

Performing *Kongwu's* (空無, Emptiness, Nothingness) Attitude Towards Language,
Time, and Self: Responding to Nam June Paik, John Cage, and Marina Abramović

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ABSTRACT

Since 1950s, the concept of Kongwu (空無, Emptiness, Nothingness) has migrated into American-European experimental performances, including those of John Cage and Cage-influenced artists who developed Happenings, Fluxus, and intermedia practices. This research-through-practice investigates how the concept of kongwu, an intercultural synthesis of Chinese Daoism and Indian Buddhism, may shape the principles underlying performance making and how performance may, in turn, elucidate Kongwu way of making sense the world.

The installation-performance, *Poem without Language* contemplates Kongwu's distrust of language by undermining the communicative purpose of writing and responds to Nam June Paik's approach to media language. The research practice, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Narratives, and Different Memories* responds to John Cage's use of silence to revise time and measurement, and exposes the habit, how we experience the 'present' as accumulations of the past, and how we order experiences as a linear continuity, which we call 'time'. My performance, *... is Present* suggests different definitions of the 'meditative mind' and 'being-here-and-now' and critiques the relationship between embodiment and identity in Marina Abramović's construction of 'suchness'.

Three works offer one response to the poetics and politics of intercultural encounters in the context of Chan/Zen in intermedia performance. My research-through-practice sheds light on Kongwu way of experiencing, particularly Kongwu's attitude towards language, time, and self.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	5
Chan/Zen in Intercultural and Intermedia Performance	7
The Concept of Kongwu and Different Versions of Emptiness and Nothingness	10
Performing Kongwu’s Attitude toward Language, Time, and Self.....	14
1. When Language Cannot Function: Responding to Nam June Paik through <i>Poem Without Language</i>	22
Taking the Indicator as the Thing: The Finger is Not the Moon	29
Occupying the Position of the Observer as the Centre of Experience	30
Reconsidering the Mechanism of Language in Ink Landscape Painting	37
Traces of the Materiality of the Medium in <i>Zen for Film</i> (1964)	44
How Would a Buddha Watch TV?	45
The ‘Being’ of the Thing in Real Plant/Live Plant and Real Fish/Live Fish	47
The Ancient Technology of Writing	53
The Orchestra of Gazes in Multiple Closed Circuits	56
Movement in Stillness: To See Seeing Arrive	59
2. When Time Never Arrives: Responding to John Cage through <i>One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories</i>.....	66
2.1 Time in Kongwu	69
The Debate of Time in Buddhism	69
Sengzhao’s “The Immobility of Things”	72
Being-In-Time and Being-Is-Time	78

2.2 Analysing John Cage’s Investigation of Time from the Kongwu Perspective	80
From Musical Time to Clock Time in 4’33”.....	83
From Clock Time to Zero Time in 0’00”.....	85
Music as Any Temporal Act	88
2.3 A Participatory Universe	93
2.4 How We Experience the ‘Present’ through the ‘Past’: <i>One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories</i>	97
3. When the Identification is suspended: Responding to Marina Abramović’s Version of ‘No-thinking Mind’ through ... <i>is Present</i>.....	112
3.1 Suspending the Identification through Meditation: Comparing Abramović’s No-thinking Mind and Kongwu’s Logic.....	114
The Experience and the Identity in <i>The Artist is Present</i>	115
Presence and the Other in Abramović’s Frame of Narrative	126
3.3 Dis-identifying with the Description of Experiences: The Research Performance ... <i>is Present</i>.....	144
CONCLUSION	161
BIBLIOGRAPHY	167

LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL:

DVD – Performing Kongwu: Three Works by I-Lien Ho

FIGURES

1.1 I-Lien Ho, Poem Without Language

1.2 The feedback loops

1.3 I-Lien Ho, Poem Without Language

2.1 I-Lien Ho, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*, a snapshot from the video documentation for the installation

2.2 Right: the juxtaposition of the three descriptions in the video. 2.3 Left: Person Three voiced a stream of thoughts. I-Lien Ho, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*

2.4 I-Lien Ho, 'Time is Language' in *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*

2.5 I-Lien Ho, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*, the snapshot of the installation of Task Two from the video documentation

3.1 I-Lien Ho, *...is Present*, the snapshot from the video documentation

3.2 I-Lien Ho, *... is Present*, the snapshot from the video documentation

INTRODUCTION

This research investigates how the concept of *Kongwu* may shape the principles underlying performance making and how performance may, in turn, elucidate the philosophy of Kongwu. The reciprocity between Kongwu, as a philosophy, and performance making offers one understanding of the way we structure our experiences and orient ourselves when we encounter the world. Kongwu (空無, emptiness, nothingness), an intercultural synthesis of Chinese Daoism and Indian Buddhism, has contributed to the development of aesthetics, philosophy and spirituality in many East Asian cultures, including China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The concept of Kongwu has been loosely translated into English as ‘emptiness’, ‘nothingness’, ‘void’, ‘blankness’, and ‘suchness’. Particularly since the 1950s, the concept of Kongwu has migrated into American-European experimental performances, including those of John Cage and Cage-influenced artists.

My research is driven by a series of questions: what happens when one tradition migrates into other contexts; why has Chan/Zen philosophy been connected to intermedia performances; how might Kongwu, with an inherently intercultural approach to making sense of the world, offer a different understanding of temporality and experience for performance practitioners; how might Kongwu be used to explore the experience of ‘being present’ and simultaneously disengage from the search for authenticity and presence; and what are the implications of Kongwu for performance making?

Three practices shed light on the Kongwu way of experiencing, particularly Kongwu’s attitude towards language, time, and self. My installation-performance *Poem without Language* contemplates Kongwu’s distrust of language by

undermining the communicative purpose of writing and responds to Nam June Paik's approach to media language. The research practice *One Street, Three Persons, Different Narratives, and Different Memories* responds to John Cage's use of silence to revise time and measurement, and exposes the habit, how we experience the 'present' as accumulations of the past, and how we order experiences as a linear continuity, which we call 'time'. My performance ... *is Present* suggests different definitions of the 'meditative mind' and 'being-here-and-now' and critiques the relationship between embodiment and identity in Marina Abramović's construction of 'suchness'.

The three chapters of the thesis chart the triangulation between the Kongwu attitude, the selected artist's approach to performance, and my response performance. My analysis of the Kongwu attitude defines the focus for my analysis of these three artists and begins to address the issues associated with articulating Kongwu in performance. Further, my research-through-practice reflects how experience is mediated by the mechanism of language and dualistic differentiation and how we experience 'the present' through 'the past'. By offering a definition of the 'meditative mind' that differs from Abramović's definition of the 'no-thinking mind', my work ... *is Present* suggests a different approach to embodiment, one that does not entail enhancing the identity of the self.

Chan/Zen in Intercultural and Intermedia Performance

Concerning the undercurrent of Chan/Zen philosophy in intercultural and intermedia performance practices (Baas 2005; Baas and Jacob 2004; Friedman 1998; Marranta 1991; Munroe 2009; Westgeest 1998), John Cage's version of Zen, which primarily comes from the interpretation of Alan Watts and D. T. Suzuki (Cage 1961:xi), is often mentioned. While Suzuki popularised Zen in American-European societies, Cage transformed musical compositions into intermedia performances by incorporating Zen philosophy. Those influenced by Cage include the Fluxus artists George Brecht, Nam June Paik, and the performance artist Marina Abramović, who has incorporated 'Eastern' philosophies or 'non-Western' spiritual practices into her performance practices. The shared 'East-West' interest in the philosophical implications of emptiness and nothingness have led to very different approaches to performance and versions of emptiness, as artists express diverse longings, reinvent the self, and chart paths for transformation.

As Said analyzed, Orientalism used 'the Orient' to project the desires of 'the Occident' and to define the European self, and identified with the 'relationship' between the self and the other and "its ideas about the Orient", which can be represented as the essence of the Orient ([1979]2003:1-3). The undercurrent of Chan/Zen philosophy in performance art exemplifies the long tradition of East-West interaction that Western artists have romanticised the 'other', making 'East' or 'Zen' an empty marker and a mirror, a tool useful to imagining one's utopia and to mobilizing oneself on the march toward one's own version of newness. The dualistic East-West categorisation provides a convenient context for artists to position themselves in. Theorists take advantage of such dualistic pairings to retell familiar

narratives and build discursive constructs that map out how Western artists have manifested culture-specific longings and instrumentalised the 'non-Western' in ways that allow them to resist modernist ideology and respond to the concept of progress. Critiques of modernist ideology often reinforce the dualistic relationship between East and West. That this constructed relationship is often taken as real causes essentialisation of both the East and the West.

In recent years, scholars of religion and East Asian studies have reconsidered Zen's construction in the twentieth century (Cox 2003:43; Faure 1996 and 1991; Heisig and Maraldo 1995; Sharft 1995 and 1993), and particularly have critiqued the specific historical construction of Suzuki's Zen. Suzuki's brand of Zen Buddhism could be seen as self-Orientalism. Suzuki was the important mediator of East-West dialogue, who introduced Zen Buddhism to the Western societies. He conceived of Zen as particularly Japanese, yet, at the same time, universal (Cox 2003: 35). Others have noted that Suzuki's Zen and the Kyoto School's 'absolute emptiness' supported Japanese nationalism and militarism (Heisig and Maraldo 1995; Sharft 1995 and 1993) and challenged the illusion of Zen as being "ahistorical", as implied by Suzuki (Faure 1993:65 in Cox 2003:36). His interpretation of Zen Buddhism enhanced the mystical and exotic differences to the 'West'. Suzuki suggested that Zen Buddhism is the "spirit of the East" (1970: 347). He claimed that Chan as the distinct school originated in China, but the true spirit of Zen is uniquely Japanese (1970: 347). Then, he emphasized that the nature of Zen is universal. As the representative of 'Eastern' spirituality, Suzuki projected his utopia and built an ideal "spirit of the East" (1970: 347), onto his 'Zen Buddhism'. By doing so, he created the quality of 'East', or, in fact, 'Japaneseness'. What revealed was not only a teaching of Zen, but the historical constructs that made his version of Zen possible.

Both East and West essentialize the result of categorisation as the intrinsic nature, and consequently define the relationship between East and West as the quality of each. The concept of Chan/Zen emptiness has been employed in cultural campaigns to create new collective and individual identities. The 'East' has used emptiness to self-orientalise, and the 'West' has exploited emptiness to establish an absolute otherness against which to essentialise 'West' (Cox 2003:43). Both 'East' and 'West' have employed similar categorisations to find positions from which to appeal to the desire for authenticity. One could respond to the construction of Zen and its connection to Japanese Nationalist expansion (Faure 1996 and 1991; Heisig and Maraldo 1995; Sharft 1995 and 1993). Or, as Nam June Paik did, he condemned Zen for its 'Asian poverty, and commented that Suzuki's Zen as the "cultural patriotism" is the "suicide of Zen" (Paik 1979:n.p).

Because of those reasons, I don't follow Suzuki's interpretation of Zen Buddhism to understand 'emptiness', but use the stories from Chan Buddhism and Nāgārjuna's *The Book of the Middle Way* in which he explains his notion of *śūnyatā*, translated as suchness, emptiness and nothingness. Nāgārjuna's notion of *śūnyatā* becomes the foundation of the different schools in Eastern Asian Buddhism, and the philosophical constructs in Kyoto school's Absolute Nothingness and Suzuki's Zen. One could, similarly, ask which version of emptiness/nothingness an artist constructs. One could argue that self-invention's use of emptiness and emptying out has encouraged artists and theorists to not only produce new selves, but to promise universality. Cage, for example, sought musical and social solutions through Zen, and Abramović has sought to produce the experience of presence through explorations of non-Western meditative practices and the construction of a unique version of 'being here and now'.

The Concept of Kongwu and Different Versions of Emptiness and Nothingness

The concept of Kongwu is often translated as void, empty, nothing, blank, emptiness, and nothingness. Those translations have the connotation of 'no-things', the absence of 'being', the lack of 'presence', non-existence, and non-being. Those connotations mean the opposite of fullness in the traditional Western metaphysics and ontology. Yet, this is not the case for the concept of Kongwu. The concept of Kongwu does not mean non-existence, as opposition to existence, nor mean non-being, as the opposition to being, so I use the term Kongwu without using English words to emphasise the different linguistic associations and philosophical contexts that the concept of Kongwu can operate.

In the lecture, "What is Metaphysics?" (1929), Heidegger critiqued the Western metaphysics tradition (Heidegger 1998: 82-96). He rejected Aristotle's view to take nothing as the absence of being, absence and the lack of substance, and being as fullness, presence, and substance. Furthermore, he developed the 'Nothing' as the foundation of metaphysics. For Heidegger, the Nothing is akin to the original beginning, which gives birth to all beings and Being (Ma 2007:179-182; Yao 79-82). Even though Heidegger does not take the Nothing as substance (a being of no-thing) as Aristotle viewed, the Nothing becomes the original of all beings (Yao 79-82), as a way to go back to Being, things as themselves. Heidegger's Nothing is not the opposition to being of beings, but the Nothing points to the desire of knowing the original being, and promises that we, human being can know Being (Ma 2007:30). Presence and Being emerges from the Nothing. As Derrida notes in *Speech and Phenomena*, Heidegger stills wants to "through very language" (1973:160) and through the Nothing to seek Being that is transcendent from language and find a route back to the 'thing as themselves' as the authentic presence (1973:157-60).

Heidegger's Nothing is not a substance, and is the opposition to fullness and being, but becomes the most authentic ground for Being, which resonates with Laozi's view on Wu (無, Nothing) as being (Yao 2010:83). According to Yao, in Chapters 2 and 40 of *Dao-De-Jing*, Wu is the origin, which gives birth to all beings (Yao 2010:83). Such view implies an objective existence of Wu, and Wu has a unified presence. Heidegger cited Laozi's Wu to elaborate his own notion of "ontological difference" and "Being" (Ma 2007:5,119-43), and developed his metaphysics based on the Nothing. However, the similarity between Heidegger and Laozi is actually full of discontinuity. For example, according to Ma, "the word You overlaps with the sense of "having." It means "to be present" or "to be around," and has nothing to do with how the terms "Being" or "existence" are used in Western philosophy or in Heidegger's thought"(Ma 2007:5). The word You and Wu in Chinese philosophy never have the same meaning in Heidegger's own metaphysics nor the Western metaphysics (Ma 2007:5-6).

Even though Laozi and Zhuangzi both were often considered as the founders of Daoism, their views on Wu (無, nothing) and Dao (道, way) are different (Billeter 2011; Luo 2012:154; Wu 2006:43). Zhuangzi never considered Dao as something with the unified presence (Billeter 2011; Luo 2012:154; Wu 2006:43). Consequently Zhuangzi's Wu, different from Laozi's Wu, does not refer to something universal, but the perceptual process and experiential events (Wu 2006:43). Because of this distinct understanding of Wu, Zhuangzi's Wu implies the practice of living and aesthetics (Wu 2006:43) and Laozi's Wu implies the metaphysical search. Laozi takes Wu as the ontological origin; Zhuangzi takes Wu as a particular perceptual process and a specific experiential event. Heidegger's 'Nothing' is more similar to Laozi's Wu. Because of the emphasis on the particular perceptual process and

experiences, Zhuangzi developed the particular linguistic strategies to demonstrate his concerns on the way of living, and the possibility to practice a different patterning of experience and perception (will discuss further in Chapter One and Three).

To understand the way of experiencing to which Kongwu refers, such as the meditative experience of 'no mind', one has to understand how the expression of experience, and culture-specific modes of expression, have shaped experiential possibilities. In Buddhism, Nāgārjuna claims about the dynamic quality of life rely on śūnyatā (空, kong in Chinese, emptiness), which is a reaction to "Hindu ontological" oneness (Streng 1967:36). Daoism developed Wu (無, nothingness, non-being) to undermine the dominant Confucian view of the ordering of life and moral behaviour (Yang 1993: 19-53). Daoism considers value judgments artificial and not in accordance with the Dao. Yet, the Dao cannot be named. What can be named is only another value-bounded result. The differences between the Daoist and Buddhist views result from specific cultural-historical conditions. The centuries-long amalgamation of Daoism and Buddhism gave birth to Chinese Buddhism, particularly Chan Buddhism and the meditation practices (Kohn 2010:33-46).

The Book of the Middle-Way (中論, Zhong Lun in Chinese, Mūlamadhyamakakārikā in Sanskrit) is central to understanding Nāgārjuna's concept of śūnyatā. Many Chinese Buddhism schools that "claim to teach the Middle Path" (Chen 1969:396) were influenced by Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā and revised his philosophical modes of inquiry (Westerhoff 2010) through the intercultural syncretism of Daoism and Buddhism (Chen 1969:336-449). For example, Chan Buddhism applied the principle of emptiness to the ways of living and addressed the understanding of reality through an approach to language, akin to that of the Daoist

Zhuangzi, who relied on shocking conversations and stories to understand Dao (Chen 1969:445-6). Zhiyi (智顓, 538-597 A.D), as the founder of the Tia-tan Buddhist School, integrated the Daoist and Buddhist meditation traditions and reworked Nāgārjuna's twofold reality into a threefold reality (Swanson 1989:1-17).

Not all Buddhist schools accepted Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā. In *The Book of the Middle Way*, many chapters record the debates between Nāgārjuna and other Buddhists or non-Buddhists schools. All the different schools come from the different interpretation of pratītya-samutpāda (dependent-origination, dependent-arising), which means "things are formed in existence depending on other things" (Streng 1967: 60). Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā is a critique of Abhidharma tradition. The Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia such as "Burma, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand" is one of eighteen schools of Abhidharma that "does not teach" śūnyatā. (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:219-20). Within the Mahayana Buddhism, the Mind-Only school partially agrees Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā. Those different views do not point to the problem of 'truth', to offer the most 'authentic' or 'truthful' answer, because they are merely the different discourses, the products of the social, historical, cultural and linguistic conventions. However, various Buddhist schools are useful devices in terms of various effects and practice that different discourses can activate in a certain context.

Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā is not a view of a substantialist, nor a nihilist. Śūnyatā does not mean the absence of being and existence, neither the origin of beings (Laozi's Wu and Heidegger's Nothing). According to Huntington (1989:25-32), Western reception of Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā and Buddhism went through different stages. These Scholars interpreted Buddhism as Nihilism, Absolutism, and through post-Wittgensteinian pragmatism and deconstruction (Huntington 1989:25-32). From

Nāgārjuna 's perspective, nihilism and absolutism are different forms with the same need of a "stable ego-self "(Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:144). The different Western interpretations of Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā are the products of academic preference in its specific time and space. As Foucault would say, *episteme* creates the possibility and limit of knowledge ([1970] 2005). For Kongwu, every interpretation of 'emptiness' or 'nothingness' is merely 'the 'known', a result of a distinctive way of knowing in a circumstance, conditioned by its intellectual, social, cultural and historical convention.

From the perspective of Kongwu, whatever meaning of 'being' that one intends to understand is merely the result of a particular way of knowing and 'seeing', which is 'the known', 'the perceived' or 'the seen'. Therefore, 'being' is by default already a consequence of dualistic differentiation, meaning the subject-object dichotomy and the function of the dualistic pairs in language. When we claim one understanding of 'being' and one definition of 'presence', we already accepted the assumption of a subject-object dichotomy. In other words, we identify with the result of the dualistic differentiation as the 'being' of things. The concept of Kongwu has the different attitude towards 'being', and forces us to confront the issue of experience and temporality without grasping a foundation of self-identity.

Performing Kongwu's Attitude toward Language, Time, and Self

My primary inquiry is in the context of performance making, which determines the construction of Kongwu in my research and practice. The selection of texts for analysis in this thesis aims to clarify how Nāgārjuna's principles and Zhuangzi's linguistic strategies underpin my practices, and directly address the problem of

language, time, and self, which is fundamental to performance practice.

With respect to performance making, I focus on the dialogue between performative languages and the problematisation of Kongwu. The understanding of temporality in Fluxus works resonates with “the Buddhist analysis of time and existence in human experience” (Friedman 1998: 250). But to what the label of ‘Zen Buddhism’ and the Buddhist sense of time and experience refer requires clarification. Elucidation of the philosophical implications of a Kongwu approach to performance practice, and particularly of the effects of Kongwu’s understanding of experience and temporality, demonstrates how the Kongwu perspective shapes the principles underlying performance-making and, additionally, offers an analytical context that escapes the narrative constructed by the dualistic East-West pairing.

Bolter and Grusin defined “remediation” as the complex “repurposing” between medium, and response to each other (2000). We can remediate Zhuangzi’s concerns and Nāgārjuna’s logic into performance practices to reconsider the primacy of experience without grasping a concept of the self-identity in performance practice. Moreover, this remediation creates intermediality between the medium of philosophy and performance. The Fluxus artist Dick Higgins suggested that by using “intermedia”, we recognised a “new mentality” that emphasises “continuity”, instead of “categorization” (Higgins [1965]2001:50). Higgins used John Cage as an example of intermedia because Cage explored “the intermedia between music and philosophy” (Higgins [1965]2001:50). Performance can create “Third Space” (Bhabha 1994:37) where “ambivalence” (Bhabha 1994:217) occurs, the categories of ‘East’ and ‘West’ are untenable. Performance can create an “in-between” moment (Bhabha 1994:4) when the hierarchy between the strong and weak medium, the boundary between self and other are suspended. Performance introduces

indeterminacy. In this sense of intercultural and intermedial, my research-through-practice offers one response to the poetics and politics of intercultural encounters in the context of Chan/Zen into performance.

Artistic practice has the freedom to absorb various frameworks and synthesise them as encounters of scientific theories, technology, art, and humanity. Moreover, it has the capacity to create a liminal space-time for these intersecting frameworks and, consequently, generate different experiential possibilities. Perceiving performance as kinaesthetic networking is the best approach to synthesizing diverse contexts and making abstract theories, historical discourses, and culture-specific frameworks in confronting the unpredictability of human and non-human consciousness, physicality, and materiality. Performance where “intersensuality thus joins intertextuality” (Kapchan 1995: 483) is, thus, intended to trace assumptions and has the capacity to act and articulate potentialities in the fractures of different realities and worldviews. In this way, performance can help us reconsider how we structure our experiences. By incorporating Kongwu’s rather counter-intuitive attitude into performance practice, we can rethink how we experience our experience as the real as the condition in which we live.

As concerns the performance of Kongwu, it is useful to note that both Daoism and Buddhism distrust language and symbols, and question the validity of using conceptual ordering to present the world as it is. For Kongwu, the ‘reality’ we think to be never can be without the mediation of the observer’s own engagement. The label of Kongwu reflects the mediation enacted by the observer’s experiencing, as the observer encounters the world and claims the ‘being’ of the world by taking the result of experience with differentiation as real. Kongwu disengages itself from the anthropocentric organisation that constructs ‘reality’, which is the condition with

which we engage and in which we live. In many stories of Koan in Chan Buddhism, which are records of the teaching between masters, students and monks, the master often used non-sense gestures and actions to communication. The masters do not intend to communicate a result from a specific perspective or a 'what', but they perform to trigger a way of perceiving without identifying with indicators. They communicate to expose the habitual way of understanding, which is, taking 'the perceived' as the thing in itself. Bolter and Grusin defined hypermediacy that "reminds the viewer the medium" (Bolter and Grusin 2000:272). "Sometimes hypermediacy has adopted a playful or subversive attitude, both acknowledging and undercutting the desire of immediacy"(Bolter and Grusin 2000:34). The particular way of considering the functioning of communication in Koan creates a "hypermediacy", and could help to consider how we use performative languages in performance.

The three chapters of the thesis chart the triangulation between the Kongwu attitude, the selected artist's approach to performance, and my response performance. Kongwu reconsiders how the subject-object dichotomy governs the way 'we' experience and bring the world into 'being' for us, which implies the impossibility of the absolute split of 'subject' and 'object' and questions the reification of the 'relationship' between subject and object. For the concept of Kongwu, the fundamental assumption within any particular way of knowing is that 'subject' uses language and concepts to describe and indicate the experience of 'object'. Consequently this activity creates a 'relationship' between subject and object, and in turn the result of describing and indicating circulates back to be the sources and evidence of the 'subject'. 'Subject' is being assumed as a creator of the relationship

and description. Yet 'subject' is the functioning of describing and building a relationship. In Chapter one, I outline Kongwu's attitude by discussing the problem of language and focus on how an object we think to be is the product that we take the relationship between subject and object as the object within itself. In Chapter Two, to consider the problem of time from the concept of Kongwu, we confront the assumption of human being as the measurement of all things, which makes the division of 'before' and 'after' possible, and constructs a feeling of events happening in a train of past, present, and future. In Chapter Three, we analyse how the whole process of functioning circulates back to produce the sense of 'self'.

Specifically, I focus on how Paik, Cage, and Abramović put the concept of Kongwu into practice. Paik's approach to media resonates with Kongwu's distrust of language. His use of media turns the spectators' attention to the medium's materiality and mechanism. For example, the co-presencing of the 'real' fish and the 'live' TV fish in his installation *Real Fish/Live Fish* questions how we interact with the description of an object and know the 'being' of an object. His installations externalise the effects of language on our ways of experiencing and exposing the function of experiencing as a form of mediation of our encounters with the world. Though Cage influenced Paik and though many artists who developed intermedia practices were Cage's students, the thematic structure of my examination of Kongwu lends itself best to analysis of Paik in Chapter One and Cage in Chapter Two. Through integrating Zen Buddhism and reconsidering the time measurement in music, Cage questioned the 'being' of music. Cage's notion of time echoes Kongwu's attitude towards time, thus providing us with an intercultural context in which to analyse time in performance practice and Cage's expansion of music into intermedia practice. Abramović has explored the meditative experience and the

concept of 'suchness', enhancing the possibilities of performance and the potentiality of the body and mind. Particularly in her performance *The Artist is Present*, her investigation of the 'no-thinking mind' and her version of being-here-and-now provide a vantage point from which to examine the relationship between the process of experiencing and constructing an identity of the self.

Chapter One explores the dichotomy inherent in our use of language to describe experience when, in fact, experience is governed by language and, particularly, language's dualistic differentiation. Dualistic differentiation means the subject-object dichotomy and the dualistic pairs of language that is the mechanism by which that language can function. I discuss how language triggers emotions, value judgments and actions, which are seen to constitute 'reality', the condition with which we engage. When we perceive our habit of experiencing through dualistic differentiation, we sense the 'real' we think to be.

Paik's approach to media resonated with Kongwu's distrust of language. I show how Paik shifts the viewer's attention away from the message and toward the mechanism by which the media produces the message in *Zen for Film*. Paik further explores the process of seeing in the *TV Buddha* series and reflects on our habit of taking indications of experiences as the 'beings' of things in *Real Fish/Live Fish* and *Real Plant/ Live Plant*. Reflecting on the process of writing in Chinese calligraphy, the spatial organisation in ink landscape painting, and electronic writing in video devices, I create a traceless writing that cannot serve the expected purpose of writing and uses multiple closed circuits that disrupt the traditional tunnel-vision perspective. My performance, *Poem without Language* dissolves the communicative purpose of writing and responds to Paik's approach to media and Kongwu's distrust

of language.

