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IMMERSIVE THEATRE AS A STRATEGY FOR RAISING ECO-AWARENESS

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a
Master's Degree in
Culture Studies: Performance and Creativity

By

Hou Lam WONG

Faculty of Human Sciences

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Abstract

The failure of existing efforts in tackling environmental and man-made catastrophes reiterates the need for transformative understandings about eco-issues. However, the eco-problem is a massively and complexly distributed phenomenon, which needs to be localized for the public's consciousness before their perceptions about it and resilience against it can be mobilized. As such, this dissertation studies how immersive theatre can be used as a transformative strategy to raise eco-awareness. Reflecting on the theories and literatures in the fields of ecocriticism, performance studies and immersive theatre, and the working practices of current immersive performances, this study develops a relational model which situates the bodies of spectators at the collapsing aesthetic, territorial and anthropocentric boundaries in the eco-discourse. It argues that based on the affective and emancipating natures of immersive theatre, the tactics of creating intimate encounters in the performance, guiding spectators to perform reciprocal agencies, and allowing a capacity for weakness and negative feelings may culminate to both enhance the immersive experience of the spectators and open up a space for eco-awareness to emerge. These immersive tactics treat the bodies of the spectators as aesthetic sites of sensory exchanges and empathetic imaginations, from which personal connections and perceptual transformations may be enabled. Addressing intercorporeality and intersubjectivity, an eco-conscious immersive theatre may then collapse the boundaries between onlookers and stakeholders, human and non-human through highlighting one's immersiveness in both the theatre and the ecosphere. To exemplify the above, Rimini Protokoll's *World Climate Change Conference* (2014) and Riverbed Theatre's *Hypnosis* (2017) will be studied as the major cases of the dissertation. They will be analyzed with the guidance of knowledge from the fields of ecocriticism and immersive theatre, and concepts such as immersion, affect and emancipation.

Keywords

Immersive theatre, eco-awareness, intimacy, theatrical agency, weak theatre, intercorporeality, empathy, affect, emancipation.

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Introduction

The initiative of this study stems from the fatigue towards the repeating news and representations of climate emergency, and towards the failure of mitigating ecological problems in/with those representations. While the ineffectiveness of inter-governmental bodies to address climate change is disappointing, the impotence of the overflowing media representations is also wearing out people's attention to the topic. As such, based on my experience of participating immersive performances, I am motivated to look at how it may provide an alternative way to communicate ecological issues.

This initiative is also grounded on the intersection of the cultural framings of eco-issues, spectatorship and performance. Both the ontology of the climate change and the shift to a performing-spectatorship have fundamentally reshaped the human subjective since the last half of the 20th century. As much as human beings want to resolve the most pressing challenge of global warming, they also resort to embed themselves within eco-problems in the increasingly "addictive" (Kershaw 2007, 14) performance culture. I contend to start with briefly locating these broader contemporary contexts to understand their indications for this study.

Towards ecology and performance: our contemporary society

Eco-issues have entered the human discourse as scientific problems which need to be solved for the good of the planet. Mike Hulme ([2007] 2013) has made a thorough genealogy on the advent framing of climate change and how this framing impacts subsequent treatment in the following decades. According to him ([2007] 2013), the dominant framing of climate change was shaped mainly from 1985-1992. It frames climate change scientifically as a unitary globalized atmosphere, situates it as the centrepiece of policy and uses it to guide the institutionalization of inter-governmental regimes. The Villach Conference in November 1985 was the key moment when climate change was established as an object of natural sciences; since then, it has become the way to present ecological crises to the policy world (91). This framing has also led directly to the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1998, which "staked out the contours of climate change – almost trade-marked *Climate Change*™ one might say – which were to dominate the next two

decades” (Hulme [2007] 2013, 91). He continues with the impact on the upsurge of more governing bodies and protocols, including the Conference of Parties, which continues to meet annually in an attempt to combat CO2 emission and other climate issues (Hulme [2007] 2013, 91).

However, without another anchor of reference, this framing has only created a hegemonic and imposing understanding of eco-problems, one which is highly regulated and manipulated by science and politics as the benchmark perspective for future policies. This probably also explains why major proposals of eco-measures are not progressing effectively, as this early framing has put the social sciences and cultural perspectives aside. It is only later in the 2000’s (Hulme [2007] 2013, 91) that attempts to reconstruct the framing have given more attention to the locally relevant sociocultural impacts. This early framing has produced our current practises of generating eco-measures based on scientific predictions of future climate scenarios, but it has not prepared our cultures to be sensitive of eco-crises, even though, as Hulme ([2007] 2013) suggests, whether climate predictions “are read rhetorically or literally, they depend tenuously – at best – on ideas and possibilities of future cultural change” (91).

On the other hand, in the realm of culture, how the mode of spectatorship shifts from Guy Debord’s society of the spectacle (1967) to a society of “implicated spect-action” (Lavender 2016, 155), as a result of technological, communications and economic advances, has increasingly weakened our resilience and ability of reception. This new society is also a “society of performance” (Kershaw 2007, 12), and both concepts point to how human beings are now engaged in a permanent condition of performing themselves for a “diffused audience” (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 39), which is formed of all members of a society, including oneself. Lavender (2016) considers this shift as where a social member completes an event not through witnessing, but performing in it. However, whether this participation is liberating is doubted. “It folds the participant modally into the procedures” (155). While she feels engaged as a social member, she can also be just enjoying the visual affirmation of being a participant, as she can be incorporated in an unchanged conformity rather than an emancipation (156). What Kershaw (2007) terms as the “society of performance” is characterized by an addiction to perform which stems from the end of the 20th century, when

“every dimension of human exchange and experience is suffused by performance and gains a theatrical quality” (12). As he sees it, all human beings are integrated into an addictive global performance system resulted from a double bind. With a compulsive desire to stay in their current lifestyles, which are characterized by digital evolution and pleasures, human beings continue to perform the way the spectacle and implicated spectatorship shape their subjectivities, without realizing how their performances also perpetuate the ignorance of ecological problems such as “carbon addiction” (12), population problems such as “carrying capacity” (12) or psychological problem such as “envy, despair and greed” (13). This performance addiction has made people into “spectators of themselves as participants in an emergent culture (dis)order” (226). Deducing from the above, participations in our performance culture does not necessarily take us way from the spectacles. It continues the conforming witnessing of the spectacle by redistributing it as a form of performance. Within the society of spectacle, one needs to understand how it has replaced lived reality; whereas within the performance society, one needs to uncover how it has created a false lived reality and how one has performed it and perpetuated it.

The above conditions of our time have given shape to the founding problems of this study. Juxtaposing these scenarios together reflects that climate change is simultaneously shaped with scientific and political performance and ignored in our increasingly performative becoming. They reinforce our inert position in both mitigating and adapting to the unpredictable eco-crises. To mobilize this inert position, I agree with Hulme (2009)’s proposal that it is by “understanding the ways climate change connects with foundational human instincts of nostalgia, fear, pride and justice we open up a way of resituating culture and the human spirit at the centre of our understanding of climate” (42).

Research Question

To open up these sensorial and emotional connections, and disclose the ingrained human performance in the constitution of climate change demands a transformative strategy which is affective, in the broader Spinozist-Deleuzian sense of evoking corporeal intensities, and reflective, in the sense of experiencing compatible reciprocity. This strategy should also cultivate an awareness which parts from the dominating scientific framing and informs about

human's engagement with the more-than-human world. As such, I propose that immersive theatre may be considered to fulfil this function. With the aim to induce immersion, its scenography and settings are usually intended to arouse corporeal experience and visceral feelings. As an art form which depends on its spectators to co-construct the meaning-making process, it constantly invites its spectators to connect her performance in the theatre with that in life. As will be seen in the coming chapters, immersive theatre is an emerging field of studies, and the number of documented eco-conscious immersive performances is relatively small. However, scholars (Kershaw 2007, Machon 2013, Lavery 2016 b, Woynarski 2017, Kolesch 2019) have seen its potential as a captivating approach to not only incorporate eco-issues as its performance content but also heighten one's sense of interconnection within and beyond the theatre. Drawing from the above, this research aims to study how immersive theatre can be used as a strategy to raise eco-awareness.

The take on this research question is both combinatory and inclusive. It does not assume the research results as the only ways to achieve eco-awareness. It also does not assume immersive theatre as a more favourable way to raise eco-awareness than other strategies. Rather, it is intended to open up more creative (or not) solutions to address climate change. While immersion can be understood as both an experience intended and facilitated by theatre-makers, and an experience which emerges in the spectator's mind, this research question emphasizes more on how theatre-makers craft the performance to evoke such experience. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, few apparatus can readily measure, consolidate and translate audience experience, and therefore, spectator feedback and evaluation will not be included under the scope of this study.

Methodology

With an interpretive approach and a clear contextual intent, this dissertation is a theoretically-informed study which questions how current cultural framings of eco-issues engage with the complexities they engender, and from there, argues that immersive theatre can be a strategy to instigate reconsiderations of the status quo and raise eco-awareness. Reflecting on the theories and literatures in the fields of ecocriticism (most notably from Morton 2013, Kershaw 2007, Lavery 2016 a; 2016 b, Chakrabarty 2012, and Latour 2014), performance studies (Turner 1969; 1974b, Fischer-Lichte 2008, Carlson 2017, and Butler

[1998] 2008) and immersive theatre (Machon 2013, Frieze 2016, White 2016, Kolesch 2019), and the working practices of current immersive performances, this study develops a relational model which situates the bodies of spectators at the collapsing aesthetic, territorial and anthropocentric boundaries in the eco-discourse. This model inquires the potentiality of immersive theatre to address eco-issues with references to the mechanisms of affect (Massumi 2002; 2015) and emancipated spectatorship (Rancière 2009), and examines the capacities of various immersive tactics to generate eco-sensitive experiences. To exemplify the argument, the following performances will be analysed as the cases of the study.

The first case is Rimini Protokoll's *World Climate Change Conference* (2014). It was a large-scale performance engaging more than 650 spectators in a theatrical simulation of a global climate summit. Its connection with the climate topic was obvious and its format of delivery was laid bare as a simulation as its title suggested. It had also made explicit the relationship between climate summits and political performance and designed a complicated immersive setting to address the complicated tensions within. The second case is Riverbed Theatre's *Hypnosis* (2017). It was a tiny-scale performance with only one spectator in a confined environment. It did not explicitly relate to any topic but the state of hypnosis. It had designed an immersive setting which was intended to draw the spectator into her subconscious through visceral stimulations, and let her discover her own feelings and connections with the ecosphere if only that was her association. As will be discussed in more details in Chapter 4, these performances are chosen for a number of different reasons, but one significant reason is that they have both been recorded and edited into substantially comprehensive videos and the videos are publicised online, so that these online videos can be used as the objects of study in this dissertation and a mutual reference between the reader and the analyst. Another significant reason the cases are chosen stems from my personal experience with them. I have participated in *Hypnosis* (2017) myself as a spectator and attended a lecture in which *World Climate Change Conference* (2014) was introduced by one of its creators. As such, the essences of the performances may be captured better with a deeper understanding of their intents and operations.

My different observer/participant positions and the very different formats of these performances also lead me to adopt slightly different but compatible methods of analysis for each of the cases. Without participating in *World Climate Change Conference* (2014), I will

use its official online video recording as the only object of study. From a third eye's perspective, excerpts of relevant scenes in this one-hour long video will be highlighted, and analysed with the abovementioned conceptual model developed based on the tactics and mechanisms of immersive theatre. As the only spectator in the instance of *Hypnosis* (2017) I participated in, I will adopt the "Spectator-Participation-as-Research (SPaR)" approach (Heddon et al. 2012, 122) to analyse it. With this approach, the analysis will be made also upon the analyst's first-hand account of her own participatory experience, which serves as empirical data alongside the video recording, and essentially enhances the analysis of a singular-perspective immersive experience. As will be explained in Chapter 4, the methods of analysis adopted are meant to be an inclusive collaboration of empirical spectatorship and critical interpretation, through which, I contend, will demonstrate how an immersive experience may come to be understood as a significant perception-transforming factor.

Before going into the structure of this dissertation, I want to clarify the applications of some frequently used terms in this study, which serve to align with the openness embodied by immersive theatre. First, while *immersive theatre* connotes an immersive event in a theatrical setting and relationality, which applies to the two performance cases, *immersive performance* is also used interchangeably with it to reflect the essentially unrestrained ways of creating an immersive production, regardless of its theatrical specifications. Second, *spectators*, *participants*, and *audience* are also used interchangeably to designate those who go to 'spectate' and participate in the performance. If the binaries of active/passive spectatorship has been "unhelpful" (Bishop 2012, 8) in reflecting this era of blooming live performances, spectatorship should be newly defined and qualified with interactivity as Oddey and White suggest (2009, 13). The acts of spectating and audiencing "not only require listening, but both looking and observation, action and integrations, and interactivity" (Oddey and White 2009, 12). Thus, *spectators*, *participants*, and *audience* all take on their enriched meanings here and pertain to designate the roles of performing spectators, not distant witnesses, in an immersive performance.

Structure

This dissertation is organized into four chapters. Together, they manifest a process-oriented research pattern and gradually develop my conception of a pro-ecological aesthetic.

Chapter 1 contextualizes the eco-problem as a cultural problem. It questions the paradoxical discrepancy between the increasingly alarming scientific warnings about climate change and the stagnant public responsiveness to it. With reference to the scholarship of ecocriticism, it introduces the major eco-critical concerns which should be “countervisualised” (Mirzoeff 2014) to mobilize one’s eco-responses. The chapter closes with the contextualization of the budding field of eco-related performances. Indicative of the need for felt experience to understand climate change, it establishes immersive theatre as a possible solution to productively transform the communicative barrier of eco-issues.

Departing from the fundamental literature on performance studies, including Fischer-Lichte (2008)’s theorization on the transformative power of performances, Chapter 2 continues to explore the generative potentials of immersive theatre. Through looking at its genealogy, design and operations, and tracing the emergence of immersive experience, the chapter calls on theatrical immersion to reflect one’s embeddedness in eco-relations and create “anti-structures” (Turner 1974 b) in the spectators’ minds.

Founded on the propositions deduced from Chapter 1 and 2, Chapter 3 develops a conceptual model of body relationality to examine the potency of immersive theatre to raise eco-awareness. Informed by the concepts of affect (Massumi 2002; 2015) and emancipated spectatorship (Rancière 2009), this model suggests how immersive performance can inquire into eco-issues through crafting a space of empathetic exchange (Thompson 2001) and self-transcendence, where the intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty 1968) shared among the spectators and the ecosphere is highlighted. The chapter sets forth three immersive tactics to exemplify this inquiry - inducing reflections through intimate encounters, experimenting on reciprocal agencies, and generating capacities for weakness and negative feelings, which together demonstrate how eco-awareness can be raised at the practical level.

In Chapter 4, the two cases, Rimini Protokoll’s *World Climate Change Conference* (2014) and Riverbed Theatre’s *Hypnosis* (2017) will be analysed based on the conceptual model delivered in Chapter 3. The analyses will demonstrate how the cases generated their own immersive contexts and how they employed the immersive tactics differently to achieve an

eco-conscious effect. While the former emphasizes on the use of audience agencies to activate spectator reflections on the socio-political tensions behind climate change, the latter highlights the use of intimate encounters to situate its spectator into the cosmic relationships and unbalanced agencies between human and non-human. Nonetheless, both of them are observed to have taken an affective and non-coercive approach, and have potentially animated the spectator's personal awareness about the multi-faceted eco-issues.

1. Ecological Problem as a Cultural Problem

The urgency to comprehend and tackle ecological issues has almost become a condition of our being in the past few decades. Complicated by the blooming of political agendas and scientific projects derived for ecological causes and all sorts of coverage on social media, ecological problems have never been represented and mediated as much and frequently in front of the public. However, as much as they are essential heuristic devices to apprehend eco-problems, the significance of ecology-related ideas such as *climate change* and *Anthropocene* seems to be slipping away from the public discourse, loaded in them potentials of being objectified as catchphrases. This seeming gap between the representation and realization of eco-problems calls the current discourse of ecology into question. This chapter is a discussion which speaks to the need of problematizing the communication of eco-problems through the cultural domain. By capturing the inefficiencies in the rhetoric of eco-messages to the public and discussing the discursive concerns of eco-critics, I propose that immersive theatre may be used to bridge the communication gap and create new imagination about eco-relationships, an essential condition from which eco-awareness may emerge.

1.1. Interrogating the ecological problem

Danish filmmaker Nina Holmgren recently created a short film *I Want You To Panic*¹ for the special film program *Survival Season* curated by NOWNESS, a digital art and lifestyle video channel online, as an artistic response to climate change. The film depicts a family oblivious to a fire which is gradually burning down their home. They are being occupied by personal interests such as tanning and weight-lifting, and ignoring the fire right by the window of their home, even if smoke is running everywhere around them. Video and audio clips of Greta Thunberg and Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, the two biggest teenage eco-activists, pleading for climate change are also embedded into the short film, playing at times in the background with no one watching and listening. At the end of the film, calls for action made by Thunberg and Martinez to revert environmental damages are reiterated as texts on screen. Holmgren, the director, indicated, “Human passivity is the core issue of climate change” (Holmgren

¹ The video can be viewed online at: Holmgren, Nina (2019, June 3), “I Want You to Panic”, *Nowness*. Retrieved from <https://www.nowness.com/seasons/survival-season/i-want-you-to-panic-nina-holmgren> (accessed June 30, 2019).

2019). Inspired by Thunberg's 2019 plea, in which she said, "I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is" (Thunberg 2019), the film is an alarming work to remind the audience their numbness towards the eco-crises we are already deeply entangled in. It also fully captures the paradox of our time – the more urgent is the need to tackle the eco-problem, the more normalized and fleeting their representations are, which perpetuates the abovementioned "human passivity" (Holmgren 2019) towards any call for eco-actions.

1.1.1. Re/De-ceptions of eco-issues: a paradox

A number of scholars have attempted to account for this indifference of reception in a number of ways. Psychologist Per Espen Stoknes (2015) sees this as a result of what he termed the "psychological climate paradox" (3). It documents the discrepancy between how climate-related scientific facts are getting more alarming each year and how people are not responding to those facts, which is caused by a cognitive dissonance between personal practices and the difficulty to contextualize and cope with scientific data, such as those about carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emission. In other words, people are overwhelmed by the rapidly developing climate debate. Cultural scholar Paulo de Medeiros (2015) frames this within the catastrophe culture, putting the indifference as "a whole generation numb" (23) rendered by media coverage which is incompatible to represent the severeness of catastrophes. Media, according to him, also "lulls us into docility and acceptance of a catastrophe" (25) by showing disasters happening far-away from the viewers as a form of escapism from their own crises. He also blames the many catastrophe films for normalizing the appearance of disasters and casting a falsely resurrecting future after every instantiation of catastrophe. The resistance to acknowledging eco-problems, through his lens, has become "not only as an event but also as a form of culture in itself" (27). Isabel Gil (2015) contends that "the naturalization of risk as a discourse" (49) has created resistance towards catastrophes. In between the positions of "perceiving disaster as a trigger for cultural and social action and the numbing power of devastation, is the spectator disaster constructed" (Gil 2015, 49). Theatre scholar Jeanne Tiehen (2017), following Husserlian phenomenology and media theorist Douglas Rushkoff (2013), ties this numbness with the idea of presentism, stating that many current cultural operations encourage an attitude which sees the present as

what matters, and thus processing a detailed picture of climate change for the future is made even more difficult, especially because climate change is not a stable phenomenon to be measured by our past experience. According to her, we are enmeshed in a distracted present in which other stimuli, such as pop culture events, may take over the statistics about climate change and become an obstacle to think ahead. Philosophy scholar Ted Stolze (2018) compares the indifference towards eco-problems with scepticism about climate change and terms it “climate stoicism” (319), an attitude which he regards as gradually replacing climate denialism. It is an attitude that “dangerous climate change must be accepted as an external force beyond human control” (319), and human beings can only cope with it instead of acting to resolve it. Ecology scholar Jad Jagodnizinski (2018) sees the indifference as a result of an alterity generated by geopolitical strategies. Following Paul Virillio’s cinematic derealization (1989) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivaks’ idea of distant planetarity (2003), he suggests that the earth has become a distant object of contemplation and manipulation as it is always presented as a manageable object, such as being a miniature of itself in pictures distributed by NASA or as a zoomable globe in online maps (Jagodnizinski 2018, 46-47). As have observed by these scholars, current attentions to eco-problems have somehow been invaded. Eco-problems have been casted as distant in both time and space; the public is not affected nor exposed enough to grasp its extensiveness in scope and complexity in influences.

The studies from these scholars certainly do not exhaust the list of depictions about current receptions of ecological issues. However, I contend that their ideas have already pointed to two central directions. First, the problem of representing ecological issues in our culture does not situate only in its partiality and selectiveness, which causes incomplete deliveries and receptions of their scopes and scales, it also induces reluctance to understand eco-crises and accept them as consequential existence. This is a self-deceptive mentality derived to envelope oneself within a momentary sense of security. As a result, our current communicative practices of disseminating eco-related information are potentially both showing and forming deceptions in our culture. Second, this ecological/cultural problem is also a problem of lack of affect, as if the majority of the public are sensually immune from eco-issues. In order to tackle it, a more affective approach, in the broader Spinozist-Deleuzian sense of evoking the capacity and power of bodies to act or transform, should also be taken into account for a strategy to raise eco-awareness.

1.1.2. Barriers in communicating eco-issues

Joost Raessens (2019), a theorist of green media, aims to counter the above communication paradox through reframing eco-issues with new rhetorical strategies and affective media. In his approach of eco-game design, he identifies three causes to the failing reception of eco-messages which he terms communicative barriers. According to him, “[t]hree barriers might cause conventional climate communication to lead to a state of denial. The first barrier arises when global warming is framed as being distant in space and time [...] The second barrier arises when global warming is framed as a doom scenario, an apocalyptic-movie mode without any thinkable practical solutions, which is depressing and generates the desire to avoid the topic altogether [...] The third barrier arises when global warming is framed in such a way that it is not compatible with our values or our sense of identity” (96). Raessens (2019) suggests that these communicative barriers can be transformed into productive solutions correspondingly through reframing eco-issues as immediate, receptive attitudes as positive and eco-changes as feasible (97). Applying these rhetorical strategies in the story of an eco-related video game may lead players to feel more motivated to understand ecology.

Meanwhile, in addition to Raessens (2019)’ three communicative barriers above, I propose two more observed barriers to add to the list - the fourth barrier arises when eco-issues are communicated in a comparatively less affective way when juxtaposed to other media stimuli, which causes a lack of interest in a lasting engagement with the communication. The fifth barrier arises when current communication skips the visualization of certain part of the ecological discourse easily, such as the less disseminated information on the network of interrelationships between eco-problems and geopolitics, and leads to a rigid and superficial understanding of the problem. Eco-issues can be better contextualized only if even the more abstract and complex ecological interrelatedness are made visceral and comprehensible. Then, I suggest that the solution to the fourth barrier lies largely on the form of mediation used while that of the fifth on countervisualising (Mirzoeff 2014, 226) certain underrepresented parts of the current eco-discourse. Although different approaches to communicate eco-issues may employ a different selection of solutions, these rhetorical, formal and discursive orientations lead me to look at the potentials of performances in shaking the grounds of the current eco-narratives and advocating eco-changes. In the coming

section, I will first explore the discursive orientation through looking at the current eco-narratives against the backdrop of ecocriticism.

1.2. Ecocriticism - an ecological turn of thinking

Looking again at the short film *I Want You To Panic*, in addition to depicting the communicative paradox mentioned in the above section, sarcastic portrayals of capitalistic and anthropocentric ideas are also embedded into it to add levels to the storyline. For example, the juxtaposition of a slim teenager lifting weight for muscle building and a big man working out to lose fat, and a fat boy drinking endlessly spilling milk, bring the problems of overproduction and overconsumption to the forefront. Also in the film is a boy playing around his supernatural power to stick metal spoons and coins onto his naked body, implying the high amount of radiation human beings are already exposed to. These images are quirky in their appearances, and will make sense only if the fabric of ecology are specified for our culture. To contemplate these phenomenon and tackle them, calling for general environmental-friendly actions, such as signing petitions or presenting science data to the public, do not serve the purpose adequately, especially because environmental destructions are emergent and difficult to be localized immediately. There exist certain discursive inadequacies which should be made more visible and visceral to the public in order to develop an attitude compatible for initiating actions. From the last half of the previous century, increasing scholars, ecologists and artists have tried to bring such vision into their researches and brought forth an interdisciplinary field of studies called *ecocriticism*. They have contributed to the emergence of an ecological turn of thinking, in hope of developing a new cultural fabric which will bring fundamental eco-changes. Their studies have posited key concerns about the ecological predicament, and should be addressed to a greater extent if ecological issues are to be communicated more effectively.

Ecocriticism originates from the study of nature in literary studies. Early eco-related criticism can be traced back to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1963). It is one of the fundamental literature which made a sociopolitical enquiry through exposing a normalized ecological problem to the public. Carson translated her scientific research of harmful DDT and pesticides into the public discourse, brought cultural attention to the inaccessible

scientific object and achieved a revision of the environmental policies in the United States. Her work has become the cornerstone of ecocritical narratives. Academically, the term *ecocriticism* was first coined by William Rueckert (1978) “to develop an ecological poetics by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature” (73). In line with this, when defining the early tasks of ecocriticism, performance and ecology scholars Wendy Arons and Theresa May (2012) specify two applications of the subject, which are either “analysis of the depiction or figuration of nature and the land in ‘canonical’ works of fiction”(3), or “studies of nature writing” (3). Pioneer of ecocriticism, Lawrence Buell (2005), loosely categorizes this interest of the nature in literary writings as first-wave ecocriticism (7).

The field of ecocriticism continued to bloom with more cultural significance. Literature and environment scholar Cheryll Glotfelty, in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), defines ecocriticism more broadly as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty 1996, xix). Nature writer and eco-critic Richard Kerridge (1998) suggests that, “the eco-critic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces” (5). Sustainability scholar Greg Garrard (2004) also defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (5). These broader cultural perspectives constitute what Buell (2005) loosely considers as the more sociocentric second-wave ecocriticism (8), which includes “queer, deconstructionist, and postcolonial varieties” (Garrard 2014, 2), and extends the reach of environmentalism to metaphysics, gender, racial politics and colonial and neocolonial relationships. The current field of ecocriticism has also been extended to the studies of places (e.g., Foucault 1984; Agué 1992; Buell 2001), urbanicity (e.g., Berleant 1992; De Certeau 1993), catastrophe culture (e.g., Oliver-Smith 2004; Holm 2012; Gil and Wulf 2015), technology (e.g., Virilio 2009) and more, which may align with what eco-critic Scott Slovic (2014), following Buell (2005), proposes as the third wave of ecocriticism (4), reflecting the

increasing aspects of life ecology is seen to intertwine with, in relation to concepts such as cosmopolitanism, materialism, posthumanism and activism, of which the influences are being increasingly experienced today. For the purpose of this study, three main concerns discussed in this ecological turn of thinking will be encapsulated in the following, with the latter two following from the first, i.e., eco-problem as a product of anthropocentrism, as a hyperobject, and as a sociopolitical wrestling. To reach a more effective communication of eco-issues, I argue that addressing these discursive topics in addition to the rhetorical concerns already discussed in section 1.1. may help to contextualize eco-problems more concretely.

