disciplines; no single approach is sufficient. Truth-seekers will have to become more versatile, master many disciplines and methods, learn artistic creativity and balanced judgment. [18]

The condition required for the new philosophers, William Schroeder states, is an existential transformation, the three-stage metamorphosis of the spirit which Nietzsche refers to in *Human, All Too Human* and in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the three metamorphoses. Schroeder explains that Nietzsche proposes the usage of three elements in this model: 1 - the cognitive element to elaborate the way to determine the truth; 2 - the cultural reconstruction element to diagnose the present; 3 - the educative element to facilitate the transformation in others.[19]

Based on the triangulation methodology proposed by Nietzsche, I initiated my journey to find a methodology to apply in my practice-based research. The form of triangulation that I deployed incorporated three angles: philosophy, Social Sculpture and the dialogic. When I started I thought that including Social Sculpture was a way of achieving that Nietzschean triangulation, but I came to realize that SSE does not work with a stable triangle. The form of a triangle is too static to be applied as the methodology of SSE and also the triangle implies a power relation as the form incorporates a hierarchy, where something is always on the top.

These three elements define and redefine one another in a motion of transformation. But this transformation has another element: connectedness. They are involved with each other through connection in what I would come to consider an assemblage. For Shelley Sacks, the aesthetic involves the connective, as she states,

> 'Aesthetic' understood as the opposite of 'anaesthetic' or numbness has to do with enlivened being and connective practice.[20]

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[18] William Schroeder, *Continental Philosophy: A Critical Approach*, Wiley Blackwell, 2004, p.118.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Social Sculpture Research Unit, 'Home', social-sculpture.org, http://www.social-sculpture.org/, 2012, accessed 24th September 2019.

The connective practice arises between all the participants and also arises between the methods in this assemblage. The SSE can be a very simple action, as Joseph Beuys posits,

Even the act of peeling a potato can be an artistic act if it is consciously done.[21]

When Joseph Beuys uses the phrase "consciously done", this also refers to being connected to the action, and to the inner invisible materials and the outer materials as part of the same action, which echoes practice as research. Within this assemblage all the methods connected, including the writing.

Katie MacLeod's 'Seesaw effect'[22] is a method for writing and working in my practice. MacLeod explains how the making and the writing goes beyond a binary relation.

> Research evidence has demonstrated that the making/writing issue has gone far beyond a simple binary argument. The relationship between the two can be extremely productive. It is about the tension between them, as each visits and revisits the other and constantly revises, rethinks and (re)presents each to the other. Artist/researchers show that the two forms are integral …[.] [23]

Using the seesaw effect to understand this connectedness between writing and making as opposed to writing *about* making, became a method of work that connected both writing and practice together, which makes practice-based research possible, because one informs the other back and forth.

I use failure as a method. Most of the decisions I take to move from one work to another, or from one body of work to the following, and the decision-making at the next step is based on the failures of the former. Failure in my work determines the turns in the dérive as it unfolds. This engagement with failure parallels MacLeod's seesaw effect and returning and reflecting on a project or work is folded into later works, and the understanding of earlier work is shifted by what is being worked on now.

In this thesis I call my work SSE, Social Sculpture Explorations, because I introduce the work as open-ended, as something which we, the participants, are exploring as opposed to initiating a process and

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[21] Willoughby Sharp, 'An Interview with Joseph Beuys,' *Artforum* 8.4, 1969, pp. 40-47.

[22] Katie MacLeod, 'The Functions of the Written Text in Practice-Based PhD Submissions,' Working Papers in Art and Design 1, 2000, available at http://www.herts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/12289/WPIAAD_vol1_macleod.pdf.

[23] Katie MacLeod and Lyn Holdridge, 'The Doctorate in Fine Art: The Importance of Exemplars to the Research Culture,' *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 23:2, 2004, p. 158.

anticipating results. We have no determined plot nor plan. My practice is about exploring being connected in that moment and in that particular environment. The exploration I propose is an exploration without a map as opposed to the colonial concept of exploration, in which he/she who explores, discovers and therefore owns the territory. Rather in my Explorations there is no previously created map, it is a method that resonates more with the *dérive* (as described by Guy Debord and the Situationists) in which the act of exploring is based more on a dérive movement than on an action that follows a measured and calculated map.

> In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.[24]

This resonates with my practice, in which we (the participants) discover, connect, and do as we go. The SSE happens in a dérive in which the terrain is in fact the state of being connected, we don't follow a map, if anything a map emerges as we go and exists only in our invisible material, that is in our memory. At the end we have a memory of what happened during the Exploration, and we recall the memory with awareness, as the memory becomes invisible material.

During the SSE I reflect alone and with the participants through dialogue. My reflection of the process is focused on what was happening during the period that included both the production of SSE and the moments immediately after, during the post-SSE wrap-up session. Later in my studio during editing of the recordings, self-reflection based on the collected material occurs. The next step is preparing for the next SSE which is influenced by the failures and experiences of the previous ones. Photography, video and sound recording are methods for collection of material, and as I progressed in my research, I came to understand these tools used during the process are non-human participants. The reflection process, and the movement from one project to another, now involved these tools or devices as fellow participants, and this shifted how I understood my part in the overall process, as I describe in the later chapters.

Finally, the metaphorical shape I ended up using to articulate my methodology was a circle made from the dynamic movement of a seesaw, the energy of the seesaw as it swings is the force that draws the circle.

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[24] Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive,' 1958, in *Situationist International Anthology*, edited and translated by Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, available at http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm, accessed 6th February 2017.

The methodology incorporates the seesaw's up and down movement (which evolved from the triangulation I used in the beginning), and joins this through the dialogic, to arrive at the SSE, with failure operating as the fulcrum. The force of their movement resonates with MacLeod's seesaw metaphor.

> [W]hat fascinated me about this type of research was the seesaw effect of working on the written text and on the art projects: what appeared to be happening in this type of research was that after the completion of one phase of the written text, when the seesaw was high in the air, the ensuing work on the art project would destabilize what had been achieved to the point that when the researcher returned to the next phase of research on the written text, the seesaw was firmly down on the ground and the text had to be completely reconceived; when the next phase of research on the written text was completed and the seesaw was high in the air, it was only to descend again when the work on the ensuing art project was underway. Thus, the written text was instrumental to the conception of the art projects but the art projects themselves exacted a radical rethinking of what had been constructed in written form because the process of realizing or making artwork altered what had been defined in written form.[25]

I used the seesaw as a method to connect writing and practice in the artistic research, but by the end of my last body of work, in 2018, the seesaw became an important part of the methodology and gave me an image or shape that allowed me to better describe the whole process of the SSE.

To restate this model then, the methods that compose the methodology (which is an assemblage of methods, from which the methodology is the emergent property) have at their center failure, which is both the point for reflection or pause, and can be the beginning of the next piece. This fulcrum is also the point of balance for the seesaw, the see goes up when the saw goes down and vice versa. It can also happen that the see and the saw are at the same level, the point of failure, the fulcrum, keeps the see saw in balance (or off balance). The force that moves them up and down is the dialogism. What emerges is the SSE, which is the emergent property.

Ethical Framework

> "But there has to be mutual trust and mutual responsibility. If it's going to work, it has to be a collaboration between me and the other person. I'm incredibly impressed by the way most people come on board. People are so willing – and that mustn't be abused. But I always make it clear that

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[25] Katie MacLeod, 'The Functions of the Written Text in Practice-Based PhD Submissions,' Working Papers in Art and Design 1, 2000, available at http://www.herts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/12289/WPIAAD_vol1_macleod.pdf. last accessed 6th October 2019.

what I'm doing is art, not therapy."[26]

This thesis is about connectedness discovered through explorations with participants. In both, the practical portion as well as in the written portion of the research, even though it is my practice, there are occasional moments where other voices come through. The thesis in part presents my interpretation and description of these explorations that are bigger than me, that include more than me and extend beyond me.

In my work with participants, I was guided by the Ethical Framework set out by University of Plymouth and introduced to us as Artist-Researchers as part of the PhD research training. The guiding statement can be found here: **https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/governance/research-ethics-policy.** This framework helped me consider the various aspects of the participatory process and to reflect on their potential impact on participants.

In every SSE, I introduced myself as a contemporary artist doing research about Social Sculpture, interested in working with groups of people to develop simple actions with just a few materials and myself. I explained that during each event there was a camera and that I was also going to do voice recordings. Everybody was invited to participate, and I requested their ideas on how we might use a particular material (for example, some fabric or a chair). After that explanation I started slowly to make less of my own suggestions and let them take over the decisions and negotiations on what to do and/or how to play.

Using their interests in my work as an anchor I talked with them about Social Sculpture, Joseph Beuys and my own views on it. After the sessions we shared our understanding of how and what we engaged with. At that point, before we began, I told them I was going to do recordings of the discussions and later on during editing of the documentation I was going to be using these recordings as part of a sound piece and would analyze them for my research writings.

Participants were asked to ensure that the choices they made during the SSE process did not have the potential to cause harm either to themselves or others. Participants were informed verbally in a group conversation about my research and my approach in constructing SSE pieces. The level of conversation was adapted to the group age (for example) teens were approached differently than seniors. Participants

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[26] Adrian Howells quoted in Lyn Gardner, 'How intimate theatre won our hearts,' *The Guardian*, August 11, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/aug/11/intimate-theatre-edinburgh, accessed 3rd March 2020.

were given a consent form to sign explaining their rights to withdraw and the timing to do so, their right to be mentioned if needed on either the visual documentation or the writing part of the research. The consent form also has information about the project. (see Appendix A)

I was clear, honest and open about the research with the participants. Deception and covert methods are not part of my research. On the consent form participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time but they had to give me thirty days' notice. In this case they had ninety days from the performance date to withdraw their images and recordings. If they decided to do so the parts in which that specific person appears either (visually or in voice) would be securely destroyed. No harmful situations were part of the sessions. If any accident occurred, 911 and family members would be called immediately. Participants were always informed about the process of the project. Participants had the choice to be acknowledged by name or not in my research. They specified their preference in the consent form.

The Chapters

Chapters II to IV each focus on one body of work. The first chapter is a discussion of the key terms of the thesis along with a discussion of the critical context and a philosophical background to the practice and research. The second chapter explores my transformation from the object maker I was before I started my PhD to an action maker, I titled Chapter II "Solo" because I worked by myself in my first actions. It was at the end of the period documented in the second Chapter that I started working with participants which brought me to the material discussed in the next chapter. I called Chapter III "Participatory" because in this body of work I explore working with participants, both human and non-human. I also explore whether I could be material for the participants. In Chapter III, I worked with three female students from Miami Beach High within an Internship program between the school and the Art Center/South Florida (recently it changed its name to Oolite Arts), where I had my studio. I also worked with senior participants from two Senior Centers from Miami Beach. Working under the institutional umbrella was problematic and due to this at the end of this body of work I decided that in the next body of work I was going to change to non-institutional and more intimate explorations. The fourth Chapter, "The Family" discusses work I did with my family, there was some work done with my brother and sister, but this chapter focuses on the body of works I did with my mother. It was during the work discussed in this chapter that I really began to understand the role of the camera in SSE. In the fifth Chapter, I focus on the camera's role in all the practice research made during

the PhD. These five chapters are followed by a concluding section where I draw the ideas and outcomes together and reflect on further practice.

Chapter I

Research Context & Key Terms

Introduction

In this first chapter I will discuss both the critical and philosophical context for this practice-based research. Following the discussion of context, I will outline my use of a number of key terms used throughout this thesis, which are Assemblage, Agency, Dérive, Dialogic, By-Product, Non-Human, and Failure.

The context of my work is situated in different disciplines such as music, sound, literature and visual arts, as well as philosophy. This section will give an overview of these various intersecting and overlapping aspects.

In *The Open Work*, Umberto Eco is prompted by a number of composers and musical works, including Henry Pousseur, Pierre Boulez, "Klavierstück XI" by Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luciano Berio's sequenza for solo flute, to consider the form of their compositions.

> A number of recent pieces of instrumental music are linked by a common feature: the considerable autonomy left to the individual performer in the way he chooses to play the work. Thus he is not merely free to interpret the composer's instructions following his own discretion (which in fact happens in traditional music), but he must impose his judgment on the form of the piece, as when he decides how long to hold a note or in what order to group the sounds: all this amounts to an act of improvised creation.[27]

This description has important parallels with my work in the respect that the participant is the person who takes most of the decisions. Composer Stephen Montague, in his contribution to a gathering of reflections on John Cage, remembered that one day while on a tour, they were with other people in a lift that stopped working between floors. While waiting for help Cage said:

> "It's the perfect opportunity to hear a piece of music. Just listen." There was a sort of rumble, a kind of hum from the building. We all listened intently. After a while, Yvar started some irregular, very occasional tapping, and so did I. Finally - after about 20 minutes, though it seemed like hours - the lights went back on and we were able to get out. Later, John said: "Wasn't that a

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[27] Umberto Eco, *The Open Work,* translated by Anna Cancogni, Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 2.

marvelous piece of music. My only sadness is that two people were adding dissonances to it."[28]

John Cage always welcomed chance and Montague also recalled Cage telling him: "I regard telephone calls as unexpected pleasures. I like to remain open to things I can't predict."[29] The tapping from Montague and Yvar Mikhashoff, that Cage perceived as dissonances, I would take to be an important part of a piece as it is how the participants engaged with the environment. If I think of this in relation to the SSE, for me it is the plasticity of the situation that molds the dialogue, and the dialogue then connects all the invisible materials to form the piece. Cage, works with chance but in my case I consider all the invisible and visible elements during the exploration in terms of plasticity. In this sense the method I use is closer to the Situationist Dérive than to Cagean Chance.

Eco's *The Open Work* later inspired Gilles Deleuze to write *Difference and Repetition*, and Eco's ideas resonate with Deleuze's claim within his discussion of "difference" and "multiplicity" that there cannot be one original or identity.[30] This attempt to call into question the idea of the divine original and the notion that everything else is merely a degraded copy can be traced back to Nietzsche's eternal return.[31]

> Nietzsche conceives of the eternal return from a rigorously non-teleological perspective as the accomplishment of a philosophy strong enough to accept existence in all its aspects, even the most negative, without any need to dialecticize them, without any need to exclude them by way of some centrifugal movement.[32]

However, Deleuze goes further and rejects identity as the divine original,[33] meaning that art pieces (and ideas) should not refer to a "divine original" but rather should create moving circles and be "nomadic" as

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[28] Stephen Montague, 'The Music Of Chance,' The Guardian, 15th January 2004, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2004/jan/16/classicalmusicandopera1, accessed 20th September 2019.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, translated by Paul Patton, Continuum, 1994, p. 69, 313.

[31] "This idea of 'having it over again ... throughout all eternity' is the idea of the 'eternal return' of the world and everything that happens. In his unpublished notebooks, Nietzsche toyed with the idea that the world actually does repeat itself, that everything that has happened in the past will happen again, that everything that happens in the future has happened in a previous cycle. But he never defended the idea in print." Michael Lacewing, *Nietzsche on Eternal Return*, 2017, available at https://michaellacewing.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/4-nietzscheeternalreturn.docx, accessed 8th September 2019.

[32] Paolo D'Iorio, 'The Eternal Return: Genesis and Interpretation,' *Lexicon Philosophicum, International Journal for the History of Texts and Ideas*, number 2, 2014, available at http://lexicon.cnr.it/index.php/LP/article/view/414/338, accessed 8th February 2020, p. 47.

[33] Plato's ideas on the degradation of representations are explained in Book X of the Republic with the example of the three beds: the "real bed" (the divine natural space for sleep), the first copy made by the carpenter, and the other copy made by the painter. Plato argues that each one moves further away from the original one and degrades the fundamentals and identity of the true thing. Plato, *The Republic*, Project Gutenberg eBook, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1497/1497-h/1497-h.htm#link2H_4_0013, accessed 12th October 2019.

opposed to being (as they traditionally are seen to be) "sedentary" (that is, immovable and referring only to the original) and always referring to a center (for example, the capital city, the original, identity or God). Some scholars such as Paolo D'Iorio do not agree with Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal return:

> There is no need to remind the reader that neither the image of a centrifugal movement nor the concept of a negativity-rejecting repetition appears anywhere in Nietzsche's writings, and indeed Deleuze does not refer to any text in support of this interpretation. Further, one could highlight that Nietzsche never formulates the opposition between active and reactive forces, which constitutes the broader framework of Deleuze's interpretation. ... Deleuze introduced a dualism that does not exist in Nietzsche's writings ... but these are nonetheless the result of complex ensembles of configurations of centers of forces that remain in themselves active. Neither the word nor the concept of reactive forces ever appears in Nietzsche's philosophy.[34]

Nevertheless, the idea alone that Nietzsche opened the way for Deleuzian notions such as "nomadic," "repetition," "difference" and "simulacrum" has proved sufficiently insightful to allow me to create a map that traces itself in a movement of failures (or successes). I have found this map useful as a way to consider progression or movement from one work or exploration to another. If the exploration sparkles within the frame of philosophy, for example, in the stage of reflective editing with a dialogical movement between the interactions during the explorations, the route to follow will be different than if the exploration is a failure. In the case of failure there will be no frame nor language to articulate. At the same time, if the exploration is a failure then it will set the route for the following piece. The movements within the body of work between the pieces is a non-centrical map that builds as it goes. In fact, implicit in Deleuze's idea of repetition, difference and the nomadic are moving non-centric circles in relation to the development of ideas or the creation of art. This is an application of his interpretation of Nietzsche to his own concept of 'nomadic' movement.

The open mode (after Eco) through which I facilitated and reflected upon SSE was a way of working that was nomadic and non-central, and it was not based on repetition of an original idea. There was no plot, plan or identity, but only forces, action and reaction between participants from different age groups, random objects and other elements that are simply placed in, or are present in, an environment where the exploration is happening. These can include, but are not limited to animals, plants, the weather, or any unplanned event.

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[34] Paolo D'Iorio, 'The Eternal Return,' p. 4.

Authorship in my SSE practice and its contextual framing also finds a language that can help me articulate it in Nietzsche's eternal return and Deleuze's simulacrum. Who is/are the author/s of my pieces? Are all the participants—humans, non-humans and myself—the authors? Roland Barthes in 'The Death of the Author' raises a similar point:

> We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture.[35]

Once again, this notion is connected to detachment and stands in opposition to Plato's original. Another good example would be Stéphane Mallarmé's *The Book*.

> The form of The Book can be described briefly: four books, which can be ordered as two pairs, make up The Book. Each book is subdivided into five volumes (not only interchangeable within each book, but also from book to book). Thus, Mallarme envisions the mixing and exchange of the volumes of one book with those of another. Each volume of each book is made up of three groups of eight pages—24 pages in all. Each page is discrete and may be further broken down, having 18 lines of 12 words. Thus, words, lines, pages, page groups, volumes, and books all may be shuffled into new combinations. This disposition offers a multitude of possible readings. Mallarmé even proposes that each page be read not only in the normal horizontal way (within the page's verticality), but backwards, or vertically, or in a selective order of omissions, or diagonally. Mallarmé imagines another important structural inversion in the reading of the total Book: the five volumes form a block. The reader looks through the pages, and reads according to depth. Each line of each page helps form a new vertical page. Paging is therefore three-dimensional. This absolute integrity of the container implies integral organization of the content.[36]

This description of Mallarmé's *The Book* suggests a work in continuous movement that does not have an original to refer to and that is made and manipulated by the reader, who chooses the order in which to read it. This is another example of the nomadic way of working, and relates to the death of identity (Deleuze), the death of God (Nietzsche) or the death of the author (Barthes). The identity of the participant/reader/subject dissolves into the artist/subject/author and this creates many possibilities. The multiplicity of reading possibilities is on a par with the many creative possibilities, because every circle refers to another circle in movement. It is a work in which the reader makes their own piece in each

[35] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' translated by Richard Howard, UbuWeb Papers, http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf, last accessed 26th May 2020

[36] Jacques Polieri, from *Le Livre de Mallarmé: A Mise en Scène*, quoted at http://short-schrift.blogspot.com/2008/07/mallarm-and-book-of-books.html, 2008, last accessed 22nd April 2020.

decision or dérive as they unfold their own book.

Deleuze and Guattari wrote *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), a book about Kafka in which they describe how he has no centre in his literature but rather has architectures that are open to infinite possibilities. Eco also mentions this in his essay 'The Open Work':

> In Kafka there is no confirmation in an encyclopedia, no matching paradigm in the cosmos, to provide a key to the symbolism. The various existentialist, theological, clinical, and psychoanalytic interpretations of Kafka's symbols cannot exhaust all the possibilities of his works. The work remains inexhaustible insofar as it is "open," because in it an ordered world based on universally acknowledged laws is being replaced by a world based on ambiguity, both in the negative sense that directional centers are missing and in a positive sense, because values and dogma are constantly being placed in question.[37]

In the case of both Kafka and Mallarmé, my interest was focused on their non-centric and very circular approach, in which the subject and the object of their pieces are constructed in a nomadic movement. This nomadic circling is not fixed to a centre, and this is the non-centrical movement I refer to when I propose SSE without a plot. Exploring without a map, open to the possibilities, as in the dérive concept described by the Guy Debord and the Situationists.

In considering the philosophical context of this project, I would point to links and connections between philosophical thinking, contemporary art practice, and Joseph Beuys' Social Sculpture. This discourse also connects to the critical context around authorship, openness and possibility that I have begun to outline above. Social Sculpture's field of transformation resonates with philosophy and poiesis,

Critical and Philosophical Context

In his essay *Poiesis and Art-Making: A Way of Letting-Be,* Derek H. Whitehead analyzes the term poiesis in contemporary art making,

> What is the relation between *poiesis* and the sensory embodiments of art making? Here I evoke the notion of the *poietic act*, something which has the potential to reinvigorate the artist's creative energies in and for our times. At a philosophical level I argue that *poiesis* may be seen as a liberating force which seeks to engage the multiple conditions of

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[37] Umberto Eco, *The Open Work,* translated by Anna Cancogni, Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 9.

contemporary aesthetic reflection. [38]

Whitehead considers the Greek origins of the term, and how these may continue to be applicable to a consideration of art making:

> The Greeks drew a distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*. *Praxis* in the Greek sense had to do with the immediate sense of 'an act', of a will that accomplishes or completes itself in action. *Poiesis* was conceived as bringing something from concealment into the full light and radiation of a created work. Poiesis is not to be grasped in its features as a practical or voluntary activity, as Agamben persuades us, but rather in its being an 'unveiling,' *a-letheia*, a making known which pro-duces or leads things into presence. The related idea of *technē* (of 'an art' or 'trade') for the Greeks meant 'to cause to appear,' and poiesis, 'to produce into presence.' Such pro-duction becomes associated with *gnosis*, with 'knowing.' *Poiesis* essentially characterises *technē*, production in its totality.[39]

Whitehead also draws on Martin Heidegger's use of poiesis as a term to describe processes of transformation:

> For Martin Heidegger, the notion of *technē* and *technites* (or 'the artist-producer'), tends to reinforce *poiesis* as a principle of origination, of a 'bringing forth' which seeks to be known by being brought into the light (or the clearing) opened up by the created work itself.[40]

This sense of unveiling and bringing to presence, or bringing forward, causing to appear, to be present is essential to allow for an awareness or ability to connect. All these processes imply transformation in the making or suggest being connected with something that belongs to the field of transformation and of Social Sculpture. So, both to bring forward a presence through making (pro-duce), and to connect with it, one must be aware, to be able to connect one has to, first, unveil it.

Following these and with an awareness of *Poiesis* as etymologically derived from the ancient Greek term ποιεῖν, which means "to make", to transform the world. It links to the idea of Greek poetry (and later art) and to Beuys' idea of transforming the world in the context of Social Sculpture: "Social Sculpture as the field of transformation,"[41] as Shelley Sacks often explains in many of her lectures[42]. This supports my taking this sense of Social Sculpture as in process, as always engaged in transformation, and so not

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[38] Derek H. Whitehead, 'Poiesis and Art-Making: A Way of Letting-Be, *Contemporary Aesthetics* (Journal Archive): 1:1:5, 2003, available at: https://digitalcommons.risd.edu/liberalarts_contempaesthetics/vol1/iss1/5, accessed 2nd March 2020.
[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Shelley Sacks, 'Morning Lecture,' YIP: Youth Initiative Program, 2012, available at https://vimeo.com/41405341, accessed 9th March 2020.

[42] Ibid.

arriving at a conclusion.

During the period of production of the second body of work examined in this research project (November 2015 -June 2016), described in Chapter III: Participatory, I found a means of using SSE to grasp continental post- philosophical terms and poiesis. Philosophy can be understood and embodied through plastic arts sensibilities, particularly with Social Sculpture as it has participants in plastic interactions. At the same time SSE can be articulated under the umbrella of philosophy. By this I mean, when humans and things interact without a plan and only moving within connectedness, imagination and intuitive gestures then awareness of existence arises. In trying to connect to the other, as opposed to using introspective reasoning, the artist and the participant engage in a search for the answers and questions of everyday life. This practice brought me to philosophy because I found that it was the place where my reflections, within its invisible material, found a space. The openness of philosophy to ideas and and to thinking without a goal, gave me a language to discuss and a space to reflect on and contextualise my art practice.

In her Tate Paper, 'The Great Reason of the Body: Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph Beuys and the Art of Giving Meaning to Matter and Earth,' Kirsten Voigt states how Nietzsche was not only a pioneer of the theory of performance art but also of the concept of embodied thinking. She argues that Nietzsche, in parallel with Beuys, posited that life (body, earth, performance) comes before philosophy, and so it produces it. She presents two arguments in support of this idea,

> The first concerns the philosopher [Nietzsche] being not just an initiator of a philosophy of the body, but also a philosophy of life: 'The product of the philosopher is his life (first, before his works). That's his work of art.' Correspondingly, for Beuys, his performances and also any form of consciously exerted human labour are action fields of creative formation and self-formation.[43]

Her second argument is that Nietzsche's philosophy has ambiguities and in its unfinished state, it invites transformation:

> Nietzsche is a pioneer of performance because his philosophy is staged, fluid, narrative, rhetorical, sensual, aphoristic, style-conscious and anti-systemic; it is open to interpretation with plenty of ambiguities and sometimes contradictions; it is basically unfinished, and invites

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[43] Kirsten Voigt, 'The Great Reason of the Body' – Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph Beuys and the Art of Giving Meaning to Matter and Earth,' *Tate Papers*, 32, 2019, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/32/nietzsche-beuys-giving-meaning-matter-earth , accessed 12th February 2020.

the reader or listener to work with it and transform it.[44]

I grasped these connections between Nietzsche and Beuys not with my reason but rather with my senses. I embodied it as I was going through the research process, and then, in February 2020, as I was finishing my Thesis for submission I found Kirsten Voigt's paper. Her essay draws on Beuys' personal copies of Nietzsche's works, that contained Beuys' own pencil notes. Voigt's comments supported my felt sense of the connections between the two writers. Her paper also presents a parallel between the work or the making of the philosopher, his life, and the work of the artist. Beuys responded strongly to this parallel, this sense of art and life openly intersecting, and it echoes my adoption of philosophy as part of my method of reflection on my practice. With Voigt's findings I corroborate that my practice-based research took me to those conclusions through a different, an interdisciplinary route, the route of the body, the route of the senses as opposed to the route of reason.