Chapter Two rethinks the notion of time from the Kongwu perspective, with reference to Nāgārjuna, Sengzhao, and Dōgen. Kongwu considers the experience of time to be an illusion of continuity that results from the operation of language and the fixed position of the observer. The past is a memory of the present, and the future is an expectation generated by past accumulation in the present. Past accumulation means a collection of earlier experiences, language, concepts, personal histories, cultural backgrounds, and social conventions as the accumulation of 'already-there'. Past accumulation shapes a particular way of perceiving. The present comes into presence in the relationship between the constructions of past and future. Whether memory and the description of experience are possible without the intervention of language and conceptualisation, and whether 'time' can be conceptualised linearly without a constructed continuity, is dubious, according to Kongwu.

Chapter Two shows how Cage revised the notion of time in *4'33"* and *0'00"* (*4'33" No.2*) by giving up the measurement of time, and how Cage's revision echoes Kongwu's attitude toward time. Critically, the intercultural dialogue in these works on the issue of temporality enables Cage's expansion of music into intermedia performance. Cage developed the idea of nondual listening through the operation of silence. My work, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Narratives, and Different Memories* further investigates nondualistic experiencing by exposing the mechanism via which we experience the 'present' through the 'past', as the accumulation of experiences. In this way, my work reconsiders how we experience 'the' experience and how we order experiences as a train of past, present, and future and construct the feeling that events happen in a sequence.

Chapter Three reconsiders how we identify with our individual collections of

experiences and appropriate accumulations of experiences as the sources of our selves. To examine the production of self-identity, we realise how past accumulation not only shapes a particular way of perceiving, but is precisely the 'self'. In my analysis of Abramović's 'no-thinking mind' and 'being-here-and-now', I compare the relationship between the process of experiencing and the identity of the self implied in Abramović's performances and examine her narrative framework from a Kongwu perspective. I scrutinise why Abramović emphasises the experience of 'being-here-and-now' in her encounters with 'others': East and Nature. Referencing Nāgārjuna and Zhuangzi, I probe how Abramović's version of 'suchness' is trapped in the habit of experiencing through dualistic differentiation and identification.

The performance ... *is Present* creates a dialogue between a 'real' performer and a performer inside a TV. The reciprocity between the two performers demonstrates how, if one does not identify with the content of experience, one cannot establish identity. My performance suggests definitions of the 'meditative mind' and the experience of 'being-here-and-now' that differ from those offered by Abramović. Moreover, by erasing the subject in the title, the performance ... *is Present* critiques the relationship between the embodied process and the identity of the self, as implied in Abramović's *The Artist is Present*.

Taking Paik's approach to media, Cage's view of time and measurement, and Abramović's approach to presence and experience as its starting points, my three performance works facilitate dialogue about these artists' practices. To clarify the Kongwu perspective, my research-through-practice focuses on how we live in the effect of language and language's dualistic differentiation, construct the illusion of continuity as time, and identify with collections of experiences to create another illusion of continuity, the identity of the self.

1. When Language Cannot Function: Responding to Nam June Paik through *Poem Without Language*

Introduction

Kongwu supports the way in which such artists as John Cage, Allan Kaprow, and the Fluxus artists Nam June Paik and George Brecht have considered the possibilities of performance and experience in intermedia practice. The philosophical implications of Kongwu (空無, emptiness, nothingness) in Daoism and Buddhism have been understood with reference to the 1960s European-American avant-garde. Revisiting the historical context of Kongwu and its relationship to performance raises the questions: what happens when one tradition migrates into other contexts. In this chapter, I investigate the relationship between Kongwu's understanding of the world and the principles underlying performance.

As concerns Kongwu, one has to understand that the 'world' we see is the result of observation with differentiation, and we take the result of differentiation as the 'being' of the world. To understand this assertion, we investigate Kongwu's attitude toward language and how the looping effects of language form. We use language to indicate, describe, and document what we experience, but we end up being governed by language, particularly its dualistic mechanism. We act according to the emotions, feelings, and value judgments that dualistic differentiation triggers. We live in the 'reality' that results from the looping effect of the dualistic ordering of things.

How might Kongwu's distrust of language shape the underlying principles of a performance? Performance can be seen as an activity in which symbols and markers are produced via the use of dance, words, and body gestures in theatre; tempo, rhythm, and tone in music; and media, visual, and sonic technology. I analyse how Paik uses media, reveals the mechanisms by which media produces messages, rethinks habitual patterns of seeing, and questions the implications of allowing the results of selective seeing to be taken as the 'being' of a thing. My research-through-practice further reconsiders how performance language resonates with the distrust of language in Kongwu. With reference to Zhuangzi's linguistic strategy, I show that the writing of Chinese calligraphy on the surface of water is a traceless action, that is, an undocumented writing that constitutes a 'poem without language'. By disrupting the expected function of writing, water calligraphy therefore shifts attention from content to the process of writing itself. Concentrating on Paik's approach to media and spatial organisation in ink landscape paintings, I further show how the use of multiple sets of closed circuits create an orchestra of gazes that contemplate the looping effect; what we see is the result of seeing with differentiation, and the result of such seeing we take as the 'being' of the thing.

1.1 Reconsidering the Looping Effects of Language with Reference to Kongwu

In order to understand how language governs the way we can perceive and experience from the perspective of Kongwu, I introduce Nāgārjuna's Śūnyatā and Twofold Reality, use the Chan/Zen proverb to discuss the relationship between things and indicators. The two Chan/Zen poems examine how the human being (the subject) can occupy the centre of experience. By using the ink landscape painting,

we investigate how the spatial organization in the painting demonstrates the uncertainty between the observer and the observed and distrust of language.

From the perspective of Kongwu, what we often experience is the result of experience with differentiation. Then we mistake the result of selective seeing as the 'being' of the world. Selective seeing means a particularly way of perceiving (seeing, listening and sensing) conditioned by social, cultural and historical backgrounds as well as limited by past experiences, language, and social convention. Foucault's concept of *episteme* can help to understand selective seeing. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault examines Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas* (1656, The Maids of Honour) to address the relationship between reality and representation, and the possibility of knowledge (Foucault 1970:3-18). According to Foucault's analysis, Velazquez made the act of representation to be seen, and created a painting that is reflective to its mechanism of representation, and its mediation that determined what could be invisible or visible. Through the example of Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas*, Foucault argues that what could be known and be visible is determined by its historical *episteme*. *Episteme*, as Foucault defines, refers to "the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice" (Foucault 1970: 183). As Foucault suggests, each *episteme* has its sets of assumptions that determine what can be thinkable and knowable. Then, one *episteme* could replace another. A claim of 'truth' and the knowledge of things could replace another version. In other words, the 'truth' is merely the functioning of a specific *episteme*, but one takes what can be represented in a particular *episteme* as the 'being' of objects (Foucault 1970: 370). Foucault doubts the 'truth' produced by its specific historical conditions. Similarly, the concept of Kongwu forces us to

confront the issue that we take the indicator as the thing in itself, calling for dis-identifying with 'the seen'.

The circulation between language and our emotion, feeling and action is the looping effect of language, which becomes a 'reality', the condition with which we engage everyday. Because of the dualistic differentiation that means the subject-object dichotomy and the dualistic pairs of language, language can perform the functions of describing, indicating, and documenting. We use language to understand the world. In fact, we are governed by language. Language exercises emotive influence and affects value judgments. When we use language to point to something, it triggers associated memories and feelings and affects our subsequent actions. We live with the effects of language. The looping effect of language implies that the 'I' is being assumed as a creator of the relationship between the 'I' and the 'world', but indeed the 'I' is the functioning of describing and building a relationship (will further discussed in Chapter Three). In this sense, we take our descriptions of experience as 'real'. The functioning of language has been mistaken as the reality.

Nāgārjuna coined the concept of śūnyatā (emptiness, nothingness), which derives from several presuppositions: twofold reality and dependent-origination.

Whatever is dependently co-arising
That is explained to be emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation,
Is itself the middle way.

(Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995:69)

The principle of *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent-origination, dependent-arising) means that “things are formed in existence depending on other things” (Streng 1967: 60). Everything, when considered as an entity, is only a temporal aggregation of multiple elements in the specific condition. That a specific entity can exist presupposes the co-existence of the entities of not-this-one. Every ‘thing’ is an aggregation of things not-itself. ‘Self’ is already including not-self. Dependent-arising refutes the view that everything is independent, with its own absolute essence.

According to Streng, Nāgārjuna’s reinterpretation of dependent-origination does not “assert the annihilation of things” (Streng 1967:159), but rules out the search for “first cause” (Streng 1967: 60 and 159). For Nāgārjuna, “cause” should be regarded as “an orderly set of circumstances or conditions — which themselves are conditioned”. So cause does not lead to “an original source” (Streng 1967: 61). Śūnyatā, as a linguistic label, functions without being trapped in the dualistic ordering of experiences by either the position of absolute being or absolute nonbeing (nihilism), which is the middle-way (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:546). As an extension of dependent-arising, śūnyatā does not imply that things do not exist, but that each thing has no self-contained essence and substance, as we claim when conceptualising the ‘being’ of the world. The concept of śūnyatā is not non-existence, no-things. The concept of Twofold reality (Conventional Reality and Ultimate Reality) operates in a way to avoid taking śūnyatā as nihilism or another absolutism.

In Nāgārjuna’s Twofold Reality, Conventional Reality refers to a circumstance, a result of the habitual way of perceiving conditioned by the historical cultural, linguistic conditions, and social agreements, and caused by the subject-object dichotomy. Conventional Reality is merely what can be thinkable and knowable,

conditioned by its specific circumstance. As Foucault's concept of *episteme* noted, *episteme* is the base that determines the possibility of knowledge, and produces a version that we think to be of reality. Conventional Reality has to depend on its specific sets of condition to be possible.

Ultimate Reality does not suggest the independent absolute essence of reality possible, but refers to a particular way of experiencing that one does not identify with the result of the habitual way of perceiving. Ultimate Reality responds to the function and effect of Conventional Reality. The phenomenon of Conventional Reality is the foundation for the significance of the second truth, Ultimate Reality (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995:68). Kongwu's worldview is based on the notion that the Twofold Reality is driven by simultaneous workings. According to Nāgārjuna, Conventional Reality is the outcome of one's seeing and describing. If one understands the meaning of Ultimate Reality, one realises whatever 'being' we can know is the result of experience with dualistic differentiation.

The dynamic of Twofold Reality resists the dualistic separation of Conventional Reality and Ultimate Reality. In chapter twenty-four, "Examination of the Four Noble Truths", of *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (Book of the Middle-Way), Nāgārjuna responded to other Buddhists (and non-Buddhists) who criticised Nāgārjuna's concept of emptiness and promotion of nihilism. If everything were really empty, as Nāgārjuna had stated, the four Buddhist truths for practice – knowledge, abandonment, meditation, and manifestation – should not exist (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995:67; Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:326-31). Nāgārjuna's opponents charged that his statement "all is empty" was nihilistic (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995:295-7), because his concept of emptiness could "turn out to be another absolutistic" position (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:326-7). They further alleged

that all being empty did not explain causality and the phenomena of birth and death, arising and disappearing. To clarify, Nāgārjuna stated:

The teaching of the doctrine by the Buddhas is based upon two truths: truth relating to worldly convention and truth in terms of ultimate fruit. MKV® p.492; MKV(V) 1p.214

(Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:331)

Nāgārjuna explained the need to develop the concept of Twofold Reality and the operation of *śūnyatā* in the linguistic realms and as concerns the nature of reality and perceptions of the world. “Truth relating to worldly convention” refers to the Conventional Reality that results from linguistic markers (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:536), representational systems, contexts and social conventions. Ultimate Reality means that one does not identify with whatever versions of ‘truth’ resulting from Conventional Reality, particularly the subject-object dichotomy. Śūnyatā as a linguistic strategy responds to the first reality, Conventional Reality (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:536).

Habitually, one takes Conventional Reality as real. However, one needs to dispense with the habit of identifying with the results of dualistic discrimination. Ultimate Reality expresses understanding of the provisional position and responds to the problem of taking Conventional Reality as real, with absolute substance. Though Nāgārjuna called the second truth Ultimate Reality, he also expressed the understanding that there is no such thing as a ‘reality’ or ‘truth’ with absolute substance and fixed essence. Even ‘emptiness’ itself does not have any absolute essence (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:542), as the nihilists hold. Conventional Reality is

thus the result of dualistic differentiation that constructs the conditions in which we live, and Ultimate Reality requires that that we each dis-identify with the result of a particular way of seeing, without being governed by the dualistic construction. To understand the kinds of conditions in which we live, we can look at the looping effect that differentiation causes.

Taking the Indicator as the Thing: The Finger is Not the Moon

Differentiation is the foundation upon which language indicates, describes, and documents experience. As concerns Kongwu, we experience the world by taking the result of differentiation as the thing in itself. The Zen proverb, ‘the finger is not the moon’ addresses our tendency to take the indicator as the thing in itself. In volume nine of *Dazhi Dulun* (大智度論, *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*), a teacher uses his finger to point to the moon and indicate what it is. The student only sees the finger and does not see the moon. The teacher asks, “I used the finger to point to the moon, so why do you see the finger as the moon, not the moon? (Nāgārjuna and Jia 1997:273-280). The finger, as the indicator, points to something that is not the indicator itself. Indication can, therefore, function according to dualistic pairs, and the ‘finger is not the moon’ proverb reveals that indicators habitually trigger our emotions, leading us to act out responses. Hence, chain-effects shape the worlds in which we live.

Zhuangzi addressed the influence of language upon not only our emotions, but our value judgements:

The “this” is also “that.” The “that” is also “this.” According to “that,” there is a system of right and wrong. According to “this,” there is also a system of right

and wrong. Is there really a distinction between “this” and “that”? ... Not to discriminate “that” and “this” as opposite is the very essence of Tao (Way). There you get the Axis of Tao. There you attain the Central Ring to respond to the endless.

(Chuang [Zhuang] 66 in Yip 1993: 71)

Bound by discrimination, one prefers good to bad, right over wrong, and sees the world through a value-bounded perspective that makes arbitrary connections between the observer’s learning experiences, social conditions, memories, and habits. We conduct ourselves according to ‘this’ or ‘that’. We live in the effects of differentiation that generates value judgements. In this sense, we take the indicator as the real.

Occupying the Position of the Observer as the Centre of Experience

The indicator is about something, but is not about the thing in itself. The aboutness is the relationship we establish between the world and the self. Then, we take the relation as the world. The indicator points to something that is not the indicator itself. To follow the direction of the indication, we do not meet the thing; rather, we encounter the ‘self’. We assume the human being occupies the position of the observer. A network of indicators is the outcome of our experiencing the world through the ‘I’, as the centre of experience. Put to our purposes as humans, language mediates subject and object, bringing the subject closer to the world. This employment of language assumes that the ‘I’ as a unified entity should occupy the position of the observer.

Shen-xiu and Heing-neng’s poems question the assumption that we need to

occupy the position of the observer to understand the world, even in spiritual practice. The Fifth Patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism, to know his students' understanding of reality, asked them to write poems. Shen-xiu wrote:

The body is the Bodhi tree;
The mind is like the mirror bright,
Take heed to keep it always clean,
And let no dust collect upon it.

(in Xiong 1998: 138)

The Bodhi tree is the symbol of true wisdom in Buddhism, and the mind, as a mirror, reflects the world. The monk Shen-xiu (606-706 A.D) used the metaphors of the Bodhi tree and the mirror to describe the specific body-mind state necessary to truly understand the world. Specifically, he assumed there is a self that empties the self.

The monk Hui-neng (638-713A.D), who later became the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism, challenged Shen-xiu's approach:

The Bodhi is not like the tree;
The mirror bright is nowhere shining;
As there is nothing from the first,
Where does the dust itself collect?

(in Xiong 1998: 139)

In "there is nothing from the first," Hui-neng questioned why we assume the self as the reference point from which to understand the world, that is, selective

experiencing. When we have assumed this position from the beginning, we experience through selective perception. Then, what we experience is the outcome of selective experiencing.

Dust may be viewed as a metaphor for accumulations from the past that cause dualistic thinking and experiencing with selection. When Sheng-xiu said, “let no dust collect upon it”, he assumed the position of the self (the metaphor of the mirror), thereby avoiding the collection of dust upon “it”. Yet, he forgot that the self is the collection of past experiences with which we identify. Though he did not want past accumulations (dust) to constitute his experience, he still conceptualized of the self as a unified entity and something obtained through the purging of past accumulations. Past accumulations means memories, personal histories, the cultural and social backgrounds, which often condition a particular way of experiencing. Sheng-xiu thereby claimed that ‘this’ was better than ‘that’, according to Buddhist wisdom – ‘that’ being accumulations from the past. According to Sheng-xiu, what one needs to do is make ‘this’ better and more precise. The self being taken as the reference point as a foundation, dualistic opposition becomes possible. For Hui-neng, without assuming the self as the centre from which to understand the world, we cannot experience dualistic opposition, according to ‘this’ or ‘that’. We experience in a nondualistic way.

The issues posed by the poems of Hui-neng and Sheng-xiu rethought the unconscious habit, the subject-object dichotomy that governs our way of experiencing. When we reconsider how the indicator functions, we not only revisit the problem of dualistic thinking, but also the position of the observer. Shen-xiu still assumed ‘I’ as a unified entity and remained trapped in the loop of language because he retained the self who accumulated Buddhist teaching as his principal

reference point. Hui-neng challenged whether the experiencer could or should be the centre of experience. Then, we confront a way of understanding the world and studying experience without assuming a ground of self, a unified entity (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991).

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch used their cognitive experiment on colour to suggest a “groundlessness” without a subjective ground as ego-self and an objective ground as the world ‘out there’ (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:217).

color provides a paradigm of a cognitive domain that is neither pregiven nor represented but rather experiential and enacted. It is very important to note that just because color is not pregiven does not mean that it does not exhibit universals or that it cannot yield to rigorous analysis by the various branches of science.

(Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:171)

They proposed an enactive approach to experience, a middle-way between objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism and subjectivism shared the same desire: “the craving for an absolute ground” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:141). Because of “the basic logic of representationism”, objectivism tended to search for “an outer ground in the world” and subjectivism for “an inner ground in the mind” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:141). They pointed out that the dualistic treatment of mind (subjective) and world (objective) is “not given and ready-made”, but a product of “the history of mind and nature” that can be traced back to the Cartesian mind (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:141). They used Nāgārjuna’s

Middle-Way and the meditation practice to interpret the perception of colour and to propose that the core of experience is the lack of a unified self.

The “groundlessness” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:217), being the core of experience dissolves the Cartesian divide of subject and object. From an enactive perspective, the foundation is “circularity” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:16), and not “separation” that is the foundation of representationalism (Barad 2007: 137). The enactive approach and the perspective of Kongwu both rejected representationalism, and proposed that we cannot find a foundation of ‘self’ in the experience.

Barad investigated the implication of Niels Bohr’s physics-philosophy to the production of knowledge, and suggested that we cannot localise “the agency in individuals (whether human and nonhuman)” (Barad 2007:x). Bohr questioned “the Cartesian belief in the inherent distinction between subject and object, and knower and known”(Barad 2007:138). According to Barad, Bohr’s physics-philosophy that rejects “atomistic metaphysics” (Barad 2007:138) forces us to confront Newtonian worldview, “Cartesian epistemology and its representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers, and things” (Barad 2007:138). In discussing the scientific practices, Barad noted “one of representationalism’s fundamental assumptions: the view that the world is composed of individual entities with separately determinate properties”(2007: 55). The “most forms of realism” often share this assumption, and “presuppose a metaphysics that takes for granted the existence of individual entities, each with its own roster of non relational properties” (Barad2007: 55). From a nonrepresentationalist realist perspective, Barad proposed that realness “does not necessarily imply “thingness”: what’s real may not be an essence, an entity, or an independently existing object with inherent attributes” (Barad 2007: 55). If we follow

Barad's analysis, because of the concept of dependent-arising and Nāgārjuna's śūnyatā, 'the real' in Kongwu did not "subscribe to an individualistic metaphysics" (Barad 2007:56). Nāgārjuna's interpretation of dependent-origination by śūnyatā suggests a very different understanding of reality, and can be understood as the nonrepresentationalist account of the reality.

Barad raised the controversies between Bohr and Heisenberg, and Barad's interpretation emphasised the distinction between Heisenberg and Bohr to develop "an agential realistic ontology" that focuses on the process of "intra-actions that phenomenon comes to matter" (Barad 2007:140). Yet, if we consider the problem of the subject-object dichotomy, similar to Bohr, Heisenberg questioned the assumptions embedded in our understandings of nature and science. Heisenberg developed the principle of indeterminacy and the concept of probability and challenged the Newtonian notion of the "pure case" (1958a:53), with a neutralized observer and an "objectively real" (Heisenberg 1958a:129). In quantum physics, the notion of nature as the observed object results from a chain of processes and interactions between the device, observer, and the rest of the world (Heisenberg 1958a:128-131).

Heisenberg stated, "what we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning" (1958a:58; 1958b:105). The observer's culturally conditioned subjective input determines the observer's methods of seeing and measuring (Heisenberg 1958a: 56-8). Heisenberg reminded us, by paraphrasing Niels Bohr, "in the drama of existence, we are ourselves both players and spectators" (Heisenberg 1958a:58). For quantum physics, the scientific method, including the formulation of a theoretical motivation and the construction of a measuring device, reflects the operations of an intersubjective network of collective

“practicing scientists” (Wallace 2005: 317). Science, this “specialized intersubjective” network, “illuminates facets of *the world of experience*, not *the world independent of experience*” (Wallace 2005: 317, original emphasis). The utilisation of certain observational instruments in the lab depends upon a mentality based on scientific theoretical assumptions. When one constructs a definition of reality, the observer and the observed, the active and passive roles, circulate incessantly in a loop.

In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour (1993) argued that the concept of the pure subject, which is different from the object, is a modern illusion, based on the first internal “Great Divide” (1993: 99) between society and nature within European modern society and on Newtonian objectification of nature, which assumes human beings to be totally neutral observers. Analysing how the second “Great Divide” between “us [European]” and “them [non-European]” emerged (1993: 99), Latour argued that the moderns never really “separate humans from nonhumans any more than the ‘others’ totally superimpose signs and things”(1993:104) and never abandon the “ancient anthropological matrix” (1993:107) that anthropologists would use to describe premodern tribal societies, weaving nature, culture, humans, and nonhumans together (1993:107). The two Great Divides do not describe reality, but only enable the European cultural-specific way of establishing relations with others, which is to be “felt modern” and universal (1993:103). In other words, because one claims separation, one may make an effort to establish a relationship between the self and other. Given the assumption of the totally neutral observer, one takes the dualistic ordering of things, the relational, as the real. Therefore, the ‘being’ of the world and universality are assured.

Latour argued that even the “anti-moderns, like the post moderns” can critique modernism, because they have accepted the Great Divides (Latour 1993:46-9). He

proposed to “the field of nonmodern worlds” (Latour 1993:49) to disengage the dualistic pairs that purify the boundaries between self and other. The Great Divides not only create separation, but also cause value judgements and violence. While the dualistic mechanism advances technological innovation, it also causes violence in the form of imperialism, colonialism, and race and gender discrimination. We have to dissolve the effects of dualistic thinking and find a way to disengage from the violence that results from inferring the real from dualistic purification. Kongwu examines the looping of dualistic pairs, opens up a nonmodern field, and seeks the path to experience in a nondualistic way.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault traced the changes “in the fundamental arrangement of knowledge” and pointed out that “man is a recent invention” (1970:422). Human as the centre to order things could disappear as it appeared. Man “would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (Foucault 1970:422). If we take the anti-representationism seriously suggested by Varela, Thompson and Rosch’s experiment on color perception, the physics-philosophy of Bohr and Heisenberg, and the problem of the fundamental separation between human and non-human suggested by Barad and Latour, and apply these to our everyday experience and feeling as the practice suggested by the concept of Kongwu, we can release from an anthropocentric ordering of things.

Reconsidering the Mechanism of Language in Ink Landscape Painting

Ink landscape painting provides insight into how a specific worldview, particularly distrust of language, may shape artistic language, and how we can disrupt the function of language through indicative tools. Kongwu disputes the notion

that the world should be organised into a picture that can be viewed from a single position, as posited by Cartesian perspectivism; this is considered an “epistemological elaboration” that requires human intellectual intervention (Yip 1993: 48). Yip discussed ways of seeing and positioning in Chinese landscape paintings. In many, “the perspective evaporates before the viewing eye” (Yip 1993: 81). *Travellers among Mountains and Streams*, a Northern Song school landscape painting by Fan Kuan (990–1020), exemplifies the principle that “[d]istance is not absolute” (Yip1993: 81). According to Yip, in the lower right corner of the forest, hills and rocks appear very small, indicating that the viewer is at a distance from them. The mountain far behind the hills and rocks appears huge and imposing, as if right before the viewer’s eyes (Yip1993: 81). The painting avoids a single perspective and shows multiple points of view from different angles. The spatial relationship between objects is moveable. The position of the ‘I’ is multiplied, existing in different locations simultaneously, unable to occupy an absolute fixed position. For Yip, the culture-specific spatial organisation and representation in Chinese landscape paintings are mobilised by the poetics of Kongwu with the question, “How can we take this as subject (principal) and that as object (subordinate)? Merely one form of being among millions of others, what right do we have to classify other forms of beings? How can we impose ‘our viewpoint’ upon others as the right viewpoint, the only right viewpoint?” (Yip 1993: 71). The spatial organisation in Chinese landscape paintings thus questions the position of the observer.

When Bryson analysed multiple perspectivism and the subject in the corner, not the centre, of the Chan ink painting *Landscape* by Sesshu (1420-1506), he argued that the spatial language found in Sesshu’s painting questions “the occupation of the self” before generating gazes (Bryson 1988:88). The painting

includes “the object’s remainder, the other views which pass out from the object to all those uncountable places where the viewer is not” (Bryson 1988:103), and acknowledges “the viewer’s remainder, the sum of other views that the viewer excludes by assuming this view” (Bryson1988:103). Hence, the painting questions the gaze generated by the tunnel vision of the fixed viewing subject and causes dualistic differentiation.

Kongwu suggests that we cannot grasp the result of any fixed measurement as ‘being’ and rethinks the circulation between the ‘subject’ and ‘object’. The observer’s position and perceptual process are the primary mediators of the relationship between the observer and the thing being observed, before any technological tool and observing device come into play. The concept of Kongwu acknowledges this level of mediation, an active complex network that activates any attempt to purify the boundaries between self and other or nature and culture. Consequently, one gives the world an objective being through intellectual elaboration and constructs a worldview and universality.

‘Being’ refers to the enclosed circuit, the result of selective observation from an anthropocentric view; Kongwu refers to the quality of not being caught by the enclosed circuit. The object of perception can only refer to the specific conditioning of possibilities. As a result, the identity of the thing becomes uncertain, without serving the human purpose. Ink landscape painting, as an example, responds to the Kongwu attitude towards language. In performance practice, the question raised is how this attitude shapes the principles underlying performance. Using Paik’s installation, I elaborate on how performance resonates with Kongwu’s orientation toward language.

1.2 Nam June Paik's Approach to Media: From The Traces of the Observing Tool to The Traces of Observing

Paik's approach to media, particularly his mechanisms of indicating, representing, and documenting, resonates with the Kongwu perspective of language. I investigate how Paik uses the tools of indicating to disrupt the self-contained circuitry of language and our habitual patterns of experiencing in everyday life. Kongwu reconsiders our entrapment in the looping effects of language and takes issue with our description of experience as reality, particularly with the influence of indicators on our emotions and value judgements. Kongwu has developed a meditation practice that dissolves the habits reinforced to us by dualistic differentiation. The meditator learns to shift attention away from the content of experiences but remains aware of the process of experiencing that produces 'the' experience. Paik brings the viewer's attention not to the message itself, but to the media mechanism used to produce the message. He thereby uses the convenience of technological tools to reflect how we perceive the world and reconsiders how we bring the 'real' into 'being'.