1.2.1. Eco-problem as a product of Anthropocentrism

Human actions have arguably unleashed a coming sixth mass extinction (Ripple et al. 2017, 1026) of our biosphere and, although geologist and environmentalist share different views on the relevant time scales, our geological epoch, Holocene, is said to have already been taken over by the Anthropocene. The concept of Anthropocene was first popularized by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000 to describe the “human-dominated, geological epoch” (Crutzen 2002, 23) which could have been started in the late eighteenth century, and succeeded by the rapidly multiplying human activities developed notably as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Its generic term *anthropos*, which means *men* in Greek, identifies the responsibility of human agency in environmental degradation on one hand, and implies how human beings have constructed a world of human-centred dualisms on the other. Raymond Williams (1980) indicates that nature is a contingent concept largely influenced by human and human history. Environmental historian William Cronon (1996) also sees wilderness as a cultural construct made separate from human after the Industrial Revolution. Binaries such as culture/nature, which serves as a founding ground of the humanities, and production/resources, which is the backbone drive of human economies, have pointed to the ultimate dichotomy in human history – human/the others.

Although *Anthropocene* has been criticized as a buzzword ever since it was popularized (Castree, 2019: 25), it nevertheless serves as a heuristic device which opens up an understanding of the network of interrelations among all entities in the world, both

geologically and politically. Dipesh Chakrabarty advocates the use of the Anthropocene concept as an analytic frame. In his famous “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” (2009), he sees climate change as a point where the distinction between human history and geological history collapses. According to him, the historical understanding of human existence no longer make sense of the climate change, and the concept of Anthropocene “has brought into view certain other conditions for the existence of life in the human form that have no intrinsic connection to the logics of capitalist, nationalist, or socialist identities” (217). That being said, it is through reframing the imaginations of human beings as a global species, who have had exerted geological agency collectively, that a more complete picture of climate change will be reflected for human beings. Similarly, Eileen Crist, in response to how human beings have entitled themselves supremacy in this world, requests a re-evaluation of the current human-centric culture. She proposes that the dominant culture has not adequately reflected human’s indifference towards non-human and that “our conceit has made us so imagination-poor that we cannot fathom that future people, disabused perhaps of our own species-small-mindedness, will desire to live in a world rich in kinds of beings and kinds of places” (Crist 2012, 150). She considers the concept of Anthropocene as a change in nomenclature for positive changes in ecology but also remarked how risks are incurred in employing increasing technological and managerial attempts in tackling eco-crises, which are only organizing the perceptions of the world with yet another set of human-centred standards (Crist 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to go to the root and “reimagine the human in a register that no longer identifies human greatness with dominance within the ecosphere and domination over nonhumans” (Crist 2018, 1243). As deduced from these scholars, in order to reimagine and understand eco-problems, human beings have to first acknowledge our role as the key agent of environmental damages, that the domination over non-human is already entrenched in our discourse, and that the complex picture of climate change is too elusive for human beings to grasp completely.

1.2.2. Eco-problem as a hyperobject

Closely related to the above idea of anthropocentrism is another major concern of ecocritics, i.e., the need to understand the ecology as a deep interconnectedness among entities in the world of which the magnitude and influence are beyond the human capacity to

conceive. Philosopher Timothy Morton (2013) conceptualizes eco-crises in relation to this interconnectedness, calling it a *hyperobject*, which is ubiquitous, inescapable and non-localizable, always working in a contingent manner. Climate change and nuclear radiation are instances of a hyperobject, although existing everywhere, they can only be experienced when its manifestations, such as floods and cancer, happen. In other words, the non-measurable impacts of human damages are all encompassing but invisible at the same time, demonstrating an asymmetry between what is framed and felt by human beings and what is actually engulfing human beings. In a similar vein, an asymmetry may also be observed in the murky idea of human collective when considering its role as the agent of environmental damages. As Latour (2011) contends, the actor in Anthropocene is “not a character that can be thought, sized up, or measured. You never meet him or her. It is not even the human race taken *in toto*, since the perpetrator is only a part of the human race, the rich and the wealthy, a group that have no definite shape, nor limit and certainly no political representation” (4).

The ideas of immeasurable vastness and inclusivity in *hyperobject* also echo with Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of cosmology and immanence in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), about which all entities in the universe are interconnected in a molecular sense without spatial and temporal boundaries. Starting with the ideas of multiplicity and heterogeneity from an analogy of rhizome, they develop a geo-philosophy to bring “stratification” (2005, 40) into question, which is the inevitable, anthropocentric act of nomenclature “beneficial in many respects and unfortunate in many others” (2005, 40). From a more cosmic angle, they see the earth as a deterritorialized and fluid body without organs, a body which is “permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles” (2005, 40), a world which always flees the “judgements of God” (2005, 40), which is referring to the perception of the human subject. As much as human beings want to revert or get away with the eco-problems we are causing, we are also at a loss of strategies to do so if we do not acknowledge how unknowingly entangled we are within what theatre ecologist Baz Kershaw (2007) terms “the mutual vulnerability” (238) with other entities in the world. It is through understanding the “non-human in the human” (Kershaw 2007, 238) self-consciously that human beings can continuously participate in the vast ecology. In Morton (2013)’s words,

one may have to learn how not to be modern² (14).

1.2.3. Eco-problem as sociopolitical wrestling

Ecology has always been a matter of integral politics, not only in between human and the non-human, but also among nations, among regions and among people. Félix Guattari, in his manifesto for eco-revolution, *Three Ecologies* ([1989] 2008), extends the definition of ecology to include sociopolitical relations alongside the anthropocentric and ecological concerns discussed above. He forms an eco-philosophy suggesting that three interconnected ecologies exist - the environmental, the social and the mental. He argues that it is through creating changes at all three networks, specifically through breaking away from capitalistic desires at the mental level, that an eco-equilibrium can be achieved. He contends that “Integrated World Capitalism” (21) is a direct cause of climate change and associates it with how eco-damages, social problems such as unemployment, gentrification, oppressive marginalization, and physic problems such as “loneliness, boredom, anxiety and neurosis” (20) happen alongside one another. The emergences of these problems are also intensified by the parallel breakdown of social bonds and human subjectivity caused by the machinic effects of technological advances, mass media, and pop culture. It is through thinking transversally among the three networks and cultivating a common ground where the different voices and the marginalized are also included for collective considerations that equity on earth can be achieved.

Scholars have also been documenting more specific sociopolitical enquiries in relation to ecology. For example, Jagodzinski (2018) remarks that the Anthropocene is a direct result of colonialization during European’s Enlightenment period, and has been evolving together with the colonialist mentality appearing in the form of progressive capitalism and neo-liberalism nowadays (2). He also suggests that, under the current technologically driven

² Morton wrote, “Unlike Latour then, although I share many of his basic philosophical concerns, I believe that we have been modern, and that we are only just learning how not to be” (2013, 14). Nonetheless, within the frame of ecology, I contend that the difference between Morton and Latour’s concerns ([1991]1993) on the constitution of modernity is more rhetorical than epistemological. At the root of their concerns, they both see the modern division of nature and culture as an anthropocentric construct. Thus, they both call for a more eco-centric perspective and look for a non-humancentric constitution, as exemplified in what Latour called “the Parliament of Things” ([1991]1993, 142).

capitalistic world, the narrative of Anthropocene may be better described as “Capitalocene” or “Technocene” (5). Carolyn Merchant (1993) and Ariel Salleh (2018) study ecology with a feminist approach. They discuss how the otherness and the disorder of nature are always compared with the female gender, which continues to posit constraints on the socio-cultural formation of gender identity. Within the framework of eco-racism, scholars such as Robert Bullard (2001) and Peter Mohai (2008) use the case of waste trade to document local environmental injustice in the United States to global climate injustice in our world. They criticize that worldwide environmental policy-making has not considered enough how certain races and classes have always been made more exposed to pollution and vulnerable to environmental crises. Massumi (2011), on the other hand, comments on how collective eco-action is restrained as the lines between natural disaster, terrorism, national security apparatus and military are blurred, and such blurring has been made legitimate through affective media representations which often portrays distant, irrelevant fears and individual heroism. Studies from the scholars above do not cover the vast spectrum of events going under this sociopolitical concern, but they have all demonstrated how eco-issues are never standalone problems but engendered with sociopolitical inequity. In the words of Raymond Bryant and Sinéad Bailey, key political ecologists who wrote the fundamental *Third World Political Ecology* (1997), “the role of politics in shaping ecology is much greater today than in the past as a result of rapid social and technological changes that render problematic the idea of a ‘natural’ environment” (5). Understanding the political in the ecological is thus quintessential. While politics is the greatest force in controlling the biosphere, it is also where human beings are most able to execute large-scale, radical and systematic changes.

The three discursive concerns above represent the major criticism of our current eco-narratives within this ecological turn of thinking. Getting across such concerns to the public may help to raise their eco-sensitivity. However, the assumed position of the public’s insensitivity does not mean putting them under responsibilities of guilt and actions abruptly. As Latour ([2015] 2017) minds, “it is useless for the ecologically motivated activist to try shaming the ordinary citizen for not thinking globally enough, for not having a feel for the Earth as such. No one sees the Earth globally and no one sees an ecological system from Nowhere” (26). Forcing shame and guilt onto individual public member based on selective scientific data without being able to provide them a bigger picture of the ecological problem

suggests more of a moral burden than actual eco-actions. In this case, those in the know may consider to help bridge the discursive dissonance between the communication and reception of ecological information through connecting the public with these eco-concerns, and translating these concerns into more tangible and visceral ideas for comprehension.

1.3. Performance as a hammer to shape eco-awareness

1.3.1. Art as an affective strategy

Reframing the eco-discourse rhetorically in Section 1.1 and educating the eco-concerns in Section 1.2 to the public require effective forms for mediation. If politics and science alone do not carry out this mediation sufficiently, as reviewed from the discussions about, art may play a role to fulfil the task. Connecting eco-conscious practices with art, Guattari ([1989] 2008) sees art as a praxic strategy which is constantly innovative and contingent. Unlike politics and scientific data, it allows itself to capture the always emerging and integral ecology, and open up imaginations of eco-problems by auto-constructing theories and practices (37). Similarly, Nicholas Mirzoeff (2014) relates the Anthropocene with aesthetics, in Rancière's ([2004] 2011) sense of how networks of despositifs organized the human sensorium and common sense of the world. Mirzoeff (2014) suggests that the "Anthropocene is so built into our senses that it determines our perceptions, hence it is aesthetic" (223). Therefore, he calls for a countervisualisation of what is and how it is hidden or opaque aesthetically in history, in an attempt to claim the right to look and decolonize (230) the human sensorium from the "Anthropocene-aesthetic-capitalist complex of modern visibility" (213). Morton (2013) specifies this sensorium-changing role of arts for its affective potentials. He contends that art is able to change attitudes and human consciousness because it is "an affective experience that would existentially and politically bind them [human beings] to hyperobjects, to care for them. We need art that does not make people think (we have quite enough environmental art that does that), but rather that walks them through an inner space that is hard to traverse." (184). Latour (2016), relating the idea of aesthetics also to the more affective sense of what renders one sensitive to something new, proposes to conflate the aesthetics of science, politics and art to publicly render human sensitive to the New Climatic Regime. The aesthetics of art can help to raise sensitivity towards the

“contradictions, complexities, novelty and size of the entanglement of humans and non-humans” (Latour 2016). As perceived by these scholars, the emergent and affective qualities of art seem to make itself a possible strategy to redistribute the weaving of fabrics (Ranci re 2010) around the eco-discourse and, thus, to raise eco-awareness.

Among artists, a movement also emerged in the 1960’s to catalyse art expressions with reflective functions for environmental awareness. Brady (2007), Wallen (2012), and Marks (2017) have made detailed reviews on how the 1960’s paradigm shifts in both the artistic and sociopolitical arenas had challenged established institutions and derived a variety of eco-art forms, such as social sculpture, activist art, walking works etc. The diversity of works and strategies have created a wide range of definitions for eco-art but Marks (2017) deduces one that serves all – it is “not based on the work itself, but on the rationale behind the work – to create environmental awareness, discussions and/or solve environment problems” (31). In a world which is more and more characterized by eco-crises, eco-art, according to Gablik (1992) and Wallen (2012), is a quest for a new cultural representation. This new representation will be able to transform modern individualistic human relationships into intersubjective relationships in which the “others” coexist with human. Art, as an eco-inquiry, aims to continuously problematize our anthropocentric perspective and management of the biosphere.

1.3.2. Emerging role of performances in ecocriticism

Although eco-arts have been studied integrally and an increasing number of performances with environmental themes are produced, the field of environmental performances is still undertheorized (Arons and May 2012, 2; Woynarski 2017, 73) and the role of theatre in ecocriticism is minor when compared with other disciplines (Lavery 2016 b, 230). Arons and May, in their first anthology of the field, *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (2012) observe that “[t]he growth of interest in ecocriticism among literary scholars has only just begun to spark a similar interest in the subject among their colleagues in theatre departments” (2) and propose two reasons for it. Materially, the emergence of the ecocritical wave coincided with the blooming of performance studies, so it took time for both fields to develop necessary conditions before collaborations would be plausible. Ontologically, theatre arts,

in the western sense, have been regarded as the activity which separates human from nature. As a result, performance and ecology do not easily share space together. Nonetheless, scholars taking up the field such as Una Chaudhuri, Downing Cless, Bonnie Marranca, Wendy Arons, Theresa J May, Deirdre Heddon, Sally Mackey, Baz Kershaw, Carl Lavery and Lisa Woynarksi, have been advocating an interdisciplinary study of performance and ecology for its eco-critical potentials.

Erika Munk's 1994 plea for an eco-theatrical approach to reinterpret ecology in the special issue of the American Journal *Theatre* is one of the earliest quests for scholarly responses to the field. Una Chaudhuri (1994) writes in the same issue a pioneering text "There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake: Toward an Ecological Theatre" to advance the theorization of ecology and theatre. Drawing from works of Ibsen and Chekhov, she observes the paradox of using the humanist theatre to define ecology, and states that to use ecology as a metaphor in a humanist fashion in theatre is once again underscoring the separation between human and nature. She explains, "ecological victory will require a transvaluation so profound as to be nearly unimaginable at present. And in this the arts and humanities – including the theatre – must play a role" (Chaudhuri 1994, 25). Thus, she calls for a breakaway from conventional theatre which treats the nature as a primary source of symbolism and which perpetuates the "anti-ecological" (24) theatre aesthetics which stems from nineteenth-century humanism. Una Chaudhuri (1995, 2014) later expands this ecocentric approach to her studies on the interrelationship among theatre, landscape and animals, and her quest for an ecocentric theatre sets the tone for coming scholars to inquire, critique and problematize ecological issues in and through theatre .

Bonnie Marranca, another early scholar bridging ecology and theatre, has a different take on using nature metaphors in performance. Although she shares the same vision with Una Chaudhuri on an ecocentric view and has proposed a linkage between landscape and theatre studies, she contends in her *Ecologies of Theatre* (1996) that "elements in a landscape – people, objects, or nature – only become meaningful to one when they are looked on" (xvi). In this way, she suggests that natural metaphors, which Chaudhuri opposes, are important drives in the discussion of both performance and ecologies. She sees a productive usage of natural metaphors to embrace "multiplicity of species and languages in a work" (xvi) and

has developed an ecological analysis of performance.

In line with Una Chaudhuri, theatre scholar and director Downing Cless (1996) observes that mainstream theatre in the United States was once stuck in the humanist/ecological paradox. He sees a turning point only in the 1990's when American grassroots theatres started inviting participatory and environmental elements in their practices and the beginning of an 'eco-theatre' movement emerged (79). However, unlike Chaudhuri (1994), and drawing from canonical texts such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Downing Cless suggests in his *Ecology And Environment In European Drama* (2010) that the humanist tradition does not necessarily put all theatrical works in opposition to nature and the work of re-interpretation relies a lot on the director's staging (2012).

These early scholars, although sharing different perspectives on how the traditional nature/culture dichotomy should be treated in theatre, all look for an eco-theatrical approach to analyse and study performances, and have led the field to go towards more experimental and participatory theatrical practices for the sake of a new eco-perspective.

The interdisciplinary field continues to develop with increasing publications such as Kershaw's *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (2007), Arons and May's *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (2012), Besel and Blau's *Performance on Behalf of the Environment* (2014), and Lavery and Finburgh's *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd: Ecology, Environment and the Greening of the Modern Stage* (2015). Journal collections dedicated to the field includes special issues such as "Performance and Ecology: What Can Theatre Do?" (Lavery, 2016b) in *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* and "Anthropocene and Theatre" (McConachie, 2018) in *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre*. Performances staging specifically for ecological or climate situations are also slowly on the rise. The Warwick University (2015) and the American Theatre Magazine (Eyring 2016) document a number of UK and US climate change performances on their websites respectively, listing notable plays staged in both countries such as Steve Waters's *The Contingency Plan* (2009), Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* (2011) and series of eco-performances such as those staged in ARTCOP, a global festival of cultural activities and

theatre performances on climate change. These lists are not exhaustive but not extensive neither, reflecting the fact that current productions, documentation and criticisms in the field are still emerging. Lavery (2018b) even suggests that UK weather plays was a “short-lived flurry” (6). Nonetheless, Lavery (2018a) generalizes how eco-issues are usually presented in such performances. They can be “activist or committed performance[s] that intend to tackle recognizable problems by representing them in ways that we immediately grasp; site-specific interventions that, in some way or another, aim to place the work within the environment as opposed to merely depicting it [...]; work[s] that refuse the large energy expenditure of the theatre and instead aim to generate green power by obtaining its energy from the sun or by pedal power”, or classical plays which merely present their audience the mess of an eco-crisis and leave them to draw their own conclusions, such as presenting those works of Samuel Beckett. As seen from the above, researches on and productions of eco-related performances exist in both conventional and experimental arenas. On one hand, this reflects a development alongside the diversification of performance formats as a response to both political and artistic democratization stemming from the 1960s. On the other hand, this also reflects a desire to stage ecology in a way which may create more impact, unlike being under the uncertain atmosphere among previous “short-lived” eco-related performances Lavery (2018 b) sees.

1.3.3. A turn to immersive theatre with ecology

The field of eco-related performances is not without its debate on efficacy. Analysing mainstream eco-plays with Mike Hulme (2011) ’s deficit model of communication, which explains how climate scientists presume the public knowing little about the climate problem and force hard scientific information onto them from a superior position, Heddon and Mackey (2012) argue that mainstream climate plays in UK lack thematic impact, feel like lecture, or consume the ecology theme only as a device for theatrical and character development. Arons and May (2012) also state that playwrights of eco-theatre may be challenged as it is difficult to find the balance among foregrounding ecological issues, sustaining stories, presenting the non-human in performances and, excavating the normalized anthropocentric attitudes and behaviours deeply entrenched in historical theatre texts. It seems that staging the topic explicitly as a text performed distantly from the audience

is not engaging them necessarily. Indeed, as Carlson (2017) observes, eco-related performances may have started out of two far ends. One end concerns primarily with staging literary texts (Carlson 2017, 169), sometimes with landscapes as the backdrop. The other end concerns the eco-art varieties which are mainly the performance art of everyday actions at a chosen landscape, such as the performance of cleaning the river in *The Great Cleansing of the Rio Grande* by French artist dominique mazeaud (Carlson 2017, 168), in which the boundary between labour and aesthetic performance is too blurry to make it a captivating event for its spectators. A less pedagogic and more captivating approach, one which creates the “metaphor of circularity, plurality, multiplicity, multivocality” (Hulme 2011, 85) may be needed to communicate the eco-topic.

A few scholars consider immersive practices, which involve changing spectatorial roles and participation, as this more captivating approach for eco-inquiries. One of the predecessors include Richard Schechner who advocates the use of Environmental Theatre. Although Environmental Theatre here means incorporating spatial and network interconnections outside of the theatre into the theatrical space instead of the ecological environment, and Schechner does not define it as immersive nor use it specifically for eco-concerns, it is largely inspired by how corporeal senses of the space, free flow and spectator participation can be used to activate a reconnection with nature and its energies (Schechner [1973] 1994, 16). Considering such form of theatrical experience as a “communication from within the spaces of the body to within the spaces of the place one is in” (Schechner [1973]1994, 18), he sees it as an affective interface which breaks away from orthodox dramaturgy. He applies the space- and sense-central architecture onto other theatrical works of non-ecological themes but the immersive potentials established by the Environmental Theatre for eco-inquiries has not been undermined.

Baz Kershaw is, on the other hand, one of the early scholars who draws a more complete picture of the intersected scholarship of performance and ecology, and advocates the use of immersive theatre specifically to raise eco-awareness. In his *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (2007), he contributes a systematic theorization of fundamental concepts and terminologies surrounding the interrelationships among ecosystems and theatre, of which the extensive reach can be situated within areas such as spectatorship, funding,

creativity and production etc. Within his framework, Kershaw (2007) identifies the growth of mass pleasures under mediatization and globalization, such as internet and theme parks, as a key factor to a cultural disorder in which people are paradoxically both empowered and disempowered by a pervasively expansive performativity. He argues that only by exposing the contradictory power of the spectacle with a “reflexive participation in spectacular performance ecologies informed by that paradox” (238) that humanity can be connected to its ecological environment in a responsive and responsible way. He proposes a subversion of the nature/culture dichotomy by also subverting the audience/spectacle binary in theatre and suggests that immersive and participatory theatre may be where such subversions occur. With the openness and inclusivity of immersive theatre, Kershaw (2007) sees its capacity for new kinds of biocentric existence and environmental agency to emerge.

Other notable studies connecting ecology and immersive performances include those from Carl Lavery and Lisa Woynarski. Lavery has been studying the role of immersive theatre in ecocriticism as well as advocating the use of immersive practices as a research tool. Like Kershaw (2006), he regards immersive practices as an “aesthetics of disclosure” (Lavery 2016a, 305), one which “brings worlds together” (310) and affirms the human “as a part of the materialized cosmos” (311). Following Deleuze and Guattari ([1980]2005)’s idea of cosmology and Morton (2013)’s idea of *hyperobject*, he focuses on the unknowingness of human beings on how we are already part of the ecology. When recounting Simon Whitehead’s performance *Dualis Suite* (2006), where Whitehead brought a guitar to the river Dualis and amplified the sound of the water flow “playing” the guitar, Lavery (2016a) highlights the importance of the performance to have “uncover[ed] the extent to which we are always already participating, always already immersed” (305) and suggests that human beings should exist humbly with all co-habitants on the ecosphere. As such, Lavery (2016a) binds eco-consciousness with immersive theatre and sees its potentials in creating a rupture of the status quo through disclosure rather than direct preaching.

Lisa Woynarski (2017), an emerging scholar in this interdisciplinary field, focuses on the significance of dramaturgy in eco-related performances. She analyses the qualities of site, participation and materiality of eco-related performances to see how various styles of eco-dramaturgy can engage the audience and open up new sensations towards the interweaving

connections among ecology, socio-politics, science and culture. In her examples, Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosin's *Ice Watch* (2014) as an immersive installation has reframed urban sites into a spectacle of glacier melting. Riding the electricity-generating bicycles to power the whole play in Katie Mitchell's *Lungs* (2013) has revealed the often invisible ecological connections in our daily actions through materiality. With reference to immersive theatre and following Kershaw (2007), she indicates that Rimini Protokoll's *Climate Change Conference* (2014), which is also one of the central cases to be analysed in this study, has opened up new imagination about the audience' roles in climate change events through participatory practices. The audience, who took the roles of delegates in a climate change conference in the performance, were given the chance to decide on eco-policies and "actually have a say" (83). As such, immersive practices are able to provide alternative contexts to understand the usually hard and complex ideas of ecology, and connect the topic with real life in a more relatable way.

The ideas of the abovementioned scholars do not make the most comprehensive literature of the still emerging field of immersive theatre and ecology yet, but they prompt this study to continue the enquiry by asking how human and non-human agencies can be reflected, how participation can allow self-reflections, and how the immersiveness in the interconnectedness of the ecosphere can be embodied in the immersiveness in a theatre. They motivate this research to look at the potentials of immersive theatre to not only bring understanding, but also feelings and questions about the less represented ecological relationships to the audience.

Recapturing this chapter, I have argued that an effective communication of eco-issues should somehow be presented as immediate and compatible rhetorically, disclose the eco-concerns ignored in our current discourse, and be an affective form of mediation. I have also cited the short film *I Want You to Panic*, which has successfully fulfilled the first two qualities. However, it being a short film circulating on the internet has created a short attention span for itself, like most other video clips online, gone in a click, which does not qualify it as much as an affective medium. Drawing from the above, I believe immersive theatre, as will be explored in the next chapter, can be an effective approach to fulfil this delivery, as it is a medium which magnifies affect also through corporeal senses and a mobilized encounter.

2. Immersive Theatre as a Cultural Practice

When addressing how nature is deteriorating at unprecedented rates and how global responses are insufficient based on the landmark 2019 Global Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), Chairman Sir Robert Watson notes that making transformative changes is the key to conserve the ecosystem. He also states that “by its very nature, transformative changes can expect opposition from those with interests vested in the status quo, but also that such opposition can be overcome for the broader public good” (United Nations 2019). This quest for transformation may yet be another point where immersive theatre and ecology converge. The idea of performance as transformative has continuously been put forward, ranging from what Marvin Carlson sees as a more pragmatic orientation such as considering performances anthropologically for “specific social, cultural, personal, and rhetorical goals” (Carlson 2008, 10), to a more aesthetic orientation such as treating performance as a dynamic art event from which perceptual transformations can derive (Fischer-Lichte 2008). In this chapter, by situating immersive theatre within the transformative potentials of performance, looking at its aesthetics and developing immersion as an eco-perception, I propose that immersive theatre may challenge the status quo and create transformation in the audience’s minds, and thus it may serve as a possible tool to raise awareness for the broader good of the ecology.

2.1. Transformation: a performative turn of thinking

Transformation may well characterize the academic fields of humanities and social sciences in the latter half of the last century. Stemming from postmodern fragmentations and reflexive of then sociopolitical fabrics, “cultural turns” (Bachmann-Medick 2016) arose with an expansion of interdisciplinary studies which democratized the concept of culture to encapsulate full range of human experiences. Objects of inquiry, such as rituals and space, have been transformed into analytic categories which are used to grasp broader cultural phenomena beyond the narrow sense of subject areas (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 16). “Structures of feelings” (Williams 1961, 64), the hallmark idea of Raymond Williams, has also brought the “articulation of presence” (Williams 1970, 135) and “thoughts as felt” (Williams 1970, 132) into focus, and introduced experience, affect and materiality into the

analysis of culture. In this same vein, a performative turn of thinking, manifested by the growing field of performance studies as well as an advent of experimental performance activities, emerged in the last few decades and provided an alternative lens to see “culture as performance” (Fischer-Lichte 2009, 2).

2.1.1. Rise of a performative approach

Regarded as a “‘new’ Enlightenment” (10) by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2009), the rise of performance studies since the 1960’s has played a key role in synthesizing a new means of cultural analysis. Drawing from fields such as anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, performance studies has extended the understanding of performance beyond conventional representations on stage, i.e., theatricality, to include the performativity of cultural behaviours in everyday life, encompassing “rituals, festivals, political rallies [...] and the like” (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 2). Led by studies of key figures such as John Austin and Victor Turner, the concept of performativity has reoriented academic attention from subject/object binaries and signification towards dynamic social processes and embodied experiences.