> Heraclitus also rejected the senses, says Nietzsche, like other philosophers did, but not because the senses showed multiplicity and change, but because they showed things as if they had permanence and unity: '"Reason" is the reason we falsify the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie … The "apparent" world is the only one: the "true" world is merely added by a lie.' Beuys came across this description of the relationship between the senses, reason and the world of ideas or truth as a young man, when it would obviously affect his basic epistemological assumptions.[45]

In giving the senses an importance in relation to making and thinking, to philosophy and art, Nietzsche offers Beuys, and other artists, a way of feeling a connection between art and life, art and reflection. In my SSE these sensory experiences involve not only the artist, but all the participants. Within the cluster of the human and non-human participants the agency of the camera assemblage (Key terms & Chapter V) emerges because the interactions among all of us derive from the senses rather than reason.

During the SSE at the North Beach Senior Centre I made the first Social Sculpture with participants. In *Metamorphosis,* November 2015, I facilitated a playful environment in which I surrendered control of the action and obeyed the participants' control, decisions and proposals. In other words, I was exploring the possibility of becoming material for them. I "provoked" them by bringing in a roll of white

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

fabric and asking them what I should do with it. Another tool of provocation was the camera sitting on a tripod; the seniors knew that they would be filmed, but to my surprise they liked it and they took control of the filming as well. They directed me on what to do with the piece of fabric. They told me to wrap myself in it with a chair and to unwrap it. They also indicated to me how to start and when to finish. I made audio recordings of their comments after the action and subsequently edited them into the video by-product (https://vimeo.com/145870528).

The different perceptions of the participants and how the action provoked completely different reactions are where I found the material that resonates with philosophy and poiesis. One participant spoke about the enjoyment of the metamorphosis of a butterfly, while others related the action to the sadness of death. It may be that any metamorphosis implies death or what we lose when we become something else, as in Nietzsche's *Three Metamorphoses* quoted at the very beginning of my Introduction. In the transformation we experience something beyond Platonic dialectics[46], which we can understand as the becoming of the main human force that both Nietzsche and Beuys often return to. Some of the participants were pleased with the idea of becoming, some were uncomfortable about the idea of it occurring without their control, all those possibilities were subjectivities inherent in the participants' imaginations, i.e. anything they were imagining through this action.

In this piece as in most of the explorations in this Social Sculpture practice, the roles of the respective participants (humans, non-human and me) are those of catalysts or subjects. Participants' experiences and interactions, as well as the common shared moments and space, motivate forces that intuitively embody and produce thoughts. The invisible material (thoughts) are related to philosophy in its poetical manifestation. This has similarities with the method philosophers use to search for terms based on metaphors or the origin of the words dialogically with the concept they developed, in that sense philosophers act as creators or artists. Philosophers' etymology, the search for words to name a concept, uses methods that resonate with artistic methods.

> This new optic, Nietzsche suggests, would allegedly unleash the creative side of philosophical thinking, its transforming and renewing power over concepts, theories, worldviews. A philosophy contemplated from the point of view of the 'artist' would reach the

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[46] Dialectic. Plato uses the term dialectic throughout his works to refer to whatever method he happens to be recommending as the vehicle of philosophy. The term, from dialegesthai, meaning to converse or talk through, gives insight into his core conception of the project. See Constance C. Meinwald, 'Plato,' Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Plato, last accessed 5th June 2020.

status of a "philosophy of life," of a philosophy which is not 'scientific", but pluralistic and creative, truthfully reflecting the infinite transformations within the world of becoming. In his endeavor, Nietzsche is not alone. He is backed up by a powerful philosophical and poetical tradition that starts with the Greek poets and playwrights and some pre-Platonic philosophers (Heraclitus, the Sophists). In the Greek mythical-philosophical accounts of the world, Nietzsche saw the common roots of art and philosophy. [47]

In Nietzsche's own words,

He [the philosopher] arrives at knowledge by poeticizing and poeticizes by arriving at knowledge.[48]

I understand SSE as the embodiment of philosophy. The primary material of Social Sculpture is invisible; when Beuys referred to "the invisible material" he was referring to "thoughts," "senses," "questions," "imagination," and the usage of different "organs of perception." He proposed to start using those organs for thinking through sensorial perception. Such a use of those organs and the ability to transform were the material of Social Sculpture. While editing the recorded material of the explorations I was able to perceive how SSE resonate, echo, embody and grasp philosophical poiesis.

Through the participatory aspect of the Participatory body of work (Chapter III), I was able to see how every group of people has its own tragedy. Tragedy is a term used before the term poiesis existed, while at the same time poiesis is the term used before 'art', in a way tragedy, poiesis and art are synonyms used in different periods by the ancient Greeks. During the SSEs, poetry (tragedy) comes to the surface in the way people relate and react within the situation. Different groups of participants relate to each other differently, and the relationship between participants and objects varies as well. I have seen it in the senior community, in *Metamorphosis* (Figure #12, Chapter III, https://vimeo.com/145870528), and how different ages within the "senior" category share active and reactive forces during the SSE, with those forces contributing in different ways, when we share a dialogue about our personal experiences during the exploration.

In *Joseph Beuys*, Allan Antliff describes viewing the work *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (Schelma Gallery, Dusseldorf, November 26th, 1965), in which for three hours Beuys moved around the

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[47] Ştefan-Sebastian Maftei, 'Philosophy as "Artwork:" Revisiting Nietzsche's Idea of a "Philosophy" from the Point of View of the "Artist".' *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 71, 2013, available at https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/82215309.pdf, accessed 10th October 2019, p. 91.
[48] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Vol. 11, Stanford UP, 1995, p. 16.

Gallery with a dead hare.

> [The piece] ended with Beuys seated on a stool with one of its legs wrapped with felt (a bone and wire 'radio' was placed underneath the seat), protectively cradling the deceased hare in a manner akin to the Madonna in a *pieta.)*[49]

Beuys' entire head was covered with gold leaf and honey, "in order symbolically to associate the bee's capacities with his own efforts to expand the human potential for thought and expression beyond the rational..."[50]

As said above Nietzsche suggests that reason, intellectualization and dialectics killed tragedy (which was Poetry and later Art), similarly Beuys emphasized that imagination and intuition has more powers than stubborn rationality, and that intellectualization destroys intuition. Antliff states,

> 'Even a dead animal', Beuys mused in a statement of his action, 'preserves more powers of intuition than human beings with their stubborn rationality.' Human thinking was capable of achieving so much, but it could also 'be intellectualized to a deadly degree, and remain dead, and express its deadliness in the political and pedagogical fields'. (...) He then speculated that many were enthralled by the work, which had proved to be a media sensation, precisely because their imaginations were stimulated, allowing them to transcend rationalism in favour of 'mystery or questioning'. His art was yielding results.[51]

My approach of facilitating SSE emphasizes chaos and reason (Beuys). The tension created allows behaviors that go beyond reasoning, tapping perceptions, questions and doubts about the way we (the participants) recall what happened. The by-product does not provide the viewer with an opportunity to intellectualize the material as it is very hard to separate the different overlapping channels that make up the sound and the images.

In this section I have outlined the critical and philosophical context for the making of and reflection on the SSE, this shows how ideas of openness, the engagement of the senses, the awareness of the non-human, the intersection of life and art that are important to this thesis have their base in my reading and thinking around the work of Nietzsche, Beuys, Eco and others.

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[49] Allan Antliff, *Joseph Beuys*, Phaidon Focus, 2014, p. 62.
[50] Ibid, p. 62.
[51] Ibid, p. 62.

Key Terms

In the following pages I present a series of explorations of how some specific terms are working for the purposes of this thesis. These terms will be used and further put into context within the chapters as the terms and their concepts allowed me to critically reflect on the practice-based research project. As it happens with the concept of the agency of the camera assemblage, to critically reflect I need to use more than one term: agency and assemblage to articulate how the cluster of participants come to form it. Further, I need dialogic to articulate the particularities of how the participants affect each other; and another example is when I need to use the term by-product to refer to the outcome and more tangible objects that emerged out of the SSEs, or dérive which is used in many levels to refer to the open method that is used in different stages of the SSE.

Assemblage

Assemblage as a method in Artistic Practice is defined on the MoMA New York website as,

> A three-dimensional work of art made from combinations of materials including found objects or non-traditional art materials.[52]

I arrive at assemblage not as primarily a formal definition focused on the formal composition of materials in an artwork, as a term within the art history field, nor as specifically object oriented, rather I use assemblage as it is articulated in post-human philosophy. In *Vibrant Matter,* Jane Bennett defines Deleuze & Guattari's assemblage as:

> Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies, because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface. Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to

[52] 'Assemblage,' n.d., MoMA.org, https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/10, accessed 1st February 2020.

determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen (a newly inflected materialism, a blackout, a hurricane, a war on terror) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone. Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage. And precisely because each member-actant maintains an energetic pulse slightly "off" from that of the assemblage, an assemblage is never a stolid block but an open-ended collective, a "non-totalizable sum." An assemblage thus not only has a distinctive history of formation but a finite life span.[53]

Assemblage describes my process, my method and my project. The assemblage of connections from Beuys, Nietzsche and Deleuze leads to an unfolding of the umbrella under which the SSE practice happens. The human and non-human participants of each piece act as a combination of entities with different capacities that produce the SSE that is formed from the camera assemblage. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduced the concept of assemblage in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*:

> In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an assemblage.[54]

Assemblage in many texts is also described as synonymous with Network. In N. Katherine Hayles' *Unthought: The Power of The Cognitive Nonconscious,* she explains why she preferred the term assemblage rather than network, as it is in a state of constant transformation between human and non-human entities.

> I prefer "assemblage" over "network" because the configurations in which systems operate are always in transition, constantly adding and dropping components and rearranging connections. For example, when a person turns on her cell phone, she becomes part of a nonconscious cognitive assemblage that includes relay towers and network infrastructures, including switches, fiber optic cables, and/or wireless routers, as well as other components. With the cell phone off, the infrastructure is still in place, but the human subject is no longer a part of that particular cognitive assemblage.[55]

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[53] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 24.
[54] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* translation and foreword by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 3.
[55] N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of The Cognitive Nonconscious*, University of Chicago Press, 2017, p. 15.

The problem comes about when one sees that 'apparatus' (*dispositif)* is described as networks as well. In *What is an Apparatus*, Giorgio Agamben states "The apparatus itself is the network that can be established between these elements" suggesting both assemblage and apparatus are somehow "networks". As outlined by Mirko Nicolić, in an article seeking to distinguish the scope of the terms assemblage and apparatus, the terms also support a grouping of agencies and can inflect power relations, maintaining a differential dynamic among participants.

> Apparatus and assemblage are sometimes understood as referring to material arrangements, but in performative ontologies of new materialism they are material-discursive dynamics, modalities of groupings of agencies, of composition of power, which generate different histories, states of affairs and future possibilities.[56]

Nicolić further expands on the relation between the terms, bringing in Foucault's term *dispositif* which was translated to English as apparatus but also translates to 'disposition'.

> Foucault uses the word dispositif, which is usually translated as 'apparatus' in English, to indicate the processual and physical nature of the organisation of power. In French, the word means 'disposition' both as a specific arrangement of elements, but also an inclination, tendency, propensity. A mechanism can thus be seen as a product and a material coagulation of an apparatus' dynamics. [57]

In an interview in 1977, Foucault is asked about the meaning of apparatus (dispositif), Foucault's definition was:

> What I try to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. [...] between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term 'apparatus' a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function.[58]

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[56] Mirko Nicolić, 'New Materialism: How matter comes to matter,' 2018, available at
https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/a/apparatus-x-assemblage.html, accessed 14th January 2020.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, 1980, quoted in Frank Kessler, 'Notes on *dispositif* ,' 2007, available at http://frankkessler.nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Dispositif-Notes.pdf, accessed 18th May 2020.

Assemblage does not have a dominant strategic function, rather has a non-finalizable and a finite life span (Bennett), assemblage is open ended, those are some of the reasons why assemblage is a concept that works better to refer to in my project, even to refer to the camera, as opposed to Foucault's dispositif/apparatus which is a possible term in some aspects that are relevant to this project, but I found dispositif/apparatus less useful because I respond more closely to the assemblage model as is outlined by Manuel DeLanda's emergent property, as opposed to apparatus/dispositif's 'dominant strategies', there is no 'strategy' in this project. Thus, when I discuss the camera in detail in Chapter V, I use camera assemblage rather than camera as apparatus.

Artist and philosopher Manuel DeLanda states that Deleuze's concept of 'assemblage' is a "part to whole relationship" in which the parts interact with each other and as a result bring about an "emergent property," which takes the phenomenon to a new level. The components of the assemblage, once on this level, are "irreducible," as the parts separated cannot reach the level of the assemblage's result, which is the emergent property. In his lecture, 'Assemblage Theory, Society, and Deleuze,' Manuel DeLanda states,

> [In a chemical reaction] oxygen and hydrogen come together and form molecules of water (…) whereas hydrogen and oxygen [separated] are fuels, you throw them into a fire and you excite the fire, when you bring them together into an assemblage, when you form them into a molecule of water, they lose that capacity of being fuels, you throw water on fire and water extinguishes the fire … water has properties that neither oxygen or hydrogen have, water has 'emergent properties' … the definition of emergent property would be this; is a property of a whole that arises from the constant interactions between its parts … the parts must interact and in that interaction they must exercise the particular capacities that they have … [.] [59]

In the SSE as described in this thesis, the emergent property is the transformation as a result of the exploration, the SSE. The by-product is the object, video, photograph or writing that supports a sharing of the process and, hopefully, of the emergent properties. The 'assemblage' is different from any accidental or ordinary combination of elements because in my research the assemblage appears within the SSE, at the same time the SSE forms from the camera assemblage, within the interaction of the methods working together towards the methodology, within the editing of/reflecting on the by-products. Each emergent property that may happen during or after the exploration contributes to the core of the SSE—that is the transformation.

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[59] Manuel DeLanda, 'Assemblage Theory, Society, and Deleuze,' 2011, transcription from video recording, https://egs.edu/lecture/manuel-delanda-assemblage-theory-society-and-deleuze/, accessed 10th October 2019.

The dérive element is apparent when the participants find each other, move around, or stay still, when we listen to the sounds, or see the lights on the walls with the help of the camera memory and point of view. When all this happens in different stages of the process is when the assemblage happens with its participants (actants) and their agencies. For example, Bennett lists a complex intertwining of elements in her description of an assemblage.

> [...]"my" memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particulates in the room, to name only a few of the participants. What is at work here on the page is an animal-vegetable-mineral-sonority cluster with a particular degree and duration of power. What is at work here is what Deleuze and Guattari call an assemblage.[60]

The SSE are open ended, in this they have some characteristics of a dérive, known in English as drift or drifting, from here on I will refer to it as dérive. Far from being stolid, they call for freedom of the agencies in the formed assemblage, because there is no intention of mapping, and they work to resist hierarchical structures. The term assemblage is important to me as an artist with sculpture and installation background, I used this method of assemblage to compose my objects in the past and is a way I am familiar with. For all these reasons just described I choose assemblage over apparatus and/or network.

The term assemblage describes my practice in many levels, within the way the SSE happens and the inter-relations of the participants, this is also entangled within my reflective practice, and it is intertwined through the writing portion of the project. With the finite life span of the assemblage emerges the agency of the assemblage. This is the non-totalizable sum that leaves the possibility of the agency present within the participants of the assemblage of the SSE as an emergent property as well as within the participants separately. The emergent property emerges in some participants more than others, and at different stages of the SSE, for example the camera in this project has agency, as part of the SSE and its presence particularly during editing/reflecting.

Agency

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[60] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 23.

Bennett's writing, with her complex post-human understanding of assemblage, the agency of the assemblage and further human, non-human participants' agencies, resonates with the practice and methodology of the SSE.

> In addition to being tied to the idea of efficacy, agency is also bound up with the idea of a trajectory, a directionality or movement away from somewhere even if the toward-which it moves is obscure or even absent. [61]

The absent end resonates with the dérive movement of events within which the agency of the assemblage emerges with no pre-determined objective other than processes of unfinished SSEs.

After discussing the term agency from Augustine, Kant, Connolly, Adorno, Spinoza, Derrida, Merleau-Ponty, Latour, and others Jane Bennett posits that the dilemma of the term agency is that it remains a mystery and that, as one cannot determine how humans can have agency, one cannot determine how or whether non-humans have agency.

> Why speak of the agency of assemblages. and not, more modestly, of their capacity to form a "culture," or to "self-organize," or to "participate" in effects? Because the rubric of material agency is likely to be a stronger counter to human exceptionalism, to, that is, the human tendency to understate the degree to which people, animals, artifacts, technologies. and elemental forces share powers and operate in dissonant conjunction with each other. No one really knows what human agency is, or what humans are doing when they are said to perform as agents. In the face of every analysis, human agency remains something of a mystery. If we do not know just how it is that human agency operates, how can we be so sure that the processes through which nonhumans make their mark are qualitatively different? [62]

The camera has agency during both the SSE, and the reflective practice during editing of the collected material into the by-product. This part of the process I call reflective editing, because in this project most of the reflection happens during the editing of the material. But the rest of the participants whether human or non-human have agency within the assemblages developed through this project. Whenever entities enter into interaction and change each other there is agency, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines Agency as follows,

> In a very broad sense, agency is virtually everywhere. Whenever entities enter into causal relationships, they can be said to act on each other and interact with each other, bringing about

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[61] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 32.
[62] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 34.

changes in each other. In this very broad sense, it is possible to identify agents and agency, and patients and patiency, virtually everywhere. [63]

The term agency is mostly understood to refer to intention, and moral capacity. Agency was for a long period attributed to humans only, without taking into consideration that the non-human is part of the assemblage that makes humans what they are, and without the non-human entities the human would be completely different. Even with the attribution of agency to humans, the relation of cause and effect was blurred. Jane Bennett notes that,

> [t]his sense of a melting of cause and effect is also expressed in the ordinary usage of the term *agent*, which can refer both to a human subject who is the sole and original author of an effect (as in "moral agent") and also to someone or something that is the mere vehicle or passive conduit for the will of another (as in "literary agent" or "insurance agent"). [64]

Particularly if we understand that an actant (in SSE, a participant) never acts alone, as Jane Bennett states, those interactions are also with bodies and forces.

> While the smallest or simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus, conatus or *clinamen*, an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces. A lot happens to the concept of agency once nonhuman things are figured less as social constructions and more as actors, and once humans themselves are assessed not as autonomous but as vital materialities. [65]

Collaboration or interactive interference happens within the SSE, as the non-human are participants with agency (actors) and human participants are not autonomous and interact with objects changing each other. For example, during the second body of work the Miami Beach High group of participants were picking objects and materials as they made a dérive within the studio and came across them. Later, they were interacting with the materials and objects, that is, they (human and non-human participants) interacted, causing change in each other, from their own agencies. Bennett talks about the modification (I call it transformation) that happens when all the participants interfere and interact with each other.

> What it means to be a "mode," then, is to form alliances and enter assemblages: it is to mod(e)ify and be modified by others. The process of modification is not under the control of any one mode -- no mode is an agent in the hierarchical sense. Neither is the process without tension, for each

[63] Markus Schlosser, 'Agency,' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), available at https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/agency/, 2019, accessed on 14th October 2020.

[64] Jane Bennett, Vibrant Matter, *A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 33.

[65] Ibid, p. 21.

mode vies with and against the (changing) affections of (a changing set of) other modes, all the while being subject to the element of chance or contingency intrinsic to any encounter. [66]

Aware of the potential for hierarchical structures to arise while exploring SSE, I carefully chose assemblage (rather than apparatus) because it is in the agency of the assemblages that the agents (participants) should not have hierarchical relations towards each other, and because the method of dérive to establish relations with human and non-human helps to prevent hierarchical outcomes. Further the non-human has its own capacities when dérive plays into the relation or movement between all the participants or bodies. As Bennett puts it,

> bodies enhance their power *in* or *as a heterogeneous assemblage*. What this suggests for the concept of *agency* is that the efficacy or effectivity to which that term has traditionally referred becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts. [67]

As I conclude at the end of this project, my human participation takes me one step further from my subjectivity, in the direction of objectivity, in similar proportion, the non-human steps away from its objectivity towards a subjectivity, and we human and non-human somehow meet between subjectivity and objectivity. While in the SSE we transform each other with our agencies, that gives life to the agency of assemblage, and later in this project I discuss this agency as the agency of the camera assemblage.

Dérive

At first, I thought I was using chance as a method to take different decisions at different moments of my practice, but later I realized that chance has structured steps to follow, for example the way John Cage uses the I-ching.[68] I realized that in many moments of randomness I was not using chance, nor intuition; rather I was applying dérive (drift) with its randomness. The following text is from Guy Debord's 'Theory of the Dérive':

> If chance plays an important role in dérives this is because the methodology of psychogeographical observation is still in its infancy. But the action of chance is naturally conservative and in a new setting tends to reduce everything to habit or to an alternation between a limited number of

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[66] Ibid, p. 22.
[67] Ibid, p. 23.
[68] John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p. 17.

variants. Progress means breaking through fields where chance holds sway by creating new conditions more favorable to our purposes. We can say, then, that the randomness of a dérive is fundamentally different from that of the stroll [.] [69]

Dérive also works better with small groups of participants, and the length of the practice varies between brief moments to a few hours, which resonates with the intimate SSE due to the shifts of intensity and awareness in short pieces.

> One can dérive alone, but all indications are that the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness, (…). It is preferable for the composition of these groups to change from one dérive to another. With more than four or five participants, the specifically dérive character rapidly diminishes, dérive often takes place within a deliberately limited period of a few hours, or even fortuitously during fairly brief moments. [70]

Debord states that the dérive brings about changes in behavior. Even though an SSE is not intended to be therapeutic, and I cannot point at specific intentions for or examples of changing behavior, the transformations that emerge from the SSE echo the dérive as well.

> Such an experience gives rise to new objective conditions of behavior that bring about the disappearance of a good number of the old ones. [71]

On the *Mythogeography* website there is a 'Starter Kit: five steps to a Drift or Dérive,' in which one of the steps advises:

> Slip down alleys, chase any intriguing detail, follow instincts not maps.[72]

In the decisions of what material to use, or in what space to be during the SSE, how to curate objects in a setting (as in *Mute*, the last piece made with the Miami Beach High students) I specifically adhere to two elements of dérive: to follow instincts and not to follow a map. Chasing intriguing details is what the Miami Beach High students are doing when they look for material in my studio and choose anything they feel attracted to or rejected by. Also, when I engaged in a dérive around Berlin with my mother we stopped for a hug with no previous plan. In *Meeting in Progress*, a piece made with my mother in my studio, the dérive method allowed me to introduce a standing sign that was in situ in the space when we entered.

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[69] Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive,' 1958, in *Situationist International Anthology*, edited and translated by Ken Knabb, Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, available at http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm, accessed 6th February 2017.
[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Phil Smith, 'Starter Kit,' mythogeography.com, https://www.mythogeography.com/starter-kit.html, accessed 22nd October 2020.

Dialogic

Mikhail Bakhtin explains the dialogical concept as a constant interaction between meanings. I found this is what happened when I transitioned from my former object maker practice to the present SSE practice and is in fact part of the methodological process of the PhD. It also happens when I move from one piece to another, and this interaction comes back during editing and reflecting, and within the dynamics of the seesaw circulation (see discussion of see saw in Introduction above). When I revisit a piece the dialogic takes place. In *The Dialogic Imagination,* Bakhtin explains:

> Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world (…). Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance. This dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, ensures that there can be no actual monologue.[73]

In the case of the SSE, the dialogic happens in different moments, when making the exploration, when editing the exploration and when observing the by-product. Grant Kester, who uses Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic, writes:

> Dialogical practices involve the co-presence of bodies in real time. They encourage a heightened awareness of bodily schema—our capacity to orient ourselves in space relative to the world around us—and an increased sensitivity to the process by which our bodies feel, relate, and produce meaning. Further, they revolve around an experience of reciprocal modelling, as each subject shifts roles, anticipates, mirrors, and challenges the other.[74]

I refer to the dialogical when the concept of dialogic happens, not in words or in a linguistic context as it was conceived by Bakhtin, but rather when it is applied to the wider operations of SSE, involving me, the other participants, human and non-human, and what I come to describe as the camera assemblage..

By-Products

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[73] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 426.
[74] Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, Duke University Press, 2011, p. 114.

Joseph Beuys stated in an interview with *Artforum* in 1969 that the production of something tangible was a distraction from his main aim, which was teaching.

> Teaching is my greatest work of art, the rest is waste product, a demonstration. If you want to express yourself you must present something tangible. But after a while this has only the function of a historic documentation. Objects aren't very important anymore. I want to get to the origin of the matter, to the thought behind it.[75]

I refer to the remains of my actions as "by-products" rather than as "waste," and my aim is to reveal an emergent property through a process of transformation during the SSE. I look for that small moment of transformation, even if it occurs on a minimal scale. With the term *by-products* I mean the videos that I share throughout this thesis, as well as the tangible objects such as pictures and some of the writings for this thesis. At the same time the by-products engage in yet another dialogic with the reader and potential viewers. In her book *Artificial Hells,* Claire Bishop focuses on what participatory art produces rather than a process-focused practice.

> The central project of this book is to find ways of accounting for participatory art that has focus on the meaning of what it produces, rather than attending solely to process. This result - the mediating object, concept, image or story - is the necessary link between the artist and a secondary audience (you and I, and everyone else who didn't participate).[76]

While the intimate SSE practice produces by-products, the focus is on the transformation that the SSE can bring to the participants. The by-products of my work are the resulting videos, voice recordings and still photographs recorded during the SSE. It is in the process of editing that some of the transformation happens to me as I reflect on the process of both the action and the editing, and to the materials that I am working with. The reflection happens during the editing of all that material, as a result there is a by-product.

Dr. Pablo Helguera calls the remains (documentation) of the SEA (Social Engaged Art) 'relics'.