Nam June Paik (1932-2006), a Korean-born American artist, was often considered as the Father of Video Art. He studied aesthetics, music, art history at the University of Tokyo (Decker- Phillips 1998:24), and wrote a dissertation on Arnold Schönberg. He moved to Germany to pursue his doctoral studies (Kaye 2007:32). In 1958, Paik worked with the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen at the electronic music studio (Grunenberg and Wismer 2011:11) and met John Cage. Paik moved to New York in 1964.

Paik's encounter with Cage transformed his attitude towards music as well as visual arts. Paik's exhibition *Exposition of Music — Electronic Television* in 1963 was

his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany, also an important “intermedial experiment” (Grunenberg and Wismer 2011:11). In the leaflet of *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television*, Paik wrote that his electronic television “represents a contrast to electronic music, [...] which shows a pre-defined, determined tendency both in its serial compositional method and in its ontological form” (Paik 1963 in Media Art Net 2005). Paik’s statement revealed his move from determinism to indeterminism. As Harithas indicated in the forward to *Nam June Paik: Video 'n' Videology 1959-1973*, Paik’s interest in indeterminacy “has roots in Zen Buddhism and in contemporary Western philosophy and science”(Harithas in Paik 1974), particularly cybernetics and Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle. Inspired by John Cage’s indeterminacy which reconsidered the ontology of music, in “Afterlude to the Exposition of Experimental Television”, Paik wrote, “INDETERMINISM and VARIABILITY is the very UNDERDEVELOPED parameter in the optical arts, although this has been the central problem in music for the last 10 years” (Paik 1964 in Paik 1974: n.p). Paik remediated John Cage’s music and philosophy in his television experiment.

Even though Paik was influenced by John Cage and Cage’s use of Zen Buddhism in music, long before the academic scholars in Buddhism studies and East Asian studies criticised Suzuki’s version of Zen (discussed in the Introduction Chapter), Paik commented on Suzuki’s Zen in 1964.

Now let me talk about Zen, although I avoid it usually, not to become the salesman of “OUR” culture like Daisetsu Suzuki, because the cultural patriotism is more harmful than the political patriotism, because the former is

the disguised one, and especially the self-propaganda of Zen (the doctrine of the self-abandonment) must be the stupid suicide of Zen.

(Paik 1964 in Paik 1979: n.p)

He continuously wrote,

Zen consists of two negations.

The first negation:

The absolute IS the relative.

The second negation:

The relative IS the absolute.

The first negation is a simple fact, which every mortal meets every day; everything passes away... mother, lover, hero, youth, fame,... etc.

The second negation is the KEY-point of Zen.

That means...

The Now is utopia, what it may be.

The Now in 10 minutes is also utopia, what it may be.

[...]

The Now in 40 million years is also utopia, what it may be.

Therefore

We should learn,

How to be satisfied with 75%

[...]

How to be satisfied with 9%

How to be satisfied with 0%

How to be satisfied with -1000%...

Zen is anti-avant-garde, anti-frontier spirit, anti-Kennedy.

Zen is responsible of Asian poverty.

How can I justify ZEN, without justifying Asian poverty??

(Paik 1964 in Paik 1979: n.p)

Paik was aware of the self-orientalisation in Suzuki's Zen, in which Zen becomes a tool to re-centre the self. Paik was aware of the very different assumption of transformation and improvement embedded in Zen, so he did not see Zen as a utopia or solution implied in Cage's Zen, but condemned Zen for its "Asian poverty". In this context, Paik reflected Zen philosophy and responded to Cage's works through his television experiment. Even though Paik was influenced by Cage's art and philosophy, to consider the thematic structure for introducing the concept of Kongwu and its relevance to performance, I analysed Paik's works first before Cage's works in the next chapter.

Traces of the Materiality of the Medium in *Zen for Film* (1964)

In *Zen for Film* (1964), a loop of unexposed blank 16mm film leader is projected onto a wall. Throughout the length of the projection, there is no content, only a bright square of light. The spectators could notice the traces of scratches and dust accumulations on the film. Paik often engaged with the projection, by standing in front of the projection and back to the spectators. As the result, his shadow and body were present in the square of light. By projecting blank film in *Zen for Film* (1964), Paik disrupts the function of film, indicating and documenting our expectation that visualising technology be used for performance purposes. Paik asks the viewer to pay attention not to content, but to the mechanism by which the visualising technology operates. Akin to an observational tool, film usually provides a frame through which to observe the world and documents the results of selective framing. By emptying film of its contents, Paik reflects on the selective framing that film usually provides and on the traces of materiality in film.

Viewers of *Zen for Film*'s blank content may see not only the film's materiality, but also the viewing environment reflected on the blank screen as dust and shadow. The viewer is aware of the environment in which the film projection and the act of seeing are situated. *Zen for Film*, according to Kaye, "points to a plurality of times" and the limit of its medium in the "intersection of times" (2006:42). The film provides a measurement and a structure of time. However, through repeated projection and the passage of time during which the film is not projected, the scratches and dust on the surface of the film have challenged the measurement provided by the film itself. These material traces reveal a sense of time that is different from the pre-assumed time structure of the film projection (Kaye 2006: 42). The content becomes the scratches produced by the projection and the dust left when the film is or is not being

used. Thus, *Zen for Film* records film's materiality and traces from film's interaction with the environment. It, therefore, documents its own medium's temporalities.

The content being projected is this observing tool's own traces. When film does not produce a recognisable image, its materiality is revealed, and its mechanism is observed. By emptying film of its expected photographic images, Paik disrupts the viewer's habits and asks the viewer to think critically about the selective seeing that results from the framing of film and its emotive influence. By playing the empty film at twenty-four frames per second, Paik makes the viewer aware of the act of seeing and reflects to the audience its habitual behaviours. What we can see is limited by a medium's mechanism (such as the film here). Paik questions the utility of film as a way to frame views, measure time, and observe the world.

How Would a Buddha Watch TV?

In the *TV Buddha* series, *Buddha Watching TV* (1974), and *Enlightenment Compressed* (1994), Paik uses a closed circuit TV-camera installation and Buddha sculpture to reflect upon how we perceive and understand the world. He puts a Buddha statue in the position of a TV viewer. A video camera records the Buddha statue, so the Buddha looks at its own 'live' image on the TV screen. In the context of Buddhism, the Buddha reflects the notion that an observer can experience the world in a nondualistic way, meaning without judgment and differentiation and without being conditioned by the accumulated past. Multiple programmes are available on TV simultaneously, and we select one from many to watch and respond with emotions and opinions. Paik asks how Buddha, as the symbol of observation without selection, would watch TV, and tentatively responds that Buddha would watch the TV set itself, its process of transmission, but not the content that the TV

plays. Given the nondualistic nature of its seeing, Buddha would not identify with the stories, contents, and emotive influence of TV programmes or experience the looping effects of indicators that TV produces.

Buddha would likely look at its own image in the TV and observe its own action of watching TV. In this case, the TV viewer is being viewed. If we understand the cultural significance of Buddha, we cannot interpret this as an act of narcissism. Instead, the Buddha looks at not the content, but the TV's mechanism of transmitting symbols and producing messages. When one meditates, one shifts awareness from the content of experience to the faculty of experiencing itself. The Buddha does not identify with the bundle of experiences as the self, but questions the emergent process itself. Thus, meditation implies that when we follow the direction of indication, we do not meet the thing in itself, but we encounter the observer's own mechanism of seeing.

Paik investigates the act of viewing and its traces, regardless of whether technology comes into play. "During the Projekt 74 exhibition", Paik not only put the Buddha sculpture sitting in front of the TV, but also himself sat like a Buddha in the other enclosed circuit (Media Art Net 2005). The immediacy of live-feed reflects how 'past' gazes determine 'present' gazes and amplifies the constant flow between the gazes of the present and past, as well as the circulation between seeing and being seen. *TV Buddha* reconsiders our habit of experiencing through dualistic differentiation, before any electronic mediation comes into play. The result of this observation refers back to the observer's self, resonating with principles underlying meditation. In *TV Buddha*, Paik demonstrates how he transfers the underlying logic of observation without duality in the context of meditation into media arts and performance.

The 'Being' of the Thing in *Real Plant/Live Plant* and *Real Fish/Live Fish*

After examining the mechanisms by which observational tools are made effective and the observer's act of viewing, Paik questioned the result of observing, the 'being' of the thing. In *Real Fish/Live Fish* (1982), Paik emptied two vintage TVs. He turned one TV into a fish tank with water, live fish, and plants. Inside the other TV, he placed a monitor on which we can view the live-feed video of the 'real' fish swimming in the fish tank. The 'real' fish and the 'live' video fish were swimming next to each other. Paik crystallised critiques concerning the reality and representation, similar to those of Latour and Heisenberg, of our understanding of 'being' in the world. From a Kongwu perspective, *Real Fish/Live Fish* invokes at least three possible modes of perceptions that koan illustrated and referenced Nāgārjuna's 'twofold reality': "that phenomena are both ultimately empty and yet conventionally real" (Stalling 2010: 125). The koan appears in Chan/Zen Buddhist *Transmission of the Lamp*:

Thirty years ago before I was initiated into Ch'an, I saw mountains as mountains, rivers rivers. Later when I got an entrance to knowledge, I saw mountains not as mountains, rivers not as rivers. Now that I have achieved understanding of the substance, mountains are still mountains, rivers still rivers.

(in Yip 1993:101)¹

¹ Wu-teng Hui-yuan, vol.17 in Ching-yin Wen-yuan-ke Ssu-k'u Chuan-shu Tzu-pu, no.359 (Taiwan:Shang-wu, 1983), 105 che, p. 735.

Using the koan to look at *Real Fish/Live Fish* via the first mode of perception, the fish has a self-inherent existence forms the basis for human communication. The live fish is distinguishable from the real fish when the camera's eyes are in play. That it is living emphasises the fact that the closed camera-television circuit is capable of imitating the human eyes and mind, particularly the rapidity with which we receive the results of selective seeing.

Via the second mode of perception, the fish, no matter whether real or live, is not taken for granted, as it is via the first mode. The fish, according to the law of dependent origination, does not have a self-inherent existence, but rather only exists in an interdependent network. The fish becomes a fish, a sign, and not a not-fish or a symbol of other ideas and signs, because we observe it with our intellectual, social-cultural traces, and sensory constructions. Given this, the 'being' of the fish is trapped in the self-contained circuit of language. Whether the real fish becomes a fish, a sign, and not a not-fish or a symbol of other ideas and signs, depends on the relationship between references already present and the dualistic ordering of experience in the closed circuit of indicators. The technological gaze represents our human eyes and reproduces the simulated fish. Putting the fish perceived via the first and second modes together, with one swimming in the water and one swimming in the electric live-stream, Paik brings both to life.

In *Real Fish/Live Fish*, the live fish (both the "real" fish in the water and the "live" fish swimming in the TV) come into 'being' because of dualistic seeing, but also are killed by the violence that language and vision perform via the differentiation. The being of each fish cannot refer to the thing in itself, but must rather refer to the mechanism that claims the 'being' of these things. The human subject who occupies the position of the observer with tunnel vision sees the world and assigns a being to

the 'seen'. In this way, when encountering the world, the human subject can orient the self. Yet, being, in this context, serves an anthropocentric purpose. By experiencing in this way, we take the known, the result of selectively observing from the observer's perspective, as evidence of what the real 'is'.

The simulated fish exteriorises the first mediation when we observe the "real fish" without the aid of any electronic media. The observer observes the fish by matching the phenomena with thoughts and filtering events through private perceptions and social-cultural impressions. The technological gazes simulate similar visual markers witnessed with the human eyes and mind. Given the similarities between the markers to which we are accustomed and the markers in the artistic medium, we can recognise the fish as being the fish inside the TV. The simulated live realm is as valid as the 'real' realm, with regards to its ability to stimulate an affective association and triggers the viewer's memories. We rely on dominant visual and linguistic markers to identify the 'being' of the fish. The 'suchness' of the fish is in the closed circuit, the habitual pattern that makes us match the experience to the idea, such that the fish is not a fish.

Via the third kind of perception, one acknowledges phenomena, in terms of Nāgārjuna's twofold reality, both as constituting conventional reality with a communicative function and as being ultimately empty if one attempts to assign 'being' to a thing. The *live* is as valid as the *real*, with regards to its affective association and perceptive identification, so that the real *is* the live. When one takes the results of observation and gives 'being' to the fish, the 'being' manifests differentiation and is governed by measurement and representation. Thus, there is no need to deny provisional being to the fish in conventional reality. While one acknowledges that the fish is not a fish in itself and that its being is already mediated

by the observer's dualistic seeing, one accepts this "provisional reality" as "conventionally true" (Stalling 2010: 125). Consequently, the fish is a fish. The third mode's fish-is-a-fish perspective is different from the fish-is-a-fish perspective of the first mode of perception.

Paik uses media and the tools of indicating and documenting to externalise our inner perceptual habits and consequently rethinks how we are governed by dualistic differentiation when we experience through our body-mind, without the aid of media. Paik step-by-step questions the mechanism by which media determine messages and explores the observer's own self, which filters what one can experience and of what can be aware. Furthermore, he questions the outcomes of observing, the being of the thing, and how we bring the thing into the 'being' that becomes the 'real' with which we engage. The result of observing cannot be taken as the thing in itself, but only as what can be exposed to the mechanism of framing and differentiation. One acknowledges that one cannot occupy the position of observer as a neutral standing point, but one is already engaged in intersubjective play between humans and nonhumans. Acceptance of the conventionally real is not acceptance of nature in itself, but is rather acceptance of the representation of one's "relation to nature" (Heisenberg 1958b:107).

1.3 *Poem Without Language*: Disrupting the Purpose of Writing and Returning to the Act of Writing

Performance is an activity that relies on symbols and languages, from the musical, visual, and somatic, to the written word and beyond. Yet, Kongwu distrusts language because of its dualistic differentiation and reconsiders how language governs our

experiences. How might this philosophical view affect our use of language in performance?

Paik used broken televisions, such as those in *Zen for TV*, inserting into them objects or rewiring their electronic paths. The broken or distorted televisions disrupt the production of sounds and images that serve the purpose of indicating, representing, and documenting. The materiality of the instruments undermines industrial conditioning. When television is unable to look far away and show things visually and sonically, expectations are disrupted, revealing the medium's physicality and materiality. The viewer recognises that the television is a collection of parts and a mechanism of transmission. In this way, the viewer's attention shifts from the message to the mechanism by which the media produces content that serves a human purpose.

In Paik's *Real Fish/Live Fish*, when we observe the 'real fish' without the camera's eyes, we use our sensory organs and, through a constellation of past experiences and a linguistic network, know the being of the observed and bring the 'being' to ourselves. This is how the fish comes into 'being' for us, the observers. The camera, as an extension of our eyes, observes the 'real fish', and the TV produces the description of the result visually and sonically – the 'live fish'. The camera and TV can provide more precise descriptions of the results of our observation than we can provide with language and perceptions of our personal past experiences. We, however, know the 'live fish' not as real, but as the 'real fish'.

Similarly, Heisenberg pointed out that the most important contribution of modern physics itself was the proposition of a new concept of reality and its transformative philosophical implications in everyday life and as regards "a new foundation for the development of art" (Heisenberg 1958b: 108). Scientific

observation and measurement are more precise than the representations of electronic TVs and cameras or perception. Every day, we experience through a constellation of personal tastes, value judgements, and colloquial language. Yet, science still faces the problem of our assuming that measurement reflects nature in itself. Reflections, such as Paik's, on the mechanisms by which media technology and scientific observation work raise the question of why, when we experience the world, we take the indication of experience that results from the arbitrary accumulation of past experiences and our network of indicators as real. How does the dualistic ordering of things govern the way we experience, how we experience 'the' experience of which we are aware, and consequently how we claim the 'being' of the world?

Zhuangzi, one of the main founders of Daoism, aimed to challenge the hierarchy built on language's dualistic logic and its affective influence and moral judgment. He used several examples to illustrate that value is always "perspective-bound" (Xi 1983: 215) and developed 卮言 (*zhiyan*), a linguistic strategy for disrupting language's function. 卮 (*zhi*) is a kind of wineglass that is unable to contain any wine. According to Guo Xiang, when *zhi* is full of wine, it is unbalanced and therefore turns upside-down (Xi 1983:235). When *zhi* is empty, it stands upright (Xi 1983:235). Thus, *zhi* is an unstable container. From the perspective of functional value, it is unusable. Its unstable and unusable quality conflicts with its function as a wine glass. 卮言 (*zhiyan*) proposed a language that is unusable for the function of communication and too unstable to contain any linguistic identification.

With reference to *zhiyan*, Zhuangzi challenges the value of language and denies the hierarchy organised by language, such as of good over bad, long over short, strong over weak (Xi 1983:235). Zhuangzi's linguistic strategy resists the

violence that language (differentiating via dualism) performs, thereby releasing us from the looping effects of language. My research, through the installation-performance *Poem without Language*, develops writing that is traceless, undocumentable, echoing Zhuangzi's linguistic strategies and the metaphor of *zhiyan*, the wineglass that cannot contain any wine.

The Ancient Technology of Writing

Poem without Language investigates how Kongwu shapes the principles underlying performance making – particularly, how we can disrupt the purpose of language using the tools of indicating. I developed a performance research project, *Poem without Language*, which involved writing Chinese calligraphy on the surface of water. Replacing the rice paper used in Chinese calligraphy with water, water writing amplifies the Daoists' "decreative-creative dialectic" (Yip 1993: 72). As one writes, the writing disappears. Does the performer write water, or is water writing back on the performer's gestural trace? Creation, in this instance, is the circulation between materiality and intention. The water constantly empties human intention and intellectual intervention.

The materiality of water controls the decreative-creative dialectic, which is not totally under human control. Water writing does not welcome linguistic identification, but the process of the material defies linguistic naming:

Tao, told, is not the constant Tao.

Name, named, is not the constant Name.

Nameless, the beginning of the world.

Naming, the mother of a million things.

(Lao in Yip 1993: 66)

The “Tao, told” and “name named” results from an anthropocentric perspective and “belongs to the realms of concepts and linguistic formations” (Yip 1993: 66). The notion of materiality is located here. Materiality is chaotic, is constantly becoming, and cannot be contained by names and signs. Things are self-generating and self-organising, without language (*wuyan duhua*, 無言獨化). According to Yip, “strictly speaking, any thought of a thing becomes itself a verbal act, the deverbilized world (*wu-yen* [*wuyan*] 無言, *wu-yu-chiech* [*wuyu jie*] 無語界) is the first step toward grasping the totality of things”(1993:66). Water gives birth to form, and immediately this form dies away. The life force is in constant flow, without human-centred planning.



1.1 I-Lien Ho, *Poem Without Language*

Writing Chinese calligraphy on the surface of water expands Chinese calligraphy’s purpose of creating anti-representational and non-representational performances. The aesthetics respond to the non-anthropocentric worldview, dispersing the fixed position of the observer and cohering the materiality and physicality of the writing. Water writing interferes with writing’s quotidian purpose of

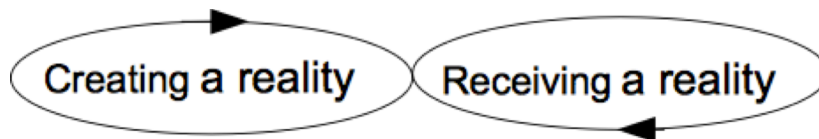
communicating and documenting. Materiality and physicality cannot be contained within linguistic and visual form. Bodily actions and gestures break the frame of vision, interfere with past-tense linguistic references, and bring attention back to experiences, not only to vision in the present moment, nor to the before or after, but also to the whole bodily senses, to the here and now. The act of writing does not serve the function of indicating the human being as the centre of experience. In this sense, when the writing cannot produce an expected result, the function dissolves and the act of writing stands on its own, as its centre.

Chinese calligraphy, particularly the cursive style, distorts the shape of words and makes the linguistic and communicative functions secondary. When the communicative function breaks down, dominant human subjects are no longer instrumentalising words. In Chinese calligraphy, writing documents not only through linguistic markers, but also through visual traces. The gesture of each stroke emphasises the actions of the rest of the body and indicates how the body, its tools, and the environment interact in the action of writing. The gestural traces left on paper indicate how the next stroke should behave. Examining the interrelation of strokes in a sequence is one way that one engages in aesthetic judgment. When one writes on the surface of water, previous traces do not stabilise and become visual referents. Without these traces, one cannot decide the next stroke according to the aesthetic system of Chinese calligraphy. In other words, one cannot experience action by referencing past accumulation. Thus, traceless writing does not serve accumulations from the past; it is both the linguistics and the visuals of Chinese calligraphy that evoke aesthetic judgement.

The Orchestra of Gazes in Multiple Closed Circuits

The three closed circuits in *Poem Without Language* generate multiple perspectives, reminding us of the looping effect, that is, that what we see is the result of selective seeing. The multiple closed circuits facilitate the circulation of gazes. In the reflectivity fostered by circulation, back and forth, the performance considers how the self becomes the self, why ‘this’ is the object, and why ‘that’ is the subject. Multiple sets can create multiple “object’s remainders” and “viewer’s remainders” (Bryson 1988:103). Additionally, they may expose the ideology embedded in the spatial arrangement of a closed room with six faces and three dimensions, such as a white cube and a black box that create the illusion of an ideal enclosure for an “unmediated communication between the viewer’s eye and pure form” (Bryson 1988:107) and the “framed” (Goffman 1986) behavioural codes enforced by theatrical performers and spectators.

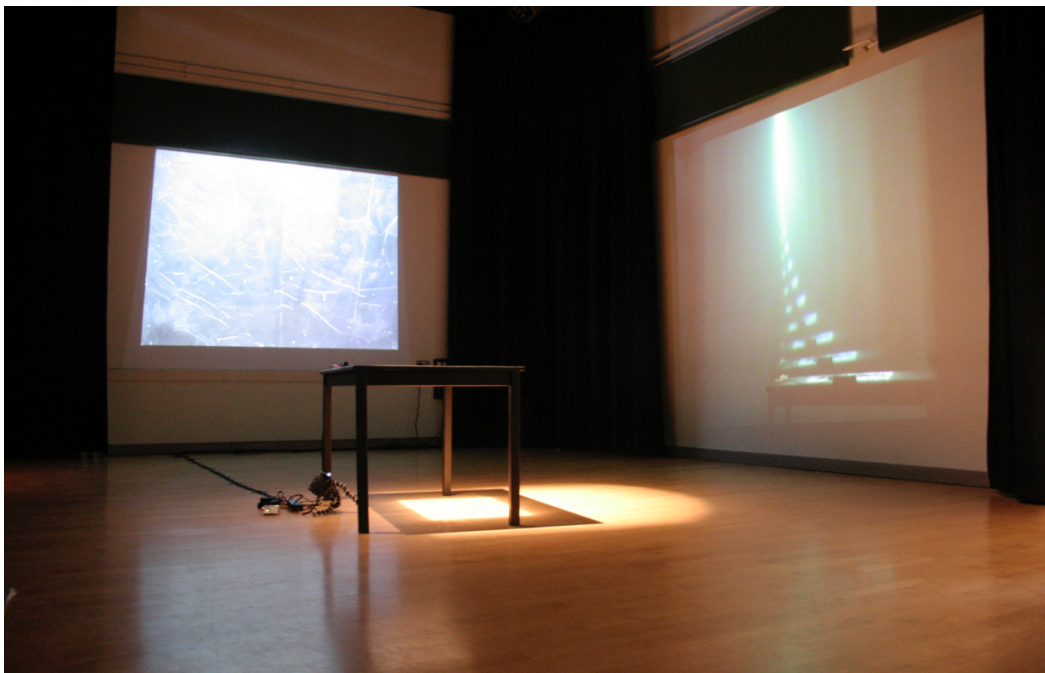
The ‘I’, the observer’s self, is the result of intersubjective exchange and cannot be assumed to be a unified entity or the centre of experience. The feedback loops in the multiple closed-circuit devices of *Poem Without Language* act as a metaphor, elaborating this view.



1.2 The feedback loops

My approach to electronic media resonates with the aesthetic, philosophical, and spiritual imagination in Kongwu’s poetics and landscape painting and in the cosmology embodied in Taiji body techniques. The ethereal electronic waves and

water flow re-imagine the organic, formless *qi* (氣, energy, vital force) body circulating in the microcosm and macrocosm without a fixed location. The multiple perspectives orchestrated by the simultaneous live-feed sets, in conjunction with real body movements, explore the dispersed subjectivity that cannot be a unified entity or occupy the position of the observer. The orchestra of gazes reinforces the notion that a singular, stable self never exists as thought, but rather exists as a changing multiplicity, so that the labels 'self', 'you', 'I', 'subject' and 'object' are insufficient. Making the camera look at the result of its viewing, the projection on the wall, generates endless doubling. What the camera sees is in the loop and results from its selective seeing. This approach to media makes the representational tool contemplate its own functioning.



1.3 I-Lien Ho, *Poem Without Language*

The spatial organisation in ink landscape painting reconsiders the gaze by unsettling the position of the 'I' occupied by the observer and claiming the 'being' of the thing. For Kongwu, nature is a non-anthropocentric and self-regulating organism. Thus, nature cannot be contained by the 'being' we assign to 'it'. What we can know

is the result of our assumed separation of the object and the subject via one-way tunnel vision. The 'being' of the world resulting from this kind of seeing is merely the product of the dualistic ordering that serves our human purpose. The subject cannot be a constant presence, a closed container from the very beginning of the logic of the gaze. If we unsettle the position of the observer, we could be released from the purpose of language that serves our anthropocentric way of seeing.

Poem without Language does not foster tunnel vision, with the subject on one end and the object on the other. One can use closed circuits to extend the Cartesian mind-body that produces the tunnel vision gaze. On the other hand, one can use closed circuits to dispute that habitual gaze and transform the 'mind' into different horizons. The camera's position insists on multiple trajectories of gaze and on the different temporality of each gaze. The positions from which the performance is viewed are also pushed into liminal, unstable, and exchangeable states. The body's entry into the performance interrupts the frame of vision, what is inside and what is outside the selection, reminding us of the boundaries we institute to make contact with the world. The use of multiple perspectives does not suggest that the world 'is' or consists of multiple perspectives, but reminds us of the places where the 'I', the observer, is not. What we see is, in fact, the 'relation' that we establish to overcome the constructed separation and so cannot be taken as the real in itself.

Movement in Stillness: To See Seeing Arrive²

The action score in *Poem without Language* includes slowing and paused movements. The rhythm of pausing and slowing thwarts the expectation of bodily movement, evoking the idea of silence as a crime in music, first raised by John Cage's aesthetics. The slowing and pausing of bodily movement resist the violence of vision. The spectator usually expects a body whose smooth, consistent motion provides information and content in a performance. What kind of spectator participation and anticipation arise when a body freezes in the middle of action, moves in slow motion, or delays the termination of motion via a very simple action, such as walking?

