THE USE OF USELESSNESS AS A STRATEGY FOR CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

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Abstract

This research is led by an arts practice, and examines the relevance of the Bataillean concepts of uselessness, excess and non-productive expenditure for contemporary visual and performance practices. Deploying the model of Practice as Research the project investigates these terms through and against Catherine Clément's concept of Syncope, her science of pauses and the philosophy of rapture. The key terms are investigated through a set of live performance interventions which are conceived for specific sites, and reconfigured in their translation to other sites. The written thesis traces this dialogue between the performed works and Clément's and Bataille's philosophies. The chapters are interspersed with texts which select one theoretical notion at a time, and critically situate these within ethnographic, psychoanalytic and philosophical debates. Five close-up images and a Schema document each of the performed projects, and are dispersed throughout the chapters or included in the Appendix. A video DVD accompanies the thesis with documentation of *Slow Races*, the last performance project, a compilation of scenes of expenditure and loss.

The Prologue outlines Bataille's critique of the pervasive, utilitarian economic framework that is characteristic of capitalist modernity, based as it is on an idea of scarcity, and which harnesses individual agency for the sake of profitmaking. Bataille's contribution to this debate, his core contentions that all exchanges are accompanied by excess, and that societies need to allow for a meaningful expenditure through socio-cultural and wider economic frameworks, forms the backbone of the enquiry. To explore this claim the live interventions look like work but do not produce anything, they disturb one system by performing another.

Chapters 1 to 4 analyse a first set of performed works through Clément's concept of Syncope, a philosophical project which challenges Western philosophical concepts of the subject and returns to what was advanced by Bataille. This discussion gives rise to the notion of the artist's pursuit of the inconsequential, which is contextualised in Chapter 5 through relevant arts practices and art criticism of the 20th and 21st century. Chapter 6 critically investigates Clément's contribution to the canon.

The final chapter, Chapter 7, documents a departure from the earlier task-based interventions in the practice, and reflects on a new set of works which deploy a more radical notion of uselessness and sovereignty, and which conclude with a proclamation of the *Universal Declaration of the Human Right to Uselessness*.

The research concludes that a pursuit of uselessness is not only a powerful method for arts practices that are concerned with a reflection on the human condition, but is an apposite engagement if art is to break through the limitations imposed by the claims of the Enlightenment and the economy of capital.

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed:

Dated: 31st January 2016

Prologue: The modern individual

This drives me near to desperate distress!

Such elemental power unharnessed, purposeless!

There dares my spirit soar past all it knew;

Here I would fight, this I would subdue! [10218-21][1]

The series of performances developed during this research project are engaged with literary and philosophical discourses which subject to critique the effects of capital on the formation of identities and modern living. In particular the research is concerned with the ubiquitous demands of productivity and outcome that govern much of the everyday. The research investigates possible forms of critique and resistance, under the understanding that the individual is never only an obedient worker or a mindless consumer, "assimilated by a jungle of procedures", but that there are always margins in which values are contested, procedures altered and materials redeployed.[2] As Michel de Certeau has argued in *The Practice of Everyday Life*:

> [...] the consumer cannot be identified or qualified by the newspapers or commercial products he assimilates: between the person (who uses them) and these products (indexes of the 'order' which is imposed on him), there is a gap of varying proportions opened by the use that he makes of them.[3]

De Certeau's argument is that the consumer is never only a consumer, and that his interactions, transactions and forms of use are part of everyday practices which allow

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1 Faust, cited in Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, New York: Verso, 1983), 62.
2 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press 1984) 32.
3 Ibid.

for individuation and differentiation. However, he also acknowledged that any analysis must concern itself with the relations of power which define these operations and which inscribe and limit those who are weak.[4] The imperative to work, to be productive and successful, must be one of the more insidious directives which has infiltrated and shaped modern living and which control the supposedly autonomous, independent and self-directed modern individual. In a lecture entitled 'Wasting Time' in April 2015 at the Jerwood Space London, literary theorist and psychoanalyst Joshua Cohen described this paradigm as 'a world of pain':

> […] Entering this world of pain seems to be today the sovereign imperative of our politics and our culture. Successive governments left and right of centre have been intent on keeping us all busy from as early to as late in life as possible. […] Those pockets of the life cycle protected from the demand to learn, work and produce are being rapidly eliminated. Perhaps the time will come when the privilege to not work will be extended only to the unborn and the dead. […] Idle time, time without content, is a source of contempt, confusion and terror.[5]

Cohen pointed to the gradual but inexorable process by which more and more of the life cycle is subsumed under the imperative to work. Time has become synonymous with productivity, and 'time without [that] content' has become unacceptable. Moments of loss, waste or excess, are confined to the shadows of capital city. This ever increasing instrumentalisation of everything and everyone is mirrored in the appearance of the exhausted, as Teresa Brennan has argued in *Exhausting Modernity* (2000), a condition which has made numerous appearances also in modern literature. An early embodiment of the exhausted can be found in Goethe's *Faust*, originally published in 1808, not in the form of a human figure but in the character of the Devil. In a scene that is part of Faust's journey over the land, the protagonist looks at the coast and the ocean before him and exclaims that all should be mobilised for profit, controlled and industrialised: "Such elemental power unharnessed, purposeless!"

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4 Ibid., 34.
5 Joshua Cohen, 'Wasting Time', Jerwood Visual Arts, 13th April 2015, http://jerwoodvisualarts.org/3093/Wasting-Time-a-lecture-by-Josh-Cohen/454. Accessed 06/07/2015.

Faust exclaims, excited by all these possibilities. "There dares my spirit soar past all it knew" signals the paradigmatic change embedded in Faust's vision.[6] The Devil who accompanies Faust is however left dazed and exhausted because Faust's drive and ambition have exceeded his own! In *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman reviewed the scene acknowledging its announcement of a new world order:

> Long ago Mephisto called up the vision of a speeding coach as a paradigm of the way for man to move through the world. Now, however, his protégé has outgrown him: Faust wants to move the world itself.[7]

According to Berman, Faust's concrete programs and operational plans are radically different to previous modes of engagement. But Faust's vision has come true and the world has come to serve the "new collective human purposes."[8] There is no doubt that Faust's operational plan, devised in 1808, is in full force today. As cultural theorist and performance scholar Jen Harvie has argued in *Fair Play - Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013), it operates in the form of "neoliberal capitalism's relentless deployment of labour" and is "instrumental to the cultivation of productivity, wealth and profit."[9] In other words, the deployment and value of labour is the focus of modern operations and dominates modern life with material profit as the measure of all things. Berman's notion of a 'collective human purpose' indicates the pervasiveness of this transformational endeavour of earth and sea, although the notion of a 'collective' is somewhat misleading. According to Harvie, the endeavour is rooted in 17th century liberalism, an ideology that promoted the idea of individuality unconstrained by instituted regulations.[10] This promotion of the individual was formative of the bourgeoisie of the 19th and 20th centuries and has been operative ever since, celebrated even by 20th century Avant-gardes.[11] As Harvie argued, the Neoliberalism we know today in the 21st century is made up of precisely the

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6 Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, 62.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Jen Harvie, *Fair Play - Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2013), 95.
10 Ibid., 12.
11 Malcolm Turvey, *The Filming of Modern Life: European Avant-Garde Film of the 1920s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

"principles of diminished state intervention and enhanced individual liberty to seek self-reward."[12] In other words, any 'collective' modern venture is driven by sets of individuals who really pursue 'only' their own goals.

But individual agency and unconstrained liberty is also only part of the cocktail that makes up the Neoliberal society. Individual agency is not only endorsed but also harnessed by corporations for the sake of profit making. In other words, the promise of self-realisation underpins an identity that is always available for work. Harvie stated: "Workers are constantly 'on call'; work is unstoppably dispersed, saturating all life."[13] Drawing on the writing of sociologist Richard Sennett, in particular his book The Craftsman (2009) Harvie made the point that it is not so much the foregrounding of labour per se but the appropriation of labour for the sake of financial profit, which casts individuals as workers and producers, be they professionals, students or artists. Labour has been instrumentalised for production, wealth and profit and other values which could be associated with and realised through labour such as social values, work for its own sake, creative forms of making and "quality-driven work" have been marginalised or left to play a minor role.[14] This means that modes of doing nothing, and forms of inertia and idleness or slothfulness, or 'time without content' as Cohen proposed, have become highly contentious.

These trademarks of modernity are not confined to Europe. An equivalent to the literary Faustian scene from the other side of the globe is the image of *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (Kanagawa oki nami ura), also known as *The Great Wave*, a colour woodblock by Japanese artist Hokusai from around 1830. It was created at a time when the American military stationed gunships in front of Japanese ports forcing Japan to more fully open its door to international commerce and to the American market, having until then restricted trade to dealings with the Dutch and the Chinese. *The Great Wave* is said to represent both the turmoil of this moment and the desire to be part of global developments, already containing influences from both European

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12 Harvie, *Fair Play,* 12.
13 Ibid., 53.
14 Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 8-9 and 24. Cited in Harvie, *Fair Play*, 95.

and Dutch art.[15] With its depiction of the sea in turmoil the work echoes the sentiments explored in Faust's vision from roughly the same time period. The wave of modernity was, and is, global and appears to be unstoppable. Some of it is beneficial and facilitates progress in terms of individual agency, freedom and mobility. On the other hand, as suggested by the title of Marshall Berman's publication *All That is Solid Melts into Air,* a phrase taken from Marx's *Communist Manifesto*, modern life also signifies the dissolution of old structures and boundaries and the imposition of exhaustive and exhausting economic regimes. These, in turn, reduce and restrain the individual in new ways.[16]

The work of French philosopher Georges Bataille sits within this context and constitutes a vehement critique of the utilitarianism that dominates modern life. Writing in the late 20s and up to the late 60s Bataille was critical of the idea of the 'professional man' and of idealist notions such as Nietzsche's Superman. For Bataille the so-called successful person was only a fragmentary being. In *On Nietzsche: the Will to Chance*, Bataille wrote:

> When a man limits his desires, for example, to the possession of power within the state, he acts, he knows what he has done. It matters little if he fails; he profits from the outset. He inserts himself advantageously within time. Each of his movements becomes *useful*. It becomes possible for him to advance, with each passing instant, towards his chosen goal. His time becomes a progression towards this goal (that is what we usually call living).[17]

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15 Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 514-518.
16 It will not be possible here to identify and analyse all the factors, histories and agencies that contribute to and continue to fuel this particular modern idea of progress. Alongside Liberalism and its consequences one would need to include, for example, the Victorian morality which blamed idle individuals for their unemployment and poverty, the Beveridge Report, which laid the foundations of today's Welfare State but named idleness as one of the five Giant Evils, and global capitalism which emerged at the crossroads of all of these. The Welfare State. The National Archives.
https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/brave_new_world/welfare.htm. Accessed 20/09/2015.
17 Georges Bataille, 'On Nietzsche: the Will to Chance', in *The Bataille Reader*, eds. F. Botting and S. Wolson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 336.

This passage highlights the predicament formed through the combination of the promise of self-realisation and the simultaneous instrumentalisation of the individual under the wider imperative to work. Bataille insisted on the need to challenge this kind of double bind of aspiration and deployment. He claimed: "Only by refusing to act, or at least by denying the pre-eminence of the time reserved for action, can I maintain the quality of wholeness within myself."[18] His critique was directed against the capitalist credo of production, which subsumes humankind under a modernist notion of progress, that is an ever increasing level of productivity and efficacy and increasing demand on individual commitment and servitude, whereby a person is reduced to a tool. French writer and Bataille champion Catherine Clément echoed Bataille's critical stance: in *Syncope, the Philosophy of Rapture*, she lamented the fact that "hardworking modernity denies […] retirement to the social being", meaning that self-directed retreats are not available to the professional individual: "Now, one does not *go* on retreat, one is *retired*: it is a state, old age, uselessness, a social shame."[19] The notion of social shame goes some way to indicate the harsh negativity that is attached to non-productive states. It suggests that an individual has worth only as a useful person and that the other aspects of the Self have fallen off the social, cultural and political agendas in one way or another.

Bataille was not an economist, as he himself acknowledged, but he nevertheless expanded on this topic by publishing first an essay entitled *The Notion of Expenditure* in 1933, and, three decades later in 1967, a comprehensive theory of a *general economy* in *The Accursed Share,* published in France as *La Part Maudite*.[20] For Bataille a review of the economy was key to his big project, the restoring of a sovereign individual and of a cohesive, heterogeneous society. His various theoretical enquiries do not comment on, or engage with, other specific economic theories but constitute a wider critique of capitalist market economies and their protestant ethics and roots.[21] Bataille's referents are found mainly in anthropological debates, such as

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18 Ibid., 336.
19 Catherine Clément, *Syncope, The Philosophy of Rapture*, trans. Sally O'Driscoll and Deidre M. Mahoney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). 25.
20 Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume I* (Zone Books, 1989), Preface 9-14.
21 As Michael Richardson commented in a review of Bataille's economic theory, Bataille basically agreed with Max Weber's arguments made in his famous essay *The Protestant Ethic*

Marcel Mauss' *The Gift*, published in 1925, which led him to make the following claims: first, he proposed the notion of a general economy as a conceptual, economic framework that takes a wider, global perspective and that includes, for example, the sun and other such natural processes which feed into man's productive cycles. Bataille's argument was that economics should not be studied "as if it were a matter of an isolatable system of operation", and that a much larger outline needed to be considered which included global flows of energy.[22] Secondly, Bataille proposed that economic theory should focus on expenditure rather than production, an idea which went very much against the grain of his contemporary economists. He called his theory the *general economy*, in comparison with conventional, isolated economics which he described as *restricted economy*. In the *The Accursed Share* he claimed that:

> the extension of economic growth itself requires the overturning of economic principles—the overturning of the ethics that grounds them. Changing from the perspectives of *restrictive* economy to those of *general* economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking—and of ethics.[23]

The statement reveals Bataille's ambition. With economic principles and its ethics Bataille referred to what he called the 'material problem', in essence the reduction of man and his activities to what is "useful", and the equating of man to a *thing*, a commodity.[24] According to Bataille, this reduction is key to capitalist market economies and has resulted in a fundamental misconception:

> Where we think we have caught hold of the Grail, we have only grasped a *thing*, and what is left in our hands is only a cooking pot… [25]

In other words, man lives under the illusion that the satisfaction of mainly material interests, requirements and needs lead to fulfillment, but, according to Bataille, the subject will only ever accumulate *things* and miss that which he is seeking.[26] Modern man, far from being free and sovereign, is therefore only a shadow of himself. And it is not only the individual who is estranged from himself, but also the social fabric which no longer accommodates heterogeneous elements. According to Bataille, this is the fundamental problem and leads to the following question:

> How can man find himself – or regain himself – seeing that the action to which the search commits him in one way or another is precisely what estranges him from himself?[27]

Michael Richardson acknowledged the significance of the project, despite Bataille's lack of economic credibility and various inaccuracies and inconsistencies in his arguments.[28] Richardson endorsed Bataille's observation, that in capitalist economies the human need for rest and play "is negatively related to the need for work" and added, that the economy of slavery is "capitalism in its extreme form, in which [this] principle is taken to its logical conclusion".[29] Richardson's metaphorical use of the term slavery is contentious, but it does make a valid point in that individuals have become slave-like. Richardson also noted how much Bataille went against dominant economics which endorsed the free market, economic efficiency and social homogeneity, measuring all social activity in terms of their economic benefits.[30] Bataille, he wrote,

> is looking towards an entirely different conception of economy, one that would serve to destroy utilitarian postulates and institute new possibilities of heterogeneity […].[31]

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26 Ibid., 131.
27 Ibid.
28 Richardson, 'Expenditure', 67-96.
29 Ibid., 72.
30 Ibid., 69.
31 Ibid.

The notion of heterogeneity is pivotal in Bataille's thought, for it is normally the hallmark of a healthy society. As Richardson argued, it is that which guarantees a coherent social entity compared to homogeneity which "weakens the social cohesion within a given society", because of its reductive approach which values life only as far as it contributes to production and accumulation.[32] This utilitarianism confines man to a system that promises one thing and delivers another, a system which ultimately does not serve him, but which he serves. In order to challenge this estrangement and to restore the subject, Bataille requested humankind to surrender to an economics based on excess and on the need for loss. His own oeuvre is an exploration of what this might mean, and the performance practice that is under discussion here also seeks to address this predicament, exposing the limitations imposed on the modern individual and proposing live performance practices as a means to transcend these conditions.

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32 Ibid., 84 and 91.

Chapter 1. Flush, or the possibility of moving towards an impossible goal

Flush, or the possibility of moving towards an impossible goal (Kappenberg, 2002)

In 2002, I conceived a performance entitled *Flush, or the possibility of moving toward an impossible goal*. The work was first performed in Geneva at the Gallery Centre D'Art en Ile.[33] *Flush* was a live intervention on a narrow footbridge in the city centre of Geneva, programmed as part of an exhibition entitled *Unbemerkt in Genf*, [Un]noticed in Geneva. The chosen walkway runs just above water level and parallel to the riverbanks, down the middle of the Rhone before connecting to higher bridges that span the river. Being lower than the surrounding riverbanks the footbridge resembles a stage in the centre of an urban amphitheatre.

The performance occurred at lunchtime over four days. The gallery had advertised the exhibition and the times of performance interventions in its vicinity but there were no public signs at the actual location indicating that art was taking place or giving instructions as to how to negotiate the intervention on the narrow bridge. Over four days two female performers in long black rubber dresses with fluorescent green and pink sleeves arrived with a bucket each. They engaged in a ritualistic activity, which suggested an un-obtainable goal: to scoop water from one side of the bridge and pour it into the other whilst working in opposition to each other.

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33 *Flush*, Centre D'Art en île Geneva, Switzerland, 4 - 6 April 2002, at 1.00pm for 30min, performed by Claudia Kappenberg and Elgin Clausen. Devised by Claudia Kappenberg. The work was later reconfigured and presented in form of a video installation as part of Controlled Democracy, White Space Gallery, London UK, 1-18/09/2004. Documentation of work: images are included in this Chapter, and a Schema of the work is included in the Appendix, 226. The images within the text are not titled or 'signposted' so that the reader comes across them like he/she would come across a performance when walking through the city. In the case of *Flush*, no cameras were present during the actual performances to avoid drawing attention to the activity in this way, and the stills were taken separately. All subsequent performance documentation is of the actual performances. The format of the Schema is inspired by Dan Graham's Schema, published 1966. Graham devised the Schema as representations of texts, "to be published as component pages […] specifically published as individual pages in various magazines." He stipulated: "Each page is to be set in its final form by the editor of the publication where it is to appear, the exact data in each particular instance to correspond to the fact(s) of its published appearance." Dan Graham, Schema (March 1966), (London, Cologne, New York: Lisson Publications, 1972), Preface.

The performance proceeded in a slow and measured way; the performers stood at some distance from each other, each looking out to one side of the river and the banks of the city. The buckets were tied to a rope, dropped into the water over the side of the bridge and hauled up when full. Holding the buckets both performers turned simultaneously to cross the bridge, rested the buckets on the opposite railing and poured the water back into the river. When the buckets were empty they lifted the buckets towards the sky, paused and began a new cycle, dropping the buckets again into the river below and waiting for them to fill up with water.

The simple gesture of bringing up water echoed the historical past of the bridge which was suggested by the name of the walkway, *Le passage des Lavandières* (Passage of the Washerwomen), marked on a street sign. At this point in time the footbridge was generally used as a walkway for the urban passer-by, as a means to get from one place to another. On one level the persistent activity of the performers mirrored this sense of direction and purpose of the daily commuters but on another, the repetitive gestures and doubling of each other's effort subverted the familiar economic logic. Caught within their rhythm the performers both reinforced and canceled each other's efforts. Each cycle led to a new beginning without producing anything and without leaving any traces at the site. The intervention constituted, above all, a generous squandering of time.

Periodic interludes further reinforced the game: after a certain number of movement phrases, of dropping and pausing, hauling up and pausing, crossing and pausing, pouring out and pausing, dropping and pausing, hauling up and crossing, the performers suddenly froze as they walked from one side of the bridge to the other. Standing still on the middle of the bridge and holding the buckets, they faced opposite directions as if caught mid-step. Meanwhile the city around them and the waters below continued to flow. The unexpected stop and sudden absence of movement stood in a marked contrast to the river and to the adjacent city traffic with its many noises, cars, buses, trucks and trams. As the performers stood still the walkway fell silent, invoking an absence as in the ghost note of the bass player, a missing beat.

Flush had been devised to work both with and against the specific location and designed to both enchant and disrupt the fabric of the site. In order to work with and against the local patterns, the performance played with the notion of "the disturbance of one system by another", a formula borrowed from reflections on Pasolini's film *Teorema* (1968) in Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*.[34] In *Teorema* a stranger quietly inserts himself into a family and makes everyone fall in love with him. Barthes explored this dynamic as part of a text on the amorous dedication that accompanies the gift for the lover, be that real or imagined.[35] Love will seek whatever forms of expression, Barthes wrote, be that song, work of any kind, or writing and its dedications. That which is given is however not necessarily kind to the other but a demonstration of one's own mastery, one's own pleasure and thereby possibly oppressing the other.[36] Hence, Barthes surmised, that which masquerades as a dedication is instead an inscription that functions in two ways: the loved one is inscribed by the gift, but he also inscribes himself into that which is given, the song, the dedication, the text, the gesture, and, he inscribes himself into the one who gives. Speaking of the loved one Barthes added:

> […] Your presence within the text, whereby you are unrecognizable there, is not that of an analogical figure, of a fetish, but that of a force which is not, thereby, absolutely reliable. Hence it doesn't matter that you feel continuously reduced to silence, that your own discourse seems to you smothered beneath the monstrous discourse of the amorous subject: in *Teorema*, the "other" does not speak, but he inscribes something within each of those who desire him – he performs, what mathematicians call a catastrophe (the disturbance of one system by another): it is true that this mute figure is an angel.[37]

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34 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977).
35 Ibid., 75/76.
36 Ibid., 78/79.
37 Ibid., 79.

The stranger, the other, the mute figure, argued Barthes, inscribes himself into those who come in contact with him. His otherness may appear insignificant, uncertain or minor compared to the dynamics and discourses that surround him, but this does not diminish his force. By inserting himself into that system he causes a commotion, a rupture, a disturbance.

Barthes' stranger compares with the performing figure who does not need to "speak" – much like the angel in *Teorema*. Nevertheless, she will inscribe herself within all of those whose attention she catches. This is how she performs the catastrophe, the disturbance of one system by another. The amorous subject is the passer-by in that his gift is not necessarily what it seems. He will be intent on mastery, on valorising what he brings as well as on valorising himself through what he brings.

In this sense the game of *Flush* was one of surprise and seduction: the performers inserted themselves into the network of the commuting population and performed a well-coordinated routine, but they really only played 'work'. Nothing was made and no trace was left on site. The responses of the passers-by to this poetic performance of wastefulness tended to be physical and immediate, either they would halt their progress or hurry away, or respond with an erratic combination of both. Perhaps the passers-by 'fell' for this Other that was presented to them, for a moment, before realising that the spectacle was rather incompatible with the programmes and schedules they had signed up to. Their faces would express a kind of 'what is that supposed to mean?' but the work would not provide them with an answer.

Barthes' understanding of the dedication and his terminology reference Marcel Mauss' seminal 1925 publication *The Gift*, and Georges Bataille's subsequent reading, or re-writing, of the notion of the gift. Both Mauss and Bataille undertook an analysis of the gift-economy in primitive societies and of the American Indian ritual of potlatch in particular, but arrived at considerably different interpretations. Barthes sided with Bataille in that he understood the gift as something excessive and therefore disruptive: "The gift is not necessarily excrement, but it has, nonetheless, a vocation as waste" wrote Barthes. A gift is disruptive because it does not fit into existing patterns or arrangements, it "is more than I know what to do with, it does not fit my

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space," declared Barthes.[38] Accordingly, Barthes differentiated between the gift that is declared as such, and which therefore becomes part of an exchange economy, and what he termed *silent expenditure*:

> A typical argument of a "scene" is to represent to the other what you are giving him or her (time, energy, money, ingenuity, other relations, etc.) […] To speak of the gift is to place it in an exchange economy (of sacrifice, competition, etc.): which stands opposed to silent expenditure.[39]

Barthes' silent expenditure is equivalent to Bataille's quest for the irrational, disruptive gesture, the excessive or erotic element that exceeds established relations. Barthes was possibly drawing on post-modern research into the gift in Indian rituals as discussed by Carl Olsen in a comparative study between Hindu and Western concepts: reviewing the work of Jonathan Parry on the giving of gifts by pilgrims in the city of Banaras, Olsen proposed that "the best form of a gift is secret and without a recipient. A good example of a secret kind of gift is money that is surreptitiously thrown into the Ganges river."[40] Such a gift would constitute perhaps the ultimate loss, not even be witnessed and not secure any kind of status or power like the gift-expenditure that takes place in the context of an exchange. Olsen's idea of a secret gift resonates with Barthes' proposition of *silent expenditure* as an event or activity that is without representation.

One could argue that *Flush* pertained to this category of events, as a surprising intervention and combination of gestures that was silent and not instrumentalised as part of any kind of predetermined exchange. It was simply there, unfolding without explanation within the public space, perhaps seen, perhaps not. Not part of any given narrative the scene inscribed itself onto the passers-by, challenging the work patterns

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38 Ibid., 76.
39 Ibid., 77. The theoretical and ethnographic references embedded in this proposition will be discussed later on in the research project. In this Chapter I focus on what Barthes' ideas mean for live performance.
40 Carl Olsen, 'Excess, Time, and the Pure Gift: Postmodernist Transformations of Marcel Mauss' Theory', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol.14, no.3/4, 2003, 365. See also: Parry, Jonathan P. (1986). *The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the "Indian Gift"*. Man New Series, vol.21, 453-473.

that are written into their bodies and identities as employees of a global and pervasive enterprise in which everything is organised in terms of productivity and wealth creation. And perhaps it took some time for the 'catastrophe' to settle and for any recognition to take place on the part of the audience as to this possibility of wastefulness. The work then offered a perspective, an opening. It invited the recognition of alternative regimes, relations and modes of exchange that are not driven by interest and purpose. This was a performance of uselessness with regards to dominant values and expectations, and it was 'useful' in the sense of a jolt and the probability of an inscription.

Barthes' reflections offer a vocabulary with which to think through this work. As a text infused with Bataillean concepts from *The Notion of Expenditure, The Accursed Share,* and *On Nietzsche: the Will to Chance*, it pointed to Bataille's oeuvre as a theoretical framework that could underpin a development of the performance practice.[41] On the other hand, some of Bataille's writing, in particular his ideas on sovereignty, seemed a bit grandiose and somewhat outdated, but the work of Catherine Clément, a contemporary French writer, philosopher and diplomat, offered a contemporary perspective and useful translation of these problematic aspects of Bataille's thought. Her publication *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture* (1994) presented furthermore impulses for the development of choreographic structures and for the analysis of audience experience in the encounter of live work.[42] The writing of both Bataille and Clément proved instrumental in the advance of the research practice, allowing for a dialogue between the performed work and the theoretical propositions. On one hand, the research examined the performance practice through the writing of both these theorists, and, on the other, the performed work explored the relevance of the theoretical concepts for contemporary art practices.

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41 Georges Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure' in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. ed. Allan Stoekl, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 167-181; *The Accursed Share;* 'On Nietzsche: the Will to Chance' in *Visions of Excess,* 330-342.
42 Clément, *Syncope*.

Syncope, a missing beat

Further above I described the frozen moments in *Flush* as an absence like the ghost note of the bass player, a missing beat. I borrowed this comparison to a musical phenomenon from Clément, who proposed the notion of Syncope as a vital interlude or timeout in the above-mentioned *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture*.[43] Clément's Syncope is an elusive concept. According to the author herself one might describe it as a form of chasing death, an interlude of nothing in the fabric of the everyday.[44] The fact that this occurs in the middle of something is key. Like death, Syncope happens suddenly and unexplained, it constitutes a jump and a break of relations. Syncope is the other to transition, to that which can be followed and understood. Like the missing beat of the bass player Syncope suspends, delays, throws out of sync, provokes a discord or rushes ahead.[45] In *Flush* the frozen moments constituted a syncopic moment in the sense of a sudden absence within the perpetual movement of the performance itself and of the surrounding urban every day. Occurring unannounced and unexplained, the freezes upset the comforting regularity of the perpetuum mobile. Like a freeze-frame in film, the interruptions suspended the movie of the everyday. Suddenly there was no direction, no pace and no purpose. Two figures in costume stood in the middle of the bridge, holding buckets, motionless. One facing one way, the other facing the other. Then, without explanation they began to move again, picking up where they left off.

During the even-paced cycles of buckets, audiences slowed their steps in order to observe the choreography, sometimes pausing before continuing their journey along the walkway. The freeze-frames however caused a rift between the performers and the surrounding space and disrupted the audience's pleasure in the synchronized play. Occasionally a passer-by would be caught within the freeze-frame on their way across the bridge and would in most cases hurry away to rejoin the moving city. In the context of the urban every day the performing figures were moderately strange, but the freezes would have been utterly foreign and not easily incorporated or explained.

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43 Ibid., 20, 21, 27.
44 Ibid., 20.
45 Ibid., 27.

This corresponds to what Clément wrote about Syncope in that it needs to go further than the "muffled rhythm of the social day and social night, of work and rest."[46] She wrote:

> For *those* moments, stealing time is not enough: one has to go further and suspend time. That is the function of the short Syncope: a sudden flight into non-existent time.[47]

The freezes in *Flush* appeared to provide something like this flight into sudden, non-existent time within the regular pace of simulated work. Combining several opposing elements the performance both copied and created a friction with the everyday. On one hand, the constant movement pattern proceeded with the regularity of a pendulum, mirroring the viewer's own pace and offering an assurance. On the other hand, the endless repetitions and futility of the gestures were excessive and absurd, unsettling the passer-by. Finally, the periodic freezes in the middle of the bridge threw the delicate equilibrium into disarray and created a vacuum that disturbed the scene. In the words of Clément this is the kind of dissonance, which "dislocates harmony *for a moment*",[48] a fragile instance, which is minimal in duration and cannot last.

Clément's philosophical, aesthetic and political project

To fully understand the concept of Syncope and what it might offer as a possible reading for performed work, one needs to consider the wider conceptual framework and the philosophy of which it is a part. In the foreword to Clément's *Syncope, The Philosophy of Rapture,* Verena Andermatt Conley summarized the narrative thread of the book as a "negative history of sorts that deals with what Western philosophers, from the Greeks to Hegel, and the contemporary scene, have repressed or excluded."[49] Clément herself described this history of the repressed in the introduction as a

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.,161. Italics mine.
49 Verena Andermatt Conley, Foreword to Ibid., 1994, xi.

genealogy of syncopes, claiming that the syncopic is generally considered equivalent to "unfortunate accidents, sources of disorder, unhealthy disturbances, private and public fanaticisms."[50] Giving a flavour of the history that is offered in the book she wrote that the repressed finds a twofold fate in Western modernity in that it made an appearance in the writings of the Romantics and philosophers such as Hölderlin, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Bataille, but that, on the other hand, it disappeared from the contemporary every day. Today, Clément stated, the repressed returns in the disguise of fainting fits, drunkenness and through medical symptoms such as depression.[51]

Clément's concern with the repressed is echoed across a wide body of feminist literature from the late 20th and 21st centuries. It examines, from diverse angles, the patriarchal mechanism of repression, its histories and feminine forms of rebellion. Clément's reading of *La Traviata* in her publication *Opera or the Undoing of Women* (1999) is symptomatic for the feminist critique of, for example, the operatic schema and serves also to outline Clément's own complex endeavour. *La Traviata*, Clément wrote:

> is the exemplary history of a woman crushed by the bourgeois family, exemplary because the entire history of opera pivots around things at stake in the family. There is a common law, there are fathers to defend and apply it, and there are rebels.[52]

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50 Ibid., 20/21.
51 The claim that the repressed disappeared from the contemporary every day is somewhat categorical and debatable. Cultures find all kinds of ways to lift the restrictions that govern everyday life. Large-scale public festivities such as the carnival could be considered here, in particular through Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. In a study of 70s' British Punk Terry Jones deployed the carnivalesque describing it as a reincarnation, as a ritual for the oppressed, and as a fertilising event. He also cited Terry Eagelton's claim of the carnivalesque as "a licensed enclave", all of which suggests possible parallels between Bakhtin's concept and Clément's philosophy of rapture. (Jones, Peter. 2002. "Anarchy in the UK: '70s British Punk as Bakhtinian Carnival". *Studies in Popular Culture* 24 (3). Popular Culture Association in the South: 25–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414964.) However, Clément herself does not engage with Bakhtin and I am therefore limiting the discussion to focus on relevant debates in psychoanalysis, ethnography, feminism and phenomenology, to investigate her claims.
52 Catherine Clément, *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, (London: Virago Press, 1999), 60.

The family is at stake also in Clément's project, and there are quite a few intellectual "fathers" under the name of Freud, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Bataille (among others), while the rebels are, of course, the women. Under consideration are the patterns of repression and the lack of culturally agreed mechanisms through which the repressed can emerge. The particular discourses embedded in Clément's project are Lacanian and Indian approaches to psychoanalysis and feminist philosophical debates. Furthermore the work is deeply rooted in Lévi-Strauss' structuralism and his re-reading of the pathological and, finally, the project pays tribute to the philosopher Georges Bataille as the author of an exceedingly disruptive literary and philosophical oeuvre on which Clément could however lean in her approach and ambition.[53] Bataille's concept of *non-productive expenditure* complements Clément's critique of the rational Self and his formulation of inner experience and sovereignty is perhaps the closest to what Clément pursues with the notion of Syncope. There is also a wider contemporary interest in forms of pausing and stopping, suspension or standstill within the field of theatre and performance research, and a theorisation of these moments as potential forms of resistance against the increasing acceleration and mechanisation of the everyday. German scholar Prof. Dr. Barbara Gronau has explored this field through several publications such as, *Performanzen des Nichtstun* (2008), on the performing of non-doing, a collaboration with Alice Lagaay, as well as *Ökonomien der Zurückhaltung, Kulturelles Handeln zwischen Askese und Restriktion* (2010), on cultural interventions between asceticism and restraint, also in collaboration with Alice Lagaay, and a new publication *Künste des Anhaltens, Ästhetische Verfahren des Stillstellens* (2015), on the art of suspension and aesthetics of the standstill. There is a correlation with Clément's work particularly through the exploration of traditional, ascetic practices and rituals, an ethnographic debate which will be discussed in Chapter six. What mark these different explorations is their interdisciplinary and political ambitions, as well as the belief that the arts may be

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53 The disruptive character of Bataille's work has been described, for example, as equivalent to "an unburied corpse", compared with the French "deferred prose of late-phenomenology." Mark Douglas Price, Eroticism by Georges Bataille, book review, 2004. Online https://philosophynow.org/issues/46/Eroticism_by_Georges_Bataille. Accessed 06/07/2015.

instrumental in advancing both the theoretical discourse and the practice of forms of non-doing.[54]

Different discourses are brought together in Clément's oeuvre without apology, to unfold a dialogue that brings Eastern approaches into Western debates. Clément has argued that we have to look East and to start there if we want to recover the sense of wholeness that the West has lost. "By starting East, we can then return and rediscover the enclaves into which the art of dissension has slipped, through the meshes of a tightly drawn net."[55] This statement is however highly categorical and one might argue that it does not hold in such general terms. Clément herself went East but as she also acknowledged, the syncopic is understood in the West by, for example, Lacan, even if he considered it to be beyond the reach of psychoanalysis, and by Bataille, who, she proposed, "encounters by himself the paths' to syncope.[56] Nevertheless Clément claimed:

> History has imposed a split on the world where the subject is "strong", free and conscious of its own identity, and the world where the weakened subject surrenders itself, through copulation, to the cry of the Other, and reality.[57]

Clément offered an uncompromising and exclusive view according to which there is either "the control of syncope or the autonomy of the subject."[58] As discussed in *Syncope*, this view is based on Lévi-Strauss' argument, that the advent of Islam was responsible for a defining and definite split between Christianity and Buddhism, the West and the East. Agreeing with Lévi-Strauss, Clément concluded that only the East disposes of a rigorous philosophical method as well as a practice that can sustain the

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[54] The debates in Germany are infused and informed by the work of philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and his thesis that movement is the blindspot of contemporary philosophy. He argues, for example, that contemporary, capitalist societies lack holistic perspectives and subject the world to an exhausting regime of continuous mobilisation and production. His work is less known or referenced in the Anglo-Saxon discourse. Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989).

[55] Clément, *Syncope*, 21.

[56] Ibid., 141.

[57] Ibid., 142.

[58] Ibid.

effort required for syncope.[59] The method referred to is Tantrism, which Clément described as a "philosophical science of syncope", and which is underpinned by a "consummate art of its practice," that is an uncompromising deconstruction of the Self through the renouncing of everything that could confirm a sense of identity.[60] Re-rehearsing the binary mapping of East and West, Clément perhaps fell prey to a romantic impulse that she discussed elsewhere in *Syncope*. Nevertheless, she had good reasons for claiming that Tantrism consists of a unique, systematic and extremely rigorous practice and philosophy, that is concerned with the forces of the orgasm, that is a fusion of masculine and feminine energies, of I and the Other, and of inside and outside.[61] Quoting the Indian scholar Michel Hulin Clément wrote that orgasm is "an inner stirring whose essence is the tumultuous release of the entirety of one's energy."[62] It might be safe to claim that such a radical dissolution of the individual subject is foreign to Western cultural practices, even if Western bodies of thought explore some of this territory.

A more in-depth investigation into the validity of Clément's notion of a categorical historical split between West and East - and of the implied argument that the differences remain in place today - would have to be the focus of a different research project. Such an investigation would need to compare and contrast texts from the wider phenomenological tradition, for example from Heidegger's Dasein and Being towards Death, or Freud's death drive, with Clément's oeuvre, in order to examine proximities and differences to the Indian "plunge into the place from where we come, from where we were born, *inter faeces et urinas* […]."[63] But this is not the work that this practice-led PhD can undertake.

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59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 21/132. Tantrism is an ancient ritual which was fully developed by the 11th century and has been practiced by many of the Brahmanic sects ever since. The practice is explored in depth in Chapters 10, 11 and 12 of *Syncope*.
61 Ibid., 138.
62 Ibid., 138. Clément quoting Michel Hulin, *Le Principe de L'ego dans la pensée indienne classique: La Notion d'ahamkara* (The Principle of Ego in Indien classical thought: The concept of d'Ahamkara) (Paris: Collège de France, Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1987), 331.
63 Ibid., 142.

The present research is an investigation into where and how Clément recognises Syncope, what she drew from George Bataille in particular, and what this proposes for contemporary arts practices. This research investigates Clément's claim, that Art is a realm within the Western world where syncopic experiences are still possible. Clément claimed that the work of some artists "reproduces the scenario of syncope: a surprise, a delay of life, a violent anticipation, and a slow return to what one calls the 'self'."[64] However, Clément also warned that Syncope is ultimately elusive and cannot be assumed or guaranteed. Instead, she argued, it is a matter of allowing for surprises in the work, and for accidents.[65] Testing Clément's proposition therefore presents a challenge: if syncopic experience depends on surprises and accidents, the research practice can only focus on the conditions of possibility that can allow for such experiences. The following chapters will investigate the conditions of different performed works, as they emerged in the course of the research. But first I will review Clément's concept of Syncope in more detail, and contextualise this concept through some of Clément's other works and relevant feminist, phenomenological and psychoanalytical discourses. This will provide a fuller picture as to the dialogues that informed and underpinned the notion of Syncope and the philosophy of rapture.