> The photographs and films may become relics, artwork in themselves, or surrogates for the original work. ... They retain some aspects of "product" and, as such, a direct connection to a product maker—that is, an author. [77]

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[75] Willoughby Sharp, 'An Interview with Joseph Beuys,' *Artforum* 8.4, 1969.
[76] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, 2012, p. 9.
[77] Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, Jorge Pinto Books, 2011, p. 75.

Helguera also talks about relics when he refers to performances. I considered the term but decided that it was not the right one as I did not feel comfortable with the religious implications of the term. What remains of an SSE, the material on the camera's memory, and in my memory, creates a new assemblage during editing when dialogizing both of our memories. In this case the new emergent property is the video object or sometimes a still photograph. That is the emergent property between both of us (the camera memory and my memory) after a dialogic process within both the assemblage and reflection. Therefore, the resulting object is the by-product of the sum of reflective practice, of the dialogics in that assemblage which included material collected during the encounter part of the SSE. Once the work is done, I lose control of the by-product. Through the internet, my website, Vimeo etc, the by-product will reach other viewers. That can happen now or in the future, in which case the new viewers will dialogically give new meanings, becoming the new participants in as much as they reflect on the by-products of the SSE. Through it the assemblages may continue now in another level, the level of the viewer (the other) of the by-product.

Non-Human Participants

Beginning in Chapter III, reflecting the way it happened through the research, the non-human participants become part of my work. Although the non-human were present in Solo, the body of work discussed in Chapter II, I was not aware of their presence as participants until later during the Participatory body of work. My understanding of materials and how to use them in my pieces has also transformed. Initially, I used materials to produce a piece, but over time I started to use fewer materials as props for the action. The latest stage of my transformation in this area was to understand materials as non-human and at the same time to conceive of myself as material. In doing so, I gave control of the action to the participants as the SSE takes place. In this project, materials play several roles.

During the SSE, materials are active participants because they interact with human participants and cause different energies to develop within the assemblage. During editing, the material collected in the form of

video and audio goes through a reflective practice (editing). After editing, I have a by-product. The combining of video and audio creates an object, and the methods required for making this object draw on both the main technical strands of my background: video work and photographs on the one hand, and sound on the other. I understand sound as a three-dimensional element. During the sound editing, I create form and space with the audio and look for different textures.

My relation, for example, to the mattress' cotton in *Colchonero* (Chapter II), to the cookery book in *The Tower* (Chapter III), or to the sign in *Meeting in Progress* (Chapter IV)*,* as well as how I relate to my previous object-making practice, includes the associations, the dialogic possibilities they have, the memories they carry, and that they are somehow subject to me. These objects are used to communicate a narrative that I direct. This resonates with the discussion of objects in Sherry Turkle's book *Evocative Objects, Things We Think With*.

> There is the power of boundary objects and the general principle that objects are active life presences. Levi-Strauss speaks of tinkering; Jean Piaget, of the child as scientist. With different metaphors, each describes a dynamic relationship between things and thinking.[78]

Furthermore, Turkle states that "objects bring together thought and feeling,"[79] which resonates with my former practice as sculpture (object) maker. Unlike the previous direct engagement in making objects, during the SSE of this project the objects as participants are related to the making of memories, to experiences of intimacy, and to self (transformation).

> When Objects are lost, subjects are found (...) discovering the similarities on how we relate to the animate and inanimate, in each case we confront the other and shape the self.[80]

Later in the project I shape my understanding of the object, particularly with the objective (lens) as a participant, and the camera as a colleague.

Failure

Fail again. Fail better.

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[78] Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With,* The MIT Press, 2007, p. 9.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With,* The MIT Press, 2007, p. 10.

Failure in in this practice raises the question of what is needed to move from one piece to another and from one body of work to the following. The failure of the previous piece activates inspiration, imagination and allows me to dérive to the next Exploration. Lisa le Feuvre writes in *Failure*:

> The inevitable gap between the intention and the realization of an artwork makes failure impossible to avoid. [81]

In this project, the invisible material of failure is present, it is the fulcrum of the seesaw (see in Introduction Methodology section), not in the gap between intention and realization, rather, it is situated in the gap between one piece or body of work and another. Awareness of failure arises as a result of the reflective practice of the previous work and the beginning of the following, it is the force that activates inspiration and imagination. To fail, in SSE, is also a measurement (or evaluation) of transformation, when something fails, there is a need to transform, therefore failure is a method to locate transformative movements through research. Failure is not static, not only because it produces a force, but also it is in the middle of the dialogical relation between the former and the following work.

In the Chapters that follow, where I discuss a series of bodies of work, the shift from one work to another, and from one body of work to another, is driven by an awareness of failure that arises in the reflective editing process. The thesis structure and the sequence of chapters parallels this dérive of making, reflecting, making again. The other key terms I have introduced here will recur through the Chapters and will be encountered by the reader in action with the practice and serving to support the reflection (writing) on the process of research.

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[81] Lisa Le Feuvre, *Documents of Contemporary Art*: *Failure,* Whitechapel Gallery / The MIT Press, 2010, p. 12.

On the Despisers of the Body

... "Body am I and soul" – so speaks a child. And why should one not speak like children?

But the awakened, the knowing one says: body am I through and through, and nothing besides; and soul is just a word for something on the body.

The body is a great reason, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, one herd and one shepherd.

Your small reason, what you call "spirit" is also a tool of your body, my brother, a small work- and plaything of your great reason.

"I" you say and are proud of this word. But what is greater is that in which you do not want to believe – your body and its great reason. It does not say I, but *does* I.

What the sense feels, what the spirit knows, in itself that will never have an end. But sense and spirit would like to persuade you that they are the end of all things: so vain are they.

Work- and plaything are sense and spirit, behind them still lies the self. The self also seeks with the eyes of the senses, it listens also with the ears of the spirit.

Always the self listens and seeks: it compares, compels, conquers, destroys. It rules and is also the ruler of the ego.

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a powerful commander, an unknown wise man – he is called self. He lives in your body, he is your body.

There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom. And who knows then to what end your body requires precisely your best wisdom?

Your self laughs at your ego and its proud leaps. "What are these leaps and flights of thought to me?" it says to itself. "A detour to my purpose. I am the leading strings of the ego and the prompter of its concepts..." [82]

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[82] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, translated by Adrian Del Caro, edited by Robert B. Pippin, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 22.

Chapter II

Solo

Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the first body of work of my practice-based research, which began my process of becoming a researcher. In relation to the transition that took place at the beginning of my PhD research, it is crucial to understand both my previous practice and my current one, because the process of transition between them was itself part of the project. The shift from being an object maker to creating more performative work (as well as later coming to the decision to use the term Social Sculpture Explorations to refer to my work) is best understood through a process of revisiting my former work via a dialogic process. In this case I use the term dialogic to refer to the dialogue between different bodies of work that led to a transformation in understanding due to different time periods of life, increased knowledge or a change of view. The shift resulted in a changed understanding of my former pieces by looking at them through the objective of the new practice, and through a new understanding of art and theory. Specifically, in this chapter, the focus will be on the Deleuzian concept of becoming, Joseph Beuys' plastic theory and Social Sculpture.

The first body of work of this practice-based research ran from September 2015 to January 2016. During that period, I conducted performances outside my studio space at the same time as I moved from producing objects to producing action pieces. I gave my former objects a new meaning through dialogics, with which I revisited my former objects with my new performative approach and understood them differently. Some of the former objects also became material for the new performative pieces. I became aware of and connected with Joseph Beuys' idea of "invisible material,"[83] which understands reflection, thinking and sensorial perception as part of the artistic process. In September 2015, a period when I felt the need to change my practice, I started exploring performative actions that were recorded in video and audio forms. I performed my actions in different environments that conditioned the different relationships between myself, the space, the materials, the viewers and the participants who featured in the piece.

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[83] Joseph Beuys, *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America,* compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993, p. 19.

From Sculpture to Social Sculpture

For more than two decades, up to 2015, my artistic practice was that of an object maker.

In the past, my concerns were more within the field of aesthetics: the gesture in the making, expression and dialogue with the material. I was manipulating the materials and interpreting their limitations and qualities, without taking into consideration that I had my own limitations and qualities that were subjectively constraining the material's part in the dialogue, which I thought I was able to interpret. I enjoyed manipulating materials, solving problems within their own characteristics, stretching and discovering their possibilities, having a dialogue with them, and allowing them to make decisions. I was giving my own voice to materials without understanding that the material could have its own voice. Now I understand that the materials didn't have a part in that dialogue; they were an excuse for a dialogue with myself as I sought to interpret them, much as Beuys believed that making sculpture was a method of locating human forces within the material.

> How can it be that sometimes a sculpture is one thing, and other times, something different? I was not satisfied by merely going back into sculpture in terms of its stylistic development. Instead I was more interested in [a conception of] sculpture in which the human being could be rediscovered. In other words I wanted to locate forces in sculpture that exist within human beings themselves.[84]

Now, as I dialogically revisit what I was doing previously, I understand that what I thought to be a dialogue was a search for my own practice within the material, in a similar vein to what Beuys calls "locating human forces."

In my former sculpture making, I always focused on transformations in terms of form and on how different materials' qualities could shift a raw material's natural form into a new one. Often, I wanted to see a form in more than one material to see how I reacted to it. The object could have the same form, but different emotions would emerge through the use of different materials and my use of different gestures. A good example of this process is provided by *Vientre* (2004, see figure #1). I worked with fabrics and soft materials when I made the first version of this piece, but then I used wire to make *Vientre II* (2004). I did so to explore the sensory reactions that different materials can provoke. These two pieces have a concave

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[84] Ibid, p. 133.

form in which something can be contained and protected. The title, *Vientre*, *is* Spanish for *belly*. This form can provoke different emotions when it is produced using different materials. Moreover, different materials made me manipulate them in different ways, so the gestures used to create the different versions changed as well. Sometimes the form has to change to adapt to the material's possibilities, and the senses react differently by touching and moving in various ways. The ambient temperature, the strength I applied and the positions of my own body changed as I manipulated different materials.

Figure 1, *Vientre,* H26 D16 W16 inches *, Vientre II,* H32 D15 W15 inches*, 2004

Those were my interests, but now I can see that process much more clearly as I am seeing what was happening through a dialogics that lets me understand how the performative work of my practice started. I was not connected to the pieces as an action practitioner then and when I revisit those objects dalogically I see how the performative was happening then, but that I wasn't aware of it. Now, as I engage dialogically, when I produce my artwork, my perception of the core of the process becomes more immediate in a similar manner to the process that Bakhtin explains below:

> In philology, however, a dialogic penetration into the word is obligatory (for indeed without it no sort of understanding is possible): dialogizing it opens up fresh aspects in the word (…), which, since they were revealed by dialogic means, become more immediate to perception.[85]

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[85] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 761.

What Bakhtin describes as happening in words happens in the process of material manipulation in my sculpture. For example, in my present practice, the dialogic takes the following forms: the ways in which humans, materials and space (which I also consider to be a participant) affect each other; the approach taken when editing the work's video, photography or sound; these elements' interactions with some terms that belong to continental post-human philosophy; and the three elements of the "dialogical circulation methodology" that I was using at the beginning of the research (explained in the Introduction).

When I created the object-sculptures, I understood my interest to be more focused on tactile emotion—that is, the emotional response to materials, manipulation of them, the gestures needed to create the object, and adaptation to a specific form made using different materials and their particular plasticities. I was attracted to creating aggressive forms in soft materials and also and in opposition I produced naïve forms in sharp, hard or punctured materials, and still sometimes form and material could overlap without following the soft-sharp-aggressive-naïve oppositions, but always having a form-material quality relationship in dialogue with my body manipulation and its senses. In both cases, the material and the form were the main elements that I was working with, and as I revisit those pieces dialogically I also can see how this relation between materials and form had then a dialogic that I was grasping intuitively even though, I wasn't at that point aware of this concept. This emotional and sensorial relationship between my practice, myself, the material and the form will come back later in Chapter IV when I work with my family, in which it is no longer binary but an entanglement of emotional responses between all the participants. Expanding on Bakhtin's ideas in relation to art and artworks, and noting the importance of the artwork's interaction across culture and generations, Miriam Jordan-Haladyn posits:

> The unfinalizability of the dialogic discourse entails an understanding of the ever-expanding context that an artwork moves through, reaching deep into expanding time and space. Bakhtin constantly points out the superficiality of attempting to study an artwork without taking into account the interconnection and interdependence of cultural forms across generations.[86]

In *Dialogic Materialism*, Jordan-Haladyn explains Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability and his notion of dialogical context between the work of art and its context in the present and in the future. Future viewers will dialogically add to or take from the piece based on their present moment and their environment, language and culture.

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[86] Miriam Jordan-Haladyn, *Dialogic Materialism, Bakhtin, Embodiment and Moving Image in Art*, Peter Lang Publishing Incorporated, 2014, p. 40.

I realized that as Bakhtin proposes the concept of the unfinalizable in creative processes as in life, I was revisiting my objects with a similar approach, treating nothing as finalized. Not only had I gone back and changed old works by undoing them and reusing their material to make new work, further I left many pieces as they were conceived in form and changed some of my understanding of them. Deborah Haynes explains in her book *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts,* the concept of unfinalizable in the visual artist as a process with the openness of always being able to come back and change something, and that is what I did when I re-visited my former object maker self.

> The creative process, too, is unfinalizable, except insofar as an artist says, somewhat arbitrarily, "I stop here". Precisely because it is always open to change and transformation, artistic work can be a model for the possibility of change in the larger world outside the studio. Indeed, unfinalizability gives us a way to speak about the problems of representing the changing world through the artistic lens of our diverse and ever-changing subjectivities.[87]

The idea of unfinalizable gets stronger as I go through this research project, by the end I understand that none of my pieces are ever finished also due to the by-products' unlimited future exposure to participants.

Solo

> I myself am the artwork at this moment. That is, it is yet to come that man itself is the work of art ... And that potentially every human can participate in this realization, to make the world a work of art (as Social Sculpture).[88]

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[87] Deborah J. Haynes, *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts,* Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 300.

[88] Joseph Beuys in The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland, 1988, p.10, quoted in Kirsten Voigt, 'The Great Reason of the Body' – Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph Beuys and the Art of Giving Meaning to Matter and Earth,' *Tate Papers*, 32, 2019, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/32/nietzsche-beuys-giving-meaning-matter-earth , accessed 12th February 2020.

Figure 2, *Action I*, September 2015

In 2015, I began to conduct performative work through my first action, *Action I* (September 2015, figure # 2), in which I wrapped my body in a roll of burlap and then unwrapped myself. During the action I did this gesture of unwrapping and wrapping three times and then left. (The by-product video can be viewed on my vimeo page at https://vimeo.com/138980725.) I needed this chaotic transformation at that time to break through from the inside of my studio to the outside space. Through my use of raw material, the action embodied the formation of thought as the material for the sculpture, and the sculpture embodied the idea built with the thought (Beuys). Joseph Beuys believed that process was the object of his work. In his process, everything is in constant change, which provokes thoughts and stimulates transformation and evolution, thereby shaping thoughts as well as the world.

This first action had a powerful transformative meaning. It gave me an inner catharsis and new view of my former usage of materials and made me feel that I needed to abruptly change my traditional practice as an object maker. Using burlap with my body—the material touched my skin over my entire body, whereas in my past work it only came into contact with my hands—meant the material had an effect on my body that was as powerful as the effect on my hands would be when I manipulated the material in my usual way. Joseph Beuys wrapped himself in felt in many of his actions, which was originally inspired by his memory of

when his plane crashed in the Crimea.[89] Whether or not this is a myth, or a memory from his unconsciousness while being ill, for him this was a memory that changed his life; specifically his career and his practice. That memory is the core of all his practice, material selection and theory. This first action of mine changed my practice, not only because I walked out of my studio, but I discovered as well that working with my own body was more powerful than making objects and resonates with my ideas of transformation. To be able to make a seven-minute action, as opposed to being in the studio working with a particular material for long periods in isolation, was in itself a social practice, even if no participants were part of the experiences at the beginning. The effect of the action was powerful and instant, it was a catharsis. I embodied the transformation in a faster and deeper manner. I knew, then, that doing performative work was what I needed at that moment, and simultaneously I started the process of research, to explore both, at the same time becoming a researcher and an action maker.

This action of wrapping myself aesthetically resonated with Christo and Jean Claude's wrapping pieces.

> Christo's *Wrapped Objects* explore the transformative effect fabric and tactile surfaces have when wrapped around familiar objects.[90]

Christo and Jeanne-Claude were influential in my previous work as an object maker. I have pieces in which I explored different wrapping methods such as wrapping objects in paper that had images printed on it. I moved on to using strips of fabric that had been immersed in plaster and building sculptures by the gesture of wrapping objects in the strips. (See Figures #3 and #4.) After my first divorce, I took my old bed linen and used it as the material for this piece. I was recycling material, and as I was recycling, I was seeking to transform and to make a piece out of a memory, feeling, invisible materials. Using a tangible and invisible material, without knowing I was making SSE.

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[89] 'In 1943, Beuys was in a Stuka dive bomber that was shot down over the Crimea. The way he told it, he was the pilot of the plane and when it came down, nomadic Tartars rescued him and swaddled him in fat and felt to keep him warm. The story has taken some batterings since Beuys died in 1986. Records have shown that he was the radio operator, not the pilot and, for some, this puts the whole story in doubt. "It was a mythologised event," admits Tisdall, "but based on real experiences. The crash was real, the Tartars were real, being wrapped in fat and felt were real. Obviously to me, as a very close friend, he spoke about the pain of the cold metal in his head which is why he wore that felt hat."' Jonathan Jones, 'The Man Who Fell to Earth,' *The Guardian*, 18th July 1999, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/1999/jul/19/artsfeatures2, last accessed 22nd April 2020.

[90] Adam Blackbourn, 'Wrapped Objects, Statues and Women,*' Christo & Jeanne-Claude,* http://www.christojeanneclaude.net/projects/wrapped-objects-statuesand-women?view=info, 2011, accessed 7th March 2019.

Figure 3 & 4 *Untitled,* 2004, Detail

The gesture of wrapping things with fabrics, wire or paper was part of my practice for a long time. The tale of Tartars wrapping Joseph Beuys in felt and fat to keep him warm probably marks the beginning of his practice, as all his life he carried on using those materials. The wrapping as a metaphor of care, as containment, in his case, and to frame his theories.

> The materials used in his works, particularly the fat and felt that had long been tied to the myth, were used not merely because they represented the Tartars, but because he was able to conveniently insert it fully into a theory. In other words, his story helped him form the basis of his conceptual framework, but the materials in his work were not meant to represent historical facts as such.[91]

In my piece, *Colchonero* (September 2015, https://vimeo.com/139811466 Figure #5), I dismantled a set of soft sculptures that I had made between 2006 and 2010 (Figure #6). I took out the stuffing that gave volume to the fabric/skin which I folded and stored. I did the same thing to each one of the approximately twenty-five pieces that made up that body of work. I left outside what was inside, and later that material became another piece, *Memories II, his memories* (see Figure #7, https://vimeo.com/147497876).

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[91] Cara M. Jordan, *Joseph Beuys and Social Sculpture in the United States,* PhD Thesis, Graduate Center CUNY 2017,available at https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/1731, p. 31.

Figure 5, *Colchonero,* ACSF, September 2015

Figure 6 *Emotions*, Windows @ Walgreens, 2014

Figure 7, *Memories II, his memories*, October 2015

Through this action I was not only connected to my inner need to undo my traditional work with a performative action; I also felt I was becoming more honest in my practice. I was exposing the inside material—the unseen, the hidden, that which gave volume to the sculptures so that they occupied a space with a specific form. The volume makes the form come to existence. The main material that shaped it was now outside, visible and tangible. Martin Heidegger writes in a poetic way, how the piece is within the material:

> But also this much celebrated aesthetic life-experience does not bypass the thingness of the artwork. Stone is in the building. Wood is in the carving. Color is in the painting. Sound is in the spoken word. Ringing is in the tonal work. Thingness is so irremovably in the artwork, that we must even rather say it the other way around: The building is in the stone. The carving is in the wood. The painting is in the color. The spoken word is in the sound. The musical work is in the tone. That's self-evident, people will counter. Certainly. But what is this self-evident thingly in the work of art?[92]

In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger posits that every time we look at "the thing" through a specific concept we ultimately subject the thing to violence. Even though it was evident that my soft pieces

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[92]Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, translated by Roger Berkowitz and Philippe Nonet, Draft, 2006, available at https://www.academia.edu/2083177/The_Origin_of_the_Work_of_Art_by_Martin_Heidegger, p. 4.

contained stuffing, for me at that point, the stuffing became the thing within the piece, the core of it, the piece itself—the thingly (matter) that makes the thing (sculpture).

> It almost seems that the thingly in the artwork would be like the structure, in and over which the other and the proper is built. And is it not this thingly part of the artwork, that the artist properly makes by his handwork?[93]

As I was recovering the material that I had used, I discovered its capacity to produce form that was the previous piece. The material that makes the piece is the piece; the piece cannot be without it. I experienced and discovered the importance of the unseen material and found that it was the closest to the essence of the piece, the material which can be used and transformed as much as I as an artist could be open to work with it. Violence, in this case to the former pieces, was also present within the performative action of undoing the soft sculptures—that is, cutting the threads and taking the stuffing out. In the by-product (https://vimeo.com/139811466) one can see these actions.

It was also interesting that when Deleuze introduced his concept of "concept" in his book *Difference and Repetition* he wrote of the "thing" and introduced the concept of becoming as well:

> However, a concept can always be blocked at the level of each of its determinations or each of the predicates that it includes. In so far as it serves as a determination, a predicate must remain fixed in the concept while becoming something else in the thing (animal becomes something other in man and in horse; humanity something other in Peter and in Paul). This is why the comprehension of the concept is infinite; having become other in the thing, the predicate is like the object of another predicate in the concept.[94]

The material that was inside the former pieces, the stuffing that I was taking out was becoming another piece, previously hidden, now exposed.

But more than anything else, I was linking an action with a memory from my childhood.

After my grandfather passed away, my grandmother called the colchonero (mattress maker) to cut my grandparents' queen size mattress in the middle to make two smaller mattresses, she also called a carpenter to make two beds from her marriage queen size bed. But I will never forget the work of the colchonero. The inside of the mattress sat as a big pile of material in my grandmother's garage, and it stayed there for a few days while the colchonero came every day to air the stuffing and to separate and make the two mattresses. One became my grandmother's bed and the other my bed. I was five years old

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93 Ibid, p. 4.
94 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition,* translated by Paul Patton, Continuum, 1994, p. 12.

when I saw that process. I loved that material, and above all I thought that the cotton was just beautiful and a playful material. I was able to see the inside of the mattress and touch it; the fact that the material became a pile that was bigger than me also struck me. It was a mattress and a mountain.

Yoko Ono's approach resonates with my memories as invisible material in *Colchonero's* exploration.

> I often remember this sort of story from my childhood: Buddha actually came from a rich family he was a prince or something like that and one day he just dropped everything and started walking with his wife and his children. Soon, someone comes out and says, Give me something. And Buddha gives him his jacket or shirt. Then he goes on, and somebody else asks him for something; he gives them his family, and so on. And finally, I think it's a tiger that asks him for his body. So, he just gives his body and is transformed into a spirit. It's the total giving concept. The struggle with art, for me, became about the concept of whether you were stating your ego through your work or creating an environment where other people can be creative as well.[95]

Ono's memories shape her perspective as an artist. Her will to create an environment for people while recognizing and giving value to all of her audience as potential creators, along with the stimulation of her childhood memory, connects closely with *Colchonero* and with my practice.

In a TEDx UCLWomen Talk, Shelley Sacks shares her memory about her early life in South African apartheid inside her family home, and how it shaped her as a social sculpture practitioner,

> ... tormented by the injustices which my little six years old self could not understand or articulate. The kitchen was the common zone where black and white met, where several different South African mindsets collided with each other. I watched the woman who worked for us, cook food for me and my parents, which we then ate on china plates in the dining room. After we finished eating, she and the gardener ate the remainder of the food, but, on tin plates in the yard or the kitchen, not in the dining room. When I was six or seven, I asked my mother why does Grace eat off tin plate and we eat off china ones, why does Grace not call you by your name, why did she call you ma'am, she shrugged helplessly and answered, what can one do? That is just how things are.[96]

Shelley Sacks' practice relates with her memories from the completely different reality she had lived in South Africa during her childhood. It resonates with my memories and how the memories as invisible materials are there present within the Social Sculpture work.

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[95] Kevin Concannon, 'Yoko Ono's Cut Piece: From Text to Performance and Back Again', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art,* 30:3, 2008, p. 91.

[96] Shelley Sacks, 'Rethinking "home" and the art of changing one's mind-set,' TEDx UCLWomen Talk, 2017, available at https://youtu.be/rE_5Yaad2-U, transcription by the author, accessed 3rd May 2020.

This was my first encounter with mindset but not the last. Whenever I asked why, I got the same helpless response. I remember lying in bed at night feeling very alone with my questions and thinking, this can't be just how things are, why can't we change them? Who said it must be like this? At ten or eleven I started to ask Grace questions about the situation in the kitchen and in South Africa, she would look down and say don't get sad, don't be angry, what can one do, your mother is not a bad woman. Sometimes when my parents were out, Grace called me to come and sit in the yard and eat with her, so my home consisted of many homes and I wasn't sure where I was at home, in the kitchen where all the mindsets collided, in the dining room in my parents' mindset, in the yard, sometimes it even seems like none of us were really at home.[97]

Later in the same talk she explains mindsets and memory as invisible material. Mindsets operate in her Social Sculpture and Connectedness practice and bringing awareness to these is one of her main aims. She describes how she works with the connection between inner experiences and imagination as forces that wrongly we take for granted:

We can call forward images and experiences from the past, we call them memories. (...) When I go to buy tomatoes for example, I see them in front of me in the present, but actually I see them in this space because my eyes are not on the tomatoes and they are not in me, whilst I was looking at the tomatoes on the shelf in front of me I look back into the recent past and see what's in the fridge, but now I also start seeing what am I cooking with them, as I imagine this I can almost smell and taste what I'm going to cook and I begin to salivate. What is taking place is truly astonishing. I am now looking at something that does not yet exist. I am picturing the future, and it activates an inner experience. I salivate, although this process is so profound and gives us a sense of our imaginative power, it is also so obvious that we take it completely for granted.[98]

In my childhood encounter with the Colchonero, the change of scale and proportion of the material when it was out of the mattress intrigued me. When I started to undo the soft sculptures and make that pile of stuffing in my studio, I immediately started to revisit those memories, and through them I started to ask myself about the connectedness I was experiencing through the manipulation of the material and the undoing of the piece. I also started to ask myself: Which one was the piece? Was it the action of undoing? Was it the new pile of stuffing outside? Or was it the memory and its connectedness—the invisible material of my memory, as Joseph Beuys called thought?