“Slowness and stillness call for patience in the microphysical kinaesthetic because bodily times are in plural time zones. Different sensations (touching, seeing, hearing and so on) have different rhythms within the body to receive, perceive and generate cues in the choreographic field” (Ho 2009: 33). By removing exterior movement, one acknowledges the micro-movement that is usually taken for granted or not acknowledged by our everyday awareness. The micro-movement in stillness is one point from which to approach the question of how eyes, which are able to see everything but themselves, produce the seen.

Stillness, the freezing of movement in the middle of action, and movement in slow motion also raise questions about how movement is initiated. Movement here also concerns the invisible or imperceptible micro-movements that lack

² The phrase, to see seeing arrive, is adopted from the sentence, “I want to watch watching arrive. I want to watch arrivances” (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 1997: 4).

representational visibility and resist language. The flow of psychosomatic consciousness, proprioception, and interoception circulates in the exterior and interior and the micro and macro-cosmos. The small dances, nearly immaterial, invisible, and imperceptible, support the visible, smooth means-ends movement. The stillness and slowness, which are analogous to meditation techniques, turn one's attention to the complexity of experience without differentiation.

To take stillness as movement brings nearly invisible or imperceptible micro-sensory activities into the spotlight, instead of leaving them backstage. This recalls Han Zhuo's (韓拙, 1095–1125) speculations on the use of white space as an ink trace (yi bai dang hei 以白當黑) in the spatial arrangements shared by Chinese calligraphy and ink landscape painting (Kao 1991: 83-88). According to Yip, "the emptiness of language" makes co-present the written that is fixed and solid and the unwritten that is fluid and empty (Yip 1993: 82). "The negative space, such as the emptiness in a painting" and "the condition of silence with meanings trembling at the edges of words in a poem" lead to "an art of noninterference akin to the workings of nature" that interweaves "unspeaking, concrete, changing nature" together (Yip 1993: 82). This echoes Zhuangzi's allegorical reminder that like language, "which we are to forget once it is pronounced, the fish trap can be forgotten once the fish is caught" (Yip 1993: 82). If movement in motion is the brighter side of the senses, and movement in stillness is the darker side of the senses, the rhythms of slowing and pausing movement may darken the bright senses and brighten the dark senses. Consequently the "vital rhythm" or "atmosphere" that usually lack visibility can be felt (Yip 1993: 82). To be still is not to be passive, but is rather to actively receive micro-movement. It is not just to move, but also to be moved.

The possibility of our possessing the universe under a dominant visual narrative has been questioned. Frederic Jameson stated the “visual is essentially pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination” (Jameson 1992: 1). Disrupting smooth means-ends movement by pausing, delaying, slowing, or suddenly increasing speed may urge us to resist the drive to transform the world into a sheer commodifiable image and, thus, into the “spectacle” that Guy Debord, in *Society of Spectacle* (1983), argued was replacing diverse social relations, as mediated representational relations were used to serve the logic of consumerism. In choreography, slowness and stillness touch the limits of representation (Lepecki 2006: 43).

Slowing and pausing rhythms may also make it possible to resist the violence of vision, as well as to transform vision into a form of inter-sensory meditation. Instead of mindlessly seeing, one can really consciously experience one’s own action of seeing and see seeing arrive. Dispensing with “vision as the master sense” (Jay 1988: 3) and the main means of accessing the world allows the other senses to catch up and operate via their own various rhythms, rather than under the threat of habitual speedy visualisations, and to thereby stretch “the structure of feeling” (Williams 1977: 132-3).

The field of Kongwu moves away not only from linguistic organisation and reasoning, but also from “ocularcentrism’s essentializing gaze” (Stalling 2010: 226). Ocularcentrism’s essentializing gaze not only organises the world into a picture that prioritizes aesthetic perspectivism, but also constructs the world as a machine, adopting a scientific standpoint (Heisenberg 1963). Michel Foucault targeted the invisibility of visual knowledge that creates power via the cold scientific medical gaze and the gaze of panopticon. As Stalling noted, Luce Irigaray connected Western

ocularcentrism to the male gaze (Stalling 2010: 226). Ocularcentrism's essentializing gaze also "enables Orientalists and anthropologists alike to construct knowledge of the other" (Stalling 2010: 226). Jay (1994) traced the anti-Ocularcentrism in the French intellectual discourse that resisted the desire to fix a version of truth by eyes. Jay warned of the dangers of using "vision as the master sense" (Jay 1988: 3) to construct our worldviews and even offered "critiques of power and hegemony" in the "modern era" (Jay 1988: 3). He refused to defend "the dominant visual order" (Jay 1994:47), but argued that we didn't need to denigrate eyes, and called for a multiplication of "scopic regimes" (Jay 1994:591) to disrupt the unconscious habit: one takes 'the seen' as the 'truth'.

Kongwu, as "nonmodern" (Latour 1993: 49), articulates a foundation of not "separation" that "representationalism has" (Barad 2007:137), but "circularity" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991:16), so differentiation loses its power to categorise lives. Varela, Thompson and Rosch's research on colour perception (1991), discussed previously, and the concept of Kongwu proposed that the core of experience is the lack of a unified self. If we apply this enactive approach to sensory experience, including seeing, smelling, touching and hearing, we don't have to denigrate our eyes, nor use other senses as "the antidote to the hegemony of the eyes"(Jay 1994:414). As Jay noted, for Foucault, we can continue the "search for essentializing immediacy" by using smell and touch (Jay 1994:416). The spatial organisation in the ink landscape painting and the multiple sets of closed circuit in *Poem without Language* exposed the habitual patterning of seeing to unsettle the separation of subject and object, and to disrupt the habit of treating 'the seen' as the 'real'. Kongwu seeks to dissolve not only the violence of language and vision, but

also the violence that differentiation performs, causing dualistic judgment and the anthropocentric ordering of things.

Conclusion

When language cannot function, dualistic differentiation cannot be performed. When we cannot order things dualistically, we cannot occupy the seat of the observer, nor can we take the result of our anthropocentric seeing as the thing in itself. 'Being' is an enclosed looping effect of language, pointing to ourselves and only indicating our relation to the world, not the thing in itself.

Paik disrupted the expected function of media and brought the viewer's attention not to the message, but to the mechanism of the media that determines the message. Further, Paik turned the observer's body-mind into the observed, contemplating the inner perceptual pattern that first mediates the senses, before the aid of any media technology. Paik's approach to media resonates with the philosophical implications of Kongwu, particularly Kongwu's distrust of language. In *Poem Without Language*, I travel from the ancient technology of writing in Chinese calligraphy to the electric writing of cameras and projectors, transferring the spatial organisation in ink landscape paintings to the orchestration of gazes by multiple closed circuits. My work, therefore, reconsiders the function of writing. When writing cannot be documented and is traceless, it serves no anthropocentric purpose. My work demonstrates how the philosophical implications of Kongwu shape the principles underlying performance-making.

Heisenberg used modern physics to validate the results of philosophical traditions (1958a:76-92). Where may Kongwu's philosophical tradition be located in

relation to modern physics? At the very least, extending Heisenberg's discussion, it may be said that Kongwu's philosophy does not locate knowledge in the Cartesian mind, or in experience and perception, as do Locke's, Berkeley's, and Hume's theories of sensualism and positivism. Even experience and sensation are, in some ways, more authentic than linguistic and logical reasoning in the field of Kongwu. Kongwu also does not take space, time, and existence as a priori forms of pure intuition, as Kant did. Heisenberg examined the "limitations of the applicability" (Heisenberg 1958a: 92) of each philosophical framework. Kongwu's applicability and its own cultural-specific limitations also need to be re-examined using other systems and in other contexts.

McLuhan has stated that technology is an extension of the mind. If, in this extension, the mind is a self-centred, closed subject and occupies an anthropocentric position, the instrumentalisation of otherness, the perception of the world as a machine, and the treatment of nature as a source of human development is to be expected. In a way, one could argue that colonialism and imperialism resulted from the expansion of a closed human subject and an assumption that otherness included human and non-human, with the non-human being a machine that could be objectified by human-centred instrumentalist logic. What kind of relationship between technology and humans, and what kind of worldview, may exist in Kongwu without the anthropocentric position? Paik fuses high technology with non-Western and maybe 'premodern' cosmology, to create futuristic cybernetic networks that are alternatives to the worldviews of capitalism and consumerism. My project *Poem Without Language* explores this kind of hybridisation.

While Kongwu is ancient enough to be called 'premodern' or part of "the anthropological matrix" (Latour 1993:107), Kongwu's critique can be seen as

“amodern” (Latour 1993:47-8) and an ancient “spiritual cyborg” (Davis 2004: 155) that hybridises the dualistic categories of human, nonhuman, nature and culture. Kongwu offers an approach to questioning the underlying assumptions upon which symbol and language systems function and even dominate our emotional associations and value judgments. Through Kongwu, we may reconsider the looping effects of language and the violence induced by anthropocentric gazes. This makes it possible for us to divest ourselves of the habit of ordering things dualistically and from anthropocentric gazes. By decentring the self that desires to occupy the position of observer, we can release ourselves from the enclosed loop of dualistic differentiation.

2. When Time Never Arrives: Responding to John Cage through *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*

Introduction

As the Fluxus artist Ken Friedman suggested, the understanding of temporality in Fluxus works has resonated with “the Buddhist analysis of time and existence in human experience” (Friedman 1998:250). Yet what the Buddhist analysis of time means and in which way that artistic practice resonates with the Buddhist view of time need to be unpacked. John Cage influenced many Fluxus artists. The concept of time had been an important issue for Cage. He developed silence to problematise the concept of time and measurement in music, so I use Cage as the case study to see how his view of time echoes the Buddhist view.

The concept of emptiness or nothingness is one of the primary drives behind John Cage’s innovative composition, and the act of listening, all aspects of performance. Dr. Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki played a catalysing role to popularise Zen in Western societies around the post-World War Two period. Suzuki influenced Cage’s understanding of nothingness, which led Cage to reconsider time by music. However, to understand what the Buddhist concept of time means and consequently how the performance resonates with this specific worldview instead of considering only Suzuki’s version of Zen, I choose the primary texts to introduce how we can examine time from the Kongwu perspective. My version of Kongwu is what I found useful to connect theory, practice, and the case study in the following sections.

By using the texts of Nāgārjuna, Sengzhao, and Dōgen, I introduce the examination of time through the logic of Kongwu. All three authors rejected being-in-time and proposed being-is-time. Nāgārjuna integrated various discourses of Buddhist schools, and proposed the concept of śūnyatā, which translates to emptiness or nothingness in English. Nāgārjuna applied the logic of śūnyatā to the notion of time in *The Book of Middle-Way*. Sengzhao is the first person to synthesise Daoism and Indian Buddhism into Chinese Buddhism as the foundation of Chan in Chinese or Zen in Japanese. He challenged the metaphor of flow that we use to describe the changing, and questioned its dualistic assumption. Japanese Zen master Dōgen's assertion "when time never arrives" demonstrated Nāgārjuna's logic of śūnyatā. The philosophical implication of quantum mechanism suggested the relativity of time and a "participatory universe" (Wheeler 1996:291). The relativity resonates with the practices in Fluxus and of John Cage. The artistic practices question the authorship and the artwork's entity, exploring the observer as the participant. Through referencing the three texts and the philosophical implication of quantum mechanism, I elaborate upon how the worldview of Kongwu questioned the measurement of time and suggested a temporality of non-time.

After defining the concept of time from the Kongwu perspective, I use John Cage's work as an example to explore in what way the Buddhist concept of time resonated with the intermedia practice. My analysis shows how John Cage integrated the Kongwu worldview to rethink time and measurement in music. Cage revised his silence pieces, and shifted from musical time to clock time in *4'33"* as well as from clock time to zero time in *0'00"*. Cage reconsidered the notion of time that echoed the Kongwu perspective, and developed silence to create the "nondual hearing" (Loy 1999:69). Kongwu shed new light on understanding John Cage's

operation of silence. Cage's revision of time and silence helped to redefine music through, as Robert Ashley observed, the "transitional" operation of "theatre" (in Cage 1962b:52), expanding musical into intermedia practice.

John Cage used silence to undermine dualistic listening and thus release sounds from the musical language, which liberates music from the accumulation of the past. As a result, one can listen without invoking the past. My work explores the nondual experiencing that Cage aimed for through the operation of silence. However, my work follows the reverse direction. By mimicking the habit of dualistic differentiation, my work exposes how the mechanism of differentiation has been governing our experiences, and reveals our habit of experiencing the 'present' through the past. By using two action tasks with the installation, my work exposes the way we experience time through dualistic discrimination according to the accumulation from the past. Consequently, we feel events happening in the train of the past, present, and future—the illusion of continuity.

Through discussing the paradigm shift from absolute time in Newtonian worldview to the indeterminacy in quantum physics, I connect the worldview of Kongwu with the relativity of time and observers as participants in the quantum mechanism, and situate John Cage and Kongwu in the intersection of art, science, and spirituality. The way that the Kongwu perspective resonates with performance practices shows that Kongwu as an approach can unsettle the habit of differentiation, and can provide an alternative way to making sense of the world.

2.1 Time in Kongwu

How has time been conceptualised? Does time exist before one notices it? Concepts of time and space have very often been taken as universal ontological categories for “ordering experience” (Koller 1974:202). Although “temporal experience” is universal and temporality is a “feature of human experience” (Koller 1974:202), how time is conceptualised as ‘time’ and how experience is ordered by time is cultural and situational-specific. Kongwu reconsiders the common sense that events are often thought to flow through the ‘river of time.’ For Kongwu, time is not something with persistent presence and is not independent from experience, but results from the interactivity between the observer and the observed. Kongwu suggests a worldview with a relativity of time. Before analysing John Cage’s works and elaborating how Kongwu as the spiritual and philosophical context fosters Cage’s development of the intercultural and intermedial performing strategies, I introduce the problem of time discussed in Nāgārjuna, Sengzhao, and Dōgen’s texts.

The Debate of Time in Buddhism

Within Buddhism, there are various camps on the problem of time. The Mind-only school considers the past and future as not being real, but they maintain the present is real (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:400). The Sarvaastivaada school of thought considers entities taking place in the past, present, and future as real with the actual substance and the time that is associated with that entities as also existing (Kalupahana 1974:187). In chapter nineteen of *Mulamadhyamakakarika (Book of Middle-Way)*, titled “Investigation of Time,” Nāgārjuna criticised Sarvaastivaada’s claims that time is real and that events traverse from the past to the future.

Nāgārjuna asserted that time is empty without self-nature; therefore, time is only *relational*. In this sense, time cannot have any absolute objectivity, so the concept of time is unreal.

Nāgārjuna analyses the contingency of the ternary concept of time. The distinction of the different stages of events is only a conceptual structuring and a linguistic convention that serves as a communicative function. The distinctions that we express with the concepts of time (i.e., past, present, and future) have no ontological substance on the metaphysical level. Nāgārjuna elaborates upon this argument based “on the fact that a thing (bhāva) or its substance (bhāvasvabhāva) and time (kāla) are relative to or dependent upon one another” (Kalupahana 1974:187) and on the assumption that “two things cannot be related unless they are coexistent” (Kalupahana 1974:188). He discusses whether the present and future are dependent upon the past.

If the present and the future
Depend on the past,
Then the present and the future
Would have existed in the past.

If the present and the future
Did not exist there,
How could the present and the future
Be dependent upon it?

If they are not dependent upon the past,

Neither of the two would be established.

Therefore neither the present

Nor the future would exist.

(Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995:50-1)

Nāgārjuna opposes Sarvaastivaada's perspective of the reality of time, which is the idea that cause precedes effect. In doing so, Nāgārjuna implies that if one knows the past accurately enough, one can know "with the absolute certainty what the present and future could be" (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:276) Nāgārjuna argues that if the present and future are not dependent upon the past, then they cannot be established. Furthermore, if the present and future are not dependent on the past, then the past, present, and future are independent (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:401). Therefore, the present and future do not have substance (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995:255; Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:277). Time does not have its own entity and is only "a set of relations" (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995:257) that are 'seen' when an observation is made.

Time is not a container in which events take place (Inada 1974:173; Koller 1974:202). Without an interaction between the observer and the event, time does not exist. Thus, time has no independent entity before one notices it and experiences the event changing. By using *sūnyatā*, Nāgārjuna aims to describe the experience and worldview that is attained without any explicitly stated point of view (Berman 1997:50). Nāgārjuna applies the same logic to the concepts of the high, middle, and low as well as to identity: similarity and difference (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:403). Such distinctions are not "absolute distinctions" but relative distinctions, being only logical linguistic conventions (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:277). Nāgārjuna

argues that time is immeasurable because nonstatic time cannot be grasped as stationary time (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:405-8; Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995:50; Kalupahana 1974:188). If time were stationary, which would make it “manipulatable” (Kalupahana 1974:188), then we could have measured it. However, no such “enduring or static time” exists (Kalupahana 1974:188).

To summarise Nāgārjuna’s arguments, time is empty and not real because of its lack of any self-nature. The concept of time is only a result of the observer becoming engaged to organise events. In this sense, time is the mental construction. Time is only the ‘seen’ and not the real as such nor within itself. In *the Book of Middle-Way*, Nāgārjuna, in chapter eighteen, proposed the immeasurability of time, and, in chapter one, discussed the motion of things as neither coming nor going, which implies the concept of non-time.

Sengzhao’s “The Immobility of Things”

Sengzhao [Seng-chao] (僧肇, 378-414 A.D.), the founder of Chinese Mādhyamika was a Daoist before he became a Buddhist monk. He undertook one of the earliest cultural translations between Chinese Taoism and Indian Buddhism, which further developed Chinese Buddhism schools, such as Chan Buddhism, later becoming Zen in Japan. Often Daoism and Buddhism have argued that things are changing as the flow of time. Sengzhao, as Chan observed, argued that the metaphor of flow itself is unreal (Chan 1963:346).

In the chapter entitled “The Immobility of Things” in *Zhao Lun* [Chao-lun] (*The Treatise of Zhao*, 肇論), Sengzhao engaged the longstanding debate of motion and non-motion within the Chinese intellectual tradition by using Indian Buddhism,

particularly Nāgārjuna's concept of *śūnyatā* (emptiness, nothingness) in Mādhyamika. In *Zhao Lun*, *śūnyatā* is equal to *pen-wu* (Berman 1997:43). Sengzhao used *pen-wu* (本無), meaning "original non-being" that is associated with Lao Tzu's *wu* (無), meaning the nothingness full of existences within it (Berman 1997:43). However, Sengzhao did not believe the Daoist original non-being was the same idea as Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* (Tan 2008:197). Sengzhao did not use the term 'time,' and instead invoked the motion of the thing that synthesised the interrelation of being, space, and time concerning changes.

Sengzhao relies heavily on "the language of paradoxes" to explain his conception of time (Berman 1997:44). He understands "the limits of language's ability to express his doctrine on time" (Berman 1997:44). Sengzhao's distrust of language can be traced to the Daoist position proposed by Laozi and Zhuangzi and the Buddhist position, particularly Nāgārjuna's concept of *śūnyatā*. In the chapter "The Immobility of Things," Sengzhao defies common sense by asserting that an object does not move in the flow of time. Sengzhao explained:

That the people call things are changing is according to that the past events were passing and unable to preserve in the present. However, what I mean by rest is that the things are not changing because the past events stayed in the past and did not come into the present. Things are not changing and not flowing. Things are moving because the past events did not come into the present. Things are *not* moving because the past events stayed in the past and the present events are rest in the present. Things are rest in the time they exist. These two perspectives are according to the same assumption, but they arrive at the opposite conclusions.

(trans. from Sengzhao and Hong 1996:39)

He took an extreme position to reveal the language fallacy and to argue that a thing is never really flowing nor staying in the three containers of past, present, and future.

By employing common sense, Sengzhao arrived at the opposite conclusion: things are at rest and do not move. He did not really agree with the immobility of things. He suggested it to compel people to reconsider their common assumption that things are moving and changing in the divisions of time. The appearance of changing is only the phenomenon that emptiness manifested temporally and what we perceive, but not what things actually are. He played with the contradiction between stillness and motion to empty the commonsense notions of 'changing' and 'moving' concerning temporal events. By saying that things are either moving or non-moving, one falls into the two extremes. By saying that things are neither moving nor non-moving, one follows the middle path (Fung 1983:263 in Berman 1997:50).

He argued that neither the stillness of a fixed being nor a constant change could be real, because both resulted from the habit that the observer experienced dualistically through the self as the fixed reference. He proposed a statement of non-duality that the object is neither changing nor unchanging, neither permanent nor impermanent, neither arriving nor leaving. By using the same logic, he argued that the difference between the present and the past is not real and solid with independent substances, as they appear to be. Sengzhao developed a viewpoint that is between being and nonbeing to understand the complexity of the human being's interaction with things. He questioned the point of view that generates the description.

In the first chapter of *Zhao Lun*, Sengzhao revealed how the concept of being

and nonbeing circulated.

Even though everything lacks an intrinsic nature, it is experienced as being real. We cannot call events nothing (nonbeing). According to the principle of dependent-origination, every thing is non-existence. We also cannot call it a *being*. The nature of everything being a *not-being-not-nonbeing* suggests that being cannot be the opposite of nonbeing. If we would understand that being is being, then one must take the absence of the being as nonbeing. Nonbeing is relative to being. Only when *being* exists can *nonbeing* exist. Without *being*, there is no *nonbeing*. Where can we hold and attach to an absolute *nonbeing*?

(trans. from Sengzhao and Hong 1996:26)

How being and nonbeing depend on each other is how the concepts of past and present need each other to operate. Without the concept of past, we cannot differentiate the stages of events and thus experience the 'present.' Concerning the complexity of reality, he argued that the relationship between the name and the thing is only contingent through the principle of dependent-origination. This argument refers to Nāgārjuna's two-truths, the relation between the conventional truth and the ultimate truth. In chapter nineteen, "The Investigation of Time," in *Mulamadhyamakakarika (The book of Middle-Way)*, Nāgārjuna asserted that without a similarity there is no difference; without difference there is no similarity.

The relationship between a signifier and the signified does not exist because the sign can truly refer to the thing itself, but because the binary system and the

differentiation between signifiers support the signifiers to exist and function. Both Nāgārjuna and Sengzhao assert the concept of *jiaming anli* (假名安立), meaning that signs and language create a 'fictional being' that is the 'temporal place' or shelter where the phenomena settle down for the human being's purposes. We mistake the fictional being as the intrinsic nature. We differentiate things by using the system of symbols and the dual pairs in language and conceptual thinking. To track down this process, we could understand in which way the fictional being becomes 'being' and for whom.

Even though the "clutter of the concepts" of flow, flux, and becoming are useful to disrupt the essentialist position and the concept of progress and to establish "time as becoming" (Grosz 1999:3), Sengzhao's view can provide a critique on the obsession of 'here and now,' the fetish of the ontology of performance on its constant disappearing (Phelan 1993), the preference of becoming over being, impermanence over permanence, future over present and past, because one can argue that those are still trapped in dualistic thinking and under the shadow of melancholy and fear that everything disappears and time flies away.

Dōgen's "Being-time"

The Japanese Zen master Eihei Dōgen (永平道元 1200-1253 A.D.) proposed "uji" as "being-time," explaining:

"Being-time here means that time itself is being [...] and being is time. Each moment is all being, is the entire world. Reflect now whether any being or any world is left out of the present moment.

Time is not separate from you, and as you are present, time does not go away. If time merely flies away, you would be separated from time. The reason you do not clearly understand being-time is that you think of time as only passing [...] and do not understand that time ever arrives [...]. People only see time's coming and going, and do not thoroughly understand that being-time abides in each moment."

(Tanahashi 1985:76-80 in Loy 1992)

Dōgen's being-time echoes Nāgārjuna and Sengzhao's perspectives. Nāgārjuna stated that time is dependent upon existence and that time does not exist. Sengzhao rejected that time is passing away and that things move in the flow of time. Dōgen's assertion "when time never arrives" can be traced to Nāgārjuna's discussion in chapter one of the *Middle-Way Book*. Chan paraphrased Nāgārjuna words, "From one's own point of view, one knows that a thing has gone away, but what is [thought to have] gone does not arrive anywhere" (Chan 1963:345).

That "time never arrives" suggests that time is just one ordering of the temporal experience and one mental construction that makes one feel driven by expectations of the future or memories of the past. The dualistic relation between what was gone and what will come is dispersed. The separation between the observer and the observed is also dissolved. Time is not an object to be objectified by the observer. Each thing and event has its own rhythm and way of realising its own temporality without requiring an observer to trigger its being and becoming. Time is within each sentient being, rather than each sentient being traveling 'in' time. Time is neither a flow nor an empty canvas.

Being-In-Time and Being-Is-Time

From Kongwu's perspective, the ontology of time raises the questions of how time is conceptualised as time and for whom. Kongwu (空無) (*śūnyatā*, emptiness, nothingness) does not mean non-existence, non-being, or nihility, "but rather the lack of autonomous existence (*niḥsvabhava*)" (Berger 2005). In the logic of Kongwu, time never arrives. Time does not have any ontological substance. Time does not exist, or it exists only when it is invoked in the everyday context within the communicative function and teleological operation. Time results from the observation of the events through the linguistic, social, and cultural conventions that are the documentation and indicators of the events. However, we mistake the indicators as the real, so we have mis-considered time as something real with a constant presence.

Can time exist without events? For Nāgārjuna, it cannot. Time results from the network of relations and the observations that we make to describe the changes. Nāgārjuna concluded that time is dependent upon phenomena. Time does not exist without an existence. However, according to dependent-origination, everything is not autonomous and without the independent entity, so an existence is nonexistence. "Whence can there be time?" (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:279). Nāgārjuna did not reject temporal phenomena; he rejected only the dualistic observation and conceptualisation that make time the absolute entity. Things cannot take place *in* time, that is, an absolute objectified time. Our observation forces the things having the quality of the past, present, and future and other essences that constitute the condition of being.

The perspective that the event *is* time, replaces the perspective that an event takes place *in* time. One can argue that 'becoming,' rather than being, is more suitable to describe events and changes. Yet for Kongwu, if becoming exists, then it

implies the stages of becoming, already-became, is-becoming, and not-yet-become. Even 'change' is imposed by the observer's interaction and relative point of view, as what Sengzhao suggested in "The Immobility of Things." We need to create one standard position as the ideal spatio-temporal limit, such as here and now for measurement, so that we can prefer becoming over being and differentiate present from past. The preference and discrimination implied a perspective from an anthropocentric observation. The argument of becoming falls into the same problem of claiming the reality of time and segregating time into past, present, and future.

Grosz rethinks "the 'nature' of time"(1999:15-6). She calls for a temporality of becoming (Grosz 1999:1-28). As Grosz suggested, by rethinking the nature of time and the three concepts of past, present and future, we can rethink the issues of "development, origin, and identity"(Grosz 1999:18). She warns that the past is associated with "reminiscence, melancholy, or nostalgia" and the present is associated with "the retrievability of the past and the predictability of future" (Grosz 1999:18). Yet, she prioritises the future. In her argument, the future links to chance, indeterminacy, and unpredictability that produce the newness.

Kongwu challenges the ontology of time. However, rather than proposing a future oriented temporality (Grosz 1999:4), Kongwu suggests a 'temporality of non-time.' The transformation comes from when time never arrives. Even though such temporality is often expressed in the phrase, the return to the present, we still need to rethink the concept of present, particularly the possible obsession with the present. Yet, Kongwu would warn the danger of promoting future over past and present, becoming over being, for example a future oriented temporality, proposed by Grosz (1999: 15). The concept of future still needs the concept of past and present to be possible.