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64 Ibid., 21.
65 Ibid., 14.
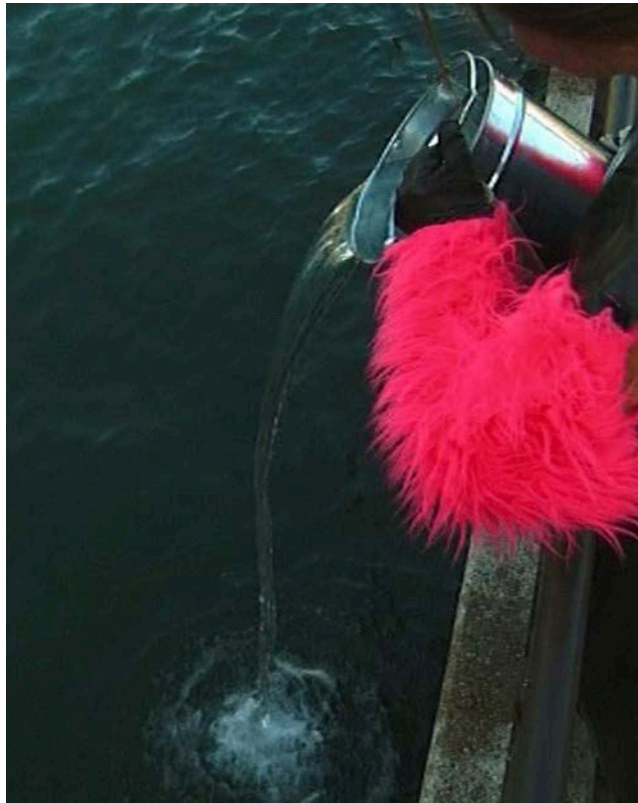
Chapter 2. Catherine Clément's psychoanalytical discourse

Lacan's mirror stage as Syncope

The syncope project is an attempt to propose a new name for something that European and Anglo-American traditions have found difficult to name. Syncope takes us to – or takes place at – the threshold where language and the symbolic order fail, where the body is foregrounded but only in a diffuse and formless or possibly estranged way. Clément stated:

> 'Syncope' is a strange word. It pivots from the clinic to the art of dance, tilts towards poetry, finally ends up in music. In each of these fields syncope takes on a definition. At first there is a shock, a suppression: something gets lost, but no one says what is won. Suddenly, time falters.[66]

This passage suggests the many facets of Syncope, but it also identifies a common denominator in that 'something gets lost, but no one says what is won'. This classifies Syncope as a seizure within a socio-cultural economy that strives for accountability, accumulation and permanence: Syncope stands for loss. To explicate this psychic phenomenon within a Western understanding of the Self Clément turned to Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, the surprise moment of recognition of the infant in the mirror. For Clément it is the primordial Syncope:

> Nothing else happens except for this image in the mirror, this pause, and this sudden rapture. It is a fleeting and precise moment.[67]

At birth, an infant is highly dependent and physically limited. From 6 months to 18 months, Lacan contended, when the infant looks at a mirror, he begins to recognise that the image in the mirror is his own self. As discussed by Lacan, his moment of recognition of himself as a unique individual constitutes a major leap and a 1st

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66 Clément, *Syncope*, 1/2.
67 Clément, 'The Birth of Identity and the Syncope of the Imago: Lacan', in *Syncope*, 119.

formation of the 'imago' as an image of the Self.[68] For Clément, what is key in this instant is Lacan's insight that the "internal thrust is precipitated from *insufficiency* to *anticipation*."[69] This particular psychic movement is what Clément identified as syncope, borrowing the musical term:

> Remember the definition of syncope in music: a note lags behind and anticipates the rest of the movement. This is the dynamic of the imago: caught in the mirror, "captured" in the organic gaze, it is prolonged and anticipates the human figure of the animal who thinks.[70]

In other words there is an instant recognition and identification as well as a projection which provides the passage for an individual to enter a social context with its roles and responsibilities and to take her own place in that community. According to Clément, this primordial syncope acts as the blueprint for all further syncopes and life's transitions, its rites of passage. Two issues arise: first, the imago offers, somewhat misleadingly, the image of the self as an autonomous entity, and second, this Western syncope becomes a kind of barricade on a one-way street, because, according to Western psychoanalysis, a psyche cannot reverse the process or re-constitute its imago. As Clément noted:

> The mirror phase protects and alienates; if the mirror cracks because of another round of syncope, one could just as easily not come back, and remain the other that one has become. One can go mad from it.[71]

Another round of syncopes could be instances which challenge the ego, rites of passage, surprises, and raptures. These, Clément argued, are dangerous, a threat to the Self. However, she claimed, they could be managed and they would be easier to bear if the individual were supported by rituals and part of a community which understands

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68 Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Routledge, 1980), 1-7.
69 Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', 4. Also quoted in Clément, 'The Birth of Identity', 119. *Emphasis hers*.
70 Clément, 'The Birth of Identity', 119.
71 Ibid., 122.

and which allows her to get 'lost' and to come back to the Self. Clément lamented that industrial societies offer less and less of these rituals and that an increasing instrumentalisation puts more and more pressure on the subject to act as autonomous self, to be always 'on', to use Harvie's term. As she pointed out, Lacan also commented on this development in response to a wave of 50s' ego-psychology that was coming from the United States to Europe:

> It is clear that the promotion of the ego today culminates, in conformity with utilitarian concepts of man that reinforce it, in an ever more advanced realisation of man as individual, that is to say, in an isolation of the soul ever more akin to its original dereliction.[72]

Man as utilitarian subject is a narrow, one-dimensional model. Its consequence is a devastating isolation of what Lacan calls the soul. In consideration of this socio-economic context Lacan understood psychoanalysis as "reserves of space at the heart of industrial societies," as rituals on the margins of the social.[73] He conceived the psychoanalytical session as a time for reflection and respite, marked by a non-Cartesian concept of the individual: for him the Self is not defined through rationality as in the 'I think, therefore I am.' On the contrary, as Clément pointed out, Lacan inversed the formula to offer a complexity which gives the subject a means to experience itself differently: "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think."[74] This dictum both signals the limits of knowledge and rationality and opens the possibility of otherness within the self. The differentiation is crucial to protect the subject from totalitarian conceptions, but it also points to weaknesses and vulnerabilities. According to Clément and in view of Lacan's notion of the imago as a more or less rigid defense of an essentially insufficient and fragmented Self: "From that moment on, "I" am nothing but a syncope, a fault line between thinking and being, a subject that is suspended, "shifted", fainted."[75]

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72 Lacan cited in Clément, *Syncope*, 123. Original source: Lacan, 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis', in *Écrits*, 27.
73 Clément, 'The Birth of Identity', 125.
74 Ibid., 126.
75 Clément, *Syncope*, 126.

This Lacanian concept of Self is fundamental to Clément's notion of Syncope and signals the vulnerabilities at the heart of the subject. This subject is not the idealised Western, free autonomous unit as envisaged by the entrepreneurial society, discussed above, but it must behave as if and it must hide any other parts of its self. [76] "In our Western society," Clément wrote, "each person has to find in solitude the means of leaving himself." This society does not want to see fragility and it has no time for it. Few socio-cultural spaces remain in which the utilitarian wo/man can let loose or let go:

> We are still lucky enough to have rock and roll, love at first sight, depression. But they try so hard to cure us that soon there will be nowhere for us to test disharmony; nothing for us to know how to "pass" in the sense that we understand "to die".[77]

Lacan's formula, "I think where I am not" and "I am where I do not think", indicates that the 'I' has few possibilities to 'be' within the rationalist framework, that is to be in a 'thoughtless' mode. Such time has become a luxury few can afford, and opportunities to 'pass' have been eradicated. To address this predicament Clément took the notion of Syncope out of the psychoanalytic context and projected it back into the everyday, reclaiming the phenomenon as non-pathological and necessary instances in the life of a subject, as part of its totality. She uses Syncope broadly to challenge received notions of autonomy and mastery and to advance weakness instead:

> The world in which I have lived until now idolizes power and force, muscle and health, vigor and lucidity. Syncope opens onto a universe of weakness and tricks; it leads to new rebellions. [78]

Clément's writing and choice of words emphasises the cultural and political potential of Syncope as a concept with which to understand what is at stake for the modern

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76 Ibid., 142.
77 Ibid., 128/129.
78 Ibid., 30.

individual. The concept can inform strategies that help to challenge the imposed homogeneity of the everyday and intervene in its system of values. The performance *Flush, or the possibility of moving towards an impossible goal*, offered a glimpse into the kinds of cultural strategies that can facilitate at least minor versions of the ecstatic, syncopic moment when spectators forget their routine and are drawn in to a ritual that facilitates moments of loss, waste or excess. These are rituals where people can 'pass' however briefly. Syncope as a concept can thereby offer a conceptual framework for performance practices, to understand not only what the work facilitates, but also its significance within a wider social field. Advancing laughter and loss, sacrifice, weakness and eroticism, as well as practices of renunciation, Clément proposes a concept with which to rehabilitate the dissenting parts of our selves.

The snake and the snake-charmer

What are the limits of a concept that is founded on a psychoanalytical discourse? The concept of Syncope was originally inspired by Eastern cultural rites and values, but Clément (re)turned to Lacan, whose seminars she had attended and to whose circle she belonged, in order to theorise the syncopic moment. As part of Lacan's circle she will have been fascinated by his psychoanalytical narratives, as Elisabeth Grosz has argued in a feminist review of Lacan, and therefore been caught in "a relation similar to that between the snake and the snake-charmer, in which each charms, and traps, the other."[79] Grosz argued that this kind of fascination is "a risky business" because of the ambivalent identification with the other that "the self strives to incorporate […] in an act as aggressive as it is loving."[80] The issue that is addressed here is that much of psychoanalysis is based on hysterical female figures and thereby traps women in a genderist stereotyping, whilst simultaneously offering a promise of clarification of roles and predicaments within patriarchal structures.

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79 Elisabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan, A feminist introduction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 6.
80 Ibid., 6/7.

Clément herself has acknowledged Lacan's fascination with female characters of all types: "Marcelle, Aimée, the Papin sisters – the whole cast of characters in his early work consists of women. Not a single man is present. […] Here is a man whose thinking is founded entirely on the study of female paranoia. A man who never stopped talking about women."[81] It is pleasing and flattering to be the centre of attention, but such a one-sided investigation must necessarily be distorted. And, fascinated as Clément was by Lacan, her own discourse somewhat replicates the intense focus on the feminine, for example in *L'appel de la transe*, an ethnographic and historical overview of cultural ecstasies which basically discusses female trances only and casts men as the authoritative oppressors. Anorexia is presented as a contemporary remnant or version of trance for young women, and the debate omits the anorectic young men and does not consider what trance states may be available to contemporary males.[82] In *Syncope*, men do feature extensively, but generally as men of letters and purveyors of reason, whose carefully constructed mental edifices crack occasionally and despite themselves, thereby inadvertently allowing for instances that could be read as syncopes - by the female interpreter – with the exception of the Romantic poets, in particular Hölderlin, and of course Bataille whose syncopic journeys Clément deeply admires.

One could therefore argue that Clément is caught within the psychoanalytic spell of fascination with the female psyche, but she also exploits the discourse for her own purposes. In another publication in which Clément and co-author Hélène Cixous imagine, think, write and bear the new female as suggested by the title *The Newly Born Woman* (*La Jeune Née*, 1975), Clément deployed a psychoanalytic lens to investigate how and in what guise the repressed returns under patriarchal laws. Focusing on the figures of the sorceress as the one "who in the end is able to dream nature and therefore conceive it", and the hysteric "who lives with her body in the past [and] bears witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering", Clément highlighted the patterns and dynamics which women have developed over time to

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81 Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan* (New York and Guildford, Surrey: Columbia University Press, 1983), 61. Original publication: Vies et Légendes de Jacques Lacan, (Paris: Édition Bernard Grasset, 1981). Also cited in Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 6.
82 Catherine Clément, *L'appel de la transe* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2011).

cope with and live within a man's world.[83] Psychoanalysis here emerges as a powerful tool and gives Clément the means to cut through what Sandra M. Gilbert has called "the wilderness out of which silenced women must finally find ways to cry, shriek, scream, and dance in impassioned dances of desire."[84] Introducing the English translation of *La Jeune Née* to an American feminist readership Gilbert re-deployed Clément's account of the dance of the tarantella, an occasional mad female dancing practiced in Southern Italy, which is triggered by the imaginary bite of the tarantula: Gilbert pointed out, that within this collaboration with Cixous, Clément deployed traditional methods of analysis and argumentation that "inflicts, yet again, the ghostly bite of the tarantula – the invisible yet powerful insect of patriarchal lore, lure, and law", whereas Cixous "does the dance, the tarantella of theory necessitated by the hideously potent yet phantasmatic incision."[85]

Clément again deployed psychoanalysis in the above-mentioned *Opera, or the Undoing of Women,* originally published in France in 1979 and translated in 1988, in order to unmask the plots in which passionate and independent women surrender to male authorities and in which they are killed (more often than not) in order to uphold the family's order of things. As Susan McClary wrote in the foreword to the English translation,

> A psychoanalytical model permits the following sort of explanation: music is able to simulate the state when the infant still feels itself to be coextensive with the mother's body, a state in which all sensation appears to be authentic – before the alienating social codes of language and culture intervene, before one is even aware of being an individual separate from the mother.[86]

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83 Clément, 'The Guilty One', in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans Besty Wing (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 5. According to Clément one of their ruses is occasional mad dancing, as in the Mezzogiorno of Southern Italy, triggered by the imaginary bite of the tarantula. In a later publication *L'appel de la transe* (Clément, 2011) another whole host of such strategies and rituals are explored in detail.
84 Sandra M. Gilbert, 'A Tarantella of Theory', in *Rereading Women*, *Thirty Years of Exploring Our Literary Tradition*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 77.
85 Gilbert, 'A Tarantella', 79.
86 Susan McClary, Foreword, in Clément, *Opera*, xv.

Psychoanalytic narratives serve Clément here to unmask the operatic subplot in that music appears to allow for unmediated experience and resembles an authentic state while simultaneously masking the highly constructed and coercive narratives. In the end, according to Clément, opera never fails to deliver its moral codes: not only textually but also musically opera demands the obliteration of the irreverent female voice in order to resolve itself. According to McClary, "It is precisely the overpowering necessity of diatonic closure that causes audiences to desire [Carmen's] death: the tonal cards are stacked against her from the outset. […] Cadence at all cost."[87]

Clément's condemnation of the whole of operatic scripts is however not uncontentious: in an article on the female voice, and deploying a feminist phenomenology, Linda Fisher critiqued Clément's view and argued that such a wholesale attack on operatic plots was unwarranted and that the extraordinary display of female voices in opera also puts women in strong roles: "The voices and vocality of operatic women belie and even subvert their traditional gender narratives."[88] Clément's sharp critique of opera must be seen in the context of her other publications and essays of the mid to late 1970s, such as her collaboration with Cixous *La Jeune Née* (1975) discussed above, and *Les Fils de Freud sont fatigués* (1979), as well as in the context of Cixous' project of the *écriture féminine* which began in the mid 1970s. If *La Jeune Née* coincided with, and was part of, the launch of the *écriture féminine, L'Opéra ou la Défaite des femmes* followed just a few years later and appears to be imbued with a similar urge to rewrite and remake culture at large. At that time it would have been more important to provide further evidence for the repressive patterns of patriarchal structures than to find redeeming features.

If Clément's psychoanalytical discourse was informed by, and indebted to, the Lacanian school of thought, her commentary on Freud was vastly more critical, in line

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87 Ibid., xiv

88 L. Fisher, 'Feminist Phenomenological Voices', Continental Philosophy Review, vol.43, no.1, 2010, 90. See also Linda Fisher, 'Opera and the musical semiotics of gender', European Journal for Semiotic Studies/ Revue Européenne d'Études Sémiotiques/ Europäische Zeitschrift für Semiotische Studien, 2001, 13(3-4): 645-659.

with much of contemporary feminist writing. The *écriture féminine* was basically "at odds with biologically based readings of Sigmund Freud", commented Chiara Briganti and Robert Con Davis in a review of Cixous' trajectory, rejecting much of Freud's theories.[89] Lacan however had much to offer to the feminist project, according to Grosz, due to the "radical centre [of his] project – his notion of language as signification – to reconstruct his work sociologically and anthropologically."[90] The shift towards a more socially contracted understanding of the Self was in line with the feminist view of Self and gender as inscriptions on the body, the prevalent position of the *écriture féminine*. Clément, a constitutive member of this group of provocative female writers, borrowed extensively from Lacan following her enchantment with psychoanalysis, but she also appropriated this material and made it her own, and called the project *Syncope*. While the endeavor is indebted to psychoanalysis, Clément has been highly critical of the institution of psychoanalysis and sought to critique its ossification as a bourgeois enterprise in *The Weary Sons of Freud* (1978). She also extended its reach by engaging and collaborating with its dissidents such as Tobie Nathan, in, for example, *The Couch and the Amulette*, originally published in 2002 and translated in 2005.

Water with water all around

From the 80s onwards, Clément published extensively on India, both in the form of novels and critical essays. Inspired by the Eastern concepts of the Self, Clément drew on the writing of Charles Malamoud, who famously exclaimed, "The centre of the self is shit". To this, Clément added: "It absorbs all on its way through, but is especially good for burning."[91] The Indian Self is ideally to be consumed by fire, and to undergo ritual burning in order to secure its continuity. In the Brahmanic universe, "to burn is to reconnect".[92] This is the

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89 Chiara Briganti and Robert Con Davis, 'Cixous, Hélène' in *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 162. Online: https://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/cixous/efcrit.html.
90 Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, 19.
91 Ibid., 151.
92 Ibid., 150.

opposite to the fear of loss and dissolution that is ubiquitous in Western culture. Clément's proposition of Syncope or rapture as a momentary and ritualistic loss of Self is, in line with the Indian notion of the Self, to be conceived therefore as a desirable moment in the passage through life, and not as a pathological event.

As Clément wrote, the concept of Syncope may have occurred to her also in other contexts but the particular contiguity of life and death in India, as well as the dancing, the foreign tongues and scripts and its love poetry, led her to formulate the philosophy of rapture.[93] The experience of ecstasy, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, also forms part of this catalogue of rapture. To describe ecstasy, Clément referred to the work of the philosopher Ramana Maharishi who wrote that it could be compared to a bucket immersed in water: "it is water with water all around."[94] Following the burning away of what the West would call the Ego, water is that which dissolves what remains in an unlimited ocean. The image of a bucket full of water immersed in water shall serve here as visual representation of the loss of Self in syncopic experience. The image figures in *Flush* in each of the cycles; every new round began with the two performers dropping their buckets into the river below. Hitting the surface of the water below the buckets would produce a hard metallic sound, which echoed around the space. Afterwards there was always the silence of the water gradually flowing into the bucket, and the buckets slowly sinking into the river. The sinking of buckets of water constitutes a scenario of loss in metaphorical terms. I had not come across Clément or studied Indian psychoanalysis when I conceived the work, but perhaps the performance was dipping into an archetypal reservoir of images and sensations.

On the limits and at the limits

Whilst calling for a rebellion that rehabilitates weakness, Clément nevertheless conceded that it is a "limited rebellion", both in political terms and as a philosophical

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93 Ibid., 20.
94 Ibid., 153.

project.[95] As she observed, her writing works not only "at the limits" but "*on* the limits" of Western philosophical discourse.[96] Describing syncope though metaphors, observations, comparisons and anecdotes, and circulating between one and the other, Clément took recourse though music, medicine, philosophy, psychoanalysis and ethnography, but she could never really point directly at the syncopic, or lay it bare. Clément confessed this in the introduction to the project:

> I am only a philosopher, quick to intertwine the threads of thought around a phenomenon that fundamentally rejects it. All that is left is the way procession wanders; like an animal, it makes circles around its desired prey, meanderings that little by little draw nearer, perhaps to the heart.[97]

Perhaps my attempt at retracing Clément's steps, and attempting to gain clarity as to the precise nature and condition for Syncope, is equally limited, and I might not get any closer than Clément to the heart, or to syncope. Nevertheless, as in *Flush*, which performs *the possibility of moving towards an impossible goal*, I explore the possibility of understanding Syncope, through making, writing and reflecting, even if it is an impossible goal. The impossibility is also the motor, provoking and instigating time and again new attempts with another perspective, another question, or a new round of buckets.

In the quest for Syncope, perhaps one needs to stop short of the last step as the scientist did in Tarkovsky's *Stalker* when he got to the forbidden room inside the forbidden zone. He decided not to look inside, and to walk away. Works of art also function like rooms into which we cannot see, doing something that is 'unsayable', as Rilke wrote in the first of a series of letters to a young poet:

> Things aren't all so tangible and sayable as people would usually have us believe; most experiences are unsayable, they happen in a space that no word has ever entered, and more unsayable than all other things are works of art,

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95 Ibid., 20.
96 Ibid., 5.
97 Ibid., 7.

those mysterious existences, whose life endures beside our own small, transitory life.[98]

Syncope then works on and at the limits also of discourses in art, but offers a vocabulary that allows for a critical perspective and mediates between different fields and modes of enquiry.

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98 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. Stephen Mitchell, (Massachusetts: Burning Man Books, 2001), 5.

Interlude 1 On Bataille

Sacred use-value

Georges Bataille developed his theory of a *general economy* in the 1930s, an endeavour that combined a philosophical, avant-garde project with a contemporary ethnographic debate. Parts of this debate took place in and around the Journal *Documents* through a focus on use-value. The two sides of the argument are discussed by Denis Hollier in an essay entitled *The Use-Value of the Impossible*: on the one hand, ethnographers were concerned with the preservation of the use-value of objects, when these are transferred into a museum; on the other hand an intellectual avant-garde, including Bataille, was interested in a sacred use-value and concerned with ritual and the particulars of place.[99] The two concepts of use-value were diametrically opposed as the latter was not interested in instrumentality and even less in the museum but rather in a sacred notion that was resistant even to displacement. The sacred, according to Bataille, is constituted through those activities and events that exist in excess of and beyond the functional and the rational domain, and acquire meaning through loss. These activities run counter to the primary concerns of production and conservation and include: "luxury, mourning, war cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality)."[100] As Hollier surmised, this whole debate was essentially a form of resistance against the prevailing laws of exchange value, an attempt to assert the irreplaceable, a quest for the "inexchangeable heterogeneity of the real", a resistance against "any kind of transposition, of substitution, a real which does not yield to metaphor."[101]

As discussed by Denis Hollier, Bataille's sacred use-value comes into effect only when an object is liberated from the productive context. Hollier quoted Bataille: "I challenge a lover of modern art to waste away for a canvas like a fetishist does for a

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99 Denis Hollier, 'The Use-Value of the Impossible', in *Bataille, Writing the Sacred,* ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 139-140.
100 Georges Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', 118. Bataille gives a more extensive definition of the sacred in the essay: Georges Bataille, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', in *Visions of Excess,* 137-160.
101 Hollier, 'The Use-Value of the Impossible', 138.

shoe."[102] Bataille was not interested in the shoe of the everyday, but in the expenditure of the fetishist when faced with a shoe. Bataille called this share the *non-productive expenditure*, a purely excessive, disruptive energy, which becomes available only outside functional contexts. In the journal *Documents*, Bataille and others around him exercised this idea by writing about objects in a way that disrupted traditional forms of classification, representation or deployment as metaphor. Instead they wrote about dirt and spittle and all that which could challenge conventional notions of authority, order and good behaviour. Hollier commented about some of the contributors of the journal:

> The ethnographers wanted continuity, Bataille wanted a rupture. They wanted to reconstruct context so that everything would seem in its place, while he would have the document expose the radical incongruity of the concrete […].[103]

According to Bataille the problem was that within the economic value system of Western societies, activities pertaining to *non-productive expenditure* were reduced to a concession and to a minor role, while those activities and individual effort which lead to either production or conservation were considered primary. In *The Notion of Expenditure*, Bataille wrote:

> Pleasure, whether art, permissible debauchery, or play, is definitely reduced, in the intellectual representation in circulation, to a concession; in other words it is reduced to a diversion whose role is subsidiary. The most appreciable share of life is given as a condition – sometimes even as a regrettable condition – of productive social activity.[104]

Bataille argued that by contrast, societies and individuals ought to have considerable interest in loss. Bataille explained this need for loss through the example of a son, who is not allowed to express what "gives him a fever" or to speak about his interest

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102 Ibid., 140.
103 Ibid., 145.
104 Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', 117.

in that which provokes horror.[105] Instead, only acquisition, conservation and rational consumption are permissible and will be supported by the father.[106] Bataille described this construct as a "flat and untenable conception of existence", a sentiment that was later developed in *The Accursed Share* where he expanded on the estrangement of man from himself through the quest for commodities and material gains.[107] The *Accursed Share* was first published in 1967 in France, against a backdrop of widespread economic growth in mainland Europe, in particular the *Wirtschaftswunder* in Germany, Austria and Italy. Bataille's concern with the estrangement of man from himself speaks to this post-war prosperity, which was – and continues to be - underpinned by an increased materialism and a mass culture that pretends to satisfy individual interests and desires when it is really interested in financial gains and the accumulation of wealth. The European *Wirtschaftswunder* rested on an increasing instrumentalisation of the individual, as discussed in the Prologue, according to which time needs to be spent purposefully and without distractions or deviations. In this context non-productive individual pursuits are perceived as 'regrettable condition', to use Bataille's turn of phrase.

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105 Ibid.

106 Bataille also discussed the conflict with the father, and by extension the social, in his essay 'The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic', as an example of the real, where a dialectic can be meaningfully applied. In this essay he argued that in the case of the father/society, this negativity does in fact constitute "a constant recourse […], not as goals but as means demanded by historical developments." (Georges Bataille, 'The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic', in *Visions of Excess*, 114.) His critique of the applications of the Hegelian dialectic are part of a series of essays, published in *La Critique Sociale*, in which Bataille formulated his concept of history as well as his differences to the prevailing Marxist ideologies of the group around Souvarine (Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, (London and New York: Verso, 2002).167-182. In accordance with his wider oeuvre, Bataille argued for the need of the irrational and of catastrophe and loss within a society. According to Surya, Bataille did not believe in the possibility of revolution for the purpose of overturning a society, but saw revolution as part of *unproductive expenditure*. (Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 168.)

107 Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', 117. Also Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, *Volume I*, 129-131. In 'The Notion of Expenditure', Bataille proposed two different categories for non-productive expenditure, *real expenditure* and *symbolic expenditure*. According to Bataille, the first includes activities such as dance, music and architecture, which expend in real terms, while the second group includes literature and poetry, which symbolically engender feelings of loss, horror and dread. As Bataille indicated these categories are not exclusive but combine in different ways. (Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', 120.)

Bataille mounted a resistance against the tyranny of exchange value, through his quest for sacred use-value, and his interest in the meaning of loss. His aim was to challenge the homogeneity of the commercial enterprise, and to defend the 'inexchangeable'.[108] The latter is highly relevant for discourses on live and site-specific performance practices, in which the live instant is always irreplaceable and inexchangeable. In an essay which reflects on the intensities of dance performance, and which draws on the intensities in the writing of Bataille and Blanchot, Karmen MacKendrick described the dancer's attention to the moment:

> In some sense dance is the body's devotion to the moment that cannot be kept; attentiveness to each moment is essential if the dance is to seduce and delight us. Reflective consciousness or intentional thought (what we usually call "paying attention") is far exceeded here. Consciousness, that relatively weak and late development, cannot be adequate to the saturated time of the dance.[109]

MacKendrick's comment reveals the utter dedication to the moment, the unreserved valuation of the here and now which renders these performances so seductive. It is the dancer's attention to the moment which also draws in and keeps the attention of the audience, according to MacKendrick, and which brings them into the spell of the work. The dance's passing of moments is "bursting with possibilities yet guaranteeing loss".[110] Intensity and loss together are the hallmarks of the live event, in which each moment is "infinitely valuable because it is irreplaceable (because it is never placeable at all, because it must be a loss)."[111] The dancer's liveness and her enlivening of the instant provide the kind of saturation which is celebrated in Bataille's oeuvre. And dance, Bataille notes, is part of *real expenditure*, it is inexchangeable.[112]

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108 Hollier, 'The Use-Value of the Impossible', 138.
109 Karmen MacKendrick, 'Embodying Transgression', in *Of the Presence of the Body, Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, André Lepecki ed. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 150.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.,154.
112 Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', 120.

Chapter 3. Composition of the Arbitrary

Composition of the Arbitrary (Kappenberg, 2004)

Composition of the Arbitrary (Kappenberg, 2004) was devised for an exhibition entitled *The Well* at the Danielle Arnaud Gallery, London. The scenario:

Twelve pillows are scattered in the middle of the gallery and seven performers sit or stand amongst them. The light is dim and the shutters in front of the windows are closed, dampening the sounds of the city. The performers quietly feel their own pulse, either at the wrist or at the neck, listening to the pace of their own bloodstream. Gradually each performer starts vocalising his or her rhythm, beginning sparingly by making a single click sound on every few pulses, then slowly adding other click sounds on the interim beats to build up a personal pattern in amongst the other emerging patterns. Over time the room fills with a curious (ir)regular noise akin to rain falling on a windowpane. Eventually one person sharply claps his/her hands, just once, everyone stops and the room falls silent. In the quiet interval some performers get up and change pillow. Eventually the process starts again; first single dispersed click sounds disrupt the silence and gradually different combinations and patterns of click sounds appear, getting denser over time. After a while one performer claps and all fall silent. Some performers get up and change places, others remain standing. After a number of cycles and once the process is well established, the door to the space opens and audiences are led in to encounter the performance in full flow. They walk around the pillows and settle along the walls and on the floor. They listen to the cycles of sound and silence, and to the diverse patterns that emerge and build and stop. Eventually, a steward signals to the audience to leave the room while the performers continue.[113]

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[113] Documentation of *Composition of the Arbitrary*: Images of the performance are again included later in this Chapter, and a Schema of the work is included in the Appendix 227. The same principle applies to the subsequent performance projects discussed in the thesis and only the last project, *Slow Races*, is also documented on video and included on the DVD.

The performance was devised as a requiem for a young artist friend, Jo Wood, who died and to whom the exhibition at Danielle Arnaud Gallery was dedicated. The choreography was an attempt to think through the possibility of someone dying; Martin Heidegger famously said, "The essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but remains still unthought."[114] Death takes us back across the fault line, to use Clément's expression, in a final syncope from which we do not come back.[115] Death is in that sense unknowable but we can witness it, and this allows us to rehearse death and to survive, as Peggy Phelan argued in her essay on the film *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (1993), a documentary by Mark Massi which documents the last stages of Aids and the death of his lover Tom Joslin. Phelan wrote:

> Death cannot be avoided. But perhaps the spectator's encounter with Joslin's death can effect a transference beyond the usual notions of the limit of the body's time. Filmmaking is not a homeopathic "cure" for AIDS. But at least in this instance it is an emphatic interrogation of what it is to die, and by extension, of what it is to witness death.[116]

Cinema, and other time-base arts, can show someone dying and remind us of death, remind us that we do not know death and what it entails. We tend to imagine death as an end, but death is not really an end. It is a passage, a process, and there is something beyond for those who witness it. According to Phelan, "A cinema for the dead reveals that such an end keeps moving, and does not end."[117]

Composition of the Arbitrary organised the audience like visitors of a screen-based installation: their entrance into the space was devised to have no effect on the durational performance much like a gallery audience whose arrival has no effect on a film that is projected on a loop. Audiences entered and left, and the performers did not acknowledge their presence or their leaving. Any changes to the atmosphere in the

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114 Martin Heidegger, *On the way to Language*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 107.
115 Clément, *Syncope*, 126.
116 Peggy Phelan, 'Infected Eyes: Dying Man With a Movie Camera, *Silverlake Life: The View from Here*', in *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories,* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 156.
117 Ibid., 156.

performance space or sounds caused by the movement of additional bodies were ignored. This set-up treated the audience with indifference, to echo an everyday or a sense of time that is indifferent towards individuals. The arrangement contrasted with the disruption that was performed within the work and that was caused by the clapping of individual performers. These small gestures had a disproportionately large effect, suspending everyone's action. Each clap constituted an end, a first click sound a new beginning. Together the performer staged cycles within cycles, beginnings and endings, allowing for undetermined silences in between which implicated the audience members by asking them to endure the passing of time, the not knowing if the sounds would start again, or when. This constellation exercised a clear hierarchy between those bodies who acted and determined the rhythm, and audience members, who were witnesses and recipients. From the audience's point of view, the disruptive and syncopic was exercised as something that happened to them, that was governed by rules they did not know. The disruptions were decisive, suggesting forces that can potentially annihilate, that are not selective. This was an enactment of mortality.

The mechanics of the performance was reminiscent of medical examinations and medical equipment such as heart monitors in intensive care units, which equate sound with life, and the absence of sound with the absence of life, that is death. Sound in this performance translated and represented internal processes and its fluctuations. But sounds, more generally, do not only represent life, they are part of life and they were the actual material of the performance. Individual click sounds, tonalities and rhythms and individual gestures emphasised the specific and the physical real; patterns and repetitions meanwhile facilitated abstractions that allowed for a sense of universality. The whole echoed the heart beat of the viewer's own body, and resonated with what we understand to be life and death in a wider, universal and more abstract sense. The performance therefore was *both* a representation of the life-death cycle, and a moment of life itself.

The choreographic idea was a kind of tuning in – a listening to the body through the feeling of the individual, unique and invisible pulse, that ongoing, inner rhythm which tends to escape our awareness except in extreme circumstances of excitement or terror. The pulse is both unique and a hallmark of our selves as living entities that are

part of larger biological system. The pulse marks our animal selves, and is responsive to our emotional experiences and lives. Amplified by the click sound patterns, the pulse therefore highlighted not only an abundance and continuity of life's processes, but also the vulnerability of the body, and the potential for disruption, for sudden endings, for death. The clapping sounds, whilst constituting an abstraction of the possibility of death, also stood for the actual death of someone somewhere at that very instant in time. The darkened gallery space with its closed shutters facilitated the turning of attention towards these inner processes and internal spaces within the physical and emotional self.

As a performance the work needed a material abundance in order to begin always and again: in *Flush* I had river water at my disposal which was as bountiful as time. For this performance, I deployed the body itself, engaging with its physical nature, the bodily fluids and processes, the persistence of its patterns. Reminiscent of *Flush*, *Composition of the Arbitrary* thereby asserted both continuity and the disruption of its own patterns. In contrast to *Flush* with its regular, mechanical pace, the latter work played with the different rhythms of individual bodies so that each moment was different to any other, despite the repeating cycles. In that sense, each moment and each sound pattern was unique and inexchangeable, in the sense that no moment could be repeated and no bodies would be the same.

The whole was however a repetition of constellations and patterns, governed by a simple set of rules. In that sense it was a ritual as much as a performance, a vigil that could potentially be repeated on other occasions as part of a process of mourning. The deployment of several performers and pillows allowed for this multiplication of bodily rhythms and click sound patterns as well as spatial variations, which opened the work out to suggest not a finite duration or capacity, but the infinite possibilities of life that is constituted through and beyond bodies and their internal rhythms. Staging cycles within cycles and beginning and endings, the performance enabled a witnessing in which the end "keeps moving, and does not end", as proposed by Phelan.[118] These repetitions take the viewer beyond the fault-line, to use Clément's expression, staging syncopes as an experience which can be shared. As a ritual it was

[118] Phelan, 'Infected Eyes', 156.

an acknowledgement of the universal force that governs everything we do and are and the world in which we live.

Composition of Uniformity

In *Syncope* Clément argued that we have lost much of our selves, due to different forms of repression, as well as through the idealisation of something which we are not. According to Clément European philosophical traditions in particular have been guilty of advancing idealised notions of the world and of ourselves, constructs, in which little changes, in which difference and death are rarely acknowledged and debated. To critique and unmask this continued suppression and its ideological basis Clément turned to the body, to its materiality and to dance, to reveal both the mechanisms of repression and postulating forms of rebellion. For example, Clément wrote about the dance of the dervishes and the waltzes, as a kind of dancing that makes the real world disappear and that enacts an idealised world instead. Clément noted that these dances manage to enact sameness and permanence even though they take place in space and time:

> The same principle stirs the dervishes and the waltzers: turning but with the illusion of a uniform movement in one place; turning but in such a way that the world is not affected; preserving both the immobile and the mobile, the stable and the unstable, even the impossible. Thus is achieved the disappearance of the too-real world in which children grow old.[119]

The too-real world does indeed disappear for the spinning dancer because the dervish takes his focus into the centre of his own circle and into himself to a place where there is little movement. Once he manages this technique, he can go on and on. It is much the same for the two spinning waltzing people who hold onto each other and keep the focus pinned on one another. In the eye of the storm, there is complete stillness. Enacting a world in which there is no change these dancers dream the dream of immortality and banish the entropic: where he or she are there is no decay, old age or death. But this entails a complication: in these dances stopping needs to be done with caution because any contact with the world of change produces vertigo. Clément surmised: "The lesson is obvious: excess – that is, the breaking of the rhythm – must

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119 Clément, *Syncope*, 53.

be forbidden."[120] The breaking of rhythm constitutes an excess because it signals the real world of living and dying, of pleasure and of pain. *Flush* and *Composition* enacted precisely this excess, through the breaking of rhythm, be that the inner rhythm or the rhythm of work.

Examining a line of Western thought which stretches from Plato to Descartes and beyond, Clément homed in on the philosophical quest for a fixed point, a fulcrum, compared to which the rest of life is but imperfection. In respect of Plato she explored his idea of a divinity that is "uniform, invariable, and in one place" [121] as an ideal notion of being that is universal and permanent. However, Plato himself admitted that "absolute and perpetual immutability is a property only of the most divine things of all, and body does not belong to this class."[122] The body here also means the universe, in that it exists in space and time. This means that the universe is changeable after all, and that it cannot therefore be fully divine. As a sort of compromise Plato proposed a universe that "moves […], so far as it is able to do so, with a single motion in the same place and in the same manner."[123] In this way it was at least approximating divinity. This kind of movement is, of course, also that of the dancing dervish, a single motion, in the same place and in the same manner. The waltzers also pursue a single motion, and although they may not stay in the same place at least they generally turn in one direction. Their experience is much like that of the derwish. Dancing then to experience, or rehearse, a sort of god-like state.

But no matter how much one might desire immutability, earthly things, as Clément pointed out, are subject to movement and change. To illustrate her point Clément offered a long list of emotions, experiences, failures and other actions that could intervene, strike, shout, touch or otherwise disrupt the proceedings that regulate the

120 Ibid., 54.
121 Plato, 'The Statesman', cited in Clément, *Syncope*, 52.
122 Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol.12, trans. Harold N. Fowler, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, London: William Heineman Ltd, 1921), section 269d, http://perseus.uchicago.edu/perseus-cgi/citequery3.pl?dbname=GreekFeb2011&query=Pl.%20Plt.%20269d&getid=1. Accessed 19/8/15.
123 Plato, 'The Republic', 269d, http://perseus.uchicago.edu/perseus-cgi/citequery3.pl?dbname=GreekFeb2011&query=Pl.%20Plt.%20269d&getid=1. Accessed 19/8/15.

everyday. Much of this has been repressed since Plato, and following Socrates' repressive edicts. Clément's writing is an incantation of all that which has been lost in that way, and returns to the page that which was excluded from the literature of the Republic and from its philosophies. The writing is evidence also of an allegiance to Bataille and to his visions of excess, through her fervent style and abundance of images, rhythms and sensations. The text appears to perform its ideas, if performance is an immanent engagement and encounter with materials. If Plato's ideal thinker would seek to convey a reality that "is not wandering between the poles of generation and decay,"[124] the philosopher Clément does precisely that.