The materials used in his works, particularly the fat and felt (…) were mnemonic referents, linking Beuys' own memories with a collective experience of war, loss, tragedy, and destruction in tangible

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

form. He used these referents to make sense of his experience and to connect it to his broader ideas about art.[99]

My transformations, memories and ideas became the new material of my pieces. They were the invisible material that was shaping me as an artist.

At that point in my development of this new body of work which included actions, I was making use of ideas, the invisible material of thought and the way in which that thought becomes an idea, which is a sculpture, in the same way as when one shapes ideas and articulates words. I started to explore other artists' perceptions of my work (without giving them prior information about the pieces) by asking them to look at a by-product and express the ideas that the pieces provoked in them. The artists therefore became participants, and participation started to be part of my practice. The audio for the by-product video features a recording of the group of artists' feedback. Similarly, to Beuys, I was exploring the artists' reactions and using my work to provoke them and inviting them to engage with my actions.

> These works were intended to provoke audiences, not to shock them, but to engage them creatively and intellectually.[100]

My focus slowly and progressively shifted to participatory interactions and post-action editing. I started using dialogics to understand and revisit my processes. It was at this point that I understood that materials such as the environment and/or objects were non-human participants. Later I understood that material can have its own agency, especially when these non-human materials participate and become part of an assemblage and by the end, I concluded that the camera assemblage was the result of the cluster of the participants, event, SSE, reflective editing and by-product (discussed in Chapter V).

The materials in the artworks are in constant relation with other materials such as the environment, animals and humans. Through the relational dynamic the materials affect each other in a continuous process of change (Beuys), and in an ongoing "becoming" (Deleuze).

Deleuze's notion of becoming,

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[99] Cara M. Jordan, *Joseph Beuys and Social Sculpture in the United States,* PhD Thesis, Graduate Center CUNY 2017,available at https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/1731, p. 31.
[100] Ibid, p. 58.

> [a]s if every great doctrine were not a combined formation, constructed from bits and pieces, various intermingled codes and flux, partial elements and derivatives, that constitute its very life or its becoming,[101]

resonates with Joseph Beuys' transition to performative actions and his extended meaning of art and process. Beuys posited that

> [...] the activity of sculpting was an expression of our transformative power to change materials from a condition of chaotic fluidity to ordered form, mirroring processes that permeate nature and are an expression of its living energy.[102]

Austrian visual and performing artist, Valie Export also based her work on becoming and transforming. She embodies the continual becoming of something else in her performances.

> Export's work proposed a subjective model based on a conscious process of transformation; a continual becoming something else; a continual moving elsewhere. Embracing the monstrous, the abject, the animal and the machine, Export presents a loaded, contradictory set of self-signifiers that cannot be easily absorbed, controlled or agreed on by either the spectacular commodity culture or the culture of criticism.[103]

Valie Export's body and performative work also relates to some of my work from this Solo period. In my piece *Embodying Space* I use my body to transform my understanding of the building where my studio was, and the juxtaposition between my studio as a private space and the building in which the studio is located as a public space. *Embodying Space*, is a continuation of my transformation of breaking out of my studio with all my senses, with my entire body.

I made *Embodying Space* (October 2015, Figure #8 & #9, https://vimeo.com/139811466) in an attempt to connect with the building (South Florida Art Center, where at that time I had my studio space) and its space and architecture. I enacted a repetitive motion that made me dizzy and so prevented me from going fast. As I walked, I rolled my head against the walls and I let myself be connected to the shapes and forms of that particular space. It was a performative walk that passed both outside the studio and inside and around the

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[101] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 117

[102] Allan Antliff, *Joseph Beuys*, Phaidon Focus, 2014, p. 20.

[103] Charles Labelle, *Valie Export*, review 6th June 2001, Frieze, https://frieze.com/article/valie-export, accessed 9th August 2019.

building. This brought me to an experience in which the environment and I connected. This performative exploration helped me to use my body as a sensory organ. I was aware of the connection of my full body with the material that made the building, and I was understanding the building using my body. Another organ of perception was explored.

Valie Export made a series of *Body Configurations*. In *Encirclement* (1976) she traces the Viennese streets with her body.

> Throughout the series, the geometry of the city is emphasized by bodies that mirror shapes in architecture. While in *Encirclement* the artist's body contours the curb, in other photographs of the same series her body appears in fetal position contrasting with the hard edge of a building. The series also contains images of her body becoming bridges and triangles when juxtaposed with the city's architecture. According to the artist, in this work the body externalizes internal states by depicting the contrast between the organicity of the human body and the severity of the urban landscape, while also presenting the body as a complement to the architecture and urban setting.[104]

In *Embodying Space* I was emerging from my closed studio work and as I went out, I found that the building that contained my studio was an Institution (Art Center South Florida). While I successfully broke out of my studio, as I embodied the building, I encountered the problematic Institutional situation for the first time, by being limited in what I could or could not do, due to Institutional policies. My body then embraced the architecture while still rejecting the Institutional power relation, as it imposed rules that I did not have inside my studio. In *Embodying Space,* as my body encountered the building it rejected its restrictive hallways and I turned back to my studio to reflect.

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[104] Vitoria Hadba-Groom, 'VALIE EXPORT Artist Overview and Analysis,' *The Art Story*, https://www.theartstory.org/artist/export-valie/artworks/#pnt_5, accessed 9th August 2019.
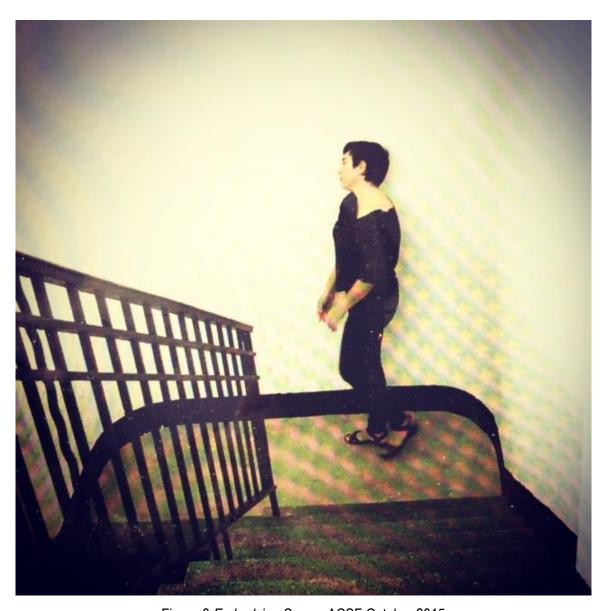
Figure 8 *Embodying Space,* ACSF October 2015

During that period, I was still in the beginning of my performance practice, and leaving the studio was an issue that I had to work with in order to break that space barrier. Richard Schechner states that, "one of the meanings of 'to perform' is to get things done according to a particular plan or scenario,"[105] and that is what I explored when I walked out of my studio with a plan of embodying the entire building in which my studio was contained. I followed the hallways that were traced through the design of the interior space of the building. These turned out to be more restrictive than my studio itself as now I had to follow Institutional rules as opposed to being the rule maker inside my studio. I realized that leaving the confines of my studio

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[105] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies*, second edition, Routledge, 2002, p. 42.

was going to bring new problems related to liberties. In the building one must follow institutional rules and regulations and power relations. Through this embodiment, I copied, with a sensorial approach, an environment that I inhabited yet ignored every day. Those actions led me to the awareness of the environment as a participant, but a new question arose: did I want the Institution to be a participant? I did want the building, as any environment to be a participant, yet I rejected the Institutional power. The institution is not a free environment. It has policies that do not always make sense to me, especially when the building belongs to an art center that looks for new artists, and artistic ideas, but they cannot offer a space of freedom to work due to insurance policies, board members views, and so forth, that they must enforce. Later in this research, I conceive of the camera assembage as a cluster of elements which includes the institution as one more non-human participant. (Chapter 5)

Figure 9, *El juego,* ACSF, October 2015

Back in my studio I performed *El Juego* (*The game, October* 2015 Figure #9, https://vimeo.com/144651650). I re-visited the pile of stuffing from *Colchonero* and I reused that material. I entered the work dialogically and revisited the materials collected from my former pieces, which became objects to provoke my action. I used the materials within a playful explorative approach. I was trying to have a different relation with the raw materials, which were no longer something that I could just manipulate or subordinate. The idea of material as a colleague started appearing here. I was not manipulating materials

or using them to accomplish a previous sketch of a traditional three-dimensional piece. Rather, I undertook this action to gain a sensory perception of the materials and their natural capacity. The materials and I lay down and related one to another, we started to form an assemblage. Beuys writes:

> I have also been searching for materials. Materials that are challenging enough to provoke states of excitation in the sleeping creative centers of the recipients […]. I knew what the psychological effects would be: if I make a fat wedge it will necessarily cause people to get agitated about it, it will cause something in them to boil over.[106]

In *El Juego*, the material (stuffing) and I were the action. I was slowly moving through it, and it kept surrounding me. During this action I was creating this Social Sculpture from my imagination. I was inspired by the material and moved through it intuitively to let the creative forces appear. I was putting myself in a less traditional role of artist and started moving toward a more intuitive, imaginative action connected with my senses' working processes as opposed to traditional processes of work in which the creator follows a plot, a sketch or a previously conceived idea. It was in that period that I started to think of the material more as a participant and of myself as the material. This decentered approach of working resonated with Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome concept, which appears in *A Thousand Plateaus* and which Felicity F. Colman defines as:

> a concept that "maps" a process of networked, relational and transversal thought, and a way of being without "tracing" the construction of that map as a fixed entity.[107]

The concept of working as material, of material as participant was the focus of the piece since the piece had no previous expectation, no map to follow, just an action of my body, the material and my senses unfolding new sensory organs in my work.

Conclusion

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[106] Wolfgang Zumdick, *Death Keeps Me Awake: Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner Foundations of their Thought*, Spurbuchverlag, 1995, p. 131.
[107] Adrian Parr, (ed.) *The Deleuze Dictionary,* Edinburgh University Press, 2005, p. 231.

Not with my hand alone I write:
My foot wants to participate.
Firm and free and bold, my feet
Run across the field – and sheet.[108]

I have shown through this first body of work of my practice-led research project how my practice has changed, but more importantly how I have gone through a process of transformation as an artist. The arc from an object maker to an SSE practitioner was a slow, natural and spontaneous process. A process of detachment, catharsis and dialogics transversally brought me back to understanding my former work from my new self, who has more theoretical and philosophical knowledge. From that dialogical new meaning, my practice transformed from that of an object maker to that of an artist-researcher. The relation between practice and writing started not only to make sense but also to bear fruit.

In my early practice of object making, I was focused on gesture and manipulation, which turned into the gesture itself. I could dialogically review the gesture and encounter my own body as work material. I moved to an action maker body artist as the first step to understand transformation in my method of making art. In that way gesture became the piece when I turned to a more performative work. Later, I put the gesture first, and emphasized the material, leaving the object, (which only will appear again as a by-product, after the exploration is done). My transformation was to embody my own body as part of the material for the artwork which resonated with Joseph Beuys' actions.

By the end of this body of work I started to participate in a critique group of artists and that experience led me to start looking for participants to be part of my SSE.

In my next chapter I will discuss how the project became participatory and who the participants are, as it extends beyond only humans. I will enter in a dialogue with the ideas of Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, Deleuze, Nietzsche and Joseph Beuys. I will also describe a method in my practice of failures and impossibilities of me trying to be material for the participants and the contradictions of my practice if made within an Institution, and how these failures took me to the third body of work, the family.

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[108] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, Random House, 1974, p. 63.

Chapter III

Participatory

Introduction

In this Chapter I will continue to describe the process of transformation of both my practice and myself as an SSE practitioner. It is a continuation of the narrative in Chapter II in which I described my former practice and how I responded to my need of moving from my object maker practice in the studio to a body of solo practice making performative actions, until at last I saw myself as an SSE practitioner.

I will describe how the methodology developed through the consideration of the work in dialogue with the philosophical and contextual sources that I looked at (described in the Philosophy section in Chapter I under the Context section).

Furthermore, the reflective practice applied during the editing of the material collected during the SSE brought the explorations into dialogue with Deleuzian concepts (that are always related to Nietzsche's terms or at least inspired by them). Such terms (listed in Chapter I) are used to explain the methodology I used to relate to the participants and to let them interact without me telling them what to do, (rather we are an assemblage) and are used to explain this difficult process. I found that it was better to use these terms to discuss how I did not use a pre-set plot or idea, instead dérive-ing with materials without a considered outcome and understanding materials and space as non-human participants. (The details of the Ethical Framework regarding my work with participants are given in the Introduction to this Thesis.)

Chapter II described my evolving understanding of materials, which in turn led to a change in how I label my practice: I adopted Joseph Beuys' term Social Sculpture as it provides an umbrella term for a practice that works with or without participants and with or without materials. One that focuses on plasticity as the primary quality of materials and on the medium as a modus of understanding aspects of materials, of the human, and of society.

I suggest that Joseph Beuys used the term Social Sculpture rather than performance art, because Social

Sculpture is a practice that focuses on dialogue, plasticity and transformation of materials, the society and the world. The material and the social (in Beuys' case the political and pedagogical while in mine the relations between participants) come together in this term and the common element is plasticity.

During Documenta VI, 1977, Beuys made his piece *Honey Pump at the Workplace,* in which two tons of honey and 220 lb. of fat were circulating in copper cylinders through a pump mechanism. In his book, *Joseph Beuys,* Allan Antliff posits that *Honey Pump* "suggested that Social Sculpture was a vital force for renewing the 'blood stream of society', as Beuys put it".[109] I chose Social Sculpture for similar reasons because as a plastic artist (see beginning of thesis Introduction and Chapter I for my rationale for choosing this word), I am interested in the plasticity of the materials and the participants' capacity to transform as material; I am not interested in using reasoning, usually associated with our brain, but using connectedness and imagination which are associated with the senses, 'the other organs of perception' (Rudolph Steiner)[110]. The senses are the other organs of perception and are located in the body which is material. The structure of Beuys' project emphasized the important connections between the material and the spiritual, the sensory and the imagined:

> The creative work being realized by Free International University participants was represented by three empty bronze pots near the honey container, which stood in for the threefold spiritual aspect of human beings: 'imagination, inspiration, and intuition'.[111]

The connection that I make from this work to my own practice is that when I facilitate an SSE I try as much as possible not to give the participants an expectation either from me or as regards a result. I call on them to use their imagination, inspiration and to dérive. For example, I tell them:

> "We are here today, Tuesday, it is 4pm, and we are in Miami Beach inside the Senior Centre of North Beach, we have the Ocean next to us, and inside this room we are 12 people together, with a roll of fabric, what else do we have here? Yes we have chairs, what else, a camera, yes, some tables, we have a music system, from all this, what do you want to use? you can choose anything you want, you can also choose not to work with any object, you can tell me what to do, if you want."[112]

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[109] Allan Antliff, *Joseph Beuys*, Phaidon Focus, 2014, p. 74.
[110] Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Spiritual Processes in Human Life and in the Cosmos*, Anthroposophic Press,1994.
[111] Beuys quoted in Allan Antliff, *Joseph Beuys*, Phaidon-Focus, 2014, p. 74.
[112] An example of how I introduced my practice to the participants at the Senior Centre of North Beach, Miami beach.

I motivated them to be aware and to feel free to choose what inspires their imagination, for them to dérive, to have a connection with the others, human or non-human, and then I let them do, let them act. I tell them I do not have expectations, I remind them to choose (by either attraction or rejection), to imagine and derive. But first I must be sure they feel they have freedom; without the sense of freedom, we cannot start an SSE. I also clarify that even though I am an artist, in this particular experience they are the doers not me, I will do something only if they want me to do anything. I am there for them. It is a paradox to expect them to feel free, so I have to explore ways of communicating in which I still do not tell them what to do, but at the same time find ways to let them be free, feel free. As I will explain later in this chapter, I do not intellectualize nor make explicit my reasoning in relation to what we are going to produce, in order to preserve the poiesis of our exploration. This is why I call upon the participants' imagination, inspiration and ask them to dérive.

The greater part of the transformation brought about in my SSE took place through the senses and became possible through connection with the participants' imagination. This allowed for an unfolding of the exploration through the inspiration to participate and this constituted the emergence of the assemblage.

An unexpected outcome became apparent, one that surprised me, when I realized that my work started to have participants in the soundtracks. This was unexpected because when I decided to use the critique group voice recordings with the video, and to edit them both together to create the by-product, my intention was not to have participants. I was just thinking about the sound part of the piece, and the action as a provocation of thoughts. Later I realized that those voices were talking about the action taped in the video and that they were participants constituting an assemblage with the by-product. At that point I decided to explore further the presence of participants during the explorations and later my understanding of participants went further and they became part of the assemblage and became embodied in my practice, not only the human participants but also the environment and objects as participants.

In November 2015 I began to explore Social Sculpture with small groups of people. Having previously worked on actions alone, this endeavor turned into participatory work when I began to use recordings of artists' critiques of my solo actions from a group of artists I was part of (The Fieldwork Workshop)[113] at the

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[113] "Fieldwork is a unique forum for artists to share developing works and exchange feedback, peer to peer. The Fieldwork structure reveals how each piece is perceived by others and fosters a detailed information exchange. Incisive and stimulating critiques are guided by an experienced facilitator. Comments focus on what's happening in the work and how each choice shapes the work, keeping the authorship of the artist constantly supported. Fieldwork cultivates insight into

South Florida/Art Center). Later the pieces *The Tower (2015)* and *Metamorphosis (2015)* marked a pivotal movement in my practice transition, as I started to look for human participants and I began to work outside of my studio building. Then I realized that by using the overlapped recording of voices as the soundtrack for the solo by-products, I was working with participants. After this, I started looking for groups of people to work with. The first individuals to become involved in my artistic practice were a group from North Beach Senior Centre and a group of three female teenagers from Miami Beach High (Camila, Carolina and Eileen), whom I contacted through the Education/Internships Program at the South Florida/Art Center, where I had my Art Studio. None of the participants had an artistic background.

Transition to participatory

In *The Tower* **(**December, 2015, figure 10, https://vimeo.com/147463347), the audio of the video features several women's voices. All of them are reading a homemade bread recipe, each in her own language. I asked them to read, if possible, a bread recipe that belongs to their family. The different vocal recordings are manipulated as soundtracks, focusing on each language at different moments.

The materials used in The Tower had significance in terms of memory and family history. I used a family book of cookery recipes, and a dress that has a particular fabric that is the same as dresses of my childhood.

Figure 10, *The Tower*, November- December 2015

Broderie anglaise is the name of the fabric of the dress I wore in this piece and in many other pieces that will come later in this research project. In 2004 - 2005 I was living in a small apartment in the Miami Biscayne Bay area when a neighbor knocked on my door one day and gave me a bag with dresses from her thrift store that were not salable and she thought would be perfect for me. I used them for a series of self-portraits. The time passed and I lost the dresses during moving, clean ups, except for one with which I felt connected from that day until now. The white broderie anglaise that makes up this dress (or nightgown) has connections in my memory of the dress made by my nonna for my communion. It is not the communion that is memorable, it is the fabric and the Necchi sewing machine with the wheel and the pedal that came with my nonna and my mother across the Atlantic Ocean and made it from the Italian Alps to Buenos Aires. The smell and the sound, the broderie anglaise in my inner world connects me to that moment and to many moments, to her home, her language and her stories.

The cookbook was El Libro de Doña Petrona[114]*, a book that has the recipes of Argentinian food, my nonna was a cook but she was an Italian immigrant in Argentina, so there were many local recipes and ingredients*

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[114] First edited in 1933, I have the 1953 version.

she didn't know, when my mother got her first paycheck as a teacher she bought this book for her mother, my nonna, a few years ago my mother gave it to me.

I made several versions of *The Tower* and I worked on presenting it in different ways. During Art Basel week in December 2015, I projected the work on a window of the Art Center South Florida. The window faced Lincoln Road, a very busy pedestrian street in Miami Beach. For three hours each day for four days, I sat in a green room and read out my family's bread recipe. Simultaneously my image appeared as the third on the window. At the same time, a red chair, which was the same as the one I sat on in the video, was on Lincoln Road, next to a table on which there were many bread recipes in different languages. Passers-by were invited to pick a recipe and read it while sitting on the chair. The complete piece was the video by-product of me giving a live reading of my recipe from the green room, and the participants on Lincoln Road reading out bread recipes or describing their own ones, which was broadcast on an Internet channel. (see Figure 11, https://vimeo.com/150347770) The images of pedestrian participation appeared intermittently on the viewer's screen, alternating with the image of my live performance; either me or the person reading would appear on the third part of the screen. The different vocal recordings were manipulated as soundtracks, creating a sense of space and giving control to each language at different moments. This last version during Art Basel was a failure, as I realized that something very intimate was lost in the process. The connectedness that I look for in my pieces was lost in this process in which I didn't have a direct dialogue with the participants. Only the viewers could see what was happening, but my work is not intended to be for viewers, it is intended to be for the participants, and I don't think that under these circumstances any of the participants (including me) were having a connective experience.

Figure 11, *The Tower*, Images of Miami beach Art Basel week, December 2015

The transformation of the participants in my work was unexpected and it traveled the following path: participants first appeared in audio form only; then they directed me in my attempt to be material for them (*Metamorphosis)*; and then they were voices in *The Tower* in which they were not present at the time of the exploration, because this work is a collaboration with women participants from different parts of the world. This made their participation have a greater presence, as their identities took the place of the subject matter of the piece because they were reading in their own languages, their own family bread recipe.

Participatory

I call this chapter 'Participatory' because in the period between November 2015 and June 2016 I started looking for participants for my SSE. In her book *Artificial Hells,* Claire Bishop, clarifies that participatory practices are pieces made with people. She also examines how the term works in contrast to other labels for work with other people:

> 'Participatory art', since this connotes the involvement of many people (as opposed to the one-to-one relationship of 'interactivity') and avoids the ambiguities of 'social engagement', which might refer to a wide range of work, from *engagé* painting to interventionist actions in mass media; indeed, to the extent that art always responds to its environment (even *via negativa*), what artist *isn't* socially engaged?[115]

The SSE I made in this period were not focused on Socially Engaged Arts or framed with political philosophy as often happens in Participatory or Socially Engaged Art (hereafter known as SEA). Bishop states:

> … theories and terms have been imported from political philosophy, but also from theater history and performance studies, cultural policy and architecture.[116]

Instead of using political philosophy or social studies theories to frame my work I used continental post-human philosophy. During the production of this body of work and while producing and editing each Exploration's by-products, the work resonated with passages of *The Birth of Tragedy.* Alexis Frasz and Holly Sidford define socially engaged artistic practices in their book *Mapping the Landscape of Socially*

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[115] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, 2012, p. 1.
[116] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, 2012, p. 7.

Engaged Artistic Practice in the following passage:

> A working definition of 'socially engaged art' is artistic or creative practice that aims to improve conditions in a particular community or in the world at large. A range of different approaches fall under this umbrella, including what sometimes is called art and social justice, artistic activism, community-based art, cultural organizing, participatory art, relational aesthetics, civic practice, and social practice art. [117]

My SSE are not situated under the umbrella of the Socially Engaged Artistic Practices, even though there are a few common elements, such as questions about the role/function of the artist and the aim to transform, in the case of SEA, the community. In my work the transformations are for the participants, including myself. My practice is Social Sculpture because it is based in plasticity, dialogue and the understanding of the tangible and invisible materials' capacities of transformation and connectedness. The difference with Beuys' Social Sculpture is that I work with participants in small, intimate settings and that I emphasize the connectedness within the plastic element in Beuys' Social Sculpture.

The SSEs I produced during this research project are short in duration, the reason for this is because I search for intimacy and intimacy creates intensity. Intensity in connectedness, intensity in awareness, intensity in stillness and silence, therefore they are shorter in length. Furthermore, in the *Family* body of work, it has most of the time a (secular) ceremonial element which also calls for intensity and for shorter pieces in duration. The longest exploration in *Participatory* lasted two hours, later in the following body of work *Family,* the explorations became much shorter in time, most of them from fifteen to thirty minutes.

When I revisit this period of SSE, I see that I entered into a period in which the energy for the following piece was most of the times created by the previous piece's failure. Christy Lange wrote in a text in 2005 for TATE, *Bound to Fail:*

> What contemporary artists (...) tap into is not the cold rationalism of conceptual artworks, but the cracks in their objective systems, or the vague, fleeting appearance of insecurity or doubt. Combined with their own conflicts about the system of the art world. What they allow us to see is not the patent success of previous works, but their occasional futility and failure.[118]

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[117] Alexis Frasz and Holly Sidford (Helicon Collaborative), 'Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practice', artmakingchange.org, 2017, p. 4.

[118] Christy Lange quoted in Lisa Le Feuvre, *Documents of Contemporary Art*: *Failure,* Whitechapel Gallery / The MIT Press, 2010, p. 136.

While Lange acknowledges the presence of failure in contemporary art practice, I argue for a much deeper engagement with the role that failure can (and does) play in my own practice. I suggest that failure is a necessity, both in general terms (i.e. as part of a creative method that learns from its mistakes and missteps) and in the more specific circumstances of my own Social Sculpture practice, as outlined here. My work is in constant dialogue with failures, and uses it as inspirational invisible material to move from one body of work to another. Conversely, when someone builds the subsequent project based on the successes of previous projects, one is at risk of entering in a mechanism of repetition situated in capitalization of the success. If that happens the transformations stop and the production of a marketable product can start. That mechanism to me is the death of research, of art, or at least of its poiesis. Instead, this mechanism of reflecting on my failures resonates with my anti-capitalist views in a market driven art world to which I do not wish to belong. I am not looking for success with which to capitalize my work, but failures which will endlessly give me invisible material to aim for transformation of the human without producing a successful object or piece for a given art fair, table, gallery, or booth.

In my process failure is the force that keeps me working. Failure of one piece is the inspiration for the next piece, failure is the invisible material that has the force to inspire and produce the following piece. Failure also goes through a transformation from what is unexpected in a piece, that turns into the initial intention of the next SSE. This transformation has a poetic dimension similar to the one described by artist Harold Szeemann in his essay *Failure as a Poetic Dimension.*

> For me failure is a poetic dimension of art. (...) it's purely a sculptural gesture; the failure itself becomes a wonderful story.[119]

Rather than a story, in my SSE failure is a poetical invisible material force that connects one piece to the following in a transformative process.