One origin narrative of the performative turn is referred to language philosopher John Austin. In *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), he coins the term “performatives” (Austin 1962) to differentiate performative utterances, which perform actions, from constative utterances, which make statements. In accordance with his speech act theory, “to say something is to do something” (Austin 1962, 94). Saying “I do” during a marriage ceremony is a verbal action transforming a locution into a social function (i.e., to enter into marriage) corresponding to its discursive situation (i.e., a marriage ceremony). Austin engages the verbal as an embodiment of actions and redefines language as constituting social realities, demonstrating strong interplays between textuality and performativity in the formation of cultural meanings.

Another origin narrative takes its root from Victor Turner’s anthropological analysis of rituals and social processes. By adopting Arnold van Gennep’s idea of *rites de passage* to analyse the installation rites of a tribe called Ndembu, Turner (1969) puts forward the ideas of *liminality* and *communitas* to present how members of a society undergo social transformation collectively by performing symbolic behaviours. He defines liminality as the

state of threshold during “the passage from lower to higher status” (Turner 1969, 97) in a tribe. During this “moment in and out of time” (Turner 1969, 96), an undifferentiated society, i.e. *communitas*, of statusless individuals passively submit themselves to the symbolically transformative acts of rituals so that they can reintegrate into the society with a new status. Performed for collective witnessing, such rituals are public liminal phases which are meant to invert the status quo and feed innovation back into the social order (Turner 1974b), such as a new reality of social hierarchies and a transformed (self-)perception towards the *communitas* who gained a higher status. Turner also sees rituals as ordered by a processual plot structured with breach, crisis, redressive action and reintegration (Turner 1974a). By using social drama as a metaphor for social events ranging from tribal rituals to national conflicts (Turner 1974a), Turner connects materiality to cultural processes and personal transcendence, and indicates how theatre analogies can be used to analyse social behaviours. Laying the foundation for a performative thinking, both Austin (1962) and Turner (1969; 1974a; 1982) set forth a “performative analytical vocabulary which dynamizes the concept of culture and text” (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 75) and facilitates the understanding of the “pragmatic process of symbolization itself” (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 80).

2.1.2. Performativity in theatre and society, bodies and politics

Bachmann-Medick, in her *Cultural Turns* (2016), identifies how the performative approach has developed into a methodology which supports analyses in a vast array of disciplines such as literary, historical, economic, political, comparative cultural and neurobiological studies. With relevance to the topic of this study, I would like to look specifically at its application in theatrical practices and body politics, which are largely influenced by the works of Richard Schechner (1985; 1988; 2003) and Judith Butler ([1988]2008; 2011) respectively.

Richard Schechner, founder of the performance studies department at New York University and a theatre practitioner himself, has advocated the bridging of the broad spectrum approach of performative studies with theatrical practice and performing arts (Schechner, 1988). Working closely with Turner, he adopts Turner’s model of social drama to analyse drama in actual theatrical practice. He schematizes the flow of relationship between them (see *Figure 1.*) by suggesting that “the politician, activist, militant, terrorist use techniques of the theatre

(staging) to support his social action” (Schechner 1976, 12) while “[t]he theatre person uses the consequential actions of social life as the underlying themes or frames of his art” (Schechner 1976, 12). Thus, performances are also “restored behaviour” (Schechner 1985, 35), re-enacting existing strips of behaviour reflexive of a culture. When different strips of restored behaviour carrying their own memories are taken into a new context and re-combined, a new cultural meaning that is reflexive of such intercultural exchange (Schechner 2003, 324) will be unleashed. The theatre, which is a recombination of the ritual and the artistic (Schechner 2003, 324), is therefore an arena where new perspectives maybe generated. As such, it should be studied not “only as art but as a means of understanding historical, social, and cultural processes” (Schechner 1988, 6).

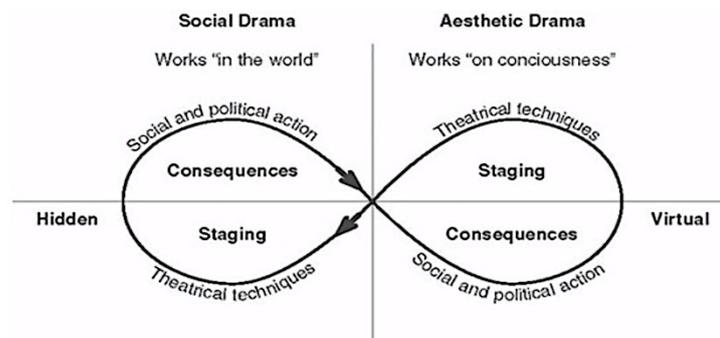


Figure 1. Flow between social and aesthetic drama by Richard Schechner (1976, 12).

Departing from the ideas of the scholars above, Judith Butler’s theory of performativity foregrounds the idea of corporeality in relation to gender identities and social politics. Butler considers gender reality as performative rather than biological. It is “an identity instituted through a stylized *repetition of acts* [emphasis by author]” (Butler [1988]2008, 187). Inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological stance, she sees the body as a “continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities [emphasis by author]” (Butler [1988]2008, 189) rather than a static being, which subverts how gender identities have traditionally been framed within a binary and heterosexist organization. Butler’s studies on body vulnerability and coalition policies (2011) has later shifted her attention from individual identities to the inter-relatedness of bodies. She observes that the disempowered always appeared “in a way that cannot be oneself” (Butler 2011, 2) in terms of their rights to public visibility. In order to reclaim the “emancipatory potential of performance” (Carlson 2017, 70) for them, a political space constituted with the corporeal assembly of bodies, such as in hunger strikes

or occupy movements, is necessary. This collective performativity has been considered as “the most significant utilization of performativity in contemporary culture” (Carlson 2017, 70). Performativity, as presented by Butler, has opened up new possibilities for individual, social and political reorganization, as well as a door to deploy corporeality and embodiment in a sociocultural context. While Schechner sheds light on how performativity in theatre is reflective of and affecting the staged nature of social actions, Butler maps the formative power of performances with bodies, power relations and activism. With these in mind, I believe that the performative approach is capable of analysing the inter-reflections among immersive theatre, the quest for ecological transformations and the sociopolitical wrestling involved within. Transformation being seen as both a mode and an intention of performativity is also reflexive of the transformative power engendered in performance itself.

2.1.3. Aesthetic performances as transformative events

In addition to the methodology-conscious performative turn mentioned above, the 1960's also marks a new wave of experimental performances brought about by avant-garde artists, performance art practitioners, postdramatic theatre artists and the like. New approaches in visual, installation and performing arts such as the happenings led by Allan Kaprow, live body performances carried out by Marina Abramović, multi-means performances presented by John Cage etc. broke away from disciplinary boundaries and created fluidly defined performance events in which participation and immediacy were essential. These events of so called “action and performance arts” (Fischer Lichte 2008, 18) were interested in “developing the expressive qualities of the body, especially in opposition to logical and discursive thought and speech, and in seeking the celebration of form and process over content and product” (Carlson 2017, 93). Staged in a seemingly anarchic manner, they made “each art more performative” (Fischer Lichte 2008, 18) while posited a crisis of contemplation for their spectators since art production, work and reception were no more clear-cut sequential territories. Along with the social upheaval in the 1960's, this performative turn has added to the dismantling of the status quo through violating traditional aesthetic schemata as well as transforming the spectators' ways of perception.

Aware of how this artistic movement has diversified performance formats and increasingly

played with the constituents of performance and their inter-relatedness with changing spectator experience (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 181), Erika Fischer-Lichte contributes to current performance studies by bringing its “transformative power” (2008) to the forefront. Sharing the focus of the German school of theatre studies on embodiment and social event, she theorizes performance as an open-ended event brought forth by the bodily co-presence of its spectators and performers (Fischer-Lichte 2004; 2008; 2009). Turner’s concept of liminality (Turner 1969) underlies such eventness, allowing the performance to be where attention heightens, destabilization occurs and spectators transform. According to Fischer-Lichte (2004; 2008; 2009), upon entering an artistic performance, the contingent interactions among the performers and spectators form an autopoietic feedback loop which influences them inter-affectively and dynamizes the event as a co-determined result based on their perceptions and perceptible reactions. Meanings, associations, emotions and self-reflections emerge in their consciousness as they oscillate consciously but unwilfully (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 149) between the phenomenological world (i.e., order of presence) and the fictional, semiotic world (i.e., order of representation) they sustain. On the other hand, the presence and energy of the participants, the performativity of the *mise-en-scène*, the exclusiveness of tonality all culminate to generate a materiality which feeds back into the loop and increases the intensity of the spectator experience. Thus, working with autopoiesis, emergence and materiality, a performance generates a liminal experience which is unpredictable, non-recurrent and affective, restricted to the constellation existing in the here and now, until the participants transit out of the performance. The transformation of everyday experience into components of aesthetic experience, dynamic role assignments, and the heightened attention of the participants (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 168) all contribute to the liminal dimensions. Aesthetically, an alienated space between reality and imagination is enabled for negotiation of new meanings, orientations and emotions.

On another level, this conceptual shift from seeing a performance as a work of art to an event also calls traditional dichotomies into question. Under this perspective, boundaries among spectators and performers shatter, production and reception happen simultaneously, presence and representation are perceived with “multistability” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 97), and staged crises are in as much need of resolution as real-life crises are. The collapses of these oppositions may result in a destabilization of the frameworks which guide the

participants' behaviour and create what Turner calls an "antistructure" (Turner 1974b, 72), "the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints" (Turner 1974b, 72). The participants are again in a "betwixt and between" (Turner 1974b, 71) state where possibilities for metamorphosis are opened up (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 23). This open and liminal environment is meant to be a playground for experimentation and innovation, even in unconventional or less comprehensible ways. Not only can the performers present their "individually-based appraisal of the social structure" (Turner 1979, 499) so as to make visible a cultural problem for the audience to reflect upon, but they are also liberated to play with diversified art forms to critically subvert existing roles and discourses (Turner 1974b, 72) so as to make the spectators face immediate counter-realities and flourish possible antistructures.

However, unlike in tribal societies, antistructures become "an auxiliary function of the larger structure" today (Turner, 1974b: 83) and attendance to liminal spheres such as theatrical plays are usually optional (Turner 1974b, 72). Transformations achieved by performances take place predominantly during the performance and within an individual's consciousness, while the durability and strength of their effect tend to depend on other factors such as the affectiveness of the performance and the individual experience of the spectator. Nonetheless, I contend that a performance can be seen as a catalyst for personal transcendence and perceptual transformation, which relates to my emphasis on eco-awareness, a prerequisite to eco-actions, with the belief that the transformative effect will be reintegrated into real life as the participants "live through the performance as an aesthetic as well as a social, even a political process, in whose course relationships are negotiated, power struggles fought, communities build up and dissolve" (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 11).

As seen from the above, the performative turn has not only contributed an academic approach to analyse "the generative and transformative aspects of culture" (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 73), but also performance events which reflect on and even bring changes to the status quo surrounding us. As such, the performative approach may also be used to study the always contingent eco-phenomenon and inquire into the possibilities of performances to destabilise the status quo of our current eco-communication. Against this backdrop, I propose to look at the potentials of immersive theatre to fulfil the function of eco-inquiry as

its aesthetics also celebrate liminality by foregrounding autopoiesis, emergence, processes and innovative uses of materiality, and it involves its participants in “an ongoing dynamic of the fulfilment of the process of life and consciousness” (Carlson 2008, 9).

2.2. The practice of immersive theatre

The dynamic and loosely bound immersive theatre, which scholars in the field find it difficult to define systematically as a genre (Machon 2013, xvii; Alston 2016, 5; Frieze 2016, 3), is considered as one of the most popular challenges to traditional theatrical practices (Carlson 2015, 587). Performed in ever evolving forms, its gist is to allow heightened spectator experience, so that spectators can “feel as if they have dropped down a rabbit hole into another world like Alice” (Gardner 2014), being soaked in and enveloped by a constructed reality. While many regard the London-based theatre companies such as Shunt and Punchdrunk as the pioneers who have brought it into prominence since the early 2000s, their game-change visions are not too far away from those of their performance art predecessors in the 1960’s. Sharing the same intention to defy conventions, this new wave of immersive performances in the 2000s has tended to focus more on an aesthetic revolution rather than a political one. The increasing demand for the new, immersive aesthetics proves this new wave a commercial success (Gardner 2014; 2019) and appealing to spectators. However, as Lyn Gardner, the much referenced theatre critic of *The Stage*, observes, the term *immersive* can sometimes be an overstatement and not all events of immersive theatre can live up to its name (Gardner 2014). It can draw in new audience who are not particularly attracted to conventional theatre³, but it can also disservice a delivery which could have achieved more had it been staged traditionally in a proscenium theatre. For an immersive performance to pave a short journey of transformation which will potentially sustain the spectator for a lifetime (Gardner 2008), it has to extend the emancipating qualities of its antecedent frameworks in performance arts, make sense of the purpose of the autopoiesis, and offer a convincing immersive experience to its spectators.

³ Lyn Gardner presents this observation in *The Stage*, which “is borne out by statistics”. “When the Guild of Misrule, which has recently staged a version of *Gatsby* in a disused local pub, as part of Theatr Clywd’s spring season, worked with Sheffield Theatres and York Theatre Royal on versions of the show, a whopping 40% of those who attended were new audiences” (Gardner, 2018).

2.2.1. A legacy of audience-engaging sensitivities

Josephine Machon, whose *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (2013) are among the first comprehensive publications on immersive theatre, follows the source of immersion as an aspect of game studies and virtual reality technology in the early 1980s (2013, 58). Carlson (2017) also uses Magelssen's term "simming" (148), which derives from online games, to characterize theatre immersion with the essence of alternate personae in electronic games. The idea of inducing immersion during an electronic game explains itself as using sensuous and ludic engagement strategies to boost realism and suspend disbelief, so that, as media scholars Bolter and Grusin (2000) contend about virtual reality, "the user is no longer aware of confronting a medium, but instead stands in an immediate relationship to the contents of that medium" (24). In addition to this association with immersion in games, the artistic trajectory of immersive theatre may also draw a clear image of the practice itself. Carlson (2012) connects the aesthetics of immersive theatre with the tradition of mobile audience back in the medieval theatre in Europe, the tailored spaces in the Environmental Theatre of Schechner in the 1960s and the roaming spectators in the British Promenade Theatre in the 1980s. Machon (2013) traces the genre's origin from modernist influences such as Artaud's "total theatres", the fun and fluxes in *commedia dell'arte*, the immediacy in Allan Kaprow's Happenings and the mid-century hybridization of experimental and interactive practices. Gareth White (2013) focuses on the participatory foundation of immersive theatre and associates it with practices such as Applied Theatre, Museum Theatre, Theatre for Development and Theatre of the Oppressed, in which longer involvement in research and workshops suggest a stronger sense of lasting transformation (15). All these preceding performance formats suggest the unconventional operations of spectatorial arrangement, interaction and space in immersive theatre.

Some theoretical visions of the following scholars may also resonate with the intrinsic values of immersive theatre as a cultural practice. Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics" (2002) indicates 'art as a state of encounter' (18) and a "place of conviviality" (28) where exchanges and inter-subjectivity emerge. This may synchronize with how immersive theatre is the hybridized material space created from multiple "meetings of signs and forms" (110), "on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt" (112), and

how it celebrates a collaborative agency. Returning to the idea of immanence by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) already explored in Chapter 1, it may be associated with how immersive theatre invites heterogeneity and accentuates interconnectedness from within, as well as how it derives a capacity for fragmentation and chaos, the liminal entities. Foucault's idea of heterospace ([1984] 2002), an out-of-normal space driven by imagination which mirrors, brings together or inverts all other real sites within a culture, points to how immersive theatre manipulates space to question the ideologies of a culture, the paradoxical operations of realization and abnormality in a space. As seen from the above, immersive theatre is not merely a continuation of postmodern art practices; it is an amalgamation of various sociocultural sensitivities, and a response to the constantly shifting realities we situate in.

However, immersive theatre may not be the only practice which corresponds to the above genealogy and theoretic trajectories. While they all offer participations, interactions, spectator mobilization and are overthrowing conventional theatrical boundaries, differentiating immersive theatre from three of its predecessors – Theatre of Cruelty, Epic Theatre, and Theatre of the Oppressed, may help understand the immersive practice better. Theatre of Cruelty, which is mostly associated with Antonin Artaud, aims to use movement and gestures to shock audience into an awaken awareness of otherwise ignored violence in real life (Tripney 2017). Similarly, immersive theatre puts the sensory experience of the spectators at the centre and employs gestures, set, lighting or props to create quasi-authentic images of challenging disorientations, but it is more inviting in the meaning co-making process as it involves affective arrangements which can activate a much wider range of emotions than the overpowering but narrow sense of violence put in the face of the audience.

Practitioners of Epic Theatre, such as Bertolt Brecht, aim to raise the criticality of spectators on the sociopolitical issues being staged by interacting and discussing with them. However, what Epic Theatre employs are metatheatrical, alienating and anti-illusory techniques, such as displaying pedagogical captions or messages for the audience, which often interrupt spectator experience (Gordon 2017) and create perceptual distance from the performance intentionally. Taking a different approach, immersive theatre utilizes quasi-reality to achieve continuous experience and total environment, which highlights the corporeal presence of both spectators and performers, so as to generate affect prior to interpretation and judgement.

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1979) uses role-plays and invites spectators to act on stage during a performance. Calling them "spect-actors" (Boal 1979, xx), Boal guides the audience through a staged situation of oppression which they can act, discuss or comment to resolve, in a way to achieve empowerment by equipping them with similar conflict resolving skills in real-life situations. Immersive theatre, although designed for inducing productivity and, hopefully, transformation from the spectators, is not always community-based and skill-focused like Boal's vision and has extended the use of audience agency to a wider range of situations and aesthetic experience other than oppressions and conflicts.

Indeed, as most scholars of immersive theatre may agree (Machon 2013, 67; Alston 2016, 5; Frieze 2016, 6; Kolesch 2019, 14), drawing a sharp line between immersive theatre and its antecedent art forms is almost impossible as it is a legacy of their essences of audience engaging and empowerment. It is not uncommon that traces and tactics of one form can be found in another. As such, instead of taxonomizing immersive theatre's generic traits, this study will look at how some of its central features work and focuses on how the experience of immersion may be achieved throughout the course of performance.

2.2.2. Central features of immersive theatre

As an almost newfound academic interest in the 2000s, increasing scholars have been expanding their researches on immersive performances. In addition to the aforementioned performance specialists, academics such as Gareth White (2012; 2016), James Frieze (2016), Adam Alston (2016), Doris Kolesch (2019) and their colleagues are contributing to an emerging framework to study them. While "spectator experience has primarily been a matter of conjecture and speculation" (Kolesch 2019, 14), I contend that some central features of immersive theatre can be deduced from the intersecting observations of these scholars. Such features do not compile an exhaustive list of tactics to be considered in an immersive blueprint, nor should all of them be employed to shape an immersive practice, but they do serve as the core configurations to characterize how immersive theatre can be produced.

Intention. In order for the spectators to regard the event as an immersive performance, the theatre-maker has to frame it according to her intentions. While game events such as Escape

Room or Murder Mystery Lisbon claim also to be themed and highly immersive, an immersive theatre differentiates itself from similar affective events with an artistic intention other than pure entertainment, one which “defines its role and function as a piece of art” (Machon 2013, 69). It is through realizing the intention and acting up to the framing that the event can be justified as immersive theatre.

Scale. An immersive theatre can take up multiple scales and forms according to its purpose and artistic intent. It can be of a music festival scale as in Argentina theatre group De La Guarda’s *Fuerza Bruta* (2005), which was delivered by a group of performers in a concert arena full of installations and spectators to achieve craze, energy and experience of the all-encompassing sensual stimulation. It can be as small as the one-to-one *Foot Washing for the Sole* (2008) created by British performer Adrian Howells, which took place in a minimally decorated room between one performer and one spectator to explore intimacy and haptic pleasure in a foot massage session. It can also be a mix of the above such as in Punchdrunk’s *Sleep No More* (2003) in which multiple spectators could walk together in parts of a building to participate in group occasions or one spectator could walk into another part of the building for a one-to-one situation with a performer.

Performance Space. Lyn Gardner (2009) observes that immersive theatre often takes place in warehouses or post-industrial buildings, but it can also happen in places such as on the street, with rural landscapes, or even in public toilets. The choices of space are usually site-related⁴ so as to enhance the liminal atmosphere, utilize the associations, memories, ideologies and social systems loaded in it, and allow a kinaesthetic and all-surrounding experience. For example, in *The Long and Winding Road* (2007), British artist Michael Pinchbeck staged his performance in a moving car to create a driver/passenger relationship with the spectator and an everyday-like conversation between new acquaintances. As Frieze (2016) contends, a performance site can also be viewed from a phenomenological standpoint. Instead of virtualizing a place, sometimes one’s being in it constitute it as his or her “personal histories fuel and are fuelled by the social experience of space” (9). To sum up, successful

⁴ The term *site-related* is used to acknowledge Frieze (2016)’s critical stance towards how terms like *site-responsive* and *site-specific* become too broadly functional. He comments, “the ways in which participants are led to engage spatially rarely follows logically from the sites themselves, [...] focusing on location can miss the ways in which performances intervene in familiar experience of space and place” (Frieze 2016, 9).

framings of the space exists in “the critical and conceptual address to their location, to existing models of practice, and to dramaturgical logics” (Filmer 2016, 296).

Temporality. An immersive theatre can be as short as a few minutes in one-to-one performances or as long as a 48-hour stay in a fictional care home such as in Christopher Green’s *The Home* (2019) where participants live the lives of the cared for but controlled elderlies under a care system (Wvyer 2019). Playing with felt temporality in immersive theatre is also common, performers can “elongate, contract or coil time into a helix” according to the design (Machon 2013, 96) to impact the experience of the event, without necessarily following a linear timeline as in conventional theatre. Within this hybridized temporality, where spectators are captured “at the interface between times *sensed*, times *intuited*, times *measured* and times *recalled* [emphasis by author]” (122), Belvis Pons (2016) suggests that *kairos*, which means the opportune moment in ancient Greek, may be invoked. It connotes “a moment in between (timeless time) when something significant happens, when a specific moment becomes meaningful” (Belvis Pons 2016, 122). It is through enacting actions, embodying expectations and passing time together that such possibilities of temporality may be made more relatable, so that a more lasting memory of the *kairos* can go beyond the ephemerality of the performance.

Blurry Boundaries. Immersive theatre tends to destabilise conventional boundaries on many levels. It suspends the differences between life and art through creating realistic scenographic and sensual design, as well as those between spectators and performers through role-plays and improvised interactions. Performances start to do without designated stage area and audience can act and walk within a provided framework. Multiple art forms and media like dance, TV, music, games etc. can happen at the same time to enrich the spectator experience. As Felix Barrett of Punchdrunk believes, they work together as a fusion and “no one discipline is more important than another” (as cited in Machon 2013, 159). One of the many examples demonstrating this feature includes Copenhagen-based company SIGNA’s *The Ruby Town Oracle* (2007). Fischer-Lichte recalls (as cited in Perick 2016) that the audience had to present a passport to enter the town-scale performance with quasi-authentic living quarters and act like inhabitants or visitors in a dark and mysterious occult community.

Contract between spectators and performers. Machon (2013) observes that immersive theatre usually employs a “contract of participation” (99) to invite an audience for varying levels of participation. Such contracts may be in explicit forms of spoken or written guidelines delivered in the opening or somehow implicit within the logic of the performance and become clear “in tacit fashion” (99). This allows both parties to act toward a certain extent which they feel respected and protected, especially the spectators are situated in a parallel universe which may not be immediately comprehensible and sometimes even encourages them to test their own boundaries. As British company The Guild of Misrule prepares for their immersive performances, they send pre-show emails to remind the audience of what to expect. Audience also have to go through an “airlock” where they read signages explaining the rules and get prepared for a different world (Bakare 2019). In these ways, the blurry boundaries of immersive theatre stay away from murkiness.

Collaboration. Executed through role-plays and other invitations for participation, leaving parts of the process for the spectators to fulfil or enact alongside other elements of the performance is an integral part of the event, especially because spectator experience is central to the production of immersive theatre. Such collaborations can be as interactive as in Adrian Howells’ *Foot Washing for the Sole* (2008) which would not have made sense without the spectators offering their feet for touching and their will to disclose their feelings in conversations. It can also be giving spectators everyday tasks such as “walking, shedding or donning items of clothing, singing, dancing or just speaking” (Frieze 2016, 12) which are proven to be also affective (Frieze 2016, 12). Sometimes, the spectators and performers generate a collaborative result based on the decision of the spectators such as in Ghent-based company Ontroerend Goed’s ~~£~~€\$ (*LIES*) (2017) where spectators acted like players on a game table and tried to win most out of the game by deciding the amounts to bet on when they interacted with the performer-dealers, as a miniature co-exploration of trust and control in the international banking systems.

However, collaboration and its subsidiary contracts question if spectators will be manipulated excessively as their participations are usually controlled and limited to a certain schema of behaviour (White 2006; Machon 2013 27; Gardner 2019). While executing authorship may help to enhance a tailored and individual spectator experience, which is

appealing to the audience and attracts involvement, collaboration can sometimes be messy. As Frieze (2016) contests, there is always a difference about how a spectator feels towards executing “the operational-performative (the mechanics of doing and playing) and the agentive-performative (creating and controlling meaning)” (12). Immersive artists should therefore consider an effective and ethical allocation of tasks among participants so that spectators can feel secured enough to unleash their will to participate and acknowledge their actions as meaningful elements for a co-authored creation.

Sensual arrangements. In an immersive theatre event, it is common to make use of somatic and sensual designs to activate the whole sensorium. Engaging the five senses, plus what Machon (2013) sees as the sixth sense, the haptic sense which is a “fusion of cerebral and corporeal cognition” (80) motivating a holistic bodily knowledge through kinaesthesia and proprioception, an immersive event highlights the immediate physical presences and responses of the participants and tries to engage their imaginations through intercorporeality and embodiment. In Seoul-based company Elephant Laugh’s *Bodies in the Dark* (2015), participants were placed in a pitch-dark environment where they agreed and were allowed to act however they wanted to, sometimes in full nudity. Without the sense of sight, participants were guided by an intimate sound in their headphones to move around and sense their bodies through movement and contact, amidst strangeness with other participants, and resource their tacit corporeal senses alongside their boosted courage for self-performance as an anonymous person. Recent developments of sensual enhancement also include the use of binaural headphones and Virtual Reality technologies, which go along with the technological advances of our time. The intention to connect with the corporeal apparatus of human beings is at the core of innovating these tech-based sensual designs, which reiterates the attention to corporeality addressed in immersive performances. As Fischer Lichte (2008) suggests, in contemporary performances, corporeality dominated semioticity, the central concern is “not to understand but to experience it and to cope with these experiences, which could not be supplanted there and then by reflection”(17). In this way, the sensual designs enable an immersive performance to be more than just a message to be read and interpreted.

The above central features cannot guarantee the same level of immersivity in each performance for every spectator, but they indicate how various designs have been used to

resource their “sensuous, imaginative and explorative capabilities” (Alston 2016, 2). Through various participatory extensions, such as “bodily, technological, spatial, temporal, spiritual, performative, pedagogical, textual, social” ones (Frieze 2016, 6), an immersive experience may be achieved and used to heighten the senses and corporeal memories of spectators, and come to a fruition of perceptual transformation as a result of the dissolution of existing frameworks. As such, I suggest that immersive theatre may offer the affective experience integral to the countervisualisation of the Anthropocene aesthetics (Mirzoeff 2014) mentioned in Chapter 1, an experience which Morton (2013) specifies as an inner space to be walked through viscerally. Its subversions of boundaries is also what Kershaw (2007) proposes as a potential strategy to subvert the nature/culture dichotomy.