A phenomenological perspective

Clément's passionate incantation of mutable things resonates strongly with a feminist phenomenological perspective, which consists of "a […] fundamental desire for materiality, the need for an embodied, material connection."[125] This may sound like a banal statement, but in the wider context of historical repression of the body, the phenomenological perspective constitutes a significant, paradigmatic shift and achievement. It allows writers like Clément to pitch lived experience against classical philosophy and to let rip on the page if she so desires. "Physicality and the material have a grip on us", wrote Fisher.[126] Advocating a feminist phenomenological perspective to both re-assert the lived materiality of the embodied self and to be able to theorise its many inscriptions Fisher claimed:

> From a phenomenological point of view, the material is what is always already there, perhaps concealed or forgotten, but always present and dynamic. While admittedly any linguistic rendering inserts the described phenomenon into a codified meaning system, phenomenology nevertheless maintains the possibility of an immediate connection with and intuition of experiential phenomena on one hand, while on the other hand affirming the capacity of reflection to thematize and theorize lived experience within, socio-political,

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124 Plato, *The Republic*, III, section 484b, cited in Clément, *Syncope*, 55.
125 Linda Fisher, 'Feminist Phenomenological Voices', 93.
126 Ibid.

discursive, and linguistic operators, without being defined or determined by them. [127]

The plain acknowledgement that the body is an always-present and constitutive part of any experience, relation, communication or insight is a game-changing event in the history of philosophy. The phenomenological account of the body as an active part of the world reconfigured the role of the body not as passive and inconvenient object but as that through which we understand the world. As Merleau-Ponty claimed: "Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space."[128] It is through this embodied existence that the Self is in, and part of, space, with the body constituting a sort of mediator between the Self and the external world. As Merleau-Ponty also argued, this relation is most evident in movement when the body actively engages with time and space.[129] The discussion above of *Composition of the Arbitrary* as a rehearsing of the uncertainty of death is therefore indebted to the phenomenological discourse: in the dancing body a material reality is set in motion which in turn constitutes an experience for both the performer and for the observing, listening and co-habitating audience. Equally Clément's reading of the waltzes and the dance of the dervishes as an exercise in, or illusion of, sameness and divinity could be taken for a phenomenological account. However, Clément never mentioned Merleau-Ponty, in *Syncope* or elsewhere, and feminist scholars are largely ambivalent with regards to his oeuvre. In a review of the relation between feminist discourses and phenomenology Elisabeth Grosz considered both the common ground and the differences.
On one hand, Grosz argued, the corporeality offered by phenomenology is not dissimilar to the key ambitions of the feminist debate around lived experience:

> [Merleau-Ponty's] focus on the body-subject, has resonances with what may arguably be regarded as feminism's major contribution to the production and structure of knowledge – its necessary reliance on lived experience, on

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127 Ibid., 94.
128 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 5.
129 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 100-102.

experiential acquaintance as a touchstone or criterion of the validity of theoretical postulates.[130]

On the other hand, and considering in particular the critique of Luce Irigaray, Grosz proposed that some of the bones of contention which keep phenomenology and feminist discourses in tension are Merleau-Ponty's omission of gender difference and the maternal body, his privileging of vision and his concept of Flesh.[131] It is beyond the reach of this research project to fully examine these differences, but a consideration of Irigaray's point of view will elucidate both the feminist perspective and highlight some of the differences with Merleau-Ponty.

Feminist perspectives

Of French feminist writers, Luce Irigaray is most explicitly critical of Merleau-Ponty's work, and her own oeuvre demonstrates what is incompatible: Irigaray is one of the more determined advocates of a re-imagining of difference between persons, gender and in language. In 2013 Irigaray published *In The Beginning, She Was*, in which she revised the key themes of her work, locating the suppression of notions of difference in the work of the Pre-Socratic philosophers, going back even beyond Plato.[132] Their omission, she argued, of the female origin – of "nature, woman, or Goddess," – from their accounts laid the foundation for the formation of a parallel universe in which Being is described as neuter, in which Being "is, or are, given without anyone who gives."[133] In this universe, "a God is situated at the source and end of all worlds, all existence, all lives, [which] closes up the opening of the unutterable experience in the relation between the master and she who inspires him –

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130 Elisabeth Grosz, 'Lived Bodies: Phenomenology and the Flesh', in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington, IN: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 94.
131 For a review of Irigaray's critique of Merleau-Ponty's omissions see Elisabeth Grosz, 'Lived Bodies', 103-107.
132 Irigaray uses this term without hesitation in, Luce Irigaray, *In The Beginning She Was,* (London and New York, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, *2013)*. For a more detailed discussion on the term and its implications see: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/presocratics/.
133 Irigaray, *In the Beginning,* 4.

nature, woman, Goddess."[134] According to Irigaray this God, or the beyond, acts as a safeguard so that the ecstasy of the in-between, of the relation between others, is deferred and not lived. "A certain God has thus enclosed within sameness what formerly corresponded to the ecstasy of a relation to the other."[135] According to Irigaray this concept of a construed and imposed sameness between people who are said to be the same, informs and stifles what could otherwise be a rich sharing. It reduces relations to an exchange of things at the cost of what we might call desire.[136]

Irigaray's reading of the repression is more overtly feminist compared to that of Clément: Irigaray argued that an exclusion of women and the feminine is at the root of today's repressive Western societies and their languages, whereas Clément's account is less gendered. Clément instead accused philosophy of generally establishing a sanitised life and a repressive regime "that is called wisdom." [137] According to Clément, it is the body that is excluded in this refusal to acknowledge love and pain, birth and death, digestion and excrement, as well as all other processes of fermentation. But both Clément and Irigaray wrote on behalf of the recognition and inclusion of what may be summarised as the other, or Other, to undermine a politics, which maintains itself through an imposed uniformity and equilibrium in which people are subjected to calculation and interests. Within this constraint, the moment of rupture of a ritual or a dance constitutes an opening and a moment of excess that breaks the illusion of sameness and universality like a reminder of another universe: when difference is celebrated there is a possibility to challenge notions of power and control, deployability and employability.

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134 Ibid., 6.

135 Ibid., 8.

136 "Now, in order to have access to another era of History, the gesture we must carry out is to pass from a sharing in sameness through all kinds of objects or things – material or spiritual – to a sharing of ourselves thanks to the respect for difference between us." Ibid., 9. Irigaray deploys the notion of ecstasy to circumscribe the possibility that people could be considered irreducibly different. This state would give rise to desire as opposed to need, the latter being that "which always aims to fill". Ibid., 17. Desire, by contrast, is the attraction between people who remain different to each other, if not unknown and unknowable and beyond appropriation.

137 Clément, *Syncope*, 55: In her discussion of Hegel's reading of Antigone, Clément addressed the question of femininity but considered it to be a minor issue. She conceded that Hegel 'fixes' femininity, that it represents for him a negative force within the community and that he turns Antigone into a good girl which negates her rebellion, but, "the possible mysogyny of one philosopher more or less does not matter very much." Ibid., 67.

Clément searched variously for contemporary traces of the repression of the body and its processes. Looking to India, she compared Plato's philosophical ideal to the traditional Indian widow, who lives as if dead, if indeed she does not burn alongside her dead husband, condemned to wear only white clothes and no jewellery, to shave her hair and refrain for ever from salt and spices.[138] The similarity of this list of repressions with all that which Plato thought harmful is striking. Historically, according to Hindu customs, the widow had no longer the right to partake in life, although, as Clément also pointed out, contemporary Indian culture has begun to blur the traditions. White is being worn more generally, and the funeral custom of Sati has been banned officially with a few, rare cases still being reported by the media.[139] Variations of the repression of bodily processes run however through many cultures, and today's technologies are frequently deployed to continue the 'dream' of immobility and eternity by banning aging bodies and death from everyday life.[140] Perhaps eternal youth is today's mystical fulcrum, the illusion of a fixed point and eternal life that is immune to rotting and decomposing.

In *Composition of the Arbitrary* it is the pulse of each performer that secures difference. Nothing can control the diversity of paces, clicks and patterns. Furthermore, the performance seeks rupture to confront the body's vulnerabilities, the possibility of absence, and of death. The unsolicited clap of a performer is a chaotic instant that is written into the structure of the composition. Combining sound and silence, something and its absence, the performed reality is determined by unpredictability: variation and chance are the general state of things, underpinning the ritualistic event as an organising force. The title of the performance, *Composition of the Arbitrary*, is an exploration of the prodigious squandering of nature that makes and destroys in a wasteful exuberance that is going nowhere. As Adam Phillips writes in *Darwin's Worms* (1999): "Nature is astonishingly prolific, a prodigal process going

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138 Ibid., 56.
139 See Guardian news stories from 2008 and 2002: Randeep Ramesh, "Relatives arrested after widow burns to death on funeral pyre", http://gu.com/p/2xp24/sbl. Accessed 25/08/2015; Luke Harding, "The ultimate sacrifice", http://gu.com/p/jptq/sbl. Accessed 25/08/2015.
140 See also Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage, 1993).

nowhere special, sponsored by destruction and suffering."[141] Abundance and wastefulness implies decay, loss, and death. It is the opposite of the idealised states of immobility and sameness.

The lived body

Both Clément and Irigaray are part of a feminist discourse that puts the body centre stage and confidently considers the body as a historical and cultural artefact through which experience is constituted. In amongst the different feminist camps this approach comprises arguably the most developed of body-mind discourses, and has shifted considerably since historical feminist argumentations by Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, who were highly sceptical of the body, its limitations and limiting aspects. As argued by Grosz, neither the early form of 'egalitarian feminism', nor contemporary discourses of, say, Julia Kristeva and Nancy Chodorov and their 'social constructivism' fully embrace the body as that which generates and nourishes women's experience of themselves and their position within the social field.[142] Grosz argued that it is really a third group of feminists, namely Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Gayatryi Spivak, Judith Butler, Monique Wittig and others who have taken this more positive turn.[143] For them the body is

> no longer […] an ahistorical, biologically given, acultural object. They are concerned with the *lived body*, the body insofar as it is represented and used in specific ways in particular cultures. For them the body is neither brute nor passive but is constitutive of systems of meaning, signification, and representation.[144]

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141 Adam Phillips, *Darwin's Worms*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) 40.

142 Grosz, 'Lived Bodies', 13-19. According to Grosz social constructivism as advanced by Julia Kristeva, Nancy Chodorov and others, also explores psychoanalytical approaches, but sees the body more as a distinct biological entity which finds a representation within the political and social field. Grosz proposed: "Instead of being coded by the nature/culture opposition, as it is for egalitarian feminists, the mind/body opposition is now coded by the distinction between biology and psychology and the opposition between the realm of production/reproduction (body) and ideology (mind)." Ibid.,16.

143 Ibid., 17.

144 Ibid., 18.

Such broad categorisations of fields of discourse are always awkward, as Griselda Pollock has explored in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts*.[145] Grosz' overview nevertheless highlights the extent to which feminist discourses are now embracing the body and how this affects their theorisation. In this discourse the body is finally the material from which and through which political, cultural and relational networks are forged. Furthermore, as Grosz wrote, the women theorists of this group refine the concept of difference, not only as a distinction between the sexes but also as constitutive of and enriching the differences within every grouping of people, thereby avoiding forms of essentialism.[146] Irigaray's writing exemplifies this approach time and again, advancing difference as a defining element in the relation with an other as for example in her book *To be two*: "Only love consents to a night in which I will never know you." And, "does such a night correspond to blind faith or to respect for the one I will never know? Is it not this unknown which allows us to remain two?"[147] Irigaray foregrounds the unknowable and difference in the other as that which secures individuality and relationality, as a provocation to the conventional privileging of knowledge and in critique of the power that is associated with knowledge, and which, within relations, turns into power over somebody else. Arguably Irigaray also offers a different model to the Lacanian idea of Self that is formed through the mirror stage and whose specular qualities facilitate an association between the image of the Self and knowledge over the Self. If I relate not to the image I have of the other but to the unknown within the other, a different relation ensues and the differences safeguard each of the partners.

Given the general characteristics of this third group of women theorists I would propose that, along with Luce Irigaray and the other theorists listed by Grosz, Catherine Clément should be included in this group, due to both her own writing and her numerous literary collaborations with writers like Hélène Cixous. An endeavour

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145 Griselda Pollock, 'The politics of theory, generations and geographies in feminist theory and the histories of art histories', in *Generations and Geographies, Feminist Readings*, Griselda Pollock ed., (London: Routledge 1996), 13. In the essay Pollock explored the potential depoliticisation of such mapping if it relies on, for example, generational and geographical mapping, which tend to omit more overt political contexts and dynamics.
146 Grosz, 'Lived Bodies', 18.
147 Luce Irigaray, *To be Two*, trans. Monique M. Rhodes and Marco F. Cocito-Monoc, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 9.

to advance the lived body permeates Clément's rewriting of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and underpins her history of the repressed in Western philosophy. As discussed more extensively in Chapter 6, Clément's perspective is furthermore informed by the ethnographic research of Claude Lévi-Strauss and his structuralist approach, which interprets physical, individual behaviour as historically specific response to the wider symbolism which structures a society at any given time.[148] Taking a structural approach Clément is keen to normalise what may be considered to be abnormal or pathological, whilst recognising that so-called healthy persons may be experiencing various levels of alienation that are equally not acknowledged as such. Clément sees individual behaviour always as an attempt to resolve issues, and even as a means to test and advance new social and cultural values, or to shift boundaries. As I argue in Chapter 6, she understands individual behaviour always also as a phenomenon in a collective ecology and the project of Syncope is based precisely on this approach.[149] In that sense Clément avoids the traps of essentialism and rigorously promotes difference, what Grosz argues is a characteristic of this group of female writers.

The fact that Clément is not explicitly listed in Grosz' list may simply mean that Grosz placed her into the group of the unnamed 'others'. In any case the list is not conclusive. However, in difference to the other feminists Clément positively embraced a generation of male intellectual forefathers, be that Lacan, Lévi-Strauss or Bataille, and she was not in any way concerned with this kind of 'patronage'. Neither was she averse to the idea of mastery, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6 under 'Intellectual traditions and male forefathers', despite the controversial status this notion has acquired in the wider feminist debate.[150] I can only speculate but perhaps this embracing of male traditions with its traditional approach to knowledge production is the cause of a somewhat marginal status within the feminist debates, and despite her passionate endorsement of the lived body.

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148 Chapter 5, 13.
149 Ibid., 12.
150 Chapter 6, 11, 12.

The Self as spectator

Despite the limited engagement with Merleau-Ponty's work by feminist thinkers, his theorisation offers useful insights and a vocabulary which aids in understanding the complex psychophysical and developmental processes of the individual. Merleau-Ponty looked to psychoanalysis for inspiration and also contributed to its findings. For example, his theorisation of the mirror stage provides an account that is useful for this discussion on syncope and the primordial syncope of the mirror stage. Merleau-Ponty's contribution was a detailed study of the sensorial maturation in the infant and the role of perceptual functions in the formation of the Self. Whilst considering the role of sound and the voice in the identification of others as Others and of the infant to itself, Merleau-Ponty nevertheless agreed with Lacan that the most significant sense for the formation of an identity is the visual sense. Visual perception acknowledges spatiality and distance, and is therefore key to a gradual process of separation between internal sensations and those that arise from contact with the external world which, in turn, contributes to the child's identification of itself as a separate and unique individual. Crucially, the acquisition of a visual representation of one's own self means that a person becomes a spectator of herself. According to Merleau-Ponty:

> To recognize his image in a mirror, is for him to learn that there can be a viewpoint taken on him. …By means of the image… he becomes capable of being a spectator of himself. Through the acquisition of the specular image, the child notices that he is visible, for himself and for others.[151]

This description of the mirror stage is interesting for its emphasis on the fact that it constitutes a first exercise in spectatorship, and for highlighting that it facilitates both a recognition of oneself as oneself and a seeing of oneself as seen by others. This suggests a simultaneous experience of, or an oscillation between, a confirmation of one's own self in this one place and a quasi out-of-body experience through the taking on of a perspective others may have of oneself. Again agreeing with Lacan, Merleau-Ponty also acknowledged the potential of alienation that is embedded in this process,

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151 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 136. Also cited in Grosz, 'Lived Bodies', 93.

whereby a "lived *me*" is constantly compared with an "ideal, fictitious or imaginary *me*" and, furthermore, with the image others have of this "*me*".[152] As Merleau-Ponty noted, the mirrored image becomes highly enmeshed with any other experience an individual may have, or with any other representation an individual may encounter, whereby "this image would henceforth be either explicitly posited or simply implied by everything I see at each minute."[153] With this theorisation Merleau-Ponty picked up on a historical enquiry into the spectatorial source of identity, drawing on, for example, the work of Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (date). Smith was already interested in the notion of an imagined but 'impartial spectator', whose function is to cast judgement and who thereby guides individual behaviours and safeguards moral codes.[154] 20th century theorists and Merleau-Ponty are however no longer concerned with moral judgement and have replaced the idea of impartiality with subjectivity, interested rather in the role of perception in experience and the production of knowledge. The mirror stage as described by Merleau-Ponty is of interest also for reflections on the experience theatre audiences and other spectators may have in situations in which the kaleidoscopic representation of oneself is called into question, brought into focus or broken down into its various components. In the following section I will explore Tim Crouch's play *The Author* (2009) to further investigate this quandary.

The absent body made present

In 'Falling Faint', Wendy Hubbard described her experience of attending an open dress rehearsal of Tim Crouch's play *The Author* (2009). Hubbard wrote that about twenty minutes into the play she began to feel faint, or rather, starting to "become faint", feeling a sense of weakness, changes in her breathing and vision, a rush of blood to her head and a trickle of cold sweat at the base of her neck: "Shamed at the idea of making a scene within a composed, thoughtful, aesthetic event – of becoming

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152 Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, 136.
153 Ibid.
154 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000).

visible to the assembled spectators as a falling, clumsy object-body," and conscious of the cultural cliché of feminine swooning, Hubbard hurried out of the auditorium and observed the rest of the show through a monitor.[155] Hubbard's reflective essay on the 'falling, failing spectatorship' reads this instance in reference to Catherine Clément's work as a syncopic experience which is interesting here also due to her first-person account. However, before I go any further I would like to note that *The Author* – and this spectatorial experience – is an extreme case of theatre, where audiences actually faint. This play is not discussed here as an ideal or especially successful condition for syncope. Rather, I focus on the proposition of the 'becoming faint' as a temporary return to the body on the part of a spectator.

In the play audience members are seated in rows facing each other and the actors are placed in amongst the audience. The traditional, fixed spatial delineation of the stage and the space outside of the stage is thereby lost and replaced with shifting spheres in which audience members are brought into the play and people are revealed as actors, deliberately confusing expectations of what is "on" and "off" stage. Audiences are not only becoming part of the play but also the subject of investigation through the actors, who periodically check in with the audience as to how they are doing. Hubbard wrote:

> By removing the stage, *The Author* denies its audience the relief of a clear, settled focal point outside of our bodies. It refuses me the illusion of absenting myself into a detached, observational stance: I am palpably on-show and amidst – surrounded.[156]

Hubbard then described how the play, which is constituted like a play about another play, makes audience members complicit in the telling of abusive accounts. At the same time the audience is given a description of how the fictitious audience of the fictitious play supposedly reacted, with claims that people would groan, give standing ovations or faint. Hubbard surmised that it is the excessive multifocal attention on the audience, combined with a rhythmical, syncopated delivery with extended pauses,

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155 Wendy Hubbard (2013) 'Falling Faint', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 18:4, (22-29) 22. DOI:10.1080/13528165.2013.814341
156 Hubbard, 'Falling Faint', 23.

which caused her, eventually, to feel faint and to leave the space. She noted that "in these beats of inaction a nervy, self-conscious audience watches itself, abandoned in a pliant waiting, exposed and expectant, reacting, receptive and increasingly wary."[157] There is a whole series of processes embedded in this list, such as the tension created through the pauses and moments of waiting, the exposure of the audience caused by the lack of separation between performance and audience space, the confusion of their roles as both witnesses and participants, and the uncertainty caused by the general collapse of boundaries and expectations.

Hubbard further explored her fainting experience in phenomenological terms, in reference to Drew Leder's claim that in its habitual state consciousness is effectively split from the physiological self and that any interference with, or reversal of, this split can cause the kind of discomfort she experienced, and may have caused her to feel faint. Leder developed his argument in reference to Merleau-Ponty's comment that in the everyday a perceiver largely cannot see himself, arguing that absence and a sense of disembodiment are intrinsic to the Self.[158] Leder wrote: "We simply cannot see our seeing no matter what reflexive means are employed."[159] Secondly, Leder argued that this kind of absence or effacement of the physiological self facilitates our being and functioning in the world, which in turn means that a general splitting of the body from consciousness is a kind of habitual state, our status quo. The self will therefore try to avoid situations in which the careful balance between active mind and 'absent' body is challenged. In general, the physiological body will emerge into consciousness only through some kind of provocation or crisis, in moments of dysfunction or failure. Leder argued:

> I may be thrust into an experience of my physical presence if, standing tiptoed on a chair, I begin to lose my balance. At once I become painfully aware of my precarious and rapidly deteriorating position.[160]

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157 Ibid.,23.
158 Drew Leder, 'The Ecstatic Body', in *The Absent Body,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 12.
159 Leder, 'The Ecstatic Body', 17.
160 Ibid., 19.

Leder described the being thrust into an awareness of the physiological self as an experience of pain, or giving rise to a painful awareness of this fact. The pain may well be indicative of the kind of resistance a subject may have to this sort of disturbance of the habitual mode, to the foregrounding of what is usually in the background. As Leder observed, the foregrounding of the body in stressful situations must run counter to a habitual, and useful, life organisation, a fact which, according to Leder, explains the prevailing negative attitude to the body in Western cultures and its preference for a disembodied state that is controlled through mental faculties. Leder surmised that the whole conundrum also provides a basis for an experiential, and pervasive, argument for Cartesian thought.[161] Leder maintained:

> This absence is not simply a deficit but a constitutive principle of the real. The inexhaustible depth of the perceptual object, even promising more than I now see, is precisely what lends it the texture of reality, distinguishing it from flat image or hallucination.[162]

In other words, the absent body is constitutive of the self and its internal split between body and mind, and this absent presence also forms a blueprint allowing us to understand objects and the world, giving us the sense of depth and a sense that there is more than we can see.

Drawing on Leder, Hubbard claimed that prior to a syncopic instance a person experiences "a fall back into the body", meaning that a person is involuntarily and forcibly thrown back into, or reminded of, this real aspect of her embodied existence. While this may not necessarily be a negative sensation it can be experienced as such, according to Leder, in cultures that strongly favour disembodied, rationalist modes. A theatrical situation could, arguably, be an overwhelmingly negative experience due to the heightened sense of visibility or enforced exposure of audience members in a theatrical configuration such as that of *The Author*. This may also more generally be the case if audience members go to the theatre with an expectation of being able to

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161 Drew Leder, 'The Dys-appearing Body', in *The Absent Body*, 86. The shifting and destabilising of a spectator's sense of Self is reminiscent of the experience of being on a ship at high sea. Here the amount of movement and internal physiological adjustment that is provoked in the passenger and which is beyond her control also creates nausea and sickness.
162 Leder, 'The Ecstatic Body', 13.

hide within an anonymous group of spectators and a darkened auditorium – as is the case in most theatrical presentations. In the case of *The Author*, individual audience members were not only marginally involved but were in fact the material under investigation and – literally – put under the spotlight by sitting opposite each other, by finding themselves next to the actors and by being directly addressed by the actors or compared to another fictitious audience. It is plausible that this intense focus on one's body and embodied nature would cause an uneasy and possibly unbearable mix of the lived me and its ideal and imaginary versions. Hubbard's experience of being "exposed and expectant, reacting, receptive and increasingly wary" suggests as much. It makes sense of her falling back into the body, and of the falling of the body as in a syncopic experience or fainting fit.

Hubbard had noted that the idea of being seen by others as a sweating, failing and falling object caused much anxiety in her. This constellation is much the same as that described by Merleau-Ponty in the mirror stage: as discussed above, the cognitive processes involve both seeing oneself and being seen with all the possibility for anxieties that this entails. This suggests that the mirror stage instigates the split between consciousness and body, and that the birth of the self as spectator is at the cost of the self as embodied entity. If ever this split is reversed as in this spectacle of *The Author* – through a heightened exposure and heightened sense of seeing oneself being seen, combined with a focus on the embodied, real presence – this can possibly provoke the sort of suspension of consciousness Hubbard described. Hubbard's notion of falling back into the body as a preparation for, and part of, a syncopic moment supports the argument that a shift in the 'normal' or habitual organisation of embodied, or disembodied, consciousness, a shift in the ratio of absence to presence, background to foreground consciousness, is at the heart of Syncope.

It is likely that pauses in the theatrical proceedings and the uncertainty of waiting provoked such a heightened, self-conscious state and increased discomfort in the audience. Furthermore it is probable that a sudden absence of focus, or a sudden shift of attention onto the audience, also contributed to the syncopic experience. As strategic, theatrical or choreographic devices these techniques call forth the spectator's body. Strangely then something is gained in the Syncope, that is a temporary embodiment, or a reconnecting with the embodied self. If this is too much

to bear, the audience member either walks away or loses consciousness in an attempt to ward off the increase in self-presence and the implications of a heightened corporeality.

Leder's reading of the phenomenological body offers a possible narrative with which to make sense of Hubbard's experience. It is also consistent with the historical Cartesian divide between body and mind, and accounts for the stronghold that this division has within Western cultures. Leder's account offers a vocabulary and a set of concepts with which to describe what may be happening for the passers-by or the spectators when encountering works such as *Flush* and *Composition of the Arbitrary,* even if their experiences were much less pronounced, and it makes sense of the choreographic strategies deployed in these performances. Both pieces did not separate the performance space from the audience space. The play and display of rhythms and internal processes reminded audiences of their own embodied existence. The deployment of sudden changes and the withholding of movement or sound for uncertain periods heightened this spectatorial experience. Together, the different choreographic devices created a condition that was favorable for a syncopic experience on the part of the audience. This whole analysis is, however, speculative, and something of this relation between body and mind must necessarily escape our desire to know and to understand. Leder himself referenced a comment by Merleau-Ponty that is useful here to balance the analytical thrust: "The relationships between my decision and my body are, in movement, magic ones."[163] Nevertheless a pattern emerges though this analysis which is further investigated in subsequent performances and which indicates a possible strategy for contemporary performance practices.

Leder's account throws new light onto Clément's proposition that Syncope "opens onto a universe of weakness and tricks."[164] Perhaps it is our weakness that we cannot bear the plenitude of our embodied selves. Perhaps we can have too much access to that self, in the sense that we do not want to be reminded of the vulnerable, fallible, sweating, aging and rotting creatures that we are. Perhaps this is what lurks beyond the 'fault line between thinking and being', and why we – that is 'we' in the West -

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163 Merleau-Ponty, cited in Leder, 'The Ecstatic Body', 20.
164 Clément, *Syncope*, 30.

dare not go anywhere near it.[165] This inherent reticence certainly accounts for the Platonic ideal of an immovable god as the absolute other of our own real, physiological, impermanent embodied selves. The supposedly motionless and disembodied Platonic God perfectly contrasts our embodied existence.

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165 Clément, *Syncope*, 126.

Interlude 2 On Bataille

Non-productive expenditure

Bataille based his concept of *non-productive expenditure* historically on primitive economies, in line with contemporary research that refuted the traditional view of primitive exchange as a form of barter.[166] Bataille drew on ethnographic enquiries in this case, and in particular on Mauss' essay *The Gift*, which also became a key reference point for many other French intellectuals of the 20th century. As Gerald Moore wrote in a review of the key debates and the politics that emerged through the engagement with Mauss' work:

> The spirit of the gift, of Mauss legacy, should be identified less with a romanticised notion of receipt than with an acceptance of the 'risk and danger' that the gift's poisonousness poses to established disciplinary boundaries.[167]

Moore was referring here to the split that divided the French intellectual community through two different receptions of Mauss' writing: "a[n] *exchangist*, structuralist Mauss of Lévi-Strauss and the Nietzschean, aneconomic Mauss of Bataille."[168] The notion of 'aneconomic' broadly refers to the fact that Mauss conceived of the gift as part of a system of obligations which ordered kinship and group relations, whereas Bataille understood the gift as part of an irrational, excessive, disruptive, erotic and *general economy*. This debate around *The Gift* was constitutive for poststructuralism and is significant in that Bataille's own reading, or contestation, of Mauss constitutes a large part of his own legacy within the poststructuralist discourse, its subsequent generations and for the *écriture feminine*, paving the way for the kind of feminine economy formulated later by Cixous and Irigaray. However, Bataille's claims are not

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166 Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', 121.

167 Gerald Moore, *Politics of the Gift*, *Exchanges in Poststructuralism*, Introduction (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 24.

168 Moore, *Politics of the Gift*, 26. Moore argued that Bataille's refuting of a modern Hegelian dialectic tradition and his own claim for an all-embracing 'general economy' of experience radically changed how politics and philosophy could be thought about.

uncontested. I will first summarise Mauss' thesis in order to elucidate Bataille's argumentation before discussing various objections.

Mauss had grouped various primitive economies under the name of *potlatch* and claimed that this economic activity was rooted in the gesture of giving and in the forming and maintaining of social relations. Mauss thereby contested traditional views whereby primitive economies had been considered to be based on barter and trade.[169] Mauss also claimed that the giving of gifts was intended as a circulation of wealth and the rebalancing of power within social groups. For Mauss there was, in other words, no loss or gain associated with this exchange economy, and it served to stabilize social groups. Taking on the idea of an economy based on giving, but departing from Mauss, Bataille proposed that *potlatch* was a ritualistic and excessive destruction of wealth and possessions, in which the giver achieves status through the giving away of his riches. In such a system, Bataille argued, social hierarchies were established through publicly visible loss rather than through accumulation and conservation as in contemporary industrialized societies. Bataille wrote:

> It is the constitution of a positive property of loss – from which spring nobility, honor, and rank in a hierarchy – that gives the institution its significant value. The gift must be considered as a loss and thus as a partial destruction, since the desire to destroy is in part transferred onto the recipient.[170]

Through these enactments of loss, Bataille surmised, wealth circulated endlessly within the community and ensured that it was not a stable entity but reconstituted periodically. Referencing Mauss, Bataille argued that the ideal would consist of a gift that was not responded to in similar terms, but his conclusions contradicted Mauss who considered a sense of reciprocity as an essential feature of *potlatch*.[171] In a comparative study between the three key postmodern theorists of *The Gift* – Mauss,

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169 Richardson, 'Expenditure', 77/81/89, and Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966/1969) 3-5, 10-12.
170 Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', 122.
171 Ibid.

Bataille and Derrida – and four scholars of the Indian culture, Carl Olsen summed up the difference between Mauss and Bataille:

> If Mauss wants to strip the irrational from the notion of gift and emphasize its harmonious reciprocity, Bataille thinks that the potlatch disrupts the homogeneity of Mauss' theory. […] Unlike Mauss, Bataille wants to examine the irrational, disruptive, destructive, and excessive aspects of the gift. The examination of these types of features enables Bataille also to stress its powerful, paradoxical, absurd, and erotic aspects.[172]

Instead of a homogenous social pattern, Bataille saw heterogeneous processes which allow for irrational, disruptive and destructive elements.[173] In other words, Bataille introduced the notion of excess into the debate, offering a different and rather turbulent idea about that which circulates within the social field. As Michel Surya pointed out in his reading of Bataille's *non-productive expenditure*, Bataille's understanding of potlatch and his emphasis on loss mirrored on an ethnographic scale Bataille's individual experience and trajectory. Surya wrote:

> What Bataille discovered in discovering Mauss was that the oblative series he had opened up from his own experience had anthropological endorsement.[174]

While such biographical readings are always speculative, making a link to Bataille's own experience could partially explain the differences between his and Mauss' anthropological account. Bataille explored the same kind of ethnographic material as Mauss but came to very different conclusions. As Michael Richardson confirmed, Mauss saw the gift as part of an exchange which required a compensation or return, whereas Bataille developed the idea of expenditure for its own sake, and of deliberate waste.[175] Critical of Bataille's interpretation, Richardson maintained that primitive economies, including those practicing potlatch, were focused on "maintenance and distribution" and not waste, and that any excessive gestures would have been

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172 Olsen, 'Excess, Time, and the Pure Gift', 353, 356.
173 Ibid., 357.
174 Surya, *Georges Bataille,* 174.
175 Richardson, 'Expenditure', 74-77.

"incidental", thereby challenging a significant aspect of Bataille's *general economy* that was supposed to promote waste.[176] Disputing the association of primitive economies with waste, Richardson proposed instead to turn Bataille's argument on its head by suggesting, "that it is modern industrial societies that operate on a principle of waste and expenditure."[177] His comment was referring to the consumer society that is built, after all, on consumption and waste in order to secure economic growth. However, Richardson's counterclaim does not necessarily hold in that Bataille's expenditure is not just any kind of spending and wasting. Bataille saw the archaic form of giving as a form of social expenditure on behalf of, and visible to, a wider community. By contrast, the spending and wastage of contemporary consumer societies is done in general for the benefit of selected individuals only and not for the community or the public. Also it tends to take place behind closed doors, at times pried into by the media but essentially exclusive and private. Richardson subsequently undermined his own argument while examining more precisely the kind of expenditure that is required: he acknowledged that capitalist expenditure is not a "joyous surpassing of limits", that people expend "grudgingly with an eye upon an ultimate accumulation", that it takes place "in the spirit of universal meanness", and that it is "not returned back to the community but is made to serve the market," precisely echoing Bataille's critique of contemporary economies.[178] Richardson had a point however when he challenged Bataille for ignoring the fact that an economy needs to accumulate at least enough for subsistence, and that it cannot focus only on expenditure.[179] Richardson's overall view is therefore relevant in that he proposed that economic theory should focus neither solely on expenditure – as Bataille commended – nor solely on accumulation – as in the capitalist agenda, but that it needs to consider both accumulation and expenditure as interdependent and equally significant for social relations.[180]

Richardson also had a number of other queries: for example, confronting Bataille on his narratives of the energy and explosions of the sun and the volcano as expenditure

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176 Ibid., 82
177 Ibid., 85.
178 Ibid., 95.
179 Ibid., 78.
180 Ibid., 88.

or free gifts; instead, Richardson argued, the earth is entirely dependent on the sun's energy which is a very different kind of relation, and volcanic explosions tend to be enormously destructive for their surroundings. One could argue that Bataille's narratives were somewhat mythic in their interpretations, and this also applies to his account of the Aztec society and its sacrificial practices: as Richardson pointed out, Aztec society was very aware of the precariousness of its situation and its dependency of the sun. Their sacrifices were, by all accounts, precisely an attempt to give something back to the sun in return for its energy. Richardson argued the Aztecs were rather motivated by insecurities and a fear of retribution than any supposedly inner impulse for expenditure.[181] "Sacrifice", Richardson wrote, "for them appears to have been more a means by which to expel rather than to confront death."[182] In other words, Mauss' reading of their rituals appears to be a lot more coherent than that of Bataille with regards to the impetus for their sacrifices. Addressing Bataille's view that the Aztec sacrifices would have contributed to building and maintaining a heterogeneous bond through excess and transgression, Richardson argued that these violent rites of the Aztecs may well have been part of a homogenising exercise, and that, by all accounts, the Aztecs secured a social heterogeneity through communal meals.[183] The idea that the Aztec sacrifices may have had a homogenising effect is plausible, given that wars tend to form or confirm the uniformity of a people through the us-against-them dynamic. Equally Richardson's proposition of communal meals as a means to exercise heterogeneity is plausible and interesting in this context of an enquiry into the arts and the performing arts as a means to secure the heterogeneity of a society. However, it is not possible here to fully examine Richardson's diverse claims and more details are necessary to ascertain exactly how the Aztecs proceeded and how they addressed and dealt with strangers, visitors, and enemies, and how they selected their sacrificial victims. Nevertheless it is interesting to note that the Aztec sacrifices have solicited such different interpretations over time. Richardson also referred, for example, to the impression the Spanish invaders had of the rituals:

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181 Ibid., 79.
182 Ibid., 80.
183 Ibid.

What most shocked the Conquistadores was not at all the excessive character of what they witnessed, but the opposite: sacrifice was performed as an everyday, inconsequential act. It was something that was taken for granted and subject to little ritual excess. Aztec society was in fact extremely well-ordered and puritan, and the human sacrifice performed conformed to this general sense of order.[184]

The Conquistadores saw a puritan order, Richardson mooted the possibility of a homogenising practice; another anthropologist, Christian Duverger, believed them to be part of an imperialist strategy and "technical means of domination", and Bataille saw sumptuous excess.[185] For yet another reading Richardson referred to the work of Tzvetan Todorov, who commented on the difference between the unacknowledged and shameful brutality on the part of the Conquistadores, compared with the very public and ceremonial Aztec sacrifices, and which, he argued, "testifies to the strength of the social fabric and only takes place within societies which are founded on intimacy and heterogeneity."[186] The latter interpretation rather vindicates Bataille's point of view that sacrifice, in the proper sense, contributes to the heterogeneity of a social group. A public display in which all parties are acknowledged and everyone owns their role is entirely different to violence that is carried out in the dark and remains unacknowledged. Private, unacknowledged brutality is a violence that reduces everything to the nature of a thing. As Richardson concluded, the descent into sheer cruelty on the part of the Spanish invaders could be seen as a sign of the advent of modernity in which degradation and reductive utilitarianism become normalised.[187]

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184 Ibid., 81.
185 Christian Duverger, *La Fleur Létale: économie du sacrifice aztèque* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1979), 233, in Richardson, 'Expenditure', 82. Richardson himself contested Duverger's claim and wrote: "The Aztecs did not go in search of riches or to subjugate the native populations to themselves, but sought the wealth (that is sacrificial victims) that could be expended in excessive violence (in so far as all violence is excessive) that would ensure the fecundity of their society and so ensure their own daily survival. In this sense Aztec violence does retain its sacred quality and remains at the antipodes of production." Richardson, 'Expenditure', 84.
186 Tzvetan Todorov cited in Richardson, 'Expenditure', 83.
187 Richardson, 'Expenditure'*,* 85.

Regardless of the accuracy of Bataille's interpretation of ethnographic data, the discussion led Bataille to the formulation of his theory of a *general economy,* which profoundly challenged the foundations of the bourgeois economy in which he found himself. As Surya wrote, Bataille hated the Bourgeoisie with its meager and depressed forms of living. [188] In *The Notion of Expenditure* Bataille vented his spite for their petty displays of wealth and their rationalist and homogenising frameworks, lamenting the loss of the "dazzling contrast that the rich provided to the poor" in tribal and pre-industrial societies.[189] The Bourgeoisie developed, as Bataille complained, "in the shadow of a more powerful noble class" and the balancing of accounts became the main focus and its existential purpose.[190] Bataille's concept of class struggle is modeled on an archaic separation between the classes, whereby the wealthy expend in order to separate themselves from the common, poor or impoverished man. The new middle class is, according to Bataille, but a new, impoverished or distorted version of the same principle.[191]

Bataille's concept of class struggle is again critiqued by Richardson, who contested Bataille's idea of an innate abundance and expenditure as human necessity. Richardson argued that those "at the lowest level of society who are denied the possibility of work, those who have accumulated nothing, are those who are least likely to rise up against their condition."[192] In other words Richardson claimed that there is only expenditure once one has been able to accumulate. While this is a complicated issue which cannot fully be debated here it seems necessary to at least note some doubts: it may be true that the have-nots do not start a revolution because they are too busy surviving, but Richardson seemed to forget about the possibility of expenditure through sacrifice and self-sacrifice: there are many cases in which individuals on the lower end of the social scale, and those who feel as such in relation to other, more powerful groups and agencies, undertake one-off violent interventions

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188 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 174.
189 Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', 124-126.
190 Ibid., 124.
191 Ibid., 125/126.
192 Richardson, 'Expenditure', 86.

and sacrifice their own Self.[193] Richardson may claim that, in general, "if we indulge in ruinous expenditure it is in response to accumulation", but people can give their own lives, which constitutes the ultimate and most ruinous expenditure there is.[194] Finally, Richardson commented on the issue of alienation in Bataille's writing, and observed that an overcoming of alienation, an experience that is independent of class and a consequence of the wider restricted economy, can only be achieved "by engaging with new possibilities of heterogeneity" and "a confrontation of one's own alienated self".[195] According to Bataille, the only way for this to happen, the only way that the capitalist entrapment can be undermined, is through the refusal to work, a refusal to submit to the instrumentalising agenda of capitalist institutions.