Situating my practice within Beuys' Social Sculpture ideas gave me a space to shape and mold. From my observations and failed explorations, I understood the aim to be transformation and the usage of invisible materials which led me to relate my reflections with philosophy and to put the practice into dialogue with

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[119] Harold Szeemann quoted in Lisa Le Feuvre, *Documents of Contemporary Art*: *Failure,* Whitechapel Gallery / The MIT Press, 2010, p. 194

these ideas.

For my SSE *Metamorphoses* (November, 2015, Figure 12), I went to the North Beach Senior Centre where I had arranged to work with a group of volunteers. It was my first exploration with human participants present during the event. I brought a roll of white fabric and my camera on a tripod. I introduced myself and had a short conversation about my practice with the group of people who were interested. I explained that I was an artist who was working on a PhD research project. I made them aware that the work that I wanted to produce with them was going to be part of my artistic research and followed the ethical procedure described in the Introduction. I suggested that they play with me and my fabric and asked them what they would do with us. The total group contained about eighteen people, out of whom six really engaged immediately and very spontaneously. They told me what to do, and with the white fabric they wrapped me and a chair up together. One of them took over the camera, and the group told her when to start recording. Once they were outside the camera view they indicated to me what to do from behind the camera, and while they were wrapping me, they were also telling me what to do. For example, they were specific that I should enter walking from the left, and that they were going to wrap me. Right after they would leave the scene and I had to unwrap myself in any way I could. After the action, all of them, including the ones who didn't directly participate, came to make comments, which I recorded. Those recordings are the sound on the by-product video which you can view on my Vimeo page at https://vimeo.com/145870528. My aim was to explore losing control of the action and letting the participants take over. Ultimately, I wanted to become material for them and to create an action in which they could make all the decisions and propose the direction of the work. These ideas would result in failure later.

Figure 12, *Metamorphoses*, North Beach Senior Centre November, 2015

In this piece the process led the participants to cluster into an assemblage and to have their own agency as they took decision over my actions, which resonates with the work of Adrian Howells, who, in *It's all allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells* states:

> My insistence on the spontaneous, a flexible structure and on non-scripted, improvised exchange allows for the audience-participant to contribute so much of themselves and to recognise that they have agency in the piece, which can often lead to them negotiating a total change of content and development of the piece. And this is ALL allowed.[120]

My reality in Miami Beach was certainly different from the environment in which Adrian Howells was working in Glasgow and Edinburgh. One of the key differences was that the Institution was present at all times, and the participants' own agency was limited due to the Institution's policies. Sometimes the Institution was directly in conflict with the participants' agency, at other times the participants were placed in a situation where they lacked or had lost agency. The Institution would not tell the participants, which in the case of the Senior Centre are the community, what they could or could not do, instead the Institution

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[120] Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson, *It's All Allowed: The Performance of Adrian Howells*, Intellect Live, 2016, p. 14.

administrators would call me and in the best case would tell me, for example, "you cannot take them out to the beach because of insurance policies". In the worst case they would tell me "our schedule is full, we don't have time for your activity, we have bingo time". The administrators approached me because they knew their community would not agree with them. At that point I started to experience how detrimental the institutional bureaucracy was to my SSE research project. Later, I would understand that the agency of the assemblage includes the institution, as another participant that constitutes it.

In *Metamorphosis* although the participants took some control, the fact that I was the one who arrived with the fabric and the camera and who proposed to do something with them made it impossible for me to lose control completely. Also, the question that remains open is, would they have taken the same decisions if they were working outside the Senior Centre in a non-institutional environment?

In Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8PStAfdV6w)[121] she gives herself up to the viewers, giving them control of the performance. "Ono sat motionless on the stage after inviting the audience to come up and cut away her clothing."[122] In her score for the piece, Ono writes:

> Cut Piece First version for single performer: Performer sits on stage with a pair of scissors in front of him. It is announced that members of the audience may come on stage—one at a time—to cut a small piece of the performer's clothing to take with them. Performer remains motionless throughout the piece. Piece ends at the performer's option.[123]

In a second version, Ono amended the instructions slightly, indicating that "members of the audience may cut each other's clothing. The audience may cut as long as they wish."[124] Yet still she is the one giving the viewers the instructions: this is a difference from my actions as my intent was to give myself up, becoming material and letting the participants (viewers) take decisions and direct the action, rather than giving them instructions. Most of Ono's pieces put the viewers as participants who complete her pieces, sometimes through her instructions or giving the viewers the option to participate in her installations. In the case of *Cut Piece*, Ono was inspired by the Buddha's life, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

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[121] Yoko Ono, 'Yoko Ono Cut Piece 1965', available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8PStAfdV6w, accessed 9th February 2020.

[122] Kristine Stiles, 'Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions,'in Peter Schimmel (ed.), *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, Thames and Hudson, 1998, p. 278.

[123] Yoko Ono, 'Cut Piece, 1964,' available at https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/yoko-ono-cut-piece-1964/ accessed 10th February 2020.

[124] Ibid.

Ono's inspiration for Cut Piece was the legend of the Buddha, who had renounced his life of privilege to wander the world, giving whatever was asked of him. His soul achieved supreme enlightenment when he allowed a tiger to devour his body, and Ono saw parallels between the Buddha's selfless giving and the artist's. When addressing serious issues – in this case voyeurism, sexual aggression, gender subordination, violation of a woman's personal space, violence against women – Ono invariably found means to combine dangerous confrontation with poetry, spirituality, personal vulnerability, and edgy laughter.[125]

She was giving up herself by letting the viewers take action over her garment with a violent tool, as a metaphor of the Buddha's selfless giving, but she was also making a statement that, in common with the rest of her work, is about transforming the world. She interpreted her piece differently in different moments:

> *Cut Piece* has inspired numerous (often conflicting) interpretations, including those offered by the artist herself. In 1967, for example, she described it as "a form of giving, giving and taking. It was a kind of criticism against artists, who are always giving what they want to give. I wanted people to take whatever they wanted to, so it was very important to say you can cut wherever you want to. It is a form of giving that has a lot to do with Buddhism … A form of total giving as opposed to reasonable giving …[126]

In a late version of *Cut Piece* Ono also refers to ageing, as she presented the first version of it in 1964, and more than 50 years later she keeps performing it. More recently, she has scored the work for other artists to perform it as in the case of international rockstar Peaches, who recreated the "Cut Piece" performance in *Meltdown 2002,* festival in London.[127] Ono also adds to the meanings of the piece issues that concern her at the moment. This change of interpretation as time passes also resonates with the changes and transformation of the artist that is aware of the body, and of the unfinalizability of a piece.

In *Imperfect Destruction* (Figure 13, https://vimeo.com/156415842)*,* I worked with Eileen, Camila and Carolina, all high school students from Miami Beach High. I met them through the Education Department at the Art Center South Florida where I had my artist-in-residence studio. I made a request to the education department to work with students from the Internship program and Eileen, Camila and Carolina were the ones interested. We worked together every other Saturday for about two to six hours for three

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[125] Marcia Tanner, quoted in Kevin Concannon, 'Yoko Ono's Cut Piece: From Text to Performance and Back Again'*, PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art,* 30:3, 2008, p. 87.

[126] Yoko Ono, quoted in Kevin Concannon, 'Yoko Ono's Cut Piece: From Text to Performance and Back Again'*, PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art,* 30:3, 2008, p. 88.

[127] CBC Arts, 'Peaches Recreates Yoko Ono's Legendary "Cut Piece" Performance,' available at https://youtu.be/_jbqqd2Z_qA, accessed 3rd March 2020.

months and between February and April 2016 we made six explorations.

The first time they came I suggested to them that they could choose anything they found from my studio to work with, including my sculptures. They decided to destroy one of my sculptures using my tools. After the SSE, we discussed the experience, and they gave me some instructions for editing the footage, all the discussion was recorded and they also suggested that I added another layer of sound. I edited this by-product video with them working with me as I was editing. Most of the decisions in the edit were taken by them.

Camila told me to use two vertical images. They also told me when to use slow motion in some parts in one or the other of the vertical images, as well as when to move from black and white to color or vice versa. They were commenting how they felt strange, somehow, they described themselves as having feelings of killing something, and Eileen looked for the soundtrack of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. They instructed me to slow down Hitchcock's soundtrack as well and use it as one of the sound layers. I followed all their suggestions. During that period the camera assemblage, the cluster of the students, my studio material, objects, the Art Centre, the camera the computer and myself had already an established agency. But I wasn't aware of this until later when I worked with my mother. In Chapter V I come back to this period to talk about the role of the camera and how the agency of the camera assemblage emerged.

Figure 13, *Imperfect Destruction*, Eileen, Camila and Carolina, February 2016

In *Imperfect Destruction* this piece resonates with the action itself of the destruction of the sculpture, also the dérive, in the sometimes chaotic ways they choose to destroy it, for example hammering movements with a saw, or sawing with a pair of scissors. After the exploration, during the dialogue, reason manifests through decisions in relation to editing, choosing images and sounds. These are elements of rationality, individuality and structure while the action that was in nature impulsive, un-reasonable and non-questionable manifested during the exploration. The sum of these actions, one after another, created this piece with no plot or plan, but rather a dérive.

In March 2016 Eileen, Camila, Carolina and I made *Strings Attached*, (Figure 14, https://vimeo.com/158035797). This was our second time working together and we again met in my studio, and again I told them to dérive around my studio and choose materials. I invited them to feel free to open bags or consider any materials in storage. They found bags with fibers (I had kept them from previous work I made with plaster and concrete). They liked the softness, the color and texture, and they immediately called the material "hair". I set my camera on the tripod, as always, and I also set my cell phone on the floor for a low point of view angle. In this second exploration I wanted to see what they would do if I was not present in the exploration space, so at some point I left for about 25 minutes. When I left the studio they picked the cell phone that was recording, and moved it around. I noticed during editing how their attitude changed towards the camera when I left. I can see how they were much more playful, dancing, playing with their hair and making faces to the cameras, things that they never did while I was there. This speaks volumes about how my presence determined their actions. It showed that I was not able to simply be material as had happened at the Senior Centre. They remained aware of me, so I was not able not to influence their interaction with the material, the space, themselves and the camera.

Figure 14: *Strings Attached*, Eileen, Camila and Carolina, March 2016

As I am the one facilitating the SSE, even if I do not want to have a hierarchical position, it seems it is implicit as the students changed to an excited and spontaneous attitude only when they knew I was not around. This is also evident in the chaotic and intuitive way they hung the material from the ceiling and the walls. *Strings Attached,* as they named the piece, is determined by this material they worked with, the "hair" as they called it. The way they interacted with this material influenced their decision about what they wanted to make in the following piece as during editing process for *Strings Attached* they decided they wanted to make a piece with their own hair.

Two weeks after *Strings Attached,* in April 2016, we made *Trenzadas (Braided),*
(Figure 15, https://vimeo.com/161467425). Camila, Carolina and Eileen knew from the last time we met that this time they wanted to work with their own hair, and as we met this third time they told me they wanted me to braid their hair together. Later Camila called me to sit on a chair and they wrapped me with the chair, in a similar way to what the Senior Center group did with me five months earlier with white fabric, this time in black fabric. Carolina also played with the camera zoom and angle.

Figure 15, *Trenzadas*, Eileen, Camila and Carolina, April 2016

Chaos and imagination happened as part of a playful experience. Eileen, Camila and Carolina became one creature from the three of them through being attached by their braided hair. Their bodies were facing outwards, in different directions and this made it very difficult to coordinate their movements, to travel around, and as they played they lost control of their own bodies. During very short periods of time they were just playing with their limitations in this attached condition, it sparkled as pure imagination in a chaotic situation. It was interesting to see how their bodies were having motor issues while at the same time their imagination worked together in deciding to make this piece, the assemblage worked at the invisible material level of imagination differently than at a level of bodily motion and action.

In April 2016 we made *Emotions*, (Figure 16, https://vimeo.com/163256974). Carolina was not able to come to this fourth exploration, so I worked with Camila and Eileen. Similarly, to previous explorations I asked them to walk around my studio and pick some objects that they felt either attracted to or repulsed by. During that time, I left them by themselves, as I wanted them not to feel my presence and to choose freely. They chose an orange, a can of spray paint, a scissors, paper and pencils as their materials. The order we recorded the parts is not the same order in which the parts appear in the by-product, and that change of order was requested by Camila and Eileen agreed with it. We made three different recordings, and we

called them part I, II, and III. The recording order is reflected by the number of the parts. The order of recordings is the following: Part I Eileen and Camila wanted to draw portraits of each other and then they walked to the camera using the drawings as masks and left (this part appears second in the order of viewing the by-product); Part II (which appears last in the by-product) is the part when each one of us threw the orange on the floor from left to right and proceeded to walk following the orange; Part III was recorded inside the restroom and they wanted to kill the orange and they became very aggressive to the orange. First Eileen wanted to spray paint it with golden color but she was frustrated that the orange was absorbing the paint and never got golden, as she wanted. After that with the scissors they start to stab the orange and later they cut it (this part appears first in the by-product).

In Part I, *Drawing each other,* they commented that more than trying to draw one another as an action of representation they tried to use drawing to understand what they were doing in that particular moment. I didn't pay particular attention to this until later when I came across a Shelley Sacks essay from the book *Beuysian Legacies in Ireland and Beyond,* in which she explains how Beuys was producing a curriculum for a new kind of art:

> Drawing as a means of understanding, as opposed to representation or expression, would enable students to "see the phenomenon" and come closer to the "organising ideas" in forms.[128]

This also resonates with the discussion of whether Beuys used art as a prop to explain his ideas. In her essay from the same collection, 'Anthropology, Mythology and Art: Reading Beuys through Heidegger,' Nicola Foster explores this question. She quotes Benjamin Buchloh who she suggests started the discussion which was later continued by Eric Michaud and Caroline Tisdall among others.[129] In this discussion, I agree with Foster's conclusion, when she states that the problem has been misinterpreted

> Beuys, it seems, is attempting to focus our attention on what exists, but is not always visible and seen, not because it is not possible to see it, but because our attention is focused elsewhere.[130]

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[128] Shelley Sacks, 'Social Sculpture and New Organs of Perception: New practices and new pedagogy for a humane and ecologically viable future,' in Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes and Victoria Walters, editors, *Beuysian Legacies in Ireland and Beyond, Art Culture and Politics*, University of Ulster / LIT Verlag, 2011, p. 81.
[129] Nicola Foster, 'Anthropology, Mythology and Art: Reading Beuys through Heidegger,' in Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes and Victoria Walters, editors, *Beuysian Legacies in Ireland and Beyond, Art Culture and Politics*, University of Ulster / LIT Verlag, 2011, p. 52.
[130] Ibid, p. 55.

I can see that what Eileen and Camila were doing (without knowledge of Beuys' ideas) is very close to the relation imagined by Beuys around the production of a work of art, to evoke invisible materials like thought, imagination or memory based on tangible materials. In this particular case, the making of a drawing functions as an action that connects to the other, involving observation, awareness of embodiment of the other, as a process of connection from eye-brain-hand, as a bodily understanding through senses, not only developing a new organ of perception but also putting it to work.

Part III *Killing the orange &* Part I *Drawing each other.* In *Part III, Killing the orange* they are dérive-ing in chaos, none the less they keep doing it, they keep trying to paint with spray paint and use the scissors as a knife and as I was observing them I do not know why but I felt compassion for the orange. I also observed Eileen engage in painting it to make a piece and enjoying the process. Camila was having fun when she was trying to hurt the orange but the orange was moving, almost as if the orange had intention. Part I *Drawing each other*, had a consistent intention with an intentional aesthetic form, but also it loses this when they intuitively use drawing as a tool of understanding with the senses rather than reason. In Part II, *Following the orange* we were more connected to the space, the orange, and to each other. We were inspired and in silence and this piece had a silence element within the space and the consistent form.

Figure 16: *Emotions*, Eileen and Camila, April 2016

In May 2016 we made *Plastic Waves*, (figure 17, https://vimeo.com/166809251). This piece was made with Eileen Karakurt who was the only one able to come. This SSE is performed though a series of playful interactions with plastic. In this case, Eileen chose a plastic sheet that was already there in the studio. During this process, nothing was established in advance, except the choice of the material, the space and

the camera's point of view. In the by-product Eileen described what we did. It has the sound of the plastic that we emphasized during editing as we both liked the noise of the plastic because it resonates with the noise of the ocean waves. The movement we were doing with the plastic, Eileen believed, was to pursue the sound of the plastic that made us move it as waves. The sound, as a non-human participant of the assemblage, directed us as human participants. In *Plastic Waves* I see the sound as a distinct participant as it is the only element over which we lose control. The sound dictated and controlled the movement we did with the plastic, not only during the SSE but also directed the decisions made during editing.

Figure 17: *Plastic Waves*, Eileen, May 2016

In May 2016 we made *Mute*, (figure 18, https://vimeo.com/168937705) this is the last piece we made together as after this piece the internship was completed.
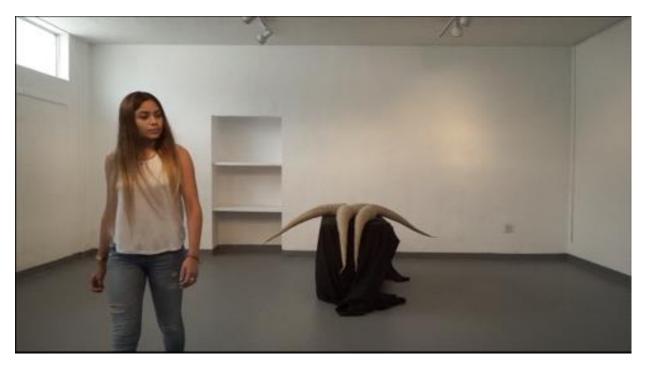
Figure 18: *Mute*, Eileen Camila and Carolina, May 2016

In this last exploration, after working on the previous five explorations together with the three of them simultaneously, I wanted to see what could happen if we could collaborate in the same piece but not at the same time, non-simultaneously affecting each other. I wanted to see how and if working together for three months would have an impact on collaborating on the same piece but separately. One of us at a time was working inside the studio. I asked each of them to review all of the video documentation from the previous experiences and write three ideas and one question for each video. As they were doing this, in another studio I prepared the camera on a tripod, a table with a black cloth and four burlap soft sculptures with a cone form that were part of one of my former installations. I explained that once they finished with the writing task they would enter the other studio one by one, and that as they entered they would find certain materials (I didn't specify what they were going to find). They were invited to do anything they wanted with the materials and the space. I also told them to take any time between ten seconds to ten minutes. I asked them not to speak to one another as they walked out of the room. I did my part first, and then Eileen, Caroline and Camila took turns in that order.

Shelley Sacks describes the space of imagination as a space with unique capacities, in which one can observe one's own thoughts and thoughts in relation to the "other:"

The most astonishing capacity related to the space of imagination is to be able to stand a bit to the side and just see what I see, and that minute we can also begin to see how I see (...). The lenses with which I see the attitudes, values, and habits of thought and when I see on this level I begin to see how I think. This is one of the most significant capacities we have because this in turn enables me to think about what I think. This whole process is one of coming home to oneself in countering what I think - my pre-judgments, prejudices, my concerns, my future scenarios; in a group, in an organization and in the social movements - it helps each person gather their own impressions and thoughts, look at them, organize them, form them and share them, and then we can listen to what is emerging from the group as a whole, just as bees work together to make honey from the individual streams of nectar that they collect, so we have to develop ways to make social honey to work together to share new social visions; this is part of the mystery of the relationship between the individual and collective action.[131]

During editing, it was interesting to see what each one did in terms of the different dialogue that each one established with the materials and the space that they encountered. Although we entered the space separately, we maintained a dialogue with one another through the materials and the space as each one found the same materials but in different places - those places where things were left by the person before. That dialogue could only be appreciated later through the video. In this last encounter, the video repositions to another role. We have a new experience as we watch the video and find out what the others did with the same materials a few minutes before or after. A few days later I asked them to write three sentences and a question about *Mute* exploration.

Eileen

1. The bean bag resembled horns for me so I used them in that way.

2. The props were unusual and random.

3. This project made us be creative and see what we can do with just a table, blanket, and 4 bean bag horns

Q: why did you choose these props?

Caroline

1. When I saw the two pieces on top of the table I thought of devil horns like Eileen suggested they were, and I want to change it into something else like building something new from something falling apart.

2. I used the blanket as support to try and keep the pieces together.

3. And I failed haha.

- What did it represent when you pushed the sheets in and out from under the table?

[131] Shelley Sacks, 'Rethinking "home" and the art of changing one's mind-set,' TEDx UCLWomen Talk, 2017, available at https://youtu.be/rE_5Yaad2-U, transcription by the author, accessed 3rd May 2020.

Camila

1. While I walked in and saw the props I thought back to what Caroline and Eileen did with them and what I could've done that was different.
2. I had to open up to new ideas thinking of what to do with only 3 props.
3. When I placed the props on the table it resembled a body figure.
- what did the beginning of the video mean when you were under the table?

They wrote those sentences after they saw the by-product and the footage while we were editing. I wonder what they could have written if they did their writing just after the exploration and without knowing what the others did.

Eileen's approach was to embody the objects, creating a body with the assemblage of her own body, the soft sculpture forms the table and the black fabric. It resonated with the former SSE *Trenzadas,* in which the three of them became one body attached with their braided hair, only this time, the new assemblage was made with the object participants attached to Eileen's body. Caroline made a new object by assembling them differently on the table. Camila seemed to start reordering and cleaning up but as she was moving the objects on the table she ended up making an animal with the objects and then she left.

What intrigued me is how all of them worked with the same objects, no one used the wall concavities that were on the back of the studio, and no one talks, sings, or screams as they did when they were all together. Even though they did different pieces they all have similar qualities. Perhaps because this was the sixth time working together and they did develop a way of acting and reacting in these situations, in a way they developed a method of doing a SSE and being part of the camera assemblage.

I did answer their questions and told them that there was no reason why I decided to be under the table during my time. I also told them that I liked to explore the sounds I was able to make with the fabric and the table, again I explain that dérive sometimes takes me to places that I don't want to explain nor understand. Perhaps it is difficult to say "I did it just because I was dérive-ing, and exploring sound." I could perceive that they were not convinced by my answer.

In this piece the relationship between the human participants is possible through the presence of the objects. The object participants hold the chaos element while the actions of the humans embody the form

nature of sculpture. In this piece the form appears in the (human) participants' search for beauty through the design of the object-space relationship, given by the human reasoning. The participants were moving the objects to "make" forms that for them had sense, they interact and dérive with the non-human participants.

Mute is a Social Sculpture exploration piece about the interactions of each participant with the objects, materials, space and the other participants without being there simultaneously. What the participants have to work with is what they find when they walk into the studio alone. Each one of the participants found the same space with the same objects in it but each time the objects were arranged differently as a result of the participant that explored them before.

Materials, Objects and Space (environment)

> In this perspective, a thing is never just an object, but a fossil in which a constellation of forces are petrified. Things are never just inert objects, passive items, or lifeless shucks, but consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, all being constantly exchanged.[132]

My understanding of materials and how to use them in my pieces has evolved over this period of research. Initially, I used materials to produce a piece, but over time I started to use fewer materials as props for the action. The final stage of my transformation in this area has been to understand materials as non-humans participants, at the same time to conceive of myself as material, and then to understand that we, all participants, cluster into an assemblage.

The participants in the Social Sculptures Explorations who were not people—the non-human, and their relation with the human participants and how they affect and relate to each other have also become a focus of my reflections. In my practice, how the non-human participates in, relates to and undergoes dialogics in relation to the human participants during SSE is a question that is raised before the encounter takes place. This question is established, when I decide on possible locations and participating materials. In the case of the latter, sometimes I provided the materials myself and focused on participants' reaction to them, and other times (for example, when working inside my studio) I let the participants dérive and choose them. In

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[132] Hito Steyerl, 'A Thing Like You and Me,' *e-flux,* 15, 2010, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61298/a-thing-like-you-and-me/, accessed 30th April 2020.

doing so, I gave control of the action to the participants as the Social Sculpture Exploration took place. In my work, materials play several roles.

During the SSE, materials are an active participant because they interact with human participants and cause different forces to develop. During reflective editing, I took the material collected in the form of video and audio into consideration through reflective practice. After editing, I had a video with sound and still photographs. The methods required for making this object drew on both of the main technical strands of my background: video work and photographs on the one hand, and sound on the other. I understand sound as a three-dimensional element. During the sound editing, I created form and space with the audio and looked for different textures to achieve the by-product of the Social Sculpture Exploration, which in turn is not conceived to be a marketable object but rather to share in this research.

As mentioned above, SSE becomes the process of transforming the self and the other, through connectedness with others and the environment. I was aware of the power relation I could easily have as the "artist who facilitates" and for that reason I was always trying to leave my presence as secondary. If possible, I was interested in allowing the participants, and reminding participants, to use the materials and myself in any way they wanted. Now I realize the paradox of doing so. As I was the one facilitating the space to do the exploration, it was almost impossible for them not to perceive me as "the artist". As much as I tried, I know that the intention of being material was a failure. At the end of this body of work I knew I needed connectedness, within the assemblage, between my invisible material of imagination (inner world), and the world of imagination of the participants (outer world) to create a space for explorations.

I started reflecting on the impossibility of one of my main premises, namely the idea of "giving myself up" during the SSE. I initially expressed this idea as an objective, and my practice was also grounded in it. I later concluded that it was not possible to give oneself up. Rather, what was possible was to go to the edge of doing so (for example, as Yoko Ono did in her "Cut Piece"). This conclusion prompted me to focus on the boundary between the possible and the impossible. I doubt that it is possible for me to truly give myself up. At that point, I started to understand failure as an important part of my process, mainly with regard to my methodology. Giving oneself up as material is impossible in a conscious state: one is always there, and one's presence will affect what the others do. Moreover, in this case, I was proposing what to do, and so the intention failed. I was the "artist" who was doing "research" and who had come from elsewhere with a proposal, which created a contradiction in itself: one cannot possibly be the "material" and be the one who

96

proposes to do something, no matter how non-structural that proposal is. In his article "Utopian Prospect of Henri Lefebvre," Nathaniel Coleman posits that "demanding the impossible may always end in failure but doing so is the first step toward other possibilities nevertheless."[133] Sometimes it is the absence or impossibility of something that actually allows us to see or understand how something functions.

One unforeseen experience I had after completing a SSE had an important impact on my plans and changed the project thereafter. After long conversations with the Jewish Community Center of Miami Beach, I met a group of seniors four times. We made a SSE with the fabrics I brought. We explored looking at each other and we recited poems we remembered by heart. At the end of our fourth SSE, I received a phone call from the center in which they informed me that someone in a position of power saw the by-products that I produced during the sessions and did not like them. The individual decided that she would not let her mother, or anyone at the senior center, participate in my work. Furthermore, she informed me that "everything [all the material collected] has to be destroyed." This happened a few weeks before my winter residency in New York City in which I had to present my research work to my supervisors and my external examiner for my transfer from MPhil to PhD. The videos were to be used in my presentation. I decided that even though the verbal communication did not prohibit me (legally) from showing the by-products, as the participants had agreed to be in the SSE, I accepted the request and used it as an opportunity to accelerate my process of transforming my practice.