2.3. Immersion as a bridge between performance and ecology

2.3.1. Concept of immersion in immersive theatre

As seen from the above, defining immersive theatre as an affective theatrical performance which allows the experience of immersion to emerge seems to apply to most instantiations of the genre, but immersion as an intention complicates this description and needs more explanation. Deriving from the Latin verb *immergere*, *immersion* is always associated with embodied metaphors such as submerging in liquid or being absorbed or enveloped in a total environment, an artificial experience or a medium (White 2012, 227; Kolesch 2019, 4). Connecting it to immersive theatre, Machon (2013) suggests that total immersion is both absorbing and transporting (63), meaning the event can absorb audience in terms of “concentration, imagination, action and interest” (62) within its form and transport them to “an other-worldly world that requires navigation according to its own rules of logic” (63), both conceptually and physically. As such, immersion can open up emotional, existential, and formalistic transformations in the spectator. Kolesch (2019) regards immersion as a relational concept which attends specifically to a liminal experience of fluidity between boundaries (4). She dissects immersion as a mental-psychological or a perceptual-physical situatedness, or both (5), which are similarly equivalent to Machon (2013)’s concept of absorption and transportation respectively. These ideas of immersion may well be referenced to earlier media studies such as that of Alison McMahan (2003) who differentiates

perceptual immersion from psychological immersion (77) in 3D games and Virtual Reality environments, and suggests that immersion may be evoked through engagement, presence, interaction, and realistic environment. As deduced from these scholars, immersion is a multi-dimensional experience which requires affect and imagination as drives. It is also a state of intensive engagement, an inner space contingent on its differences from the external world.

2.3.2. Emergence of immersion: an oscillation

As art exists in the eyes of the beholder, so does immersion. Fischer-Lichte suggests that attentiveness is the most important thing for a spectator to experience an immersion (as cited in Perick, 2016). Such attentiveness means one is open to whatever comes to herself as all kinds of perception and senses are important. In this sense, Machon's synaesthetic approach may explain further how immersion may be achieved in the spectator's mind. Applying the idea of *synaesthesia* to explain immersion as a form of corporeal hypersensitivity, which means "the production of a sensation in one part of the body resulting from a stimulus applied to, or perceived by, another part" (104), such as the experience of hearing colours or seeing sounds due to a cognitive slippage, Machon sees immersion happen between "the human faculties of intellectual and instinctive perception" (105) and encompass both "the emotional and the physiological capabilities of the physical body" (105). Situating spectators between authentically felt senses and a fictional story, an immersive theatre directly disturbs the cognitive processing of real life and lucidly real fiction, stimulates an interrupted perception in both arenas and causes the individual spectator to experience the performance in the moment with an intermodal perception interlocking their tensions and paradoxes. Kolesch (2019) also regards immersion as an in-between state. She sees immersion happen as "an interruption of aesthetic illusion, insofar as a moment of distance, of rupture" (8), when the spectator oscillates between "embeddedness and distance", "submersion and surfacing" (Kolesch 2019, 8), "illusionment and disillusionment" (Kolesch 2019, 9). It is then a threshold state resonating with the liminality which underlies transformation in performance. Frieze (2016) explains this oscillation as an outcome of inseparable "experiential, expressive, and critical faculties" which calls on spectators to "experience from first- and third-person, insider and outsider perspectives, often in the same instant" (Frieze 2016, 4). This moment of *kairos* may be exemplified in an audience's comment for

Ontroerend Goed's ~~£¥€\$~~ (*LIES*), "It can really activate you to think of what's going on in terms of the world and banking, and also just what's going on in the room. So it activates you in two ways at the same time." (Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts 2019). Then, the abovementioned has suggested that immersion as an engaging experience does not diminish the spectator's capacity to think. Afterall, oscillation may be referenced to how conceptual integration works in our everyday minds for creative thinking and reality construction. As Mark Turner (2007) theorizes, through combining various frames and reassembling existing knowledge, conceptual integration exerts its transformative potential, especially when rich clashes among inputs from contrasting scopes offer challenges to imaginative capacities, and produce blends which are emergent and personal (215).

As much as immersion acknowledges an integration of senses and thoughts, it also means collision. Frieze (2016) puts forward the concept of "resistant immersion" to explain how a spectator maybe "maintaining the critical distance needed to make sense of a new and disorienting experience whilst surrendering to intimate engagement" (5), meaning that immersion as oscillation necessarily engenders a plasticity for "glitches", "awkwardness" and "processual incompatibilities" (19). In this way, immersion allows for both fragmentary and unpredictable experiences and responses as they would have existed in real life. This differentiates immersion from Plato (1945) 's critique of spectators' infectious sympathizing with fictional characters on stage because immersion allows spectators to also hold a critical distance from the sensual and visceral stimulations in the performance. As theatre practitioners Lundahl and Seidl indicate, although spectators have "the freedom to immerse themselves in pure subjectivity, being removed from their analytical self, because that analytical self could remove them from the experience, [...] they would often analyse more afterwards" (as cited in Machon 2013, 172). Immersing in the performance may therefore add depth to the memories necessary for post-performance reflections rather than shut off perception through illusion. Afterall, resurfacing is a prerequisite for immersing to be liminal, memorable and, hopefully, reflective and captivating.

2.3.3. Significance of immersion to eco-awareness

Underlain by liminality, immersion in immersive theatre may also be used to reflect other

threshold phenomenon in life. It can be used to manage, frame and attend to both the theatrical and the real life liminal contexts as a conductor in between. As such, I argue that the liminal nature of immersion has already made itself the connecting concept between theatre and the eco-critical discourse to advocate a more critical understanding on the three discursive concerns discussed in Chapter 1, i.e., eco-problem as a product of anthropocentrism, as a hyperobject and as a sociopolitical wrestling .

Immersion does not exist only as a visceral and sensual experience per se, it may be used to reflect on how interconnections have always been existing among all units in our ecosphere, in both negative and positive senses. In view of eco-degradation, Kershaw (1999) sees theatrical immersion re-embody “the relationship of humans to the potential for global ecological crisis, because the post-industrial societies of the world have ensured that it is already being ready-made for everyone and that humankind is by definition fully immersed in its future progress” (194). This implication of immersion, when incorporated in theatre, may inform a reflection on the rigidly anchored anthropocentric stances dominating over the ecosphere. On the contrary, in a more hopeful sense, immersion may also lead to positive insights by eliminating distances among subjectivities. Lavery (2016) suggests that instead of merely seeking to create immersion as intentional theatrical acts, “the more humble, but just as vital, objective is to uncover the extent to which we are always already participating, always already immersed’ (305). This implication of immersion, then, helps to re-establish a more cosmic relationality in the ecosphere and understand the mutual vulnerability shared by all networks of human and non-human under the hyperobject of eco-crises.

The instrumentality of immersion in theatrical performances is, in many times, also used to reflect one’s embeddedness in various emotional and socio-economic systems in real life. As in theatre, so in real life, “phantasmatic *topos* of ‘total immersion’ combines both the desire for immersing oneself in a pleasurable mode of manipulation and the fear of being immersed without recognizing it” (Mühlhoff and Schütz 2019, 234). It is through making space for the spectators to reflect upon these parallel immersions that they may attend to the socio-political wrestling surrounding eco-issues, especially when spectators are given “genuine agency to make decisions, influence the outcome and take responsibility for their own actions” (Gardner 2019) in the theatrical vis-à-vis real life political power struggles.

Fischer-Lichte observes in performances in general (2008) that “[w]hether the experience of the concerned subjects – caused by the destabilization of the self, the world, and its norms – leads to a reorientation and lasting transformation depends on each individual case” (179). This uncertainty is acknowledged in this study but I contend that immersion, complemented with affect and holistic bodily experiences, may still probe a higher chance of creating lasting impressions of the performance and, thus, more possible perceptual transformations afterwards. In a project of spectatorship studies conducted by The British Theatre Consortium (2014), it is reported that “the audience tended to emphasise sensory, affective and physical intensity and quality” (as cited in Kolesch 2019, 14) in their surveys right after an immersive performance and “highlight the cognitive dimensions of theatre and its capacity to stimulate ideas” (as cited in Kolesch 2019, 14) in their surveys for the same performance two months later, demonstrating the preference of corporeality over interpretation and an extended memory of the event. Against this background, immersion is shown to be not only a deep engagement with one’s senses, it is understood “much more as a way of making the observer conscious of their specific point of observation, of drawing attention to their critical relationship to a representation and its formal, genre- and media-specific conditions” (Kolesch 2019, 9). Therefore, if immersion is employed in an eco-conscious theatre performance, it may possibly evoke a heightened self-criticality in the spectators to reflect on their eco-related beliefs, behaviour and attitudes.

In immersive theatre, incorporating configurations which break away from conventional operations facilitates a more open space in which spectators can perform in and experience a rite of passage. Perceptual transformations may be induced through immersive experiences enabled with the rediscoveries of one’s tacit senses and perceptions in near real-life scenarios. Although these immersive experiences may not make the world a better place yet, it may at least “change the ideas, attitudes, habits” (Fischer-Lichte in Perick, 2016) of some of the spectators. As such, it is possible that introducing immersion as a new kind of perception can lead to new eco-changes. Knowing how the features of immersive theatre have shaped it into a captivating form of communication, and having explored the instrumentality of immersion as a connecting concept with eco-issues, I will discuss further in the coming chapter the efficacy of immersive theatre as a medium itself to make an eco-inquiry, by looking at how its mechanisms and core tactics may raise the eco-awareness of its spectators.

3. Immersive Theatre to Raise Eco-Awareness

While the need for new imaginations of the ecology has been discussed in Chapter 1 and the possibility of creating perceptual transformation through immersive theatre has been discussed in Chapter 2, this chapter connects the two and explores in further details the efficacy of immersive theatre as a tool to raise eco-awareness. Treating immersive theatre as a site of animated relational dynamics where multi-positionalities are embraced, I contend that its mechanisms of affect and emancipation may generate a more personally relatable experience for each individual spectator and, therefore, fulfil the quest for an affective and non-coercive means to translate eco-issues into the sensory fabric of the public. This efficacy to raise eco-awareness can then be further actualized through employing one or all of the following immersive tactics in the production of the performance - creating intimate encounters, inducing reciprocal agentive participation between the theatrical world and the real life, and leaving space for weakness and negative feelings in the theatre. My contention is that through the operations of these tactics, an immersive theatre may (re)activate the relationalities, actions, and impressions necessary to mobilize one's original perception of climate change, and, hopefully, lead to a personal transcendence which may extend into an eco-awareness in the real world and last beyond the ephemerality of the performance event.

3.1. Efficacy of immersive theatre as an eco-enquiry

The underlying motivation of this research may very well resonate with Brian Massumi's statement in his article at *The Guardian*, "an ecological alter-politics must also be an alter-politics of affect" (Massumi 2011). Going in line with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of cosmic belonging and seeing participation and relations in the world as pre-recognition (Massumi 2002, 231), Massumi (2015) sees the challenge to this statement as how to practice "an affective politics that is capable of addressing the nonconscious dynamics, that occurs on an affective level of immediation and how to do that without becoming coercive" (139). Immersive theatre may operate as one such practice based on its affectively and immediately engaging nature while putting the autonomous exploration of its spectators at the core. In the following, focusing on the politics between the spectators and the performances, and showing how immersive theatre foregrounds the mechanisms of affect and emancipation, I

argue that immersive theatre can be the site where such alter-politics happen and is, therefore, efficacious in making an eco-enquiry.

3.1.1. Immersive theatre as theatre of affect

“Encounters generate affect” (Colman 2017, 8). As have already indicated in previous chapters, immersive theatre is essentially a theatre of immediate and bodily encounters. It employs both visceral and kinaesthetic techniques to induce sensations and invite reactions from the spectators. It utilizes the intercorporeality among the spectators, performers and the entities of thematic concern to enable intensified spectatorial experience, trigger immersion and mobilize contingent inputs to sustain the intersubjectivity. I suggest that it is this intensified affective mechanism of prioritizing corporeality over interpretation, feeling before thinking, passage before position (Massumi 2002, 46) which manifests the possibilities for immersive theatre to induce awareness of the ecosphere.

Massumi (1987), in the Spinozist-Deleuzian lineage, defines affect as “an ability to affect and be affected” (xvi), a bodily potential which locates autonomously from conscious, logical or rational cognition and is always in effect. Unlike emotion, which is socially, linguistically and contextually qualified and always disorienting (Massumi 1995), affect is a pure and autonomic feeling, a non-qualified intensity activated through synesthetic sensibilities or sensations, which makes it trans-situational and trans-corporeal (Massumi 2002, 62). It is also a field of immanent relationality in which human and non-human are braced together under a kind of differential attunement, which allows individual trajectories, attention and energy within a collectively bound event (Massumi 2015, 115). Treating bodily reactions as directly bound up with the ability to think (Massumi 2015, 115), Massumi sees affect as a world glue (Massumi 2002, 217) which brings the fictional, quasi-corporeal and the real, tactile together for each individual. As such, affect may capture the dynamic and the becoming where imagination applies. Along with this conceptualization of affect, which is specified in a relational sense⁵, I argue that immersive theatre can be considered as an

⁵ While Massumi’s concept on the autonomous role of affect has been criticized as anti-intentional and putting forward affective determinism (cf. Leys 2011, Zerilli 2015), I suggest reconsidering such critiques from Slaby (2016)’s perspective and embrace the ambivalence of Massumi’s conception in this study. Slaby (2016) suggest that these critiques may be resulted from the different conceptual tools these scholars employ and the domains their examples of affect are situated in. While philosophers of emotion, such as Leys and Zerilli, consider affect

intensified form of affective communication which connects its spectators with eco-issues on the following multiple levels.

Pre-conscious level. Before conscious cognition takes over, affective forces are already at work to shift the spectators' perceptions from personal human centeredness to a hyper-relationality with the world, a "sense of event response-ability" (Massumi 2015, 136) which applies to both the immediate theatrical performance and the world phenomenon it transports to through an immersive experience. In the affective event, all forms of affective arrangement, i.e., a network of visceral, performative and episodic stimulations, work towards opening up the sensorium of the spectators so as to connect them with otherwise unimagined emotions and responses in eco-related situations, and localise or make immediate the often ungraspable *hyberobject* of eco-crises for its spectators through pre-judgmental, felt and tacit dimensions, where the energy of authentic feelings in a quasi-authentic environment come into play. In this way, immersive theatre offers its spectators access to the presence in a different world through its affective forces. As Gil (2015) observes, in London-based theatre company Headlong's production *Decade*, a multi-writer artistic response to the 9/11 event, immersive theatre "becomes a counterfactual, spectacular space where the intensity of the catastrophic event is appropriated by means of affect" (58). This mechanism is not primarily about interpreting or believing in the performance, which risks polarizing the aestheticization of the artist's subjectivity over the non-representable intersubjectivity of all participants. It is directly "about feeling and about asking questions through the affective mode of art" (Gil 2015, 57).

I would also argue that interpretation and, later, concepts may emerge only as a consequence of such unwilled affective responses, in the process of making sense of them, and being aware of the underlying reasons of such stimulation or strangeness. As Judith Butler (2009) suggests, affects become "the very stuff of ideation and of critique" (34), "they call upon and enact certain interpretive frames" (34) and can also "call into question the taken-for-granted character of those frames" (34). Immersive theatre as an affective medium may, therefore, provide a localized, embodied while idiosyncratic encounter with eco-topics, of

as individual mental states with intentional content; cultural affect theorists, like Massumi, account affect for relational dynamics among individuals within social domains. This frame of culture studies is used in this study as it helps to make visible the political implications of affect in the contexts of immersive theatre and ecology.

which the framings in media are often distanced, disembodied and universalized.

Social level. On the more conscious level, by placing the interactions with and/or among spectators as the centre of the performance, the sociality within the theatre is energized with affect and charged with ecological implications. As Gareth White (2016) recounts his participatory experience in London-based company Coney's *Early Days (of a better nation)*, an interactive event in which spectators acted, debated and voted as representatives rebuilding a nation, "[w]hen we are with other people their presence frames our perception of ourselves and puts demands on our action and inaction, [...] the myriad moment-by-moment adjustments and anticipations, tensions and attentions through which social space manifests itself to us" (23), "my own affective responses to my own behaviour are not the background to a more important conscious part of my spectatorship, but are part of the work that I am spectating" (24). This demonstrates how the autopoietic feedback loop of the performance is sustained by the magnified reciprocal affective forces inside the theatre. Performing becomes not only an affective act but a present participation in affect itself. The theatre is no longer the place where the identities of spectators fade into silence and darkness. The interconnectedness and power relations among all elements in the theatre are brought to the forefront for its spectators, whether they are the beholders of the performance or national representatives in the story. As their actions carry potential impact onto the becoming of the performance, spectators are also loaded with self-awareness due to the social process of participation, which prompts spectators to question their self-beings and the current distribution of political agencies in both the immediate environment and in real social life.

If channelled into an eco-related situation in real life, such awareness of interconnectedness may reclaim certain degree of collectiveness in our response to the climate problem in our current "post-social era" (Monbiot 2014) since spectators are engaged in an affective *communitas* co-constituted by mutual sensations and responses. Based on a reconsideration of one's being in the world and the observation of affect in operation, such awareness may also inform the co-existence, mutual vulnerability and reciprocity of affect among human and the others, as well as the contingent micropolitics and subjectivities among those who are already at stake and those who are unaware of the vast impact of eco-crises yet.

Personal level. Although there is still a controversial debate on how immersive theatre can be a commodified, marketable product in the experience economy (Alston 2016; Lavender 2016, 155), its seeming suggestion of a more thrilling spectatorial experience nonetheless takes on significance in evoking a spectator's self-reflection even beyond the ephemerality of the performance. Alston (2016) proposes that an intense and personally valuable experience is a reward for spectator participation and can, therefore, encourage spectators to get more involved and present in the performance (35). On top of that, since not all participants have the same degree of feeling towards a shared source of affective stimuli, each spectator has a foundational role in the production of the affective relations which captivate her (44). Such production allows each participant to bring in, whether consciously or not, their own cultural and social baggage, what Alston (2016) terms as "autobiography" (39), along with their inputs. These autobiographical elements influence both the production and reception of affect in a way which is not only conveyed immediately in the performance but also persistent beyond the event because it links the performance to one's affective memories. This stands not too far from what Machon (2013) proposes as the idiosyncratic corporeal memories necessary to enhance more lasting impressions of the performance (105).

While Alston (2016) conceptualizes this return to one's own physiological and psychological state as narcissistic participation⁶ (36), which is essential to the aestheticization of affect in immersive theatre, I would like to refashion this as a sense of ownership or authorship as a result of co-production. As a spectator feels responsible for, or care for an intersubjectivity she owns a part of, it is more likely that she will think more of it in retrospect or re-live the experience under similar affective stimulus. If eco-topics need to be relatable, eco-crises conceivable, and eco-changes compatible with personal values and identity as indicated in Chapter 1, immersive theatre may be the affective site in which these reimaginings can be activated in a more voluntarily and enactable way. The "differential attunement" (Massumi, 2015) engendered in affective relationships may create a space for individuation within a communal encounter and may allow spectators to feel more willing

⁶ The term *narcissistic participation* may have captured the essence of *autobiography* which Alston (2016) conceptualizes, but it is not preferred in this study. I consider the return to self-awareness as backed by an ultimate intention to understand one's relation with the other, instead of a self-indulgence as suggested by the connotation of *narcissistic*. I contend to relate this with how Noland (2009) explains self-awareness through a phenomenologist perspective, "focusing inward, or "recentration," is far from an act of narcissism; rather, it is a way of re-discovering in one's own experience the basis for an empathetic encounter with the other" (53).

or ready to suspend their disbelief and experience immersion within a co-produced intersubjectivity.

The role of affect in relating the audience to eco-topics in immersive theatre is unpacked through situating the spectator's body as the site of aesthetics where responses to the eco-issue are mobilized, intersubjectivity is realized and relatable connections are made. As observed from the above, immersive theatre has fulfilled what Angerer (2017) considers as the operations of affect – to be connective, disruptive, and translative (60). Immersive theatre may distribute affective dynamics collectively while animate each spectator's idiosyncratic experience without simply dominating her with an affecting thing or person. This non-coercive approach is closely related to another mechanism of immersive theatre which can address alter-politics – a theatre of emancipation.

3.1.2. Immersive theatre as theatre of emancipation

Instead of regarding immersive theatre largely as an experience machine in an experience economy (Alston 2016, 2), I see its appeal coming from a mechanism which fulfils human's inner quest for self-exploration and (re)discovery. It is similar to the pleasure Amy Cook (2018) seeks in performances – in how it challenges the spectator to create new categories and find new ways to reorganize oneself to better fit the world around us. She explains, “I want theatre that does something to me that I don't even recognize that I need” (232). Reviewing the failure of current measures to solve ecological problems, there is also a parallel urge to discover unknown needs, unknown remedies, and unrecognized initiatives in the ecosphere. Immersive theatre, with its emancipatory mechanism, may satisfy both the artistic quest and the ecological urge for a new thinking tool and offer a common ground where translation of perspectives is made possible.

The political/aesthetic theories of Jacques Rancière have always been mentioned in the studies of immersive theatre (Machon 2013; Alston 2016; Lavender 2016; White 2016). His stance on the virtue of equality, which is the basis of politics and celebrated through dissensus rather than consensus, is much exemplified in his manifesto about a new kind of spectatorship - “The Emancipated Spectator” (2009). In this essay, Rancière calls for a

reconsideration of participation in theatre and suggests readers to move away from the dichotomic premises in current forms of theatrical spectatorship, which presupposes spectators as passive and unthinking. It is through understanding how binary designations, such as active/passive, viewing/acting, seeing/doing are “embodied allegories of inequality” (12) and, therefore, belong to structures of domination and subjection that emancipation is enabled. Based on his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987) inspired by the teaching philosophy of Joseph Jacotot, he suggests that theatre-makers should be the ignorant schoolmasters who allow their spectators to be “individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront or surround them” (16) instead of stultifying them with a pedagogical means to suppress their explorations. Since all intellectual journeys are equal and all spectators are capable to learn in their own trajectories, a theatre should be a community of “narrators and translators” (22) in which spectators can translate for themselves and for the other participants their perceptions in their own ways. By having the ignorant theatre-makers learning together with their spectators without hierarchies of intelligence, the roles and boundaries in a performance become fluid, frames traversed and individuality embraced in collectivity. As such, spectators can be emancipated from the stultifying system of unequal relationships.

The participation politics in immersive theatre is inevitably connected to “The Emancipating Spectator” (Rancière, 2009) as it claims to leave room for spectators to co-create with the performers and reform conventional theatrical spacetime to allow more implementations of self will, interaction and exchange. However, the political potentials of immersive theatre may not be as straightforward as a causality between a liberated disciplinary format and political transformation, just as Rancière (2010) puts it, “no direct cause-effect relationship is determinable between the intention realized in an art performance and a capacity for political subjectivation” (141). Thus, in the following, I want to further examine the efficacy of this mechanism in addressing the political and, ultimately, the ecological, through its closely related and sometimes overlapping qualities of unassuming effect, decoupling the sensible and subjectivation through personal will.

Unassuming effect. Latour (2014) concerns about how climate change is beyond our capacity to reason and respond. He writes, “people are not equipped with the mental and emotional

repertoire to deal with such a vast scale of events; that they have difficulty submitting to such a rapid acceleration for which, in addition, they are supposed to feel responsible while, in the meantime, this call for action has none of the traits of their older revolutionary dreams” (1). Similarly, Heddon and Mackey (2012) observe that uncertainty is a keyword which describes our current ecological situation. Environmental change science is “unfinishable” (169), narratives and information about eco-crises are highly variable according to multiple political beliefs and sociocultural contexts; thus, an adaptation strategy which helps build a “capacity to think critically” (171) against the ever-changing contexts of eco-crises is necessary. Emancipated spectatorship as a result of an open-ended immersive performance may indeed favour adaptations to such uncertainties and unknowingness, and help one discover her own capacity or the lack of it under precariousness. Although immersive theatre offers a set of contexts, “a forest of things” (Rancière 2009, 16), to induce certain processes and imagination from its participants in the performance, it does not and cannot assume a specific action or thought from them as they all have their individual interpretations and are usually encouraged to make their own decisions. It is the discovery processes experienced or the unforeseeable results created by the spectators which are central to the transformability of immersive theatre.

This unassumingness is, then, where responsiveness, flexibilities and thinking processes under uncertainty are exemplified and what connects the immersive event with contingent world events. Looking forward to the unknown together with the spectators, theatre-makers have allowed this emancipatory form to enact its critical function since it does not only contradict possible forms of domination in a performance, but also “questions its own limits and powers” and “refuses to anticipate its own effects” (Rancière 2010, 149). It does not specify for the spectators a motto to follow for a certain cause. The unassuming quality of immersive theatre is emancipatory not so much because of liberation than opening up a “relation-of-nonrelation” (Massumi 2002, 21) for the spectators without claiming a promise of political and eco-changes, the opposite of which will only be another managerial strategy of ecological resolutions which forces a cause to act onto the spectators determinately. As Hulme (2009a) sees it, creative applications of climate change should “thrive in conditions of pluralism and hope rather than in conditions of universalism and fear” (43).

Decoupling the sensible. When considering how affect politics and technological advances in world events and catastrophes impact spectatorship today, Kolesch (2019) mentions that climate change, globalization and postcolonial thoughts are the three phenomena which have shaped our worldviews in the last few decades. According to her, these phenomena “do not formulate and explain from, nor can they be shaped by, an outside perspective that lays claim to a supposedly singular and all-seeing positionality. Instead, they accept and embrace positionalities situated within a multiply networked complexity, characterized also by an openness to the simultaneity of multiple, diverse ways of seeing” (10). However, understanding the multi-positionalities of these phenomena can be challenging. It requires one to break away from “the dichotomous dualisms that structure our thoughts and deeds” (Kolesch 2019, 10) and be aware of the “interdependency and reciprocal complexity of subject and world, of the familiar and the foreign” (Kolesch 2019, 10). Disrupting the status quo may call for Rancière’s idea of redistributing the sensible, or, what I would argue, also a translation of affect. Rancière (2008) observes that, “[h]uman beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of ‘being together’”(4). Immersive theatre, introducing a new way of ‘being together’, is then essentially political, not only because it allocates its audience more agency or mobilization to act in the performance, but also because it extends for them the spectrum of sensible which informs and unpacks the kaleidoscopic nature of eco-issues for the public.

Allowing personal paths, gestures, and expressions, the emancipatory mechanism of immersive theatre possesses a capacity for ‘dissensus’, which refers not only to a different order or disagreement, but also to how every situation presented in the theatre can be cracked open from the inside and reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification (Rancière 2009, 49). On the macro level, immersive theatre shifts the normal theatrical boundaries towards “divergent places of engagement” (Lavender 2016, 145) and transforms the way ideas are communicated to the audience. On the micro and kinaesthetic level, focusing on the prioritization of the spectator’s sensations may allow her to “momentarily detach movement from meaning, thereby recognizing that movement and meaning might be coupled in different ways” (Noland 2009, 54). The spectator, as such, while keeping her own critical distance from the performance, can be given the opportunity to decouple and

recouple the sensible and the thinkable with various positionalities she is exposed to in the theatre.