With his exploration of sacred use-value, non-productive expenditure and sacrifice Bataille theorised the heterological aspects of the gift, and of the (dis)organising principles of the social. As discussed above it was a radically different vision of the social compared to Mauss. As Olsen pointed out, the proximity between the gift and sacrifice in Bataille, which is based on the fact that both withdraw and liberate objects and materials from productive cycles, reinforces Bataille's particular stance. One could contend that Olsen's study overall supports Bataille's theoretical position and interests: the heterological aspect of the gift, its irrational and excessive character and its erotic potential. Referring both to Bataille and also to Derrida's extensive work on the gift, Olsen summarized the ambiguities embedded in the poisoned chalice that the gift constitutes: "Not only do the positions of the postmodernists give us something to think about when reconsidering the notion of gift, they help us to grasp the more radical implications of the gift and enable us to see that the notion of gift is not simply about exchange, obligation, and receiving."[196]

In dance scholarship the debate on the gift has been taken up by Mark Franko in an essay entitled 'Given Movement, Dance and the Event', in which Franko explored the

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193 See for example a discussion on the self-sacrifice of Palestinian suicide bombers and martyrs, in 'Why do people sacrifice their lives?', *The Why Factor*, Radio 4, 28/08/2015. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p030cszz.
194 Richardson, 'Expenditure', 86/88.
195 Ibid., 92.
196 Olsen, 'Excess, Time, and the Pure Gift', 369.

relation between performance and event, and performance as response to an event or as something which is owed.[197] Writing in a climate of scholarship post 9/11, Franko's essay contests Derrida's proposition that the performative has lost power in the wake of the bombings in New York and the Middle East, with Franko defending performative events for their quality of a gift.[198] In the course of the essay Franko issued a number of claims. Drawing first on the Heideggerian notion that "there is no time, time is given", Franko argued that an event such as 9/11 is similarly given, meaning that it is unexplained or inexplicable. Drawing on Derrida's reading of Mauss' theory of the gift, Franko claimed that 9/11 is a gift of the kind which obliges but which equally aspires "to disable response, to block the competitive impulse to reciprocate."[199] Drawing directly on Mauss, and on the idea that the force of a gift does not differentiate between objects and things, that it circulates by virtue of its nondifferentiation, Franko proposed that live performance - as dance or otherwise - is equally a force brought into circulation that cannot be contained or bound.[200] Referencing Lyotard - whilst not acknowledging Bataille's contribution to the debate - Franko concluded that the gift allows for the circulation of excessive energies which disrupt and disturb regulatory mechanism. Positing a parallel circulation between bodies which occurs beyond and outside of the generation of meaning Franko argued for a notion of transmission and for dance or live performance as instances of transmission or inscription: "A tremor, a shock, a displacement of forces can be communicated – that is transmitted."[201] Equally, teaching and learning and the passing on of traditions are described by Franko as transmissions or inscriptions, which include the giver giving something of himself, again an idea derived from Mauss.[202] Franko ended his essay by arguing that soliciting 'responses' to 9/11 had generally been misplaced and that it was gifts and in particular "choreographic giving", that is the transmission between bodies, that was required.[203]

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197 Mark Franko, 'Given Movement, Dance and the Event', in *Of the Presence of the Body*, 113-123.
198 Ibid., 115.
199 Ibid., 117.
200 Ibid., 117/118.
201 Ibid., 118.
202 Ibid., 119-121.
203 Ibid.,123.

Franko referred to Bataille only in a footnote, acknowledging Bataille's notion of expenditure as his equivalent to Mauss' gift, but without recognising the particular philosophical ambition of Bataille's wider project which does in fact support his own claims. According to Bataille, the gift is precisely the expenditure which disrupts established political economies and circulates outside of codified knowledge regimes. In the case of events such as 9/11 there is indeed the sense of an impossibility in that no reaction and no performative action, however large or small, could be an adequate 'response'. In that sense it could be argued that 9/11 has become a cultural given, a gift that is perhaps that of death, smashing right into the self-same uniformity of New York's artificial cityscape. And on the other end of the scale, as Franko argued in his essay, choreographic giving allows for the transmission of experience between one person and another that reaches beyond received parameters. By declaring performative acts as a gift, Franko spoke to the possibility of an engagement which draws on the undifferentiated forces that circulate through inscription and transmission. This echoes and supports my earlier analysis of *Flush* as a gift which inscribes itself in the passers-by. A thinking in terms of the gift and giving is a way then to comprehend disruptive and traumatic instances, be they public or private events, gestures large or small.

Chapter 4 Extreme Ironing

The Romantic Impulse

Advancing through Clément's history of repressive philosophical regimes, one comes across Leibniz who Clément referred to as a philosopher who suspended death in a "metaphysical game from which absence is absent", and Hegel whose dialectic slowed even the movement of thought to a controlled pace.[204] Occurring in the period between Leibniz and Hegel was the Romantic movement – *Sturm und Drang* – to which Clément turned as a "philosophical era of syncope."[205] In this chapter I am exploring Clément's interest in the Romantic poets and their visions to further clarify what the role and work of the artist might be within a world dominated by purpose and goals. The romantic project will be compared to George Bataille's own inner journeys in order to further clarify what is its stake, and why Clement may have an interest in both of these, otherwise diverse projects.

The Romantics celebrated passion, the sublime experience of nature, poetry, music, laughter and love. As Clément noted, they personified the inner uncontrolled forces and emotions in the figure of the female/ goddess/ lover, either in their poetic imagination or through the adoration of actual women and lovers, as a persona who grants access to all that had been banned by both the Greek forefathers of Western philosophy and by Christianity under the name of evil. The Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin shared this interest in the feminine with his contemporaries and the whole of Asia and 'the East' figure in his writing as an expression of it. He looked to Asia, Clément wrote, for a place where stormy desires could be lived out and where one was swept away, a country that was both mysterious and accessible due to its

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204 Clément, *Syncope*, 59.
205 Ibid., 60. *Sturm und Drang* is often translated as storm and stress, but this does not give the right impression: it should be translated as, for example, *Storm and Desire*, as the German word Drang references an inner urge, as suggested by the Freudian drives. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sturm_und_drang.
See also an informed discussion 'Sturm und Drang', *In Our Times*, Melvyn Bragg, BBC Radio 4, 14/10/2010. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00v72x6.

feminine nature.[206] According to Clément this is evident, for example, in his novel *Hyperion*: "Now we were standing close to the summit's rim, gazing out into the endless East."[207] And in these lines from Hölderlin's *In Lovely Blueness*: "A thousand towers of fragrance, Asia I saw: dazzled."[208] The selected lines do confirm that Asia signified sexual ravishment and a sublime experience of inner, uncontrolled desires. More recent scholarship however queries this reading of *Hyperion* and claims that Hölderlin was not as unreservedly 'romantic' as is conventionally believed, and that the novel was precisely an attempt to critically reflect on the Western idealisation of the East by comparing an imagined East of a distant past with a contemporary Greece occupied by the Ottoman Empire.[209] Clément may have overlooked this aspect of *Hyperion* and Hölderlin's broader intentions, but she was correct in highlighting that this dream of a ravishing East was shared by many of those who felt disillusioned with the West and who thought of Asia as a place where they could, somehow, follow their imagination. Clément called them "the Hölderlins of all nations":

> Whether they are drugged to the eyebrows or simply a little cracked, the inconsequential leftovers of a system they do not fit into, that is where they go without purpose or goal, bearers of an absurd 'yes' that often leads them to unexpected physical death, from unforeseen, disconcerting accidents.[210]

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206 Ibid., 70.
207 Ibid.
208 Hölderlin, cited in Clément, *Syncope*, 70.
209 Elena Pnevmonidou, 'The Orient of Friedrich Hölderlin's Hyperion', talk as part of "East meets West - German Orientalisms", organised by the Research Cluster on German Orientalisms, University of Victoria, AUS. Pnevmonidou points out that Hyperion was a novel set in 18th century Greece, that is modern Greece, which was occupied by the Turks at the time. This occupation by the Ottomans complicates any easy idealisation of the Orient. Pnevmonidou argues: "Hölderlin has a character who looks for a mythological Orient, but at the same time he is confronted with a present Orient that he wants to reject, and that is the Ottoman Orient. So the novel Hyperion is about the collision of two irreconcilable conceptions of the Orient. One is desirable, it is connected to the imagination, to poetry, to fantasy, to myth, to the mythical origin of our civilisation in the past, and one is very much rejected which is the Ottoman occupation of Greece in the present. So what I am looking for is not one single homogenous discourse about the Orient in Hölderlin, but I am looking precisely at the friction that Hölderlin very deliberately establishes between these two very irreconcilable conceptions of the Orient." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dInMTzqRank. Accessed 31/08/2015.
210 Clément, *Syncope*, 70.

If the West values only strength and purposefulness, if it offers no respite, if it has no tolerance for those who want to live at a different pace or for those who want to explore their imagination, where do they go who do not fit in, and what do they do? It is perhaps not surprising that the East and the Far East with its other kinds of music, vivid colours, different physicality and mysterious rites came to occupy this place in the Western imagination. However, according to Clément the West also has its own places and spaces in which other kinds of truths and values are explored and experienced, "enclaves into which the art of dissension has slipped, through the meshes of a tightly drawn net."[211] This enclave is creativity, Clément suggested, and "there are the artists whose work reproduces the scenario of syncope: a surprise, a delay of life, a violent anticipation, and a slow return to what one calls the self."[212] These artists could be described as the modern Hölderlins in that they seek to facilitate an experience of totality. However, as artists they do not need to go East and practice back at home instead. Like Hölderlin, they pursue the inconsequential in order to reproduce the scenario of syncope, and lay claim to that which does not fit into the system, that which is without purpose or goal. At times they may be regarded idiomatically as a little cracked, but this crack is the disjunction between that which they themselves pursue and the system in which they operate, rather than a crack in the individual.

Stimmung

Clément also discussed the notion of *Stimmung*, coined by Novalis, as another feature of the Romantic movement. The term *Stimmung* was indicative of the desire for liberation of the soul from the repression of emotions, sensations, desires. [213] *Stimmung* suggested the tuning of the soul, as Clément pointed out, but it was, and still is today, also used for all kinds of general atmospheres and moods. The musical nature of the term implies resonances and reverberations, and imbues everything with a poetic sensibility and a hint of sensuousness, desire and longing, be that a summer's evening, a given place or a moment in time. Clément concerned herself with the

211 Ibid., 21.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid., 60.

Romantic interiority and its moods not only because they acknowledge individual experience and desire, but to reposition them as a significant, constitutive part of a historical, philosophical and cultural trajectory. Her declaration of the Romantic period as an era of syncope puts the Romantic poets and writers in pole position as the bearers of something new within the Western tradition. For Clément, they are the Ambassadors of the philosophy of rapture, which advances a different understanding of self.[214]

Reflecting on what was at stake for the poets of the time Clément quoted the following *Stimmung* by Karoline von Günderode:

> I stood on a high rock in the Mediterranean, and before me was the East, and behind me the West, and the wind was resting on the waters. … I saw a vast ocean before me that did not touch any shores, not to the north, nor to the south, nor to the east, nor to the west. Not the slightest breeze stirred the waves, and yet this immense sea was troubled in its depths, as if by an eternal fermentation.[215]

As Clément noted, the scene was part of a vision that Günderode wrote down a few days before committing suicide.[216] The promise that the East held for her and for those who wanted to follow the stirrings of their inner selves created ambivalences and an explosive mixture of excitement, fear and trepidation. Only few would have had the courage to explore their troubled depths and face the unknown, and to rebel against the wider cultural and social pressures of bourgeois expectations. The image of a calm surface over troubled waters is therefore an apt metaphor for the inner tension people would have felt, and correlates with the phenomenological account of the rational self which has split off its own troubled depth, as discussed in Chapter 3.

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214 For a more recent study on Romantic interiority and moods see Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy*, 1790–1840 (JHU Press, 2005): Pfau takes the view that Romantic literature and its specific emotive paradigms reflected the extensive political, economic and cultural reconfiguration of the European landscape in the wake of the French Revolution. Pfau thereby echoes Clément's approach by which individual experience is subject to wider socio-cultural conditions.
215 Karoline von Günderode, cited in Clément, *Syncope*, 70.
216 Clément, *Syncope*, 70.

Bataille's journey

Georges Bataille undertook the journey into troubled depths by himself it seems, going on forays into the dark alleys of the city and the recesses of the mind with what Martin Jay called a decidedly anti-ocular project.[217] Bataille's work precipitated a breakdown of the hegemony of vision and privileging of the rational self, exploring darkness and blindness in numerous ways in his work, from entries in *Documents* and *The Critical Dictionary*, through writing about the night of the subject in *Inner Experience* to laying bare dark, sexually transgressive impulses in *The Story of the Eye*.[218] Some of this work is still controversial but as part of what she characterises as 'the poetry of transgression' Susan Sontag has resolutely defended it: "He who transgresses not only breaks the rule. He goes somewhere that others have not; and he knows something that others don't know."[219]

The concept of knowledge in this context signals a radical break with the doctrines of the Enlightenment and needs to be used cautiously with regards to Bataille.[220] Throughout his work (except for a very early venture into Catholicism) Bataille explored knowledge within a dark realm of subjectivity through experiences such as shame, guilt, horror and violence as well as states of ecstasy. These experiences led Bataille to the formulation of 'non-knowledge' as another kind of knowing distinct from that gained through rational enquiry. Non-knowledge is the subject of his publication *Inner Experience,* a text in which he played with the conventional notions of seeing as a path to knowledge, in order to undermine any certainties which rationalism used to promise. Bataille wrote:

217 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes, The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 212.
218 *The Story of the Eye* was Bataille's first novel and one of his earliest publications and signaled the radical and unorthodox means by which he was to develop his work. Georges Bataille, *The Story of the Eye* (London: Penguin Books, 1982).
219 Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination', reprinted in Bataille, *The Story of the Eye*, 116. Originally published in Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Vintage, 1967).
220 See also Georges Bataille, 'Un-knowing and its Consequences' and 'Un-knowing and Rebellion', in *The Bataille Reader*, 321-329.

> Non-knowledge lays bare, therefore I see what knowledge was hiding up to
> that point, but if I see, I know. Indeed I know, but non-knowledge again lays
> bare what I have known. If nonsense is sense, the sense which is nonsense is
> lost, becomes nonsense once again (without possible end).[221]

This non-knowledge is recognition through experience. A laying bare is still an exposure of some kind, an emergence, but it is a recognition that is different to the grasping of the rational mind. Furthermore, any possible proper knowledge with its suggestion of finite truths is undermined through the circularity of the experience, the seeing and laying bare of the knowledge, so that no conclusion can be achieved. Following Susan Sontag the circularity and processing 'without possible end' is partly to blame for the rejection of Bataille's pornographic writing as literature. Sontag referred to Adorno who argued that pornography couldn't belong to literature, because it does not perform according to beginning, middle and end.[222] Bataille's writing therefore challenges the limits of literature, because it echoes the obscene aspect of pornography and tends not to resolve itself.

This is also what makes Bataille's writing so radical, in that knowledge becomes non-knowledge, which lays bare but does not end – in knowledge. It is an obscene form of knowledge, which undermines the certainty of objective, rational enquiry and shatters the concept of eternal ideas as postulated by Plato and celebrated by the Enlightenment. The homogeneity of the ego is also shattered, and displaced by a heterogeneity of the body. Allan Weiss explored this dynamic in his essay for *October* on 'Impossible Sovereignty'. He argued that in Bataille's "atheology, the violence of sacrifice disrupts the symbolic by offering the body as non-sense, as the nexus of possibility and mortality, hence as pure contingency." [223] Furthermore, "linguistic unity is revealed as the pretext for the regulation of the body."[224] If

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221 Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 52. Original publication, _Expérience Intérieure_, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1954).
222 Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination', 87.
223 Allan S. Weiss, 'Impossible Sovereignty: Between The Will to Power and The Will to Chance', *October*, vol. 36, *Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing* (Spring, 1986), 132.
224 Ibid. 146.

meaning is lost, it is due to the sacrificing of intentionality, for the sake of intensity and libidinal pursuits, according to Weiss.[225]

Bataille's work thereby dissolves the split that is described in Günderode's vision, in which no breeze disturbs the surface of the water and all troubles remain hidden in its depth. Bataille's concept of *non-knowledge* forms an important part of what he understood as totality, or wholeness. In *On Nietzsche, The Will to Chance* he argued that conscious totality is a state of incoherence. This essay is perhaps one of the most revealing texts Bataille wrote and indicates that much of his own project is a response to, and reworking of, Nietzschean thought:

> The accomplishment of my totality in consciousness requires my relation to the immense, comic, painful convulsions which is that of all men. This is a movement in all directions and all senses.[226]

The movement in all directions profoundly challenged the philosophical fulcrum of immobility and permanence which philosophy had pursued for so long. Instead it builds on Nietzsche's advocacy of chance as constitutive elements of experience and revolves around the nonsensical. Bataille deployed this notion in two ways: first, a rejection of objects that bear no sense reflect the individual's rejection of parts of him/herself and hence her own totality; secondly, a deliberate searching for that which is free of sense signifies an absence of denial and an embrace of the totality which we are.[227] This constitutes an affirmation, an exercise of freedom which Bataille sought through his work, but he was in no doubt that this was a dark journey: "In following this path, I become absurd. […] I cast off good, I cast off reason (sense), I open beneath my feet the abyss from which action and its consequent judgements have separated me."[228] This comment identifies exactly the risk that has to be taken and the difficulties that the path entails. Compared with Günderode's fearful *Stimmung*, this is bare analysis and accepts the need to reject what is commonly regarded as good and reasonable. Furthermore, the comment shows that Bataille consciously and

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225 Ibid.
226 Bataille, 'On Nietzsche', 338.
227 Ibid., 339.
228 Ibid.

deliberately opened the abyss beneath his feet, even though he knew that this conscious totality begins with a crisis. Quite likely it was this sense of an impending crisis that drove Günderode to take her own life, because she could not bear the thought of having to face the troubled depth and Bataille's "endless incoherence."[229] If Clément is interested in both these journeys, it is because they constitute the two sides of a coin, so to speak, that is the pursuit of the totality of the Self in difference to the idealised and always reasonable Self as formulated by the Enlightenment.

Extreme Ironing (Kappenberg 2007/8)

I propose the following scenario; it is October, the middle of autumn, and the leaves are falling from the trees in large quantities. A private garden in an average, urban neighbourhood somewhere in Northern Europe has been opened to the public. The garden features a large established maple tree and a small greenhouse has been set up underneath. In the greenhouse there is an ironing board, a high chair and an array of baskets. The yellow and brown leaves of the tree are spreading over the garden covering bushes, lawns and the greenhouse itself, and more and more leaves are falling. A woman, not from the town, has temporarily moved into the family home. In a daily routine she goes into the garden, collects leaves, irons them in the greenhouse and stores them in the baskets. Over the duration of three weeks the baskets fill up. Visitors wander into the garden alone, as families or in groups, looking into the greenhouse or stepping inside, standing around the ironing board, smiling and taking in the scent which emerges from the steamed leaves. The air inside the greenhouse is a little warmer than outside because of the heat the iron is giving out, and the moist herbal smells that come of the leaves recall a teahouse. The ironing woman smiles back at the visitors and responds to their various questions about the temperature of the iron she is using, about the amount of time she is ironing, and about what she is going to be doing with the leaves. At the end of the exhibition, she says, they will be redistributed in the garden. Again the visitors smile. Some people stay for quite a long time, chatting as one might around the kitchen table. People are bemused about this

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229 Ibid.

peculiar undertaking, or astonished, and a few shake their heads and walk away. Those who stay begin to compare this scene to the rest of their own lives, at times expressing what sounds like envy or longing for something out of the ordinary. Some talk about life and death and there is a lot of laughter: one man says he now understand why leaves have sticks, because you don't scald your finger when ironing them. On the last day of the exhibition the ironing woman takes the baskets one by one and redistributes the ironed leaves around the big tree. Being dry and crisp they gently float in the air before landing softly on the ground. For a brief moment there is an ironed garden, until the rain and the wind return everything to chaos.

This was the scenario of *Extreme Ironing* (Kappenberg, 2007), an intervention for Vogelfrei 07, a biennial exhibition in the city of Darmstadt, Germany. The work took its title from a sport, whereby people go to unusual location and iron clothes on site. This project was however not concerned with spectacle or bravery, but reconfigured a domestic activity, in order to create an excessive and absurdist ritual.
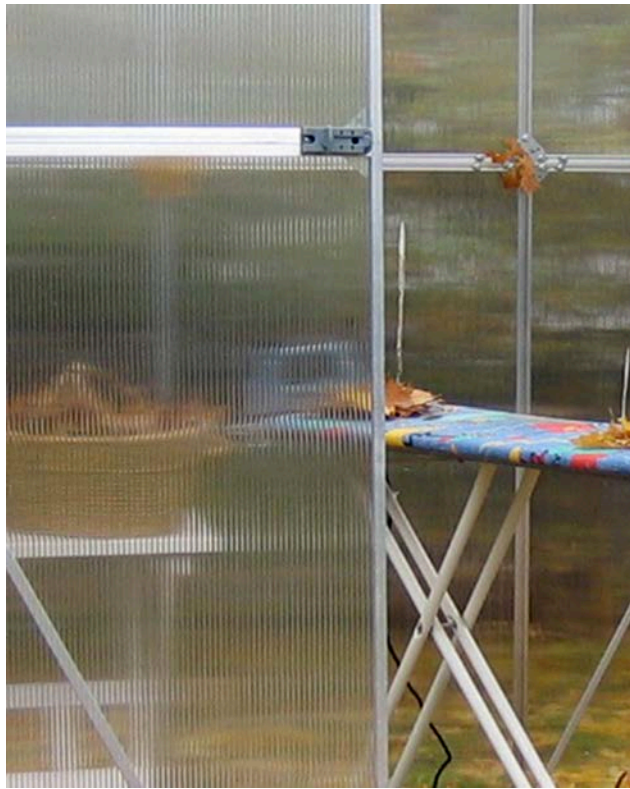
Pursuit of the inconsequential

Extreme Ironing was a loving task that defied the logic of economic thinking. Much of it was familiar, the ironing board and the regularity of the gestures, the figure of the female worker and the space of the garden. But the domestic order had been jumbled up and a customary activity had been rendered strange: an endeavour, which usually takes place indoors was taken into the garden and into nature; a menial task that normally happens in private was exposed to the public; the notion of the practical and sensible housewife was challenged through an excessively durational and non-sensical activity; a female figure was taken out of her traditional sphere, occupying instead the garden shed; what one might understand as gardening, that is the ordering and taming of nature and its entropic processes, was taken to an extreme; and finally the autumnal leaf, traditionally used for folk arts and crafts, became the material for a conceptual intervention.

In my art practice I iron and carry buckets, I have also shaken out feather pillows and baked. Domesticity features repeatedly and one might conclude that the work has a feminist agenda. In a short essay entitled "Household Images in Art" from 1973, Lucy Lippard explored the deployment of domestic imagery in women's art of the 1950s and 1960s and argued, that they do this "because it is what they know best, because they can't escape it."[230] For me, working in the early 21st century, and for many (female) artists from my generation this does not apply anymore. What I know best is thinking and writing, emailing, public transport and putting on tracksuit trousers, and I divide my time between academic affairs, administration, project management and creative endeavours.

Why then household imagery in the artwork? First of all there is something immediate in housework, it is physical and deals with the here and now, with the local, its materials and its people. This is helpful for a performance practice which seeks to engage with individuals in their everyday. Secondly, housework is comprised, more

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[230] Lucy R Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 62.

often than not, of small gestures that are repeated and lead to transient benefits like ironed shirts or cleaned surfaces. Their general purpose is maintenance, arising out of love and care, and not out of the desire for monetary gain. Housework, therefore, tends to take place outside of the economic sphere and its modus can potentially serve to challenge and disrupt dominant economic paradigms. Thirdly, the gestures and activities that are deployed in housework such as collecting and sorting and other kinds of handling, facilitate the recycling of materials, another aspect of the practice which allows the work to sidestep economic frameworks and pressures, and to advance a Bataillean *general economy* instead. Bataille's excess is modelled on the cyclical aspect of nature in which everything is part of an ongoing process of growth and decay. The decay and its excess is precisely that which regenerates the system. Leaves fall off the tree and decay, fertilise the earth and support new growth the following year. According to Bataille, human excess would similarly regenerate the world, its resources and society.

In *Extreme Ironing* the combination of housework-like activities and recycling of materials allowed for an excess that integrated itself easily into the everyday. It merely borrowed materials that were available, and spent without creating redundancies. As art it was a mode of work, a form of art practice that built on the interventions and performances of the Arte Povera artists, who made 'poor' objects in defiance of the economic boom and materialist culture of the 1960s and 1970s. *Extreme Ironing* similarly performed a 'poor' process with a 'poor' outcome, its expenditure basically an elaborate kind of recycling.

At entering the garden of the exhibition and seeing the work, visitors were frequently bemused and often stayed for long periods to observe the ironing, to look at the baskets of ironed leaves and to take in the warm scent that was drifting around the greenhouse. The temporary glass structure had become a sort of teahouse without tea, and people were asking me why I was doing what I was doing, and chatting about life and death. The trees had unusually vibrant hues that autumn and some visitors came back on other days to bring me different coloured leaves from their own gardens. In the course of the days I learned to observe each leaf, the way it had crumpled and how it straightened out when ironed.

Stepping into the public sphere with domestic labour was a feminist undertaking in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but now, in the 21st century and within Western economies, the domestic space is less of a gendered space than a realm that is generally and increasingly devalued. The neoliberal economy is not interested in maintenance or the domestic labour of love. Katrine Marçal's *Who Cooked Adams Smith's Dinner* (2015) highlights this predicament: "There are no workers in neoliberal history. There are only people who invest in their human capital."[231] Ubiquitous notions of investment and capital dominate individuals who serve predominantly to accumulate wealth for an Other, or for another time. Against this backdrop domestic materials and patterns of manual labour lend themselves for rebellious acts that challenge, more widely, the ethos of 'economic man'. Domestic imagery has become a means to claim - and reclaim - "what it means to be human."[232]

The scale and effort of the performed activity were beyond reasonable proportions and the simple ritual was no match for the entropic process. The skewed amplification of the domestic through the autumnal reflected not comfort and order, but something like the "immense, comic, painful convulsions which is [the life] of all men" as Bataille wrote. The large tree which framed the scene was well established and impressive, but it was not so much a symbol of life in this case as a presence which dwarfed the human effort underneath. Its inevitable seasonal decay and losing of leaves was no reassurance. This was therefore not a cosy symbiotic relation between woman and nature, or nature as nurture. Instead, it was a scene of incongruence, and absurdity. Nature's cycles and its seasonal changes were pitched against the linear notion of progress and wealth creation. Within this context the performed activity pointedly celebrated the inconsequential.[233]

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[231] Katerine Marçal, *Who Cooked Adam Smith's Dinner? A story about Women and Economics* (London: Portobello Books, 2015), 146.

[232] Ibid., 147. A number of female artists have built a body of work out of domestic gestures and processes, most notably Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Bobby Baker, Janine Antoni. The titles of their works often highlights the values that are under threat, such as in *Loving Care* (Janine Antoni, 1993).

233 Ibid., 338.

This is movement that runs in all directions, performing an absurd 'yes'. Might this work or this artist therefore not be perceived to be a little cracked? On the contrary, *Extreme Ironing* pursued its own truth, in defiance of that system in which most (Western) individuals live most of their time and which is dominated by a relentless imperative to work and to produce. "Are you the Ironing Woman?" people in Darmstadt would ask me when they saw me on the street during my three-week intervention in the garden of family Riad. "Yes". I'd say, at times recognizing the passer-by from one of the conversations in my garden-tea-house.

Here is another scenario, this one at Brighton Train Station in 2008. On one end of the broad concourse which leads to the ticket barriers and the trains, a group of women set up two ironing boards with an iron each. Staff from the train station bring over sacks of discarded newspapers which commuters read on their journey from London and elsewhere and leave behind at arrival. The women wear white gloves and work in pairs with one turning over the pages and the other ironing the paper. A fifth woman hands the ironed papers, still warm, out to the waiting travellers, who respond with the familiar mixture of curiosity, bemusement and bewilderment. Again, the scene is reminiscent of a domestic situation but the ironing boards are delightfully out of place. A familiar pattern of gestures is performed but not for the usual reasons. The objects under consideration are mass-produced and ultra cheap, normally handed out freely and confined to waste after being read perhaps once. This sort of product and wastage epitomises a capitalist, one-dimensional economy which concerns itself only with production and has no understanding of the potential meaning of waste: as discussed in Bataille's *general economy*, waste or expenditure should be at the core of economic and cultural processes.[234] Testing the Bataillean position *Extreme Ironing* inverses the conventional economic logic by turning to, and 'ennobling', a waste product according to a lost tradition in which butlers would iron the morning paper before handing them to their masters. In *Extreme Ironing*, each paper took a significant amount of time to iron and the investment into the waste material was excessive – if not mad – by current standards. But this was precisely the intention, to release excessive energy which becomes available only outside functional contexts,

234 According to Richardson it would be a balancing between accumulation and expenditure as discussed in Interlude 2, page 86. Richardson, 'Expenditure', 84.

according to Bataille and as discussed above.[235] This is the kind of disruptive energy, which Bataille calls *non-productive expenditure*. The newspapers are no longer the papers of the everyday, interchangeable and replaceable and mere functional objects; the intervention turns them into singular objects, each paper seemingly gaining dignity and each printed story gathering significance. The excessiveness of the activity is heightened by the fact that the transformation is short-lived for the papers are – most certainly - discarded again on their next train journey.

In the two versions of *Extreme Ironing*, the autumnal leaves and the pages of the newspapers were originally chosen as material because they accumulated at a certain time and in a certain space, thereby facilitating a labour of love, that is ironing. However, given their respective provenances, trees in case of the leaves, and factories and media businesses in the case of newspapers, they also afforded different associations. Leaves and papers are each part of their respective systems, that is, nature and culture. According to the project's maxim of the disturbance of one system by another, the domestic interference with the materials deliberately intervened in these two systems. In the first case, the ironing attempted to bring the leaves into a cultural context, temporarily suspending their own, entropic cycle. In the second case, the ironing highlighted that even the word is mass-produced and then redundant. Furthermore, the white gloves of the ironing team at the train station acted as a gentle reminder, that the printing ink is not only unpleasant, but also toxic. The ironing and recycling of printed papers then drew attention to the realm of communication and story telling as processes by which cultural values are determined and then discarded. Even the people who make the news seem throwaway within this system.

This kind of redundancy, be that of people, objects or processes, is alien to a Bataillean *general economy* as discussed above. According to Bataille, expenditure, excess and loss are constitutive parts of a system that ultimately regenerate the system. By recycling autumn leaves *Extreme Ironing 1* performed an excess that did not 'cost the earth' but simply and temporarily suspended a natural cycle. The operation was part of an organic whole. *Extreme Ironing 2* deployed an industrial product, but nevertheless again recycled matter that was readily available.

235 See earlier discussion on sacred use-value, Interlude 1, 51-54.

Considering Olsen's observation of the proximity of the gift and of sacrifice in Bataille, which is due to the withdrawal of objects from the productive cycles, there is a resonance here with both the giving of gifts and sacrificial rituals, even though there is big gap between the sacrificial killing of captives amongst the Aztecs, on which Bataille based his thinking, and the careful ironing of wasted newspaper. But fluid boundaries between different forms of *non-productive expenditure* only reinforce Bataille's stance, as Olsen surmised.

The artist's work

The body of work that developed during this research project became recognizable over time, with patterns emerging in the performance practice and in its use of uselessness: the performer(s) surrender to a work-like activity, but this activity produces nothing; the body itself and local materials are deployed at their place of origin; it is a form of theatre that blurs the boundaries between the performance and the everyday; the activity is almost probable and mirrors the urban environment, repetition is key: one system is disturbed by the implementation of another. The activities give rise to silent expenditure, to use Roland Barthes' term, as something that is circulated without representation and cannot be assimilated easily by the everyday. Highlighting the deeply ingrained, pervasive imperative to work and to accumulate, the performances play with, and mirror, the process by which even the worker is reduced to the level of a *thing*. In this context, it takes little to disturb the given order, a few bucketful of water, a few ironed leaves or a set of ennobled newspapers; they all highlight the extreme constraints of what is acceptable. In the context of the performances, the filling of buckets, and the ironing of leaves and newspapers take on the property of a gift and circulate through transmission and inscription. As deliberate excessive interventions they disturb a homogeneous social field that is regulated by received notions of efficiency and purpose. Finally, the simplicity of the interventions would allow for the work to be performed at a large number of urban sites, each presenting the evidence of the constraining mechanisms.

The performances challenge the ubiquitous imperative to work. Nevertheless they are works of art, and perhaps the kind of work that art can do. "And what is the work?" asked Blanchot in *The Space of Literature*:

> The exceptional moment when possibility becomes power, when the mind –
> law or empty form rich only in undetermined potentiality – becomes the
> certainty of a realized form, becomes this body which is form and this
> beautiful form which is a lovely body. The work is mind, and the mind is the

passage, within the work, from the supreme indeterminacy to the determination of that extreme. This unique passage is real only in the work – in the work which is never real, never finished, since it is only the realisation of the mind's infiniteness.[236]

Blanchot used many words to rethink the notion of work, and to withdraw the work of art from what is commonly known as work. He also called this *désœuvrement*, a kind of un-working or de-working perhaps. In a German essay on the meaning and history of the French word désœuvrement - there translated as worklessness - Andreas Hiepko pointed out that Blanchot's achievement is the salvation of the work of art through the differentiation from common notions of work. As Hiepko noted, Blanchot reflected more than once on the notion of désœuvrement, pursuing the idea that a work of art can only be art if it has partaken in a kind of non-doing, if it constitutes a refusal.[237] Exploring different translations of the term désœuvrement, such as Außerhalb-des-Werkes-Seins, that is being-outside-of-work, or Nicht-am-Werk-Sein, that is not-being-at-work, Hiepko suggested, drawing on Agamben, that Blanchot's term is a potentiality, which does not necessarily express itself in 'work'.[238] Potentiality is however different to refusal, I would add, the first referring to an abundance and flow, the latter suggesting a negativity towards a dominant paradigm. Perhaps most interesting is the difficulty in articulating anything which is not work in the sense of a utilitarian deployment, the "accomplishment of tasks materially set and defined", to use Bataille's turn of phrase.[239] Utilitarian deployment is marked by a deferral, either for the good of a city, clearly identified and credible, or for a transcendent good and imagined god. The work of art as described by Blanchot is not conceived with either of those aims, it is not determined by purpose. As artist I seek

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236 Maurice Blanchot, 'Death as Possibility', in *The Space of Literature*, trans. A. Smock, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 88.

237 Andreas Hiepko, 'Möglichkeiten, das Wort désœuvrement zu übersetzen', in *Ökonomien der Zurückhaltung, Kulturelles Handeln zwischen Askese und Restriktion*, eds. Barbara Gronau and Lagaay, A. (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag 2010), 32-34.

238 Ibid., 33.

239 Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, 337. Bataille summarised this conundrum in a miniature creation story: The horizon was once dark. The object of grave import was first the city's well-being, but the city was one with the gods. The next object was the soul's salvation. Action was aimed, on the one hand, at a limited, understandable goal and, on the other hand, at a totality defined as inaccessible down here (transcendent).

to make this kind of work, which is not the utilitarian sort, but how can I avoid 'simply' refusing to work, how can I assert another kind of 'work', and by what means? *Flush* offered something of that quality, in that it enacted the potentiality that is in work, without being 'work'. Perhaps Flush is *of work*.

Bataille's notion of the work of art is similar to Blanchot's, but also different. According to Bataille, a work of art is not a fight against the prevailing conditions, constraints and oppression. Instead, he argued, work is the positive exercise of freedom, giving without reckoning, exuberance.[240] This sounds somewhat like Blanchot's undetermined potentiality, when the mind is the passage, and unique. However, Bataille also pursued a notion of sovereignty, and of the artist as sovereign, that combines both of refusal and, I would argue, an impossible proposition.

The artist as sovereign

Bataille assigned to the artist the role of the purveyor of a subjectivity which he theorised through the notion of sovereignty, and which performance theorist Allan S. Weiss described as a "quasimystical atheology" that is "essentially groundless, without a true foundation or origin."[241] Pursuing a radical break with rationalist traditions, Bataille developed this sovereignty through his own work and writing. Sovereignty was an idea born at a specific historical moment and through a particular 'conversation': as Weiss noted, Bataille's notions of sovereignty and heterogeneity came out of an engagement with, and appropriation of, Nietzsche's work, in particular Nietzsche's rejection of transcendence and his quest for immanence and totality. Within this construct of absolute immanence, Weiss noted,

> the self is [...] no longer subject, but sovereign. And communication is no
> longer a teleological activity, but rather a function of both love and evil where

240 Ibid.
241 Allan S. Weiss, 'Impossible Sovereignty'; Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing. (Spring, 1986), 141 On the miraculous, a mystic sense of the absence of all limits and the absence of the fear of death see Bataille, *The Accursed Share II & III*, 204-211.

the relation between two beings is put entirely at risk, exposed to the vagaries of chance. [242]

Sovereignty is cast by Bataille as experience that unfolds beyond volition and communication, a refusal of intentionality and any symbolic register, as the pursuit of chance, excess and danger, as an inner experience that risks all. This sovereignty is open to dissociation and to the heterogeneous forces of the body, to life and death. As Weiss observed,

Laughter is one of the modes of sovereign conduct, a moment in which rationality is exceeded by a gratuitous affirmation of life, of contingency, of the body. It effects a rupture with thought, within ideality. […] It is rather a mode of disorganization by means of excess, waste, and irrationality.[243]

As is evident though this description, Bataille also differed from Nietzsche in that he rejected the Nietzschean claim for power, and envisaged sovereignty as refusal instead. Alongside laughter, Bataille explored sovereignty through, "eroticism, drunkenness, […] sacred sacrifice and poetry," [244] not surprisingly the kind of pursuits which Catherine Clément listed as modern syncopes. The affinities between Bataille and Clément's endeavours are clear. As Weiss noted, Bataille's scatological tendencies, his interest in eroticism and excess, death and waste, are comparable with Tantric Rituals and Hinduism which, in turn, also inspired Clément.[245] Bataille's construct of an excessive, irrational and libidinal sovereign subjectivity that does not even fear death, is perhaps the crux of what Clément borrowed from Bataille, except that she found a way to integrate the rupture – and rapture - into a wider, cultural whole through the notion of the musical syncope, and grounded it psychologically through the association with the mirror stage. What is refusal and quasi-mystical atheology in Bataille becomes a coherent, psychoanalytical – and post-psychoanalytical - discourse in Clément. Both oeuvres are however similarly critical

242 Ibid., 137.
243 Ibid., 140.
244 Ibid., 134.
245 Ibid., Clément, for example, discussed Bataille's i*nner experience* as a form of spontaneous Tantrism. See *Syncope*, 141.

of the kind of subjecthood that is available to the modern individual, and interested in finding ways to disrupt the false homogeneity that is enforced through cultural norms and its discourses. But the differences between Bataille and Clément are significant. Bataille was after all part of an avant-garde which grappled with a rising Fascism.[246] As evidenced by the concept of the artist as embodiment of sovereign subjectivity, Bataille wanted the artist to opt out, to renounce bourgeois, servile existence in favour of sovereignty. Clément is instead part of a 20th and 21st century analytical, feminist discourse. In *Syncope*, she deployed the concept as a device with which to recover, and to integrate, loss, excess and irrationality into contemporary culture and Western frameworks. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, she understood Syncope, and related forms of trance, as cultural processes which play an important role within the wider cultural fabric and which need to be facilitated through communally sanctioned rituals. She admired, but did not endorse, the solitary anguish of Bataille's trajectory.