These SSE were still works in progress in the stage of reflective editing. Moving on from this experience, I decided to produce my next body of work outside any institutions. I realized that I wanted to explore the transformative potential of SSE, and I wanted to produce work in a more intimate and free environment. At that moment I realized that SSE transformations cannot happen in centralized institutions, at the end of the research I further understood that the 'Institutions' were also participants and part of the camera assemblage. Trying to manage SSE in institutions with a traditional power structure was a contradiction and in the end, a failure.

Conclusion

> With my tears, go into your isolation, my brother. I love him who seeks
> to create beyond himself, and thus succumbs. [134]

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[133] Nathaniel Coleman, 'Utopian Prospect of Henri Lefebvre,' *Space and Culture,* 16:3, 2013, p. 162.
[134] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* edited by Bill Chapko, 2010, https://holybooks-lichtenbergpress.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Thus-Spoke-Zarathustra-by-F.-Nietzsche.pdf, accessed on 15th February 2020, p. 56.

As I said previously failure had become the inspiration and impetus to move from one body of work to another. Failure is the invisible material for a transformation of the practice going forward. For example, while at the Senior Center someone told me that "I wouldn't let my mother participate in your… whatever it is what you are doing". In response, I asked myself why not? Then I decided to do a SSE with my own mother.

The conclusion of this section of the research, and this part of the thesis, is an accumulation of failures, and this suggests the way in which to go to the next body of work which is discussed in the next chapter. The failure of working with Institutions brought me to the decision of working in the open air, in my studio or in my home. Understanding failure as invisible material made me recognize the material as participants and myself as yet another participant searching for transformation. I decided in response to these factors, to work with my family, in intimate settings.

> The early Greek theoria was not a private matter, an individual intellectual or
> professional path leading away from home and tradition. It was, instead, a circular
> journey, beginning and ending in a rootedness and commitment to one's native
> place, family and community, and supported by them every step of the way. Theory,
> the journey to new and more comprehensive insight, and practice, the living of daily
> life, were not divorced. Theorizing did not lead only outward and forward, in the linear
> style of modern thought, but back to the hearth and the polis.[135]

Chapter IV

Family

Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce *Family,* the last body of work for this practice research project, which was made between March and November 2017. In November - December 2015, I made *The Tower,* which is described in Chapter II, it is the first piece in which I used family as material for the piece. Furthermore, something that I didn't mention in the Chapter II description is that the book from which I am reading my family bread recipe is my grandmother's cookbook. In January 2016 I made a piece with my, then six-year-old son, Dante, *Memories II, his memories* (https://vimeo.com/147497876) which can be considered the first *Family* piece of my research, but when I did it was not my intention to make a body of work about my family. I can now see that this theme was apparent in early work, but it was not as purposeful as it became in the later work. Over these years, I worked with several members of my family and there are a number of explorations in this body of work. My mother and I met six times in my studio in Miami Beach in the spring of 2017, then she went back to Argentina. In July-August 2017, we met again in Berlin, Germany and Madrid, Spain. Another piece took place in a Berlin community garden with my brother and the last two pieces of this body of work were made in November 2017 with my sister in Norman's green belt in Norman, Oklahoma, USA. In one of these pieces, unexpectedly, my niece and the dogs also participated.   Although I made those other works , in this chapter, I will only concentrate on the work I have done with my mother as while it was the most difficult it exemplifies learning and connectedness, awareness and the atmosphere of silence and stillness and is the most fully realized of my family Explorations.

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[135] Chris Thompson, *Felt: Fluxus, Joseph Beuys, and the Dalai Lama*, University of Minnesota Press, 2011, p. 51.

As I explained in Chapter III, when I finished the second body of work, *Participatory, after* a series of impossible destructions and failures I concluded that working in institutions was in contradiction to the SSE I was exploring. Even though there were several Explorations that brought about transformation and revealed emergent properties from the participants, I decided to look for different settings. I needed a more intimate setting, an experience of one to one work. Dr. Rachel Zerihan in her Study Room Guide, *One to One Performance* defines one to one as:

> Quite simply, "One to One" or "One on One" or "Audience of One" are all terms used to describe a performance that invites one audience member to experience the piece on their own. Such performance interactions generally last for around five or ten minutes, though they have been known to take any time from one minute to one hour. Generally they are site specific/based performances that can be described as drawing on live art aesthetics. What I find most exciting about One to One performance is the opportunity it affords the spectator to immerse themselves in the performance framework set out by the practitioner. This can be a seductive / scary / liberating / boring / intimate prospect and an even more intensive experience.[136]

In my one to one SSE the "other" does not have the audience role but rather the participant role, as in my previous *Participatory* work. Particularly the participants are my family members as I wanted to experience connectedness and transformation with them. Being with members of my immediate family in a one-on-one Social Sculpture Exploration had an element of intimacy that I wanted to explore. In his work *Foot Washing for the Sole* (https://youtu.be/k_a8PDfErtA)*,* Adrian Howells works in an intimate situation. Here he describes his piece:

> In the one-to-one performance piece that ensued, I simply washed, dried, anointed with oils, massaged and kissed the participant's feet. Intimacy was engendered not only through the touching of the feet but also through the silence and stillness that surrounded the performance, as well as my supposed 'act of servility' (...). I found I was afforded the opportunity to become more in 'touch' with myself.[137]

The intimacy that appears in the SSE made during this period emerged mostly during the 'silence and stillness' just as Howells described above. Those silent moments with each member of my family were full of invisible materials, with memories and feelings entangled. The plethora of invisible materials made us break the silence and dérive in order to manage the amount of overwhelming feelings. Eventually after

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[136] Rachel Zerihan, *One to One Performance, a Study Room Guide*, Live Art Development Agency, 2009, p. 3.
[137] Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson, *All is Allowed: The Performances of Adrian Howells*, Intellect Live, 2016, p. 189.

several explorations the intimacy became less chaotic, but nonetheless difficult to articulate. Howells' comment that the intimacy afforded him the opportunity to become more in touch with himself is something that resonated in *Family* SSE more than in the participatory work. When I worked with participants, I did not know that it was hard for me to share silence and stillness. The lack of the silence and stillness in the atmosphere during the participatory explorations always left me with the sensation that something was not coming through. I was not aware of it then, but I became aware as I was reflective editing and writing and realized I had probably decided to work with intimacy as an element due to the failure of creating silence and stillness with strangers.

My Family

I grew up in a family of four siblings, we all lived with our mother, an educator, my father (an architect), and our 'nonnos' (my mother's parents). My nonno's house was underneath ours because my father built our house and theirs. It was a creative house full of light, windows and stairs. At one point my nonnos planted a grapevine that grew all the way up to our house. From that grapevine we made wine and vinegar together. When I was almost five years old my nonno passed away and a month later my sister was born. My nonna needed company and my mother needed to focus on the newborn, so I moved downstairs with my nonna. My nonna was born in 1904, and my nonno in 1895. They had my mother very late, just as my mother had me late. While living with my nonna, I learned how to cook and bake, how to use her sewing machine with the wheel, how to crochet and knit, and how to step on grapes to make wine (sometimes vinegar). I had so much fun doing all these crafts and activities that when my friends would come to play, I would often choose to stay with her. In the middle of the city capital of Argentina, these activities were not common. I was learning things that few learned in my generation in Buenos Aires City. I always felt and still feel that I am misplaced within my generation. My nonna lived through the first and second world wars, and in her mind a third one could come at any time. I believed she was preparing me to survive it. My interest in material and transformation was born then, as we would cook and knead bread together in her home.

My nonnos came from little towns in the Italian Alps. Gressoney St Jean & La Trinite, in Vall D' Aosta. Gressoney are two towns that belong to the Walser culture, a German culture that traveled to that area during the 1100s-1200s from what is now Bavaria, to what is now the Monte Rosa. They walked up on the mountains and founded six Walser towns on the Alps. Their language is an old German one called Tich. I

grew up listening to Piedmontese, Tich and Italian abd to stories from other times and places as we handcrafted clothes, shoes, food, and more. Dialogue and transformation of materials were always together. To me they naturally belonged to each other.

On the other side of my family, my father's parents, or my 'abuelos' lived four blocks away from our house. My father's father, an Italian Genovese, born in 1905 came when he was a young boy, before the world wars, and ended up in the Argentinian Province of Entre Rios in a small town called Gualeguaychu. He was a blue-eyed gaucho, that the people of the town chose as their 'Juez de Paz', (Peace Judge) probably because he could read and write. He had children (my father and his sister) with a woman, my abuela, (that already had a child). She did not know where she came from or if she did, she did not share this with us, as she was adopted. I do not know if it was a nice family that adopted her or a family that kept her as a servant as my abuela did not talk much. She spent most of the time in silence, and she communicated with her family with her deep gaze. She was an analphabet, except she learned how to read recipes, measurements, and ingredients. She was an excellent cook of Argentine criollos (gauchos and natives) foods. For me cooking was the first contact with plasticity at work.

Inside my home our world was rich in cultures and without prejudices, while in the external world we were immersed in the Argentina of the dark years of the 70's, in which anyone could disappear at any time. I was born in 1972 the year that Juan Domingo Peron returned to Argentina, shortly after in 1973 Augusto Pinochet killed President Salvador Allende in Chile and in 1974 Peron died. My memories start from about 1976, the year that Jorge Rafael Videla illegally and forcefully took the presidency and started a Government of State's Terrorism against the people of Argentina. In my day and night dreams I was always in my nonnos and mother's town in the Alps, a place that became real in my imagination, my secret place in the world. Later in my teens, when democracy came back to Argentina, I started to travel to the town and all over Italy.

How could I begin doing research about material and participant's plasticity without going back to my family and exploring with them? I left my home during my teens. I started to travel, having periods in Argentina in which I studied but I never shared my family home again for more than just a few days over extended periods of time. Reconnecting with them was a challenging task to undertake.

Around the time I started to think about making more intimate and connected work with my family, my mother arrived at Miami Beach for a visit and vacation. I decided to start the work with her. A few days after her arrival, I told her that I wanted to do some work with her for my research, so we started going to my studio at South Florida/Art Center.

During the explorations with my mother, I realized that the situation of being with her in my studio as opposed to at any other place was an opportunity to be aware of what was happening, to be aware of the connectedness, by developing an atmosphere of silence and stillness. To be with one's own mother is not unusual, it is a common situation, the difference in the six SSE we made during that first period of working together is that we were in a non-familiar space, an art studio. We went there wearing specific clothing that we chose together, I had my dress (nightgown) that I used in *The Tower* and in the Berlin and NYC versions of *Embodying Space,* made of broderie anglaise (in Chapter III I tell the story of the dress) and for my mother, I bought a short blouse made with broderie anglaise. We also had the tripod and the camera. We did not have a pre-set "something to do," rather we agreed to be there, to be aware of each other's presence and to experience the moment, the situation, and dérive. The difference between being in the studio and going out, for example, for an ice cream with my mother was the experience of awareness and connectedness and those were my thoughts during the experience. On the Social Sculpture Research Unit website, they define the methodology of Social Sculpture as an exploration and awareness practice of everyday life that connects our inner and outer worlds:

> ... we explore a range of connective practices and approaches that can help to develop 'new organs of perception' and to bridge the gap between information and real awareness, information and action: practices that begin with our thinking and our values, with the world around us and with our everyday lives as starting points; practices that connect inner and outer worlds.[138]

During SSEs I used the approach of awareness and connectedness with the world around us and inside us, and an intention of exploring these connections with no reasoning but rather by developing the senses through the 'new organs of perception.' This gave the element of poiesis to the time I spent with my mother. Among other things my mother has always been a lover of plants, trees and forests, and she is always

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[138] Social Sculpture Research Unit, 'Our Methodologies,' social-sculpture.org, http://www.social-sculpture.org/category/our-focus/our-methodologies/, 2012, accessed 6th February 2020.

concerned with human relations as a core of living, a true believer in the power of love. An educator who always explored new pedagogies through the arts for teaching children, she was among the first educators to apply the Montessori method in Buenos Aires. She always said that no matter what an educator does, without love it does not work properly. Having these theories during the 1970s in Argentina was dangerous and could be interpreted as "subversivo" enough to 'disappear.'[139]. My mother's position on education resonates with Shelley Sacks when she states that connectedness is about developing the skill of hearing. When she describes the University of the Trees, Sacks writes:

> Standing in the forest one day, I suddenly realized that I was in a 'university' and that if one could develop the patience and the skill to hear, see and understand, one would find that all the trees were teachers.[140]

During my childhood I always heard my mother talking about building bridges with other humans and the environment, using poetry to teach children, and valuing all the arts, other humans and nature. Perhaps her vocabulary was naive, but the core of her daily speech is similar to the ideas of Sacks's connectedness as well as Beuys' and Steiner's understanding of inspiration and active listening as body senses that help us to be connected.[141] In *Death Keeps Me Awake,* Wolfgang Zumdick explains empathy as an element of education:

> Educating our inspiration leads to self-awareness of the world. It is not only oneself that deserves such attention, but other human beings and things as well. (...) What is crucial in this is that empathy for the other is never lost. Inspiration arises primarily from the ability to inhabit the feeling-world of others. To do this one has to learn how to enter the emotional experience of others and allow it to move in our inner world. This 'active listening' involves a state of contemplation

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[139] "Thus, in the name of national security, thousands upon thousands of human beings, usually young adults or even adolescents, fell into the sinister, ghostly category of the desaparecidos, a word (sad privilege for Argentina) frequently left in Spanish by the world's press'. Seized by force against their will, the victims no longer existed as citizens. Who exactly was responsible for their abduction? Why had they been abducted? Where were they? There were no precise answers to these questions: the authorities had no record of them; they were not being held in jail; justice was unaware of their existence. Silence was the only reply to all the habeas corpus writs, an ominous silence that engulfed them. No kidnapper was ever arrested, not a single detention centre was ever located, there was never news of those responsible being punished for any of the crimes." Ernesto Sabato, from *Nunca Mas (Never Again)*, a book and research report that catalogues thousands of cases of 'desaparecidos" by the State Terrorism 1976-1983 in Argentina, quoted at http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/english/library/nevagain/nevagain_002.htm, accessed 7th April 2020.
[140] Holok Chen, 陳可樂 , 'Change makers in The University of Trees – an interview with Shelley Sacks,' *Medium.com*, 2018, https://medium.com/@holokchen/change-makers-in-the-university-of-trees-an-interview-with-shelley-sacks-cb5bebf63cf8, accessed 26th May 2020.
[141] Wolfgang Zumdick, *Death Keeps Me Awake: Joseph Beuys and Rudolf Steiner Foundations of their Thought*, Spurbuchverlag, 1995.

in which personal responses to observations are muted and stilled. (...) The contemplator has to become all eye, all ear, activating the inner senses - the sense of rhythm, of life, of balance - enabling the one contemplating to become one with the other, with the object of contemplation.[142]

Steiner's understanding of inspiration and its relation to awareness and empathy were ideas that influenced Beuys and resonate with my mother's everyday discourse as an educator and human. My mother's thinking on teaching, education and pedagogy is relevant, her notions are important because they resonated during our work together. It appears in how she and I work together, whether it is with the sign we encounter with letters (*Meeting in Progress)* or in how I prepare('teach'?) her. I intentionally do not bring planning into the action as I want to keep the flow of dérive method and that is the space that I prepare us to be in. The preparation allows us familiarity with the space and the camera. We work together in an assemblage to be able to be within and with the camera. She learns how to be with the camera, and as I observed her, I learn too. There is a generational shift, from her being teacher to me being 'teacher' within this space and situation. What is similar between us, are the innovative methods of not leading too much, which is teaching by not guiding, or not telling but instead leaving space for experiencing and observing. The question of teaching is not part of this project, but it is in the weave of the work. Beuys' Social Sculpture has a stronger pedagogical presence but like mine, it is not hierarchical.

Mother

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[142] Ibid, p.56.

Figure 19, *Ella y Yo,* ACSF, March 2017

*Ella y yo, (*figure 19 https://vimeo.com/230307312) is the first piece my mother and I did together, and it was very difficult because I did not want to tell her what we were doing to avoid setting preconditions for her. I told her that we were going to do a piece together, but I did not say much else about it. After that, I set the camera on the tripod and I simply told her that we were going to sit on the bench that we found in the studio that I had requested to work in. We just sat there; I could sense my own as well as my mother's feelings of the oddity of the situation. I became conscious of the fact that I was not able to help her. She seemed to be comfortable and started talking about life, family. I thought she needed to talk. But the camera made us aware of "the other" besides her and me, which is the potential viewer that will be able to see the by-product video later. The camera was there, watching us. The camera meant that this situation was not only about her and me; the camera represented the possibility of exposure to others (and this other could be exposure to judgement). Perhaps she needed to talk because she wanted to have her thoughts recorded. My mother did not ask about the camera, and we pretended to ignore it. By being able to observe her, I realized that I was having issues with the camera's presence, and it was at that point that my reflection focused on the presence of the camera in my work, and the transformations that the camera had been involved in since the beginning of this project journey. I came to the realization the camera was more than just a participant and the next chapter of this thesis will discuss the camera as a colleague, and the agency of the camera assemblage.

Figure 20*, Meeting in Progress I, Temor* , April 2016

Meeting in Progress I, Temor (April 2017, figure 20, https://vimeo.com/219289746) was the second exploration with my mother. We found a small sign board that said, "meeting in progress" (in *Ella y yo* this same sign was present, but it was in this piece that the sign participated more actively). I brought this sign into the frame because it was in the room in that particular and appropriate moment. Although I could have discarded it, I realized that it was a non-human participant, that was there as part of the environment and I recognized it as I was dérive-ing. Even though there were more objects in the room, this one became a participant because there was a relation between it and me. When I looked at it, it sparked my imagination inspiring me to make something with it. If that sparkle would have happened with other objects, they would have become participants as well, but on that particular day at that particular moment, it was only this small sign. Something similar happens with people. Some people decide to participate because they connect to something, an object or a person that will be part of the exploration. Sometimes some people remain sitting as observers rather than participants. Some people even leave and do not observe, and it is similar with objects. In terms of the sign's form and its content, it was what gave a starting point to our piece in which

not only the body and the elements of nature (if the piece is outdoors) are recognized, but also human-made objects. The sign had a statement written on it in moveable letters, and it also had the characteristic of giving us the possibility to change that statement. My mother turned the sign around and took the letters, and she suggested that we look for words to make from those limited letters. My mother, as a teacher, has had a lifelong love of letters, words and the alphabet. So, we did. My mother took the lead, and I followed her. The sign with movable letters connected my mother with the black board that as a teacher, she used for decades. The first word that she made was Temor, which means "fear" in Spanish. We entered a silent dialogue through the words we could put together as the sign had only the letters contained in the phrase "meeting in progress." *Temor,* (fear) was the right word for that moment. A process of connectedness and transformation began. The camera was there, but it did not change our attitudes as much as it did before, perhaps because the board was between us and the camera so there was another non-human in the room that was interacting with us, and that put the camera on the other side of it from us. The board and its letters started a dialogue between my mother and I, the board, and the camera, as part of the camera was hidden by the board from my point of view or my face was hidden by the board from the camera's point of view. The list of words we made were Si no,Temor, Pense, Sin Temor, and Meeting in Progress. In the same order the translation is: Yes No, Fear, I thought, Without Fear, and for the last one we left the sign *as* we encountered it with "Meeting in Progress".

Figure 21, *Meeting in Progress II,* March 2017

Meeting in Progress II, April 2017, (figure 21 https://vimeo.com/213439845) is the result of the calm connectedness between my mother and me. The silence itself opened a space for us to become connected. The fact that we had our backs to the camera allowed us to be more sensitive to what was happening within us. Without words, the transformative SSE continued in silence or more accurately continued with us without talking, as there were lots of sounds in the building or coming from the street. We became aware of and connected with sounds and the environment through our bodies and that allowed us to be connected. We were an assemblage with all that surrounded us and all that was within us. There were movements between body organs, sensorial connections with feelings mixed with pieces of memories. There was a sense of chaos, and that seemed to be the way it should be, but that chaotic mix is extremely difficult to articulate in writing. As regards some of the things that happened, I do not even have a name or a word to refer to them. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* writes about a dream state that somehow explains this inexplicable and raw, uneditable mix of thoughts, memories and sensorial elements:

> For I often dream about her (I dream only about her), but it is never quite my mother: sometimes, in the dream, there is something misplaced, something excessive: for example, something playful

or casual - which she never was; or again I know it is she, but I do not see her features (but do we see, in dreams, or do we know?): I dream about her, I do not dream exactly her. And confronted with the photograph, as in the dream, it is the same effort, the same Sisyphean labor: to reascend, straining toward the essence, to climb back down without having seen it, and to begin all over again.[143]

In my exploration I did not dream about my mother in the same way, as we were present physically and connected but the awareness of being present and connected was at that time overwhelming to me. I was present and connected with my mother and a plethora of fragmented memories from both life and dreams were mixed. That internal chaos is intense, it is profound, but it is ineffable.

Later when I was editing without my mother's presence, I experienced the 'Sisyphean labor' that Barthes refers to. I repeatedly watched the videos of the Explorations my mother and I had made and tried to produce a sentence that would describe what we had experienced, but every time I was about to, the stone rolled down and I had to start the work of climbing again. Finally, I realized that an unplanned secular ceremony was unexpectedly happening in our SSEs. There was only one repeated element, the clothing we were wearing. Together we were creating a ceremony, and that was all.
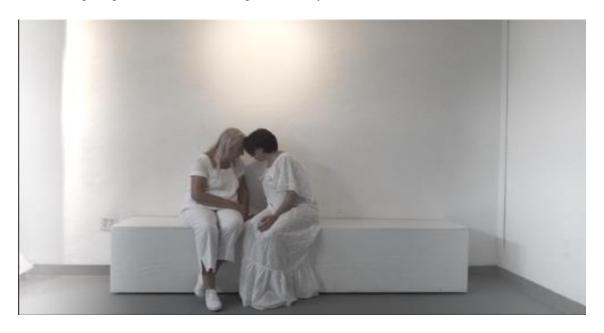

Figure 22, *Conectadas*, April 2017

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[143] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980, p. 66.

In *Conectadas*, April 2017, (figure 22 https://vimeo.com/219305054), we were able to create the atmosphere of silence and stillness which made us profoundly connected. Things came out in a wordless dialogue. We sat, and both of us were calm and connected to one another, acknowledging an inner space with no identity or center to hold on to. Being aware of the presence of the camera caused us to stay within its frame, the camera created the sense that it needed a slow pace, more time, and it was during that time that my mother and I connected, and at last I started sensing the camera assemblage. I cannot say that the camera had an intention, but I can say that its presence influenced my pace, it reminded me that I am there in that moment and space because I want to find something. I need to be aware of every detail with all my senses and that requires connectedness. In my work, the camera is a non-human participant that with its presence conditioned our process of connectedness, first through our being aware and somehow scared of the possibility of the judgment of "the other" through the camera, which made us uncomfortable. As the encounters went forward and we became more used to the camera's presence, we slowly took more time for it (the camera became a participant), and this was when our process of inner connection took place.
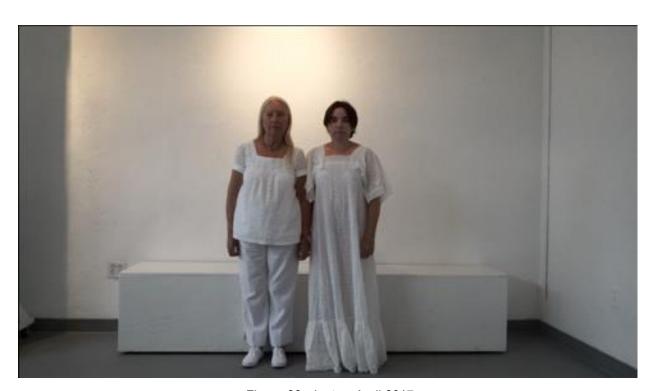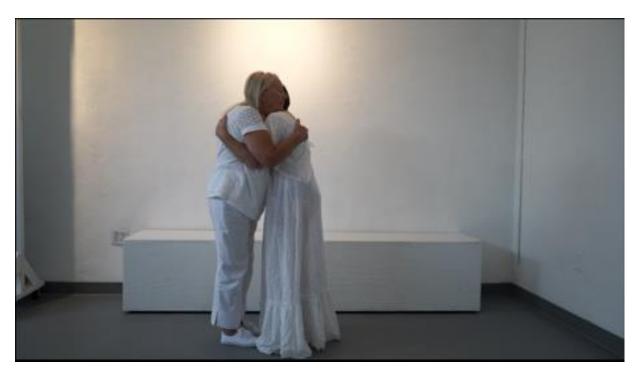

Figure 23, *Juntas,* April 2017

Figure 24, *Transformation*, April 2017

In *Juntas ("Together",* figure 23 https://vimeo.com/219301790 and in *Transformation,* figure 24 https://vimeo.com/219298134), April 2017, it is clear that we are working together with the camera and the space. We are aware of this experience, we interrelated with the environment, the in-situ objects and the camera which determined the angle and the point of view "the other" would have. The camera's recording/memory capacity gave us the ability to revisit that moment. The transformation and connectedness didn't only happen between my mother and me but between her, me and all the non-human participants. *Together* and *Transformation* both became another moment that came naturally from within us as camera assemblages. They are the culmination of our experience. Where do I finish? Where does she begin? Is it important? The connection is all that matters, without line, only forms, changing forms, breathing forms, invisible materials connected.

Figure 25 *Pizarra Blanca*, April 2017

Pizarra blanca ("Whiteboard" figure 25, https://vimeo.com/220463819*)* is a piece I did after my mother left

Miami and she went back to Argentina. I still had the need to return to the same space where we shared

silence, as if I left something in there, or as if I could find words to better understand the previous

encounters with my mother. I used the same dress and connected with the non-human participants and

with what my mother left there. This time I found a white board and markers, so I spent time drawing

shapes and lines as a brain / body exercise. In *U-topos: Beuys' Social Sculpture as a Real-Utopia and Its*

Relation to Social Practice Today, Wolfgang Zumdick writes about blackboards.