Subjectivation through personal will. In his book *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* (2009), Mike Hulme contends that climate change is more urgently of an ideological and symbolic problem than a physical and substantive problem. According to him, instead of solving it through a problem-solution framework, climate change should be considered as a mobilizing idea to be debated and used (329), especially because it means so many different things to so many different people, and technology, science, politics and economics are only able to provide “clumsy solutions” (329) at the moment. He suggests that one should ask the question “[h]ow does the idea of climate change alter the way we arrive at and achieve our personal aspirations and our collective social goals?” (xxviii) and utilize the discussions around climate change to offer the “psychological, ethical and spiritual” (329) support necessary for all upcoming human projects to cope with the forever changing and travelling idea of climate, which is fundamentally entangled with changing human needs as long as human exists. Following Hulme (2009b)’s argument, then, the emancipatory potential of immersive theatre lies right in bringing the spectator attention towards developing an active will to ask questions about climate change. Afterall, while increased eco-awareness may more likely lead to eco-changes, the pre-requisite to such eco-awareness lies in one’s initiative to reach and imagine the eco-topic, albeit its strangeness, severity, and complications. Ultimately, one has to reclaim her own intellectual resources to create new stories and projects with the constantly evolving idea and challenges of climate change.

Channelled into an eco-related immersive performance, allowing the spectator to plot her own journey leaves room for her to respond to her individual relations with the eco-topic both physically and intellectually. As Frieze (2016) contends, in a preference hungry era of many unquestioned choice-asking mechanisms, making choice in immersive theatre is an imperative instead of a freedom because decision fatigue, or “the loss of the instinct ability to decide which decisions are most important” (22), has already become a political concern. Fragmenting the nodes and structures of decision making (Frieze 2016, 22) in an eco-conscious immersive theatre can therefore mitigate unquestioned participation. The initiative to know or engage with the eco-topic may slowly unfold as the spectator is led to

make her own decisions more consciously. It is through the design of this gradually increasing involvement with the eco-topic that a subjectivation necessary for intellectual self-development can emerge during the act of participation, so that one may reclaim the rights, or at least the desire, to participate in, criticize or even reconfigure the eco-discourse. The significance is not “in the capacity to make independent and active choices in the work, nor in being left to sit in the safety of an auditorium, but rather in the extent to which we are ‘unreformed’ in our relationship with the work” (White, 2016, 31) and the ecological situations it entails.

As seen from the above, the emancipatory mechanism of immersive theatre bears the potential to inform its spectators the uncertain cultural production of the eco-problem, the multi-positionalities engendered in perceiving climate change and the need to develop their independent ideas towards eco-issues. An immersive theatre may provide a common ground where eco-issues are translated for the spectator without aiming for another fixated but “new topography of the possible” (Rancière 2009, 48), which risks manipulating the audience through a goal-oriented schema. Its potentials then lie in emancipating spectators from a tendency to attach to only one outside, single vantage point under dualistic operations.

The above manifestations of affect and emancipation correlate the spectator with eco-issues in a more personal and fluid way. Their emphases on openness and encounters are also in sync with the transformative power of performance (Lichte-Fischer, 2008) mentioned earlier in the previous chapter. From these, I believe immersive theatre can be used to make an eco-inquiry and raise the eco-awareness of its spectators as it can offer a “move from one given world to another in which capacities and incapacities, forms of tolerance and intolerance, are differently defined” (Rancière 2010, 143). In the following, how such efficacy is animated will be further explored through examining some of the immersive tactics employed in the production of an eco-conscious immersive performance.

3.2 Immersive tactics to raise eco-awareness

Based on how it embraces relationality and differences, immersive theatre is also providing a space for empathy for its participants, both intersubjectively inside and outside of the

theatre; and empathy is what underlies the belief that raising eco-awareness is essential and possible in this study. Empathy may take on different meanings in different academic fields, such as cognitive empathy in cognition studies, affective empathy in psychological researches, and somatic empathy in neurological sciences. Evan Thompson (2001), drawing an overview of empathy with relation to human consciousness, may shed light on what it means in a broader prospect. According to Thompson (2001, 17), the full performance of empathy engenders basically:

- i. The passive association of my lived body with the lived body of the Other
- ii. The imaginative transposal of myself to the place of the Other
- iii. The interpretation or understanding of myself as an Other for you
- iv. Ethical responsibility in the face of the Other

Following the above, the first dimension is based on recognizing the embodied corporeality of the Other, which is enhanced by tacit knowledge associated with the physical encounter in a shared space and animated by human sensations. Supported by the first, the second dimension is a decentring of the ego and transportation to the understanding of an intersubjectivity in which one can assume another's perspectives imaginatively. Having this openness in mind, the third dimension entails how one's self-identity is grasped based on the other's perspectives. Both the second and third dimensions are sustained through enacting and perceiving embodied agencies in a social environment, and requires intersubjective understanding on kinaesthetic, emotional and cognitive levels. The fourth dimension is the perception of the other as one who merits moral concern, of which the judgement is made based on both value feelings and the self-othering experience. Thompson (2011)'s broad overview is able to situate the significance of empathy not only interpersonally but also within our ecosphere, as the "intersubjective openness of consciousness and empathy are the preconditions for our experience of inhabiting a common, intersubjective, spatial world" (19).

With reference to Thompson (2001)'s first three dimensions of empathy (2001, 17), and considering how Frieze (2016) regards the "crux of participatory performance lies not in the object of our attention, what might normally be called 'the content', but in the ways that our attention is managed, the ways in which our engagement is co-opted with and as content" (23), I want to specify for this study, among the unlimited creative ways to do it, how

spectator attention or energy may be managed to resonate with eco-conscious ideas through three immersive tactics. These tactics are inducing self-reflections through intimate encounters, experimenting the reciprocity of embodied agency between the theatrical world and the real world, and reserving a capacity for weakness and negative feelings. Hopefully, through these tactics, eco-awareness, or what Thompson (2001) categorizes as the dimension of ethical empathy, may be raised among the spectators of immersive theatre.

3.2.1. Inducing self-reflections through intimate encounters

While intimacy may take on many connotations, as in closeness, privacy, disclosure, sharing, and even eroticism, Lauren Berlant (1998), in the special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, “Intimacy”, addresses it from the broader cultural perspective as communication with the sparsest of signs and gestures, within supposedly domestic zones of familiarity shared with another person, and an inward, private sphere which is contrasted with a respective publicness. The closeness it entails is not always stable; fears, desires and therapies are all engaged in “the mixed-up instrumental and affective relations of collegiality” (282), especially when “certain ‘expressive’ relations are promoted across public and private domains - love, community, patriotism - while other relations, motivated, say, by the ‘appetites’, are discredited or simply neglected” (285). As such, intimacy can engender both support and transgression, as opposed to mere trust and familiarity, and attachment to intimacy is then also regulated by social orders, ideologies and relations. Therefore, to rethink intimacy as a complicated togetherness is to reappraise our lives and to reimagine our futures. It carries political and generative potentials as it “builds worlds; it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relations” (Berlant 1998, 282).

Julia Kristeva, who begins writing her intimate politics since the 1980’s, traces the Latin root of intimacy as *intimus*, which means “the most interior” (2002, p.43). Its liveliest form “resides precisely in the heterogeneity of the sensorial/symbolic, affect/thought registers” (2002, p.49). Situating intimacy in between body senses and thoughts, the inner place of signification and public place of politics, she advocates an “intimate revolt” (2002) to reorganize sociopolitical orders with new aesthetic approaches which reclaim the bond between affectivity and public discourses. As deduced from the scholars above, intimacy is

marked with a liminality which is realized in between one's corporeality and inner psyche, and a transformative potential in both politics and relationalities. This motivates me to study the function of intimacy in an eco-conscious immersive performance, on how intimacy in the bodies can be translated into one's awareness, especially when language and signification does not necessitate intimacy; and how intimacy may lead to transformation because physical proximity does not essentially lead to a shared inner ecocentric aspiration.

The urge to explore the intimate is also explicated in critic Martin Jacques (2004)'s article titled "The Death of Intimacy". He states that intimacy, where our well-beings rest on, is in decline. Individualism, marketisation, communication technologies have weakened intimate relationships in the society, and people are becoming more distanced from one another and with one's self-experience. Instead of interacting interpersonally, human are increasingly subscribed to a voyeuristic relationship with everyday experience and social ties. A voyeuristic experience is theorized by Laura Mulvey (1975) as a visual pleasure stemmed from a desire of, but impossibility to, intimacy. It also suggests the act of witnessing the emergence of a spectacle while the intention to interact with it is repressed. However, as Jones (2012) indicates, at a time when performances are anxious to say something meaningful about geopolitical tensions, a more intimate face-to-face strategy, instead of a distant, voyeuristic one, is seen to work proper at the discursive level of the issue (26). With reference to the Levinasian understanding of face, which fuses the face with a responsibility for the other in an ethical exchange (Lévinas, 1985), applying a face-to-face strategy may avoid the risk of re-objectifying the performance (Jones 2012, 26) as a spectacle on one hand, and expand a private space for the "resingularization" (Heddon et al. 2012, 126) of one's perspectives out of hegemonic ideologies on the other. As such, I contend that through creating intimate encounters in immersive theatre, theatre-makers may transport the spectators to an essential sociality which informs a sense of responsibility for the other, one which is much needed for the understanding of the intersubjectivity of the ecosphere.

According to Pierce (1968), with reference to the liberated performance formats in the 1960's, intimacy is a desirable quality in a theatre structure. Often in theatre, intimacy refers to a quality of physical proximity between the cast and the audience, and may result in a greater sense of self-awareness on the part of the audience (147) based on the presence and

response-ability of the participants in the event (148). As opposed to aesthetic distance, it is the most important spatial quality in theatre which can be realized through décor, absence of proscenium and illusionist scenery, so as to direct the audience's attention to the action, enhance a communal feeling among the participants and allow intensified relationalities for introspection. Scholars (e.g., Harari 2011; Machon 2013; Breel 2015; Gomme 2015) and practitioners (e.g., Adrian Howells, Eirini Kartsaki, Franko B, Danielle Agami) in the coming decades continue to develop and study intimate encounters in immersive theatre, which are sometimes especially obvious in one-to-one immersive performances (Zerihan, 2009) because of its spatial and interpersonal intensities. While Chatzichristoudoulou and Zerihan (2012) have largely connected intimacy in immersive performances with relation to erotic contexts, intimacy as manifested through proximities and spectator's self-awareness will be my foci in this study.

Physical, sensual and communal proximities. By bringing spectators and performers together at a face-to-face and more tangible distance, immersive theatre provides an intimate space which allows kinaesthetic empathy and sensorial impact to emerge in between one another. According to Gomme (2015), immersive theatre is a passage of affect shared between at least two beings and intimacy usually emerges as a fleeting moment of connection which is best activated through spontaneous, non-scripted communication engaging body language and gaze, which are themselves proofs of a shared effort to make such connection work. Taking the aforementioned *Foot Washing for the Sole* (2008) by Adrian Howells as example, while he washed and massaged the spectator's feet in a locked room for half an hour to create a 'real' encounter (Gardner 2009), the sincerity of the performer, confined space, privacy as a result of "forced monogamy" (Zerihan, 2009:4), unavoidable gaze, sharing of stimulants and senses, passing of time together, and the bodily touch in the washing process all conjugate the necessary conditions to embody intimacy. These proxemics provide the intimate space for the participant to gradually sense that a more equal basis of interaction is established, so that she is more tended to immerse into the performance where interpersonal boundaries are destabilized while feelings of relationality and affect are intensified. Though not guaranteed, this allows the participant to then give her body for interaction, talk, disclose her histories, engage and exchange, and thus, open a pocket for feeling corporeal intimacy and understanding intersubjectivity.

The spatial proxemics also allow one to look into the details of the materiality, such as the gaze and the soundscape, and enhance better opportunities of resonance among all senses and elements in the theatre and beyond. According to Garner (2018), “[f]aces, especially eyes, play a powerful role in animating the body and marking subjectivity [...] From the perspective of movement perception, attention and intention reinforce each other when eyes are involved: movement follows the gaze, precipitates visual intention into action” (124). Not only does gaze indicate intention, it also plays at and displays voyeurism (Frieze 2016, 22), in the acts of watching among participants by participants, demonstrating the self-policing and panoptical-policing sensitives in physical closeness. If language cannot communicate genuine intimacy as Gomme (2015) proposes, then the gaze from another person may be what one observes for cues of that spontaneity.

Aural intimacy has also been used increasingly in immersive theatre as technology advances. Using headphones to magnify the receptivity of certain sound effects, immersive theatre creates or disorients the spatial reality perceived by the spectators through aural ambience. As architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa (2005) contends, “[w]hile vision is directional, sound is omni-directional. The sense of sight implies exteriority, but sound creates an experience of interiority. I regard an object, but sound approaches me; the eye reaches but the ear receives”. (49). A closely surrounding sound is inevitably omnipresent. It blocks one away from the existing world and create a space for the imagination of another, the otherwise alterity. At times, the visual and aural intimacies stimulate the spectator with such intense affective forces that they reach her in an almost tactile way. These sensory proxemics foreground an embodied participation, and prompt a more prominent presence from the participants, who will, in turn, be more open to feel more empathetically for and imagine a closer relationship with the elements or topics of the performance.

Another arrangement of proximity may involve assigning groupings, roles or seating to categorize certain participants under the same assigned goal, mission or vision, which draws them closer in motivational terms so that they aspire towards a shared narrative within the performance. This is relevant to the aforementioned concept of *communitas* (Turner, 1979). It is through assuming a certain extent of similarity in participatory experience that the

intimate sharing of an interest can be felt. (Gomme 2015, 285). A *communitas* is, then, where the sharing of intimacy and mutual perception are more pronounced. The above corporeal or communal proxemics are created to bring spectators a better chance of immersion into quasi-authentic relationalities so that, in an eco-conscious performance, a phenomenological openness towards other entities in the ecosphere can be put forward. However, although corporeal intimacy may redirect one's attention towards intersubjectivity, I suggest that it may not be directly translated to a shared intimacy in the minds of the participants. Then, I propose, the significance of this tactic lies in opening the access to one's intimate self rather than having spectators empathize with the others unquestionably .

Hypersensitivity of the self. The attention on and among the stranger-spectators, which would have been lessened in conventional theatrical performances, heightens not only engaging but also perplexed emotions. Corporeal proximity is not a genuine, interior feeling of intimacy per se. There exist intrinsic fears and risks in the tight and immediate frame with a stranger, which defy that genuine sense of shared intimacy. Critic Lisa Newman (2017) experiences the eye contact as a power game, practitioners Eirini Kartsaki reckons that the confined spaces of one-to-one performance create uneasiness (as cited in Zerihan, 2009:43), Franko B acknowledges the risks of arousing traumatic memories and over-disclosure (as cited in Zerihan, 2009:43), and Danielle Agami reports an audience's reflection of self-exposure and vulnerability in their works (as cited in Harari, 2011: 144). Although most immersive performances aim to diminish the polarized roles of performer/audience and entitle the spectators agency, the crafted environment, relationship and context set ready before the spectator still imply a dominant nature of the performer. Therefore, while such pre-designed proximities aim indeed to keep the flow of the performance and act as safety nets against psychic and physical abuses, they also make it less likely for the spectator to enter the inner world of the performer, and have the performer disclose stories and revelations in the same manner. The ideal mutuality is then abridged, going from a sense of intersubjective intimacy to different senses of subjective consciousness. Under this condition, perplexities may emerge in the spectator and create a hypersensitivity of the self, make visible the psychological boundaries with the other and the choices made to sustain/abort the relationship. The supposedly share intimacy instead inquires and magnifies the immediate connection with the ego. Intimate encounters, therefore, while trying to create corporeal

closeness, is at best connecting the spectator to her self-awareness, and leaving her the internal, private space of thinking to make sense of the encounter.

Intimacy in immersive theatre is a tactic of two orders at odd - proximity and alienation. While it may draw spectators and performers closer physically and communally, a more complicated self-consciousness emerges at a critical distance in the spectator because of such intensified relationality. This activates one's reaction to relate with and re-examine the narratives foregrounded by such sociality in the performance. An eco-conscious immersive performance may wish to induce an empathetic understanding of how such intimate but possibly problematic encounters are woven into the fabrics of the ecosphere, and lead its spectators to inquire such encounters in the real world as they will be inquired in the theatre.

3.2.2. Experimenting the reciprocity of theatrical/anthropocentric agency

Agency may generally refer to a capacity to act or make choices, and performance always involves agency in the body (Butler 2015). In immersive theatre where spectators are invited to interact with the performers or other spectators, the performance agency is redistributed from solely to the performers to both the performers and the spectators. While this may confer certain empowering effect on the spectators as they seem to be “controlling and curating their own world” (Brown, as cited in Gardner 2018) in the performance and contributing to a generative event, I suggest that it is also an immersive tactic which may be used to induce reflections of agencies in the wider context of the ecosphere.

Audience agency in theatre. According to Gareth White (2009), audience agency in all performances includes “the power to interpret, to take viewpoints, to shape our own experience, to follow invitations to active participation, and to initiate participation” (222). As for Peter Wright (2011), audience agency in theatre refers specifically to a capacity which enables individuals to become creative constructors of knowledge rather than passive receptors of external actions (112). Audience agency is therefore wielding certain extents of freedom to act wilfully with an ability to make changes and a sense of satisfaction out of it. However, how such freedom, power to impact and sense of satisfaction are endowed is still open to question, especially offering spectators choices does not necessarily translate to

spectators perceiving themselves as having agency (Breel 2015, 374). In Astrid Breel (2015)'s case study, she codes audience participation from reactive, to interactive, and proactive participation to analyse data gathered from the spectators of *I Wish I Was Lonely* (2013) by Hannah Walker and Chris Thorpe. She discovers that while most spectators reported an experience of reactive participation, less reported that of the interactive one, and none have experienced proactive participation in which initiation of actions rely mostly on the spectator. As Breel (2015) herself acknowledges, "agency is a complicated notion" (350) and there is no easy methodology to understand audience experience perfectly. However, this study provokes the questioning of whether the opportunities for spectators to make choices and the satisfaction afterwards are genuine in most participatory practices.

This question calls practitioners to reconsider ethical and meaningful designs of audience agency in their works; but it would be a blunt judgement to see this as refuting the empowering effect immersive theatre suggests at times. I tend to agree with Karl Frost's remark that "[p]hysical action does not necessarily equate with agency, and agency does not equate with meaning, though there may be complex, context specific relations amongst them" (2013). Frost (2013) develops a taxonomy of five degrees of audience agency, ranging from the classic proscenium, to passive treatment, tight interplay, open interplay and communal interplay. These degrees are not judgement of good or bad nor equivalent to grades of meaningfulness, but solely a useful model to guide theatrical practices. This leads me to propose that, in addition to possibly empowering effects, giving or restricting audience agency may be intended tactfully by theatre-makers as a tactic to induce reflection, in connection with how it involves "intention and choice" (Breel 2015, 375). As Frieze (2016) contends, agentic participation "is revealed to be not singular but multiple, fragmented narratives of our own participation playing out in our minds and in our intermittent and often interrupted observation of those around us as makers and participants become blurred. Afterwards, we wonder why we did not react differently and how we might react differently if we went through it again" (28). Therefore, the application of audience agency in the immediate co-creative contexts is indeed designed to ignite the spectators' imagination of creating an otherwise, better-designed world. Then I suggest, the active role of human agency in the ecosphere may be better localized and captured with such imagination.

Human Agency in the Anthropocene. Reviewing the discussion in Chapter 1, human agency in the Anthropocene refers heuristically to the human actions which intervene the world without acknowledging non-human agencies. It has also created subsequent ecological, sociocultural and political influences human have to bear themselves. It is a complicated concept as humanity as a collective agency is non-localizable and the responsibilities in this collective idea is difficult to be divided and measured, which makes human agency in the Anthropocene a debatable idea in the way of raising eco-awareness.

Observing this emerging ontological being of the anthropocentric human, Dipesh Chakrabarty postulates that a new understanding of humanity and human agency under the Anthropocene should be acquired. As the framing of human agency has been transformed from the traditionally biological agent, who experiences the world in the histories of modernity and globalization, to the recently shaped geological agent, who determines the climate and the history of life on earth in the Anthropocene (2009, 206), the age-old humanist distinction between human and nature collapses (2009, 207) because the self-created, thinking human has become a natural, material, and world-altering force. The timescale of human history has then been merged with that of the geological at a planetary scale. Thereafter, given the discontinued experience of these epochs, Chakrabarty (2009) deems that it is necessary to think beyond the ideas of reason and freedom, which have exclusively been shaping the ontology of human since the Age of Enlightenment, and develop a new thinking which informs a human future compatible with this new geophysical agency.

This geological agency is further problematized by the intricate web of causal and moral responsibilities distributed over the interdependencies of human, non-human, crises-makers and victims (Chakrabarty 2015, 171). Using Chakrabarty (2015) 's words, it is at once *anthropos*, as a collective geophysical force in the Anthropocene, but also *homo*, as in the one-but-divided humanity in climate politics (159), corresponding to the two kinds of histories Chakrabarty (2009) observes respectively - the deeper, since pre-recorded "species history of human" (212) on earth and the recorded "global histories of capital" (212). Following his argument, it is through putting these two histories into conversation, developing a sense of human collectivity from a shared sense of catastrophe, and acquiring a pluralistic understanding of agency of both human and non-human (Chakrabarty 2009, 222)

that climate conditions may be approached effectively. Discussions about eco-crises should then move past disciplinary discriminations and human exceptionalism, and “produce meaning through an appeal to our capacity not only to reconstruct but [...] to re-enact in our own minds the experience of the past” (Chakrabarty 2009, 220) and of others’ experiences.

Latour (2014) has also steered current understanding of agency towards a posthuman one in which human agency is situated as only part of a matter agentic continuum. In the same vein but from a different angle of Chakrabarty (2009)’s, he sees human agency as a product of a binary division of the world in which “one that is inanimate and has no agency” (nature), and “one which is animated and concentrates all the agencies” (society) (2014, 16) historically, politically and discursively. He suggests to use the term *actant* to cover both human and non-human and diminish the object/subject relationship between them. While human agency has dominated the world in a functionalist manner, human should reconsider how all actants are indeed sharing the same collective shape-changing destiny within the ecosphere (2014, 17). By moving into a common ground of agency, the existence of other matters on earth is animated, the liberalist idea of human and their responsibilities on earth is challenged, and the history and consequences of human actions on the ecosphere become even more obvious. How to “re-enact in our own minds” (Chakrabarty 2009, 220) the (in)animation of human and non-human agencies and reactions, the collective responsibility of human, the shared sense of catastrophe among human and other species, I suggest, will be implemented through inviting spectators to perform or interact with such actions or gestures in an immersive event.

Reciprocal corporeality. This tactic can be understood through Merleau-Ponty (1968) ’s notion of the *flesh* or *chiasm*, his ultimate development of the concept of embodiment. The *flesh* is a cosmic, intersubjective perception embodied through the intercorporeality among all entities. Based on the idea of double sensations, the body is not only perceived, but also a measurement of all other dimensions of the world (249). It centres around the capacity of reciprocity, as Merleau-Ponty (1968) explains, “[t]he things touch me as I touch them and touch myself: I of the world — distinct from my I: the double inscription outside and inside” (261). As such, the body is at once passive and active, mass and gesture (271). The *flesh* is, then, a mirror phenomenon and it extends one’s relation with the body (255), so that “the

presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh” (127). In other words, the experiences of other entities in this world, no matter how different they are, may become comprehensible to me because we are all grounded on a fundamental corporeal commonality which shapes, is shaped by and shared within this ecosphere.

This reciprocal sensibility motivates the strategic design of audience activities in an eco-conscious immersive theatre. Mirroring activity is essential in the empathetic understanding of performance. According to McConachie and Hart (2006), who follows the neuroscientific works of Vittorio Gallese, it is a form of cognitive engagement which involves mirror neurons in the brain (5). These mirror neurons allow spectators to attribute intention to an observed movement based on the knowledge of a shared motor schema. When seeing an action on stage, the mirror neurons in her activate not only the corresponding visual areas but also the motor circuits necessary to perform that action, so that the spectator can “replicate the emotions of a performer’s physical state without experiencing that physical state directly”(5). The different amounts of mirror-matching activities in various forms of spectating may also be the point where conventional performances and immersive performances diverge. With reference to neuroscientific researches, Garner (2018) states that “mirroring activity is lessened when one perceives an action being performed compared to when one enacts that action oneself — and lessened still more when one encounters representations of the same action in other forms (a narrative, for instance)” (156). As deduced from the above, I suggest that by inviting the audience to perform certain actions in an immersive theatre, the theatre-maker does not aim to yield imitations of a role from the spectator, she aims instead to increase the chances for the spectator to extend her own *flesh* to the *flesh* of the other, to re-embody the intentions and senses of other’s actions or reactions in a different context, and reach an empathetic understanding of the other. Such actions in an eco-conscious performance may inform the agency and sensations of the ignored crisis victims or non-human, reflect intended or unintended eco-degrading human actions or generate a shared sense of vulnerability etc.

Embracing the differential attunement of affect (Massumi 2015) as discussed earlier in this chapter, although this immersive tactic may provide a common ground of understanding through the *flesh*, it does not necessarily lead to a shared aspiration. This tactic of

experimenting the reciprocity of actions is generative. As Noland (2009) and Garner (2018) both suggest from a kinaesthetic perspective, there may exist discrepancies between what the actions mean and what performing the actions makes the spectator feel. Such discrepancies may or may not be intended by the theatre-maker, but in both cases, these differences can lead the spectator to think about it critically because of one's ability to differentiate and remark the widened gap between meaning and the sensate being (Noland 2009, 212), or uncover different ways of being because she can discern the limits she feels empathetically through corporeal resonance (Garner 2018, 12). Engaging into another's actions is not about becoming the other but reaching for the other, which "demarcates a space where otherness can be confronted and owned" (Garner 2018, 247). Borrowing Butler ([1988] 2008) 's terms of "re-enactment" and "reexperiencing" (194), by inviting spectators to re-enact actions loaded with established meanings and ritualized legitimization (194), this tactic brings the audience to re-experience their actions as human agents in the Anthropocene, the intentions and feelings of the others, and their intersubjective relationships with the ecosphere. It follows, if allocating agency to the audience maybe empowering, it will be because they are given "a power to alter those acquired behaviours and beliefs for purposes that may be reactive (resistant) or collaborative (innovative) in kind" (Noland 2009, 9).

3.2.3. Leaving space for weakness and negative feelings

In order to better synchronize a spectator's experience with the role she plays or help her immerse in the quasi-authentic world of the story, she may sometimes be engaged in a designed feeling-inducing context in an immersive performance. On the other, she may also feel towards the success or failure of the performance to fulfil its expected function or effect as the performance proceeds. In both cases, she may experience both positive feelings, such as joy or excitement, or negative feelings such as disappointment or anguish. I propose that these negative feelings and the weakness spectators regard about the performance may be used as significant elements to bring spectators mentally back to the performance and resample the inadequacies projected by or implicated within the medium, so as to engage spectators in reflections even beyond the performance. The following will explore how such intended or unintended negative traits can be implemented in an eco-conscious immersive performance to bring spectators closer to similar negative feelings or fallacies in real life.