Whether the linguistic expression of 'return to the present' or 'a future oriented temporality' is more useful to facilitate practice and mobilise transformation is arguable. If indeterminacy and unpredictability are the keys to the type of potentiality that Grosz seeks, can we introduce indeterminacy without the obsession of the present, or a future hope? Kongwu rethinks the 'nature' of time and introduces indeterminacy by suggesting the attitude of 'when time never arrives', a temporality of non-time. Kongwu's attitude reveals the very different assumption from Grosz's future oriented temporality, even though both embrace indeterminacy and reject the causality and determinism.

Before reconsidering the 'present,' as my practice does, I analyse how John Cage reflected how sounds become the form of music, and reconsidered time and measurement by integrating the Kongwu perspective. By using the case study of John Cage and my performance practice, we become aware of the very different assumption of transformation and indeterminacy embedded in the concept of Kongwu. We investigate a possibility of embracing indeterminacy without obsession of the present, or future hope.

2.2 Analysing John Cage's Investigation of Time from the Kongwu Perspective

The 'silence piece', the most famous work by John Cage (1912-1992), forces us to confront what music 'is', and the concept of 'time'. The first performance of 4'33" was at Woodstock, New York, on August 29, 1952. The pianist David Tudor walked to the piano, sat down, and set up a timer on the stage. He performed the three silent

movements, raising and lowering the keyboard lid three times in different lengths (Tomkins 1965: 119). He read the score and turned the pages attentively. He finished the performance by raising the keyboard lid, and standing up to “receive applause” (Gann 2010: 1-3). For Cage, “silence” does not mean ‘no sounds’, but the sounds “that are not notated appeared in the written music as silence, opening the doors of music to the sounds that happen to be in the environment” (Cage 1961:7-8). In 1951, Cage expected to hear ‘no sound’, when he entered an anechoic chamber in Harvard University.

I entered one at Harvard University several years ago and heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation. Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music.

(Cage 1961:8)

Cage could not find ‘pure silence’ but heard two sounds that were made without his intention. The experience suggests the impossibility to obtain a ‘pure silence’. Cage’s silence does not mean the absence of sounds. Listening to silence does not pursue the ‘being’ of silence, but practices a different patterning of perception.

John Cage’s notion of time echoes Kongwu. Cage aims to listen to sounds without using musical conventions in *4’33”*. Then, he expands the operation of silence by abandoning the measurement of time in *0’00”*. Suggested by Higgins, John Cage’s music can be viewed as an example of “intermedia” because he

transports Zen philosophy to music, which blurs the boundary between the medium of philosophy and art (Higgins [1965] 2001:50). Cage sets up the conditions to develop his method as a way to embody these philosophical debates. He transforms the logic of how Kongwu reconsiders the perception of time into music.

During his earlier phase, Cage said, the “aspect of sound that interests me the most” is “time” (Cage in Kostelanetz 2003:74). He shifted his notions of time from musical time to clock time in *4'33"*. However, in his second silence piece, *0'00" (4'33" No. 2)*, Cage dismissed clock time, and proposed that the event is time. Cage changed to the view that “time is abandoned” (Cage in Kostelanetz 2003:74). Cage used Christian Wolff’s notion of “zero time” that occurs “when we don’t measure it” to disorder time (Cage in Cage and Charles 1981:209). This notion echoes the situation ‘when time never arrives’ from the Kongwu perspective.

Cage questioned the problem of measurement in music. As a result, he shifted his attitude towards time. The underlying principle that three pieces, *0'00"*, *Variations III*, and *Variations IV*, share is “no measurements of time, no use of the stopwatch” (Cage in Kostelanetz 2003:74). The rejection of any measurement of time comes from the questioning of the measurability that is based on the assumption that time can be objectified, manipulated, and separated from the observer. The event itself as time leads to Cage’s redefinition of music as any “temporal act” that Robert Ashley observed, and not only with “the presence of sound” but also the “presence of people” (in Cage 1962b:52). By redefining music in this way, Cage’s compositional strategies blur the boundaries of music and theatre, and expand the horizons for intermedia practice.

Cage revised his concept of time between *4'33"* and *0'00" (4'33" No.2)* by making the measurement of time indeterminate. Listening to silence exposes the

convention and language of music itself. To give up the measurement of time in music raises a question whether his approach to composition, performance and listening is still musical.

From Musical Time to Clock Time in 4'33"

In 4'33", Cage rejected the logic of form that can be found in Western music. In his lecture "The Future of Music: Credo," which he gave in 1937, Cage said, "the principle of form will be our only constant connection with the past" (Cage 1961:5). The principle of form implies a history and a tradition that accumulates from the past. The principle of form suggests language and convention, meaning the broader meaning of language, not just linguistic language. Music is a system that decides what is excluded and included. Musical time results from the selection of that which is outside and which is inside this musical representational system. For example, musical languages are constructed by harmony and metric measurement, etc. Language itself suggests intentionality and teleological direction. Cage employed silence for the "demilitarization of language" (Cage 1979:184). To reject musical time and to return to clock time, Cage used clock time as the frame and container for his music to take place. Cage did not try to reproduce the musical contents that were always already in the representational system, more specifically carrying the particular intentionality in the performance.

Clock time has helped to construct modern time and then eventually the global time that is currently the universal measurable time. In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin criticises clock time for its implication of progression (Lim 2009:10; May and Thrift 2001:34). The linear version of history was

constructed in a site with the illusion of “empty, homogeneous time” (Benjamin 1999:252).

The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself.

(Benjamin 1999:252)

To break from the linear version of history, Benjamin, instead of assuming the temporality of constant moving, proposed a position of standstill and developed “the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop” (Benjamin 1999:254). This position of standstill is similar to Kongwu’s concept of non-time that presumes time never arrives. Thompson examined “the time-measurement as a means of labour exploitation” (Thompson 1967:80). The notation of time would be described as “task-orientation” (Thompson 1967:60). Thompson located clock time in industrial capitalism and in the need of “the synchronisation of labour” (Thompson 1967:80). According to Thompson (1967), the precise measurement of clock time makes labour time more easily manageable and transferrable into money. This may be why modernity is obsessed with speed and unstoppable flow. Clock time, as a naturalised empty time, produced an illusion of ‘openness’ that everything can be included and happen in a certain period of time.

From Clock Time to Zero Time in *0'00"*

Cage composed *0'00"* (*4'33"* No. 2) in 1962. The score is one sentence: "in a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action" (Cage 1962a; Pritchett 1996:138). The first performance was Cage writing that sentence (Pritchett 1996:138). After the first performance in Tokyo, as Pritchett noted, Cage added "four qualifications to the score: "the performer should allow any interruptions of the action; the action should fulfil an obligation to others; the same action should not be used in more than one performance, and should not be the performance of a musical composition; and finally, the performer should pay no attention to the situation he finds himself in, whether electronic, musical, or theatrical." (Pritchett 1996:138).

Even in *4'33"*, Cage still worked under the assumptions that "empty, homogeneous time" (Benjamin 1999: 252) is possible and that time itself has a discrete mode of being, self-essence, and particular quality and substance. Time was still something that was already there with a constant presence. The traditional musical significance system and Cage's *4'33"* both assume time is a constant presence that requires some measurements and markers to determine the duration and time-length. However, the time-length in *0'00"* (*4'33"* No. 2) shifts to be zero to propose that time cannot have the constant presence and that no precise and absolute measurement can be possible. Zero-time rejected the time measured by the clock and being as such. In an interview with Roger Reynolds, Cage said,

if music is conceived as an *object*, then it has a beginning, middle, and end, and one can feel rather confident when he makes measurements of the time.

But when it [music] is *process*, those measurements become less meaningful,

and the process itself, involving if it happened to, the idea of Zero Time (that is to say no time at all), becomes mysterious and therefore eminently useful.

(Cage 1962b:48)

When time cannot be objectified as an object, time becomes process itself. The gesture rejects the assumption that time is measurable and moves toward the exploration of what happens when time never comes and what happens when time cannot be *a priori* to observe the world and to define reality.

Cage subverted not only the concept of musical time but also the hegemony of clock time in *0'00" (4'33" No. 2)*. Cage removed the fixed pitch and melody created by the composer and revealed the melody from the environmental sounds in *4'33"*. Christian Wolff "was the first to use zero time in his compositions, concurrently with clock time"(Cage in Cage and Charles 1981:209 footnote1). Cage used Christian Wolff's expression of "zero time" to describe how his concept of time is the event itself in *0'00"* (Cage and Charles 1981:209). In *0'00" (4'33" No. 2)*, he explored experiences in which "we don't notice the passage of time, when we don't measure it" (Cage in Cage and Charles 1981:209). Even though *4'33"* breaks down musical time, the music still has a beginning, middle, and end that is still an "object" according to Cage's own definition in which "one can still feel rather confident when he makes the measurement of time" (Cage 1962b:48). Christian Wolff suggested a possible musical composition in "zero time" that dissolves the time length so that it cannot be measured by clock time:

Moves intersecting and voices overlapping can obscure structural outlines and produce meetings or events that are disengaged from them to become

simply themselves. Then, a structure that seems closed by a square of time lengths may also be dissolved by including a zero in the sequence of the time lengths' proportions (e.g. $2\frac{1}{4}$, 1,0,2...): *the zero I take to mean no time at all, that is, no measurable time, that is, any time at all.*

(Wolff 1965:29)

Cage's *0'00"*, which is equivalent to Christian Wolff's concept of zero time, subverts the concept of clock time. 'Real' time is not necessarily clock time. Cage liberates time from clock time as the absolute measurement used in the everyday context. In *0'00"*, time never arrives, to use Dōgen's expression.

The score of *0'00"* (4'33" No. 2) includes one sentence: "In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action" (Cage 1962a). The amplification could be understood as a disciplined action without any electronic device, such as an act of listening (Kaye 1996:16). When one's attention is concentrated and in a meditative consciousness, the emptied psychosomatic state can amplify the sensations within oneself and the information from the environment. The discipline refers to the capacity to control one's "likes and dislikes with something as strict as sitting cross-legged" (Cage in Kaye 1996:22). Without one's taste acting as a filter, the quantity of sensations and perceptions can be maximised by the concentration of awareness. The goal of the silence pieces is to make a shift "from intention towards non-intention" (Cage in Kaye 1996:13). The goal of non-intention suggests a non-teleological organisation, which is how the logic of Kongwu conceptualises reality and how quantum mechanics theorises the law of physics. From intention to non-intention the dualistic ordering of experiences is dissolving.

The Kongwu perspective might interpret *0'00"* as rejecting the concept of

duration that has been considered an intrinsic characteristic of sound. Rejecting the concept of duration suggests a form of presence that has no objectification of time. Kongwu provides a way to analyse the process of how the concept of time is constructed. To reconsider the concept of time without replacing it with another continuity, Kongwu suggests the primacy of experiencing without any selective perspectives. In another expression, no 'time' exists in the sense that the event and experience is time, so time should not be taken as real within itself or as such. Kongwu points to the understanding of how we construct the illusion of continuity with the various habitual ordering of experiences, helping us to realise the non-time of 'time'. Thus *0'00"* introduces more deeply the specific worldview of Kongwu and investigates ways to overcome duality. Kongwu provides an approach for challenging the fundamental assumption of time, and offers a different sensibility of time for performance practice, becoming one platform for the encounter of different disciplines, such as science, spirituality, and arts.

Music as Any Temporal Act

By developing Zero Time, 'time' becomes indeterminate. Cage has introduced indeterminacy into music through the chance operation, for example using the imperfection on the paper, Tarot Card, and I Ching for the decision-making process. Through using the chance operation and exploring indeterminacy, Cage not only questions the concept of 'time' as a constructed continuity, but also removes the composer's subjectivity and agency to determine the organisation of sounds (Bernstein 2002:210). Cage seeks a composition "devoid of the composer's personality and intent"(Bernstein 2002: 210). Cage commented on the musician

Edgard Varese's concept of music as "organized sounds", and questioned the continuity that the composer often aimed to produce.

For those who are interested in sounds just as they are, apart from psychology about them, one must look further for Varese's present relevance. This is not found in the character of his imagination, which has to do with him— not with sound itself. Nor is his use of tape relevant, for in *Deserts* he attempts to make tape sound like the orchestra and vice versa, showing again a lack of interest in the natural differences of sounds, preferring to give them all his unifying signature. In this respect his need for continuity does not correspond to the present need for discontinuity (discontinuity has the effect of divorcing sounds from the burden of psychological intentions). Though Varese was the first to write directly for instrumental ensembles (giving up the piano sketch and its orchestral coloration), his way of doing this was controlled by his imagination to the point of exploiting the sounds for his own purposes.

(Cage 1958 in Cage 1961:83-4)

For Cage, Varese is more interested in 'organized', not 'sounds'. Varese organized sounds through the mediation of his imagination. As the result, sounds were given a "unifying signature" (Cage 1958 in Cage 1961:83-4). Varese's composition needs continuity. Yet for Cage, composition has to correspond to the need for "discontinuity", and "divorcing sounds from the burden of psychological intentions" (Cage 1958 in Cage 1961:83), which is the composer's ego.

When one listens to sounds, if one listens through past accumulation, meaning musical grammar, concepts, and individual psychological histories, one organises sounds into continuity according to the accumulation of past experiences. For example, Varese “attempts to make tape sound like the orchestra” (Cage 1958 in Cage 1961:83). The continuity comes from a particular way of perceiving through past accumulation, which Cage aims to dissolve by using chance operation and developing the capacity to listen to ‘silence’, any environmental sound without selection. When one cannot claim the continuity of sounds, one cannot create a signature: the artist’s ego. It is in this sense that sound cannot be conceived as an object, nor can time. This attitude towards music and time acknowledges how the enclosed system of language and the self as the referencing point to measure constructs our way of experiencing.

By introducing indeterminacy, Cage expanded the definition of music. For Cage, music is any “temporal act” (Cage in Cage and Charles 1981:209). Through absorbing Daoism and Buddhism, Cage had revised the notion of time, and embraced ‘time without measurement’, as measurement refers to teleological function. Cage rejected the measurement of time as the parallel to rejecting the mental ordering of events. Consequently, Cage revised the definition of music.

For Cage, music cannot be an object, nor can time. His definition of music does not build upon the various measurements of time, but removes the anthropocentric construction of time. As Robert Ashley suggested, “theatre” becomes a “transitional” definition for the expansion of music “to condition people to other possibilities” (in Cage 1962b: 52). The holistic sensory engagement becomes the redefinition of music as, to rephrase Robert Ashley’s comment, “any kind of temporal act whatsoever” (Cage in Cage and Charles 1981:209). Cage revised his

definition of music according to the shifts of his attitudes on time and measurement. Cage's performing strategy shifted to seek ways to compose music without the measurement of time. Such an attitude is embodied in Cage's notation, the Fluxus-like action scores in *0'00"* (1962), and *Songbooks* (1970). Cage's revision of time expands music into intermedial practice, while simultaneously fostering the expansion of the definition of 'theatre.'

Cage borrowed the expression of "zero time" from Christian Wolff. Zero time means "when we don't notice the passage of time, when we don't measure it" (Cage in Cage and Charles 1981:209). After the first performance of *4'33"*, Cage revised it several times, keeping the three structures of composition, but making the length of time indeterminate. *0'00"*, as the second piece of *4'33"*, rejects any measurement of time. Cage's revision of time echoed Kongwu's notion of non-time or when time never arrives in the sense that time is a mental construction and a result of a static referential point that decides which comes before and after.

Cage makes the clear distinction between *4'33"* and *0'00"*:

The first one, *4'33"*, involved one or several musicians who made no sound. The second one, *0'00"*, indicates that an obligation towards others must be fulfilled, in a partial or complete manner, by a single person. The third one involves gathering together two or more people who are playing a game in an amplified context. A bridge or chess match, or any game at all can become a distinct – another essentially silence – musical work.

(Cage in Cage and Charles 1981:210)

Some of the compositions in *Song Books* (Cage 1970), which are Fluxus-like action scores and similar to Cage's third silence piece, expands music into intermedia practice. In *Song Books (Solos for Voice 3-92)*, Cage used chance operation to generate the action sequences.

To prepare for a performance, the actor will make a numbered list of verbs (actions) and/or nouns (things) not to exceed 64 with which he or she is willing to be involved and which are theatrically feasible (those may include stage properties, clothes, etc.; actions may be "real" or mimed, etc.).

(Cage 1970)

The composition becomes more action-oriented and emphasizes "the presence of people" more than "the presence of sound" (Ashely in Cage 1962b:51). Cage dismissed his notion of time in *4'33"* and expanded the operation of silence by creating *0'00"* without any indication of time length. For Cage, silence is not no-sounds, but "ambient noise"(Cage 1958 in Cage 1961: 80). To introduce indeterminacy, music becomes not "organized sounds", but "any temporal act". Zero time means giving up any measurement of time. By revising the notion of time and the definition of music in this way, Cage challenges the assumption of the observer-observed, and the belief that the observer can measure the observed and have the knowledge of the thing as such. This shift leads to redefinitions of music as any temporal act, blurs boundaries between music and theatre, introduces indeterminacy, and expands the horizons for intermedia practices.

2.3 A Participatory Universe

The Newtonian worldview believes time exists before one notices it, and proposes a deterministic perspective.

Absolute, true, and mathematical time, in and of itself and of its own nature, without reference to anything external, flows uniformly and by another name is called duration. Relative, apparent, and common time is any sensible and external measure (precise or imprecise) of duration by means of motion; such a measure - for example, an hour, a day, a month, a year - is commonly used instead of true time.

(Newton 1729:6)

Newton considered time as a physical substance and an independent existence. Newton's time is independent of an observer's motion and position. One can predict the future based on enough knowledge of the present. However, Einstein's special relativity (1905) introduces frames of references, and disputes the notion of absolute time. Einstein demolished the concept of absolute time and space, and pointed out, "Time and space are modes by which we think and not conditions in which we live" (in Forsee 1963:81). Einstein told Heisenberg, "It is the theory which decides what we can observe" (in Mehra 1987:495). Based on this, Heisenberg developed the uncertainty principle and rejected the separation of observer from the observed.

In the microscopic world of quantum mechanics, the system is probabilistic, in contrast with what we would find in an everyday context. The role of the observer

determines the state of the observed. Moreover, the selected measuring apparatus interferes with the state of the object under measurement. Heisenberg stated, “The more accurately is the position determined, the more uncertain is the momentum and *vice versa*” (in Mehra 1987:495). The simultaneous measurement of both parameters is impossible. Heisenberg’s principle of uncertainty emphasized the problem of observer. For example, an object can exhibit both wave and particle properties, which is contrary to the perspective of classical physics. While microscopic phenomena are probabilistic and governed by quantum mechanics, the observer is a macroscopic phenomenon and governed by Newtonian mechanics (Heisenberg 1958a:88). To understand the contradiction and transition between the micro and macroscopic world has provoked the different interpretations of quantum mechanics and the philosophical implications.

In Einstein’s relativity theory (special relativity, 1905), the measurements in different inertial frames of reference are dependent on the relative velocity between the observer and the observed object. Yet, the theory still operates on an absolute measurement of events (Clifton 2005:843). This space-time union preserves an independent reality (Minkowski in Clifton 2005:843). At the fifth Solvay Conference in Brussels, 1927 (Mehra 1987:499), Einstein responded to the theoretical aspects and formulation of quantum mechanics with an emphasis on “discontinuity” and “acausality” (an interpretation shared by Bohr and Heisenberg) in a letter to Bohr that stated, “I, at any rate, am convinced that *He* is not playing at dice” (letter from Einstein to Bohr, December 4, 1926; Refe. 23, pp. 90, 91 in Mehra 1987:501). According to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle and Bohr’s complementarity principle, indeterminacy is inherent in nature itself. An absolute measurement is impossible because of the disturbance caused by the observation. Thus, absolute

objectivity comes into question in quantum mechanics. That is where Einstein held a fundamentally different belief from Bohr's and Heisenberg's. Regardless the difference, they all question the concept of absolute time.

Observers as Participants

Christian Wolff proposed zero time, and Cage advanced zero time to the action itself, transforming music into intermedia performances. As Blom suggested, George Brecht reworked Cage's zero time (Blom 1998:68). Inspired by quantum mechanism, Brecht developed the event score, and further blurred the distinction between the static object and the event. (Blom 1998:68). Brecht identified the uncertainty principle and relativity as two important references in Cage's practices (Brecht 1991:64 in Kaye 2006:59). Being a professional chemist and an influential Fluxus artist, Brecht initiated the event score and engaged in Chan/Zen Buddhism and Daoism. Brecht shared the interest of "spiritual virtuosity" (Hansen 1970:122) with Cage as well as "the various theories of impersonality, anonymity and the life of pieces outside of their perceivers, makers, or anyone else" (Hansen 1970:124). In his diary, Brecht remarked that Cage's classes in New Musical Composition at the New School are evidence that the revised worldview of quantum mechanics has influenced the new aesthetics.

Uncertainty Principle

Probability

Observer-Observed

Paradox as a reflection of inability to imagine a simple model of the universe.

(Brecht 1991:65 in Kaye 2006:59)

In a similar way, Cage gave up the measurement of time. He acknowledged the unmeasurability of the real world, which contains so many paradoxes, when we aim to find single interpretations and measurements to define the world. In his discussion of the concept of nature, Heisenberg also mentioned a worldview that is represented in the interrelation between art and science (Heisenberg 1958b:95-6). In quantum physics, Heisenberg explained the engagement of measurement in the construction of 'objectivity.' In the principle of indeterminacy, he suggested that without measurement, all probability would still be endless potentials. The act of measurement turns potentials into reality. Both Brecht's event scores and Cage's silence would agree that without measurement, there is no time.

The problem of the observer in quantum mechanics has consciously and unconsciously transferred into the artistic practices, and has hence prevented the audience and viewer from being the beholders. The ideal observer, which is independent from the observed object, is not valid anymore. Bohr stated, "No elementary phenomenon until it is a registered phenomenon" (in Wheeler 1996:290). "Registered" is the key word that Bohr used, which means "A phenomenon is not yet a phenomenon until it has been brought to a close by an irreversible act of amplification" (in Wheeler 1996:120) and is thus "communicable in plain language" (in Wheeler 1996:290). "The act of amplification" is the act of measurement governed by the classical physics in the macroscopic world, where the observer uses instruments to "amplify the interaction between some particle (or particles)" (Fagg 2003:55). As mentioned earlier, Cage used "amplification" in the score of *0'00*", which could refer to the act of listening. In science, amplification pointed to the issues, such as the transition between the micro and macroscopic worlds and the boundary between the observers and the observed (Fagg 2003:55). John Wheeler

disputed that nature is a machine (1996:120), but proposes the concept of a “participatory universe” (1996:291) in which “the observer is participator” (1996:42). In art, George Brecht was one of the earliest artists to generate “participatory” art (Brecht and Robinson 2005:36). John Cage emphasised the presence of listeners and how their attention brings the sounds into presence. Cage and Brecht shared an interest in the intersection between spirituality, art, and science. In this context, Kongwu and its relation to performance suggest the desire to understand the world and nature differently.

Relativity links to the “interactivity” (Finkelstein 2004:365) that unfolds in Brecht’s participatory art and Wheeler’s participatory universe in science. David Bohm considered relativity as “a *relational* approach to physics” (Bohm 1996:vii) and as the interdependence of the observer and the observed. The observer always already engages with the world. Interactivity is not limited to the actual physical contact but also includes mental and perceptual interactions. When artwork needs the viewer to complete it (as Duchamp’s), and the viewer cannot see the whole entity of the art in one pass (as Allan Kaprow’s Happenings and John Cage’s theatre-like compositions), the revised worldview challenges the authorship and the artwork’s entity.

2.4 How We Experience the ‘Present’ through the ‘Past’: *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*

John Cage developed silence to release sounds from the musical language so that the listener can *listen without past accumulation*. Past accumulation means a collection of past experiences, language, concepts, personal histories, cultural

backgrounds, and social conventions as the accumulation of 'already-there', which determines a particular way of perceiving. If one listens through the musical system, one listens to sound through dualistic thinking. Consequently, some sounds can be more important and more interesting than the others; some can be musical, and the others are non-musical. The musical system, as a conventional language, orders sounds into a specific form. Then, sound becomes music. Why sound is ordered in this way and not another is because of the past accumulation of musical convention and personal preference. John Cage used silence to give up dualistic listening, so the listener does not match sounds to the musical convention as something from the past. The past accumulation that is the listener's social and cultural context and personal taste causes the person to listen to music through value judgment. To practice nondual listening, one must listen to sounds without the past.

My research practice, entitled *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*, explored the nondual experience from the Kongwu perspective, but took the reverse direction, mimicking the habit of differentiating that we use numerous times every day. By including two action tasks with the installation, my work exposed the way we experience through dualistic discrimination according to the past and the way we feel events happening in the train of the past, present, and future. Task One is an example of something that we do every day – walking on the street – and helps to expose the mechanism of how we experience the 'present' through the 'past'.

Task One

Three persons walk from point A to point B.

Person One uses a video to capture what one experiences during the walk.

Person Two uses words to capture what one experiences during the walk.

Person Three captures the stream of thought with spoken words during the walk.

Three persons as three experiencers observed the event of the experience of walking on a street. In Task One, they were capturing the 'present' experience through different means (spoken words, written words, and visual language) while they were walking. As a result, they generated three descriptions of the 'present'.

From the Kongwu perspective, what we experience often results from that we experience with dualistic discrimination. The differentiating can work because one references to the accumulation from the past. We often identify with the collection of past accumulation as the 'self.' Each experiencer has unique, personal trajectories that are an accumulation from the past and that are conditioned by education and the social, cultural, and historical context. The self is akin to the observing tool. Personal preference determines what is important, interesting, not important, and boring. We ignore what is boring and pay attention to what is interesting. Sometimes, something is more noticeable simply because it is physically closer to us. We take the self as the referencing point so that we can describe the experience. Through the self and dualistic ordering, we experience the result of the selection.

We often take the result of selective seeing as the thing in itself. Scientists have far more precise measurements for observing and far more precise language to indicate the observed result than the measurements and language of quotidian life. Nevertheless, Heisenberg asked us to reconsider the tendency that we take the indicators as the thing in itself.

Science no longer is in the position of observer of nature, but rather recognizes itself as part of the interplay between man and nature.

(Heisenberg 1958b:107)

In science, also, the object of research is no longer nature in itself but rather nature exposed to man's questioning, and to this extent man here also meets himself.

(Heisenberg 1958b: 105)

Heisenberg interpreted the philosophical implication of the uncertainty principle and suggested that we cannot take the result of our observations as solid evidence of what nature 'is'. Nature can be many potentials, but our measurement dictates how we see the nature (Heisenberg 1958b: 105). In other words, we take the result of our "questioning" as the singular definition of what nature is (Heisenberg 1958b:105). Then, our questioning comes from the accumulation from the past, for example, the conventions of scientific language. Even scientific language is working within the scientists' collective experiences, because the accumulation from the past enables scientists to build their knowledge. What is exposed to our question implies that which is representable by the scientific language. What is representable is what nature 'is'.