> For hundreds of years, the blackboard was a simple tool that could be used in a very sustainable
> way. It allowed one to introduce and develop ideas while others witnessed the process of how
> these ideas came into form and how drawings came into being. The blackboard captures the
> power of our imagination; it is about *us*. Humans have the ability to create things in their minds.
> They are able to make images and to think. They do not only always have to look at something that
> is in front of them; they have an inner space in which to navigate, to feel, and think, to make
> decisions and at the same time to reflect. Human beings have the unique ability to form and create
> images in themselves that are able to shape life and reality in a conscious way.[144]

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[144] Wolfgang Zumdick, 'U-topos: Beuys' Social Sculpture as a Real-Utopia and Its Relation to Social Practice Today,' 2017, available at http://wolfgang-zumdick.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Zumdick_ALP_7-7-15.pdf, accessed 6th March 2020, p. 135.

But for me the black board is also an object that I always associate with my mother, as in many memories, and photographs she is next to a black board. In this case what I found was a modern white board and I tried to recover something I thought was lost in that space, with my body using the board. I tried to have a bodily understanding of the explorations, but I failed. Zumdick also makes a point about the blackness of the blackboard:

> A salient feature of a blackboard is that it is a *black* board. When one looks at it, one looks into a *black* space. Not all blackboards are black; green ones especially have been introduced in schools and universities and Beuys used green boards as well. Still, the archetypal blackboard remains black. Its blackness above all has the special quality of providing space at the same time it creates space. A white background cannot create its equivalent. Moreover, using white chalk on the black surface leads the observer immediately into the third dimension. It seems a bit like projecting one's thinking into a space. Maybe this was one of the reasons why Beuys more or less intuitively used the blackboard with greater frequency as the necessity of introducing the ideas of Social Sculpture became more important for him.[145]

After reading Zumdick's article I asked myself if the whiteness of the board I used was preventing me from my intention of finding what I thought was lost, something that I cannot explore as I do not have access to the same studio anymore. But what I can say is that the white board did not have the same feeling as the black board and chalk in my memories. The black board also carries, to me, a connection with the photography negative-positive process. The questions of whether I could find something in that studio with a black board will remain unanswered, but an unexpected answer comes up which is a confirmation of the participation of the objects in my work, as a change on the surface by color or texture changes the result of the piece. The object is so important that one board will not give the same experience as another board, neither one or another chair and so on. It resonates with the dialogics between my previous work, as an object maker and new practice of a practice-based research Social Sculpture practitioner, described in Chapter II. As a sculpture maker I was very aware and connected with the materials and the inherent qualities that each specific material has and although I did not make the black nor the white board, I realized the qualities of the materials are specific, and they bring something into the work.

This brought me to another reflection which is mindset. My tendency to generalize, 'all boards are the same' was a prejudgment in my mindset. As part of this process of reflection I looked for a talk Shelley

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[145] Ibid, p. 135-136.

Sacks gave in which she explains how important it is to allow for "mind shifts" to occur in our mindsets. One of the aims of her Social Sculpture practice is 'to explore and reshape values, attitudes, and habits of thought'. This is aided, she claims, because,

> luckily we have an inner workspace, a rent free studio that we carry on our shoulders, it is the space of imagination and transformation; here in the space we have a direct experience of our agency and discover where mind shifts can take place.[146]

As I was finalizing this Chapter, in February 2020, I asked my mother to send me something about those explorations we did together. I said, is there anything you want to comment on? I was worried she did not remember all we did as three years had passed, and I did not want her to feel uncomfortable if she did not remember much and I purposely did not want to use words that could condition her response, like 'memory', 'remember', or 'feelings'. I only asked her to tell me something that came to her mind, to dérive in it, and was clear that whatever she told me would be fine and good. She sent me a voice message on WhatsApp. Here it is translated:

> "I could feel, while I was dressed in white as you were as well, that anything could happen, either pain, joy or sadness, anything, even also the distance, we are always together for something, the connection between us will never break, because I am your mother and you will always be my first daughter, even when we are distant and beyond the distances, even when we see things differently, there is an invisible essence that will always unify us, connect us. That is what I felt when we were making that work, both of us together dressed in white"[147]

 Her memory of the SSE shows that she was connected and aware, and that the effects of the SSE are both transformational and poiesistic.

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[146] Shelley Sacks, 'Rethinking "home" and the art of changing one's mind-set,' TEDx UCLWomen Talk, 2017, available at https://youtu.be/rE_5Yaad2-U, transcription by the author, accessed 3rd May 2020.

[147] Transcript from whatsapp voice message: "Yo senti vestida de blanco y vos de blanco, que cualquier cosa que pase, dolorosa o alegria o tristeza, o lo que sea, o la misma distancia, siempre estamos unidas por algo, jamas el lazo, entre vos y yo jamas se rompera, porque yo soy tu mama, vos sos mi primera hija y siempre a pesar de vivir distantes, a pesar de ser distintas, de ver cosas distintas, de sentir cosas distintas, pero hay una esencia invisible que siempre siempre nos va a unir, eso es lo que yo senti, cuando estabamos haciendo ese trabajo, las dos juntas vestidas de blanco" Victoria Welf. [01/27/2020]

Figure 26, *Un abrazo,* Reichstag Berlin, August 2017

Un Abrazo, (figure 26, Berlin, https://vimeo.com/230335325) was made a few months after we finished the Miami Beach series of work. Doing it was much easier for both of us, and for me this was a confirmation of the transformative effects from the previous work, as we could connect immediately and in the middle of a busy street. This exploration was made in Berlin during rush hour at the Reichstag. The exercise of my mother and I hugging each other and being aware of and connected to the other's presence made an interesting contrast with the busy pedestrian street next to the Reichstag, where we were. The Reichstag an epitome of institution was behind us, surrounding us, yet we exercised our liberty, outside and in contrast to it. My mother and I hug, yet in this piece the Reichstag was also a participant as part of the cluster of the camera assemblage. The pedestrians, a mix of tourists and people on their work routine were juxtaposed with my mother and myself in silence, attached still bodies, aware of ourselves and our connection.

This piece resonates with South Korean, performance and conceptual artist Kimsooja whose pieces are meditative and repetitive everyday actions, specifically her piece *A Needle Woman, 1999-2001*

(https://art21.org/artist/kimsooja/). In this video one can see her from the back in a very crowded street surrounded by pedestrians passing by her. She explains in *Art21*, "I am using the pedestrians passing moments, as a slow motion, as if they are webbed through my body as a needle".[148]

MAM Associate Curator Rene Morales describing her work writes:

> A woman stands on the street, immersed amid a torrent of passers by, utterly motionless -- a needle sewing through the fabric of humanity. With a simple, stoic gesture, Kimsooja vividly embodies the struggle to preserve a place for the individual within society, using her body as a conduit for critical questioning. This struggle is a perennial one, but by situating herself in an array of urban centers that span the planet, she imbues it with the tenor of contemporaneity: for if there is a single experience that can be said to exemplify the urgent conditions of today's world, it is the state of being engulfed by the "global city."[149]

Kimsooja's simple actions connect to my experiences of creating SSEs with my mother. As people go about their daily business Kimsooja stays silent and still and aware of and connected to her environment. In hugging my mother quietly in the middle of the busy Berlin streets during rush hour, I experienced how quiet my body became when my chest was in contact with her chest, the skin disappeared, and we were one. My only previous experience of this disappearance of the chest and melting with the other was with my son, when newborn he was placed in my chest, and in some memories of this feeling from my early childhood when my mother hugged me, and during those few minutes that the hug lasted I felt I was webbed through my mother's chest to the rest of humans. I was attached with my mother and all the movement and noise around became an atmosphere of calm sounds. My perception of myself was melted with the rest.

Conclusion

Working with members of my family allowed me to reach silence and stillness, I realized that this atmosphere of stillness and silence are the elements required to reach connectedness and awareness. It is

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[148] Kimsooja, '"A Beggar Woman" & "A Homeless Woman"' 2000-2001, available at https://art21.org/artist/kimsooja/, accessed 24th October 2019. Transcription by the author.
[149] Rene Morales, *Kimsooja: A Needle Woman,* 2012, available at http://trishclark.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/3.-A-Needle-Woman-2012.pdf, accessed 24th October 2019.

only with connectedness and awareness that one can have a transformational experience during an SSE. The assemblage of participants, human and non-human, environment, silence, stillness, connectedness and awareness bear the emergent property of invisible transformation.

> The notion of *active listening*. This capacity requires inner presence, clarity of thought, and conscious withholding of judgment or prejudice. It is a practice that derives from a phenomenological tradition closely linked to Beuys through Goethe, Rudolf Steiner, and Steiner's teacher, Franz Brentano, and shares certain principles with spiritual traditions such as Buddhism.[150]

This is a shift in my practice that is not conclusionary, but it is especially important that I arrived at silence and stillness during the process of working with my mother. I did not plan for silence and stillness, and now I know it is necessary to reach connectedness and awareness. Shelley Sacks, in her project University of the Trees, sees how being with the trees as non-human participants we can learn from them by being there and having "patience and the skill to hear."[151] How can we do it if not with stillness and silence?

Usually the expectation of a 'family' is being busy and noisy and in fact it was the case of mine. It is surprising that these two elements, stillness and silence, that I now know are required, came out from my mother and I working together and teaching and learning from each other, especially because I cannot recall stillness and silence between us in the past. From here on, stillness and silence will be required elements of my SSE practice.

It was during this body of work that I realized the importance of the role of the camera, how it was much closer than any other non-human participants. The camera has a unique role in my work, that is closer to being something between a family member and a colleague. The intimacy I reached during this period, the

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[150] Wolfgang Zumdick, 'U-topos: Beuys' Social Sculpture as a Real-Utopia and Its Relation to Social Practice Today,' 2017, available at http://wolfgang-zumdick.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Zumdick_ALP_7-7-15.pdf, accessed 6th March 2020, p. 151.

[151] Holok Chen, 陳可樂 , 'Change makers in The University of Trees – an interview with Shelley Sacks,' *Medium.com*, 2018, https://medium.com/@holokchen/change-makers-in-the-university-of-trees-an-interview-with-shelley-sacks-cb5bebf63cf8, last accessed 26th May 2020.

stillness and the silence, made me aware that SSE were being determined by the constant camera presence.

During the next chapter I will be reviewing all my research from the beginning to the end with a particular focus on understanding the camera as colleague, the bodies of work as camera assemblages, and how the agency of the camera assemblage emerged from the cluster of all participants.

Barthes' *Camera Lucida* is a lamentation for his mother. An anatomy of the grief of the surviving singular I/eye, *Camera Lucida* details the search for the perfect image, the *punctum* of the photograph which will return her to him. Employing public and "private" photographs, Barthes educates his eye to see that he has not seen what he wants to see *and* to look again. This double action, the recognition of not-seeing and the will to look again, is the lure of the image repertoire. The double action confirms the distinction between the gaze and the eye: the eye, ever hungry, ever restless, temporarily submits to the law of the gaze, the ocular perspective which frames the image, sees what is shown and discovers it to be "lacking." Not quite the thing one wants/needs/ desires/to see. And what is that thing? An image of self-seeing that is complete. An impossible image precisely because the law of the gaze prohibits self-seeing.[152]

Chapter V

The camera, She, my Colleague

Introduction

The camera[153] has been present since the beginning of my transformative PhD journey. In the beginning, I thought I was just using it to document my work to be able to show it to my supervisors, colleagues, and so on. But as my work progressed, I realized that in different ways, the camera was much more than that. The camera is the only participant that is always present in all my work. Reflecting upon this, I began to think of my camera as the assistant or, more accurately, my colleague. I refer to the camera as "she, my colleague" because in Spanish *la cámara* is a feminine noun. It was during my last body of work *Family,* (Chapter IV) that I realized that the camera was more significant than any other non-human participant, its role intrigued me and it started to raise questions about the agency of the camera assemblage that it constitutes with its own parts (the camera, the objective and the memory); with the rest of the participants; and with myself.

As I discussed in Chapter I, Key Terms, Assemblage, I considered using the term Apparatus (*dispositif*) for apparatus as camera, and I decided not to use it, because the camera assemblage echoes my work in several levels. Besides the fact that the term assemblage resonates with sculpture processes, during the

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[152] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, p. 34.
[153] In my practice I use a digital Sony a7s mirrorless camera, usually on a tripod, sometimes I also use the cell phone camera, (Iphone 6plus & Iphone X are the ones used in this research). I record video and sound with them and the still images are screen shots from the videos. When I refer to 'the camera' I am referring to these specific camera models, and when I refer to the camera assemblage I am referring to the cluster of all the participants, event and reflective editing.

SSE as well as during the reflective editing, the camera assemblage emerges as the term is understood in Deleuze, DeLanda, and in Bennett's post-human view of the concept (explained in Chapter I). Even though apparatus could be used for the camera, the term assemblage connects the camera, the rest of the participants and myself in an open-ended way and allows for a dérive movement. Therefore, from now on I will refer to the camera as 'camera assemblage', I will also continue to use the term agency but primarily camera assemblage, as agency emerges from it. The camera assemblage should be understood as a noun, which includes the connectedness between, and the agglutination of the event, the documentation, the reflective editing, and all the participants including myself. As Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* describes using the example of an electrical power grid, a number of elements can cluster in an assemblage.

> The electrical power grid offers a good example of an assemblage. It is a material cluster of charged parts that have indeed affiliated, remaining in sufficient proximity and coordination to produce distinctive effects. The elements of the assemblage work together, although their coordination does not rise to the level of an organism. Rather, its jelling endures alongside energies and factions that fly out from it and disturb it from within. And, most important for my purposes, the elements of this assemblage, while they include humans and their (social, legal, linguistic) constructions, also include some very active and powerful nonhumans: electrons, trees, wind, fire, electromagnetic fields.[154]

Bennett's description of assemblage shows how an assemblage does not necessarily have to have a human center to have agency. Her view in which she recognizes the active and powerful participation of the non-human elements of the assemblage, echoes mine in regards to the importance of the camera in SSE. As shown in previous chapters, the camera assemblage is made of myself, the participants, both human and non-human, invisible materials, the event, the space and environment, the reflective editing and the by-products. The 'emergent properties' of the assemblage are the piece itself; the parts in relationship with the whole, what I call the SSE. In this chapter I will discuss the role of the camera assemblage in some of this practice-based research and the way in which it contributes to the element of transformation and connectedness in the project SSEs. The chapter focuses on the agency of the camera assemblage and its role in my SSE which emerged through my practice as research, but it does not encompass a wider review of the history of the camera and performance. I will discuss how the camera contributed to the transformation in myself, and as well as the participants in my SSEs. The camera, in my work, is an essential element for reflection.

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[154] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter, A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 24.

My transformation from object-making artist to Social Sculpture practitioner happened in the consistent presence of the camera, my colleague. With the camera and other non-human participants, then with the internship students described in Chapter III, there were explorations in which I left them with the camera, and I left the space in which they were working to see what was 'emerging' from the camera assemblage between the students, the camera, the space and any other materials they picked up.

First, I conducted performative actions outside my studio space. I moved away from producing objects to producing actions, and I gave my former objects a new meaning through a dialogic engagement, by this I mean that I changed my understanding of my former pieces by looking at them through my new practice, knowledge, and understanding of art and philosophy. This approach was based on Joseph Beuys' idea of "invisible material," which understands reflection, thinking and sensorial perception as part of the artistic process. In September 2015 I started exploring self-transformations. I investigated possibilities by producing actions that were recorded in video and audio forms. Once the two elements were together, the work became a video production, the video in a form of by-product of the SSE and not as video in itself. In that body of work, I performed my actions in different environments that conditioned the relationships featured in the piece; during every single piece the camera was present, constructing the agency of the camera assemblage.

Second, I explored Social Sculpture after having worked on actions alone. I began to use recordings of people's comments on my actions, and I started looking for groups of people to work with. The first individuals to become involved in my artistic practice were a group from North Beach Senior Center and a group of teens from Miami Beach High. During my explorations at the senior center (November 2015) I facilitated a playful environment in which I surrendered control of the action and obeyed the participants' control, decisions and proposals. In other words, I became material for them. I "provoked" them by bringing in a roll of white fabric and asking them what to do with it. Another tool of provocation was the camera sitting on a tripod; the participants knew that they would be filmed, but to my surprise they liked it and they took control of the filming as well. I made audio recordings of their comments after the action and subsequently edited them into the by-product.

By observing the relation between my mother and the camera, I saw how my mother needed time and work to get used to it. Just as when one meets someone new, there is time needed to get used to the other, I notice how my mother in each piece gets less intimidated by the camera. From there I went back to all the

work previously done and I noticed that the camera agency was always present, its presence was more necessary than myself, as there were pieces or sections of pieces that showed through the by-product that I was not present, but the camera was always there. At that point I realized that the agency of the camera assemblage was a cluster of all of us and we were affecting each other during and after the event, during editing and reflecting.

Memories, my first cameras

I remember the preparations of each summer in my childhood. In the southern hemisphere school finishes in December, and summer vacation is from mid-December till mid-March. Right after the holidays every year we departed from the city of Buenos Aires to a little house on the Atlantic Ocean in a tiny town called Santa Teresita, where we spent every summer during my childhood. The full preparations were made by my mother and my nonna. My father was in charge of the car and his camera. My father's camera, a 35 mm. Voigtlander, was a sacred object that rested all year in a drawer no one should ever open, no one said so but somehow we all knew. In a ceremonious yearly silent preparation, my father after slowly gathering his cigarette holder and lighting a cigarette prepared his camera for the year's vacation. We knew no one should get close to him nor talk to him, and he sat and cleaned all the parts, set the 35mm roll, and placed it next to him for the next 30 days. My father's camera was a sacred object I never touched. When I turned 10, my godmother's Communion gift to me was a 110 camera, compact. The roll was a cassette with a very small negative, it used to come in 12 or 24. When I got that camera I became the family photographer all year round.

She, my colleague

For Peggy Phelan, performance can only take place in the present. She believes that it cannot be saved or recorded, and if it was, it would become something else. In her view, the main element of performance is its "live" nature.

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the

economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.[155]

In SSE, the "live" element is to be fully present with myself. When I say present, I use this word in both senses: present as time (contemporary, simultaneous existence) and present as space, being there physically.[156]. Sometimes I am present "live" with the participants - when I work with them in front of the camera in the territory its objective (lens) determines. Sometimes I am present for the camera by myself, that is in front of the objective with no other human participants. Sometimes I am present behind the camera and other times I am only present during editing because I have left the space while the participants work alone in front of the camera. Occasionally, my presence appears in all of those situations. While the camera has the potential to be a documentation tool, and in fact it is, in my work the camera is more than that: it is a presence that offers many possibilities, each of which affects the performance itself. I perform for the camera and with the camera, ultimately we all cluster within the camera assemblage.

For Philip Auslander, performance is "for" the camera: "The act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such."[157] In my work, I perform for and with the camera: I wouldn't do SSE without the camera as it is a required participant, its presence opens the space for awareness and connectedness to take place. During the SSE with my mother, the presence of the camera conditioned us to behave differently as we got used to being in front of the camera and with the camera. In the beginning it was difficult and intimidating but it turned out that at the end of the six pieces in this body of work, the camera helped us to reach an atmosphere of silence and stillness and as a result we connected. Even though I choose the camera's position, angle and frame, once the SSE starts, the camera dictates the space with its objective angle, that is we affected each other and therefore we cluster forming the assemblage of the camera. Sometimes, I tape the floor just to know when we are in or out of the angle that the objective determines, again in that precise moment the camera and I effect each other. I note the space that I may or may not occupy, and therefore the camera in a way directs me and the participants.

In her essay 'Against Ephemerality: Performing for the Camera in Central and Eastern Europe,' Amy

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[155] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, p. 146.
[156] In Spanish the verb 'to be' has two translations 'ser' and 'estar', the first is related to time and the second to space.
[157] Philip Auslander, 'On the Performativity of Performance Documentation,' *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 28:3, 2006, p. 6.

Bryzgel states that the photographic lens enables artistic experiment to take place. As an example of working with the camera and embracing its characteristics she cites the work of Ion Grigorescu:

> But the artist had other reasons for co-opting the camera in his performances, for using it mainly as a tool of experiment, such as in manufacturing impossible scenes. One can witness this in *Boxing* (1977), in which the artist created a double- exposed filmic image of himself boxing with himself. And in *Dialogue with President Ceauşescu* (1978), he uses the camera and the double-exposed image to create something even more impossible—a conversation or interview in which the artist, as himself, questions the leader of his country, whom he also plays, but wearing a Ceauşescu mask. Although confined to his studio, in these instances, the performance for the camera was not only the result of necessity, owing to the sociopolitical situation, but also a vehicle that enabled him to create fictitious scenes and dialogues.[158]

I have to mention that this essay is about performance during the period of the Soviet Union, and therefore under those historical and political conditions performing for the camera sometimes was a way to work and to experiment in resistance to limitations of censorship or access to audiences. Current conditions of experimenting differ from this, and yet the camera allows me to create fictional and impossible situations. I experiment while reflective editing, for example when I work with the audio recordings, as in the Solo body of work (Chapter II) when I overlap the comments from the Field critique group comments, or in *The Tower* when I manipulate the recording in different channels as if the different women were talking from different angles, which evoked their real distance to me as some of the recordings came from Italy, Brazil, France, Scotland, and Germany. SSEs are made for and with the camera, and after each exploration, with the material collected in its memory I proceed to reflect as a method of dialogical process. This reflection could not have happened without "my colleague, the camera." All the various elements mentioned above cluster into the camera assemblage.

SSEs are made to be present within the camera assemblage, instead of with or for the audience. My work pieces are not made to be live for an audience, instead they are made to develop connectedness and awareness with the participants. The intention is to be live with them as opposed to with an audience; in fact an audience there would only jeopardize the exploration. The only observer that can be present is the camera, the audience will see the piece later. The participants are not the audience, the participants are part of the camera assemblage, and what happens to them is a transformation, or at least the opportunity

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[158] Amy Bryzgel, 'Against ephemerality: performing for the camera in Central and Eastern Europe,' *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 27:1, 2019, p. 5.

to transform. SSE is not about stories that can multiply through a passive audience, rather is about the participation. The transformation that can happen in the SSE is not at a superficial level of the observer, or in the production of something marketable or of something easy to describe. SSE is a transformative exploration between the participants in a singular encounter.

The developing awareness of the camera's importance induced me to understand both its and my own role in the SSEs and how we both are camera assemblage. While I do the editing, I have the power of cutting, slowing, speeding up, and knowing what was happening behind it, while the camera has an impeccable recording of everything that happened in front of it, and the sound recording of both what was within and outside the frame. After the SSE we are separated from one another and left with our own capacities, the camera is not the same as it has a new recording and I am not the same as I have a new experience. I cannot retrace the experience, the capacity of the SSE appears only in the process of the camera assemblage, it is present only during the exploration. In any case once "we" (all the participants in each particular exploration) reduce[159], that is separate, after the assemblage experience, we have become a little of something else. This becoming is implied in the emergence of the SSE with the presence of the camera, the camera assemblage, that facilitates the participants to be aware of what is happening.

The camera is there and her presence defines a territory which marks where the exploration happened. It is the line of flight, to memorize objectively. When I say objective I refer to it in both senses: through the objective (the lens) and the objective (adjective) memory. The camera then memorizes through the objective (lens), which is not a thinking/feeling tool, but the objective subjects its memory to its characteristics and or limitations. But my memory and the camera memory differ and that difference is what makes the work unfinalizable. Also, this difference raises questions about the non-objectivity of the camera and her memory changes my memory when she makes me see things I didn't see. An example of this is in *Conectadas* by-product, (Chapter IV, Figure 23 https://vimeo.com/219305054). In this video we can see how the light moves on the left hand side, this light is from the windows that are not visible in the by-product as they are outside the frame, but within the frame one can see changes of lighting. The light changes are

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[159] *Reduce* as in DeLanda's explanation of Deleuze assemblage where he borrows the term 'reduce' as something with no return, Manuel DeLanda, 'Assemblage Theory, Society, and Deleuze,' 2011, video available at https://egs.edu/lecture/manuel-delanda-assemblage-theory-society-and-deleuze/, accessed 10th October 2019. Transcription by the author.

exaggerated by the capture of the camera's technology. It took me a few years after the editing of the SSE to see the light movement, which it is the only noticeable movement in the by-product, as everything else is still; my memory never recalled the movement of the light. It was in the camera memory and I wouldn't be able to observe it if it was not for the camera's presence and its memory capacity. The camera captures the light, something that the participants (my mother and I) did not see as we are in the SSE, but the camera captures it by being outside and part of it. The camera sees the sun light changing as well as seeing my mother and I, the camera does not make a qualitative difference between all the information. In this case it is objective. Further that is how, we, all the elements, invisible materials, and participants affect each other and cluster into the agency of the camera assemblage.

Therefore, my work sits with both Phelan and Auslander's positions, if I translate the term audience to participants. And I am with neither of them, in the sense that Phelan and Auslander's concern is the audience and mine is only for the participants and the camera is one of them, one agency of the camera assemblage. If what is at stake is to be live or to perform for the camera, in my practice, it is both. And this double quality, of liveness and performance, of presence and being present, requires the camera as participant, a participant that, as I mentioned before, is always there. Besides my presence, the camera's presence in my work is required to cluster into the camera assemblage. The question that arises now is whether the author of my work is the camera, my colleague. Can the camera as a non-human agent be the author?

The capacities of the camera, a non-human participant are: the framing function (objective), the memory (camera body) and the dialogical connections (editing). First, the lens plays a framing function, confining the space within which the work will happen. The camera agency determines a territory for the space which the human participant decides to either be in or out of. The camera sits there and records image and sound, it implies the notion of the other that is not present (physically) in the present (simultaneously) but that is a possible future observer of the recordings. SSE are not made for viewers, they are made for participants but the camera presence opens the possibility of future views from other than the participants, and that conditions the actions of the participants. Second, its memory gives it the ability to hold on to the moment, to testify about it for us and for others, and to remind us or to show us that our perception of the moment can differ from what that mechanical participant sees, that is: memorizes. Our inner reflection process perhaps collects completely different things to those recorded by the camera. Third, and related to this last point, every time I look at the video recorded by the camera, I can dialogically connect differently,

as a human being am in a constant state of becoming. For example, the framing function capacity is clear when in *Metamorphosis* (Chapter III), the camera is handled by one of the participants at the Senior Centre while I am following the directions another group of participants are giving to me. I was not in control of the camera yet the camera determined that space which I was in, but the group giving me direction decided to be out, participating from the outside of the angle of view of the objective. That invisible line that gives the participants' limit is given by the objective. An example of the memory or holding up the moment is clear in some of the pieces from the Solo body of work like *Embodying Space*. The comments in the audio recordings from the Field Works Workshop's artists about what they were seeing on the video speak about the way in which the camera shows the moments in one way, while the artists are responding based on what they see, which is different to what I was doing. Lastly an example for dialogical connection appears when I come back to the by-product and look at it again and something new can happen. For every time I look at it something changes, therefore the piece is not finished as far as one makes new dialogical connections and every viewer will have different ones. This shows its multiplicity and its unfinalizable capacity.