Weak theatre. Before looking at some of the negative feelings which may be experienced by spectators, I would like to first establish weakness as the essential catalyst for mobilizing the ecological function of immersive theatre. Following Carl Lavery (2016 b)'s answer towards the titled question in his article "Performance and Ecology – What can Theatre do?", to reflect on the efficacy of performances with "weak thoughts" (230) may help reconfigure them to be ecological doings. "Weak thought", a notion notably termed by Gianni Vattimo, is "by no means a weakness of thinking as such. It is just that, because thinking is no longer demonstrative but rather edifying, it has become in that restricted sense weaker" (Vattimo et al. 2002, 452). In this sense, Vattimo (1984, 160) sees the strong, objective, metaphysical truth as a product of dialectics and traditions; and it is through allowing mobilized interpretation and rethinking about its absolute existence that its authoritative position can be weakened and a voice to the different, the weak, can be given. Adapting Vattimo's idea and seeing the need for a new eco-critical approach in theatre and performances, Lavery (2016 b) suggests that instead of advocating direct interventions into environmental matters, prescribing "strong meanings" (230) and making bold claims of behavioural changes through theatre performances, theatre practitioners should turn to "weak thoughts" to "impose a certain limit on the possibilities of theatre, to trouble notions of mastery and intentionality, to remain hypothetical and suspensive" (230). Seeing the ecocritical potentials of immersive theatre as implicit in its medium instead of its explicit eco-messages, Lavery (2016 b) advocates a weak theatre which exposes "its own incapacity to signify, its own failure to act" (232). A weak theatre is a modest, indeterminate eco-practice of which the power lies in refraining from a self-preserving anthropocentric thinking, and allying itself "with everything that Western modernity distrust – the weak, the unfinished, the superfluous, the contingent" (233). Thus, through embracing the humble affirmation of weakness and uncertainty, and accepting an inevitable incapacity to bring forth satisfactory communication with all of the spectators, an eco-conscious performance may provide the ground where mutual vulnerability can be disclosed and felt, discussions can be opened up, and eco-awareness, rather than empty rhetoric, may emerge. Reflections on the idea of a weak theatre are especially significant at a time when theatre-makers tend to create performance in the direction of impact-oriented guidelines established in cultural policies and by funding bodies.

Negative feelings. Having this capacity for disclosing weakness as the premise of this tactic, I would like to proceed to look at how negative feelings may play a role in raising eco-awareness. Based on Gerhard Thonhauser (2019)'s working conceptualization of 'feeling' within the field of relational affect, 'feeling' is an affective phenomena which unites both bodily sensations and intentional world-orientation (57). It is an experiential dimension which is involved in the dynamics of affective resonances and the enactment of emotion repertoires (59). Feeling is "at once evaluative world-orientation and situational self-awareness" (59). Like agency, feelings take intercorporeality as the site of experience and informs intersubjective accessibility. Thus, projecting, inducing or leaving capacity for certain feelings in an immersive theatre may possibly lead spectators to reexperience similar feelings and their underlying reasons in real life. Negative feelings are used in this tactic because they tend to impose a 'sticky' attachment (Heddon 2015, 327) and compel a stronger urge to rectify an action due to incompleteness or non-satisfaction. They also imply or correspond to certain weaknesses in a medium or system. Exposing the spectators to negative feelings may also lead them to uncover the unbalanced "order of feelings" (Stodulka 2019, 310) existing in current sociopolitical hierarchies, which refers to the different feelings each community experiences as marked and shaped by the discursive orders they are in and the display rules which they abide by. With relevance to this study, some of the negative feelings, whether intended by the theatre-maker or not, will be explored as examples. They are the feelings of disappointment, unjust, and guilt.

Disappointment induced in/felt about a performance. As a contingent event, the inevitability of failing to meet the expectations of all the participants seems to be the ontology of immersive performances. Heddon (2015) considers this space between expectation and disconfirmation as disappointment, a negative feeling which is not about the inevitability of such failures, but the spectator's self-oriented or socioculturally shaped relationship with and desire about it. While disappointment sounds lacking the vitality of transformation, according to Heddon (2015), it is indeed a significant element in an eco-conscious performance, "the place of hope's reappearance" (324), especially because one needs to think through disappointment's affective register to understand where disappointment comes from and what it does in an epoch of challenges (324). Heddon (2015) considers disappointment as a 'sticky' affect which warrants a lingering attachment from the spectator

because one will always want to go back to the performance and reverse or undo the results (327). This unsettling notion is constructive because mitigating it requires new movement and resilience. It mobilizes imagination because, to deal with the feeling of disappointment, one has to “dis-appoint expectation retrospectively” (329) and re-appoint it differently, acknowledge the misplacement of expectation and move on. By including in the design of the immersive performance the failure to align with what Heddon (2015) coins as “ecospectations”, an interplay among expectation, spectatorship and ecology (329), the theatre-maker may lead the spectators to rethink the at times “overdetermined focus on ecology as a modality of affective encountering” (333) and avoid seeing performances as a hopeful solution to eco-problems. Disappointment offers a starting point, instead of an end point as suggested by fulfilment, which allows constant returns for negotiation and rediscovery. As Lavery (2016 b) proposes, this disappointment emerges not out of a judgement from a superior position; it emerges from the self-awareness of the limits posited by an eco-spectator and the nature of participatory performance instead (234).

Feeling of Unjust. Somehow close to the feeling of disappointment about the result of a performance, a spectator may also feel unjust in an immersive interaction which involves negotiation. In Gareth White (2016) ’s aforementioned review of *Early Days (of a better nation)*, in which participants voted as representatives for the founding policies of a new nation, he suggests that the dichotomous and compressive nature of voting, as well as the episodic nature of simulation have conflated the overpowering presence of the rules of the game, which ultimately escapes critique (26). Unable to reach a favourable voting result, he feels frustrated and unjust as a participant under the performance design. He justifies that he could not make reasonable assessment before he voted and was carried away unconsciously in an argument with another performer-representative, who pointed out his weak argument. This frustration of incompleteness, impulse to argue and the fear of disappointing his party provoked both his emotional response and immersion into the performance significantly (27). This kind of unexpected emotion, response, or what Alston (2016) terms as “errant immersion” in immersive theatre may be out of the expected map of interaction, but it does not influence the coherence of the immersive aesthetics. Rather, it contributes to address the omnipotent control conferred to geopolitical parties and institutions in real life, and opens a space for the critical evaluation of performance design as well as that of political systems.

As Frieze (2016) contends, this awkward moment can be “insightful and ethically challenging” (12). With reference to Ontroerend Goed’s work *Fight Night* (2013), another simulation on election, he comments that the performance demonstrates how ‘the show must go on’ principle is deeply ingrained in both the theatre and in politics. The election game naturally conjures up a majority force who deprives the voices of the minority force without themselves realizing such constitutions (Frieze 2016, 13). Immersive theatre may be the safe space where such ethical challenges can be explored strategically with a positive and reflective impact.

Feeling of Guilt. Another ethically challenging and ‘sticky’ affect which prompts the spectator to frequently reconsider human actions is the sense of guilt, a social feeling about the unfulfilled responsibilities of the human collective. I would like to follow Theresa Schütz (2019)’s application of guilt as a “specific *cultural effect* [emphasis by author] of the circulation of affects, signs and meanings between bodies” (180) instead of the morally loaded, inner feelings of each individual spectator. Attending Dries Verhoeven’s immersive installation *Guilty Landscapes* (2016), in which the spectator faced the video recordings of people in a troubled environment at a very close distance, Schütz (2019, 187) found herself set into a relationship with an unfamiliar but painful counterpart. Although there was no indication and expression of suffering, the framings of these people living with landscape of poverty and wars, which were very different from her then environment, caused her to feel, not compassion, but a guilty conscience. She feels ashamed because of her failure to render assistance to those who suffer, especially during her act of avoiding the gaze of the person in the video. I contend that this feeling of guilt can be extended to a social emotion instead of a personal one because this failure is certainly not only hers but implicit in the power relations of geopolitical struggles; and it exists among not only human but also all actants in the ecosphere. Inducing this sense of guilt through the incapability of technology mediation to offer immediate assistance is also another key design of this installation. It leads the participant to problematize this mediated feeling of guilt and raise their awareness for the distant others. Following Butler (2009, 46)’s idea, guilt for the human subject is linked to survivability, destructiveness and its consequences. It arises from the fear of losing the other, whom one depends on for survival, due to one’s own act of destruction. In other words, as a pre-moral drive emerging out of the interdependent condition of survival, the feeling of guilt

may revoke the idea of mutual vulnerability in the ecosphere.

The use of these negative feelings, unlike in the Aristotelian sense of catharsis, does not provoke a purifying effect through redirecting similar anxieties out of the spectators. It asks the spectators to interrogate the negative feelings, regardless of whether they are at peace with such feelings or not, and revisit them again in their minds, even beyond the ephemerality of the performance. The impacts of weakness and negative feelings in this tactic may then posit a vital and strong force in informing the otherwise numbness felt towards the distanced and disembodied eco-problems in real-life.

The three immersive tactics above – of intimacy, agency and weakness – certainly do not exhaust the number of ways immersive performances can use to raise eco-awareness among the spectators. Also, they may or may not be always employed simultaneously in the same eco-conscious performance, which depends largely on the artistic decision of the theatre-maker. However, their intertwining forces, at times on overlapping spatiality and temporality, may provide the conditions and environment which lead the audience into the liminal space of immersion and, hopefully, though inevitably depending on the case of each individual spectator, retrospection afterwards. Looking at White (2016, 33)’s recount about *Early Days (of a better nation)* again, his reflection below may resonate with the above argument. “Problematic or not, the fictional representatives of real-world phenomena, my interactions with them and with other participants, the interventions of performers, and my body-based intersubjective affects in response are all intertwined at this point to create the meaning, for me, of this performative moment” (27); “and yet its very difficulty and discomfort continues to provoke me to re-think and re-assess it, and to re-assess my wilful attempts to assert myself within its game structure” (33). His body has become the site of aesthetics, and his sensations are realized through his actions, social contacts and feelings of discomfort.

The following chapter will examine in depth the efficacy of the two central cases – Rimini Protokoll’s *Climate Change Conference* (2014) and Riverbed Theatre’s *Hypnosis* (2017) – to make eco-enquiries. By looking at how the above immersive tactics have been manifested in these two performances and exploring the affective and emancipatory capacities they assume, I will discuss how they may work to raise eco-awareness in their spectators.

4. Immersed and Re-Surfaced: Case Analyses

In this chapter, how immersive theatre may be used to raise eco-awareness will be exemplified through the analyses of the central cases, two very different performances which vary in style, scale, length, topic and ways of delivery. Rimini Protokoll's *World Climate Change Conference* (2014) is a "mammoth-scale" (Rimini Protokoll, 2014) performance held simultaneously in various venues during a 3-hour duration, taking 650 audience members through a theatrical simulation of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) and engaging them as national delegates. Riverbed Theatre's *Hypnosis* (2017) is a short performance held in a small, minimal room with only one audience member, looking into the subconscious of the spectator without the use of language and linear thematic development. As will be seen in the following, the choice of studying two highly varying performances is meant to show how immersive theatre can be designed in many ways while still incorporating the immersive tactics explored in Chapter 3 through implementations and combinations best suit their intentions. Reviewing the status of eco-related performances stated in Chapter 1, while the numbers of relevant plays and site-related performances have increased, increment is not as rapid in the production of eco-related immersive performances, not to mention the scarce documentation about them, which posits a limitation for general readers to invest interest in comprehending such analyses. With this in mind, both central cases are chosen also because they are sufficiently rendered through their official video recordings made public online, and these videos will be the mutual points of reference between the analyst and the reader.

However, these two cases will be analysed with slightly different but compatible methodologies as I have attended one but not the other. For Rimini Protokoll's *World Climate Change Conference* (2014), it was introduced and explained to me in a seminar hosted by one of its creators, Stefan Kaegi. I did not attend the actual performance and could only study it through its video recording, but the analysis will be aided, whenever necessary, with a comparatively more ample pool of resources surrounding it, such as official text descriptions and interviews. On the contrary, I was an audience member of Riverbed Theatre's *Hypnosis* (2017), so while the video recording of it will remain my object of study, the analysis will be supported with my memories and observations about it through a "Spectator-Participation-as-Research (SPaR)" (Heddon et al. 2012, 122) approach, a

methodology about which analysis is made based on the analyst's account of her own participatory experience alongside relevant literature and theories. This methodology is located in the experiential process of reception and emphasizes especially the relational dynamic in a one-to-one or single-spectator performance (Heddon et al. 2012, 122), so that empirical data gathered from the spectator-analyst and theoretical tools applied by her can go hand in hand in the analysis. It is an auto-ethnographic inquiry which entails a capacity to lay bare the meaning-making process with depth and care (Sedman 2019).

The analyses will be conducted based on the immersive tactics of intimate encounters, reciprocal agencies and weak theatre, with relevance to concerns in the literature of ecocriticism and characteristics of immersive theatre. The analyses are aimed to examine mainly, but not limited to: (1) how immersive theatre can make the abstract values, numbers, relationships and institutional models around eco-problems concrete for its spectators, (2) how the unspeakable and the invisible, including non-human and crisis victims, are given voices and visibility through an embodied intercorporeality in immersive theatre, and (3) how immersive theatre can offer different imaginations, sensations, feelings and revelations about ecology, of all which the results may culminate to explain how immersive theatre can possibly raise eco-awareness in its spectators. Screenshots indicating each relevant scene in each case will also be inserted into the presentation of the analyses to enhance referencing.

Given that each instance of a performance represents a different constellation of inputs and effects, and no ready apparatus can measure and deliver the always complicated audience responses duly, how spectators respond to the impact of immersive theatre will not be analysed under the scope of this study, even though the simulation model of *World Climate Change Conference* is considered to be effective by Latour (2015) and Woynarksi (2017), and adapted by the Royal Meteorological Society (2017) as a teaching event for schools in the United Kingdom, and I as a spectator felt a lasting affect from *Hypnosis*. Nonetheless, by the end of the analyses, I will explore the efficacy of immersive theatre to address eco-issues by examining whether the cases assume the affective and emancipatory capacities to raise eco-awareness.

4.1. Rimini Protokoll's *World Climate Change Conference* (2014)

Rimini Protokoll's *World Climate Change Conference*⁷ (2014) experimented on creating a site to reconsider current institutional governance and communications around climate change. It was a theatrical re-enactment of the annual Conference of the Parties (CoP) held by United Nations, which involved at least 650 spectators taking the roles of international delegates in each performance. Since its premiere in 2014 at Deutsches Schauspielhaus Theatre in Hamburg, Germany, the event had been held 16 times and reached an audience of over 9000 (Vamborg et.al 2016). In a three-hour duration, these spectators were grouped into threes or fours randomly as delegations each representing one of the 196 CoP-participating countries. Once after the opening ceremony, delegations would be divided into seven groups according to their geographic regions and moved among seven venues to attend sessions of various themes, where they would be given talks, briefings and advice by real-life scientists, journalists and experts of relevant fields playing as performers, informing them about their nation-specific challenges, global climate scenarios and negotiation strategies. In the end, they would submit their declaration of intent about their national commitment on two important topics– the reduction of CO₂ emission and the contribution to the Green Climate Fund. Bilateral meetings were also held for more dynamic and intimate exchange of discussions and views. The performer-experts would evaluate these commitments and announced in the end whether they culminate to restricting global warming to 2 °C above pre-industrial level by 2020 and 2050, which was a long proposed but never accessible target CoP struggling with in real life.

The detailed procedurality, para-authentic scenography and multi-faceted design in re-creating the reality, the obvious relevance with the topic of climate change and its outreaching applicability as a simulation model for education (Royal Meteorological Society 2017) were not the only reasons this performance was chosen as a major case of this study. It was chosen also because it was a performance of performance, showing how the CoP was organized around performances at many levels, demonstrating Schechner (1972)'s flow of

⁷ The video of the performance can be viewed online at: Rimini Protokoll, (2015, May 29), *WELT-KLIMAKONFERENZ (World Climate Change Conference)* | Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi, Daniel Wetzel (with English Subtitles). Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/129199465> (accessed May 27, 2018).

relationship between social and aesthetic drama mentioned in Chapter 2, the CoP worked “in the world” (72) as the mega spectacle taking the form of a global fair while *World Climate Change Conference* worked “on consciousness” (72) and tried to stage CoP’s staging for its spectators. The performance was also trying to generate critical understanding rather than non-constructive criticism. The failures of CoP were always in the limelight, reduction goals were set and dropped, Parties had withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, interventions and activist protests happened with each CoP. However, *World Climate Change Conference* did not focus on re-enacting these emotional controversies, but replicated the space of negotiations for the conference to speak for itself. In the following, the video recording of the performance on 12th December, 2014 in Hamburg would be analysed. The recording was condensed into an one-hour duration but it captured the main elements of the performance. As the analyst was not a participating spectator, and given the length, scale and complexity of this performance, only excerpts of relevant elements in the video would be introduced and analysed.

4.1.1. Setting the Conference



Figure 2.1: Setting of the conference in the auditorium.



Figure 2.2: Delegates of Denmark called on screen.

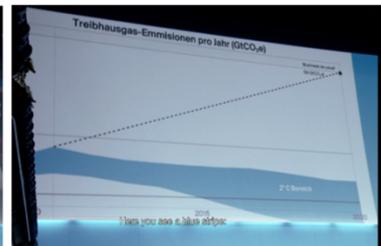


Figure 2.3: Graphic data about the limit to 2 °C increase .

As the audience entered the theatre, each of them received a national delegate badge like a conference participant did. They were then seated according to their assigned delegation with spectators they might not know. The stage was built like a conference panel, and the big screen above it was playing short clips about previous CoPs (Figure 2.1). Country information of each delegation, such as its CO2 emission per capita, demographics, prosperity level etc. were given as numbers and infographics in their badge booklets, so that spectators could better understand the nations they would negotiate for. As the performance started, spectators were addressed as ‘delegates’ but ‘not residents of Hamburg’. Some delegations were shown on the big screen as they were mentioned by the host during his

introduction on the history and goals of CoP (*Figure 2.2*). At this moment, spectators were also busy reading their booklets, the transformation of identities and solidarities as delegation members were established and re-confirmed.

With the help of statistical graphics (*Figure 2.3*), the host introduced the main target of the conference to limit global warming to 2 °C above pre-industrial level, and the tasks of the participants would be, first, to arrive at their targets of CO₂ emission in 2020 and 2050, and, second, to mitigate CO₂ emission by contributing to the Green Climate Fund, of which the numerical results would be submitted through a declaration of intent. The host continued to address the structure of the conference and declared its opening. The spectators kicked off their minute discussions with one another as they were commuting to their next meeting venues. At this point, the complexities of the conference were communicated through the opening speech, and the numbers and facts provided in printed or projected materials. Spectators were put into close encounters with one another through seating, role assignment, talking and being put onto the screen. Audience agency to co-create was foretold and had just begun to be enacted.

4.1.2. Combining the praxes of knowledge and senses

Sub-activities at various venues started to unfold, much like in the structure of CoP. These activities were themed as ‘2°C Limit’, ‘Regional Groups’, ‘Climate Scenarios’, ‘Strategy Briefing’, ‘Emission Handling’, ‘Adaptability Strategies’ and ‘Bilateral Meetings’. They were talks and presentations hosted by real-life experts, which served to provide information and experience to prepare the spectators for decision-making on their national commitment. They were held in the following ways.

Formal deliveries of facts and data. Activities with the formats of panel discussions and seminars were staged in the plenum, marble hall and restaurant respectively. Delegates sat with their groups in these formally set venues, with few chances of overt discussions. Assisted with projections, experts in the panel such as meteorologist Rosemarie Benndorf and physicist Hartmut Graßl explained a wide array of issues under the topic of 2°C limit, including numerical and textual data, histories, its omnipresent connections and influences

in sociocultural, political, economic, and diplomatic arenas etc. (Figure 2.4). Experts in the marble hall and the restaurant performed region-, scenario-, or strategy-specific seminars for their spectators with the help of data and texts too. For example, Sabine Hain talked about energy politics in eastern Europe (Figure 2.5), social scientist Satya Bhowmik discussed the many levels of problems raised by the rising sea level in Bangladesh. These activities focused a lot on the presentation of data, without many theatrical elements added to them, and delegates were not expected to enact actions other than attending. While these sections served to make the conference more authentic, they tended to be fulfilling the educational and informative functions instead of being entertaining.



Figure 2.4: Panel discussion in the plenum.



Figure 2.5: Seminar in the marble hall.

Deliveries in an inspired environment. Talks were also given in the site-inspired venue of a bus and a foyer venue decorated like a North Pole workstation. As Schirin Fathi was explaining the problems of colonialism, migration, refugees and weak social structures of Middle East countries like Turkey during the bus trip, delegates were driven along the more Turkish quarters in the Hamburg city, immediately drawing and expanding their awareness on the surroundings of a migrant-associated area (Figure 2.6). As physicist Sebastian Sonntag talked about the scenarios of overgrowing urban development in a city bus ride, videos of relevant news like heat attack and flooding were also played on the bus. Chemist Boris Koch, dressed in a snow jacket, made a presentation at the ‘workstation’ on the scenario of ice cap melting (Figure 2.7). These settings brought the spectators sensually and



Figure 2.6: Bus ride along migrant-associated areas.



Figure 2.7: Talk in the foyer with the set of a workstation.

psychologically closer to the concerned locations being mentioned, giving the immersive experience additional dimensions. This was one of the performance's intentions to incorporate spaces of imagination and corporeal memories into the data-prevalent conference. Again, the audience were not expected to act extensively, but they were given more proximal, sensual and associable experience on top of facts and numbers.

Co-staging different worlds. At Backstage A and B, two sessions of different topics were always held together. In one instance, Physicist Bernd Hezel presented a talk in front of a seated audience (*Figure 2.8*) representing Northern Europe and Northern America, calling delegates to attend to the future hits and losses faced by these regions with estimated data shown on a side screen. He even led the audience to sing in a patriotic standing position a re-adapted version of the European originated *Ode to Joy*, which was rewritten with lyrics ironically praising how well these countries did in environmental politics. As he was talking, an installation was revealed behind him. Two circles of occupied beds were revolving around a central aerial ladder where Kenneth Gbandi, President of the Nigeria Diaspora, appeared like a weather God (*Figure 2.9*). With ambience of nature playing in the background, he controlled devices to spray mists as rains, shed strong floodlight to produce heat, and create vapours as clouds, allowing delegates on these beds to feel situated in the adverse weather in African regions while they listened in their headphones to his call for supporting African delegations, rather than those representing developed countries. Two scenes happened simultaneously in the same space, but they seldom interact with nor hear one another. Two parallel but contrasting worlds were then staged together in this venue. The uneven and competing distributions of attention, and thus power to negotiate, among countries in these global summits were both explicitly delivered through the expert's speeches, data presentation, cultural references and corporeal senses, and implicated in the design of dividing spectators into the cultural scene and the natural scene. The lying delegates were



Figure 2.8: Talk in Backstage B.



Figure 2.9: Experience installation in Backstage A.

participants as well as part of a spectacle for the sitting spectators. The spectacle/spectator distance between them seemed to make obvious the distant, sometimes competing, relationships between nations in the real world, with every Party focusing on their own business and treating eco-crises in other countries as less relevant. Similar professional talks, experience sessions and spectator/spectacle juxtapositions were also made in this venue in subsequent sessions, e.g., geographer Juliane Otto and mathematician Vera Schemann demonstrated climate scenarios of drought and El Nino effect respectively using the experience installation. While journalist Toralf Staud was briefing sitting delegates on negotiation strategies, Klaus Milke from German Watch was doing his own briefing with delegates on the experience installation, demonstrating the dual character of eco-crises as felt and witnessed.



Figure 2.10: Participants talking as they were commuting to venues.



Figure 2.11: Bilateral meeting between two Parties.

Mobilized discussions. Discussions among and within delegations were highlights of this event. They were where the implementations of intimate encounters, audience agencies and co-creating efforts were most manifested. Discussions were mobilized through commuting arrangement, bilateral meetings and strategy briefings. Within the informal contexts of travelling between venues (*Figure 2.10*) and the casual atmosphere of the bilateral meetings, delegates were motivated to discuss, collaborate or negotiate with other delegates. They socialized, exchanged perspectives and looked for chances to work towards the measures and numbers in their heads, especially because those were the only time slots in which they could gather and talk freely. For example, in the bilateral meetings (*Figure 2.11*), Saudi Arabia initiated collaborative projects with Russia, and Sri Lanka and Bahrein compared their perspectives and commonalities. Delegates could also evaluate or defend themselves or other nations, like how the United States rejected proposal from Argentina because of its unsettled debts. Strategy briefings were sessions designed to prepare the delegates for negotiation. On top of all the information provided in other themed seminars, experts in

strategy briefings deconstruct for the delegates their countries' statuses in previous CoPs, relations with other Parties, strengths and weaknesses in their environmental policies and the culprits to their major problems etc. Whether these strategies were necessary, accurate or easily applicable were not known, as they were deemed strategic only by the experts delivering them. However, they internalized a certain nation-specific stance and thinking pattern in the spectators' thinking, so that they would learn more about a certain nation, and like with all other information provided in this performance, be guided to generate reasoned decisions, considering that the more thoughtful the discussions were, the more engaging the immersion experience, and the more reflective the meaning-making process.

Through these sub-activities, intriguing webs of substantive information were communicated to the spectators through a combination of theatrical and para-theatrical formats, involving the absorption and application of knowledge, as well as sensual experience in the body. However, how all information could be translated into comprehensible ideas remained questionable, as they could both assist negotiations or disorient them, which might be exemplified in the final outcome of the conference.

4.1.3. Revealing the co-created outcome

After the above sub-activities, each delegation had to decide on and submit their delegations of intent, and returned to the plenum to wait for their co-achieved outcome. As they were getting ready in the plenum, video clips of protests during previous editions of CoP were projected on the screen, showing unsettling vibes of controversies about the efficacy of world climate summits, which ironically contrasted with how the spectator-delegates had spent an evening's effort to make a consent happen. The declarations were then revealed. Bolivia declared to make the highest reduction of CO₂ emission by 2020 at 65%. The 2020 goal of 2°C limit was almost reached. By 2050, Columbia, Mauritius, Niue, Kiribati and the Netherlands pledged to make 100% reduction in CO₂ emission too. However, the 2050 goal of 2°C limit was close but not achieved. The United States pledged most in the Green Climate Fund, doubling their enormous contribution in real life, but the culminated \$100 billion goal of the Fund was still far away. These above Parties were applauded and mentioned on screen, but they were also deemed too ambitious by the host and the crowd's laughter. The host

declared that the targets were not met but results were hopeful, and certified it as a consent. The spectators were excited and happy, the climax of revelation at the end of the performance made them review their decisions and had peaked their feelings, but the mammoth-scale conference ended with cold, inaccessible numerical data and graphs (Figure 2.12), while no compatible sociopolitical changes happened in reality. The experience installation came back on the stage as the conference ended, brought the spectators back to the theatrical space from the quasi-authentic conference, and shed strong floodlight (Figure 2.13) onto the spectators as a final reminder of how the heat was real.

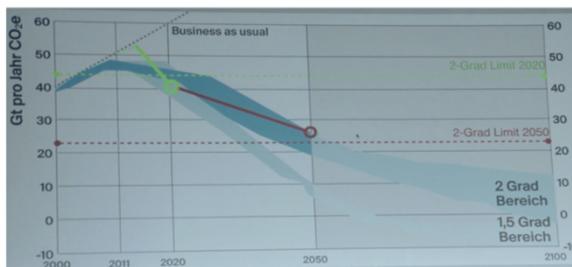


Figure 2.12: Presentation of the final results.