While Clément's reworking of the sovereign through syncope is an eloquent, and realistic, proposition, Bataille's own version of sovereign subjectivity was limited in scope. It was not much more than an idea within a particular historical situation, and was fully explored only by Bataille himself and by a small, eclectic group of friends who gathered under the name of Acéphale. Bataille's idea of the artist as sovereign rather echoed the celebration of individual freedom under Dada, which was, as Malcolm Turvey has argued, contradictory and ultimately as bourgeois as the society they were trying to critique. Writing about modern living Turvey noted:

> The changes it brings can be libratory and oppressive at one and the same time. In the case of Dada, the personal freedom of modern life is celebrated in

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246 Bataille argued, that individual sovereignty derived from the sovereignty of kings and of god, drawing on archaic social structures and their mythical sense of difference and status. Searching for new, favorable socio-political structures Bataille temporarily even considered fascist dictatorships as regimes which could potentially restore the dynamics which had been lost in the egalitarian ambitions of the bourgeoisie, a position which he regretted later on according to Richard Wolin. (Richard Wolin, *The Story of I, Unearthing Georges Bataille* (Bookforum, Spring 2004) http://www.bookforum.com/archive/spr_04/wolin.html. Accessed 15/12/2015.

a radical form, while the instrumental rationality that has enabled it, is rejected as a stultifying, deadening constraint on that freedom."[247]

Individual freedom was not invented by Dada but a product of modernity and an outcome of a rationalism which the artists were very critical of. In other words, Dada artists were very much part of Bourgeois society and its beneficiaries: individual freedom was ultimately a bourgeois concept. Dada's celebration of freedom, and Picabia's subsequent "Instantanéism," or Instantanism, with its celebration of the presence, laughter and eroticism, and its contempt for morality, could be seen as precursors of the sovereign subjectivity which Bataille assigned to the artist.[248] Granted Bataille's endeavour was a much darker and uncompromising quest for difference, with its radical exploration of inner experience, excess and death, but parallels can be found.[249] What unites the different quests for individual freedom, for totality and sovereignty, is that they sit at the crossroads between a critique of rationalist traditions and a critique of modernity. They demonstrate how enmeshed the development of one was with the other but rationalism and modernity should not be confused or rejected as one and the same thing. A wholesale condemnation of rationality did not in the end offer any meaningful or lasting alternative. Nevertheless, Bataille's theorisation of sovereignty was an important step in the attempt to dismantel the stronghold of the Enlightenment, but a critique of 'reason' does at times mask the mechanisms fostered by the relentless drive for production and productivity, as in the following of Bataille's statements:

> We should calmly ask ourselves […] if the world we have conceived in
> accordance with reason is itself a viable and complete world. It is a world of

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247 Malcolm Turvey, "Dada, Entr'acte and Paris qui dort," in *The Filming of Modern Life*, 91.

248 Picabia declared: "Instantanéism does not want great men, [only believes in today], wants liberty for all, only believes in life, only believes in perpetual motion." Francis Picabia, *391, Vol 3.* cited in *Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia,* ed. Jennifer Mundy (London: Tate Publishing, 2008) 195,196.

249 I have published a more extensive discussion on Dada, Instantanism and its relation to modernity in Claudia Kappenberg, 'An interdisciplinary reading of the film Entr'acte'*, The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies*, ed. Douglas Rosenberg (NY: Oxford University Press, 2016) 187-204.

the operation subordinated to the anticipated result, a world of sequential duration; it is not a world of the moment.[250]

The statement makes sense and one might find oneself nodding in agreement, but if one replaces 'reason' with 'money' or 'material gains' the sentence still makes sense and a different argument emerges. In the latter case the notion of 'operation subordinated to the anticipated result' describes a Faustian universe in which subjects lead a homogenous, servile existence that has been fostered under capitalist regimes. And Bataille's argument for the necessity of waste, loss and *non-productive expenditure* was arguably the more appropriate response, designed to break the stronghold that industrial productivity has over individual lives.

Bataille engaged variously in discussions in which he distinguished between different forms of labour, for example, distancing himself from communist regimes which reject sovereignty as a whole and conceive of the individual as a means to production, and from bourgeois systems in which unequal relations lead to one person working for the benefit of another.[251] He made some allowance for work which is done independently or among equals, but on the whole he saw work as that which alienates a person from him/ herself.

He therefore looked toward the artist as someone who has the possibility of play. The artist, Bataille wrote, "is the perfect image of adult play […]."[252] If one disregards the idea of the artist as sovereign, the notion of play is apposite as a strategy and as an alternative to the idea of work. Play explores beyond given structures, without purpose or goal. Play allows for the pursuit of the inconsequential, and for the positive exercise of freedom. An adult who plays may risk being seen to be a little cracked but through play she can embrace chance and the arbitrary, excess and loss in difference to the world of sequential duration. Bataille's critique of the alienating

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250 Bataille, *The Accursed Share II & III*, 227.
251 Ibid., 367/368, and 239. Bataille's discussion of sovereignty is a response to Nietzsche's oeuvre; for Bataille Nietzsche is the one who broke the spell of Christianity which had enslaved the individual through its moral edicts, and paved the way for the individual to (re)claim its own sovereignty. However, he claimed that Nietzsche did not go far enough in fully embracing the freedom that this could entail.
252 Ibid., 223.

qualities of work is therefore highly poignant and informed the performances thus far developed in this research project. As playful interludes they contain an implicit critique. As discussed with regards to *Flush*, the performers appear to be working, but in actual fact they play 'work'. The siting of this play within the street further reinforces the sense of adults playing in that it is usually the site where children gather and engage in games.

Interlude 3 On Bataille

Some Biographical notes

Georges Bataille was part of a French intellectual circle, whose critical endeavour came to be known as structuralism and post-structuralism. Bataille's work became influential for its key thinkers in the 60s and 70s, but he appeared to have been a lone figure pursuing an individual project.[253] As Patrick Ffrench has argued in his extensive review of Bataille's work:

> Existentially and intellectually, Bataille is *apart*: his thought bears witness to a series of experiences which he pursued to their extremities, beyond conventional limits and beyond the moralities at the time. He takes from Blanchot the notion that the authority which drives and demands thought and experience is *contestation*.[254]

Ffrench also made the point that Bataille's extreme adventures were part of both an experiential and an intellectual project that reached beyond specific affiliations and was carried out instead in the name of a wider sense of humanity. On the other hand, Ffrench based his review of Bataille's work on the premise that the heterogeneous aspects of the oeuvre can be explained through the different relations and encounters Bataille had:

> Bataille's thought is elaborated in dialogue and in discussion with the individual figures he encountered, either as texts, as in the case of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud, or as teachers and disciplinary authorities, such as Marcel Mauss and Alexandre Kojève, or as friends, such as Michel Leiris and, perhaps most strikingly, Maurice Blanchot.[255]

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253 Evidence of Bataille's influence is, for example, found in Roland Barthes *The Lover's Discourse*, discussed in Chapter 1, and also in 'The Metaphor of the Eye', in R. Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Penguin, 1978), 239-247.
254 Patrick Ffrench, *After Bataille: Sacrifice, Exposure, Community* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007), Introduction, 4.
255 Ffrench, *After Bataille*, 4.

As always such lists are speculative. The group of significant people may well also include André-Aimé-René Masson, Léon Chestov, Jacques Lacan and possibly members of the secretive group Acéphale who are said to have comprised, Pierre Klossowski, Patrick Walberg and Marcel Duchamp, along with the already mentioned Michel Leiris.[256] At the same time, there is little doubt in current scholarship that an association of Bataille with André Breton and Surrealism would be erroneous, and I will return to this point further below.[257]

Given the heterogeneous nature of Bataille's written oeuvre there can be many starting points for an engagement with it, but death had a ubiquitous presence in Bataille's life, and Michel Surya's extensive biography of Georges Bataille opens with the following quote from Bataille:

> We are not in the habit of taking account of it, if we reflect or speak, but death will interrupt us. I will not always have to pursue the servile search for truth. Every question will finally remained unanswered, and I will conceal myself in such a way that I will impose silence. If others take up the task, they will not achieve more and death will cut them short, as it did to me. [258]

For Bataille there was no conclusion or end other than death. It had been present in his childhood through his father, who had contracted Syphilis and was blind, largely paralysed and confined to a chair by the time Bataille was three years old. Surya characterised the young Georges Bataille as having: "the wide open eyes of a child on a man whose own eyes are closed".[259] Daily confrontations with the blindness of his father, the utter weakness and progressive incontinence of his body and the increasing pains of his illness would have left a lasting impression. According to Surya, witnessing this disablement led Bataille to develop a paradoxical relationship with the

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256 Georges Bataille et al. (eds.), *Encyclopedia Acephalica,* trans. Iain White et al., (London: Atlas Press, 1995), 4.
257 As regards his differences with Andre Breton and the Surrealists, see Michel Surya's highly detailed and extensive biography on Bataille: *Georges Bataille, An Intellectual Biography*, which includes plenty of evidence against the traditional association of Bataille with the Surrealists.
258 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, Foreword.
259 Ibid., 7.

(in)ability to see, and to a fascination with that which is in reach of a blind man's eyes.[260] The spectacle of dying would have revealed to Bataille an aspect of reality that he returned to, and acknowledged later, in his work. In close connection with sexuality, death and effacement take on a central role in Bataille's oeuvre, together with a pursuit of non-knowledge. He wrote in *Inner Experience*:

> It is when I collapse that I have a start. […] It is necessary, in the end, to see everything with lifeless eyes, to become God, otherwise we would not know what it is to sink, to no longer know anything.[261]

This sort of comment and notion of a starting point indicates Bataille's radical approach. One can speculate that his experience pushed his writing and his writing pushed his practice further and further along the path to such extreme convictions. As detailed in Surya's biography, Bataille initially attempted to overcome his traumatic childhood experiences of war and the illness of his father through a turn towards Catholicism and a strict pious existence in his teenage years. According to Masson, his friend and fellow student, Bataille spent the years 1918–19 reading *Le Latin Mystique* by Rémy de Gourmont.[262] The book is a collection of medieval texts which aim to condemn and demonise the flesh as that which is not only mortal and immoral, but also as that which must wish for its own condemnation. While it is impossible to know exactly what Bataille gained from this literature and how he interpreted the texts at the time, he encountered a language which indulged in the rotten, sick, filth, excrement and all things repulsive. As Surya speculated, it left Bataille with a profound ambivalence towards carnal matters, never able to "imagine it without repugnance", or to see it as other than the mortal condition of the self.[263] For Bataille flesh always signified terror as much as beauty, and the experience of one increased the sense of the other.[264] During a short stay in Spain in 1922, Bataille was affected profoundly by the experience of watching a deadly accident at a bullfight, slowly

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260 Ibid., 6-10.
261 Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 153.
262 Surya, *Georges Bataille,* 27.
263 Ibid., 29.
264 Ibid., 48, from Bataille's letters to an unknown Woman from 1924.

being drawn into the spell of anguished and feverish but pleasurable anticipation despite himself and his Catholic convictions at the time:

> […] I never went to a bullfight without a sense of anguish straining my nerves intensely. This anguish did not in the least diminish my desire to go to the bullring. On the contrary, it exacerbated it, taking shape with a feverish impatience. I then began to understand that unease is often the secret of the greatest pleasures.[265]

Bataille eventually renounced the Catholic Faith in or around 1924.[266] This experience nonetheless paved the way for his subsequent philosophical explorations, whilst also explaining a continued interest in the religious exigencies of the Christian Medieval literature. In a publication dedicated to Bataille's mysticism, Andrew Hussey highlighted this particular aspect of Bataille's oeuvre, which also accounted for a certain estrangement between him and other contemporaries such as Sartre.[267]

Critique of Idealism

This brief account from 'the life of' serves to punctuate the theoretical discourse that is under investigation. It underpins a large oeuvre which consistently challenged idealist positions and big ideas, and which sought to undermine these through interventions such as detailed commentaries on carnal matters, on the big toe and the mouth.[268] Bataille addressed the legacies of idealist positions most directly in an essay

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265 Georges Bataille, 'A propos de Pour qui sonne le glas, d'Ernest Hemingway', *L'Espagne libre*. (Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1946), 120. According to Surya this article appeared in the only issue of the journal *Actualité* and was written 44 years after the actual experience. It seems to have been typical for Bataille to reinterpret earlier events very differently to how he described them in letters at the time. For further detail see Surya, 'La emoción'*, in Georges Bataille,* 39-44.
266 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 30/47/52/58.
267 Andrew Hussey, *The Inner Scar, The Mysticism of George Bataille*, (Amsterdam; Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 2000), 2.
268 Georges Bataille, 'Big Toe' in *Document* (1929/1930), reprinted in *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, 87-93. 'Mouth' and 'Dust', *Critical Dictionary*, Georges Bataille and Carl Einstein eds., reprinted in *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, 29-84.

entitled 'The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic', written in the early 1930s. In this essay he critiqued the Hegelian proposition of a general dialectic as well as Engels' reworking of this dialectic. He argued that Engels wrongly attempted to apply the schema of systematic contradictions to nature as some kind of general law and that this universal application resulted in an impoverishment of the ideas itself. Bataille wrote:

> Today a new experimental justification of the dialectic has become necessary. It will be clear why this operation can only take place on the very terrain of its specific development, in other words on the immediate terrain of class struggle, in experience and not in an *a priori* fog of universal conceptions.[269]

In this essay Bataille acknowledged Hegel's own concern, that nature constituted the limits of his philosophy and that it could by no means be absorbed into it.[270] Referencing the work of Nicolai Hartmann, Bataille supported a review and radical critique of universalism, arguing that the dialectic cannot in any way be applied to scientific activity and that the limits needed to be understood for a meaningful debate over its relevance. According to Bataille, a useful and entirely appropriate application of a Hegelian dialectic can be found in the Marxist conception of history, a dialectic based on the negativity to which the proletariat is condemned and which consequently gives rise to revolutionary activity at the heart of historical developments.[271]

Bataille consistently rejected universalism and idealism, also critiquing Nietzsche for construing a 'Superman' and for creating new values, which could fill the void left by the demise of God.[272] In the same text in which Bataille critiqued Nietzsche, he also accused his contemporary and leader of the Surrealist movement, André Breton, of an idealisation. He described this as an Icarian complex and "the transformation of Icarian reflexes into pathetic-comic and gratuitous literature."[273] Bataille argued that

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269 Georges Bataille, 'The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic', in Stoekl, *Visions of Excess*, 107.
270 Ibid.
271 Ibid., 113/114.
272 Georges Bataille, 'The Old Mole and the prefix SUR', in *Visions of Excess,* 38/39.
273 Ibid., 40.

both Nietzsche and Breton wanted to surpass existing social models but were destined to fall eventually, just as Icarus did when he came too close to the sun. The moralising, elevated and romantic claims of the Surrealist canon were for Bataille a ridiculous and hypocritical endeavour, and it appears that much of Bataille's writing of the time was fuelled by this disdain for the Surrealists and for Andre Breton.[274] Perhaps Bataille needed to draw a line between him and them as their project appeared to others to be similar to his. In Bataille the fall of one system is not stabilised by the rise of another, instead there is incessant movement or process. Accordingly, Bataille argued that subjectivity needed to be acknowledged in its entirety. Deeply suspicious of all metaphorical language and tidy surrealist poetics, Bataille sought alternative modes of writing.[275] In a poetic fragment entitled *Value Based on What?* Bataille explored the sense of falling to suggest an infinite open process. He wrote:

> […] the earth slips away
> with a movement in which
> all things detach and float off
> carried by the immense movement
> that's neither the fall not its absence
> but which opens infinitely
> and dizzingly
> into all
> space.[276]

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274 As regards to his differences with Andre Breton and the Surrealists, see Michel Surya's highly detailed and extensive biography on Bataille, which includes plenty of evidence against the traditional association of Bataille with the Surrealists. Surya also discussed the role de Sade played for both the Surrealist and Bataille and mentioned Bataille's rage at the hypocrisy with which the Surrealists referred to Sade. Surya noted that Breton did eventually acknowledge in a private conversation with André Masson, that Bataille was in fact the one closest to Sade. Surya, *Georges Bataille,* 139. In a review of Surya's biography Richard Wolin, noted however the author's bias towards Bataille and argues that he minimised and oversimplified Bataille's temporary flirting with fascist tendencies. Wolin, *The Story of I.*
275 For a discussion of the differences between Bataille's writing and the surrealist enterprise, see also John Lechte, 'Surrealism or the practice of writing, or The 'case' of Bataille', in Carolyn Bailey Gill, ed. *Bataille, Writing the Sacred*, 121-124.
276 Extract from 'Value Based on What?', in Georges Bataille, *Divine Filth, Lost Writings,* trans. Mark Spitzer, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2004), 50.

In this fragment Bataille described movement as an absence of limits, as an opening into space, an image which recalls also Bataille's notion of freedom. The latter is the logical consequence of Bataille's anti-idealism and continues a philosophical line of enquiry that was initiated by anti-idealists like Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. In his biography of Bataille, Surya also documented the friendship and intensive exchange between Bataille and the Russian philosopher Léon Chestov, whose anti-idealism asserted a profound influence on Bataille. Chestov's radicalism in turn was based on the work of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, and Chestov appeared to have introduced Bataille to their work. As Surya suggested, Bataille's maxim 'everything is permitted' was built on Dostoevsky's 'nothing is true'.[277] Whilst not always agreeing with Nietzsche, Bataille shared his 'post-Christian' approach perhaps more than any other philosopher of the 20th century. Echoing Nietzsche, Bataille wrote: "Man can set aside the thought that it is God who keeps the rest of things from being absurd."[278]

Bataille's magazine *Acéphale* was essentially intended as a defense of Nietzsche during the rise of Fascism and its mission was to explore the limits of subjectivity against and beyond the constraints of a repressive communality. Bataille's secretive group the *Acéphale* also took a Nietzschean approach and was profoundly atheological, like Nietzsche committed to the death of God as "a creator of false community, associated with tranquility, absence of movement, the finished, time made finite: a prison."[279] In the universe of the *Acéphale* there was no hierarchical structure and baseness dominated the spiritual, an approach which was intended as violent, uncompromising interjection into a social field. According to Surya:

> Bataille's absolutely solitary revolt is justified by nothing but itself: the good
> no longer has a God to guarantee it, nor does evil have a God to blaspheme. Its
> only authority is its bad temper and its rage. If it denounces, it does so with no
> claim to change anything. If it decides to destroy, it is with no hope of

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277 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 58/59.
278 Georges Bataille. (1937) *The Sacred Conspiracy*, preface to the first issue of the Acéphale, as cited by Alastair Brotchie, *Encyclopaedia Acéphalica*. Introduction, 14.
279 Bataille, cited by Alastair Brotchie, *Encyclopaedia Acéphalica*. Introduction, 14.

replacing anything. If it exists, it is without an outcome… In short, it has no other authority but itself, the one that horror makes its rule.[280]

While Bataille's attitude and project was bleak, excessive and erroneous in parts there is something appealing in its bold stance and uncompromising tenor. Bataille was like a lion that would not be tamed. The philosopher, critic, writer and the man stubbornly challenged productivist modes and rebelled against its utilitarian frameworks, so that, despite his "anthropological romanticism"[281] and a misguided temporary interest in Fascist, totalitarian re-enactments he has become an icon of both a French intellectual generation and the contemporary Anglo-Saxon community. Given the ever-increasing power of capital in shaping the lives of communities and individuals across regions and nations, his critique of minatory socio-economic and bodily regimes has lost none of its relevance.

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280 Surya, *Georges Bataille*, 122.
281 Wolin, *The Story of I.*

Chapter 5. A History of Uselessness

Historical Narratives

The historical narrative under construction here gathers art practices from across the 20th century which engage with notions of functionality and purpose and frequently deploy task-based activities. This narrative situates the present research within a wider context of art making in order to constitute a 'history of uselessness'. This chapter discusses a selection of relevant works and identifies several types of artistic explorations of uselessness. The chapter concludes with a review of recent criticism that engages with this debate, most notably through the writing of the art critic Jean Fisher, who frequently deploys the concept of Syncope in her discussion of contemporary art.

In general, I describe my performance practice as a choreographic practice, devised in terms of movement and gestures. Conceptually it is predominantly aligned with, and informed by, debates in the visual arts and live art. The relative absence of dance-specific debates or contextual dance references in the discussion in this chapter and my wider research is partly due to the fact that dance scholarship has only recently started addressing philosophical discourse with both depth and breadth. [282] Also discourses in dance continue to distinguish between performance as duration and performance as representation, as for example in a recent essay by Bojana Cvejic for the 1st issue of the Performance Philosophy Journal. Her discussion is inflected by the fact that dance was historically conceived as a form of representation, whereas today experimental choreographers such as, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Deborah Hay and Trisha Brown, and more recently Jerome Bel, Xavier Roy, Vera Montero, Boris Charmatz, make work that is predominantly located in process and duration rather than in transcendent narratives.[283] In the field of live art or performance art there is no such differentiation or division. As Kristine Stiles has argued in an essay on live

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282 Bojana Cvejic, 'From Odd Encounters to a Prospective Confluence: Dance-Philosophy', *Performance Philosophy,* vol. 1 (2015): 7-23.
http://www.performancephilosophy.org/journal.
283 Cvejic, Ibid., 18.

performance art: "Performance art both *is*, and is a representation *of*, life itself." [284] I agree with Stiles' comment and I would like to add that live interventions are particularly interesting precisely because they both 'are' life and represent life at large. However this debate will not be pursued here as it would distract from the discussion on uselessness. Suffice to say that from the choreographers listed above, Yvonne Rainer is the most relevant artist and will be brought into the history of uselessness. Otherwise I will draw on visual arts practices: live, time-based work and installation practices; but also on some object-based work; and on music – the issues under consideration span all these disciplines.

A starting point of the History of Uselessness: The Gift (Man Ray, 1921)

The Gift (1921) is a sculpture by the American, Paris-based artist, Man Ray, and consists of an ordinary clothes iron made extraordinary through a row of tacks stuck down the middle of the ironing surface. In a discussion of early 20th century avant-gardes, Jemima Montague describes this object as follows:

> With typical DADA defiance, the new configuration completely undermines the object's utility, transforming it into a useless, but now bizarre and (viciously) humorous object.[285]

Montague foregrounds the desire to undermine the functionality of an object – a strategy common to Dada and to Surrealism. The method adopted is the transformation of the ordinary into the extra-ordinary, into the strange and disturbing. Louis Aragon, Dadaist and founding member of the Surrealists, commented on this interest in the strange, or, as he called it, the marvellous, in Surrealist work. According to Aragon the strange "is that which opposes itself …to what is so well known that it is no longer seen." [286] Aragon comments on a process, by which we, the

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284 Kristine Stiles, "Performance", *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90.
285 Jemima Montague, *The Surrealists, Revolutionaries in Art & Writing 1919-35*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2002), 42.
286 Ibid.

onlookers, become blind to the familiar. This remark can be applied to Man Ray's *The Gift*. An iron is an iron is an iron, one might think. An iron with a row of tacks down the middle is dysfunctional and strange, however, and calls attention to itself. It is disturbing and upsetting, hilarious as well as mean, and suggestive of ripped clothes and destruction.

Tools are extensions of ourselves because they help us do what we set out to do; as they become absorbed into everyday tasks they drop out of consciousness. If, however, tools are estranged from their function they consequently estrange themselves from us. When they refuse their functionality, they refuse us and become strange in a sense of being both familiar and different. The philosopher Maurice Blanchot explored this rupture in his essay *Two Versions of the Imaginary*:

> A utensil, no longer disappearing in its use, appears. This appearance of the object is that of resemblance and reflection: one might say it is its double.[287]

Blanchot developed this thesis drawing on Heidegger's distinction between the 'ready to hand' and the 'present to hand', the first one describing the tool which has become an extension of ourselves in fulfilling a function, and the latter describing the tool which withdraws from the user to be merely itself and present, thereby becoming visible to us (again).[288] Concerned with the phenomenological, Heidegger further explained, "Though we may know these distances exactly, this knowledge still remains blind."[289] Using examples such as the hammer, reading glasses and the telephone receiver, Heidegger described how they are physically close to us but not experienced as such: "When, for instance a man wears a pair of spectacles which are so close to him distantially that they are 'sitting on his nose', they are environmentally more remote from him than the picture on the opposite wall. Such equipment has so little closeness that often it is proximally quite impossible to find."[290] Agreeing with

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287 Maurice Blanchot, 'Two Versions of the Imaginary', in *The Gaze of Orpheus and other literary Essays*, trans. Lydia Davis, (Barrytown: NY, Station Hill Press, 1981), 84.
288 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1973), 98-101.
289 Ibid., 141.
290 Ibid.

Heidegger, Blanchot argued that the functional tool and its dysfunctional counterpart are not the same thing, one being an object that is to some extent invisible to the user, the other resembling the first, but a mere image. Blanchot linked the category of art in general to this transformation from object to image, "to this possibility objects have of 'appearing', that is, of abandoning themselves to pure and simple resemblance behind which there is nothing - except being."[291] In line with Heidegger the notion of being is differentiated from a sense of purpose, it is an absence of purpose. Blanchot continued:

> In the image, the object again touches something it had mastered in order to be an object, something against which it had built and defined itself, but now that its value, its signification, is suspended, now that the world is *abandoning it to worklessness* and putting it to one side, the truth in it withdraws, the elemental claims it, which is the impoverishment, the enrichment that consecrates it as image. (Italics mine)[292]

The term 'worklessness' is intriguing. It sharply draws attention to the key feature of a society in which work is the norm whereas worklessness constitutes a form of abandonment, an absence. Man Ray took the iron out of its usual context and thrust it into abandonment. This act is representative of the work of Dada, a movement that, as Malcolm Turvey explained in the previously mentioned discussion on the avant-gardes, rebelled against the rationalism of an Enlightenment-style modernity that was perceived as morally corrupt for allowing the unprecedented destructiveness of WW1.[293] Bourgeois modernity however, implemented industrial production on a large scale, thereby regulating labour, and imposing tight constraints on the legitimated forms of living (the socially sanctioned forms of living) of the modern subject. Dada interventions were designed to disturb these constraints, and to undermine the credo of productivity along with the authority of Bourgeois institutions. Dada artists

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291 Blanchot, 'Two Versions', 84.
292 Ibid., 81.
293 Malcolm Turvey, 'Dada, Entr'acte and Paris Qui Dort' 78/79. For a more extensive discussion of Dada film and its political ambitions see Claudia Kappenberg, 'An interdisciplinary reading of the film Entr'acte'*, The Oxford Handbook of Screendance Studies*, ed. Douglas Rosenberg. NewYork: Oxford University Press, 2016: 187-204.

delighted in the disturbance they caused, and in the rage they provoked in their audiences, even if the audiences became quite fond of Dada hoaxes.

Yet what is it that is "mastered" in becoming object, in Blanchot's terms? Tools which function are absorbed into predictable proceedings that serve one purpose or another, and thereby distance themselves from the elemental, the 'nothing' that is being. But they also bind the worker into functioning. When Blanchot says that "in the image, the object again touches something it had mastered in order to be an object", the 'it' also refers to the worker that the tool has mastered, meaning that the lines are blurred as to who serves whom. Is it the tool which serves the worker, or the worker who serves the tool? Perhaps both are caught within mutual servitude, both defined by a value external to themselves. This servitude is the antithesis to the potential of experience and being, which Bataille referred to as "wholeness". As discussed in the Prologue, Bataille argued that in order to maintain this wholeness we need to resist or limit this functional deployment, actively refuse to act or at least to limit the time given to this kind of work."[294]

With this construct of object versus its resemblance, Blanchot situates the object and its image at different points on a graph of (un)-certainty whereby the functional tool represents relative certainty that tumbles towards uncertainty in becoming an image. According to Blanchot, art emerges out of the interval between the material presence of objects on one side, and the metaphysical sphere of images on the other. Shifts and encounters between one and the other constitute disturbances, but they also reveal both the everyday and art. In this dynamic not only our perception shifts, of objects but also of individuals, the collective body and social structures: functional patterns and relations disappear into the everyday whereas broken rules and structures produce a dis-association, and an emergence of scenarios that reflects on the everyday through resemblance.

Man Ray's *The Gift* exemplifies this kind of abrupt shift of perception, and provides a historical reference point for this type of artistic practice. A performance such as *Flush* also plays on this possibility: the work looks like the everyday but separates

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294 Bataille 'On Nietzsche', 336.

itself in performing a task that does not have a conventional purpose. To paraphrase Blanchot, the activity no longer disappears in its use, and its appearance functions like a mirror or reflection of the everyday; it acts as its double, its image. The performed work becomes an image, and it becomes part of the realm of art. This dynamic lays out possible parameters for a use of uselessness in art which focuses on the deliberate disruption of production and productivity, in order to suspend its mechanisms and constraints - even for a moment. The scene, its actors and perhaps even its onlookers are temporarily abandoned to worklessness in "which there is nothing - except being."[295] This shift and temporary abandon echoes Clément's exploration of the disruption caused by a musical dissonance which is disconcerting and which "dislocates harmony for a moment."[296] There is a 'disconcertedness' in this dislocation according to Clément, which disrupts the socio-cultural 'consensus', and perhaps it is the same kind of disconcertedness when a functional tool is broken and tumbles towards uncertainty in becoming an image.

The performance practice plays with and subverts the status of the selected utensils and materials in order to question an economy that is dedicated to the production of objects, and that puts individuals into the service of its interests. By changing the relation between the individual and their utensil, or more generally, by subverting the status of materials and objects, the status of the individual and the worker can also be reconsidered and reviewed. In *Flush*, the buckets no longer master the situation, on the contrary, their sinking into the river water, their short and repetitive journey across to the other side of the bridge, as well as their diminutive size compared to the expanse of the river, all conspire to undermine their status as significant objects.

Within the performance project different kinds of shifts of relations allow for this modification in status, be that changes in patterns, excessive repetitions, changes in scale, dislocations and relocation. *Extreme Ironing* 1 and 2 most deliberately played with the status of the autumn leaf and the discarded paper, focusing the viewer's attention on the shift from fallen and discarded object to pristine article and back again. In *Composition of the Arbitrary*, the object under investigation was the body

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295 Blanchot, 'Two Versions', 84.
296 Clément, *Syncope*, 161.

itself and again the choreography shifted its status from background material to fragile and finite entity, that touches again on something it usually masters and represses in day-to-day activities. In each of these works, the art emerged out of an oscillation between material presence and metaphysical image, the tasks and activities not consolidating the material but challenging its status.

A midpoint of the History of Uselessness: *Group Hoist* (Yvonne Rainer, 1970)

After *The Gift, a* second project from the 1970s will serve as a midpoint on this trajectory of 20th century projects. In 1970, choreographer Yvonne Rainer devised *Group Hoist*, a work performed as part of *'Continuous Project - Altered Daily'*. Rainer gave a detailed account of the work in her book *Work 1961– 71* and, due to the particular task-based structure of the work, the performance reads well in text form. The piece took place in a circle of five performers and included four pillows. Rainer described the incentive of the work as follows:

> *Group Hoist* (…) started out as a problem in how to get people into the air and down to the ground in very quick succession. Using pillows or utilising pillows. The pillows functioned literally to cushion landings, but also worked to mock such a function and to indicate such a function where the function was not actually warranted.[297]

Group Hoist plays with the notion of objecthood and the associated functionality, with regards to both objects (pillows) and human bodies. An extract of the script or description of the performance reveals the deliberate confusion of functions and roles:

> […]Barbara does a handstand over his body, is lifted over and high above the heads of group and placed on her feet on the other side of the circle. Steve keels over sideways to his right and is caught by Doug. As he rolls onto his

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297 Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961–73*, (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design: New York: New York University Press, 1974), 134.

back Doug and Becky grab his outstretched hands and armpit and haul him up onto his feet, then into the air assisted by David at his feet so that he is momentarily in a horizontal swan dive. They lower him to the floor chest-first onto a pillow that Barbara has meanwhile placed there. (…) David hurls the pillow he has landed on the outside of the circle and Barbara runs and places her head on it, then throws it to Steve who throws it to David (still on the floor) who throws it up so that it lands in center in time for Barbara to run in and place her head on it.[…][298]

In *Group Hoist,* the choreography combines objects and people in a task-based activity whereby they alternatively either fulfill a purpose or do something that mocks the associated functionality. Objecthood and functionality, usually associated, are disassociated and circulate separately, in terms of objects without function, and 'functional' activities that have no real logic. In addition, bodies, usually considered autonomous and/or sentient, are disassociated from their mindfulness and treated as objects.

Group Hoist gives the impression that it may have been devised using chance as a method of construction, leading to a mismatch between its different constitutive elements. Indeed, Rainer was influenced by the philosophy of composer John Cage who had pioneered a compositional method that was designed to devise work without depending on the individual artist for preferences, intentions, or decisions. Nevertheless, Rainer explored an ambivalence with regards to the notion of functionality that is highly choreographed and deliberate; in a quick succession of movements there is a fluid shifting and changing in the relation between objects and performers, and between performers themselves. Use and functionality are alternatively confirmed and undermined, thereby effectively confusing the relation between people and things. Of this process, Rainer wrote:

> I love the duality of props, or objects: their usefulness and obstructiveness in relation to the human body. Also the duality of the body: the body as a moving, thinking, decision and action-making entity and the body as an inert

298 Ibid,, 135.

entity, object like. Active-passive, despairing-motivated, autonomous-dependent. Analogously, the object can only symbolise these polarities; it cannot be motivated, only activated. Yet oddly, the body can become object-like; the human can be treated as an object, dealt with as an entity without feeling or desire. The body itself can be handled and manipulated as though lacking in the capacity for self-propulsion.[299]

Executed in a work-like manner but undermining some of the basic parameters of work, such as efficiency and purpose, *Group Hoist* is a meditation on embodiment and utilitarian ideologies. In previous projects, and with her infamous *No-Manifesto,* Rainer had rejected the idea of expression and narrative to explore a body that was simply or merely present – 'present to hand' in Heidegger's terms – exploring its own materiality through activities like running, throwing oneself on a mattress, or turning the head. In *Hoist* she systematically took away intention and willfulness to compare the performers to the objects they were using. Pillows and performers no longer disappear in their use, rise as their own images, resembling their counterparts but constituting a double which disturbs and provokes. Instead of being lost in familiar signification, audiences begin to see the thing or the process itself.

This sort of "simple", humorously subversive work was typical for the experimental choreographers of the 1960s and 1970s who were associated with the Judson Dance Group in New York. Choreographer Trisha Brown, for example, devised *Man walking down the side of a building* (1969), in which a man is strapped into a mountaineering harness, and walks down the vertical wall of a seven-story building in Lower Manhattan. In an event the following year, also devised by Brown, performers walked in right angles to the audience inside the Whitney Museum (*Walking on the Wall*, 1970). In each case, the performance forms a resemblance to 'reveal' aspects of the everyday: bodies are moving at right angles to the surfaces they walk on which bodies always do, except that normally they do this in the vertical plane. In the process everything is made strange: the bodies, the activity and the architecture.

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299 Ibid., 134

Rainer, Cage, Brown and their contemporaries shared an interest in the resemblance, in making art that was like life, or better still, framing and performing the everyday itself with little or no alterations. As Yvonne Rainer likes to joke, she invented running and Steve Paxton inventing walking.[300] John Cage's 4'33'' is a seminal musical composition that is part of this canon, exemplifying a method which writer Lewis Hyde described as the "purpose of the purposelessness."[301] Cage surrendered his own likes, dislikes and intentions for the compositions to emerge from the everyday itself, so that audiences would become aware of the world as it was. Therefore, instead of making a composition according to a particular idea, Cage determined an occasion and a duration, in which anything that occurred became the work. The purposelessness of this construct is complemented by the fact that Cage wanted audiences to listen more closely to the noises of the everyday, and to themselves as producers of those noises. In other words and somewhat paradoxically, a purpose leads to a performed purposelessness. In the case of 4'33'', the intended purpose is the facilitation of a new listening experience and an increase in awareness of everyday occurrences.[302] Rainer's choreographic motivation was somewhat similar in that she wanted to use the everyday as material, rather than invent or construe movements. In addition, *Group Hoist* also specifically addressed the relation between object and function. In the work, objects are deprived of their function and bodies are deprived of their intentionality, with both becoming useless. A performed uselessness thereby raises awareness as to the utilitarian constraints of the everyday.

The deployment of the *use of uselessness* in both Man Ray's and Rainer's work could give the impression that the two artists, and their contemporaries, are part of an ongoing body of work, and that they form an artistic continuity. However, there are significant differences in the works that arise from the significantly different historical contexts of the projects under discussion. Man Ray and his fellow Dadaists attacked the society in which they lived. Dada artists wanted to disrupt life, challenge its moral codes, and use art as their weapon. The violent encounters between life and Dada art

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300 Yvonne Rainer's Tribute to Steve Paxton, wendyperron.com, *http://wendyperron.com/yvonne-rainers-tribute-to-steve-paxton/. Accessed 05/01/2014.*
301 Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), 148.
302 Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, 149.

confirmed the boundaries between the two. This is a different approach compared with the interest in everyday movements or sounds as advanced by Rainer, Brown and Cage which speaks of a love of the pedestrian, and collapses art into the everyday. Their work predominantly celebrates the everyday. If the work is disruptive, it mainly disrupts the institution of art and its values of originality, creativity and universality.

Another History of Uselessness: *Vexations* (1893) and *Untitled, 12 horses* (1969)

A much earlier challenge to conventions of purpose in art is found in composer Erik Satie's *Vexations*, a composition from 1893 in which a single page of music is repeated 840 times. *New York Times* critic Alex Ross wrote: "Out of contempt for tradition, out of loyalty to the absurd, Erik Satie filled his scores with unperformable commands."[303] So unperformable was it that it was never played during Satie's lifetime; John Cage premiered the work in 1963. The work is best described as a vigil of about 20 hours, in which a composition, which lasts roughly one minute, is played repeatedly and continuously. As the length makes it impossible for one pianist to complete, several pianists tend to collaborate and one plays until another takes over. Ross argued that "the monumental character of the affair seemed to have more to do with Cage's procedural avant-gardism than with Satie's bohemian anarchy," and that Satie had conceived the work as a joke.[304] I would argue however, that even if the work was conceived as a joke it is nevertheless indicative of the composer's pioneering, minimalist work and his effortless merging of high and low art. *Vexations* successfully bridged the so-called historical avant-gardes and the later 1960s experimentalists, resonating in both their contexts.

In the 21st century the work continues to have a profound effect on its audiences. In January 2004, *Vexations* was performed in the conservatory of the Barbican Centre,

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303 Alex Ross, 'Satie Vexations', *New York Times*, May 20, 1993 in Alex Ross, 'The Rest is Noise'. Blog post published 15 Oct 2004.
http://www.therestisnoise.com/2004/10/satie_vexations_1.html. Accessed 20/11/2016.
304 Ross, 'Satie Vexations'.