Language and the accumulation from the past act as the mediation when we encounter the world. John Cage raised a similar concern in music. He rephrased the words from his father, a scientist and inventor, "measurement measures the measuring means" (Cage 1969:7), and these words consider the mediation of differentiation and the measurement. To transfer this reflection from science to art,

on science, he used silence to discourage listening through musical conventions. If the listener does not listen to sounds by referencing the past, the present sounds cannot become the form of music. Cage used silence to disengage the dualistic ordering of sounds to open up the possibility of experience.

As discussed in Chapter One, we use language to describe and indicate our experience, but in turn our experience is governed by language. We can expand the discussion on language, particularly the subject-object dichotomy and the dualistic pairs that makes language able to function, to understand our experience of 'time' and the production of 'now'. The photo can help to explain the mechanism that we use to describe events in everyday life and demonstrate the insight from the Zen proverb 'The Finger is Not the Moon' discussed in Chapter One. When we use the camera to take a photo of the street, we are sure that the photo is an indicator that is different from the street. The photo is a product of a particular way of seeing. We see through the camera's eye from a fixed perspective. The photo has worked with the assumption that the subject and object are divided into two ends. The photo pointed to something not itself. Through the direction of seeing, the subject had the sense of connection with the object. The photo represents a relation that we built between the subject and the object. The photo is *about* the thing. Through the relation, we come to understand what the thing 'is'. However, when we experience everyday life, we blend the description and the things together, and no longer differentiate them, particularly how language triggers our emotions and feelings and conducts our actions. In other words, we take the relation between subject and object as the 'being' of the event. We use language as the tool, but, in the end, we experience life in a way that is governed by language. Language triggers the feelings and the values with which we associate, and seduces our emotional investment. We live in a

habitual pattern that we build with language and in the effect of the description. What we experience is not the event in itself, but rather circulates back to ourselves: the effect that language, as an enclosed system, causes.



2.1 I-Lien Ho, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*, a snapshot from the video documentation for the installation

In the everyday context, our self and language as past accumulations are equivalent to measurements that are not even as precise as those in science. What we can experience is not the thing in itself, but rather events that are exposed to our awareness. Then, we describe the selective results with language. What our ordinary language can be represented as is what the event is. Therefore, we assume that our present experience is what the 'present' truly is. To this extent, we meet the observing tools: the self and the mechanism of language. When we experience an event, we often experience the result of what has been exposed to our attention and then registered in our memory. What we experience is actually the mechanism of the differentiation, a movement back and forth referencing the past accumulation.

In the installation, the visitors saw three versions of the 'present'. That present can be *the* present that arose because of its representability and observability, framed by the experiencer's self: the collection of the past. The mechanism of differentiation dictated what could be included and what could not. In the separate room, the visitors listened to Person Three's voice, which captured the stream of thoughts during the walk. When the visitors went up and down the stairs, they saw the words on the wall, and they walked alongside the written words that captured the version of present that Person Two experienced. Then, Person One captured what was visible in the moment with video footage. The visitors encountered the three versions in different rooms, but also watched the juxtaposition of these three descriptions. I edited the three narratives into one video. By watching the narratives co-existing in one video, we could see that the 'present' is what exposed to our selective experiencing. By doing so, we see how the present becomes the 'present' through the past and the self as the referencing point. Many events happening simultaneously on the street, yet we experience through the past and through the self, so we experience the result of what we think is the 'present.' We make many events become *the* event. We make limitless potentials become the singular being.



2.2 Right: the juxtaposition of the three descriptions in the video. 2.3 Left: Person Three voiced a stream of thoughts. I-Lien Ho, *One Street, Three*

Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories

The juxtaposition of the three descriptions reveals that the concepts of past and present need each other to operate. Discussed previously, Sengzhao exposed the fallacy of language, and revealed how being and nonbeing feed each other in “The Immobility of Things”. To follow his logic, without the concept of past, we could not differentiate the stages of events and experience the ‘present’. Derrida critiqued the metaphysics of presence and perception in Edmund Husserl and wrote, “the presence of the perceived present can appear as such only inasmuch as it is continuously compounded with a nonpresence and nonperception, with primary memory and expectation (retention and protention)” (Derrida 1973:64). The ‘present’ needs ‘non-present’ to create continuity in order to have ‘presence’. To follow Sengzhao’s logic and Derrida’s critique, without the ‘past’, the presence of ‘present’ and ‘future’ cannot be possible. For Sengzhao, we can have neither the view that things are ‘changing’ nor the view that things are ‘non-changing’. This inability complicates how the present becomes the present and compels us to reconsider the assumption that we generate the experience of the present.



2.4 I-Lien Ho, ‘Time is Language’ in *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*

The statement 'Time is Language' refers to habitual selection, and expands Kongwu's attitude toward language in Chapter One. The acts of observation and selective attention transform potentials into reality. Selective attention means a particularly way of perceiving (seeing, listening, sensing, etc.) conditioned by social, cultural, historical backgrounds as well as limited by the past experiences, language, social agreement. Past accumulation means a collection of past experiences, language, concepts as the accumulation of 'already-there', which determines a particular way of perceiving. Language turns the potential into a reality. Language creates an illusion of the continuity that is called 'time'. The present is a temporality resulting from dualistic ordering. I use the performance to mimic the habitual pattern of experience to expose the fallacy of language. The present we think exists is only one of many potentials. When we experience 'the present', we experience the habitual pattern of a perception governed by past accumulation. This habitual perception creates the present, rather the present 'as such', implied by the label of 'present'. In this sense, the way we experience the 'present' is through our habit of making the present become the past.

In Task Two, we look further at how the past becomes *the* past that we think it is.

Task Two

After months, the three persons recalled the memories of the walk and described whatever they remembered.

Over the course of these months, what used to be the 'present' became traces in the form of memory. What the experience had paid attention to during the walk became the registers in the form of memory. The past in the form of a memory was the result of what we selected to experience. Our memory registered the selective result. If we experience without selection, we could not have *the* past. The memory could not be documented; instead, it would be traceless. We could not have *the* past as the reference point for personal preference. Consequently, without the past, we could not experience the present that we think exists, nor make the division among past, present, and future to order our experiences.



2.5 I-Lien Ho, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories*, the snapshot of the installation of Task Two from the video documentation

In this installation, the three TVs stood in for the three experiencers. The videos show each of them recalling their memories. The co-existence of the three

memories exposed the processes of how we accumulate experiences and how we perceive our experiences as reality. In the three videos, the past accumulation was represented in two forms. One is in the form of memory; the other is in the form of documentation by video, voice, and word through which they captured the 'present' in Task One. The three people's memories not only co-exist to implicate the 'real' that they remembered but also complicated the supposedly 'present' as the result of experiencing with differentiation and through past accumulation. We see the past accumulation expanding to repeat the interference and to determine how we experience and what we can experience. This looping effect causes us to feel the trains of past, present, and future and events happening in a sequence. For example, the 'present' circulates to be part of the past accumulation. The present became the past for the future. The memory inscribed the result of experiencing with selection. Through the accumulation, we will experience the 'present' in the future. As a result, we give the past with the persistent presence to cause the illusion of continuity. The different versions of the real and present as a paradox reflect the following process: we used the results of our dualistic experience to solidify multiple potentials into the probability that we identify with the real.

The two installations expose the habits that we use to experience the 'present' through the past and to contemplate the unreality of the real, the truth of non-truth, and the temporality of non-time. The statement, Time is Language refers to the enclosed loop of language and measurement. Through language, we use the dualistic ordering of things to make multiple potentials into the single flow of narrative. To follow the philosophical implication of the uncertainty principle that Heisenberg considered, science has a more precise observation and language system than does our everyday ordinary observation. Nevertheless, even the far

more precise way of observing comes with the problem of selective seeing to be the thing in itself. In our everyday experiences, how we can take the results of our selective seeing as the grounds for the real?

To unsettle how we experience the 'present' through the past provides a way to the nondual experience. The labels and the act of naming trigger our emotional association, and bring us into the chain effect, creating the 'real' situation for us. For example, one fears losing time, desires to control time to prolong a pleasant experience, and feels melancholy at the thought of fleeting events. To understand the mechanism that causes the looping effect, we can disrupt the emotional association without being trapped in the binary judgment.

For John Cage, sounds have many potentials, and the reason we listen to sounds only as music is because we listen through the language of the musical system. If one does not listen through the past convention, sounds cannot be contained in the musical form. When we listen through musical grammar, we make the present sound become past: the operation of musical language. Cage's silence aims to release sounds from being governed by musical language. Sounds are neither important nor non-important for us. When one accepts "equally what one likes and dislikes" (Cage 1961: 133), sounds "come into being of themselves," and then "sounds should be just sound" (Cage 1961: 70). When one does not listen through the past accumulation, one listens without "likes and dislikes" (Cage in Cage and Reynolds 1979: 581; Cage 1961: 133), which is nondual listening.

Similarly, the street upon which the three people walked has many potentials. Many events happen simultaneously on any street. Yet why we can experience the street as only *the* street results from our ordering of experiences contained in the

description and then documented in the memory. It is because we experience through the self: the accumulation from the past. The self accumulates the behaviour codes, personal tastes, and the social and cultural conventions. When we experience in this manner, we make 'present' become 'past'. We experience with the selection, and then we accumulate traces in the memory for the 'future' experience through differentiating and judging. Memory becomes the registers of the selective result. Then, we identify with the selective result. The past accumulation causes the next selection. This is a looping effect.

To experience from the perspective of Kongwu, we have to stop the dualistic experiencing. Cage's silence suggests a listening without the past accumulation, meaning listening without "value judgements" (Cage 1961:59). My work reconsidered how we experience the present and what makes us feel the trains of the past, present, and future and events happening in a succession. By using multiple descriptions and memories, my work exposes the language fallacy that causes the emotion of something passing away and thus produces the habit that we experience through the dualistic differentiation. If we understand how the past accumulation governs how we experience the present and causes the illusion of continuity, we can move away from dualistic differentiation to the nondual experience.

Conclusion

Kongwu holds that the concept of time results from what we experience through dualistic differentiation. Cage used silence to encourage nondual listening without the past accumulation that is the musical language system. The research practice, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Descriptions, and Different Memories* exposed

the process that we experience through the past and through dualistic differentiation. We identify with the accumulation from the past as the entity called the self. Through the self, we experience with selection. This is how we experience the 'present'. Therefore, without a concept of the past, we could not distinguish the past from the present. We would just experience without using the concepts of past, present, and future to describe and to make connections to the world. In this sense, when we experience nondualistically, time never arrives.

Even though the Kongwu perspective and quantum mechanics use different approaches to explore nature and truth, they share a scepticism of reality. To contemplate the paradox in quantum mechanics, we must understand the unreality of the reality and the relativity of time implied by the logic of Kongwu. To point out the parallel of the shift in the concept of nature in quantum mechanics, and the art criticism concerning authorship and the entity of artwork offers the understanding of the relationship between the observer and the observed that is crucial to shaping reality. Kongwu suggests an understanding that the 'truth,' such as the concept of time, is conventional only and useful in everyday communication. One becomes aware that time is a result of building the relationship between subject and object and is therefore not as real as it seems.

Kongwu suggests a temporality of non-time that is different from the "future oriented temporality" that Grosz(1999) proposed to mobilise transformation. Even though Kongwu emphasised the impermanence and the here and now in the operation of linguistic labels, Kongwu warned against being trapped in dualistic thinking, for example, preferring becoming over being, event over object, movement over stillness, and future over present and past. The different frameworks provoke further discussion on whether the transformation can come from the apparent inertia

that is neither coming nor going, when time never arrives.

One can link the distrust of language to theories such as John R. Searle's language as "social contract" that creates a social and political reality (Searle 2008). One can reconsider how language seduces our emotional investment and how we live in the effect of the description on the level of feeling. We use language as a tool, but, in the end, our experience is governed by language. Kongwu is not a theory for mental exercise, yet Kongwu fosters a practice concerning the ordinary perception on the experiential and emotional level. Kongwu seeks ways to conduct one's desires and longing. Concerning the human's living conditions and engagement is what I mean by spirituality. Articulating the interactivity of the observer and the observed provides a reflection on how we perceive the world, engage with dualistic ordering, and invest our emotions that give power to representation and language. When language has power, the narrative is the reality that one takes as the real. This is the habit that we have used to construct the architecture of reality and to swim in the stream of time.

3. When the Identification is suspended: Responding to Marina Abramović's Version of 'No-thinking Mind' through ... *is Present*

Introduction

The concepts of 'no-thinking mind' or 'no mind' have often been used to describe the rather mysterious meditative experience. The specific mode of consciousness has other labels such as 'pure' consciousness, "conceptually unstructured awareness" (Wallace 2000: 19), or 'perceiving emptiness directly' and 'a direct perception' in the translation of Tibetan Buddhism. The genealogy of exploring no-thinking mind through performance has been present in theatre actor training, body arts, and conceptual performances, particularly John Cage's engagement with Zen's and Suzuki's teaching, and some Fluxus artists' event scores to activate the attentiveness in the everyday act. By incorporating the various non-Western techniques of consciousness, Marina Abramović has not only explored the meditative mind in her artist's body, but also created the *Cleaning the House* Workshop for the student's body (Abramović 2004; Kaplan 1999: 18-20), and *The Abramović Method* which aims to empower the public and facilitate their own meditative transformation (Abramović 2001; Viola and Sileo 2012). Through the training of emptying and calming the mind, she constructed the space of 'suchness' to seek the possibility of experience. The raised questions here are what her 'no-thinking mind' referred to, and what kind of transformation 'meditation' offered. The question of how the experience of being present contributes to the identity of the subject in her version of the meditative mind, leads to the analysis of *The Artist is*

Present, Nightsea Crossing/Conjunction and the frame of narrative in context, to understand why she emphasizes the experience of being here and now.

Kongwu questioned whether the identity of self as a constructed continuity would still be possible if one does not experience through habit—identifying with the content of experience. By using Nāgārjuna's examination of the identity, I analyse Abramović's version of being present, particularly examining the relationship between the process of experience and the identity of self. I compare the underlying logic of 'being here and now' in Abramović's no-thinking mind, and the utilisation of the meditation in Kongwu. By analysing her frame of narrative, I investigate how her version of being here and now needs the identity, and the frame of narrative, as the underlying logic shaping her version of being here and now: the issue of existence and time.

The research through practice articulates the kind of relationship between self and experience suggested by Kongwu. The research performance ... *is Present* provides a critique of Marina Abramović's version of no-thinking mind and offers a different definition of the meditative mind: a process that when identification is suspended, the identity ceases to exist. By using the exchange between the 'real' performer and the performer inside the TV, the performance ... *is Present* explores how one does not identify with the content in the TV, and how simultaneously the identity of the performer is dissolved. The different versions of 'being here and now' and the meditative mind, reflect the making of the illusion of continuity, such as the self in different genres of performance and life.

3.1 Suspending the Identification through Meditation: Comparing Abramović's No-thinking Mind and Kongwu's Logic

The specific mode of perception is the motif going through Abramović's work. The artist has explored how to study and transfer this state of mind through the means of performance. In the early works *Freeing the Voice* (1976), *Freeing the Memory* (1976), and *Freeing the Body* (1976), she exhausted the body tools for expression as a way to empty out. Even though the early works were often associated with self-torture and shocking effect, the meditative mind is what, she considered, had gone through the development of performance. She saw pain, "as a good door to cross into another state of consciousness" (in Kaplan 1999: 13).

When I began my performances in Yugoslavia and pushed my body very hard, I started to experience different states of mind, I didn't know what they were, because I didn't have any relation to meditation or spirituality at that time, and I was not interested either. I was just an artist doing her work. But the work became more and more difficult and my body became so much more demanding on my will power and my power of concentration that I actually started to reach, through my performances, meditative states. I was not aware of it at that time. Much later when I met spiritual people, I realised that I was experiencing meditation.

(Abramović in Wijers and Pijnappel 1990: 60)

The trance-like presence seen in *Rhythm 0* (1979) became her signature, and facilitated the relationship between the performer and the visitor in *The Artist is*

Present (2010). Her existence appeared like an empty canvas and the performance instruction framed a zone of possibility. The spectators turned into the co-performers and projected their personal emotional response onto her in the environment.

But what does Abramović mean by “meditative states” and what effect does the emptying-out create? She explicitly mentioned the interest on the concept of suchness in Tibetan Buddhism. To facilitate the experience of emptiness, she not only created the performances, but the workshop *The Abramović Method* for the public (Abramović 2001; Viola and Sileo 2012) and *Cleaning the House* for the young artists (Abramović 2004; Kaplan 1999: 18-20). I will examine what kind of relationship exists between the process of experience and the identity of subject in *The Artist is Present*, and what kind of relationship exists between self and other that she established in her version of ‘being here and now’, through *Nightsea Crossing/Conjunction* and the frame of narrative. Then, I will compare her version of meditative mind to Kongwu’s logic.

The Experience and the Identity in *The Artist is Present*

Abramović, drawing from *Nightsea Crossing* (1981-1987), created *The Artist is Present* (2010). *Nightsea Crossing* was the first performance drawing of experiences found in nature. Living in the desert with Australia Aborigines changed Abramović and Ulay’s works. According to Abramović, the desert was so hot that “[p]hysically”, movement was impossible; “only our minds were functioning” (Abramović in Kaye 1996:185). “Doing nothing” in the desert revealed to Abramović “the whole other part of the mind” and reinforced that “one actually experiences” the big philosophical ideas “in your body and mind” (Wijers 1990:61). To transmit their experiences in the desert to the public through contemporary art, each of Abramović

and Ulay “chose six colours”, wore “one for each occasion” (Abramović in Wijers 1990:61) and sat motionless, “facing each other for seven hours a day” (Abramović in Wijers 1990:61), beginning before the museum opened and finishing after the museum closed, so the public would see neither beginning nor ending, but, rather, only two people sitting with “an impression of timelessness” (Abramović in Wijers 1990:61). They gave it the title *Nightsea Crossing*, with “Nightsea” serving as a metaphor “for our subconscious” (Abramović in Wijers 1990:61). When it appears that nothing is happening with the external visual form, the inner process of perception is on-going. When the public does not know the instructions given to the performers, they are “always waiting for something to happen. But when they finally come to realize that that’s the reality of the thing, they start making contact with the piece itself” (Abramović in Kaye 1996:184).

Instead of pairing with the other performer in *The Artist is Present*, the other empty chair invited any stranger to sit silently for whatever chosen duration, and to obtain the one-to-one energy dialogue with the artist in their mutual gaze and silence. There was a live-feed stream of the performance on MOMA website during the three-month performance. She created a rather theatrical space by framing the atrium with four cinema lighting and tapes, and made herself like an empty canvas with the signature trance-like presence. Visitors splashed their own anticipation, experiences, memories, and personal histories onto her.

Abramović said that the performance was about to “create a space of suchness” (Abramović 2011: n.p.) for the public to experience what she had experienced: the “no-thinking mind” (Abramović 2011: n.p.). Abramović explained that suchness is the Tibetan term for emptiness.

Suchness is empty mind, but it's not empty mind just empty mind. It's actually suchness is the fullness of empty mind, which is kind of contradiction of the term. But this is the idea that you really are not, you know, in the past or not in the future. You're just at the moment, in the space. This changes everything in your life if you get into that.

(Abramović 2013: n.p.)

“Form is emptiness, emptiness is form” comes from Heart Sutra (in Hanh 1988:1), and articulates the Buddhist concept of Two Truths. Ulay and Abramović for the first time made reference to the concept in the catalogue *Modus Vivendi: Ulay & Marina Abramović, 1980-1985*. They reprinted the article “Emptiness, the Two Truths” in which the Dalai Lama explains the concept of emptiness in an interview with John F. Avedon (1980) (Abbmuseum and Kunstverein 1985:75-7 and Abramović, Abramović, and Bern 1998:272). Since that time, the verse “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form” has been flowering as the underlying theme. As Abramović explicitly interpreted the concept of suchness through the means of performance and gave the title, as *The Artist is Present*, I investigate her version of no-thinking mind through Nāgārjuna’s perspective to advance the understanding of the relationship between the experience of being present and the identity of the subject.

Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Mahayana Buddhism, coined the concept of *śūnyatā*, from which the translation of suchness and emptiness come from. In Chapter Eighteen of his book, *The Book of Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna investigated the self and identity through the logic of *śūnyatā*. He challenged the realness of an inherent entity. That the self can be free from suffering and can be transformed “must be thought of as an inherently real entity” (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 245).

If the self were the aggregates,
It would have arising and ceasing (as properties).
If it were different from the aggregates,
It would not have the characteristics of the aggregates.

(Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 245)

Aggregates can refer to whatever kind of experiences one is having. In Buddhist text, the human's personality is analysed by the five aggregates: "physical body, sensation, perception, dispositions, and consciousness or cognition" (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 245). As Garfield noted, the aggregates should not be taken as the metaphysical categories, but only the useful communication in the meditation practice to help the practitioner "to attend his/her experience" (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 245-6).

Nāgārjuna raised the question of self and its relationship to experiences; whether the self is separate from the experiences (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:361-367; Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:263-4). If the self is the process of experience, the experience is arising and ceasing. The self is constantly changing. It cannot have continual presence as the concept of identity suggests (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:367-73). The identity means something that has an intrinsic quality different from others, and independently exists. If the self were different from the process of experience, it would not have any characteristics of the experience. So whatever 'I' experience has nothing to do with 'me' (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:264-6). Yet in our everyday experience, that we can have the identity of self is

built on the memories that are the traces of experience. Whatever kind of sensory experiences is how 'I' comes to know the 'self'. If one takes the latter position, the relationship between experience and identity become unimaginable according to experience. One proposes that the self is something outside of experience. We know things through sense experience (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:264). So if the self is different from experience, then it is "unknowable" (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:264).

If there were no self,

Where would the self's (properties) be?

From the pacification of the self and what belongs to it,

One abstains from grasping onto "I" and "mine".

(Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 247)

No self refers to the fact that the independent identity of self does not exist, neither a permanent entity. It does not mean to say that experiences do not exist. But the process that making 'something' belongs to the self, and the making of "one's own" does not exist (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:265). The concept of self has the presupposition that its properties exist, and "they must exist somewhere" (Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 247). When one refers to the identity of self, intuitively one is trying to localise where the properties and entity exist. So if there were no self, the intuitive desires to localise the self by grasping experiences as 'my' experience ceases to exist.

One who does not grasp onto "I" and "mine,"

That one does not exist.

One who does not grasp onto “I” and “mine,”

He does not perceive.

(Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 247)

When one is experiencing, one does not identify with the contents of experience as ‘my’ experience, as the properties of self. The self is not present. When one does not grasp experiences as the evidence of ‘I’, one realises that the process of experience is changing. Because the process of experience is lack of inherent existence, one cannot possess experience.

One has to understand Nāgārjuna’s words in the context of the practice of meditation. The self, who is doing the spiritual transformation, experiencing the emptiness of self, and getting rid of concepts is not available. Meditation has the purpose to free from suffering, and to understand the world without grasping, and without tagging experience with ‘my’ or ‘I’. Even when one is practicing meditation to empty and transform the self, Nāgārjuna points out that “someone who is assumed to have gotten rid of egoism and pride is also not available” (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991: 265). One has to understand that not only the common sense self that results from one identifying with the experiences is not available. The self that results from the meditative transformation is still a mental fabrication. If the identification with experience and the grasping onto ‘I’ still operate, the experience of meditation for the purpose of spiritual transformation could strengthen the experience of self. The very experience of sitting in silence could also enhance the assumption that ‘someone’ is out here.

When views of "I" and "mine" are extinguished,
Whether with respect to the internal or external,
The appropriator ceases.
This having ceased, birth ceases.

(Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 248)

When one stops taking the experiences that “belongs to the self” (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991:266), the act of appropriating experiences as the self, ceases. In other words, the experiencer ceases to exist. The problem is not about the contents of the experiences, but the identification: the habit that one appropriates internal or external experiences as the evidence of the self.

That there is a self has been taught,
And the doctrine of no-self,
By the buddhas, as well as the
Doctrine of neither self nor nonself.

(Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 249)

Even though for Nāgārjuna, the self is a product of the mental fabrication and reification of the sensory experience, Nāgārjuna does not deny that there is the embodied experience. The doctrine of self refers to the self that is a useful fiction for everyday communication and conventional reality. But the felt experiences cannot be taken as evidence to speculate on the existence of the self. Neither can a thing called ‘nonself’ be found (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:382). Nonself is useful for

communication and dependent on the doctrine of self to operate (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997: 380-5).

What language expresses is nonexistent.

The sphere of thought is nonexistent.

Unarisen and unceased, like nirvana

Is the nature of things.

(Nāgārjuna and Garfield 1995: 249)

No actual independent entities exist out there if one follows the direction of language and tries to locate what is being referred to. Language has the function of naming, recording, and indicating. Naming creates the description of experiences. Language is not the problem, but “the use of language” (Nāgārjuna and Kalupahana 1991: 268), if one takes the indicators as the evidence of things existing out there.

Everything that can be experienced has been taken as the source of the self in communication and conventional reality. In other words, if one looks for the properties of self and locates what the self is, one only finds experiences. Nonself does not refer to that, the experience of nonself can be found out there, but the identification and the conceptualisation of experiences cease to operate. When one attempted to differentiate and describe experiences as arising and disappearing, one still engages identification and conceptualisation.

After challenging the concept of self, Nāgārjuna moved one step further to avoid the possibility that nonself becomes the dogma as an objective goal to reach.

By identifying Nirvana with Samara, self with nonself (Nāgārjuna and Han 1997:386-90), Nāgārjuna recognised the habitual use of languages, aiming to stop any metaphysical speculation and habit of appropriating experiences as the properties of self. The habit of appropriating experiences makes the autonomous identity such as the identity of self, and other references for the value judgment. When one takes the result of experiencing as the identity of the experienced object, one creates the essentialised unity. To essentialise, self operates the exact habit to essentialise Dao. Zhuangzi employs the similar strategy to identify Dao with non-Dao through telling a story.

Dong-guo Zi asked Zhuangzi,

“Where can the so-called Dao be found?”

“Everywhere”, Zhuangzi answered.

“Specify where”

“It is in this ant.”

“How can it be so low?”

“It is in this rice grass.”

“How come it becomes even lower?”

“In the brick.”

“Why does it become lower and lower?”

“It is in that excrement.”

Dong-guo Zi gave no reply.

(Trans from Chen 1999: 593-4)

The distrust of language and thinking applies to Dao, the supposed 'ultimate reality' and 'transcendence'. Even though Dao occupies the central position in the whole discursive system of Daoism, Dao is still only a name, similar to other words 'not-Dao', for lack of any absolute and higher essence. By saying this, Zhuangzi used the inherently dualistic quality of language to disrupt the expectations of Dao as something holy and sacred. He also disrupted any desire of having Dao as something to achieve. He made secular as sacred. This logic is also the reason for the expression: "when one says 'Dao', it is not 'Dao'." One dissolves the duality of transcendence and everyday through the meditation.

Nāgārjuna challenged the concept of self not only in everyday communication, but also in the spiritual practice for transformation. Even the spiritual practitioner gave up concepts, and knew that 'I' am habitually thinking through concepts and creating an entry as the self and as the entity of the thing. Yet, he warned that if one is feeling that 'I' am getting rid of the habits, and 'I' am not in the past, and future, but here and now, then there is still a self to create the illusion of continuity which is looping back to enhance the sense of self, and to make the spiritual experiences as the evidence of self. He suggests that the 'self', which understands what emptiness means, and gets rid of ego, self-concepts, and habits, is not even available. Not even *the* identity of self that is here and now and fully present is available. Not even the self to be transformed is available.