In 'The Performance Art Document: A Contextualized Study,' Anne Marsh, describes how artist Jill Orr, believes that 'the documentation is not necessarily an accurate representation of the live work', and that the performance is made to be received experientially and that any translation of that experience is bound to fail.[160] However she does not believe that it is impossible to critique the event without being there. She also believes in remaking the performance for the camera to have photographs of the performance under the control of the artist.

> Jill Orr – like many artists – has tried to control the photographic documentation of her work. It's a tricky business but history suggests that it is not an impossible project. To professionalize the documentation of her work and to attempt to control its distribution, Orr established early on that she would be the prime director of the performance photographs and she prefers to do photo shoots without the audience present.[161]

Orr believes that she can control the documentation of the performance when she re-makes the

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[160] Anne Marsh, 'The Performance Art Document: A Contextualized Study,' 2008, http://www.annemarsh.com.au/performance-art-document.html, accessed 18th April 2020, p. 22.
[161] Ibid, p. 21.

performance for a remediation. This, from my point of view, turns the piece onto another work, not only considering Orr's concept of separation of the medium, but also when the piece is staged for the camera, for documentation, it is choreographed differently, therefore is not the same as the live piece. Collecting audience recordings from different viewers would, first give the audience a participatory role, and the different recordings would turn into a new piece of work. In my SSE I give the participants and the camera agency by handing over this control to them, forming the agency of the camera assemblage.

I find it very interesting that in the article Marsh tells us how there was a video documentation of a performance she saw live, and how Jill Orr had not paid attention to the video for many years. When Marsh was writing the essay, they recovered the video which was very damaged and after restoration the artist believed that it was a good documentation of the performance. Orr felt that the damages caused by time to the chemistry of the tape added another layer, and this additional layer was necessary to have a good representation of the performance. Orr commented:

> I was not interested in the early use of video from the 1970s – where the single camera view was determined by a gap in the audience, like the original footage of *She had long golden hair* because it cannot capture the vibratory exchange of the live performance. However the video footage of this work has been reclaimed by nature, time and chemical processes acting on the tape. Part of the reason the footage remained in my archives for years was that I was not interested in such bland recording and eventually the technology was redundant and the work remained unseen. Little did I know that the work was still cooking another layer. In this case the damage has re-energized the work – and edited it – creating a random rhythm relevant to the medium.(…). Some moments are intact and others blurred. The recorded dialogue – also affected by the chemical interaction through time – leaves an essential dialogue intact. This is similar to the working of memory (Orr, 2008).[162]

Not only Orr but also Marsh believes that the damage was adding what the video needed to give the viewer an equivalent experience of the live performance. What resonates is how the combination of elements like, storage, time, temperature and the particular film acted and affected each other, they cluster in an assemblage giving as a result an emergent property or, in this case, an unexpected product quality, with its own agency. Further, Marsh writes:

> The damaged tape of *She had long golden hair* is fascinating and intriguing. If it had survived in its original form, as a dumb witness tape, it would not be compelling. But as a wrecked video that has

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[162] Ibid, p. 22.

come back after years of neglect via chemical assault, it represents aspects of the live performance that the photographs cannot. It's not really a document because it wears its instability on the screen, it breaks up, it fumbles, it repeats. It is and is not a remediation. Orr puts this down to the foibles of nature. I like to think of it as the ruin of technology, the stained record, the hysteria of video noise.[163]

Also, what time and chemical process did to her documentation is similar to the point I am proposing about the subjectivity of the camera, and the agency of the camera assemblage. The analogue process of the deterioration of the video tape from 1980 used to document Orr's performance gave it all the layers needed. Although it was not planned or expected, but rather a process happening out of the artist's control. It was a subjective process. We do not, and cannot have absolute control, we need to recognize the authorship of assemblages, processes or non-human participants (like the camera or the objective). I believe in the recognition of those non-human aspects that give new subjective layers to the practice. In SSE the subjectivity of the quality of the memory, its limitations and the characteristics of the objective lens, gives layers to the by-product that are out of my control. The question of agency of the camera assemblage or of non-human authorship or participation in the SSE, in my work resonates with the Buddhist views of entities (animated or inanimate entities); the non-human have the status of inanimate entities, therefore they have equivalence to humans as we are entities too. In my SSE none of the participants have hierarchy among all the participants, and the status of the camera, or the sunlight, the environment, the white dress or the other humans are all part of the camera assemblage. They all have equivalent entity status in the SSE and have similar potential for subjective engagement in the camera assemblage. It is a transformation that one embodies and that, like the chemical process of Jill Orr's 1980 videotape, can take time before one can articulate what happened in that particular moment of connectedness.

The camera, with her presence, suggests that during the experience something is happening, but what really happened only each participant knows as it is a subjective process. It is my experience that the result of the intimate SSE is not ephemeral as the awareness and connectedness are long lasting experiences and processes that continue after the exploration happens. Through dialogic exchange in new ideas and new action I can know that this transformation keeps happening. A more tangible example of this comes to light during conversations when I talk about myself and my practice. In the case of my mother I conclude

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[163] Ibid, p. 26.

that this transformation still happens based on her Whatsapp message (2020) about her experience with the work we did together almost three years before (2017).

What marked the end of each body of work and the beginning of the next one was a failure, that failure also points at transformations needed in the practice in relation to myself. It happened with the decision to end the work within Institutional frames as I could not develop my practice with freedom, or further understanding that the institution was one more factor within the cluster of the camera assemblage, when present, that is when I worked within an institution as a work or performance space. Failure in itself is an awareness of transformation. It is similar to reading a book, the process of embodying the book transforms the reader even after the reader has finished reading it. This SSE made with invisible materials that the camera records through the objective is about the connection between the participants that cluster into the camera assemblage, and it continues beyond the moment of presence and beyond the present as connection or transformation is not finalizable.

In *Strings attached* (March 2016) one of the SSEs made with the Miami Beach High internship students, (see Chapter III), I placed a mirrorless digital camera on the tripod, but also I gave them a second camera (an iPhone 6 plus), which they were able to handle and move around. At some point during the piece, I left the studio as I wanted to know what would happen without my presence. I subsequently became aware that I had the ability to observe what happened without me being present at the encounter because of the presence of the camera, which recorded (memorized) the moment. The students played with the camera; the camera stimulated their sense of playfulness, and it made them manipulate the materials contained in the exploration in a much more spontaneous way. While my absence perhaps also contributed to this change in their behavior, the presence of the camera in their hands undoubtedly accentuated it, as is indicated by the fact that they were dancing with and for the camera while working. The emergent property from the camera assemblage of the students, the material they picked, both of the cameras, my studio and my absence seems to be implied in the joyful spontaneous collaboration and the production of an installation and transformation of the space, an experience they told me later, they have never had before. The emergent property is the SSE itself in which they created a piece; and play was the method, they were playing for the camera as can be seen in the by-product. The reflective editing that produces the by-product is the space in which I can see all the details whether or not I am present during the SSE.

During *Metamorphoses* (November 2015) at the North Beach Senior Centre, the camera gave the seniors the sense of space and the frame of making "a piece, a work of art, a production," since it was a bit difficult for them to grasp the idea of Social Sculpture. One of them took the lead on the camera. She spontaneously became the "camera woman," with the camera staying on the tripod as she operated the zoom. During this exploration the camera determined the space in which to move. The participants' choice was to stay outside of the frame and give me directions from behind the camera. There is a moment in the beginning of the video in which two participants are wrapping me up and they are in front of the camera but right after they walked behind it and from there directed me. The camera's presence marks unspoken boundaries which influenced the participants' decisions about their own placement, as Susan Sontag wrote, 'To photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude'[164], this exclusion happens within the SSE but it does not happen within the camera assemblage because all elements, all materials including the invisible one of taking decisions or failure are parts of the camera assemblage.

During my first exploration with my mother the camera's presence intimidated us. But when we got used to the camera looking at us we sat quietly to be recorded, or my mother talked directly to it. These are all moments when we performed actions that wouldn't have taken place without the presence of the camera. The camera therefore directed us. The recordings and the production of material allowed me to enter into moments of reflection. By the time I wrote this thesis at the end of the editing of the by-product, the camera and I had worked together from the beginning until the very end, we turned into one entity, the camera assemblage. Camera assemblage forms from the moment of the SSE to the editing of the by-product and the production of the whole practice-based research, in the form of by-products, the thesis, the photographs, the videos, through dialogical connection and/or production.

The camera and its point of view and recording ability are an essential part of my methodological process, it provides the point of view of another non-human participant, one that is subjective. Phelan explains how the gaze is distortion:

> The physiological understanding of vision, like both the psychoanalytic conception of the gaze and the technologies of aesthetics, is also a theory of loss and distortion.[165]

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[164] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002, p. 46.
[165] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, p. 14.

My colleague, the camera, is not copying a reality but is rather distorting it just as the human eye does, so that I can observe the SSE through an optical tool: the objective that subjectifies the memory (the recordings) through its unique vision, as Phelan posits:

> Together, the eye and the camera in mimetic correspondence, naturalize the visible real by turning it into something 'seen.' [166]

It is not new to say that photography does not reflect the truth nor is it new to talk about the optical aberrations, but there is a new emphasis in being focused on these different themes and to try to demonstrate through my findings the subjectivity of the objective or the impossibility of the objective (lens) to be objective.

The other elements that make the presence of the camera a main participant or a co-worker are its own characteristics as a whole: the angle, which comes from the objective lens as well, the point of view, the elevation from the floor, and then in the case of digital, the quality of the image, digital or analogue. While the optical aberrations are implicit in the lenses and we have learned how to see through them and believe in that image as a true reflection of reality; in truth, we can only see an objective distorting the image reflected. I cannot say that the objective lens is subjective, even though it is more subjective than objective, because there is no consciousness in it that gives the capacity of subjectivity. In conclusion I can only talk about the impossible objective (noun) of the objective (lens) to be objective (adjective).

At the very end of the research, while editing and reflecting on my notes I went one step further in my understanding of the camera as participant, the camera as colleague (or equivalent), within the camera assemblage. I got a sense that I have become object also, I and the camera together, in relation, in participation, as well as being the subject of the work where my memories or my story is shown and moved. Filmmaker and writer Hito Steyrl's text for her exhibition catalogue, 'A Thing Like You and Me' (2010), resonates with my experience with the camera assemblage and my further conclusion.

> We have unexpectedly arrived at quite an interesting idea of the object and objectivity. Activating the thing means perhaps to create an objective—not as a fact, but as the task of unfreezing the forces congealed within the trash of history. Objectivity thus becomes a lens, one that recreates us

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[166] Ibid, p. 14.

as things mutually acting upon one another. From this "objective" perspective, the idea of emancipation opens up somewhat differently.[167]

Steryl's text goes on to explain that members of the Soviet avant-garde tried to reach different relations to objects (things), their aim was to free the things from enslavement, as they believed, things are not passive, and should be free to participate actively in transformation of everyday reality. During this research I first tried to be material, then I failed, later I tried to probe the subjectivity of the camera, I couldn't as it has no consciousness, but on the other hand I cannot claim that the camera is objective. Rather than confining the camera to an objective role and myself as the subject, I prefer to move towards each other, so that the camera moves from object and I move from subject and during the process we find each other somewhere in the between, in the camera assemblage. Steryl explains that the emancipatory practices struggle in their aim to be subjects as there are conflicts with power relations.

> But as the struggle to become a subject became mired in its own contradictions, a different possibility emerged. How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why *not* be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other things? "A thing that feels."[168]

In order to change perspective and to recognize objectivity as being out of power relation issues and to give agency to things and work together, both the camera and I (forming the camera assemblage) step out of subjectivity to be the thing by stepping into objectivity. It is to reflect with the other organs of perception and to further think through the camera.

At the end of this unfinished journey, I feel confident that the initial intention to transform my practice occurred in many levels and went beyond my practice. Now I understand that the practice does not transform alone but does so along with all the participants, and that it not only happens within the practice but is also personal. This journey opened many new spaces that I am willing to dérive as different environments and participants continue working in SSE, forming the agency of the camera assemblage.

The next chapter is the conclusion of my Thesis, in this section I will review the new knowledge that emerged from this research project.

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[167] Hito Steyerl, 'A Thing Like You and Me,' *e-flux,* 15, 2010, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61298/a-thing-like-you-and-me/, accessed 30th April 2020.
[168] Ibid.

Conclusion

This written document, along with the included videos, are by-products of my SSE and together they make up the culmination of this research. What follows is a brief review of what has been discussed in the chapters along with the key learning points from each body of work, which draws together and highlights the new knowledge that has been generated for me and for other potential researchers.

In Chapter I, I mentioned Professor Kristen Voigt's paper *The Great Reason of the Body: Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph Beuys and the Art of Giving Meaning to Matter and Earth,* published in 2019 when I was concluding this project. During my research (and prior to the publication of Voigt's research) I made similar connections to those of Voigt between Joseph Beuys' and Friedrich Nietzsche's practices. For example, Voigt states that Beuys considers that sculptural and performative work transcends the dualism of mind and body with the embodiment of the mind and the usage of all senses. Voigt writes that this was a Nietzschean concept that influenced Beuys' work. She posits that Nietzsche was the pioneer of the theory of performance art and embodied thinking. Regarding Nietzsche's phrase 'only thoughts that come by walking have value', Voigt states,

> thinking with and through the body, which mobilises the whole being. Beuys put his own pointed expression of corporeal thinking in a succinct and yet startling synthesis of text and image in his 1977 postcard multiple *Ich denke sowieso mit dem Knie* (I Think Anyway with the Knee). Like Nietzsche, in this spirit Beuys argues for a concept of an 'embodied mind' or even 'extended mind', while both declare embodiment as a necessity of their performative philosophy, artistic life and everyday practice.[169]

In 2015, as I started working with my body, I was simultaneously reading Nietzsche and Beuys. I didn't know that Beuys read Nietzsche nor that he was influenced by him. I only knew that I was influenced by both and that their work, felt connected, but I could not find any document, book or information about them being connected until I found Voigt's paper. Voigt accessed Beuys' copy of a book of Nietzsche's, which has pencil notes made by Beuys as he read Nietzsche, and those notes show clearly Nietzsche's influence in Beuys' work, even though he never mentioned Nietzsche as someone that influenced him. Voigt and I come to similar conclusions through our different methodologies. As a philosopher, Voigt articulated Nietzsche and Beuys' ideas differently to me, as I was understanding them with the 'other organs of

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[169] Kirsten Voigt, 'The Great Reason of the Body' – Friedrich Nietzsche, Joseph Beuys and the Art of Giving Meaning to Matter and Earth,' *Tate Papers*, 32, 2019, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/32/nietzsche-beuys-giving-meaning-matter-earth , accessed 12th February 2020.

perception', with my senses, with my whole body, which in turn resonates with what Nietzsche and Beuys were positing in their own ways during their own lives. This simultaneous reaching of parallel conclusions via the methods of practice-based research both strengthens and validates those conclusions and the validity of practice-based research as a methodology for conducting research of this kind.

Through the first body of work, *Solo*, Chapter II, I showed how my practice had changed and how I have gone through a process of transformation as an artist. A process of dialogics transversally brought me back to understanding my former work from my new body of work. From that dialogically derived new meaning, my practice transformed from that of an object-maker to that of an artist-researcher. I had dialogically reviewed the gesture and re-encountered my own body as material. I became an action maker/ body artist as the first step to understanding transformation in my method of making art. Later, I put the gesture first, and emphasized the material, leaving aside the object (which only appeared subsequently as a by-product). My transformation was to embody my own body as part of the material for the artwork, which resonated with Joseph Beuys' actions.

In Chapter III, the second body of work, *Participatory*, I discussed how the project became participatory and that the participants were not only human but also non-human, animated and inanimate. Their presences were active in many levels, conditioning the SSE moment or appearing later during editing or reflecting. I entered into a dialogue with the ideas of Claire Bishop, Grant Kester, Deleuze, Nietzsche and Joseph Beuys.

The *Participatory* body of work is an accumulation of failures, which suggests ways in which to move on to the next body of work. Failure of working with Institutions brought me to the decision of working in the open air, inside my studio or in my home as opposed to working outside my studio or with an open studio, where I had to follow the Institutional policies. Later, when the agency of the camera assemblage became part of the project failure and Institution were understood as elements forming the assemblage. Understanding failure as invisible material made me recognize the material as participants and myself as yet another participant searching for transformation. I decided in response to these factors, to work with my family, in intimate settings. Failure had become the engine to move from one body of work to another. Failure, the invisible material, and force for a transformation of the practice going forward. Deepening my understanding of the role of failure in the dynamics which inform the formation of new work has had a substantial effect on practice, and I would suggest that an awareness of the role that failure can play may

well enable other practitioners in different media to enhance their understanding of their own practice processes.

In Chapter IV, I showed how working with members of my family allowed me to reach silence and stillness; I realized that stillness and silence are the elements required to reach connectedness and awareness. It is only with connectedness and awareness that one can have a transformational experience during an SSE. The assemblage of memories, participants, human and non-human, environment, silence, stillness, connectedness and awareness bear the emergent property of transformation within the SSE. This marked a shift in my practice in which I arrived at silence and stillness during the process of working with my mother.

Joseph Beuys' Social Sculpture practice moved from intimate settings to social projects. Intimate works such as *I like America and America Likes me (1974),* in which he shared time living with a coyote, a one to one piece with an animate non-human participant, or *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare (1965),* where once again he shared a space with (an inanimate) non-human participant. Both are examples of his intimate pieces, in which he often worked with non-human participants. Later he moved to pieces for large groups of people, for example when he collaborated with the formation of the Green Party, or at Documenta 7 when he started his massive piece *7000 Oaks (1982),* or *Honey Pump at the Work Place (1977)* for Documenta 6. Those pieces required many people to participate in them and they are longer in duration, as also is his *FIU, Free International University*. My SSE instead moved in an opposite direction. When I started the participatory pieces, I was looking for groups of unknown people and over time I have moved in the direction of the known, intimate, familiar. Beuys looked for transformation of the world by working with the world, I look for transformation for the world but through personal transformation, of one's own invisible material of memories, of the environment in intimate settings of silence, stillness and connectedness. Through these investigations of the way that Social Sculpture can function in intimate familial settings, I have examined an important and powerful aspect of this mode of practice which had hitherto been somewhat neglected.

It was during the *Family* body of work that I realized the importance of the role of the camera, how it was much closer than any other non-human participants. The camera has a unique role in my work, that is closer to being something between a family member and a colleague. The intimacy I reached during this

period, the stillness and the silence, made me aware of the camera as a presence that frames and focuses SSE.

I discovered the impossibility of the objective (lens) to be objective. The objective lens is more subjective than objective, but there is no consciousness in it that gives the capacity of subjectivity, therefore I posited it as an inanimate entity. The camera's characteristics condition the work, and the importance of her presence shows that, at least, it is not objective. In conclusion I can state the impossible objective (noun) of the objective (lens) to be objective (adjective).

The agency of the camera (she, my colleague) is necessary and forms the SSE. The assemblage emerges with the involvement of the rest of the participants, and during the reflective editing. Most of the time this reflective editing happens between the camera and me, but sometimes other participants are involved. All of them, the participants, me, the cameras, the space, the institution cluster to form one assemblage -- the camera assemblage. All those events, processes, materials and participants cluster into the agency of the camera assemblage. I reflect through the camera during the editing which makes the camera another organ of perception and myself closer to a thing. The camera creates the space for me as a practitioner to think from the camera's perspective. When we work together, the camera and I meet somewhere in an overlapping space between objectivity and subjectivity. As the camera steps further from its objectivity towards subjectivity in the same proportion I move one step further from my subjectivity in the direction of objectivity. Thus, we work together teetering between objectivity and subjectivity, within the camera assemblage.

I am complicating the binary positions as set out by Phelan and Auslander (see Chapter V pg. 121) by positioning the camera as a participant, in fact a colleague, within the SSE. The camera has agency, and it is needed as part of the SSE process and method. The camera's objectivity and required presence objectifies the human presence (myself, the practitioner). Here I would argue that the contribution lies in the development of an awareness of the very specific role that the camera can play in this mode of practice as a particularly active kind of non-human participant – it is her seeing (me) that renders the 'being present' upon which the possibility of the SSE rests.

Through the process of this research, I experienced the 'corporeal thinking' mentioned in Voigt's paper

through my work and in the way I understood my readings of Beuys, Nietzsche, Sacks, Deleuze and so forth. When I reflected during editing of the recorded SSEs, I not only reflected with my body, but I also reflected through the camera body and the objective (lens). In my research I can now say that my other organs of perception include the camera, specifically when we (the camera and I) both become parts of the camera assemblage; without it my reflections would not be the same, that is we affect each other.

Considered as a whole, this thesis demonstrates that the SSE model that I have developed is grounded in both theory and practice. This SSE model could be used by other researchers to continue the journey as the notion of an SSE is itself unfinalizable, to use Bakhtin's term. Thus, the SSE model that I propose can function as an open-ended method of participatory work for transformation that other research artists, Social Sculpture practitioners, or other social practitioners could find useful. It could also be used by philosophers or theorists who want to explore knowledge through different organs, as this thesis has demonstrated the potential utility of this method in relation to such explorations, for example when I reached similar conclusions to those of Voigt, as detailed in the first paragraphs of my Conclusion.

Becoming a researcher took me through many transformations; from object maker to SSE practitioner; from studio artist to practice-based researcher; from working with physical material to becoming focused on invisible material; from a concern with the audience and viewers to work made only with and for participants; from human participants to non-human participants; from taking the camera for granted to the understanding of the camera as participant, colleague, an organ, an assemblage with agency.

SSE practice also brought me to different understandings of materials, physical and invisible, participants as human and non-human, and within the non-human both animate and inanimate, and I work with all of them. SSE brought me to an understanding of failure in which it becomes a movement and a force. I have come to an understanding of how this can embody the stillness and silence that Howells explained through his performances; and that those elements were required to achieve transformation (Beuys) and connectedness (Sacks) in SSE.

I shared my transformative process of becoming an artist researcher. In order to do this, I created an assemblage of several disciplines, including Performance Studies, Social Practices and Philosophy and

through this process manifested the emergent property which is becoming an artistic researcher. This thesis exists in part to share this process of becoming. I do not expect this process to manifest in exactly the same way for others who might take this path. I am sharing my own process and sharing my transformation as a result of it. At first this seemed to be a wholly personal endeavor, however it is now clear to me that as a method it may be transferable to practices beyond my own, to assist others who are approaching research in related fields.

In the field of Social Sculpture, my SSE research can be understood as a practice for the self-transformation of participants in small and intimate settings; as a method for transformation that is unfinalizable and that can be used as a method of work and/or continuance of the explorations; as a method that can overlap with and inform philosophy and theory, but perhaps other researchers can apply this method to the study and integration of different philosophies.

Putting the thesis together has been a process of reflection. It brought me to a point of clarity. This research does not have an ending, but rather it represents a set of conclusions that arose from the processes that constituted the bodies of work I went through as part of this research, and in which I transformed, and transitioned to new methods of making art.

List of By-Products in Chronological Order

https://www.veronicafazzio.com/sse-by-products.html

Password: **SSEby-pro**

Chapter II, Solo

Title: Action I

Duration: 7' 11"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: September 2015

Link: https://vimeo.com/138980725

Title: Colchonero

Duration: 7' 50"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: September 2015

Link: https://vimeo.com/139811466

Title: Embodying Space

Duration: 11'52"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: October 2015

Link:https://vimeo.com/139811466

Title: El juego, la materia y el ego

Duration: 11'17"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: October 2015

Link: https://vimeo.com/144651650

Chapter III, Participatory

Title: Metamorphoses 1

Duration: 6"57"

Location: North Beach, Union, Senior Centre, Miami Beach, FL

Date: November 2015

Link:https://vimeo.com/145870528

Title: The Tower

Duration: 6'44"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: December 2015, Art Basel week

Link:https://vimeo.com/147463347

Title: Imperfect Destruction

Duration: 13'2"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: February 2016

Link:https://vimeo.com/156415842

Title: Strings attached

Duration: 16'44"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: March 2016

Link:https://vimeo.com/158035797

Title: Trenzadas

Duration: 7'59"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: April 2016

Link:https://vimeo.com/161467425

Title: Emotions

Duration: 10'13"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: April 2016

Link:https://vimeo.com/163256974

Title: Plastic Waves

Duraton: 5'10"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: May 2016

Link:https://vimeo.com/166809251

Title: Mute

Duration: 12'10"

Location: Art Center South Forida

Date: May 2016

Link:https://vimeo.com/168937705

Chapter IV, Family

Title: Meeting in Progress I

Duration: 6'12"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: March 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/219289746

Title: Ella y Yo

Duration: 7'36"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: March 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/230307312

Title: Meeting in Progress II

Duration: 4'49"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: March 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/213439845

Title: Transformacion

Duration: 4'10"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: April 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/219298134

Title: Juntas

Duration: 1'47"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: April 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/219301790

Title: Conectadas

Duration: 3'46"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: April 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/219305054

Title: Pizarra blanca

Duration: 9'36"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: April 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/220463819

Title: Expuesta

Duration: 4'5"

Location: Art Center South Florida

Date: April 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/220463123

Title: Un abrazo

Duration: 2'12"

Location: Berlin

Date: August 2017

Link:https://vimeo.com/230335325

Appendix A

Consent Form

Veronica Marina Fazzio Welf
Social sculpture participants consent form:

By signing this consent form, I_____ am giving Veronica Marina Fazzio Welf (VMFW) permission to record, video and photograph the performance I'm participating in. I authorize VMFW to potentially quote me for her PhD research and use the video and photographs where my image and/or voice appears.

By checking the 1st and 2nd box below, I choose to authorize VMFW whether or not to write my name on the material if needed.

At the date of this form, I am receiving information on how to access the material after editing, which can take from 7 to 30 days from the date of the session.

In the case I decide to withdraw from the writings and/or video and/or photographs and/or recordings I must give VMFW 30 days notice and must be within 90 days from the session date, at that point any and all parts where I appear on image or voice will be destroyed.

At the moment of this signature VMFW provided me with her blog information (where all her research material is collected), her phone number, email and her studio address.

1-___I'm willing to participate in the Social Sculpture but I don't want to be identified by name in VMFW's research.

2-___I'm willing to be identified by first and/or last names (delete as applicable) in VMFW's research.

Name:

Signing for:

Email address:

Phone number:

_____
Date & Signature

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