London as part of the John Cage Festival.[305] On this occasion pianists played for about 30 minutes each. Audiences were invited to come and go as they pleased: half a sheet of music, a slither of time, to be played "très lent" or "very slowly" according to its composer, was repeated endlessly.[306] My experience of this event was that the phenomenal duration of this continuous repetition and play suspended my sense of past and future, creating something like a vacuum. The duration disabled conventional frames of reference and urban parameters. Defying normativity, the work indulged in absurdity and uselessness, drawing its audiences into its spell. Having listened to the work in New York in 1993, over five hours from 11pm to 4am and with only short breaks, critic Alex Ross described his experience as a state on the edge of insanity and that his mind went blank. He also noted that only on the return to the urban everyday did his experience make sense: "Epiphany came only during an escape outside onto West Broadway: suddenly, after the insanity of unstoppable pianism within, the night sounds of the city were pure music."[307] To understand the description here of the unstoppable pianism and its intense effect on the listener it may be helpful to turn to an essay by philosopher and critic Louis Marin entitled *Ruptures, Interruptions, Syncopes* (1992/2001) in which he explored the mechanisms of syncope, drawing, like Clément, on linguistics, medicine and music. As will become evident, his analysis of some of the effects of syncope in painting will be useful and transferable. However, I will argue that his conclusion falls short of the key argument in Clément's discourse.

Interested in the rhythmic aspect of the syncope, in which music is "interrupted and resumed", he argued that repetitive interruptions and continuations produce "the simultaneous intensification of presence and absence as in the dazzling *Autumn Rhythm* by Jackson Pollock, or in another fashion, the rigorous formal and colourful

305 Erik Satie. *Vexations*, 1893. The Conservatory, Barbican Centre London, as part of the John Cage Festival, January 2004. *Vexations* was since also performed in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, in conjunction with a screening of Warhols's *Sleep*, summer 2007.
306 Sam Sweet, 'A Dangerous and Evil Piano Piece,' *The New Yorker*, 9/09/2013. http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/a-dangerous-and-evil-piano-piece. Accessed 04/12/2015.
307 Ross, 'Satie Vexations'.

geometry of *Gran Cairo* by Frank Stella in the series *Colored Squares*"[308] The repetitive pictorial structures compare with Satie's insistent musical repetitions, and a simultaneous experience of absence and presence in the paintings can be equated with the experience of such a sound piece. Further investigating this phenomenon Marin turned to the 'blank' areas in painting which, he argued, exemplify a certain ambivalence which dates back to Renaissance art. In its painterly construction of pictorial space the painted surface is both asserted and denied, and the horizon line is indicative both of a limit and of infinity. Marin contended that the painted signifiers tend to be 'invisible' unless the mechanism of representation is ruptured, interrupted or disturbed through visual syncopes, at which point the so-called blanks become 'opaque', disrupting the seeing and reading. A visual syncope then, is a "reflexive interruption", disrupting the illusion/transparency of a painted space and reflecting back to the viewer the mechanism of representation.

This appears to echo the Heideggerian notion of the blind knowledge of the tool which has 'so little nearness' that it is lost to its owner, but becomes visible when it is broken. But it does not seem to take account of the full effect of the repetition, when the syncopic structure is not a singular, pictorial event but a pattern that underpins a work. Given that such painting normally construes an objective observer-subject, this intense alternation between transparency and opaqueness, between signification and disruption of that process, must destabilise the viewer, throwing her time and again into a play of "not seen/seen; not caught/caught".[309] Marin only proposed that Stella's *Colored Squares* and Satie's 840 repetitions in *Vexations* reveal "the very conditions of possibility, of effectiveness, of legitimacy, of representation", but, in my view, they also throw off balance the viewing subject. Marin's analysis constitutes only one half of the equation and the full story is this: syncopated visual patterns or "unstoppable pianism" provoke a kind of bewilderment, in which the questioning of the conditions of possibility of the work of art also begins to question its observer/ subject. If the

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308 Louis Marin, *On Representation,* trans. Catherine Porter, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 374. The chapter was originally published as Louis Marin, 'Ruptures, Interruptions, Syncopes', published in French in Bertrand Rougé (eds), *Ellipses, Blancs, Silences, Rhétoriques des Arts*, (Pau: Presse Universitaire de Pau, 1992). 77-85. http://www.louismarin.fr/ressources_lm/pdfs/Ellipses.pdf.
309 Marin, *On Representation*, 383.

inherited pictorial organisation places its observer at the centre of the universe, then something happens to this subject-eye if the so-constructed, rectilinear universe is repeatedly ruptured and rebuilt, interrupted and reconstituted, or syncopated. If the blanks present themselves to me repeatedly as surface and as infinity, as both surface and infinity, it will be me who loses the sense of orientation, of boundaries, and the sense of space at my disposal. A composition like *Vexations* plays tricks in particular on our perception of time, both confirming and disrupting its flow. Clément described the syncopic not just as a stealing of time, but a suspension, a "flight into non-existent time".[310] This is not just the time of the work in question, but also the time of the observing subject, meaning that *Vexations* shifts, not only the experience of time, but also of the Self.

The procedural avant-gardism of the 1960s was a fertile environment for these kinds of interventions. In Janis Kounellis' *Untitled (12 horses)*, a work originally shown for three days at the Galleria L'Attico, Rome in 1969, and represented at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London in 2002, visitors encountered twelve horses tied to the gallery walls at regular intervals.[311] Instead of paintings of horses, there were horses. The space was filled by the strong smell of the animals, their quiet posture and large, weighty bodies. The performance – if there was one - consisted of the presence of the horses and their attendants.[312] In their quiet stance the horses mirrored the presence of the individual visitor, who abandoned his/her urban schedule to pause at a respectful distance.

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310 Clément, *Syncope*, 27.

311 Jannis Kounellis, Senza titolo (12 cavalli), Untitled (12 horses), 1969 an installation at Galleria L'Attico, Rom. Reconstructed by the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, as part of its 'A History of Performance, Part 1' in 2002.

312 As Robert Lumley pointed out in his catalogue essay for the Tate Modern exhibition on Art Povera in 2001, the first artist to use of live animals in his work was not Kounellis but the American artist Richard Serra. See Robert Lumley, Spaces of Arte Povera, in *From Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962–1972*, Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2001), 49. Constituting his first solo show during a fellowship in Rome in 1966, Serra entitled the work *Animal Habitat.* It featured a wooden structure on a wall that housed a live hare and could be considered Serra's response to the encounter with Arte Povera. According to Thomas Crow the work was "recalling Beuys and anticipating Kounellis". See Thomas E. Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties, American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2004), 164.

I was stunned when I found myself in amongst the large animal bodies and it took me a while to 'recover'. Within the atmosphere of the stable, the city collapsed like a figment of my imagination. An experience of loss and a gradual 'coming to' appeared to be at work. Clément argued in *Syncope,* that the subject is founded in the instance of loss to the extent that the 'return' becomes the moment of confusion. Drawing on the example of fainting fits she reminded us that when we 'come to' we ask not where we have been, but where we are.[313] *Untitled (12 horses)* appeared to offer a shock of this kind, propelling the visitors into a sort of nowhere land from which they recover gradually.

Real animals in the gallery provoke a radical confusion of purpose and utility. The space becomes (almost) defunct in terms of a gallery, the artwork is not really a work of art but rather a beastly interference, interruption, rupture. There is again the oscillation between a metaphysical realm of images on one hand and the material presence of the animal bodies on the other. The scenario most strikingly syncopated the mechanisms of representation, dazzling the visitor. Also, and perhaps with some delay, the mutual resemblance allowed for recognition. According to Clément, the syncope is an eclipse that produces both rupture and insight. To paraphrase Blanchot, the work plays on the inaccessible to which we have always already had access.[314]

The structure of *Untitled (12 horses)* echoes the composition of *Vexations*: the installation combines a simple, repetitive spatial arrangement through the regular placement of the horses, with a sense of excess that is the sheer mass of the animals' bodies and their persistent immobilities. *Vexations* combines a simple, repetitive structure in time through the 1-minute score, with the impossible duration of the composition which few audience members will ever listen to in full. Through the excess received notions of purpose appear to be lost. Here the encounter with uselessness is fostered through minimalist, excessive structures which disturb and overwhelm. Syncope occurs at the edge of these events, catching the visitor unawares

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313 Clément, *Syncope*, 5.
314 Maurice Blanchot, The Infinite conversation, Theory and History of Literature, vol. 82, trans. Susan Hanson, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). 245.

as they enter the space or the work. It is an edge without transition, a fast-forward that beats the rational mind.[315]

The live interventions I have developed during this research project share many of the elements of *Vexations* and *Untitled (12 horses),* through their duration, formal repetition and absurdist deployment of materials, as well as through their excessive proposition. *Flush* is an impossible proposition of carrying water from one side of the river to the other, disrupted occasionally by sudden freezes. In *Composition of the Arbitrary* the pulse provides an interminable rhythm that is suspended every now and again by sharp claps. In *Extreme Ironing* the proposition of creating an ironed garden is almost probable but again fantastic and absurd. There are different kinds of excesses at play such as, excessively repetitive structures and movement patterns, excessive time frames, and excessive physicality or materials. But no one element determines the whole. Together they act on the visitor or passing individual.

Uselessness as Syncope in contemporary art criticism

For Catherine Clément the rhythmic interplay of Syncope allows for an instance of loss or absence that is part of a wider whole. Syncope undoes the autonomous Self. A review of a few explicit deployments of Clément's notion of syncope in contemporary art criticism and by artists themselves will allow for some further consideration as to the complexities of this interplay, and how this is achieved within specific projects.

In a catalogue essay on the work of Susan Hiller from 1999, Denise Robinson discussed Hiller's installation *Wild Talents* drawing on Clément's concept of Syncope.[316] In the installation, a number of large video projections that fold around corners and spill over onto floors and ceilings show extracts of fiction and documentary material of children with special powers, in ecstasy, and experiencing

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315 As Alex Ross noted, Satie wrote onto the score of *Vexations*: "In order to play this motif 840 times, one would have to prepare oneself in advance, and in the utmost silence, through serious immobilities." Ross, 'Satie Vexations'.
316 Denise Robinson, 'Wild Talents' in Susan Hiller, *Lucid Dreams* (Oslo: Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 1999), 20-25.

visions. As Robinson noted, the process of editing, processing and duplication of material allows for a sense of repetition across screens which also deconstructs and mediates the visual material and its narrative content:

> Hiller's work has always been structured through her absorption of Minimalism's tactics of repetition, […] in this instance she uses the documentary material as a source to unfold the anxiety of such representation, through editing, re-formatting and duplication to erase the pretence of the unique and ensure the effect of repetition.[317]

Hiller is drawing on the conventional, inherited picture organisation to both construct and deconstruct a viewing space in which the subject-eye of the visitor is implicated. Robinson provides a wider context for this endeavour:

> Freud worked to separate fiction from real life in his journey through the uncanny, almost against his will pathologising the uncanny experience which could not hold this distinction, *Wild Talents* provides the mise-en-scene of danger required to re-enter these separations.[318]

This is also where Clément departed from Freud and from psychoanalytic traditions to precisely re-write our relation to the other, the uncanny, and to depathologise, drawing on Levi-Strauss, relevant forms of behaviour.[319] Hiller's installation challenges the notion of the unitary, self-same subject and pursues instead a sense of temporal beings which are not separate and distinct but part of a wider collective whole. *Wild Talents* does away with any centralised viewing point, the spilling over of the projections across different spaces in the installation never allows the visitor to see all. "What we see is the promise of seeing."[320] This is the scene for syncope.

One particular projection screen shows an absolute blackout while a small monitor in the foreground shows flickering images of children's eyes looking skywards, together

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317 Robinson, 'Wild Talents', 20.
318 Ibid., 21.
319 This particular aspect of Clément's project will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.
320 Robinson, 'Wild Talents', 23.

with bursts of light and brief hand gestures. The large black screen is not really a 'not there' of images, as there is too much to fully imply absence. The flickering on-off of images on the small screen also provokes something other than either absence or presence. Together they appear to function like Louis Marin's visual syncope with its repetitive interruptions and continuations which produce "the simultaneous intensification of presence and absence as in the dazzling *Autumn Rhythm* by Jackson Pollock […]".[321] Again a dazzling rhythm. Perhaps this is as far as the means of representation can take us. Considering the limitations of the projection screen and its visual field, Robinson acknowledged that the blackness of the screen is only that, a black screen. Nevertheless, it has an impact on its visitor: she quoted Clément, "true night does not exist … to have access to its flawless opacity, perhaps one needs the sudden gap of anaesthesia or the experience of syncope..."[322]

If the flickering of the projected images constitutes something almost absent, the twelve horses in Kounellis' installation are rather too material, they overwhelm with presence. Here is too-much body, a sensation reminiscent of Wendy Hubbard' bodily experience described in "Falling Faint".[323] Either one or the other draws the visitor beyond comfortable parameters. In any case, according to Robinson, it is not the absence or the presence which matter in themselves, but their interplay with the other elements on display. Drawing on Clément, Robinson reiterated that "in syncope the emphasis is not on the fragment, but on the point of its disappearance."[324] In other words it is the very moment of the vanishing within the flickering on-off of the projected image, or the moment of appearance of the absent body which causes discomfort, rupture or rapture. Robinson surmised that the notion of Syncope could be a linguistic and conceptual alternative to the well-used and rather unspecific term of the 'gap' or the 'in between'. The emphasis of Syncope is on a shifting in consciousness and a continual process of making and unmaking of the Self.

The phrase "Only the hand that erases can write the true thing," encapsulates this quest. The sentence was printed by Hiller on card, in pale blue on white, and handed

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321 Marin, *On Representation*, 374.
322 Robinson citing Clément in 'Wild Talents', 24.
323 Hubbard, 'Falling Faint'. See earlier discussion in Chapter 3, 76 – 82.
324 Robinson, 'Wild Talents', 25.

out to visitors as part of a project entitled *Work in Progress,* performed at Matt's Gallery in London in 1980.[325] The sentence framed a two-week project in which Hiller spent one week unravelling the weave of a canvas, thread by thread, and hanging the strands like skeins on the wall at the end of each day. The skeins were "hand-worked, by knotting, looping or braiding, into individual three-dimensional 'thread-drawings' or 'doodles'," also displayed. Any remaining canvasses were cut up, bundled and stamped, and exhibited on shelves.[326] The project is discussed in an essay entitled *Susan Hiller, The Revenants of Time*, by writer and critic Jean Fisher, who has often written about Clément's Syncope, at times citing Clément, at times writing more obliquely. In fact Fisher's own endeavour appears to parallel that of Clément, addressing time and again the fallacy of the unitary, dominant subject, and looking towards the artist as voice, advocate, or trickster who dares to challenge the status quo.

Reflecting on *Work in Progress,* Fisher points out the procedural format typical of minimalism, which breaks down barriers between disciplines and includes the viewer as witness in the process. Such work is intended to replace notions of the ideal self with a contingent and empirical self. Fisher writes:

> Duration […] rendered the subject mutable, no longer self-same, exposing the fiction of coherence and the absence that inexorably underlines the presence – or 'presentness' – of its object. By the '60s however, when a multiplicity of hitherto marginalized gender, social and ethnic identities was making itself felt, it had become clear that the simplistic mode of thought upon the West's unitary subject was based on could no longer be sustained.[327]

In this particular essay Fisher did not explicitly reference Clément's Syncope, but it is written all over the text. Hiller's work – and Fisher's commentary – acknowledge and celebrate the mutability of language, materials and the subject. As Fisher noted, "the operative words are not nouns standing for fixed objects but present principles –

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325 Jean Fisher, *Susan Hiller, The Revenants of Time*, (London: Matt's Gallery, Sheffield: Mappin Gallery, Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1990), pages not numbered.
326 Fisher, *Susan Hiller*, pages not numbered.
327 Fisher, 'Work in Progress', in *Susan Hiller*, pages not numbered.

gathering, knotting, plaiting – alluding to hands" as signs of work, of process and of creative activity.[328] The operative words constitute the work, and can also serve as a form of documentation of Hiller's *Work in Progress,* as the principles which make up *the work*. The same idea has been deployed in the documentation of the present research project in the Schema, included in the Appendix, as alternative accounts of the work under discussion. Each Schema lists the constitutive elements and the operative words that make up each intervention.[329]

A History of Repetition, Repetition

In the context of Hiller's *Work in Progress* Fisher addressed another issue that has been a consistent feature, or strategy, of minimalist work, and that has also run through much of these pages, and that is the use of repetition in visual, sculptural and performed work. A fuller debate on this topic would exceed the possibilities of this research project but I will cite Fisher's concluding remarks on *Work in Progress* to reflect on the function of repetition within this research project:

> This movement, therefore, is not the sign of a monotonous repetition but the staging of a trance: a time out of time, in which the vibrations of thought are released from the disciplines of symbolic language to liberate another speech through which the self may make and remake itself in a continuous unfolding of outer and inner experience. Repetition here is not recurrence of the self-same but the production of difference.

This comment addresses what is at stake in the frequent minimalist deployment of repetition: an assertion of time and duration for the purpose of the production of difference. Referencing principally Gilles Deleuze's seminal work from 1968 *Difference and Repetition*, and subsequent debates, Fisher concurred with the principal thesis of the book in positively embracing change over time as supposed to

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328 Fisher, 'Work in Progress'.
329 Claudia Kappenberg, Schema 1-6, Appendix 225 - 231.

dialectical processes of engagement and any predetermined identity.[330] Fisher's comment can also be read as a description of the work as a kind of syncope, as a trance-like state in a 'time out of time', in which another kind of utterance, doing or making is explored. This concurrence of repetition and Syncope suggests that the two are inexorably linked and a few more examples will elucidate this point.

British critic and writer Briony Fer has drawn on Clément's concept of syncope in a discussion of the work of the sculptor Eva Hesse, to explore "how material presence, that palpable sense of what Hesse's work was made of, can combine so disconcertingly with the sense of a void".[331] Fer argued, much like Robinson and Fisher, that the act of disappearing and reappearing, of contraction and expansion is what constitutes the syncopic. Fer again highlights the repetitive patterns, its plural forms and voids in the art of Hesse, and, as Fer proposes, also in the work of Rachel Whiteread. Constellations are simultaneously disrupted and informed by physical 'voids' or 'gaps', and the effect of this flickering is disconcerting. The interplay constitutes the rhythm in which something can be lost and found. For Clément, it is the subject which is lost in the interval and which regains consciousness.

In April 2007 performance artist Kira O'Reilly presented a work entitled *Untitled (Syncope)* as part of the *Spill Festival of Performance* at the Shunt Vaults, London.[332] She performed naked save for a pair of red high heel shoes and a red headdress, holding a small make-up mirror and a scalpel. The work opened with her gradually emerging from the dark and the distance, eventually establishing a close physical proximity with the audience. Performing to the beat of a metronome she worked with a series of inhalations and exhalations until trembling all over, making an extensive number of scars on her body, dating from previous performances, turn bright red. The performance concluded with her making a single incision on one of her calves and

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330 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul R. Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
331 Briony Fer, 'Some translucent substance, or the trouble with time' in *Time and the Image*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 73.
332 Kira O'Reilly, *Untitled (Syncope),* Spill Festival of Performance, The Shunt Vaults, London. 7 April 2007. Video see: http://spillfestival.com/show/untitled-syncope/.

performing taut automaton-style movements to a faster clicking of the metronome, before gradually disappearing back into the dark.

The performance was built on strong rhythmic elements and an insistence on pace was assured through the use of the metronome. Within this framework the body was wounded just once, revealing however the numerous scars of previous incisions, the inferred repetition over time revealing a practice of excess. In an interview with O'Reilly, Patrick Duggan argued that this sense of excess adds an irrational element, and the inability to make meaning or to name what is witnessed allows the performance to be compared to the experience of trauma. Duggan wrote:

> The performance of *Untitled (Syncope),* and indeed *Succour* in which O'Reilly makes more than 100 small incisions on her body, is excessive in that it is beyond (full/complete) comprehension in the first moment of its witnessing.[333]

Duggan's comment again points to the initial moment of encounter as a crucial instance, as the moment when something falters. Asked about excessiveness and its potential O'Reilly responded: "It has been about limits in terms of 'where does my body end and the world outside it begin?'"[334] This comment confirms O'Reilly's interest in Syncope and explains her deployment of performance strategies such as, the metronome, the staccato movement, and the excessive scarring of her body.

Careful research reveals relevant practices across all kinds of media and disciplines, in sound, moving images, sculpture, and live work, which could be described as syncopic in the sense that they endeavour to deconstruct the Western subject and temporarily reverse its construction of autonomous, self-same unit. If Western Philosophies have only rarely explored this possibility, the arts have done so time and again. Jean Fisher's extensive oeuvre of critical reviews and essays testifies to this history, i.e. through her numerous essays on Susan Hiller, in the essays on Anne Tallentire, and in essays collected in *Vampire in the Text* (2003), such as those on the

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333 Patrick Duggan, 'The touch and the cut: an annotated dialogue with Kira O'Reilly,' *Studies in Theatre and Performance,* v. 29, no. 3, (2009), 315.
334 O'Reilly, cited in Duggan, 'The touch and the cut', 316.

work of Jack Goldstein, Jimmie Durham and Adrian Piper and those engaging with mystic traditions, 'Echoes of Enchantment' and 'Truth's Shadow'.[335] It is not possible in the context of this research project to address and discuss this extensive body of material, but the evidence is there of a practice of syncope in the West. If Clément pointed time and again to India as a nation which knows how to undo the Self, she was in particular referring to Tantrism and its intense rituals which challenge the deepest boundaries of the Self:

> We must remember that there exists a world in which this same inverted passage is the object of a philosophical method that is rigorous in every sense of the world, a world where syncope is the object of fierce domestication, of constant and obstinate effort.

While a practice like Tantrism would be unthinkable in the West, and most probably be classed as madness, or lead to madness, there is nevertheless an artistic tradition, which rigorously pursues syncope, as varied as it is, through 'constant and obstinate effort'.[336]

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335 Jean Fisher, 'Dancing on a Tightrope', in *Anne Tallentire*, Valerie Connor ed. (Dublin: Project Press, 1999); Jean Fisher, Vampire in the Text, Narratives of Contemporary Art (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003).
336 The historical narrative presented here could easily be fleshed out or expanded through numerous other, perhaps equally significant, relevant and interesting work. To name but a few which did not make it into the final selection: Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro, *Womanhouse* (1972), Bas Jan Ader, *In search of the Miraculous* (1975) and *Fall 1, Fall 2* (1970), Francis Alÿs, *The Green Line* (2004), Allan Kaprow, *Fluids* (2005), Marianne Holm Hansen, *100 acts NOT worth repeating* (2007), Pierre Huyghe, *Retrospective* (Centre Pompidou 2013), and Adam Linder, *Service No 3, Some Riding* (ICA 2015).

Chapter 6. Clément 'au miroir des sorcières'

Lacan The Grammarian

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the notion of selfhood and its implications in the work of Clément, to complement the discussion on Bataille's Self and his explorations of the breadth and width of experience. To examine Clément's thinking on the Self, I will discuss her reading of Lacan, her anthropological trance project indebted to Lévi-Strauss, and her exploration of Indian philosophies. Together these constitute three pillars of Clément's thinking and of her understanding of the subject. The chapter takes its title from an issue of the Journal *La Cause Freudienne* dedicated to Lacan and entitled 'Lacan au miroir des sorcières' (2011).[337] The title references convex mirrors such as those depicted in gothic art of the low countries such as *The Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan van Eyck (1424), which were expensive and could be used either to scatter light around a room or as a means to survey a space. They therefore imply both power and magic. In the case of the issue of *La Cause Freudienne* it is Lacan himself who is being surveyed, and there is a sense that one needs a powerful mirror like this one to see the whole of Lacan and the innumerable and diverse aspects of his work. The title plays furthermore on Lacan's seminal theory of the mirror stage and inplies a complexity in the formation of the self. I am borrowing the title for my investigation into the different threads in Clément's oeuvre in order to cast a wider look and to signal the scattered and refractory fragments that will need to be considered.

It is my contention that Clément's concept of Syncope, and her wider philosophical quest, is not (only) an assimilation or re-presentation of Lacanian thought, but that it fundamentally rejects the limitations of Lacanian pyschoanalysis in order to embark on a much wider – and very different – theorisation of experience and the Self. I will begin with a discussion of a short essay entitled *Lacan Indien*, the 'Indian Lacan',

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337 Nathalie Georges-Lambrichs ed., 'Lacan au miroir des sorcières', La Cause Freudienne, Nouvelle Revue De Psychanalyse, no. 79, 2011. The title translates as: Lacan in the mirror of the sorceresses. [trans. mine]

which Clément published in the above-cited French journal *La Cause Freudienne* (2011). Whilst debating the role of Indian texts and philosophies in Lacan's oeuvre, Clément reveals above all her own critical perspective of psychoanalysis and what it may or may not offer with regards to our understanding of the Self.

At the start of the essay Clément advised caution as to any assumption about Lacan's relation to Hindu philosophies despite the numerous references in his oeuvre: "Did it influence his thinking? The answer does not immediately present itself."[338] She noted that Lacan was an eternal student and passionate about both dead and living languages and that he included text fragments of various Asian traditions in his work. Clément referred, for example, to the long and famous quote of the Upanishads at the end of the *Rapport de Rome* (1953) and warned that commentators are prone to become delirious in their reading of this passage.[339] Clément also pointed to the categorical limitation of Western psychoanalysis, which Lacan himself stated clearly at the end of his seminal text on the mirror stage; here Lacan affirmed that psychoanalysis can accompany the subject up to the limit of the Self, as far as the Hindu *Thou art that*, but that as a practitioner he cannot take the patient any further;

> In the recourse of subject to subject that we preserve, psychoanalysis
> may accompany the patient to the ecstatic limit of the 'Thou art that', in which
> is revealed to him the cipher of his mortal destiny, but it is not in our mere
> power as practitioners to bring him to that point where the real journey
> begins.[340]

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338 "Il y a en Lacan un étudiant perpétuel, passionné de langues mortes ou vivantes. L'Inde mérite-t-elle un sort particulier? A-t-elle infléchi sa pensée? La réponse n'est pas immédiate." [*trans to English mine.*] Catherine Clément, 'Lacan Indien', Lacan au miroir des sorcières, La Cause Freudienne, *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, no. 79, 2011, 49/50 and 53.
339 Clément, 'Lacan Indien', 49.
340 Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage' in *Écrits,* 509. Original text: "Dans le recours que nous préservons du sujet au sujet, la psychanalyse peut accompangner le patient jusqu'à la limite extatique du "Tu est cela" où se révèle á lui le chiffre de sa destinée mortelle, mais il ne'set pas en notre seul pouvoir de praticien de l'amener à ce meoment où commence le véritable voyage"; "Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je, telle qu'elle nous est rélévéé, dans l'epérience psychanalytique", in *Écrits*, 100; cited in Clément, 'Lacan Indien', 50.

On one hand, the reference to the ecstatic limit of the *Thou art that*, a translation of a formula from the Upanishad (*Tat Twam Ashi)*, signals Lacan's concern with the Hindu philosophy which believes that the Self, pure consciousness (*tvam*) complements and forms an inseparable whole with a transcendent reality (*tat*). On the other hand, this passage confirms that Lacan considered any ecstatic experience and any crossing of thresholds of individual consciousness to be beyond the reach of psychoanalysis. As is evident through Clément's reading of Lacan, he generally avoided any occultist, colonialist, fascist or otherwise extremist interpretations and importations of Indian philosophy which were not uncommon in amongst European scholars in between the wars, and chose instead to stick to his own roots, a fundamentally Freudian framework, in which the subject is not lost, but found. Clément wrote: "La formule freudienne, *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* n'a pas pour l'objectif l'explosion du sujet, mais son assomption. Exactement le contraire."[341] Lacan, she added, believed in language above all as the means with which to access reality and to build and exercise the Self.

To expand on and reinforce the limitation that the Freudian formula constitutes with regards to possible notions of selfhood and individual experience, Clément inserted extensive passages within her essay on Lacan in which she detailed what an Indian concept of Self might look like and what 'the real journey' which Lacan alluded to, might consist of. Briefly sketching the Hindu philosophy according to the Upanishads, Clément referred to the philosopher Shankara and his monist approach embedded in the formula of *Tat Twam Ashi* mentioned above. [342] Clément explained that in line with the monist concept, Hinduist practice includes the crossing of the threshold between individual pure consciousness (*Tvam, or l'atman*), and the other, the transcendent whole (*Tat, or brahman*). She also drew on a Hindu metaphor to explain this movement or crossing:

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341 Clément, 'Lacan Indien', 56; "The Freudien formula, *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden [Where It was, I shall be]* does not aim for an explosion of the subject, but for its constitution. Exactly the opposite." [Trans. mine].
342 Ibid., 53; "L'étudiant auquel son maître apprend le "Tu est cela" doit comprendre que le Soi – *l'atman*, pure conscience, pur 'Je suis' – n'est pas séparable du *brahman*, réalité transcendente, absolue et indéfinissable qui n'est "ne ceci ne cela", neti neti, pensée qu'on retrouvera dans le boudhisme."

De même qu'un gros poisson nage d'une rive à l'autre du fleuve à l'Est et à
l'Ouest, de même l'entité infinie se meut entre les deux états du sommeil et de
l'éveil.[343]

This metaphor suggests that it is possible for an individual to move between the two different states, that is, to transcend individual pure consciousness and also to return to the Self. An equivalent visualisation from the European image repertoire can be found in Cocteau's film *Blood of a Poet* (1930), in which Enrique Rivero falls or dives through a mirror that dissolves, seemingly swimming through a black void to somewhere else, and eventually returning.[344] This scene could be read as a visual representation of the dissolution of the Self, or transcendence of individual consciousness as practiced in Hinduism. In his seminar *Encore*, Lacan addressed this phenomenon through references to the experiences of mystic women of the Middle Ages and, as Clément wrote in *The lives and legends of Jacques Lacan,* he was fascinated with mystic and mad women and wrote about them time and again. However, psychoanalysis could not embrace this feminine mysticism or madness.[345] Clément concluded her essay on the Indian Lacan by saying that Lacan was a grammarian above all, who always and again referred to language as the tool for psychoanalysis, staying well clear of psychic Indian journeys and their devotional parameters.[346] Lacan formulated his idea of psychic journey in 1949, in his seminal theory of the mirror phase, borrowing the image of a person or child as it is reflected in a mirror. According to Lacan this reflected image forms a symbolic representation, or *imago*, which comes to stand for the formation of a unified Self. He stressed however, that this is only a *Gestalt*, an exteriority, which "symbolizes the mental permanence of the I, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination."[347] While acknowledging that the Gestalt has "formative effects in the organism"[348], that

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343 Ibid. "Just as a large fish swims from one river bank to the other, from East to West, in the same way the infinite entity moves between the two states of wakefulness and sleep." [Trans. mine]
344 Jean Cocteau, Blood of a Poet [Le Sang d'un Poète], 1930, Production: Vicomte de Noailles; Paech, J., "Orpheus hinter den Spiegeln," in *EPD Film* (Frankfurt), July 1989. Read more: http://www.filmreference.com/Films-Or-Pi/Orph-e.html#ixzz3FC6TCxnC.
345 Clément, *The Lives and Legends*'.
346 Clément, 'Lacan Indien', 57.
347 Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', 504.
348 Ibid.

it facilitates a maturation process, Lacan argued that it is ultimately "orthopedic", the "armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development."[349] Lacan was of the view that the *mirror stage* is a unique phase in a person's life and that there is no inverse process other than in pathological circumstances, a conception which is clearly incompatible with the psychic journeys as envisaged by Hinduism. In *The lives and legends of Jacques Lacan,* Clément pointed out that she eventually stopped attending Lacan's seminars, and that she lost interest.[350] Was that because Lacan could not, or would not, explore these other pathways?

Further mining for the Indian subject Clément searched beyond the Upanishads amongst the older Indian mysticism of the Vedas, re-telling the creation story of Lord Prajapati and fire, Agni, who hides inside the animals.[351] In the story Agni goes looking for Prajapati and recognises him in the animal's excrements, which look like cinders consumed by fire. The story then describes how Agni, who is therefore both fire and excrement, in turn reconstitutes the creator Prajapati, who is both sacrificed and the one who sacrifices. Furthermore, as Clément pointed out, the goddess Vac (pronounced Vatch) is the first manifestation of Prajapati and represented through a large tongue, who in some versions also turns towards Prajapati to swallow him. Vac is otherwise described by Clément as the one who descends into the human heart where she loves herself three times before taking the shape of Kundalini, an inner feminine energy which rises from the sacrum along the spine leading to the desired explosion of the Ego, to *samadhi*, ecstasy. *Samadhi,* Clément explained, is not conventional death but dissolution of the Self: immortality. Through these examples Clément demonstrated that dissolution of the Self, either as ritual practice or as the final transformation of the subject, is celebrated within Hindu practices and the destination of each and every individual. The excrement, as Clément remarked, is revered as both concrete matter and as symbolic substance, and is considered to be a noble material while its burning is associated with the dissolution of the Self, the most

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349 Ibid., 506.
350 Clément, *The Lives and Legends*, 16 and 20.
351 Clément, 'Lacan Indien', 55.

noble of passages.[352] These and other stories of the Vedas and the Upanishads serve Catherine Clément to explore where Lacan, and Freud before him, did not dare to go. The stories also reveal what she herself is looking for and investigating: ways to temporarily dispel, dissolve or suspend the imago to allow for experiences of another realm beyond.

For a contemporary alternative model to the intellectual, Western individual, Clément turned to the Indian notion of the 'Dividual' formulated by Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar.[353] The Dividual, as Clément noted in *Syncope, The Philosophy of Rapture*, desires to dissolve in the limitlessness of totality. The Dividual requires, Clément surmised,

> […] the absolute, radical, and monstrous dispossession of the subject, its degradation, neglect, and finally its deconstruction in the name of a higher good: order, fusion, the life cycle. […] Above all there is the *nonsubject*, before, during, after.[354]

While Clément may be re-enacting a split between East and West with this opposition between the Western Individual and the Eastern Dividual, this mapping nevertheless identifies a wider cultural context and explains the different status of Syncope within their respective cultural fields. According to Clément, such cultures pursue either "the control of Syncope or the autonomy of the subject."[355] As discussed in the last chapter, the West does have its own means within the sphere of art, but that does not allow for the same status within the wider culture. In the first chapter of *L'appel de la transe*, a book dedicated to Lévi-Strauss and published in 2011, Clément terms these short and long journeys as "une autorisation pour s'éclipser de la vie", an authorisation to eclipse oneself from life, but In the rationalist sphere of 20th and 21st century, hyper-productive economies there is no time for this .[356]

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352 While Clément includes plenty of disclaimers in this essay, making clear that she is not an expert in Sanskit or Indian foundational texts, she has observed, described and reflected on this literature and its manifestations for many years.
353 Clément, *Syncope*, 144.
354 Ibid., 144.
355 Ibid., 142.
356 Catherine Clément, *L'appel de la transe*, (Paris: Editions Stock, 2011), 16.

Clément au miroir des sorcières

Syncope, The Philosophy of Rapture, published originally in 1990, is part of an earlier exploration of those 'other journeys'. In it Clément turned to Lacan in the chapter entitled *The Birth of Identity and the Syncope of the Imago: Lacan,* the arguments of which have been discussed above in Chapter 2.[357] Apart from declaring the mirror phase as an instance of syncope, as a sudden shift from the insufficiency of the infant to the anticipation of what will become the adult, she highlighted the fragility of the construct, which can "crack[…] because of another round of syncope", and leave the subject in a state of madness.[358] The fragility of the Self as described in her chapter, and the danger that can present itself through other syncopic experiences of life and death, loves and its losses suggest an individual who has to fend for him/herself and who has to hold on to the unifying mirror image at all costs. However, by suggesting that one 'can' go mad from it and that one 'might' not come back, Clément allowed for the possibility that one could come back and that one might not go mad, opening the possibility for other syncopic experiences and journeys that do not lead to madness. As detailed in Clément's later book *L'appel de la transe (2011)*, these experiences are generally fostered through culturally and historically specific rituals and events, which are firmly embedded in social structures and contexts.

The 20th century is generally *not* known for a communal spirit and Clément is concerned with the fact that the increasingly utilitarian and ahistorical social environments erode communal mechanisms of support and form isolated 'desaturated' individuals.[359] Clément here drew on both Lacan and Bataille, the first for his mourning of the loss of all kinds of everyday rituals of intimacy and collectivity, the latter for his forging of a new kind of "inner experience" that was intended to replace theological and historical constructs to form a resilient modern Self;

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357 Catherine Clément, 'The Birth of Identity', 118-130.
358 Ibid., 122.
359 Ibid., 123.

[…] It is understood that Bataille sought, in an atheological attitude, through an "inner experience" to found, between debauchery and illumination, a genuine ritual for modern times, singular, lofty, at the outer limits of the transmissible.[360]

Again Lacan and Bataille. It is they who appear in Clément's mirror – for in the mirror of the sorceresses there is not just the Self, or the Lacanian imago, but a whole host of figures, ghosts, chimera which together form the subject and strengthen its resolve. In the cultures of white people, mirrors are often said to tell the future – but the mirrors of the sorceresses perhaps look back as well as forward, and observe not only the solitary 'I' and image of our own self but the ghosts of those who have gone before us. In the case of Clément there are (among others) Lacan The Grammarian and Bataille The Lone Venturer, and the two men were close: "Don't forget," wrote Clément, "that one of Lacan's intimates was Georges Bataille. The same Georges Bataille who, in *Madame Eduarda*, described a madwoman who, while exhibiting the spread lips of her vagina, said that she was God."[361] It is conceivable that Lacan demonstrated to Clément the limits of the Self, but Bataille was the one who went through the threshold and who reported on what he experienced on the other side.

Lacan and Bataille also chose different paths or modes of authorisation to approach the 'subject': Lacan through psychoanalysis, Bataille through his own writing and philosophies. But both were interested in mystic experience, whether religious convulsions or those of modern madwomen. And both were ritualists, seeking to preserve a space for ritual relations which have become so rare in the sphere of modernity. As Clément noted, psychoanalysis has managed to preserve, in an almost anachronistic manner, one such reserved space.[362] But this space has its limitations, as Lacan acknowledged, because the psychoanalyst does not possess the "power as

360 Ibid. See also Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*.
361 Clément, *The Lives and Legends*, 66. While 'Lacan The Grammarian' is a title given by Clément, 'Bataille The Lone Venturer' is a title I made up as an equivalent, as Clément did not provide any for Bataille.
362 Clément, 'The Birth of Identity', 124.

practitioner […] to bring [the patient] to that point where the real journey begins."[363]
So then, who does? For Clément Hinduism is one such framework that enables individuals to move between different states of consciousness, as indicated by the passages on Hinduism included in her essay *Lacan Indien*. She also dedicates several chapters in *Syncope, Philosophy of Rapture* to its methods and its madness. But Hinduism is not the only such cultural manifestation and in *L'appel de la transe* Clément goes on a wider ethnographic journey to explore others.

Communal rituals and convulsing bodies

In *Syncope,* Clément searched for the moment of eclipse in the biographies of philosophers, in literature, and in India. *L'appel de la transe,* published 21 years after *Syncope,* appears to be essentially the same quest, an investigation into the mysterious ways of the undoing of the subject, but this time under the name of trance and through communally sanctioned rituals. In this later book, she does not deploy the term Syncope, and this may be significant, or it may simply be that the book is written for a different public. Dedicated to structuralist ethnographer Lévi-Strauss *L'appel* is presented as an ethnographic project in which Clément describes, among others, the medieval and mainly female convulsions and ecstasies of women and nuns, the historical self-sacrifice of Indian widows, the trance dances initiated by the imaginary tarantula in southern Italy, the Greek cult of Dionysus on Mediterranean shores and the more contemporary shamanic customs amongst the Samoans and the Inuit, and concludes with a brief reflection on the North-American resurgence of the psychic eclipse in the 20th century under the guise of multiple personality disorder. At times it is the symptoms of the fits and bodily rituals which suggest an eclipse, at times the patterns of repression and persecution which follow. At the end of this epic journey around the globe Clément asked:

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363 Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', in *Écrits,* 509.