Zhuangzi and Nāgārjuna went through the process to challenge the habitual pattern of experiences and the common sense concepts, but they did not come to the other conclusion, and proposed the other point of view as the relative to what they challenged. Zhuangzi expressed the nondual perception by playing the labels of

'A' and 'not-A' in the discursive systems such as Dao and Emptiness. For Zhuangzi, Dao is not Dao. For Nāgārjuna, Nirvana is Samara; self is non-self. The result is a "loop" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991), a circulation that these linguistic naming are co-arising, co-depending for the specific operation in the communication. This looping effect implies that what we see is the product of the functioning of experiencing, which we have taken as the being existing independently. This habit is not exclusive to the conventional reality, but also to 'the ultimate reality', if one is identifying with it. Nāgārjuna challenged the danger that one takes the meditative experience in the name of emptiness and non-self to increase the sense of self. Zhuangzi challenges that one takes Dao as the preferred value over not-Dao.

Based on how Nāgārjuna and Zhuangzi highlighted the danger that one prefers the meditative experience over the non-meditative experience and how meditation enhances the identity of self, I argue that from the performance entitled *The Artist is Present*, Abramović's version of the meditative mind seduces the identification; the identity is necessary to make the experience of being here and now possible. The title of *The Artist is Present* implicitly describes the experience that one uses in the meditative experiences as a way to speculate on the existence of self, and establish the presence of self. The performance indicates that the experience of 'being here and now' strengthens the experience of self. As the title of the performance implies, the experience of the endurance, silence, and stillness is where the self can be discovered. The experience generated from the exact performance structure, suggests that there is an identity of self (the appropriator) to be found; and when one cultivates the no-thinking mind, one can locate the identity. The very experience of the meditative mind grants the security of the identity, and helps to grasp the experiences as properties of self in *The Artist is Present*.

By using Nāgārjuna's examination of self, the analysis of *The Artist is Present* raised the issue on the process of experience and identity of subject in her construction of "suchness". To further understand why she emphasises the experience of 'being here and now', the context in which she developed *Nightsea Crossing/Conjunction* can help to investigate Abramović's system of narrative: how she set up the Other by using the categories of "Nature" and "East"; and how the narrative shaped the possibility of experience, particularly the experience of presence and temporality.

Presence and the Other in Abramović's Frame of Narrative

By using the meditation, Abramović created the effect of 'being here and now' that strengthens the experience of self. If this is the case, Abramović's version of emptiness is very different from the attitudes of Nāgārjuna and Zhuangzi. The frame of meaning that Abramović has constructed can investigate why she pursued the concept of being here and now, and emphasised the experience of the meditative mind. I look at how she sets up the other to position the self and through which she establishes what she means by 'being here and now'. This is the context to understand the effect and the space of suchness she created by using 'meditation'.

When in 1975 Ulay and Abramović began to collaborate on the relational work series (1976-1979), they identified with the other person, becoming the other person in *Talking About Similarity* (1976), crashing "two artists egos" (Abramović in Kaplan 1999: 17). The result created "a hermaphroditic state of being" that they called "the death of self" (Abramović in Kaplan 1999: 17). The series, *That Self*, included *Point*

of Contact, The Other: Resting Energy, Nature of Mind, and Timeless Point of View (all in 1980). Through the exploration of self and other, That Self was neither herself, nor himself (Abramović in Biesenbach 2010: 94), but a synergy of the female and male energy. That Self was the “third existence” independent of them, carried “Vital Energy” (Abramović and Ulay 1980: n.p.), and generated the energy field. It is exactly that through abandoning the “dualism” (Iles 1998: 194), the individual selves dissolve into the bigger one and the experience of That Self becomes the other unified self.

When they feel the exhaustion that they have explored all the possibility of performance through the “tough, physical performing elements” (Abramović in Kaplan 1999: 12), they go beyond the relation within two artists’ egos and look for answers in nature. *Nightsea Crossing/ Conjunction* (1981-1987/1983) was the first performance by Abramović and Ulay to draw on contact with the other. In *Conjunction* (1983), Abramović and Ulay invited the Tibetan monk Ngawang Soepa Lueyar and the Australian Aborigine Watuma Tarrur Tjungarrayi to sit with them in Amsterdam (Wijers and Pijnappel, 1990:62).

The physical part was explored, but there were a huge mental area that had not yet been touched. But we didn’t know how to proceed with the work. The only thing we knew was the best answer we could look for was in nature.

(Abramović in Kaplan 1999: 12)

Living in the desert with the Australian Aborigine, the environment was too hot. “Physically”, one cannot move, but “only our minds were functioning” (Abramović in Kaye 1996: 185). The experience of “nature” is potent enough to provide the answer

to seek the possibility of performance and explore the potentiality of mind. Abramović and Ulay shifted from their performance approach, from more “physical intervention” towards “contemplative exchange” (Iles 2003: 164). The inspiration in nature is connected to the exploration of presence. They provided the text concerning *Nightsea Crossing*.

Presence.

Being present, over long stretches of time,

Until presence rises and falls, from

Material to immaterial, from

Form to formless, from

Instrumental to mental, from

Time to Timeless.

(Abramović and Ulay in Abramović, Abramović and Bern 1998: 258)

By the category of nature, she implied not only the desert landscape, but also the Aboriginal people’s way of living. In this context, she draws inspiration from nature to consider the issue of presence and temporality. Abramović sets up the category of the other:

The East is a source of spirituality and also of forgotten knowledge we no longer have. That, together with nature, is very inspiring for me. That is where I can reach art. Then I came to the West, where I can make my own mixture of things.

(Abramović in Kaplan 1999: 19)

The artist defined that one specific quality of “a source of spirituality” and “forgotten knowledge” is the non-Western technology of consciousness.

When I was in Tibet, or when I lived among the Aborigines in Australia, or when I learnt some of the Sufi rites, I understood that these cultures have a long tradition of techniques of meditation which lead the body to a borderline state that allows us to make a mental leap to enter different dimensions of existence and to eliminate the fear of pain, death, or the limitations of the body.

(in Dobrila and Abramović 1998: 18)

Through the means of performance, one cultivates the meditative mind and explores the potentiality of mind that becomes the motif of her solo performances.

How can a Western body have this experience, and how can an Eastern body push much farther into an area unknown for us? I am interested in this because for me, performance is a means of research to find mental and physical answers.

(Abramović in Kaplan 1999: 8)

She defines her function of being an artist as “bridging” (Abramović in Wijers and Kamphof 1990: 311) between the dualistic categories of East and West, human and non-human energy exchange, self and other, the performer and public, so the artist

can make the Eastern wisdom accessible, that is, “unknown” for the Western audience.

Said’s Orientalism can be useful for reading the narrative in which Abramović produces the notion of ‘East’ and the identity of the artist (self) through performance.

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among who are poet, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on."

(Said 2003:2-3)

The artist as a bridge is a result of essentialising self and other. In Marina Abramović’s narrative, she has accepted the distinction of ‘East’ and ‘West’ concerning “mind”, the different attitude towards time and presence. The ‘East’ has become an empty marker and mirror which projected Abramović’s desire for ‘being here and now’ and pursue for ‘presence’. By using the critiques of intercultural performance, the artist as the subject went out of the West, sought the authenticity and beauty from the East as the passive object (Holledge and Tompkins 2000), and assumed clear-cut cultural boundaries (Chaudhuri 2002: 34), so the artist’s function as the bridge could be established. The artists had access to the East, and brought what they found out back to the privileged audience in the West (Holledge and

Tompkins 2000). East in this narrative never had the agency to transform, was determined by the Western artist as something timeless. She essentialised both East and West. Then, in the narrative East connected to nature, as something raw and authentic. By putting East and nature in the same category for operating, the artist defines what West is and what the artist is.

In this setting-up, East *is* pure without corruption and preserves the 'unknown' wisdom for the West; West *is* corrupted, particularly on the notion of time.

The performance [Nightsea Crossing/Conjunction] was about experiencing something we never experience in our Western culture, that is the 'here and now'. All our lives we live either in the past or in the future. We are here just to run to the future. We never sit and reflect on the moment 'now', like this moment when I'm talking to you, now.

(Abramović in Wijers and Kamphof 1990: 308)

How she can make the critique on "our Western culture" is based on the assumption that East is virtuous, without corruption and a long tradition as timeless, unchanging and enduring. In her account of the experience, "we" is the West, "here and now" is the other. She both represents West and other. This particular experience of time, here and now becomes the source of the other. The experience of being here and now is unfamiliar to "we": West. In other words, the more she made the specific kind of experience unfamiliar, the more the other became present. The making of the other, by taking 'being here and now', caused a looping effect that made "we" and "our western culture" become present. What is at stake is that she appropriates the experiences as the property of self and other. Given the treatment of experience, the

identity of self is necessary to “being here and now” (Abramović in Wijers and Kamphof 1990: 308).

Tracking down how she embraced the other, the other never existed in the way that she used the indicators. ‘East’ refers back to the narrative system itself, not the ‘real’ East. As Said wrote,

the phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient [...] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a "real" Orient.

(Said 2003:5)

‘East’ is the product of the functioning of desiring and a constructed consistency. The subject constructed the relationship between self and other by using ideas and past experiences. The subject mistakes the relationship as the ‘being’ of object, and in turn enhances the sense of self. The discourse itself creates a consistency, an illusion of continuity: the identity of self (other). In Abramović’s narrative, the other has been emptied out. East and nature are empty markers. They indicate the subject’s own desires and projection. The other operates in a way to map out the trajectories of longing, and to mobilise marching toward that idealised homeland—self. East becomes the empty canvas. The artist projects her utopia onto the other. Like in *The Artist is Present*, she makes the artist the empty canvas. Visitors attribute their personal stories and contexts onto her. Through establishing the relationship between self and other, the presence comes into being. In this approach, the artist

positions the self in the contemporary art context. East is one of many indicators that refer back to the desires of the subject. The other as the empty marker is useful to making the desires tangible. When things become more easily categorised, things are more graspable to enter the narrative.

Abramović's pursuit of 'being here and now' and the need of presence is associated with the need of the other to be the 'real' self and the need to establish the self as foundation for experiencing. Amelia Jones noted the striking parallel between "the desire for live art to deliver presence" and European modernist's desire of authenticity, "found often among "primitive" cultures" (Jones 2011:21). According to Jones, "a belief in presence" articulated in Abramović's narrative is "an artifact of European early-modern to modern belief systems, conditioned through European colonization of Africa and other parts of the world" (Jones 2011:21). The experience of 'being here and now' becomes the mythology that Abramović appropriated to create the timeless otherness. By doing so, the subject has the substance to exist independently with the full presence. The need of the other is how the identity of the subject can be present. Being here and now and meditation become the source of the other. The more unfamiliar the other is, the stronger the sense of self can be. Through the identity, being here and now can be possible. This is the underlying frame to understand the process of experience and the identity implied in *The Artist is Present* and Abramović's no-thinking mind. The primacy of process and embodiment, particularly her version of being here and now becomes the way to set up the other, and secure a unified subject as the centre of experience.

The pursuit of self-presence and 'presentness' has its history. The desire for 'presentness' is not so unique to performance art. According to the philosopher Stanley Cavell,

what painting wanted, in wanting connection with reality, was a sense of presentness—not exactly a conviction of the world's presence to us, but of our presence to it. ... [O]ur subjectivity became what is present to us, individuality became isolation. The route to conviction in reality was through the acknowledgment of that endless presence of self. ... Apart from the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneous granting of otherness as well), I do not understand the value of art. Apart from this wish and its achievement, art is exhibition. ... To speak of our subjectivity as the route back to our conviction in reality is to speak of romanticism.

(Cavelle 1979:22)

As Bolter and Grusin noted, the desire of self-presence was remediated from painting into new electronic media (Bolter and Grusin 2000:234-5). Similarly, we could see how the desire of presentness was remediated from painting to performance art, particularly in the way that Abramović produces the theatricality of 'presence' in the dynamic of closeness and distance.

Paradoxically, in Abramović's system of narrative, being here and now is the desire of presence: just being *with* you, *for* you. Presence is like a gift, a 'something' delivered to 'someone'. One seeks the capacity for just being fully present and "making contact with" (Abramović in Kaye 1996: 184) each other. To fulfil the connection is deemed impossible because this version of self needs the other to be possible. Given the frame of narrative, meaning that the "Great Divide" (Latour 1993:

99), nature and East, make the modern subject possible, the zero-distance is impossible to reach. In the relation between self and other, the dynamic of closeness and distance, the theatricality of being here and now in *The Artist is Present* is performed. The more the volume of being here and now is amplified, the more present the self and simultaneously the other are. If one invested more effort to make the connection, one experiences more the impossibility of the closeness. The distance by default, and the longing for closeness, has linked to the labyrinth of memories and the sea of unconscious emotions. If one is determined to build the intimacy, one suffers. However, by overcoming the distance one achieved “the endless present of self” and in turn one can make the reality graspable again (Cavelle 1979:22). The more dedication that one commits to ‘being here and now’, the more the distance between the self and the other becomes.

3.2 The Meditation and Being Here and Now in Kongwu

Abramović’s ‘emptiness’ or ‘suchness’ has its route back to the need of having the authenticity. The meditative mind becomes an instrument to serve the historical constructs, particularly the belief system of presence and the need of presentness. In Abramović’s narrative, the experience of ‘meditation’ and ‘being here and now’ become the source of the other. Consequently, the identity of subject ‘has’ presence. But Kongwu developed meditation to suspend the identification, so *the* being here and now in Kongwu does not need the identity of subject and other. Abramović has constructed performances to experience ‘suchness’, particularly the experience of being here and now, for example in the performance *The Artist is Present*, the workshop *Cleaning the House* (Kaplan 1999: 18-20), and the installation-workshop

The Abramović Method for the public. Performance turns the attention toward the embodied experience. Meditation facilitates a way that one can attend the event of one's process of experience and examines the treatment of experience. Given that she has interpreted 'suchness' through performance, by referencing the development of meditation within the context of Kongwu, I refine the different results of meditation, suggesting the alternative understanding of the relationship between experience and temporality.

When she walked the Chinese wall, Abramović found the title 'Boat emptying, stream entering' that referred to "these special states of mind" (Abramović in Wijers and Kamphof 1990: 302). She did not know where the reference was from, but she said:

The title was: 'Boat emptying, stream entering'. It is a very poetic title. It looks like a puzzle, but it has a lot of meaning for me. The 'boat emptying' means: you should go to the open sea, and there is a boat, full of ballast. The boat is your body. In order to be free, to be able to develop yourself, to be able to get connected to the flow of nature, you must throw the ballast out of the boat into the sea. Then the boat, your body, takes you there naturally. I am working with minerals in different forms to show the way of emptying our boat. This is the message, how to empty the boat. Our boat is too far full.

(Abramović in Wijers and Kamphof 1990: 302)

To locate the reference within its context can help to understand Abramović's way of working and investigate the different implications. The metaphor of emptying the

boat comes from Daoist text *Zhuangzi*. To experience 'emptying the boat', Zhuangzi developed the meditation, 'sitting in forgetfulness' and 'fasting of mind-heart'. Zhuangzi developed the contemplative practice: xinzhai (心齋) and zuowang (坐忘). Xinzhai in translation is 'fasting of mind-heart'. Zuowang is 'sitting in forgetfulness'. The Daoist practice aims to realise the state of xugj (虛己), 'the emptied self', and seeing everything as equal without personal preferences. The metaphor, emptying the boat refers to the specific way of perceiving that is free from the conceptual ordering, without duality.

Zhuangzi created a fictional conversation in which Confucius (孔子) described to his disciple Yan Hui (顏回), how to practice the fasting of mind-heart,

Unify your attention. Rather than listening with the ear, listen with the mind-heart. Rather than listen with the mind-heart, listen with qi. Listening stops at the ear, the mind-heart stops at the matching [phenomena and thoughts]. As for qi, it is empty, waiting to be aroused by other things. Only if you achieve the state of emptiness, Dao can gather. Emptiness is the fasting of mind-heart.

(Zhuangzi and Graham 1981: 68; Chen 1999:126-31)

Yan Hui responds that he never succeeded reaching the state of forgetting the self before receiving the teaching of the fasting of mind-heart. After this, suddenly he feels the dissolve of the self. He asked, "Would that be emptiness?" (Zhuangzi and Graham 1981:69). The fasting of mind-heart aims to achieve the mode of perception. The assumed separation of self and other dissolves. In the specific mode of perception, the observer disengages with the goal-oriented activities, and dis-

identifies with concepts. Ears can only listen to the external audible sounds. Mind-heart means the conceptual process that orders the sensory experiences, when one senses the matching phenomena such as sounds. 'Listening with qi' could refer to the way of experiencing that is 'pure' in the sense that one disengages with the habits of differentiation and mental construction. 'Qi' (energy) in this case refers to the specific mode of experience that is nondual. Instead of catching or framing things by the conceptual construction, one is in the state of waiting without expectation, and awareness without selection.

To dissolve the self, Zhuangzi offers the other practice, zuowang (坐忘), translated as sitting in forgetfulness. In another fictional dialogue between Confucius (孔子) and his disciple Yan Hui (顏回), Yan Hui reports his learning progress. This time the disciple Yan Hui teaches sitting in forgetfulness to Confucius.

"I make progress"

"How so?" said Confucius.

"I have forgotten about rites and music."

"Good. But you still have far to go"

Another day Yan Hui saw Confucius again.

"I make progress."

"How so?"

"I have forgotten about Goodwill and Duty."

"Good. But you still have far to go."

Another day he saw Confucius again.

"I make progress."

"How so?"

“I just sit and forget.”

Confucius was taken aback.

“What do you mean, just sit and forget?”

“I let organs and physical structures drop away, dismiss eyesight and hearing, part from body-form, expel intellectual, and go along with the universal thorough fare. This is what I mean by “just sit and forget”.

(Zhuangzi and Graham 1981: 92; Chen 1999:216-9)

The fundamental Confucian ways of organising the relationship between the self and the world is li (禮), meaning the social rituals. Rites and music as the crucial forms embody social ritual. Goodwill and Duty as the Confucian core guideline of morality are the internalised social judgments. To use the fictional story that Yan Hui forgot about all Confucian ways of living, Zhuangzi criticises the dominance and artificiality of Confucian social values and conventions.

Even though Zhuangzi and Confucianism share the organic worldview of the qi field and the ideal goal of creating harmony with qi, Zhuangzi disagreed with Confucian's approach (Yang 1993). Zhuangzi proposed the practice of sitting in forgetfulness that was driven by his deep distrust of language and conceptual differentiation. By abandoning the conceptual structuring of things, Zhuangzi diminished the dualistic ordering of things and personal preferences. Through sitting in forgetfulness, the self is dissolving and expanding by becoming not-self. Sitting in forgetfulness generated “bodiless embodiment” (Wu 1993:393). According to Wu, bodiless is not disembodiment. Bodiless refers to the forgetfulness of the self and identity, and the deep distrust of the communicative function imposed on body and

the construction of body by the artificial rules such as Confucianism's principle of the body behaviours (禮, *li*; social rituals). Bodiless embodiment is the movement towards "non-selfconsciousness" (Wu 1993: 413) through dissolving the conceptual ordering of experiences and the boundary of the observer subject and object. Bodiless embodiment suggests the experience of 'embodiment without the identity of self' (which I articulate further in my research performance). The dynamics of disengagement-engagement is embodied in the contemplative practice. The conceptual structure creates the separation between self and other that results in the violence of differentiation. In the fasting of one's mind-heart and sitting in forgetfulness, one disengages dualistic ordering as the way of making sense of the world.

In the Buddhism meditation, Samatha and vipasyana are two gates of perception to observe the 'theatre-like' construction of the reality, and illusion of continuity such as the concept of self, and time. The Buddhist meditation was called Samatha-vipasyana in Pali, zhiguan in Chinese, 'just sitting', mindfulness and insightful meditation in English. Samatha in Pali, or zhi in Chinese, means cessation. Samatha, cessation, has two meanings, namely, breaking the habit and concentration. One stops the meaning making, conceptualisation and the mechanism of the conventional reality in which the fictional being is constructed, and the provisional positioning operates. One stops the wondering mind, rests one's attention in one single point without distraction, and maintains the awareness to cultivate the capacity of concentration. Vipasyana in Pali or quan in Chinese, means observation without habit of the conceptual ordering and identification. Vipasyana, observation without habit, means to cut through the illusion, to penetrate the appearance of phenomena, leading to the manifestation of the ultimate reality that

refers to the nondual perception, awareness without judgement. The observer applies the power of one-pointed concentration to scrutinize the Buddhist principles of things such as form as emptiness (Muller 2007: n.p.). If for the long period of practice, one follows the psychosomatic methods to still the thoughts and differentiations, one can achieve the mode of perception that is “conceptually unmediated awareness” (Wallace 2000: 114). The “conceptually unstructured awareness” (Wallace 2000: 117) is what Suzuki referred to as Satori, a state of pure consciousness and enlightenment that John Cage also quoted often in his lectures and writings. The psychosomatic activities are the core foundation to achieve nondual perception.

Even though there are differences between the Zhuangzi’s and Buddhism tradition of practices, they share the distrust of language and conceptual thinking. They both see that language has a communicative function and constitutes the ‘first truth’, the ‘conventional reality’ in Nāgārjuna’s term. The operation of the conventional reality is based on the dualistic thinking and differentiation inherently in the mental conceptualisation and representation. The world constructed by names and conventions is provisional positioning without any absolute essence. The contention leads to a challenge of the realness of the common sense reality. The conventional reality has nothing wrong with its communicative function. However, it becomes a problem when one has the emotional investment and the feeling associated with the indicators. That is what attachment means. The chain of thoughts multiplies the emotional association and investment. Nevertheless, things never remain in the same condition as what thought and concept indicated. For example, when one says ‘now’, using the linguistic label to point to the things and situation, ‘now’ is already past. This is the root of suffering. The spiritual practice,

being free from suffering refers to experiencing the world by disengaging with the dualistic indicators.

The problem that meditation aims to solve is the persistent habit that one identifies with, the result of the habitual way of experiencing, and engaging with conceptual differentiation and ordering. The reason that Kongwu considers it to be the problem is only because we have the tendency to create emotional association and to experience in a way mediated by the dualistic ordering. The tendency creates suffering if one cannot fulfil the direction of the desires driven by the chain effects. Meditation cultivates the nondual experience, not just on the level of the conventional reality. Through disrupting the habit, unlearning and relearning the specific mode of perception, one sees no hierarchy between the conventional and ultimate reality in Nāgārjuna's term, and Dao and not-Dao. Meditation, grounded on the embodied experience cultivates the nonduality of transcendence and everyday. This is also why emptiness is form, and form is emptiness, the verse from Heart Sutra, and a motif that Abramović has constructed her version of suchness.

Based on the analysis of time from Kongwu's perspective discussed in the previous chapter, the language creates the illusion of continuity, that is called time. Past is only the memory that one recalls, and future is the expectation. In relation to past and future, present becomes. The present is the temporal indicator that one used to describe the relationship between the subject and the object. We take the relationship between object and subject as something real with self-existence. Naming the relationship by time and other associated labels triggered the associated feelings and emotions that have effect on the next actions, emotions and feelings, and simulates the sense of real.

The fundamental problem of time is the assumption that there is a subject, and on the other end, there is an object. If one is exploring what 'being here and now' means, according to Kongwu logic, there is not even 'the self' who is experiencing here and now. If saying 'I am here and now', there is still a relationship that one describes between the subject and the object. There is still a habit that one takes the relationship between the subject and the object, as something that substantially exists out there.

When one is in the meditative mind, time ceases to exist, because one sees that time is an accumulation of concepts, experiences, values, and the personal conditions and contexts are being taken as a measurable entity (absolute time) in which events take place. Time is like the medium in which experiences take place. One sees how the illusion of continuity is being created. The version of 'being here and now' in Kongwu refers to this kind of counter-intuitive understanding. Furthermore, one understands that the illusion of continuity comes from the rooted problem—the assumption of the subject and object. Not only the concept of time, but also the concept of self is the illusion of continuity. The diverse use of meditation into performance raises the question: how far can we push the limit of language and its relationship to embodiment?

For Kongwu, if there is a self who is experiencing 'being here and now', it is not 'being here and now', but living in the past and the future. The illusion of continuity remains to exist. How self becomes self, has the same mechanism as how time becomes time. If there is still an identity present, being here and now is a

consequence of experiencing from the assumed fixed position, and that one takes the description of the relationship between self and event as real.

Abramović's *The Artist is Present* implies that being here and now becomes the source for the identity of self. There is an operation of taking the accumulated experiences as the identity of self. Her 'being here and now', represents the result that the self, being the assumed referencing point establishes the relationship between the subject and object. The identification strengthens the experiences of self, and the separation of the fixed subject and object. The very experience of being here and now amplified the experience of self. In her version of 'no-thinking mind', there is a self who empties the thoughts. Her version of 'being here and now' enhances the self. If so, the effect is exactly what Nāgārjuna challenged when he examined the concept of self.

3.3 Dis-identifying with the Description of Experiences: The Research Performance ... *is Present*

The performance ... *is Present* articulates the effects of treating experience in relation to identity and maps a trajectory of Kongwu's incorporation into performance art, using Nāgārjuna's and Zhuangzi's principles. Consequently, my work critiques the implication of *The Artist is Present*. The research performance ... *is Present*, by creating a dialogue between the 'real' performer and the Television (TV) performer, demonstrates how one does not identify with the content of the TV programming, and simultaneously how the identity of the performer is dissolved. The performance elaborates on the concept of *the* meditative mind from Kongwu's

perspective. Using the circulation between two modes of the performer, ... *is Present* reveals how the unified self is dispersed through a dynamic of identification and dis-identification. In this way, ... *is Present* undermines the production of the self that results from one's identifying with the embodied experience, specifically 'being here and now'. Given this dynamic, ... *is Present* elaborates a process from ~~*The Artist is Present*~~ to ... *is Present*. The subject is left to uncertainty. My work argues the impossibility to assembling a unified self by appropriating the meditative experience and cultivating being here and now via performance techniques.



3.1 I-Lien Ho, ...*is Present*, the snapshot from the video documentation

In the beginning of the performance, the 'real' performer assumes the self has more real presence than the TV because of being with spectators in the flesh-to-flesh condition. She attacks the TV performer by reason of the fact that the body is not 'here', in the same room with the spectators. The TV is just a machine playing content that is the result of some electronic transmission and so cannot be the performer. The 'real' performer claimed the singular 'realness' of being a performer,

and challenges the TV performer for not really being a performer at all, but an aggregation of those electronic lights and sounds. When the real performer challenges the 'realness' of the TV performer's identity, the real performer also challenges the underlying assumption for building the realness of being a 'real' performer.

To examine what assumption the identity is established on, let us look at two ways of watching the TV. Watching with dis-identification with content is how the 'real' performer attacks that the TV is not really a performer. If one does not identify with the content that the TV plays, the identity of TV performer does not come to the attention. The physicality of the TV becomes the foreground of attention. The received sounds and lights from the electronic transmission are never being appropriated into a unity. In this sense, the identity of the TV performer does not occur. What one experiences is the physicality of the TV set: a silver stand, a flat surface, a machine plugged into the socket, and flashing lights and sounds as the result of electronic signal transmission.