Figure 2.13: Heat from the experience installation.

4.1.4. As an eco-conscious immersive performance

World Climate Change Conference (2014) had taken the main pillars of the CoP organization into the performance, including the complex schema of an international summit and its multiple activities, the hybrid composition of participants, the procedurality of presenting national commitments and reaching consent, and the ecological, social, (geo)political, economic, cultural and diplomatic discourses surrounding climate change. The re-creations of the CoP format, logistics, relationships, materials and scenography had created a quasi-authentic environment and mobilized the theatre into a place of immersion. The inclusion of eco-political experts and detailed scientific knowledge, on the other hand, had brought the spectators immediately into a real-life encounter with the otherwise distant figures and names in the news or scientific reports. Experience tactics were used to provide sensorial stimulations to remind one's embeddedness in global warming, although deliveries of most ecological information depended highly on texts, speeches and graphic data. The spectators were then always moving in between the quasi-authentic, the real, and the aesthetic. The simultaneously staging of these different dimensions had not only presented the institutional models of CoP to the audience, but provoked them to engage in the

structures of feeling of this critical ‘hundred second before midnight’⁸ era, which was most easily represented through the notorious image of CoP.

World Climate Change Conference (2014) was designed to be informative and sensual at the same time. This performance did not translate all the abstract concepts of cosmic relationships and anthropocentrism into felt ideas for its spectators; textual and numerical data about social, geopolitical and scientific concerns dominated. However, this was where its merit of communication was founded on. It induced immersions into the entanglements of the negotiating processes, the inaccessibility of the numbers, and the extensiveness of the climate change discourse so as to capture the complicatedness around these concepts, from where spectators could start developing their own reconsiderations about existing structures and measures. In the following, how this space of reconsideration could be arrived at will be studied through the implemented immersive tactics of intimate encounters, reciprocal agencies enacted by spectators, and weak theatre and negative feelings.

Intimate encounters. In the video, all venues were full of people, shots of buzzing crowds commuting or delegates staying closely together were always included. The proximal and communal relationships built by putting 650 spectators together as one big crowd simulated the gigantic participation in CoP each year. However, similar to CoP, although gathering the crowd raised the energy level of the participation and motivated them to work towards the same cause together, the collective was “one but divided” (Chakrabarty 2015, 159), each Party being hypersensitive of their benefits and losses, especially they were always called to identify themselves or shown on screen for their success or failure to negotiate. On top of that, within each delegation, each spectator was also put into a hypersensitivity of the self when trying to present the most convincing ideas so as to co-achieve the best possible declaration of intent. The design of multiple levels of communality, one within the other, and the diminished anonymity within this sociality captured the struggle of balancing between one’s liability and performativity, a paradox being faced by Parties in the COP and the only near-global but non-binding entity of United Nations. Spectators were also put into situations in which developed nations would or would not offer to increase funding for the

⁸ According to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist (2020), on 23 January 2020, the Doomsday Clock was set to 100 seconds (1 minute 40 seconds) to midnight. Previously, during 2018-2019, it was set at two minutes to midnight.

less developed nations, or reduce their CO₂ emission at a favourable rate, triggering a struggle to establish or diminish the sympathetic distance between these countries. Putting spectators simultaneously into mini-societies and a transnational entity thus intensified the complexity of the political experience by twofold.

The large, diversified audience and their roles as negotiating delegates conditioned the spectators to perform and watch other spectators perform, not only in their characters as delegates, or the audience/spectacle during the co-staged worlds in Backstage A and B, but also as their personal selves in a social situation. A highly diversified spectrum of negotiation styles, personalities, modes of thinking and even ages and languages were brought into close realization as spectators had to work closely with one another and engage in small group discussions. These social encounters seemed to suggest solidarity but also disorientations and difficulties to keep up. Even if spectators were put into the same delegation, they might be aware of the different cultures, backgrounds, values and other autobiographical elements incorporated into their interactions, not to mention the more complicated condition of having them represent nations other than their original ones. Putting them into proximal relationships then highlighted not only commonalities but also differences; it had re-created in the theatre the challenges faced by CoP delegates to arrive at a real compromise, as differences between governing cultures, sociocultural values, memories etc. were already internalized in their decision making, on top of the hard facts and numbers about their geopolitical stakes. The design of these intimate encounters informed the spectators a necessarily fragmented sociality driven by the needs and vulnerabilities of each nation. The proxemics and communality indicated for the spectators their opposites - the distant and the disintegrated, and the unlikely emergence of a global collective compatible with tackling climate change.

Rather than casting performers as experts, the performance had brought real-life professionals from relevant fields of discussions into close encounter with the spectators, making the conference more authentic to one's experience. It was also a way to bridge the communication distance between the ones who generated knowledge about climate change and the ones who received them, bringing them into a shared space seemingly provided a solution to the communication gap mentioned in Chapter 1. Professionals in smaller venues

had used certain rhetorical strategies to draw the spectators closer to them, including the applications of theatricality, humour or call-out interactions. They were fulfilling the functions of performing, connecting and educating at the same time. However, whether the knowledge they delivered could connect spectators to the scenarios and relationships in real life was an open-ended question. Entrenched in the format of the conference, each spectator had to be surrounded by a lot of information from various professionals within three hours, and most information were indicated through speeches, statistics, graphs and maps. The extensiveness and depth of the knowledge engendered a psychological and heuristic distant from the spectators, which would not be compensated even with the close encounter with the professionals. Translation of knowledge was not extensively observed; on the contrary, spectators might start to reconsider how the eco-discourse, numerical data and scientific researches might be relevant to their personal values.

Despite the fragmentariness and distances suggested above, sensual intimacy applied theatrically in this performance connected spectators closely to climate and urban scenarios, and allowed a different experience within the conventions of the conference model. As mentioned previously, the design of the experience installation had opened up a space for the spectators to feel the uncomfortable heat and humidity from more vulnerable regions, or imagine the climate of the estimated future. The bus ride magnified one's empathy with sociocultural and urban issues through a temporary immersion into the city. African music playing in the headphones of the African delegates and the *Ode to Joy* sang by the Euro-American delegates animated their imagination of ethnicity-specific cultural values and predispositions. Through triggering the corporeal senses of the spectators, the close encounters with the installation, the city, the visuals and sounds reminded the spectators that climate change was happening and affecting. The sensual intimacies had then enhanced the corporal memories of the spectators about how tangible and urgent climate change was, as contrasted with the impalpable and unreachable numbers discussed in the CoP

Against all re-embodied struggles and complexities spectators might reflect on, the designed encounters in this performance had put spectators into a collaborative power like CoP did. Ultimately, both CoP and the performance tried to at least combat individualism and nationalism which threatened global collaborations needed for pro-ecological solutions.

Reciprocal agencies. Mobilizing the audience and inviting them to enact reciprocal agencies was a key immersive tactic in this performance. Allowing audience to move between venues did not only psychologically transport them to the logistics of a real conference and enhance their immersive experience, but also created chances for them to exchange with other spectators, which was one of the central merits of the event - to generate discussions about eco-issues at the local level. Spectators were also engaged in different levels of theatrical agencies. With reference to Frost (2013)'s taxonomy, spectators attending panel discussions were engaged in the classical 'proscenium' arrangement. Those lying on the experience installation went through the 'treatment' degree of agency, within which they received choreographed physical treatment passively. Audience attending seminars and strategy briefings were engaged in 'tight interplays', in which they performed cued actions within a specific frame, and in this video, most of these actions were used to enhance immersion and inform the spectators the cultural conventions of certain nations. The negotiation process, which was the whole point of the performance, manifested the degree of 'open interplay', in which audience members interacted with each other to generate open-ended results within a framework facilitated by the performers. This degree of agency was the central axis of the performance's meaning-making process. It highlighted the significance of the spectators' participation as their co-creation was not only reflective of their intersubjectivity and power dynamics, but also influential in determining the becoming of the performance.

During the discussions at bilateral meetings or session breaks, processes of co-creation were prominently exemplified. Spectators became both proactive and responsive. They had to initiate proposals and bargains, and resource their social skills as if they were situated in real-life encounters. These exchanges induced the active processing of ecological knowledge gained in one's daily life or in the performance, and challenged them against opposing perspectives from other spectators, which demonstrated the performance's capacity to be educative and generative, potentially transforming one's subjectivity based on the new intersubjectivity created by all participants. Proactive agency and negotiations also meant the emergence of a stronger self-will to understand climate change, the application of creative thinking to think of options for the represented Parties, and the development of one's critical stance to help her defend her nation when faced with questioning attitudes. In all

three aspects, spectators' resilience towards uncertainties were simultaneously activated in the theatricalized negotiations and in real life. If considering oneself as incapable of or not directly responsible for making eco-changes was an ideological fallacy aggravating the communication of eco-issues as stated in Chapter 1, how negotiations got spectators to act might help to offer a different positionality. Their proactive agencies in the theatre might mobilize them to own their autonomies to examine eco-related situations in real life. The visible outcome of their actions might animate their imaginations about feasible changes even out of the theatre.

The reciprocity of agencies enacted during negotiations was also aimed to generate an empathetic understanding of the difficulties, complexities and challenges of developing ecological measures in a world climate event. Based on the assumption that spectators would avoid to be called out to receive the negative prize as the worst negotiators at the end of the performance, which was foretold as a regulation in the opening ceremony, and that spectators had internalized their national responsibility as delegates, it was premised that spectators would make reasoned negotiations with all the information and strategies they got in the seminars. This was when complications started to prevail. First, the performance was long, information were not always easily comprehensible, negotiations might be affected because one could be overloaded with new information and tiredness. Second, disorientation might prevail as both conference locations and information stretched everywhere, different professionals pitched different calls and delegates might hold very different views during discussions. Third, it was always difficult to measure responsibilities and vulnerabilities with money and CO2 level, and balance among the interests of one's nations, the sufferings of vulnerable nations, and the mutual vulnerability of all nations. Decisions had to be made on multiple levels, managing statistics could be challenging, discreet framings, such as implicit alliance with world powers would have to be taken into account too. The list of challenges could go on as each of the 650 spectators would have their own difficult scenarios. As such, after having enacted personally this theatricalized, simpler version of the complicated decision-making process, spectators might project meaningfully the much more problematic agencies in CoP in reality. The consent reached was never made easily nor readily, and irreconcilable differences in it always existed. Spectators could then reconsider and re-evaluate the efforts each individual Party had put in to make CoP happen, the efficacy of the

whole institutional and scientific governance of climate change, and their influences in affecting the public's understanding of mutual eco-liabilities.

As the performance was about a political model, theatrical agencies enacted by spectators in it were closely related to their political agencies, though, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the relation between these agencies was never a straightforward causal passage (Rancière 2010, 141). As seen from the above, the reciprocity of these agencies in the performance was operated to also enable spaces for generative measures and empathetic understanding, so that in addition to being offered the chance to enact influence in a near-authentic political situation, spectators might also be offered mobilization of both knowledge and relationality, through which non-coercive perceptual transformation might emerge in them.

Weak theatre and negative feelings. Right in the opening speech, the host had announced that the event was a para-conference of the CoP and introduced its difficulties to reach the 2°C limit. Weakness of the CoP had then set the tone of the performance. This performance had utilized the idea of weak thoughts in the design of the event, as implicated in its open-ended structure, non-explicitly defined statement, and its intention to honestly expose itself as a simulation, which disclosed its inability to realize any eco-policies in reality. It also allowed for an uncertain result, and spectators could associate with the success or failure of meeting the 2°C limit in their own ways, embracing contingent interactions and perceptions.

On another level, in addition to exposing the performance's own inabilities to act and generate certainty as described in the structure of Lavery (2016 b)'s weak theatre, weakness was also an element the performance wanted to explicitly demonstrate and problematize, and a capacity for weakness prevailed throughout the performance. For example, professionals and scientific knowledge in the event were not expected to provide a complete picture of global warming and accurate estimations of future climate, as exemplified by what geographer Juliane Otto said as she was demonstrating the scenario of draught at the experience installation, "we can't tell you certainly how the climate would change, not even climate experts can see into future, one can't experiment with the earth but we can experiment with our climate models". The systems of briefings and negotiations, as explored in the previous sub-section, also entailed a lot of impracticalities, human weakness and

disorientations, which was exemplified through the fact that spectator-delegates were not equipped enough to make reasonable pledges, when the pledgers who contributed most in the conference were mocked as unrealistically ambitious. However, no matter how ambitious they were and how much some of the Parties could contribute, the goals of the conference were not reached, a point which signified the collective failure of the Parties caused by imbalanced efforts, the ultimate weakness shown in this performance. The key reason to demonstrate these weaknesses in these theatricalized situations were meant to help spectators uncover the weaknesses about CoP, implying the fact that both CoP and the performance were not wishful solutions to climate change with their current designs. These multiple instances of weakness engendered in the performance might then also inspire one to look at the more fundamental causes behind them. In this case, one might question whether it was meaningful to try unifying and governing the hyperobject of climate change specifically due to the short term nature of politics, if scientific and numerical data were reflective enough to capture it and tackle it, what would serve as an anchor during a time of uncertainties, or if governmental organizations the only authoritative bodies to represent and therefore generate solutions for climate change etc.

Negative feelings might not be as prominently observed because emotions of the spectators were not always identifiable in the video, as such, it was also difficult to estimate their 'stickiness' for the spectators. However, my contention was that contexts such as negotiations among developed and developing countries, regional briefings for more adversely crisis-affected countries and the final revelation of the results would always have the capacity to induce unjust feelings in their designs, as situations such as rejection of mutual responsibility, uneven distribution of capital and natural resources, unproportionate reduction rate of CO₂ emission and fund contribution would be expected throughout the processes, as much as how they had already been happening in reality. Whether spectators would always want to go back in time and work for more justified results was unknown, but a certain self-othering experience had immersed spectators into these otherwise distant inequalities in real life.

On the other hand, feelings of disappointment might be seen in the contexts of delegation negotiations, announcement of the final outcome and at the end of the performance.

Delegate-spectators might feel disappointed during negotiations as they involved selections and droppings of ideas or competing tensions, which reflected the impossibility to meet all expectations as engendered in the complicatedness of decision making in CoP. The inability to reach the 2°C limit after all the efforts might lead spectators to realize how inaccessible the ecological ‘solution’ was, how decisions of certain Parties might lead to a collective failure, and how the always hoped for miracle did not happen, which could be related to the weakness of the CoP format mentioned above. After the performance ended, the three-hour highly authentic experience was gone with the ephemerality of theatrical events, and spectators might then understand the ‘mammoth-scale’ conference as a performance again, of which similar projections could be compared with how CoP was a performance itself. This might be related to the weakness of the theatre format intended by the theatre-makers, to remind spectators of the theatre’s inability to tackle climate change alone. The ‘stickiness’ of such feelings of disappointment, again, might not be readily measured, but they served to attach the spectators to the abovementioned weaknesses more personally and enabled more critical visions on how the framing of climate change influence the effective communication about it in existing institutions.

World Climate Change Conference (2014) had fulfilled the cultural purpose of bridging the gap of eco-communication as a scientifically and artistically relevant event. Its implementation of intimate encounters, reciprocal agencies and weak theatre were seen to have enabled a heightened eco-sensitivity at the local level about how climate change had always been integral politics. While it had delivered a wide array of eco-related ideas, facts, statistics and discussions to its spectators, its central operation of immersion remained the key intended spectator experience in the performance. It was the immersion in the complicated structure of climate conferences which had conveyed the challenges of developing a global eco-solution at a time when mutual vulnerabilities among Parties were fragmentally acknowledged. The underattended needs of developing countries, which prevailed in global diplomatic situations and media portrayals, were also given a voice. By exposing the weakness of the conference through the performance’s own inability to capture and tackle climate change, it was hoped that the performance could countervisualise for its spectators the need to reconsider the performativity, accessibility, and authority of existing institutional structures around climate issues.

4.2. Riverbed Theatre's *Hypnosis* (2017)

*Hypnosis*⁹ was contracted by and venue-specifically designed for the Macao BOK Festival in 2017. It came under the “Just for You” project series by the Riverbed Theatre in Taiwan. It was an immersive event in which four performers interacted with only one audience member in an environment of surreal design. Its official description entailed not much thematic information about it other than “an image-based performance for an audience of one”, “a ritual of intimacy and connection”, “a vehicle into your subconscious” and “a performance for those who dream with their eyes open” (2017). The performance lasted about 15 minutes in a space built specifically inside an art venue called the *Art Garden*.

This piece was chosen for a number of reasons. First, I attended the performance and it gave me a lasting impression which induced hindthoughts in me. The same intensity, according to a conversation with Festival's director, Johnny Tam, was also shared by some other audience members. Second, although the performance was created based on images with no dialogues nor written symbols, some audience members reflected in a post-performance open comment book that they saw ideas such as ecological preservation, animal sufferings and unconscious consumption of the nature, which could be extended into eco-related themes. Third, without lingual elements, post-performance feelings spectator experienced might be quite unconventional as the event tried to induce not only affect but also a connection with one's subconscious. However, due to the inevitable first-person singular spectatorship in this performance, this analysis involved also an inevitable subjectivity which had to be embraced if the genre pertains mostly to phenomenological apparatus at the moment (cf. Heddon et al., 2015: 132; Gomme, 2015: 283). As such, in the following sections of 4.2.1- 4.2.3, ‘I’ will be used to denote the spectator position of the analyst during the description of the performance, in order to accommodate the subjectivity inevitably inscribed in the delivery of the experience. Nonetheless, this still upholds the fact that the performance could have been felt, understood, or reacted to in multiple ways by different spectators.

⁹ The performance was rendered into a short video in which almost all scenes of the performance with the exact settings were included but cut short. The video can be viewed online at: Riverbed Theatre, (2017, December 5), *Hypnosis: Just for You Project 開房間計劃：催眠 Macau Art Garden/ 2017/ trailer*. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/245870964> (accessed Jun 24, 2018)

4.2.1. Into the alter-state of consciousness

When I arrived at *Art Garden*, I was first led to wait in a communal area with no sign of event suggested. A staff member was there to check my ticket and keep my belongings so that I could go in ‘alone’ later. Not long after, she asked me if I was ready for the performance, as if I had to be committed to it. Having said ‘yes’ and with no other performance conventions to rely on, I opened the only narrow door in a normal office to start the journey. On the other side of the door was a dark, bare wooden tunnel constructed as an unidentifiable place from the art venue itself. The performance started as I entered this wooden corridor. Performer A waited in front of me with a strong and long gaze into mine, which was long enough for me to understand that she had been establishing a connection between me and her world. Very slowly, she put a pair of headphones onto my ears (*Figure 3.1*), and showed me her hand to signal a request to hold mine and lead my way down the slightly lit corridor. She kept gazing into me (*Figure 3.2*) while soft piano music played in my ears. Arriving at the end of the corridor, there was another door, I was left there alone and Performer A left.



Figure 3.1. Performer A putting headphones onto the spectator with an intense gaze.



Figure 3.2. Performer A leading the spectator down the wooden corridor.

Throughout this whole passage, I felt a bit stressful about the gaze, the close distance, the touch with a stranger, and the unknown. I was aware of the pressure and responsibility of being the single audience too. I was thinking if I did not interact accordingly or receive the gaze and hold the awaiting hand, the performance might just extend forever to proceed. The segregation into the unknown, the weirdly slow actions of Performer A, my re-orientated aural senses and my weakened sight in a barely lit tunnel all made me even more alert with my other corporeal senses. Indeed, by the time I entered the tunnel, I was already established as the liminal entity, but the spatial and sensual proximities magnified this sense of

separation from the real world even to a greater extent. At this point, my actions and mobility were all guided and framed by the actions of Performer A.

4.2.2. During the trance of hypnosis

I opened the door to a pink room. It was a small room in terms of size and height and forced me to sit closely in front of Performer B, who slowly led me into the room and guided me to sit myself down by sitting down herself first. I entered a surreal interior which was like a cosy miniature room; in the foreground were a small picnic cloth, a music box, a small vial of Vaseline and a small bottle of perfume; in the background was a deer head plush toy/décor lying on the floor. It looked like a world of inverted scale with random props. Performer B had been performing the slow motions and the almost haptic and persisting gaze like the previous performer did and unfolded seven short scenes as follows.



Figure 3.3: Scene 1 - Performer B drawing an invisible circle.



Figure 3.4: Scene 2 – Performer C popping up and touching the spectator.



Figure 3.5: Scene 3 – Performer B offering the spectator a drink.

Starting with scene 1 (*Figure 3.3*), she sprayed perfume in front of me, and used her fingers to draw an empty circle in the air and bring it towards me. I smelled the air quite spontaneously as if I was trying on new perfumes at a cosmetic counter. Then, I shifted my gaze and followed her gaze and gesture, trying to trace what she was drawing. At hindsight, these acts resembled a hypnotist's rituals to induce a trance. By orientating the client's concentration to a focal point and making her feel relaxed, the information in her subconscious may emerge more obviously. In Scene 2 (*Figure 3.4*), Performer C popped up from a hidden window on my left, with the same persistent gaze, she looked even closer to me and touched me endearingly on my face and left through the same window. In Scene 3 (*Figure 3.5*), performer B opened the music box, which appeared to have embedded a small flower bed, a blue sky inner cover and a shot of red drink in it. As if we were sharing a picnic together, she offered me the drink and I drank it.

In these three scenes, the encounter with the performers felt intimate. In terms of spatial distribution, we were very close, we could trace the minute actions and expressions of one another and I felt compelled to react. There were touching, close watching and sharing of smell, gestures and activity schema. The room was warmly colored and performers looked harmless and welcoming. I felt ready to gear down for more interactions. Nonetheless, their gazes felt almost intrusive and I felt like a disturbed pet animal when Performer C touched me out of a sudden. The way she looked at me made me the strange, exhibited, objectified other. While I acknowledged and felt as if I had fallen from a rabbit hole to another world (Gardner, 2014), whether I was illuded had fallen into the background, my mind kept processing the abundant array of senses I received within this short span of time.

Various kinds of theatrical agencies were also performed by the spectator, but my actions were mostly reactive, as a response to the cues of spraying perfume and offering the drink, which were socially ritualized actions already deeply ingrained in my daily life. However, at hindsight, I discovered that I was performing acts of nature consumption without realizing they were, as the frame of everyday action was dominating my actions in the theatre. Justaposing with the deer head at the back, the perfume was an animal product made with their secretions like deer musk. Contrasted with the small flowerbed, the red drink could be associated with agricultural products from vineyards, plantations, or oil farms. Similarly, the small vial of Vaseline could be associated with petroleum and oil extraction. Alternatively, occasions of inactive theatrical agency were also observed. Following the traces of Performer B's drawing finger positioned me as the hypnotized, feeling the endearing touch of Performer C could open up some non-anthropocentric sensations, and generate alternative perspectives on how non-human, such as zoo animals, have been confined, touched and tamed under no scrutiny.



Figure 3.6: Scene 4,5 - performers sucking the tube and blowing powder. Figure 3.7: Scene 6 - Performer D under the lid. Figure 3.8: Scene 7 - Performers leading the audience out.

Continued with Scene 4 (*Figure 3.6*), Performer B took a hidden tube from the faux deer head behind her, as if she was sucking from the deer through it. In Scene 5 (also *Figure 2.6*), Performer C emerged again from another door up right. She stayed behind Performer B and looked at me, while I was staring at the sucking scene. Performer C then took some baby powder from the deer head and blew it to me. In Scene 6 (*Figure 3.7*), Performer C took over the tube and B shifted to sit beside me. C opened a small window on the floor in front of me while the tube was still in her mouth, and B directed me to look through that window with her gaze. The final performer, Performer D, was lying underground, sucking a tube which seemed to be connecting to the deer and, therefore, also to the tube being used by C. Performer D looked weak, lying on the floor in a pure white ‘under-world’, the only strongly lit compartment in the set, though whether she was inhaling from or exhaling to the tube was unknown. We all looked at D. From an bird eye’s view, she was now framed through the small rectangular opening like the sacrifice on an altar. The running water in the tubes, which could be seen only at a very close distance, looked as if it kept traversing between the performers from/into their mouths, and made me feel worried for them as imaginations of over-bloating and over-discharging were simultaneously triggered in me. The scene then closed like a burial ritual. B released baby powder onto D like soil to a burial ground, and closed the lid on the floor like that to a secret. In Scene 7 (*Figure 3.8*), Performer B and C got up from sitting, continued to look at me while moving towards the door behind them, and B gave me her hand to lead me out of the room. At this moment, I felt a bit stupid, and a bit guilty, because I seemed to have happily accepted an invitation to share a dark secret unknowingly, and I could not take any action to justify myself ethically. The final gazes of Performer B and C seemed to be judging me, warning me or questioning me, the puzzled feeling felt throughout the performance did not end with leaving the room.

All scenes were like individual images to me. From scene to scene, I oscillated between participating in the surrealist world and trying to search for a coherence among them. From Scene 4 on, the topic of the Anthropocene was obviously signified through the image of human getting resources out of the deer. From Scene 5, I associated my participation in the anthropocentric agency as an inescapable reality, the proxemics just showed me how easily the perfume and baby powder could penetrate into my senses, even I did not purchase or use them. From Scene 6, the topic of interconnectedness among all entities in the world was pronounced, with a dying, underrepresented human affected by an animal made dead by the

well-nourished human. The seeming intimate feelings I felt all came back at me. The physical and sensual proxemics magnified my feeling of inescapability from this complicated interconnectedness, as someone both affecting it and being affected on. The communal intimacy established through having the performers constantly and gently guide the spectator to unfold the journey, sitting closely together with me, sharing the same point of viewing from above with me and performing social rituals with me etc. made me a partner in crime. However, their gazes, which appeared luring while questioning to me at times; made me feel paradoxically uneasy. The questions of how adequate my eco-sensitivity was and whether my actions would be judged in real life kept ringing in my head. In these four scenes, although I was given more ‘meat’ to act on, the habitual way of spectating and the gazes of the performers kept me execute the only act of looking. This act of looking made me a co-participant in the chain of indifference towards eco-issues, the kind of indifference founded on the human exceptionalism which has constructed the Anthropocene.

4.2.3. Back to reality



Figure 3.9: Performer A receiving the spectator and leading her out.



Figure 3.10: Performer A walking the spectator down the tunnel until she exited.

Performer A waited at the other side of the door in the pink room (*Figure 3.9*). She held my hand again to lead me into another wooden corridor. (*Figure 3.10*). As I was walking with her, although I was expecting the end of the performance, I did not feel completed, because the struggles of feeling guilty was still unresolved. At the end of the corridor, we stopped, she stared at me for a long time until she found it ready to take the headphones off me. In the end, she pointed to the corridor door and indicated that I could leave when I was ready. I opened the door and left while she stayed inside the liminal world.

The performance ended and I picked up my belongings. Knowing that only 15 minutes had passed, I felt astonished because I had already lost count of time and thought I had experienced a much longer stay in a parallel but very different world, especially because all motions in it were slowed down. I was invited to write down my feelings in a sketchbook, in which I could see the feedbacks from other audience members too. This second step required me to reprocess the input I had had and reconnect the frame of my living, the frame of the performance, and the frame of the anthropocentric problems I was immersed in. Peeping into the words of other spectators, I understood how everyone's subconscious was activated differently during the performance. While some mentioned ecological concerns, some showed interpretations and emotions from a totally different spectrum. Then, I left in the same appearance as I came, but with a lot of thinking processes added into my mind. The weird images and the complicated sensations experienced were decoupling my usual way of reception from my usual way of spectating, the impression on the experience lasted much longer than the performance as I kept trying to make sense of the unusual images and the unresolved feelings. After this short liminal journey, thoughts about the complicatedness of interconnections among human and non-human began to emerge in my mind, and my awareness towards my everyday consumption behaviour, my indifference and my (non-) ecological actions was activated.