> Où sont nos transes, où nos revoltes? Ont-elles entièrement disparu? Voyons-
> nous encore de ces épédemies propres aux femmes et aux filles, et où rôde la
> transe?[364]

The 'nous' is not specified in the text and could suggest a generalised contemporary world which does not appear to show many traces of this historical global phenomenon of trance. A similar concern was raised in *Syncope*:

> We are still lucky enough to have rock and roll, love at first sight, and
> depression, but they try so hard to cure us that soon there will be nowhere for
> us to test disharmony; nothing for us to know how to "pass", in the sense that
> we understand "to die".[365]

The syncopes and trances are for Clément a means to temporarily 'step out'. They are equivalent to an exercise of freedom, giving individuals an opportunity to distance themselves from functional roles, utilitarian constructs, and the everyday. Clément read the events and constellations like an ethnologist and as part of a socio-cultural structure, that is, they are considered as a response to specific cultural and historical conditions. Her use of the notion of 'epidemic' in the quote above is perhaps not helpful in that the term is reminiscent of mass hysteria and similar collective phenomena. Instead, I believe Clément to see trances as reflections of the constraints and alienation created through socialisation and repressive ideologies, as expression of the tensions between the ascribed and imposed social norms of behaviour and of thought, on the one hand, and the needs of humans, on the other. Clément lamented that such tensions and expressions are pathologised. A trance, Clément claimed, is an expression of the power of the spirit, and constitutes a play with death, or a simulation of death.[366] If trance states are excluded from what is culturally permissible, Clément argued, they re-appear, pathologised, for example as anorexia, which has, in turn, supplanted the phenomenon of hysteria. Positioning anorexia into the context and

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364 'Where are our trance dances and our rebellions? Have they disappeared completely? Can we still see these feminine epidemics of women and girls, and where lurks the trance?' [trans. mine] Clément, *L'appel*, 141.
365 Clément, *Syncope*, 129.
366 Clément, *L'appel*, 144.

history of trance practices allows for a particular comparison: as Clément noted, in anorexia it is not the person who vanishes but the body, which is shrunk to a minimum and kept at death's door.[367] Anorectic girls – for it is largely a female affliction - reject food and shrink their bodies to an absolute minimum, or eat and vomit, which amounts to much the same kind of thing. In both cases, the anorectic refuses to shit, which suggests an inversion of the goal of trance: instead of letting go and burning the Self, the person strives for eternal life, absolute mastery and control. If trance fundamentally embraces life by embracing the possibility of death, anorexia refuses life. The anorectic's attempt to turn her own body into a fulcrum of stillness is a pathological equivalent to the ritual practice of the Dervishes, discussed in Chapter 2. However, even if anorexia is a pathological inversion it is still a demonstration of power, like trance. Those who seek some kind of power or control may temporarily exercise the right to pass, as in trance, or choose the right to abstain from life as in the anorectic person. Both cases can be viewed as responses to a system which enslaves its citizens and controls their behaviour through one norm or another. Trance, in other words, is a form of temporarily (re)claiming this power; it is an exercise of ownership over one's own life.

There is a strong resonance here with the discourse of Barbara Gronau, as I mentioned earlier on. In an essay entitled 'Das Theater der Askese, Zurückhaltung als ästhetische Praxis', on the theatre of asceticism and restraint as aesthetic practice, Gronau traced the history of the public appearance of hunger artists, which dates back to the 16th century, and which secularised a religious tradition. Quoting Peter Sloterdijk, Gronau contended that the control of the need for food became an exercise with which to beat nature on her own grounds, turning dependency into a display of strength.[368] Gronau further remarked that the hunger artists did not just happen to be doing nothing with the not-eating, but rather performed a deliberate non-doing. According to Gronau, the fasting of the hunger artists was a calculated act of renunciation, which required an audience as witness in order to compensate for the internal, physical and psychological battle. As Gronau pointed out, the public took on many roles from

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367 Ibid., 143-145.
368 Barbara Gronau, 'Das Theater der Askese, Zurückhaltung als ästhetische Praxis', in *Ökonomien der Zurückhaltung, Kulturelles Handels zwischen Askese und Restriktion,* eds. Barbara Gronau and Alice Lagaay (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag 2010), 131,132.

theatre director and publicist to doctor, admirer and critic.[369] On one hand these proceedings form part of the history which informs today's anorexia, but they also highlight drastic differences: what was a shared public ritual has become a lonely battle behind closed doors. Furthermore, what was recognised as an aesthetic practice has become an individual pathology. This change is dramatic and stands for much of what Clément has argued in *Syncope*. Gronau noted that the public display of hunger fulfilled a socio-political function, rehearsing, as well as keeping at bay, the actual starvation of the poor and of migrants, while simultaneously confirming a will and a capacity to control the Self, thereby laying the foundation of the 20th and 21st century Self.[370] As Gronau claimed, these acts were a demonstration of the new Self which, much like Max Weber had argued, is marked by a rational mindset and professional attitude, but has its roots in religious, Christian asceticism.[371]

Clément also demonstrated in *L'appel* the essentially communal aspect of trance practices: a person in trance may appear like a person lost to madness but that would be a misinterpretation, she argued: rather it signifies a deep connection with a group, a God, or an animal kingdom – whatever the specific belief, historical context, and cultural group she is situated within. In her description of a periodic trance ritual amongst a group of poor women of Dakar [372] with which Clément began the book, the collective character of the event, the significance of caring group members and those who hold the trance for the others is clear. Without them there would be no trance: "S'éclipser de la vie ne se fait pas tout seul, tout seul on risque trop, il faut du soin autour, la presence d'un groupe attentif, et de la vigilance."[373] And, Clément argued, we all have the need sometimes to break out, to dance, for silence and absence, for a

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[369] Ibid., 133.

[370] Ibid., 133, 134. Gronau wrote: "Die Hungerschauen sind Aufführungen einer radikalisierten physischen Subjektautonomie. Nicht zuletzt erfüllen sie damit eine sozial-politische Funktion: In ihnen wird das elende Schicksal der ‚Anderen' (Proletarier, Migranten usw.) in Form einer virtuosen Leistung, eines sportlichen Wettkampfes oder einer Selbsterfahrung vor einem bürgerlichen – das heißt satten – Publikum zum Ausdruck gebracht. Das Schicksal des Verhungerns soll so in einer distanzierten Form der Aufführung ferngehalten werden. Die Hungerschauen sind ein Abwehrritual."

[371] Ibid., 134.

372 Clément, *L'appel*, 11-17.

373 Ibid., 16. "To eclipse oneself from life is not done by oneself, alone one risks too much. There needs to be care round about, the presence and attention of a group, vigilence." [trans. mine.]

retreat from life which can take the form of an illness, for a sudden escape, a fresh bath, an enjoyment (jouissance) without tomorrow, a moment of life without engagement or promise, of disorder, a holiday without beginning or end.[374] Clément raised two significant points: we all have these needs and we need a group that is a cultural and social entity, which authorises such behaviour and makes it possible. In the case of modern anorexia the authorisation is only given at a cost to the person, that of the pathologising of the eclipse and the alienation of the person from what is considered 'normal'. Instead of constituting a social ritual, anorexia is a withdrawal from communal rites such as family meals; it is a rejection of the mother who feeds and takes care, a profound mistrust in the collective group, isolation. The anorectic rituals are secretive and done alone.

The various shifts across time are thought-provoking also with regards to the role of art within the 21st century, and indicate some of the complexity at work in public displays of inactivity or non-doing. Drawing on the position of Boris Groys, Gronau argued, that diverse forms of restraint constitute modern art as a whole and that artists excel in finding different forms of limitations, rather than in producing anything new.[375] While there is some resonance with Blanchot's proposition of the work of art as refusal, I would not generalise to that extent or assign an ascetic impulse to all art production. This would entail that everything is conceived in relation to productivity and that there is no positive other. Stillness is not only a refusal to be active, but also something in its own right. If I take Clément's idea of the syncope as a missing beat, it may be perceived as an absence of a note, but it is also something other. But apart from of this question, both Gronau's history of hunger artists and Clément's investigation into trance and trance-like states or Syncopes point to the role that art can play, or needs to play, in the contemporary context. Art can make up for the loss of traditional, sanctioned rituals, and it can facilitate the creation of new rituals, and forms of non-productive expenditure. With the demise of religion and religious communities, the arts continue to facilitate communal experiences, loss, laughter and a return to the Self.

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374 Ibid.,16.

375 Gronau, 'Das Theater der Askese', 135: "Die Askese bildet also nicht nur – wie im Falle der Hungerkünstler – den spektakulären Gegenstand öffentlicher Aufführungen, sondern wird zum zentralen Modus der künstlerischen Darstellung selbst."

Trance versus ecstasy

Clément's ethnographic discourse also draws on the work of Gilbert Rouget to explore the richness embedded in trance rituals. In the introduction to the book *Music and Trance,* translated into English in 1985, Rouget aimed to demystify the role that music plays in inducing trance states and argued that music is not so much a trigger as a socialising factor of trance events. He also acknowledged that it is the different systems of representation or ideologies that ultimately control trance rituals and he thereby supported the notion that trance is both a psychological and a cultural phenomenon.[376] He also undertook an extensive literature review to ascertain how other researchers have used, and distinguished between, the notions of ecstasy and trance, both in French and in Anglo-Saxon publications. He argued that the terms ecstasy and trance should not be used interchangeably and he settled for a differentiation by which trance is associated with possession and characterised through extensive movements, shaking, noise and general sensory overstimulation followed by amnesia, whereas ecstasy is accompanied by immobility, silence, solitude and sensory deprivation.[377] Furthermore he claimed that ecstasy tends to be accompanied by visual and auditory hallucinations: "Since [in possession] the divinity takes the place of the possessed person's everyday personality, it does not constitute an apparition for the subject, contrary to what often occurs during ecstasy."[378] An example given by Rouget is useful here to explore this difference. Rouget wrote:

> Nothing could be more striking in this respect than the contrast one can
> observe among the Wolof of Senegal between the behavior of marabouts who
> seek out ecstasy in the silence, solitude and darkness of their grottos and that

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376 Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance, A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*, trans. Brunhilde Biebuyck, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), xviii and 3.
377 Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 8-11.
378 Ibid., 10.

of the practitioners of the *ndöp*, who enter into trance in the midst of a dense crowd, stimulated by drink, agitated by wild dancing and the din of drums.[379]

While examples such as this one could suggest that such differentiations are meaningful, Rouget conceded that trance and ecstasy should be considered as two opposing poles of a continuous field, and that they don't only appear in their extremes. However, he believed he had sufficient evidence to define two different and more or less universal categories. Catherine Clément however never referred to this debate and generally used the term trance in *L'appel*, referring to ecstasies [*extase*] only in a couple of contexts, the convulsions of women on the grave of François de Pâris in the early 1700s,[380] and as part of the description of Ramakrishna's sudden illumination.[381] In the first instance she did not even discuss her choice of terms, in the second she offered, in passing, a suggestion that trance is different to ecstasy because the first can be recognised through its sudden onset. This differentiation is not discussed any further. Why did she not engage with this debate? Did she reject the universalising and ahistorical tendencies inherent in such categorisations or are they irrelevant to her cause? Given that her oeuvre investigates what is generally known as altered states of consciousness should she not have been interested in differentiating at least between possessions, that is the episodic replacing of an identity by another entity of some kind, and the conscious experience of an apparition, hallucination, or change of state during ecstasy?

Instead of following the debate of trance versus ecstasy, Clément included the example of an 18th century practice by 'les convulsionaires', women who regularly induce fits and convulsions such as a certain sister Augustine, also known as the Stercophage, who would go through extreme fasts at one stage and consume excrement and bodily materials at another, whilst also producing an exquisite milky fluid that ran out of her mouth.[382] The same person practicing asceticism and excess, purity and abjection? Rouget acknowledged that certain cultures allow for practitioners to engage with both trance and ecstasy, and he was aware of the

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379 Ibid.
380 Clément, *L'appel*, 72, 145.
381 Ibid., 153.
382 Ibid., 80, 145.

impossibility of defining clear boundaries.[383] Nevertheless he insisted on a classification and attempted to distinguish not only between trance and ecstasy, but also between symptoms and behaviours in trance. He claimed: "Such categorisation still remains indispensable, however, since without it the multiplicity and diversity of such signs would remain sheer chaos."[384] One could argue that given trances and/or ecstasies, eclipse and syncopes constitute above all a disruption of normative rational behaviour, it is somewhat ironic that Rouget would insist on ordering them. I will side therefore with Clément's approach, whereby the different terms are not ordered and applied interchangeably. I would also suggest that Clément deliberately confuses dream, trance, madness, its symptoms and behaviours, in opposition to authors such as Gilbert Rouget, or Roger Bastide, whose book *Le rêve, la transe et la folie* (1972) also attempts to differentiate between "dream, trance and madness".[385] Clément frequently referenced Rouget's publication in *L'appel* and sang its praises as a guide to trance across the globe,[386] but she herself took a different approach which is indebted instead to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss as will be discussed further below.

Intellectual traditions and male forefathers

Given the deployment above of the mirror as metaphor I must acknowledge the feminist debate on the gendered mirror which has been advanced by a number of writers. On one hand there is Laura Mulvey's powerful argument that the gaze itself is male, but on the other there is Elisabeth Lenk's more recent claim that the (male) mirror image is no longer available in contemporary theatre and that women have therefore been thrown into crisis because there is no one anymore who is doing the looking.[387] Both positions suggest that contemporary women writers, philosophers

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383 Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 11.
384 Ibid., 13.
385 Roger Bastide, *Le rêve, la transe et la folie* (Paris, Flammarion, 1972) cited in Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 15.
386 Clément, *L'appel*, 203 (Indications bibliographique.)
387 Elisabeth Lenk, 'The Self-reflecting woman', in *Feminist Aesthetics*, ed. Griselda Ecker, trans. Harriet Anderson, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 57.

and artists, are in a dependent, negative position and look to their male counterparts for a validation of their own work and sense of self. Accordingly Adrienne Rich has argued that the looking back and self-reflection by women leads to a psychic disequilibrium, as the looking back leads to a distorted identification with male predecessors.[388] This potentially raises questions as to the accumulation of male figures in Clément's intellectual mirror. However, and here I pick up on a point I already made in Chapter 3, Clément herself has not been concerned with any kind of gender imbalance and endorsed instead the knowledge that has been passed down by figures such as Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Bataille and others. This is made explicit in the dialogue with Hélène Cixous in *The Newly Born Woman*, in which Clément speaks in favour of mastery as a route to knowledge, as compared to Cixous, who perceives mastery as repressive and as a means to make knowledge inaccessible and sacred.[389] Clément appears to have a benevolent sense of what could be described as her intellectual family, i.e. Lacan's circle and the wider tradition of French thought, despite her bold critical stance. As proposed by Linda Williams in *Feminist Reproduction and Matrilineal Thought*, there are two opposing camps amongst the French feminists: if Clément respects and writes in dialogue with some of its representatives, the other, more antagonistic position is occupied by, for example, Le Doeuff, who demands a constant break with tradition and conceives of the history of thought as a 'history of violations'.[390]

> That is the position Le Doeuff advocates that women take in relation to established traditions: one must be prepared to react violently to one's philosophical antecedents, to destroy discipleship in our independence and to be utterly unfaithful in our originality.[391]

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388 See also discussion by Lynda Hart (ed.), *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 5.
389 Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, cited in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong, (London: Routledge, 1992), 61.
390 Linda R. Williams, 'Feminist reproduction and matrilineal thought', in *New Feminist Discourses*, 61.
391 Williams, 'Feminist reproduction', 60.

Clément is highly critical of the largely male, Western philosophical tradition but her strategy is not violent rejection; rather she identifies the small cracks within their rational edifices and shines new light onto familiar stories and histories. Her attack is focused instead on the mechanisms of repression under patriarchal hegemony, and she passionately defends the need to be Other, and to celebrate this Other as a vital aspect of culture. This is the thread that binds her writing in the *Newly Born Woman*, in *Syncope,* and in *L'appel de la transe*. Instead of responding violently or rejecting discipleship she conceives of her forefathers as allies: her writing in the *Newly Born Woman* constitutes a conversation with Freud, in *Syncope* Bataille features as the trusted companion, in the concluding chapter of *L'appel de la transe* Clément explicitly returns to Lévi-Strauss and quotes from an introduction he wrote to Marcel Mauss' *Sociology et Anthropology* (1950) to support the arguments that underpin the book, describing the text as one of her primary sources.[392]

Lévi-Strauss' floating reservoir of possibilities

In the introduction to Marcel Mauss' *Sociology et Anthropology* Lévi-Strauss reflected on the fact that a possessed person or a shaman's behaviour looks much like what we call neurotic, and argued that it must not therefore be deemed abnormal or pathological. In *Music and Trance* Rouget cited the following passage:

> Either the forms of behaviour described by the terms trance and possession
> have nothing to do with those that we, in our society, call psychopathological;
> or one may regard them as being of the same type, in which case it is the
> connection with pathological states which must be regarded as contingent, and
> as resulting from a condition particular to the society in which we live.[393]

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392 Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss' in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), fourth edition, 9-44.
393 Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction' (1960), xviii – xix, cited in Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 16.

Lévi-Strauss also argued more generally that what we call mental illness is not individual malfunctioning of sorts, but a "sociological event affecting the behaviour of individuals" who have been alienated or "disassociated" from the wider group. Alternatively, he suggested, if such and such behaviour is seen as pathological, it may still have psychophysiological origins and can be taken to be part of agreed, symbolic forms of behaviour, or interpreted as part of culturally specific sociological patterns.[394]

This sort of argument fully underwrites Clément's project of syncope–eclipse–ecstasy–trance, in that she always allows for these instances to be both individual behaviour as well as part of a collective ecology. The pathological is read as part of culturally and historically specific patterns, as part of a tension caused by an imposed but repressive order. In other words, by calling many different behaviours and symptoms trance or syncope or eclipse, Clément de-pathologises what may otherwise be considered not relevant or discarded as pathological, bringing all these events, including depression, love at first sight, the fainting fit and the anorectic, back into an ancient tradition. By declassifying she says that we can see the syncope everywhere – if we care to look for it.

Emphasising the significance of Claude Lévi-Strauss' Introduction for her work, Clément also drew attention to the following argument; that the behaviour of a normal person integrates itself into the wider symbolic structures of society, but that the so-called abnormal person is the one who develops an individual symbolism, which can often not be assimilated by the collective, or at least not in the short term. To consolidate her point of view she referred to Lévi-Strauss' claim that it is rather the healthy person who is alienated in this society as she defines herself only in relation to others:

> Car c'est a proprement parler celui que nous appelons sain d'esprit qui s'aliène, puisqu'il consent à exister dans un monde définissable seulement par la relation de moi et d'autrui. La santé de l'esprit individuel implique la participation à la vie sociale, comme le refus de s'y prêter (mais encore selon

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394 Ibid.

des modalités qu'elle impose) correspond à l'apparition des troubles mentaux.[395]

At the same time the abnormal person is significant for the equilibrium of a society and has the role to figure out, or imagine and bring together, what may otherwise seem to be incompatible. Again quoting Lévi-Strauss, Clément wrote that they have to:

> Figurer certaines formes de compromis irréalisable sue le plan collectif, de feindre des transitions imaginaires, d'incarner des synthèses incompatible.[396]

The trance, Clément claimed, whatever its shape or form, is therefore one of those 'imagined transitions': a passage, a change of skin, a potential change of life. Sometimes, she argued, these incompatible syntheses or strange compromises that occur outside of collective behaviour become acceptable, such as sexual orientations which may be considered as abnormal at one point and become accepted later on.[397] Clément explicitly aligns herself here with Mauss and Lévi-Strauss in believing that languages and other cultural forms constitute a floating reservoir of possibilities, which find an expression eventually through, for example, the madmen, the poets, rebels and young people, as well as those otherwise declassified. The strange symptoms, convulsions and fits, she argued at the end of *L'appel*, do not just disturb an order, they also prefigure something. Like rap music and raves and those mass gatherings that have become possible through social media, they are an expression of a new collectivity beyond current forms. According to Clément, these new forms do not develop amongst the healthy and integrated people who are the truly alienated and alienating lot, but rather through eclipses and possessions and other such imaginary

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395 Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss', 18. Cited in Clément, *L'appel*, 188. "It is really the one who we call mentally healthy who is alienated, because he agrees to exist in a world that can be defined only by the relation between self and other. The health of the individual mind requires the participation in social life, just like the refusal to take part (according to imposed social modalities) coincides with the appearance of mental disorders." [trans. mine.]
396 Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss', 18. Cited in Clément, *L'appel*, 188.
397 Clément, *L'appel*, 188/189.

transitions. This is taken straight from Lévi-Strauss, who must therefore also be counted amongst the ghosts in Clément's mirror.

This final chapter in *L'appel* could be read as a manifesto of Clément's thought, summing up her publications over the years. It also frames her belief in art, in poetry, in the dances of the shamans and in the Hölderlins of all nations: their dissent opens the door to new imaginations and their projects make space for others to explore their individual symbolism, to make their own connections. In this sense Art equals innovation. Clément's declassificatory approach correlates with many threads of Bataille's oeuvre, his interest in heterology and his critique of the utilitarian subject, the extreme nature of his pornographic novels which pushes against established notions of literature, or his humorous and rebellious contributions to the magazine *Documents* with entries such as spittle, the big toe, and the notion of the *informe*. The latter could be considered as an equivalent, literary intervention into the floating reservoir of cultural possibilities, its function only to destabilize and to declassify. In *Documents* 'Formless' is defined as follows:

> A dictionary would begin as of the moment when it no longer provided the meaning of words but their tasks. In this way formless is not only an adjective having such and such a meaning, but a term serving to declassify, requiring in general that everything should have a form. What it designates does not, in any sense whatever, possess rights, and everywhere gets crushed like a spider or an earthworm […].[398]

Bataille attacked the academy, accusing in particular philosophy to be a mere mathematical frock coat that only seeks to fix the universe into one schema or another. The concept of 'Formless' may therefore serve as the final piece of the puzzle in Clément's mirror.

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398 Georges Bataille, 'Formless', part of the Critical Dictionary (31-84), in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 51/52.

Chapter 7 Difference between one who knows and one who undergoes[399]

> "I wanted neither the unusable not the unused, but the useless. How to
> expel function, rhythms, habits, how to expel necessity?" asked
> Georges Perec in 'A space without a use'.[400]

A brief run through

This enquiry began with a series of location-specific works using materials found on
site: a set of interventions that looked like 'work' but didn't make anything and left no
material trace on location. The experience of doing these performances influenced my
practice over time, strategically and tactically. For example, interventions tended to
take place in everyday settings, close to the audience; in these situations it became
clear that it made sense to meet people's eyes and to respond to their questions, and
eventually talking became part of the work.

As part of my low-cost and process-only approach I was interested in working with
materials that were freely available. This led me to using natural substances like water
and autumn leaves. Working with freely available and abundant natural materials
made possible the kind of excess and inconsequence which Bataille advocated in the
pursuit of wholeness – behaviours that are generally alien to capitalist economies,
which rather promote efficient production processes and the accumulation of goods or
wealth. Within the capitalist framework only the supposedly 'useful' has value, and
there is, on the whole, little concern for its exhausting patterns and the depletion of
resources. Interested in mocking this prescribed and one-dimensional way of living, I
choreographed repetitive tasks and cyclical movement sequences that recycled the
selected materials according to an ecological ethos and echoed the abundance of
nature. At the same time, the repetitive quality of the performed actions emulated

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399 Parts of this chapter have been peer-reviewed and will be published in Hetty Blades (ed.),
Performing Process, MacMillan, forthcoming.
400 Georges Perec, 'A space without a use', in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, (London:
Penguin, 1999), 33–35. https://arquivodeemergencia.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/perec-
species-of-spaces.pdf. Accessed 6/01/2015.

monotonous forms of labour. Thus the interventions could be seen to be mirroring both the excessive and prolific aspects of nature and the urban preoccupation with production and accumulation.

In order to facilitate these kinds of interventions I focused my attention on liminal spaces in which urban and social patterns converged with natural elements. Half culture, half nature, they allowed for interventions which were almost probable but ultimately absurd. Urban rivers and tidal waters made ideal sites, as did environments that undergo seasonal changes, such as public and private gardens. If natural elements were not available, I turned to discarded items such as the newspapers left behind by commuters, which also lend themselves to excessive and inconsequential endeavours. These hybrid spaces facilitated a Bataillean, holistic ecology on one hand, and also drew attention to the exhausting effects of capitalist productivity. In all these projects, the interventions played with the status of materials and objects, turning base matter into precious objects and back to waste in order to challenge the parameters which put individuals in the service of a global drive to production.

However, after several task-based performances, I felt that I was still too 'busy' in the sense of always doing one thing or another, always fulfilling tasks or briefs much like workers in a chain of production. I was, after all, still defining myself through the relation to objects and materials, and I had not actually advanced a different form of being within the selected time and space. In other words, I was still aligned with what I was trying to critique. This compulsion to always be doing something runs right through performance practices such as dance and performance art. Performers generally do, move or act when they perform. In *Exhausting Dance,* André Lepecki argued that this drive to continuous movement and agitation and the inability to resist this compulsion is part of a collusion of dance with modernity, with it's privileging of mobility and productivity.[401] Exceptions from performance art are, for example, events which feature sleep as performance, like Tilda Swinton sleeping in the gallery

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401 Andre Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2005). In this book Lepecki drew, for example, on Teresa Brennan's writing in *Exhausting Modernity: Grounds for a New Economy* (2000), in which the exhausted is theorised as a characteristically modernist trope and as a consequence of the combination of the different values modern living has inscribed in the individual, such as individuality, autonomy and the relentless pressure to be productive.

in *The Maybe*, a collaboration with visual artist Cornelia Parker (Serpentine Gallery, London 1995). But sleep or sleep-like states mean that the performers become object-like, and this was the wrong association in my attempt to claim, or reclaim, uselessness for the individual, the ordinary person, the citizen. In the above cited essay on asceticism in theatre, and modern art in general as an exercise in restriction and self-fashioning, Barbara Gronau reflected on this tendency, by which a stilling of the body in performance causes a sort of *Verdinglichung*, a kind of 'thingness'. She exemplified her argument through the work of Vanessa Beecroft, whose exhibits consist of more or less naked, immobile and speechless female performers.[402] Even the Happenings of the 60s, Gronau contended, designed to counteract the commercial art market through fleeting and uncontrollable actions, often deployed bodies as objects, lying flat, buried in sand or wrapped in bags and carried about.[403] A more suitable example for my quest of a non-reductive kind of non-doing is Ulay & Abramović *Imponderabilia* (1977), where the two artists stood naked in the doorway to a gallery, thereby narrowing the passage and forcing visitors to turn towards either her or him if they wanted to get through into the exhibition space. Here the extreme, and naked, proximity with the visitors stopped the performers becoming too object-like. It forced audiences to confront and acknowledge their gender, vulnerability and humanity.

A new approach

In the performance entitled *Difference between one who knows and one who undergoes* (Kappenberg 2013), I tested a new approach. This performance was first conceived for *Vogelfrei*, the same Biennale in Darmstadt, Germany, at which I did the first *Extreme Ironing*. Again the exhibition occupied a number of private gardens in a neighbourhood of the city and audiences were given a map to walk from one garden to another. Most exhibits were sculptures, but there were a few performances. I searched for a situation in which I could (just) be present without pursuing work-like activity, and the ornamental figure of the garden gnome, well known in Germany,

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[402] Gronau, 'Das Theater der Askese', 138,139.
[403] Ibid., 139,140.

provided the perfect ploy. I invited the owners of the gardens to propose garden gnome themes ahead of my intervention and selected three of the themes. Dressed as a garden gnome, I spent one day in each of the gardens, sitting in my outfit amongst a few scattered props suggesting that day's theme, doing nothing. For the first theme, 'garden gnome fishing', I stuck a long wooden stick vertically in an upside-down wheelbarrow and sat alongside. For the second theme, 'garden gnome with pipe', I stuck a plastic pipe into a garden fence and sat nearby, and for the third theme, 'Hanging Gardens', I hung a set of gardening tools in a tree and sat below. Besides being there, I made no effort to do anything. Visitors often laughed when they stumbled upon me on their tour through the exhibiting gardens, and when I moved a little or nodded in their direction thereby signalling that I was a real person. Returning looks and speaking with the passers-by avoided my slippage into objecthood.

The Garden gnomes we know today have a long and varied history and fuse a number of different, mythic, real and literary figurines; written records give evidence of early precursors or dwarfs in ancient Egypt, but also in ancient Crete and in the Roman Empire, as well as in Venetian accounts, in Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque architecture and in Goethe's romantic poems, more often than not associated with benevolent faculties and cheerful spirits.[404] Mystical gnomes were often believed to live in nature, in forests and mountains, and associated with tireless work and industriousness. At times they were linked to the mining trade, as in the case of a small Roman figurine which already features a pointy hat and a miner's lantern, but which is shown sleeping. There is some speculation that this particular sculpture is representing a child labourer, indicating the possibility of children working in mines also in Roman times.[405] In the 17th and 18th centuries, gnome-like figures were introduced into the gardens of noble families, and into parks, typically made from sandstone and representing something like servants or fools. The garden gnomes we know today were first fabricated in around 1870 in a small German village,

404 G. F. Hartlaub, 'Der Gartenzwerg und seine Ahnen, Eine Iconographische und Kulturgeschichtliche Betrachtung' (Heidelberg: Heinz Moos Verlag, 1962) http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/hartlaub1962/0040/scroll?sid=4d9e8923fa8795e2332699b6ba7c36e0. Accessed 26/05/2015.
405 Ibid., 12.

Gräfenroda in Thüringen.[406] They are again representing miners with pickaxes, wheelbarrows and lanterns. Their red hats have become a signature garment and are believed originally to have been stuffed with cotton wool to protect the heads of the miners. Real miners were generally small people who fitted into the mines, and often they were child labourers. Historically the small figurines therefore represented hard work and people believed that, when gnomes were exhibited in gardens, they magically did the gardening when everyone was asleep. The association with the mines and with industriousness has diminished, however, over the years and today's figurines are seen as decorative and more or less kitschy objects, at times issued with musical instruments to sweeten their presence.[407] In Germany they do, however, still hold the freedom of the fool and may also be shown with their pants down, with a whip or with a gun, drunk, having sex or pointing the finger, and no one can take offense.

Appearing as a live garden gnome gave me the opportunity to be the fool for the day, to spread out and offer my presence, and not to feel compelled to do anything. The costume had a certain familiarity and a somewhat disarming folkloric air. However, my live presence and my inactivity created a strangeness that was enough to unsettle the visitor and to provoke many questions. In particular people wondered how I could possibly manage to do nothing for a whole day. I proposed that they could join the garden gnome club, upon which they would receive a red hat that would allow them to sit in their own gardens and be inactive whenever they wanted, under the condition that they would not be allowed to do anything at all, not even weeding. There were no subscribers.

In theatre and on the stage, a costume conveys a character, transforming the actor-performer into a performing body and supporting the work of representation.[408] In everyday life, however, costumes work in other ways: here they lend themselves as a choreographic strategy or hinge with which to disrupt the everyday. As Tim Etchells

406 Andreas Klein, 'Abstammung des Gartenzwerges', http://www.zwergen-power.de/informationen_ueber_br_die_gartenzwerge/abstammung_des_br_gartenzwerges/index.php#a50. Accessed 26/5/2013.
407 Hartlaub, 'Der Gartenzwerg und seine Ahnen', 32.
408 Aoife Monks, 'Costume at the Halfway Place'. *Critical Costume, Towards a Vocabulary of Scenographic Bodies*, Edge Hill University UK, 17/18 January 2013. http://www.criticalcostume.com/monks.html.

wrote with regard to contemporary performance, such work is often intent on exploiting and blurring old dialectical separations such as "inside and outside, fiction and reality, audience and performer."[409] Within this mode of performance and in the context of the everyday, a costume can act as a theatrical element and serve to represent something, but it is not certain as to what is 'costume' and what is not. This invites speculations as to the relation between an individual and their performing persona, and also raises uncertainties with regards to the edges of the 'performance'. Particularly in site-specific performances and in those which do not advertise the event, the duration or the precise location, there is much room for uncertainty on the part of the (potential) audience. In site-specific interventions, a place as well as its histories and narratives loosely provide a frame for an event, but sometimes this frame or framing only becomes apparent through the intervention and it can also shift and change. Often it is the interplay between an intervention and the place which constitutes the performance.

A live and costumed garden gnome in a garden, for example, affects a visitor's experience of that garden. A garden is a garden, but this status can be challenged through the uncanniness of a costumed figure which seeps into the surrounding area giving the environment a stage-like quality. In such an event, a garden also becomes a stage. On the other hand, a garden is always already an artifice in that it represents 'nature' within an urban context. A costumed figure could therefore be seen to make evident the artifice that is inherent in every garden. In more general terms site-specific performative interventions call into question the assumptions, conventions and routines that are associated with a particular place. One could draw a parallel here with Blanchot's thesis that a broken utensil disturbs a given relation and rises as image. The insertion of an unexpected, costumed figure within a given situation also somewhat 'breaks' the relation people have with that space, so that it, the place and its people, rise as image. In the case of the garden gnome performance, the garden is no longer only a garden, but also its own image, a resemblance.

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409 Tim Etchells, 'Diverse Assembly: Some Trends in Recent Performance', in *Contemporary British Theatre,* ed. Theodore Shank, (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), 107-122.

This shift of status, and the uncertainty it brings, causes a little frisson in the passer-by and facilitates a different kind of attention. This shift in the mode of looking and noticing is generally rather associated with the movies or the theatre, and I am not conerned with the kind of spectorship offered by theatre; however, I will draw on these debates to perhaps elucidate something that appears to happen in the encounter with a performative situation in an environment that is not usually associated with performance. In a review of the work of the performance artist Rose English, Deborah Levy described the particular kind of spectating that occurs in theatre, arguing that "the empty conceptual space of the theatre is a place where we can be caught in the adventure of 'looking at the mystery of looking'."[410] Theatre audiences expect the unexpected and they are prepared to open their eyes to that which takes place in front of them. As Levy argued, viewers encounter "a visual and kinetic world that is curious and pleasing, a world that is made up of moments that could go any way."[411] In the absence of a proscenium arch or any other such marker of theatre and theatrical events, this shift in the quality of attention is not so easily achieved. However, exhibits or performances in familiar everyday surroundings surprise and provoke, partially through a lack of a clear delineation of the performance and performative elements within a given environment. Walking from garden to garden, the visitors in Darmstadt could not always be sure what was exhibit and what was not. The garden gnome benefitted from this uncertainty and deliberately confused categories of, art and not-art, object and human, joke and serious proposition. The title of the work, *Difference between one who knows and one who undergoes* signalled an importance of experience and process, with regards to both audiences and the performer.[412] Spending days 'just' sitting in one of the gardens I was not only representing uselessness, but also dedicated myself to doing nothing, experiencing idleness in a way that went beyond my own patterns and habits, both as a performer and as myself.

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410 Deborah Levy, 'The Eros of Rose, The Work of Rose English', in *A Split Second of Paradise*, *Live Art, Installation and Performance,* eds. Nicky Childs and Jeni Walwin, (London and New York: Rivers Oram Press, 1998), 41.
411 Levy, 'The Eros of Rose', 41.
412 The title is drawn from Harriet Rubin, *Dante in Love, The World's Greatest Poem and How It Made History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005) ix, 23.

I would argue then that garden gnome stillness is different to the standstill as renunciation as explored by Gronau with regards to the hunger artists. According to Gronau their standstill is an exercise in the disciplining of the body, like the kind of theatre training envisaged by *Stanislavski*, by which a person aims to limit and filter his/her own impulses in order to serve a particular idea or become the precise tool for the transmission of information.[413] In other words, as Gronau explicated, purpose and drill, usually deployed in the military, in schools and in diverse forms of physical training in order to mobilise the body, were replicated by hunger artists and represented as performance. Gronau also contended that they are today echoed in the practices of contemporary performance artists, for example Marina Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View* (2002).[414] Gronau understood both scenarios, those from the everyday and aesthetic practices, as an expression of a utilitarianism in which the 'undisciplined' body and mind are overcome. Gronau here concurred with Boris Groys' position, who understands contemporary art in general not as creation of new forms but as practices of renunciation and strategic reduction.[415] According to Gronau, this tallies with an idea originally put forward by Max Weber, by which the modern individual, and the art of this epoch, subscribe to a rational mode of living. Asceticism as aesthetic programme, Gronau observed, was once at home in the monasteries, but has now relocated to the arts.[416]

In this discussion Gronau also referred to the instructions contemporary artist Vanessa Beecroft gives to her performers, noting that her performers must be emotionally strong, not act sensitively, hold classic poses, be distanced, be alone, independent, and be still.[417] While these instructions resonate strongly with military disciplines as argued by Gronau, Beecroft's work must also been seen as an explicit critique of this culture of renunciation, and her human tableaux critically mirror the concept of the uniform, autonomous and rational self that so dominates modern lives.

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[413] Gronau, 'Das Theater der Askese', 136. Gronau noted: "Stanislawskis Körper-Ökonomie deckt sich so mit der zeitgenössischen Erlösungsformel des Utilitarismus, wonach es gilt, die Eigenarten, Unwägbarkeiten und Überschüsse des Körpers aus dem Prozess der Darstellung herauszufiltern, um ihn zum Werkzeug einer Information zu machen."
[414] Ibid., 141.
[415] Ibid., 134.
[416] Ibid., 134.
[417] Ibid., 139.

Whereas the hunger artists submitted to the rationalist modernist paradigm, Beecroft's multiplication of regimented, mannequin-like and anonymised bodies highlights the institutionalisation and normalisation of this kind of self-disciplining in a highly mediated environment, making evident the tyranny that dominates both public and private spheres. The approach here is to critically echo, multiply and foreground what visitors will come across on a daily basis in the subliminal messages of advertising and consumer culture. In view of Gronau's reading of Beecroft's work, one could however argue that while the work is explicitly critical, it nevertheless relies on an aesthetic asceticism.

In comparison with the aesthetic of renunciation the garden gnome project proposes a different approach and a different kind of stillness: the gnome does not conform, is sensuously engaged with the environment, is not alone and holds no classic poses. The garden gnome is furthermore a figure derived from folklore and popular culture, constituting an anti-figure with regards to the classicist, idealised kind of art object. The stillness of the garden gnome then, is not self-fashioning and no exercise in restraint or asceticism. Most surprisingly, and drawing on the tradition of the fool or jester, she is exempt from these pressures, and her stillness is pure immanence.

In December 2013, I took part in *site/space*, an initiative by Performance Space, a venue in Hackney, East London. For these events, artists just turn up on the day and improvise in response to a chosen site nearby. For this particular day, performance artist André Verissimo had chosen a square in Limehouse, an especially multi-cultural area of East London. We were a small group of four performers and we had no sign saying that we were artists or explaining our presence in this neighbourhood. I was the only one in costume – my garden gnome outfit with red hat, red gumboots, stripy dress and a bucket. I was cautious, as we were not part of the local community. I was concerned that our creative exploration – and my demonstrative inactivity – could be perceived as an unwanted intrusion or imposition. At some point, whilst sitting on the pavement attending to the cool air around me, I was approached by a couple of young boys who had been observing us from the distance. They asked: "Are you talking to the devil?" Thinking on my feet and keen to stay within my role I replied: "No, I am talking to the air." Unfazed, and perhaps intrigued by my response, they asked: "What is the air saying?" Intent on drawing them into a more contemplative mode I replied: "The air does not speak, it only listens." Apparently satisfied they walked on a few steps and stopped again, this time watching one of the other performers, André Verissimo, who was standing still and balancing an empty take-away container in one of his hands. They joined in, copied his posture, and stood still for a while. Then they sang a few lines and walked away. The interlude was a memorable encounter and a playful interaction with complete strangers. With our spatial explorations, we had on some level joined the boys and others who appeared to be hanging out on the square, and we had been passing time not unlike them. We had been operating outside of productive modes, much like them, and perhaps our 'useless' explorations positively echoed their own doing or not-doing.