4.2.4. As an eco-conscious immersive performance

Hypnosis (2017) the performance resembled a hypnotic journey in a clinical therapy. In a hypnotherapy session, the client is awake, but feels mesmerized in a different spacetime which resources her imagination. According to the American Psychology Association (2014), hypnosis is “a state of consciousness involving focused attention and reduced peripheral awareness characterized by an enhanced capacity for response to suggestion”. Procedures may suggest the client to relax, or in other cases, to become more alert, but they emphasize “the role of suggestibility over depth of relaxation” (REBHP). Though each individual client may have her own response, the therapy aims to reactivate the client's connection with her subconscious, so as to suggest a motivation for psychological or behavioural changes. Similarly, in *Hypnosis* (2017), the spectator was cut off from her peripheral environment and immersed into a flow of seemingly disjointed scenarios and

clueless actions which suggested her to connect with her subconscious. As soon as this unusual aesthetic experience came to a fruition with the end of the performance, the continuous urge to look for a coherence among each scene and interaction, accompanied by the post-performance invitation to provide spectator feedback, motivated the spectator to recollect her memories and uncover the purpose of various aesthetic arrangements in the performance. The performance was intended to suggest a personal connection to this experience of hypnosis on a twofold basis - first, it addressed how one could have been hypnotized and regulated unknowingly by the status quo in real life, and, second, it tried to embody this unconscious, hypnotic phenomenon for its spectator so as to open up a transformative space in which she might un-reform her attachment to it. In the performance attended by myself, the connection was made with my existing perception towards eco-issues.

With reference to the discussion about how immersion emerges in Chapter 2, a hypnotic journey also resembles participation in an immersive theatre, a liminal experience which draws on an oscillation between the conscious and the subconscious. *Hypnosis* (2017) itself was then a profound manifestation of immersion, especially in the absence of lingual elements, the aspects of subconscious, awareness, and corporeal senses were emphasized. Images and actions in it became metaphors, which were generative elements motivating creative imagination (Tuner 2007) through resourcing one's own experience and association. The intertwining forces of the immersive tactics of intimate encounters, reciprocal agencies and weak theatre were also seen to be indicative of making immediate for the spectator topics such as anthropocentrism, interconnections among human and non-human, and the various kinds of communication paradoxes between personal practices and the necessary ecological actions as mentioned in Chapter 1.

Intimate encounters. As seen from the above, the tactic of intimate encounters had been executed on proximal, sensual and communal levels, and led to a hypersensitivity of the self in the spectator. The closeness, the touch, the music, the colour, and especially the gazes in the performance all pushed the spectator to interact with the performers and immerse into relationships with their characters. With the outside environment totally blocked out by soft music playing so closely in one's ears, the spectator might easily feel as if she was situated in, and therefore adapted to, a world of its own dimension, pace, and ways of connection.

The gentleness suggested by welcoming gestures, slow motions and warm colours also made the spectator feel safe, relaxed and more willing to stay in the world physically and psychologically. The performers had created a warm quasi-authentic sociality which contrasted with the coldly lit underground compartment revealed during the moment of truth.

The gaze was a central element in *Hypnosis*, about which the mesmerizing and almost haptic nature was self-explained by the title. Within the very confined space, the performers kept engaging the spectator's vision through a persistent and intense gazing, 'luring' her to ignore the peripherals and to be aware of the need to respond. To give responses while she was uncertain about what would be unfolding in the coming scenes, the spectator could only allow her consciousness to synchronize with the flow of the piece without interrupting it. The performance of the gaze was then used to enhance the spectator's experience of immersion. The intensity of the gazes also pushed the spectator to connect with herself. Operating in an atypical way, the gazes highlighted the fact that the spectator was also the performer. However, unlike the Foucauldian panoptic gaze which aimed to police one's behaviour into compliance, the performers' gazes were more of an attempt to look for singularization, asking the spectator to act, but relying all on her own means and intentions. The reciprocal affect between the gazes of both parties was resourced to expand the space for interpreting one another's intention, so that the performers could guide the spectator through the performance accordingly, and the spectator could imagine about the meaning behind the staging of the gazes, as Georg Simmel (1969) would argue, "the eye of a person discloses his own soul when he seeks to uncover that of another" (147).

Communal intimacy had, on the other hand, enforced co-participating rituals or predispositions onto the spectator, forcing her to reimagine and re-evaluate how she had always been immersed in the normalized act of witnessing eco-crises as a spectacle, and how she had been unable to think of or motivate herself to enact defying actions, even if the performers' gazes were always questioning and somehow requesting actions, just as how a hegemonized mass had been deprived of awareness to alternatives. The intimate seating with performers B and C contrasted sharply with the distant location performer D was placed, signalling the similarly distant relationship between the majority of the crisis-witnesses and the minority of crises-victims. This foregrounded the objectification of others' sufferings,

which was subsumed under the act of resourcing a privileged party with a less privileged one, whose sufferings were normalized through repeated representations without according resolutions. However, the totality of the world inhabited by the indifferent witnesses was the size of this confined theatrical space, in which the spectator had no means to escape from the default relationships in it.

The spectator, while feeling being transported to a different world, was still made hypersensitive of her actions, inner dialogues and immediate relations with her surrounding as she had to face acts of looking/judging, minute facial expressions and legitimized actions requesting responses directly on her own. She might constantly appraise her performed actions, whether intended for the sake of the performance or unintended as a tacit response, against her own habitual frame of behaviour and willingness. The intimate space also made the spectator aware of the other's body in herself, as triggered by, for example, the touch felt by an animal she would not have imagined, the suffering face of the human laying underground which made her feel guilty, and the calm and cultured manners of consuming behaviour which would be found in her everyday life, all enabled through the *flesh* enclosed tightly in this space. This empathetic experience could be highly immediate and spontaneous, since a lot of corporeal associated feelings were tacit and would be realized only if triggered; and it was this spontaneity arisen from interactions in one's self-journey which might connect one's inner self with the ecosphere. Given the space to oscillate between bodily senses and one's inner thinking space, these immediately felt senses not only re-embodied the situated feelings and emotions of the other for the spectator, but also suggested her to reflect on the unusual coupling of such senses with the other but not herself. This hypersensitivity of the self might, therefore, extend one's perception about her objective body in the theatrical space to that in an ecological place. The final step of writing post-performance feedback had, on the other hand, continued to make space for the spectator to recollect one's thinking space and develop personal dialogues with the inner self.

Creating intimate encounters to induce a hypersensitivity of the self was a prominent immersive tactic in *Hypnosis*, given the conditions enabled in a small-scale, single spectator performance. The proxemic relationships in the performance had located the spectator at the locus of relationships implicated in eco-problems, and made her aware of the inescapability

from this intriguing web of interconnections in the ecosphere. The intimate encounter had also enabled the spectator's body as the site of magnified sensuous exchanges, and foregrounded the necessary feelings, actions, and emotions to enhance one's corporeal memories about the performance, which were essential to allow a more lasting impression of the topic to emerge even beyond the performance (Machon 2013, 105). The intimate space helped the spectator to experience immersion, while also constructed an alternative space of existential being where she could reach her inner self, an intimate encounter of one's own.

Reciprocal agencies. The tactful implementation of having spectator enact theatrical agency was comparatively less obviously in this performance as it did not invite extensive authorship. Rather, the spectator participated in what Frost (2013) defined as a tight interplay, in which she performed within choreographed frames of interaction. This seemed to be intended by *Hypnosis* (2017) to address how a willingness or desire to break through the normalized frame of eco-related actions was seldom enacted, nor even imagined, when one was 'hypnotized' in the status quo. The frames of spectator-performed gestures were then designed to correlate with human enacted gestures in the Anthropocene, so as to re-embody anthropocentric ideas for the spectator to reflect on. As will be seen in the following, these actions informed the spectator the dichotomous division between nature and culture, the functionalist perception towards non-human, and the collective liability of human agency under eco-crises.

Through the guided enactment of gestures in a false household environment, with outdoor elements such as the deer head, the picnic cloth and the small bed of flowers situated indoor, the spectator was put in a predesigned binary division of nature and culture. By engaging more actively with social rituals like taking an offered drink or taking the hand of the performer, the spectator inevitably performed culturally tempered actions. By enacting passivity towards instances of nature consumption and the suffering of the performer in the underground chamber, the spectator re-created a negation against the nature being her equal and treated her as a distant spectacle. Pairing together these responses towards the opposite staging, the intersubjective site of gestures informed an unequal relationship, which resonated with Chakrabarty (2012)'s observation of how human agency was made the sole agency in the world while agencies of other non-human were made insignificant.

Receiving and following the hypnotic induction of Performer B in Scene 1 had paved the way for the performance to address how one had often been hypnotized into participating in the capitalistic-anthropocentric agency of human beings unquestionably. The unquestioned reception and performance of all capitalistic gestures in the performance reflected the taken-for-granted functionalist perception towards the ecosphere. This passivity might well have re-embodied the unknowing submission into anthropocentric behaviours due to how ecocritical information was not available and how agency as a regulated capacity was being unaware of. The indifference towards human as a privileged subject served by the objectified other was the key visualization intended by the reciprocity of agencies used in this performance.

The inevitable passivity framed in the act of co-witnessing the suffering of Performer D, and the passivity being intra-witnessed by all participants in the room, were associated with the collective liability and vulnerability engendered in anthropocentric agency. After all, as Chakrabarty (2012) noted, not only those who created pollution were responsible for global warming, those who held onto the established discourse and institutions, which perpetuated a sole human agency over the biosphere, also contributed to it. The passivity was also associated with the paralysis to act even climate situations seemed graver and closer, as explained in the “psychological climate paradox” (Stoknes 2015, 3) mentioned in Chapter 1. The inescapable collectivity of human negligence in the Anthropocene was thus made clear through the inescapable pool of passive reactions staged in the theatre. Through repeated performances of a distant and unequal relationship between human and the other, and displaying such performances as compromised by the spectator, the spectator was led to contemplate through her own actions her apathy towards the status quo she inhabited in and participated to reinforce.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 already, Kershaw (2007) argues that only through allowing a participation in the performance ecologies informed by the paradoxical powers of the spectacle (238) that human could respond ethically to its ecological environment. The tactic of reciprocal agencies implemented in *Hypnosis* (2017) fulfilled this function by exposing and then defamiliarizing the frames of behaviour dominating our actions, and highlighting the act of witnessing as a passive response imprinted in one’s paralyzed attitude towards

eco-problems, so that the indecisiveness to act, mindlessness to consume, and helplessness to revert ecological situations found in the collective human could then be felt in the flesh of the spectator.

Weak theatre and negative feelings. From its beginning promotions to its post-performance invitation to provide spectator feedback, *Hypnosis* (2017) had always defied definitions and didactic deliveries. A strong statement or a topic of relevance was what it avoided, and it did not attract spectators who went specifically after an ecological topic nor a revelation about it. In this way, the performance did not only align with what Lavery (2016b) termed a weak theatre, but also utilized this idea of weakness as part of its creation, so that it made use of the inability to signify to leave each spectator to undertake, at the extremes, puzzling nothingness or overinterpretation according to her own experience, putting the limitation of mediation, representation and communication to the fore and transforming it into a tactic to connect more personally with the audience. The single-spectator participation model was also deemed to be highly contingent, audience responses and evaluations could become highly competing on top of their idiosyncratic nature, thus not everyone might feel its connection with the eco-topic. However, it might be this problematic nature which reflected how current ways of communication about climate change did not work for everyone and how the performance was not meant to be the wishful solution to connect all under the same topology.

Rather than trying to understand what was hypnosis, the performance focused on how one could be hypnotized. Thus, it focused on the process but not the result, multi-positionalities disclosed in a comment sketchbook but not detailed descriptions in a flyer, images and senses rather than language and thinking. Thinking did happen even during the immersive experience as one oscillated between orders of presence and representations, but it happened most prominently after the performance as one might want to make sense of one's journey in this weak theatre where no self-assurance, cogency and coherence were explicitly given. In this way, the disorientating set, props and staging during the performance had created both a perceptual and a corporeal intensity which might create a pocket for reflection even after the performance. The unresolved suffering portrayed at the ending of the performance, which was made partly liable to the spectator, also pointed to how the capacity for weakness

could made experiential “the fragile and opaque interface between art, mediating technologies and daily life” (Kolesch 2019, 9). It was this peculiar nature of weakness, “the unfinished” and “the contingent” Lavery (2016 b, 233) mentioned, which might generate an understanding of the powerlessness of human, as contrasted with their hubris, and a lingering effect for retrospection about it.

The abovementioned weakness and inability to signify questioned how feelings were provoked by the performance, especially because a feeling of guilt was prominently experienced by the spectator, which might potentially extend to one’s similar feeling of irresponsiveness when facing eco-issues. It was through framing the inability of the spectator to, first, save the suffering Performer D, and second, to revert the situation before she left the performance space, with the interconnecting relationships among all elements in the theatre that the spectator felt her failure to fulfil a responsibility for performer D. This responsibility might be the spectator’s, or a shared one with performer B and C, which both might lead one to associate with the failure of the collective human to act for their connected others situated at the lower order. The performance had then provided the relational conditions in which the spectator could be similarly embedded in the ecosphere and allowed her to question her relationship with this responsibility as she re-experienced the feeling in the performance. This feeling of guilt was not comfortable, but it created an attachment beyond the performance because the spectator could be thinking about how things could have been done differently, or if reversions could be made in real-life contexts. The awareness of the suffering other was simultaneously imprinted into the mind of the spectator during such reflections. The feeling of guilt might then be integrated into and transform one’s perception of herself and the world. Whether this feeling of guilt could lead to ecological changes might be difficult to find out (Bedford et al. 2011), but it had informed the imbalance found in the interconnections and mutual liability shared by all entities in the ecosphere, which would not have been felt as profoundly if it was created in the banality of daily actions.

As seen from the above, the performance was interwoven by the tactics of intimate encounters, reciprocal agencies, weakness and the feeling of guilt. They were used to both enhance an immersive experience and attend to an ecological topic. They had made visible

and physically experiential the ways one had been deeply embedded in anthropocentric and capitalistic practices, as well as the abstract patterns of interconnecting, cosmic relationships she had been situated in. The sufferings of the other, whether human or non-human, were not only giving representations, but also a space to be felt through animating the spectator's affective reactions, which also potentially displaced human from the central position of the ecosphere for a moment. The self-perception of this spectator as part of the human collective was highlighted in the performance as her daily actions were at once dramatized but defamiliarized when coupled with negative feelings. Operating on immediacy, the performance had become the place of empathy where one could participate into ecological relationships as ecological metaphors were embodied, epiphanies about passive actions were induced, corporeal senses were heightened in it. Perceptions towards the dichotomic division between human and nature was drawn explicitly, cracked open and reformed. Whether spectators would develop higher eco-sensitivities beyond the performance might depend on individual cases, but the performance had provided a reflexive participation informed by "the non-human in the human" (Kershaw 2007, 238), which might connect the spectator to the ecosphere in a more responsive and responsible manner (Kershaw 2007, 238).

4.3. The affective and emancipated spectator revisited

The two cases above had demonstrated how immersiveness in theatre might be used to engage one's consciousness with eco-related concerns, even if the ways they utilized their immersive tactics were different. *World Climate Change Conference* (2014) was more pedagogical, strengthening the spectators' resilience against climate change negotiations through delivering information about eco-crises and putting them inside the interruptions politics and nature forced onto one another. The drive to immersion and understanding was made through a gamified process, in which the final success to reach a 2°C limit might be the rewarding goal, and the negative prize for the worst negotiators was a game-over loss. *Hypnosis* (2017) was more on the phenomenological and perceptual side, relying a lot on visceral stimulations which informed intercorporeality, and abstract connections were made to be felt through dimensions other than logical thinking. The drive to immersion in it was made through an episodic journey of one's own, pushed through one's curiosity without a designated goal.

Despite their differences, both of them tried to make a countervisualisation of the status quos in the communication of eco-issues, not through writing like Rachel Carson did, but by delivering contexts which might enable a self-othering experience and a destabilized perception to emerge. However, in both cases, as Fischer-Lichte (2004) once indicated, spectators could “dismiss their transitory destabilization as silly and unfounded when leaving the auditorium and revert to their previous value system. Alternatively, they might remain in a state of destabilization for long after the performance’s end and only reorient themselves much later upon reflection” (11). As such, whether eco-awareness could be raised in these performances and whether transformation could be achieved were not always guaranteed, which in itself is a ‘weak’ statement with reference to Vattimo (1984)’s “weak thought”. Yet, it is this ‘weak’ statement which generated room for democracy and differences, and allowed the performances to be efficacious in inquiring into the multi-faceted, multi-positioned eco-problem, through manifesting the affective and emancipatory mechanisms of immersive theatre.

The two performances were affective in their own ways. With reference to Chapter 3, *World Climate Change Conference* (2014) was highlighting its affective forces mostly on pre-conscious and social levels. It tried to affect its spectators to empathize with other climate regions or political territories through pre-conscious corporeal senses at the experience installation and the site-inspired venues. It also tried to allow its spectators to affect one another gradually and almost realistically through their exchanges of perspectives on climate change. *Hypnosis* (2017) was more affective on the pre-conscious level and the personal level, through all the unspoken but intense feelings and senses it generated, and the notion to associate with one’s autobiographical pre-disposition respectively. In all these instances, the affective forces did not necessarily make the experience accurately real, but they made it personally felt and relatable through various corporeal encounters, so that it could translate eco-awareness for each individual spectator in a way that applies to her, instead of distributing an already existing, too general or over-edifying form of eco-awareness for the public. As Theresa May (2007) suggested about the relationship between corporeal intensities and ecology, “foregrounding the body also brings into focus the web of social, political, economic, and ecological systems that touch our bodies” (101), these performances have affected bodies both individually and collectively.

Both performances also relied on the emancipatory mechanism of immersive theatre to attempt un-reforming the spectators' relationships with existing framings of eco-related phenomena. They both allowed and encouraged spectators to be "individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things" (Rancière 2009, 16). They did not assume a specific response, not a perfect CO2 reduction to reverse climate change nor a heroic act to save a character from its suffering. Rather, it opened up a setting in which spectators might redevelop their own relationalities and critical stances with ecology in a temporary space of empathy, which was very much exemplified in the tactic of weak theatre implemented in both cases. They both also tried to decouple the senses spectators might have about the spectacles of eco-crises, so that they did not only dramatized the geopolitical scenes and Capitalocene representations for the spectators but let the spectators feel their different levels of embeddedness in them, or discover their own connections and vulnerabilities from within. In both performances, the emancipatory effect dwelled in giving the spectators an alternative plot to think about their current perceptions and offering an opportunity for them to generate their own subjectivities, rather than simply allocating them immediate theatrical agencies, so that they might be emancipated from staying within mental boxes of single positionalities, dichotomous divisions, distant relationships and paralyzed actions around the climate discourse.

World Climate Change Conference (2014) and *Hypnosis* (2017) had demonstrated the potentiality of immersive theatre to raise eco-awareness. Their affective and emancipatory mechanisms were encapsulated in their implementations of the immersive tactics of intimate encounters, reciprocal agencies and weak theatre. By assembling the public in a way which embraced individuality and by redistributing the sensory fabric around eco-issues, they both gave rise to a non-coercive participation from which transformative eco-awareness may emerge. Transformation takes time to effect changes, and immersive participation is certainly not the only way to raise eco-awareness, but the spectators who participated in the above immersive performances might carry the generative potentials to develop more creative ecological thinking and affect others with their own affective and emancipated theatrical experience.

Conclusion and a Way Forward

Immersive theatre, as shown in this study, has demonstrated its potentials to problematize the dominant framing of climate change, and disclose to its spectators the underattended interconnections under the eco-problem. Through its immersive tactics, it tries to reintroducing an awareness of, or even a sense of belonging to, the ecosphere, not by creating illusions, but by eliminating human's distance from it.

Looking back at the problem of failing to respond to climate change in Chapter 1, I contend that the cases of Rimini Protokoll's *World Climate Change Conference* (2014) and Riverbed Theatre's *Hypnosis* (2017) have demonstrated how an eco-conscious immersive performance may transform those five communicative barriers productively into ecological understanding. Referring back to the three rhetorical barriers Raessens (2019) observes, the two central cases did not frame the eco-topic as distant in space and time; rather, they situated their spectators into the crux of geopolitical struggles and mutual vulnerability. They also did not create a depressing doom scenario nor make themselves incompatible with the spectators' values; on the contrary, they created images of relatable tensions and depressions with an open end to implicate an urge for self-reflections and actions. In response to the two barriers I observe about the methods and messages of eco-communication, these cases proved themselves not as undistinguished ways of communication, but as an affective and captivating encounter. They also made use of immersion to bring the necessary but underrepresented eco-critical concerns to their spectators, including the anthropocentric impact on the ecosphere, the ungraspable omnipresence of eco-crises, and the socio-political wrestling within climate change mentioned in Chapter 1, so as to enhance a deeper understanding of the eco-problem beyond its scientific being.

This study uses a model of body relationality to understand this efficacy of immersive theatre to make and communicate eco-inquiries, with the acknowledgement that the tactics of intimate encounters, reciprocal agencies and weak theatre are not the only ways to exemplify its affective and emancipatory forces. Nonetheless, these tactics can contribute to contour how an eco-conscious immersive theatre may look like. While 'participation' and 'environment' are promising keywords to gather project funding or advocate political

regimes, and ‘immersion’ has become equivalent to sales in commercial performance, one may want to examine whether an eco-related performance can really utilize the transformative power (Fischer-Lichte 2008) it bills, or whether its design will genuinely incorporate spectators’ participations into its meaning-making process, as have explained in the immersive operations in Chapter 2. Some immersive works may only have replicated the audience-restricting parameters in conventional theatre performance by putting them into a new context (Carlson 2012, 24), and some works can hold an overwhelming political blindness even though they have treated spectator participation as their main contents (Frieze 2016, 20). As such, in this impact-driven era, it will be useful to also consider the aptitude of immersive designs to challenge existing aesthetics and grand narratives, so that the role of an eco-conscious immersive performance is not about creating a reality, but about corroding, problematizing, multiplying and complicating it (Lavery 2016, 233).

To corrode the status quo requires decoupling imaginations from current dichotomic pairs in the eco-discourse. In many ways, an eco-conscious immersive theatre, as seen through the two cases in this study, may try to reach a place where the ends of dichotomies can be fused together, in addition to its blurry theatrical boundaries. On its operational level, it may diminish the distance between mind and body. The way it constitutes its affective schema based on corporeal senses, kinaesthetic energy and embodiment, especially Merleau-Ponty (1968)’s conception of the *flesh*, has acknowledged the mind and the body as an inseparable unity, in which the significance of tacit, visceral experience has been brought to the forefront. On the ecological level, as exemplified by the cases, implementing the reciprocity of the *flesh* has enabled an understanding of the other, thus, through resourcing intercorporeality, it has brought human and non-human together onto the immanent field of cosmic relationship.

On the intellectual level, as the cases suggest, immersive theatre has the potential to reveal the multi-positionalities engendered by climate change and engage itself in the mesh of culture and nature, the interlocking fabrics of humanities and science. Following Morton (2013)’s conception of climate change as a *hyperobject*, it is uncertain whether it is caused and whether it can ever be solved in the ways natural sciences measure it. It can be a condition we have to live with as long as we co-inhabit in the ecosphere. Therefore, tackling

its adverse impact, in the way human comprehend it, also requires a humanist approach. Following Chakrabarty's view (2015, 146), climate change as an epochal crisis cannot be resolved only with thinking oriented to calculations and calibrations of conflicting interests, it is something ethical, above the political, not specified for a single goal that would sustain hope at a time of global crisis. While theatre has traditionally been considered as what exemplifies the division between culture and nature, but not a real instance of ecocriticism due to its ontology as a subject of humanities rather than science (Arons and May 2012, 2), this study has demonstrated how immersive theatre may serve as a humanist approach to mitigate the more-than-science ecological problems. They do not pull against one another, but exist as one together.

This dissertation serves as a preliminary study to look at the eco-potentials of immersive theatre. To continue with this immersive approach of mitigating eco-problems in the future, it may call for further discussions and studies on the basis of the following observations. The first observation asks how immersive theatre may generate or lead to more creative tactics or eco-solutions in the future. Immersive theatre, as indicated in Chapter 3, is an engaging form of critical art because it produces what Rancière (2014) considers as a dissociation of senses. This dissociation is induced through a sensory clash which mobilizes bodies by creating an encounter between heterogenous elements (143). Therefore, the attraction and intense affect of immersive theatre also come from its difference from conventional spectatorship. However, in view of the rising participation frequency which comes with the popularity of immersive theatre, one may ask the question, "What if immersive theatre becomes banal one day?" Gomme (2015) has stated how she has a fatigue of participation after experiencing several immersive performances during a festival. The performers' efforts to induce interaction and the spectators' efforts to interact has distractingly surfaced more and more as she participated into more encounters (295). Once a spectator becomes a 'professional' in immersive participation, as Frieze contends (2016), her familiar "sense of reader-agency that comes from being a part of the process of creating the event" (20) may also cause an immutability towards the affective forces participation charges. Thus, how the results of this study may be incorporated into possibilities of theatrical developments may be relevant for future studies.

Another observation also looks into the future development of immersive theatre. As indicated in Chapter 2, immersiveness sees its first appearances in virtual reality technologies and online games. Immersiveness is not exclusive to theatre, not least that interactions on social media online have already created a very immersive context which captures our everyday attention. The gamified use of immersivity has also extended to viral genres such as Netflix's interactive movie *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), or some physical navigation game applications on phones, such as the treasure hunting game *Geocaching* or the monster hunting game *Pokémon*. These technologies and online interactions have fed back into the design of immersive theatre events. For example, in Blast Theory's 2017 production, *2097: We Made Ourselves Over*, the cities of Hull and Aarhus were used as the physical environment of the performance while relationship with the contexts and immersions were led by the uses of pre-downloaded interactive movies on the spectators' phones. Spectators' physical mobilizations, on the other hand, were led by the uses of pre-set navigating mobile applications. Unlike the cases in this study, these emerging developments of incorporating online sphere with the offline sphere and GPRS tracking with daily landscapes have complicated the use of immersive theatre even more. If this increasingly popular development is to be seen in immersive theatre as an eco-strategy, it will add a dimension on top of the already problematic division between human and nature. The ecosphere as defined by the infosphere in the performance will also be problematized. How spectators will be situated in between the online immersion, the offline immersion and the immersion in the ecosphere may thus require future studies to explore.

While these calls for study are situated for future possibilities, their impact depends on how immersive theatre can be used constructively at present. Although the perceptual transformation in the spectators are not guaranteed and directly translatable, an eco-conscious immersive theatre has so far at least posted a question about the effectiveness of the dominant framings of and measures against eco-problems. Then, towards the end of this study, understanding how immersive theatre can be used as a strategy to raise eco-awareness will therefore also arrive at the question of how future eco-solutions can help human move forward in a more conscious, ecological and ethical way.

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Annex A. List of Cited Performances

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