In the context of our productive society and as discussed throughout this thesis, this mode is generally perceived negatively as a form of wasting time, to the effect that most people avoid this state at all costs and fill their time with one activity or another. As Martin Heidegger wrote in a letter to the psychiatrist Medard Boss from 1963, "That which is most useful, is the useless. But to experience the useless is today for

man the most difficult thing."[418] Joshua Cohen, already cited in the Prologue, called this 'time without content', equating content with productivity according to the marginalisation of non-productive expenditures in capitalist economies. In his talk Cohen argued that this kind of time has more or less vanished due to an ever-increasing instrumentalisation of people and their labour for the sake of profit. Informed by his work as psychoanalyst Cohen began his lecture *Wasting Time* by proposing:

> Art and psychoanalysis give expression to the nagging voices of the enigmatic and excessive selves that we can't get rid of, those elements of our inner lives that can't be integrated or contained in our ordinary self-image. These are the remaindered, unwanted or wasted elements of life that escape recognition.[419]

Figures such as the live garden gnome speak to, and embody, these 'remaindered, unwanted or wasted elements': the part of our selves that doesn't fit into our ordinary selves. To illustrate his point Cohen gave the example of a 1980s cartoon image of a woman lying in bed with the inscription: "I didn't go to work that day… I don't think I'll go tomorrow." Below the image was a second caption: " Let's take control of our lives and live for pleasure not pain."[420] These captions suggest a deliberate and willful rejection of the imperative to work, in much the same way that the garden gnome refused to join in. The gnome, and the woman dozing in her bed, furthermore demonstrated no inner conflict whatsoever, and this is perhaps the most shocking aspect. Along with the woman in the cartoon, the garden gnome is also someone who does not go to work today and who will not go tomorrow, or the day after, or the day after that. Garden gnomes are not workers on a break, and their being is not defined through work – in difference to most of us whose identities tend to be defined by what we do for work and whose lives tend to be structured through when we work.

Besides reflecting a predicament of the visitor, this state of non-activity in the garden gnome also challenges the status of the artist producer who is equally expected to do something and whose 'work' is supposed to be evidence of work undertaken. But the

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418 Martin Heidegger, cited in Nuccio Ordine, *L'Utilité de L'Inutile: Manifeste,* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013), 30/31.
419 Cohen, 'Wasting Time'.
420 Ibid.

gnome refuses point blank: the gnome does nothing and does not supply evidence of work undertaken. Cohen gave a similar example with Tracey Emin's infamous installation *My Bed*, for which she was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1999. Cohen commented on the artwork's double refusal to not only expose a scenario of idleness, but also to refuse the work that art is traditionally expected to do. Instead of complying with the notion of the art object as refined labour, *My Bed* speaks to "the profoundly ambivalent status inactivity has in our culture."[421]

Emin's bed as art object is equivalent to the garden gnome as performative act. As Cohen contended, what lurks in these images of idleness, and torments the viewer, is a whole host of associations: from the sanctioned time-out and minor guilty pleasure of the Sabbath, to the mystical and terrifying chaos described at the beginning of Genesis, which implies the potential of entropy and dissolution not only of the individual but of the world as a whole. In this argument Cohen drew on Blanchot's view that "art's political power lies in its refusal to work […] in its will to unmake […]." This is not the art that offers aesthetic pleasures, but art as interference and refusal. Searching for the historical roots of this dynamic, Cohen turned to the condemnation of idleness during the Enlightenment:

> […] the arc of the human story is one of progressive movement towards autonomy, knowledge and reason. The true destiny of the Enlightenment itself is to understand and gradually master reality rather than surrender to the dim, childish urgings of pleasure. The slobben wasters are for this reason the Enlightenment's mortal enemies, the slobs' shiftlessness, moral laxity and hedonism are living refutation of its every cherished piety. And yet the Enlightenment's austere condemnation of idleness went hand in hand with a certain fascination, even attraction for it.[422]

The cultural fascination with representations of moral laxity indicates a repression at work, but the enticing mixture of infantile gratification, sloth, wastefulness and irresponsibility suggests a mix of historical forces at play. Cohen assigned this condemnation to the socio-cultural inheritance of the Enlightenment. But some of it

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421 Ibid.
422 Ibid.

could also be a consequence of the economy of capital that emerged alongside the Enlightenment. In this economy the individual is cast as ever-desiring consumer, deployed in efforts to increase capital. Although the advance of knowledge and the sciences facilitated a new approach to, and an acceleration and expansion of productivity, it was nonetheless the power of capital that measured all things in respect of their productiveness. In the end, it is the collusion between these different forces, between rationalism and capital, which generated the particular culture in which wasted effort and unproductive time are equated with moral laxity. Some icons of today's pop culture have been forged through this repressive regime, for example, Homer Simpson. Cohen contended:

> Homer is something like a pop cultural incarnation of the vision of the future sovereign man envisioned by George Bataille, in whom the drive to reproduce is swallowed wholesale by the drive to consume.[423]

One of Homer's most famous expression is "Mmm…", usually triggered by something which he is eating such as, marshmallows, chocolate, donuts or beer, inferring an immediate, childlike ingestion and gratification. Homer also says it to introduce items such as money, organised crime, business deals, purple, and before words such as, convenient. However, the most iconic mmm-moment is "Mmm, slanty", included in a video compilation of Mmm-moments that is available on You-tube.[424] This particular expression reflects a predominantly sensorial engagement, and an indiscriminate attention to everything in his proximity. Altogether Homer gives an impression of a Self whose engagement with the world is, much like that of children, highly subjective and playful, comparative to Freud's oral stage, that is libidinal and excessive, and not concerned about risk or danger. It is the profile of the 'slobben waster', the enemy of both rationalism and entrepreneurialism. As Cohen also argued Homer makes for a good cartoon version of the Bataillean, sovereign self. As discussed in Chapter 4, a sovereign self pursues totality with what Bataille described as 'movement in all directions and all senses'. Homer's 'mmm-yes' approach to everything around him is a humorous version of that.

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423 Ibid.
424 Homer Simpson, in 'Homer Simpson mmm compilation', YouTube video, 5:41, posted by Timothy Weaver, 18 March 2014, https://youtu.be/A14qyN0rVGA?t=2.

Homer plays this out on our screens as a somewhat abstracted character contained by a flat medium. The garden gnome, a different kind of waster, brings her non-doing into proximity with the visitor, taking up residence in different gardens of the neighbourhood. She is real and life size, and thereby somewhat monstrous compared with the diminutive garden gnomes figures. Part ornament, part determined slacker, she is an unsettling mixture of the familiar and the strange, the intriguing and the repellent. Drawing on Blanchot, Cohen remarked that art 'can be so shocking and disturbing precisely because it confronts us with an image of ourselves, that we don't know at all, and that we know very well.'[425] What Cohen implied is that these images that we don't want to know, but that we do know very well, are evidence of an inner unresolved conflict which expresses itself through the ambivalent responses of visitors to performances – as in the case of the garden gnome appearances and with regards to other works in this series, such as *Flush* and *Extreme Ironing*.

Slow Races (Kappenberg 2014)

The garden gnome ventures in Darmstadt and London led to the making of *Slow Races*, a performance project conceived in 2014 for the Dear Serge programme at the De La Warr Pavilion (DLWP), Bexhill. Dear Serge, a one-day performance platform which takes place several times during the year, provided the ideal environment to test and further develop ideas that I had been exploring with the slacker in the signature red hat.

A claim to fame of Bexhill is as the birthplace of British motor racing, a passion of the 8th Earl De La Warr. He initiated the first British motor race in 1902 on the Bicycle Boulevard along the seafront which he had built previously in 1896 as part of a promotion of Bexhill as seaside resort.[426] Traditionally a 'Day at the Races' showcases the speediest cars or the fastest horses, celebrating speed as the principal

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425 Cohen, 'Wasting Time'.
426 See: Bexhill Museum, 'Birthplace of British motor racing', http://www.bexhillmuseum.co.uk/the-technology-collection-6/birthplace-of-british-motor-racing-61.html. Accessed 1/05/2014.

achievement of modern times. *Slow Races* aimed to invert these values, inviting passers-by and spectators to observe, or take part in, games and projects which facilitated different kinds of slow movement and slow time. The idea was to invite people to step back from Modernity's obsession with speed, mobility and utility. Four different projects were planned to take place alongside one another and to complement each other. They constituted an inclusive programme which brought together professional performers, different parts of the local community and visitors to the gallery.

The central project consisted of a group of seven performers dressed as garden gnomes, who undertook an infinitely slow race lasting five hours, entitled *Slow Races #1 (Seven Garden Gnomes).* Wearing their distinctive red hats, they loitered in loose configurations that gradually with no clear objective moved through the public spaces of the De La Warr Pavilion. The seven gnomes were simply present: observing, listening and celebrating their perfectly useless selves. They were not concerned with past or future but existed only in the here and now. If approached by members of the public they responded accordingly: if asked where they came from they pointed to the space directly behind them; if asked what they were doing, they replied, "slow racing." The performance deliberately wasted time. In defiance of the exhausting pressures of modern life, the garden gnomes claimed their right to dawdle.

At one point in the afternoon I performed a speech entitled *All Human Beings are Born Useless and equal in Uselessness*. This performance was originally devised for, and performed at, a symposium in Brighton in memory of artist Monica Ross, a colleague from the University of Brighton who died in 2013. Researching her work, I came across an interview with artist Brian Catling for the European Live Art Archive, in which Ross stated that she believed in art as a useless endeavour, and that art needed to allow for "the strange, the uncanny, the not required."[427] Also, for one of her performances, Ross used to recite, from memory, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR). Interested in the performativity and effort required for reciting from memory, and in accordance with a section of the UDHR which requires one to "keep […] the Declaration constantly in mind", I set out to write a speech and to learn it by heart. I began my declaration by quoting Monica's words on art as a useless endeavour, to explicitly state the importance of performance as useless enterprise. I then expanded on the history of the debates on use and uselessness in European philosophy and literature. In this I was drawing on a small publication by Nuccio Ordine, entitled *L'Utilité de L'Inutile*, published in 2013, in which Ordine argued that the useless is that which renders us more human. Taking his thesis to its logical conclusion and borrowing some of the wording from the UDHR, the speech finally stakes a claim for a human right to uselessness, listing five articles modelled on the first five articles of the original UDHR. At the symposium for Monica Ross, the speech was delivered by myself, from memory, in garden gnome costume and standing on an upside-down bucket. In order to claim the necessary authority, the she-gnome declared herself to be the General Assembly of Garden Gnomes.

At the De La Warr Pavilion, the speech was again delivered in garden gnome costume, and standing on the upside-down bucket in the bandstand in front of the Pavilion. Shifting between academic tone and spoof declaration whilst holding a typical, gnomic lantern and gesticulating with a little plastic flowerpot the garden gnome made use of her liberty to move across conventions, and to combine the playful and the absurd with conceptual seriousness. Following the declaration, a broadsheet was distributed amongst the audience with the text of the speech, the

427 ELAA European Live Art Archive, Monica Ross in interview with Brian Catling, http://www.liveartarchive.eu/archive/artist/monica-ross-0. Accessed 5/02/2014.

design of which was modelled on the original broadsheet publication of the UDHR.

Another, participatory project and part of the offer at Dear Serge was entitled *Slow Races #3 (Scooter Murmuration)*. This idea had been conceived in response to the many individual mobility scooter users who normally pass by on their own or drive slowly along the seafront as part of small groups of walking family members. Considering the smooth, slow movement capability of the scooters I envisaged a group gathering in which many mobility scooters would swoop and loop together much like the birds of a murmuration. Scientists have been intrigued by these "mass aerial stunts" for a long time and are only recently beginning to get a better understanding as to how they work and why starlings engage in these displays. Suggestions include the exchange of information, real-time social networks, preparing for roosting at night and evasive manovers in response to predators.[428] The *Scooter Murmuration* was perhaps not dissimilar, in that it allowed for an exchange of information, for a showing of strength in numbers and it was an opportunity to share pleasure. But above all, the image of a whole set of slowly looping mobility scooters made for a good inversion of the traditional idea of the races.

Preliminary workshops brought together mixed groups of local, elderly mobility scooter users with students from Brighton University, and I rented additional mobility scooters for the younger participants. During the workshops I introduced everyone to the behaviours which underpin the movements of starling murmurations and participants rehearsed driving and turning alongside one another, looping over the extensive terrace in front of the DLWP and emulating the patterns of the bird flocks. The bird formations appear to be democratic organisations based on two rules: that any animal can lead at any one time, and that all members of the swarm communicate with about seven others around it and keep equal distances between each other, alternatively bunching up or spreading out and turning this way or that. The rules

428 RSPB, 'Starling flocks, A wild spectacle', http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/name/s/starling/roosting.aspx. Accessed 1/06/2014. Also: Jaymi Heimbuch, 'The incredible science behind starling murmuration', *Mother Nature Network Blog*, 9/01/2014, http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/animals/stories/the-incredible-science-behind-starling-murmurations. Accessed 1/06/2014. And: Russel Mclendon, 'Stunning bird ballet interrupts ad shoot', *Mother Nature Network Blog*, 31/01/2013, http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/animals/blogs/stunning-bird-ballet-interrupts-ad-shoot. Accessed 1/06/2014.

were easy to remember and allowed for maximum flexibility within the group: whoever was in front could lead and decide on the next direction, while the joint swarming over the terraces created an extensive amount of shared pleasure. The staff of the DLWP were supportive of the project and invited the group to also drive into and through the entrance hall of the Pavilion. This added a particular fun element as some of the participants had never been inside the gallery and were now at liberty to take over the space with their scooters. After three rehearsals the group had established a way of moving together and was ready to perform their murmuration as part of Dear Serge. The performed scooter murmuration successfully displayed all kinds of movement patterns, everyone involved had a great deal of fun, and perhaps this slow race contributed a little to the sense of humanness of its participants.

For a fourth piece, entitled *Slow Races #2 (Buckets)*, passers-by and audiences of Dear Serge were invited to take part by walking around a predetermined racecourse whilst carefully balancing small buckets filled to the brim with water. The race course was also set up outside on the large terrace and featured two stripy poles in the centre, taking the participants in a large circle back to their starting point. Assistants were on hand with watering cans to top up the buckets if any drops were spilled. The task of not spilling water led to participants focusing intently on their cargo and walking as if in ultraslow motion, without any such instruction, absorbed by the activity. Some also turned this way and that or walked sideways and backwards in order to protect the water surface in their buckets from the wind. The activity allowed for the participation of people from all ages, from the very young to, and including, the elderly. The balancing activity derived from an exercise used in professional performance and theatre workshops, which I had come across during a workshop with the Irish performance artist Alastair MacLennan. For the event at the DLWP, I adapted the exercise by calling it a race and by providing the structure of a racecourse. There was however no competition and no prizes to be won, and participants seemed content to take part for the sake of the experience.

Other visitors to the Pavilion could observe the bucket race from the first-floor terrace, contemplating the slowly advancing individuals, or watch *Slow Races #3 (Scooter Murmuration)* from their bird's eye perspective. They could furthermore come across the slow migration of garden gnomes anywhere in the building or listen

to the emphatic speech of the she-gnome on the upside-down bucket. For those wishing to engage more deeply with the ideas behind the project, there was also the broadsheet with the text of the *Universal Declaration of the Human Right to Uselessness*.

The garden gnome paradigm

In *Slow Races #1*, the garden gnomes multiplied and developed a voice that could be communicative or enigmatic without reducing the mystery of the moment. The conversations which ensued did not distract from the habitual silence of works of art but rather drew audiences into the spell of the work. The different configurations and almost sculptural presence of the seven gnomes across spaces and staircases echoed minimalist sculptural traditions, including works such as Kounellis' *Untitled (12 horses)*, discussed in Chapter 5. Working as a group allowed the performers to 'just' be present and to focus on their physical relation to space, place and time. I am writing 'just' because focusing on presence is conventionally perceived as not very much activity in the sense of a visible doing of something that has a visible outcome of sorts. The performers were instead engaged instead in continuously scanning their environment, watching, listening and generally sensing the space and their own bodies, noting stillness and the activity of others, attending to the moment but without the necessity to respond or to engage. The garden gnome paradigm allowed for a suspension of the habitual pressures, and the specific costumes also did some of the 'work', so that the performers could appear to be doing more or less 'nothing'. The extended duration of five hours with one small lunch break further magnified their non-doing.

Whilst engaged in non-doing, the performers were enacting – and experiencing – something like sovereignty, in Bataille's sense of an existence beyond the patterns and norms and moral values that are imposed on the modern individual. This was however not sovereignty in the unconditional and transgressive mode that Bataille had explored, but the sovereign embodiment of a state beyond purpose. The performers surrendered to the singularity of every moment, attending to the qualities of every instant. Through their still presence they became the 'owners' of the space much like

fools or court jesters, whose sovereignty is second only to that of the King. They stood, walked, lay or otherwise positioned themselves wherever and whenever, in disregard of the normal rules of behaviour of any given space through which they travelled – be that an entrance or hallway, a staircase, a café, a terrace or a lounge. Framed by the costume and playing on the familiarity of the garden gnome figure, the performers were able to infiltrate the everyday with a celebration of non-doing, and 'uselessness'.[429] Infused by a sense of potential as argued by Blanchot, the garden gnomes are always in process, and they never arrive.

If Georges Perec imagined expelling necessity from a space, the strategies developed in this research project expel necessity in and through performance. [430] The garden gnome paradigm constitutes one such avenue, a light-hearted performance with an implicit critique, and a means to recover some of what Bataille was exploring under the notion of sovereignty. The work speaks to the so-called slobs and wasters in each of us, to the "remaindered, unwanted or wasted elements of life that escape recognition," as Cohen had argued.[431] The implicit critique is, partly, informed by Bataille's analysis of modern living, in view of the lack of a work-life balance experienced by the majority of its citizens. Bataille's theorisation of the gift as a potentially disruptive force made sense of the disturbance caused by the performance of excessive amounts of effort, attention, and slowness, and by the displacement of familiar activities into unconventional contexts. Bataille's notion of *non-productive expenditure* correlated with, and substantiated, the significance of wasteful interludes, endorsing the celebration of uselessness.

While Bataille's notion of sovereignty seemed limited in scope it raised important questions as to the potentiality of inner experience and social relations, and pointed to Catherine Clément's notion of syncope. The concept of Syncope then served, initially,

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429 As a gallery space the De La Warr Pavilion was not entirely everyday, although the Dear Serge event brought a wide variety of audiences, many of whom were families who frequent the Pavilion to have tea and coffee and to walk along the seaside. A subsequent performance of *Slow Races #1* at the St Leonards Warrior Square train station in October 2015 confirmed however that the performance functions well in very ordinary settings, in this case the forecourt of the train station which is frequented by commuters, passers-by of all ages and local groups of teenagers. The performance allowed for the familiar exchange of interested looks, questions, and gnomic answers.
430 Georges Perec, 'A space without a use', 33-35.
431 Cohen, 'Wasting Time'.

as a way to understand the social and cultural structures and interventions that facilitate such moments, allowing me to make sense of the project *Flush*. Secondly, the concept served as a means to recognise 'sovereign' moments within the life of individuals, without resorting to pathological discourse. Building on this understanding, I further explored choreographic strategies that embed momentary disturbances and disruptions into their structures. In addition, a review of different kinds of art practices gave rise to the recognition, that moments of encounter with a work of art can potentially challenge the audience's sense of themselves through minor syncopic moments, suspending their activities and habitual patterns for brief instances. At times, spectators were jolted, paused and looked in a way that appeared like versions of ecstatic instances, before returning to their thoughts and commitments. However, unlike Bataille's quest for an unconditional pursuit of the limits of experience which transgress social conventions and have to take place out of sight, these performances take place within the everyday, on the street or in designated public spaces, and consist of more or less ritualistic interventions that are sanctioned by the institution of art and permissible as such.

The body of work explored in this research somewhat straddles the ascetic traditions and a Bataillean-informed, sovereign approach. The earlier, task-based performances work with a restrained choreographic vocabulary, while also playing with non-productive expenditure, and they cause disturbances which offer the potential for syncopic moments. The latter work and garden gnome paradigm, is a more overtly sovereign approach. However, all the projects pursue the immanence of the here and now, and differ thereby from those practices in which a restraint is applied in order to gain something on another, higher level. Compared with the quasi-religious discourse of purification and the exchange of energy by performers such as Marina Abramović the garden gnome paradigm seeks to restore humanness though immanence. The work pursues the inconsequential, through the here and now, and through local materials and simple patterns, and without turning East or elsewhere for an imagined other space and time.

In the process of the research the concept of Syncope has clarified the need to preserve ritual spaces, within the arts or elsewhere, and to understand their

importance within a wider cultural economy. The concept can therefore serve those in performance and theatre studies, who wish to reflect on, and understand, what takes place in these liminal spaces and how work can affect its visitors. Syncope emerges also as a tool for practitioners, and for those who seek to break through the limitations imposed by the claims of the Enlightenment and the economy of capital.

Fellow feelings

In the course of the research the performance practice also led to an exploration of participatory modes of engagement, with works that are structured like games and which invite the passers-by to become the performers. In *Fair Play – Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (2013), Jen Harvie addressed the politics of participatory practices posing the following question:

> Might they sometimes offer a spectacle of communication and social engagement rather more than a qualitatively and sustainably rich and even critical engagement?[432]

I am not sure if it is possible to avoid the ambivalent status of much of participatory work. *Slow Races #2* (*Bucket Race)* and *Slow Races #3* (*Scooter Murmuration)* were designed to engage different parts of the local community in and around the De La Warr Pavilion, and this remit was probably partly responsible for securing Arts Council funding for the *Slow Races* project. But the focus of the work was a one-off exploration of slow movement and useless engagement, and not the development of sustainable social networks. Hence the work could be considered to be guilty of creating a "spectacle of communication" to use Harvie's term. Nevertheless, informed by a Bataillean position, the work offered a critical engagement through an implicit critique of a 'modern' society, which assigns value primarily to those who work and according to their productivity. All four interventions of *Slow Races* were committed to exploring, performing and practicing an alternative set of values, disrupting – as in earlier works – one system by performing another.

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432 Harvie, *Fair Play*, 3.

Despite her critical stance toward participatory interventions Harvie acknowledged that "we need some 'fellow feeling', some social sympathy, to check unreserved self-interest. We also need social engagement to sustain democracy, people's shared exercise of power."[433] The scooter project visibly generated a 'fellow feeling' amongst the different mobility scooter users, inviting social sympathy between the participants and from those witnessing the endeavour. Handing the floor, so to speak, of the De La Warr Pavilion to members of different local communities was an exercise in sharing power, and the 'race' with mobility scooters most explicitely shifted the usually powerless, 'disabled' citizens into pole position whilst allowing everyone in that group to lead all the others. The particular rules of engagement of the murmuration and deployment of the scooters empowered its participants and allowed them to show off their motors, their co-operation and their playfulness, exploring the potential of the scooters and its community of users, without needing anything other than what they themselves provided.

Harvie expressed concern, however, over the possibility that such participatory work becomes part of an "experience economy", which, according to Claire Bishop, co-opts the kind of work that has become known as relational aesthetic and has been advocated by Nicolas Bourriaud and others. Harvie contended that such work potentially

> stands to be not democratic and socially empowering, as Bourriaud would have it, but, instead, part of what Theodor Adorno scornfully called 'the culture industry', an entertainment market that offers its audiences no real power and actually deadens their awareness of the ways dominant economies enfold and exploit them.[434]

As suggested above, it is difficult to fully avoid these kinds of pitfalls, particularly when work has to satisfy the host institution, its funders and their organisational objectives. Nevertheless, work which is implicitly critical can mitigate against the culture industry. The works under discussion here, the race with mobility scooters, the

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433 Ibid., 2.
434 Ibid., 8.

race with buckets and the race of the garden gnomes, performed an expenditure that is disconnected from the ubiquitous concerns with productivity and outcome. People participated knowing exactly what they were doing and that nothing was to be gained in the conventional sense. The work thereby undermined the productivist modes which dominate the everyday. In addition, much like the Arte Povera and as discussed in Chapter 4, the different projects in *Slow Races* used sparing means to generate games and performances and to facilitate new experiences. The materials deployed were more or less borrowed from the everyday, i.e. the little buckets for carrying water and the poles around which people walked, the mobility scooters which were the participants' own or hired from a local hire service, and also most of clothes of the garden gnomes. The expenditure for materials for *Slow Races* was absolutely minimal. This approach was an extension of earlier performances like *Flush*, which used the local river water, *Composition of the Arbitrary* which measured the pulse of the performers, and *Extreme Ironing* which used either the autumn leaves or discarded newspapers. As discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to *Extreme Ironing*, this approach and the recycling of materials came out of a concern with a holistic, Bataillean ecology in which both expenditure and loss are regarded as essential and constitutive parts of a wider system, but which differentiates those from the enormous amounts of waste and redundancy that are produced, and justified, by the dominant modern economies. The 'low-key' approach to materials also supported the intention of the practice to sidestep the entertainment industry in order to avoid turning people into consumers. The games and facilitation in *Slow Races* deployed 'poor' means and offered alternative, sensorial engagements with the immediate environment, intensifying people's attention to the moment, rather than providing spectacles that invite passive forms of consumption.

The interventions of *Slow Races* were not "micro-utopias", to use Bourriaud's term, but real moments within a specific historical and architectural context.[435] The relation to context raises awareness in the way that Tate curator Jessica Morgan advocated in her introduction to a group exhibition entitled *Common Wealth* from 2003. Critical of Bourriaud's thesis she proposed:

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435 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), 31.

> What is missing from a theory of relational aesthetics based entirely on the social is an acknowledgement of the role of context, not merely as a source of reference in art, but as a determining force in the meaning of objects.[436]

In the course of this research I returned time and again to the question of context, and I wholeheartedly concur with Morgan's point of view. It is a way of understanding that also underpins Clément's oeuvre and her psychoanalytical discourse, as well as the structuralist, ethnographic debate of her predecessor Lévi- Strauss. The attention to context is embedded in the model of the musical syncope, which creates rhythm through the brief absences and delays, but whose overall rhythm is the context that informs every instant.

The interdependence of context and content also underlines that Bataille's vision of the artist as a sovereign, subjective being who operates outside of the means of production has little relevance. As Bataille himself acknowledged, artists may be drawn into the "narrow reality" of production and consumption, become servile and lose their subjectivity.[437] The notion of the artist as outsider was concurrent with the ideals of the early 20th century and cherished by the historical avant-gardes, but it is impossibly romantic from today's point of view when artists are considered to be the perfect, self-motivated entrepreneurial worker of the future.[438] In the 21st century the artist and the worker are collapsed into one and the same figure, and the artist's self-motivated mode of operation is adapted as a general standard across different industries to further increase productivity whilst tightening resources. Far from being able to extract oneself from the culture industries the artist can only use her/his awareness of context to inform the practice.

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436 Jessica Morgan, 'Introduction', in *Common Wealth,* ed. Jessica Morgan, (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 25.
437 Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 415.
438 See for example Pierre-Michel Menger, *Portrait de l'artiste en travailleur, Métamorphoses du capitalism* (Paris: Seuil, 2002); Jen Harvie, *Fair Play.*

All Human beings are born Useless and Equal in Uselessness

The speech by the General Assembly of Garden Gnomes constitutes the completion of the research process. It says what I wanted it to say and audiences listen intently, seemingly convinced by the garden gnome's expertise in the matter. After all, the she-gnome knows both the history of uselessness and what it feels like to be useless. Standing on a bucket also helps. The speech allows for a declaration of the intentions behind the work, and makes explicit my quest into that which renders us more human. The work is quite a departure from the ritualistic, movement-based, site-specific format of the other interventions: the gnome's bucket serves as a stage neatly framing the action, and the work can be presented in many different kinds of spaces. The speech has been performed in conferences and symposia, exhibitions and gallery spaces as well as at a cabaret night at the Cockpit Theatre in London.[439] The shifting in tone between academic discourse, mock declaration and theatrical presentation allows the work to be presented in different contexts while demonstrating the relevance of its material for a whole range of disciplines, arts practices and audiences. The speaker, a garden gnome figure, has emerged through a long process and now plays an important role in the practice. The figure allows for a certain deception in the work, whereby a light-hearted approach disguises a critique, by means of costume, visual poetry and humorous propositions. Patrick Laviolette has written about truth and deception in performative practices, arguing that deception is a necessary part of

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439 To date the speech has been performed at: Symposium Monica Ross, University of Brighton (8 March 2014); Flows, Performance Space, London (March 2014); Body Performance Festival, Bath Artists' Studios, Bath Spa (March 2014); Ludus Festival, Leeds University (April 2014); Performing Process: Sharing Practice, Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE), Coventry University (June 2014); Dear Serge, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill (July 2014); Labouring with no matter, Circus Street Market, Brighton (July 2014); Neoliberalism and Everyday Life, Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics, University of Brighton, (September 2014); Body and Space, Middlesex University London, (September 2014); SOS Performance Art Faction, Unit 7 Enclave, 50 Resolution Way, London (2/05/2015); Biennale Vogelfrei 2015, Symposium im Darmstadtium, Darmstadt Germany (11/07/2015); Voila Mixed Tape, Cockpit Theatre London (13/11/2015). See: http://www.ckappenberg.info/all-human-beings.

the formation of identities and historical ideas.[440] He quoted a passage from Nietzsche:

> We no longer believe that truth remains truth when it is unveiled, - we have lived enough to understand this …To-day it seems to us good form not to strip everything naked, not to be present at all things, not to desire to "know" all. *Tout comprendre c'est tout mépriser.*[441]

The speech is a declaration and reveals histories and motives, but it also plays with truth. Perhaps this is where the artist' real sovereignty lies, in the choice of language and image, in the capacity to veil the truth and to speak it nevertheless. I end the discussion here and hand over to the garden gnome for the last words.

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440 Patrick Laviolette, 'Where Difference Lies: Performative Metaphors of Truth, Deception and Placelessness in the Cornish Peninsula', in *Performance and Place.* eds. Leslie Hill and Helen Paris. (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 113.
441 Friedrich Nietzsche 'The Case of Wagner', in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche: Vol. 8*, ed. Oscar Levy, (London: T.N. Foulis, 1911), 82.

Epilogue

See Broadsheet

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Appendix

Schema of Performed Works 1 – 6

Performers:

Flush (2002)	Elgin Clausen Claudia Kappenberg
Composition of the Arbitrary (2004)	Nicola Collett Navraj Sidhu Fran Barbe Rainer Knupp Claudia Kappenberg
Extreme Ironing (2007)	Claudia Kappenberg
Extreme Ironing (2008)	Johanna Ronkko Chloe Ducharne Lori O'Regan Marina Tsartsara Claudia Kappenberg
Difference between one who knows and one who undergoes (2013)	Claudia Kappenberg
Slow Races (2014)	Andrew Barker, Kate Brown, Andrew Downs, Andrew James, Katy Pendlebury, Nic Sandiland, André Verissimo, Claudia Kappenberg, stewards and participants

Schema 1. *Flush, or the possibility of moving towards an impossible goal*,
Geneva City Centre 2002

<u>Audience facing proposition:</u>
On their journeys to and from work passers-by cross the river Rhone by walking over a small island and a low footbridge which connects the island with a road bridge that spans the river. On the footbridge they come across two women in black rubber skirts and fluorescent sleeves who carry buckets of water from one side of the bridge to the other whilst working in opposition to each other. At seemingly random intervals the two women halt their movements, freezing temporarily in the middle of the bridge holding their buckets.

<u>Materials</u>

2	performing bodies
dropping bucket into the river below	gesture 1
pulling bucket up and resting it on the railings	gesture 2
carrying bucket to the other side of the footbridge	gesture 3
pouring water out	gesture 4
lifting empty bucket up high	gesture 5
after every 5th round freezing on the middle of bridge	gesture 6
slow, sustained	pace
direct	direction
strong	effort
dropping, waiting, hauling up, carrying, pouring out, counting	name of activities
buckets (2), ropes (2), gloves (2 sets)	tool(s)
river water	materials
low footbridge in city centre	place
at 1pm, for 30min, over 3 days	duration
freezes within the work	pauses
sound of metal bucket dropping into the river	sound 1
sound of water being poured out	sound 2
city noises, cars, busses and trams	sound 3
sound of people in conversation walking over the bridge	sound 4
n/a	smells
n/a	miscellaneous

<u>Scope:</u>
SWOT Analysis
Strength: good fit with location
Weakness: n/a
Opportunity: adaptable to other situations and materials (ie leaves)
Threats: minor threat of bad weather

Impact on locality: none

Schema *Composition of the Arbitrary*, **London 2004**

Audience facing proposition:
The visitors are led into a darkened room of the gallery where they find a set of performers standing or sitting, holding their wrists or touching their necks, and making click sounds in different rhythmical patterns. Every performer has his/her own pattern. Eventually one performer claps and all fall silent. Everyone waits. Gradually the click sounds start again and new sound patterns emerge, and so on. The work offers an appearance and disappearance of patterns, with silences in between. Eventually the visitors are led out again, while the performers continue.

Materials

5	performing bodies
holding wrist	gesture 1
touching neck	gesture 2
making click sounds	gesture 3
-	gesture 4
-	gesture 5
=	gesture 6
variable	pace
none	direction
light	effort
standing, sitting, listening, clicking, changing places	name of activities
pillows	tools
own pulse	materials
gallery	place
30min	duration
variable	pauses
click sounds	sound 1
street noise	sound 2
people walking into the space/ out of the space	sound 3
-	sound 4
-	smells
n/a	miscellaneous

Scope:
SWOT Analysis
Strength: invites people to listen
Weakness: n/a
Opportunity: adaptable to other spaces and durations
Threats: none

Impact on locality: none

Schema *Extreme Ironing*, Darmstadt 2007

Audience facing proposition:
Visitors enter the garden and find a small greenhouse under a large tree with a woman inside
ironing autumn leaves. They can watch the activity through the door of the greenhouse or step
inside. Audiences may engage in conversation with the artist and may be informed that on the
last day of the exhibition all the ironed leaves will be redistributed around the tree from where
they came.

Materials

1	performing bodies
gathering autumn leaves in basket	gesture 1
picking up iron	gesture 2
selecting and picking up a leaf	gesture 3
moving iron over side A/ side B of the leaf	gesture 4
placing ironed leaf in basket	gesture 5
shaking baskets out in garden	gesture 6
slow, sustained	pace
reaching, circular motions, indirect	direction
light	effort
collecting, ironing, sorting, distributing, conversing	name of activities
iron, ironing board, baskets	tools
autumn leaves of varying sizes and from different trees	materials
temporary greenhouse	other
private garden	place
11-6pm, over nine days @ 6hrs = 54hrs	duration
intermittent	pauses
sound of hot iron on moist leaves	sound 1
sound of iron being placed on ironing board	sound 2
sound of people in conversation	sound 3
smell of hot leaves, variable depending on type of tree	smells
occasionally drinking tea	miscellaneous

Scope:
SWOT Analysis
Strength: good seasonal fit
Weakness: n/a
Opportunity: adaptable to other situations and materials (ie newspaper)
Threats: global warming adds a degree of unpredictability to the urban habitat

Impact on locality: none

Schema *Extreme Ironing*, Brighton Train Station 2008

Audience facing proposition:
Commuters arrive either by foot or by train and come across a set of ironing boards on the concorde of the train station below the announcement board. Transparent plastic waste bags with piles of discarded newspapers are lying on the floor next to the ironing boards. Women in shirts and white gloves are busy ironing the old newspapers, page by page. Working in pairs one is turning the paper and the other ironing. Another woman takes the ironed papers and hands them, warm and crisp, out to the passing public who take them onto the next set of trains.

Materials

5	performing bodies
2	station officers
collecting discarded newspapers from the trains	gesture 1 (officers)
taking paper out of the pastic waste bag	gesture 2 (women)
placing newspaper on ironing board	gesture 3 (women)
passing the iron over the pages	gesture 4 (women)
turning pages of the newspapers	gesture 5 (women)
handing ironed paper to waiting commuters	gesture 6 (women)
slow, sustained	pace
reaching, circular motions, indirect	direction
light	effort
collecting, ironing, turning pages, distributing	name of activities
iron (2), ironing board (2), transparent waste bags	tools
discarded newspapers from commuter trains	materials
train station concorde	place
11-5pm, for one day	duration
toilet breaks	pauses
sound of hot iron passing over the paper	sound 1
sound of iron being placed on ironing board	sound 2
train station noises, announcements and trains	sound 3
sound of people in conversation	sound 4
smell of warm newsprint and ink	smells
n/a	miscellaneous

Scope:
SWOT Analysis
Strength: good fit with location
Weakness: n/a
Opportunity: adaptable to other situations and materials (ie leaves)
Threats: minor threat of train strikes or traffic disruptions

Impact on locality: none

Schema *Difference between one who knows and one who undergoes*,
Darmstadt 2014

Audience facing proposition:
Visitors are given a map of a neigbourhood which highlights the exhibiting gardens. Walking from one property to another they find sculptures and installations within the established gardens. In one of the gardens the visitors come across a human garden gnome resting in amongst a set of tools, returning their looks and responding to questions. Otherwise the gnome does not engage in any activities.

Materials

1	performing bodies
nodding	gesture 1
-	gesture 2
-	gesture 3
-	gesture 4
-	gesture 5
-	gesture 6
sustained	pace
none	direction
none	effort
sitting, reclining, looking, listening, responding to questions	name of activities
bucket, wheelbarrow, bamboo stick, shovel etc	tools
none	materials
garden (x3)	place
6hrs, for 3 days	duration
the entire duration	pauses
birds	sound 1
wind	sound 2
cars passing	sound 3
people in conversation walking through the gardens	sound 4
earth, grass, flowers	smells
n/a	miscellaneous

Scope:
SWAT Analysis
Strength: good fit with location
Weakness: n/a
Opportunity: adaptable to other gardens, parks and public spaces
Threats: minor threat of bad weather

Impact on locality: none

Schema *Slow Races*, Bexhill 2014

Audience facing proposition:
Passers-by and visitors to the gallery and the café come across several projects. They find: 1) seven performers dressed as garden gnomes in different poses gradually with no clear objective migrating through the building; 2) a speech by a single garden gnome on the human right to uselessness; 3) a mixed group of mobility scooter users looping and swooping over one of the terraces and 4) the possibility to participate in a game with small plastic buckets filled to the brim with water, which need to be carried around a demarcated race course.

Materials

8 performers, 4 stewards, visitors and passers-by	performing bodies
variable (low race by seven garden gnomes)	gesture 1
holding little plastic pots (slow race with bucket)	gesture 2
steering (slow race with mobility scooters)	gesture 3
-	gesture 4
-	gesture 5
-	gesture 6
sustained	pace
various	direction
light	effort
stepping, sitting, lying, looking, listening, responding to questions, balancing, walking in slow motion, looping	name of activities
buckets, mobility scooters	tools
water, petrol	materials
gallery, corridors, staircases, café, terraces	place
1 day	duration
variable	pauses
waves	sound 1
wind	sound 2
music from other interventions at the DLWP	sound 3
sound of people in conversation	sound 4
café smells	smells
n/a	miscellaneous

Scope:
SWAT Analysis
Strength: good fit with location
Weakness: n/a
Opportunity: adaptable to other public buildings and terraces
Threats: minor threat of bad weather

Impact on locality: none