The other way of watching is similar to how we watch TV everyday. If one identifies with the content that the TV plays, one perceives the electronic sounds and lights, as there is a performer inside the TV. The physicality and the electronic mechanism of TV are in the background of attention. As mentioned before, Zhuangzi discussed three ways of listening to explain 'fasting of the mind-heart'. Listening with the mind-heart is a habit that one constantly matches the external audible sounds (the result of "listening with the ear") and the thoughts. Fasting of the mind-heart means to stop the habit of matching phenomena and thoughts, and ordering the sensory experiences. "Listening with qi" as a metaphor, describes that one

experience without grasping the experiences as a unity, and stops any mental fabrication. When one watches TV, one matches the received sounds and lights, and the chains of concepts. Therefore, one identifies a performer being inside the TV. In this approach, the contents of experiences become the evidence of the identity of the performer inside the TV. Through interpretation, identification, and mental fabrication, the perceived sensory experiences become the identity of the TV performer.

The TV performer does not simply mimic the contents that the 'real' performer performed in the opening of the performance, but mimickes the logic that the 'real' performer used to strengthen her experience of self. The 'real' performer dismissed the identity of the TV's performer by dis-identifying with the content that the TV plays. But established the identity of a performer by identifying with the content that she plays as real. Given two treatments of experiences, the TV performer extends the two ways of watching the TV to undermine how the 'real' performer established the realness of being a performer.

The reason that the 'real' performer asserted to being more real, is because she identifies with the scripted content that she plays, and takes the experience as evidence and the property of self. Nonetheless, the description of the experience is only the outcome that the subject describes, in the relationship between self and other. Then one mistakes the relationship between self and other as the source of the independent being. This is how the 'realness' of the 'real' performer is established. The TV performer exposed the assumption that the real performer used. The exact logic that the real performer used to challenge the identity of the TV performer undermines the promise of the 'realness' of being a performer. This way of

dismissing the identity of the TV performer can serve to dissolve the real performer's identity. The contents that the TV plays are electronic lights and sounds. The contents that the 'real' performer plays are the scripted words, movements and whatever experiences happen there. In this way, how the realness of the 'real' performer's being and identity is claimed, is not so different from the TV performer. Both of them are becoming real and not so real in the same degree. Without identifying with the contents, the identity of being cannot be determined. Without mental fabrication, matching experiences and thoughts, the identity of being cannot even exist.

The identification refers to the fact that the receiver receives whatever sensory information, and initiates the intimate whispering between experiences and thoughts. One is naming the perceived experiences. The receiver is feeling the effect of the TV's sounds and lights. The sounds are perceived as speech, matching the familiar words. Colour, light and shadow are organised as the familiar visual form, a human figure. The intimate whispering between thoughts and sensory experiences assembles a product: the identity of the performer. So, if the viewer is watching the TV with the mind-heart, the viewer creates the presence of the performer by matching thoughts and sensory experiences and identifying with the contents that the TV plays. When one treats the corporeal experiences with identification, one designs the aggregate of experiences, concepts, and values into the identity.

This approach of using TV and video that is the electronic technology of representation, does not seduce the habitual way of perceiving, but suspend the identification, a habit taken for granted. The electronic technology does not point to the contents, but the functioning of experiencing. As McLuhan said, "the media is the message" (McLuhan 1967), suggesting that technology is the extension of the

human's body and mind, we can also use technology the other way round, outside-in approach, to retrace steps to the inner logic of experience. Video as the external eyes helps to expand more in the third-person perspective. TV helps to see something far away in the distance. To reverse this logic, technology benefits to externalise the inner perceptual pattern for investigation. Meditation is a means of seeing from inside. Meditation shifted the attention from the contents of experiences to the functioning of experiencing, the processing itself. To make video work in this way, we can explore how experiences become *the* experiences we thought them to be, and how the process of experience becomes the experience of self. When the viewer is seeing, the act of seeing forces the experience to be the property of the entity. As the looping result, we can have the definite position and presence of something, appearing, something out there. The way of using the TV video, either live-feed or not here³, externalises the inner perceptual process, and the recycling logic between TV and the 'real' performer becomes an allegory of how we habitually experience the self, and how we can break away from the habit.

The 'real' performer appropriated the experience: 'being here and now', sharing the same place, and the flesh-to-flesh communication with the spectator, and so asserted, "I am the performer, not you" to the TV performer. The TV performer

³ I made this performance twice, one with live-feed, and the other with the recorded video. In this case, it does not matter whether it is live-feed or not, because what matters is the response to what happens when one encounters the circulation between the performers and the spectators, and how the viewers who carry the personal histories and contexts, treat the content of the experiences make the effect of the identity.

recycled the 'real' performer's treatment of the contents that the TV plays and so dis-identified with the contents that the 'real' performer performed. When the identification was suspended, the content of experiences could not be appropriated as the evidence of identity. The identities of the 'real' performer and the TV performer were negated by their conversation. The 'real' performer gradually dis-identified with the content of experiences that she felt by exchanging gazes, occupying the same room with the spectators, acknowledging each other's presence. One could not take the feeling of 'more' direct flesh-to-flesh communication as the stronger evidence of being more 'real'. When the identities of two performers are dissolving, how can the spectator's identity still exist?

That a performer can *be* the performer is because of the content that one performs. Just like the 'real' performer can be a performer only because of the content, the scripted movements, and the performed interaction. The identity of being a spectator is only possible because of the contents of the performance. Being a performer and spectator function in a way to support the conventional roles of being watched, and watching, and to circulate the rules of the interaction and agreement. Then, in the circulation of being watched and watching, the identity of the performance, and artwork is established. When the identity of the performer is dissolving, how can the identity of the spectator still be possible? When one dis-identifies with the contents that the performer plays, how can the identity of the performance work exist? How can one still take the contents of the experiences as something being contained *in* the performance, to identify *the* performance?

The TV externalises the content and form of the experiences, and helps to articulate the habit of experiences, so stopping the habit can be possible. The habit of grasping, forces the contents of experiences to become the properties of

something appearing out there. The habit of matching experiences and thoughts, arranges the sensory experiences conceptually. The separation of object and subject, being the underlying assumption shapes how experiences become *the* experiences.

The way of using video in ... *is Present* is distinct from Abramović's approach to video. Abramović said:

"Until the 1980s I used the video purely as a means of documentation, a way of recording my performances. In 1983, Ulay and I went to Thailand and made a video called *City of Angels* where we took the role of directors and used color for the first time."

(Abramović in Biesenbach 2010: 95)

City of Angel was the first work that they made for video and TV beyond the pure documentation. In the 1990s, the series of performances in which Abramović washed a skeleton with the brush and soap water was transformed into a five-channel installation, *Cleaning the Mirror I* (1995). Each of five vertically stacked monitors played the fragmented part of the skeleton: the skull, ribs, pelvis, hands, and feet (Iles 1998: 194). In *Balkan Baroque* (1997), the artist performed the mourning of the war in Yugoslavia. The artist washed the bones for several hours with the metal brush. The three-channel video of Abramović's father, mother and her lecture about catching rats, was projected on the wall, when she washed the bones and cleansed the shame. In short, the video typically served as the content provider device in her approach of using video.

In Abramović's narrative, because the possibility of video is restricted to the function of documentation and representation, she considered that video was "the second-rated document", "better than the photographs or slides, but could never replace the live presence" (Abramović in Biesenbach 2010: 95). Craving for "the live presence", she did not exclude theatrical elements, but preferred "performance art" over "theatre". She defined theatre as "a space of making belief" and "fake"(in the Marina Abramović Institute website). Abramović's view on photographs and video as the secondary because of being less 'real' exemplify a "reductive binary opposition of the live and the mediatized" (Auslander 2008:3). For Abramović, 'performance art' and 'physical body' can promise the 'liveness' and immediacy that other arts and media cannot achieve. Abramović used performance art to establish a ground for the 'real' and make connection with reality. The human body and performance art occupy the preferred value to stimulate the experience of presence and time.

My use of video does not have the agonistic dynamics between the 'live' (human body) and the 'mediatized' (video, photography) which operate in Abramović's narrative. Auslander interrogated the perception of the "oppositional relationship between the live and the mediatized" (2008: 4). He deconstructed the assumed opposition between the live and mediatized, as "ontological differences" (2008:7), and argued the opposition between the live and mediatized as "determined by cultural and historical contingencies"(2008:11). My juxtaposition of the 'physical' and the mediated body unsettles the reductive opposition. The video and theatre that my research performance used are, in Abramović's narrative, at the end of the corrupted, with the least value. Nonetheless, the habit of identification can happen with the use of video and body as the medium for artistic production. How one value is over the other is more interesting. The different approaches to video implied the

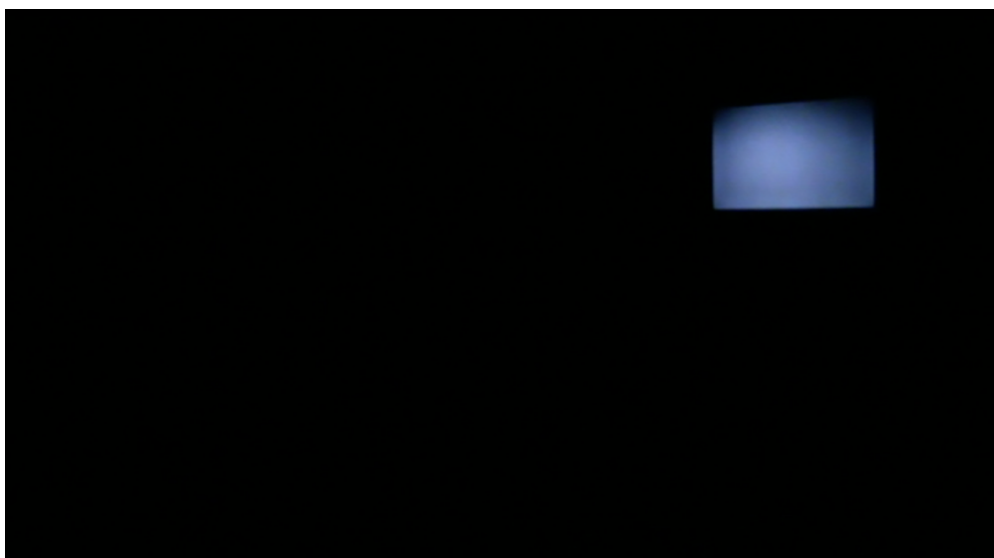
different treatments of experience to push the exploration of temporality and embodiment, causing the different versions of being here and now.

The intermediality produced by the juxtaposition of the 'real' and the mediatized performer in ... *is Present* introduces indeterminacy. This is different from Auslander's view on intermediality. Auslander used the example of dance performance *Pôles* by Pps Danse of Montreal to suggest that in an intermedial performance, both the weak (the live "body) and strong medium (digital) "are assimilated to the dominant medium" (Auslander 2000: 9). His view on putting the two different modes of 'being' together, shows that the weak media is incorporated into the strong media (Auslander 2000:5-11). However, my use of two different modes of 'being' resonates with Paik's approach to media, particularly in *Real Fish/Live Fish* discussed in Chapter One. The co-presencing of two modes of 'being' questions the process of perceiving and the mechanism of identification that bring the 'being' of thing into presence. The intermediality creates ambivalence in the dynamic of different media and positions. The performance ... *is Present* creates a unlocalisable situation in which one cannot decide 'what' the 'presence' could be, but acknowledges that the 'being' comes into presence as 'the felt' conditioned by the past experiences and the moment of encountering.

This juxtaposition makes the representation reflect itself, and makes perception reflect its process of perceiving and functioning of transmission. The functioning of perceiving (humans) and of the transmission (the electronic video device) reminds each other's 'already-there': the particular way of perceiving conditioned by the past experience and historical development. This approach to the intermedia connects to Paik's attitude towards the ontology of music. In "New Ontology of Music" (Paik 1974: n.p), he shifts the question from what music is to

when music is, and aims to “develop[ed] and exploit[ed]” this question in his “post music”, which is his television experiment (Paik 1974: n.p). Paik expands John Cage’s indeterminacy in music to visual arts. Cage transfers Zen philosophy to music. Higgins suggested that Cage “explored the intermedia between music and philosophy (Higgins [1965] 2001:50). Even though Cage and Abramović both engage with Buddhism philosophy, they have the very distinct approach to process and self. As discussed in Chapter Two, Cage introduced indeterminacy by the chance operation to remove the artist’s ego-self. In *The Artist is Present*, Abramović exploited the ‘no-thinking mind’ to pursue the need for “presentness” and an “endless present of self” (Cavelle 1979:22) through the embodied process.

In this particular context of performance practice, there is a “remediation” (Bolter and Grusin 2000) between different media, philosophy, music, video and theatre, which creates a network of “intermedia” (Higgins [1965] 2001). The intermedia imply the indeterminacy concerning the boundary (inside/outside, self/other). The intermediality in my performance does not support Auslander’s intermediality. He used the example of the juxtaposition of the live and the mediatized (Auslander 2000:5-11; 2008: 42-3) to suggest a more deterministic view. Both the strong medium and weak are “assimilated to the dominant medium” (Auslander 2000: 9). Even though my performance supports Auslander’s resistance of the ontological differences between the live and the mediatized, my performance suggests that the intermediality introduces the indeterminacy.



3.2 I-Lien Ho, ... *is Present*, the snapshot from the video documentation

Content, generated in the dialogue and the situation of the theatre is the device to trace the functioning of experience. To create the recycling of the identification and dis-identification suspends the habit that one speculates the identity as something out there with the definite presence and position. When the 'real' performer started the dis-identification with the contents, she still tried to localise where the self is. Yet she could not achieve. Wherever she localised the self, the TV performer responded with the exact opposite. The play of 'A' and 'not-A' in the conversation dissolved any certainty that the temporal and spatial markers can promise. The final line, "...just here" suggests that the described relationship between self and environment by temporal or spatial concepts cannot be established because of any fixed reference, like the identity of self cannot be found. Any point of view is unsettled. The self cannot be placed as something out there. The figure of the 'real' performer is fading into darkness. The stage leaves the sounds of the breathing, and the empty screen of the TV. The content is emptied. What is left is just the process of transmission.

In “THE HUMAN NATURE OF THE BOT: a response to Philip Auslander” concerning the issue of liveness, Herbert Blau raised the question, whether a performance is “a specifically human activity” (2002:23). It is precisely that the bot can mimic “the specifically human activity” very well, so we receive the bot’s performance as ‘being lively’(Blau 2002:23). Blau observes that the notion of liveness shifts “from being alive to being lively” (Blau 2002:23). “Being alive” implies a quality that a performer has. “Being lively” implies a quality that audiences feel in and through performance. The shift “from being alive to being lively” suggests that a performer can be “dead or alive” (Blau 2002:23), a machine, a bot, or a genuine human being. In shifting “from the ontological to the temporal”, the notion of liveness means “a relationship of simultaneity”, that is, “an event in real time that can be watched as it occurs” (Blau 2002:23). From Kongwu perspective, whatever we define liveness as the ontological or temporal, what is shared between the two is a habit of identification.

The identification forces the contents of experiences to become the properties of something appearing out there, which can be the identity of a performer or a performance. For example, the activities that a bot performs trigger our identification, an intimate whispering between the digital and visual information and our concepts of ‘being a human’ or ‘the activities that a human being does’. As the result, we feel that the bot’s performance is “being lively”. Because of the identification, we produce the ‘being’ of a performer and the identity of a performance for ourselves as the audiences. The debate between Auslander and Blau exposes a fundamental assumption, the separation of subject and object that makes the concept of liveness possible. The debate implies that liveness is a result of an anthropocentric ordering of events.

Through the habit of identification, we call a specific “relationship of simultaneity” (Blau 2002:23) as ‘liveness’ and attribute the felt relationship between the subject and object as the quality that a performer or a performance has. We force the specific relationship between the subject and object as the properties and ‘being’ of the event. If we follow the logic of Kongwu, the presence is a product of a particular way of perceiving. The habit of identification produces the ‘presence’ of a performer and a performance for the perceiver. We often localise the ‘presence’ in a performer or a performance. The desire to localise the presence needs the temporal and spatial markers such as ‘here and now’, which implies a localisable self. If we dissolve the fundamental assumption of liveness, such as the separation of the subject and object, can the concept of liveness still be possible?

The identification forces the entity to have the distinct characteristic. The identification is how the self brings the observed object, as well as the identity of the subject to have the presence. This logic, in fact, is how the TV performer attacks back at the real performer. As the ‘real’ performer denied the contents that the TV plays to dismiss the TV performer existing, the sense of being a performer could not even exist. The identification is how the subject and object become what one thinks them to be, and assigns the identity to the bundle of experiences. Drawing from bodiless embodiment, Wu’s interpretation of Zhuangzi, and Nāgārjuna’s examination of self, and following Zhuangzi’s logic of listening without the habit of matching experiences and thoughts, the line “... just here” that two performers repeated at the end suggested ‘embodiment without identity’, and ‘experience without the experiencer’. This is also why the performance is entitled ... *is Present*, countering Abramović’s *The Artist is Present* by erasing the subject, ~~*The Artist*~~.

Kongwu's understanding of being here and now undermines any attempt to exploit the meditative experience to amplify the sense of self. Nāgārjuna's examination of the self is useful to understanding the danger of using the meditative experience, in the name of emptiness, to enhance the experience of the self. In Abramović's narrative, the very experience of embodiment and process, particularly the meditative experience of being here and now has been taken as the foundation for establishing of the 'other' and has enabled Abramović's to critique "our Western culture", particularly the Western experience of time (Abramović in Wijer and Kamphof 1990:308). Abramović's construction of suchness and the no-thinking mind is complicit with the dualistic ordering of experiences and the essentializing of 'East' and 'West'. In fact, it is the exact mechanism that produces the dynamic of closeness and distance and consequently, delivers the presence of "The Artist". The desire to overcome the default separation in Abramović's narrative amplifies the identity of the self. Thus, the theatricality of being here and now in *The Artist is Present* is performed. The more the volume of being here and now is amplified, the more present the self (and the other) becomes.

As concerns Nāgārjuna's and Zhuangzi's principles, the concept of the meditative mind refers to the process by which the identity of the subject is dispersed and the self is unable to be localised by any temporal and spatial markers. My performance offers a definition of being-here-and-now that differs from Abramović's version, and demonstrates a process of dis-identification from ~~*The Artist is Present*~~ to ... *is Present*. In the process, the subject is un-localisable. When identification is suspended, one stops building the home of the self. When assembly of the self via the accumulation of experiences ceases, the meditative mind emerges.

Conclusion

In Kongwu, what the meditative mind refers to is that when identification with the contents of experience is suspended, the identity of self/other as the illusion of continuity cannot be established. One does not appropriate the embodied experience as the source to set up the self/other. Abramović's version of no-thinking mind seduces the identification. The very primacy of process and embodiment, particularly 'being here and now', becomes the way to set up the other and secure a unified subject as the centre of experience. The performance ... *is Present* articulated a circulation of how the presumed dualistic values were undone, when one dis-identified with the contents of experience. To emphasise the process of experience and embodiment does not lead to the metaphysical speculation of the identity of the subject as the centre of the experience.

The concepts of self and time are the two illusions of continuity, and the fundamental conceptual blocks to order experiences. Through the meditation, the practitioner directs the attention away from the content of experiences, but to the process of experience itself. Therefore, one sees the looping process of how the self is generated by the habit of identification, and the self produces the associations to assure the identity of self. The self is producing experiences, and the looping effect. The self is producer and the product of this habitual pattern. The meditation suggests that one realises that self is the experience. There is not any separation between self and experience. The liberation refers to the capacity for breaking from the looping effect, and experiencing without the habit of identification. The meditation suggests a way of observing: instead of finding a true authentic version of self from inside, one realises that the self cannot be found. What can be found is only experience.

The illusion of continuity is the belief we make in every moment of breathing. By the concepts of time and self, we perform the transformation of life, and believe in self or nonself, emptiness or non-emptiness, and either the present now, or the future hope. Making belief is a habit of longing, grasping experiences, and investing emotions to increase the theatrical volume of the realness.

CONCLUSION

Performance can alter habitual patterns of perceiving. On the other hand, it can break these patterns and expand the potentiality of experience by reflecting how we use such fundamental elements as the concepts of time and self to build a 'reality' with which we engage. The integration of Kongwu into performance raises the question of how the present becomes 'the present', how experiences become 'the' experience, and what 'being-here-and-now' and the 'meditative mind' mean, particularly as concerns the relationship between the process of embodiment and identity.

In reconsidering the looping effect that language forms, Kongwu suggests a spatial organisation that unsettles the position of the observer. The observer's self, the 'I', is dispersed through the multiple perspectives in ink landscape painting and by the orchestration of gazes by the multiple closed circuits in *Poem without Language*. The traceless writing of Chinese calligraphy on water in *Poem without Language* echoes Zhuangzi's linguistic strategies and resonates with Paik's approach to media. When the expected function of writing is disrupted, the writing becomes traceless and the act of writing itself comes to the forefront. Paik empties the contents and disrupts the expected function of media. In so doing, he shifts the viewer's attention from the message to the mechanism by which the media produces and transmits the message.

Kongwu's distrust of language suggests not only a different approach to spatial organisation, but also the approach to media, akin to the principles of meditation. We can use media not only to evoke our habitual way of perceiving, but

to trace the functioning of experience and, subsequently, stop the habit. In the *TV Buddha* series, Paik used closed circuits to investigate the act of viewing. In *Poem without Language*, the orchestra of gazes creates multiple perspectives that remind us of the looping effect, that is, that what we see is the result of selective seeing, and forces one camera to look at the result of its viewing, a projection on the wall, which generates an endless doubling; the camera's eyes contemplate their own functioning. *Poem without Language*, thus, exploits the convenience of technology, which serves as an extension of the human body and mind, as suggested by McLuhan (1967). As an outside-in approach to perception, technology externalises inner perceptual patterns, retracing our process of experiencing. Likewise, meditation shifts attention away from the content of experience, to the process of experience itself. A similar refocusing occurs when Kongwu migrates into performance practice; the observational techniques that are key to meditation become integral to the observational functions performed by electronic devices.

Flesh-to-flesh and flesh-to-machine communication is not so different, if we consider how the mechanism of identification comes into play. In performance installations, electronic technologies imitate our methods of perceiving, evoke associated concepts, and trigger emotive influences. This chain reaction creates a sense of the real. In the loop, things become things, time becomes time, and the identity of the self and other emerge. The act of perceiving creates the real. In Paik's *Real Fish/Live Fish*, the "real fish" swims in a closed circuit of languages and symbols. The "live fish" swims in an electronic flow of TV and camera. The two fish are swimming in the closed circuit, and the 'being' of the observed is the result of selective seeing with differentiation. Both the "real" and "live fish" swim in the

identification mechanism; the observer identifies with the pointers and creates associated emotions and feelings.

In the performance, *... is Present*, the conversation between the real and the TV performer creates a recycling of identification and dis-identification. The TV performer mimics not only the actions of the 'real' performer, but the logic of experiencing that the 'real' performer uses to amplify the experience of the self. The juxtaposition of two types of performers in *... is Present* undermines Abramović's narrative, in which the human body and performance art are prioritized over video and theatre, thereby stimulating "the live presence" that characterizes Abramović's work (Abramović in Biesenbach 2010:95). The habit of identification can happen with the use of video and body as media for artistic practices. The conjunction of 'real' and mediated modes of performance shows how experiences become *the* experience we thought them to be and how the act of seeing forces our experiences to be the property of an entity in a defined position, that is, to bring things into presence for us. The recycling logic implied in the relationship between the TV and the 'real' performer in the performance *... is Present* becomes an allegory for how we habitually experience the self and reveals how we can suspend the habit of identification.

Performance often emphasises the quality of being in the present and the primacy of experience. For Cage, when one listens to sounds without musical language and without referencing past accumulations, the sounds "come into being of themselves" (Cage 1961:70). This is precisely because one has the "discipline" (Cage in Kaye 1996: 19) to listen to sounds without the mediating functions of "like and dislike" (Cage 1961:133). Cage's operation of silence invites the listener to listen

to sounds without the past. This is possible because one has the capacity to 'return to the present', a phrase popularly used in discussions of Chan/Zen philosophy.

My work, *One Street, Three Persons, Different Narratives, and Different Memories* reconsiders our experience of 'time' as an illusion of continuity and, furthermore, exposes the production of 'now'. In the installations, the conjunction of the three persons' versions of 'the present' and 'the past' reveals how the concepts of past and present need each other to operate and reconsiders how the act of experiencing consolidates many potentials into 'the present'. The present is the accumulation of past, already-there concepts and experiences. In other words, we habitually make the present become the past. 'Experience' is the result of ordering, of positioning the observer as the centre, using language and concepts, and of determining what can be included in the boundaries of perception.

For Kongwu, 'the return to the present' does not mean that one can localise 'nowness' if one experiences in 'this' way, according to Buddhist or Daoist wisdom. However, by retracing the production of 'now', we can exhaust the affective influences triggered by the accumulation of the past and such dualistic pairs as likes and dislikes, as well as our responses to such influence. 'The return to the present' refers to a process of exposing the construction of the 'now' and thereby, opening up endless potentialities.

That time never arrives means that time is not a medium 'in' which events take place. In other words, we cannot locate an event's being in time. Subsequently, Kongwu's attitude towards time questions the emphasis habitually placed on 'being here and now' and the process of embodiment, particularly the tendency to perceive

that the very experience of being present contributes to identity-self formation in performance.

The title of Abramović's *The Artist is Present* implicitly describes the experience of the no-thinking mind as it induces identification and suggests identity is necessary to make the experience of being here and now possible. Abramović's version of being here and now enhances the presence of the self. The very experience of process and embodiment – specifically, the meditative experience – serves to set up the other and localise a unified subject as the centre of experience. Abramović's construction of suchness is, thus, complicit with the dualistic ordering of experiences.

Responding to Abramović's construction of suchness, the performance ... *is Present* articulates a different version of being here and now and a meditative mind that refers to 'embodiment without identity' and 'experiences without experiencer'. The performance ... *is Present* defines the meditative mind as one that results from the suspension of identification, when identity ceases to exist. The primacy of process and embodiment neither induce identification, nor enhance the identity of the self. In other words, Kongwu's version of being here and now exhausts the temporal and spatial indicators that localise the 'self'. The performance ... *is Performance* erases the subject ~~*The Artist*~~ and maps out a trajectory of Kongwu derived from Nāgārjuna's and Zhuangzi's principles. The performance critiques Abramović's version of being here and now and suggests a different understanding of the meditative mind in relation to identity.

Kongwu and its relationship to performance suggest an attitude, a way of experiencing and conducting attention, whereby the looping effect of language is

disrupted, time never arrives, and the mechanism of identification is suspended. Kongwu's incorporation into performance invites reconsideration of Buddhist and Daoist understandings of 'the return to the present' and 'living in the present' and questions the validity of the 'experience' and 'present' that we consider to result from dualistic ordering. Moreover, it challenges the 'relations' constructed by dualistic positionings of the self/other and before/after. The boundary of attention determines what is included and excluded in our experiences. That experience is what can be noticed suggests the observer in the observed and the constant interaction of the observer and the object of the perception. What Kongwu conducts is not a lifting of spirit, a salvation, but a loop of mindfulness: "observing the body in the body, observing the feelings in the feelings, and observing the mind in the mind" (Hanh 2006:132). The loop, hence, fosters realisation that an observer may become a participant (Hanh 2006:132). By taking notice of the enclosed circuit of language and symbols, one discovers the many potentialities made available by releasing one's mind from the constraints of identification and selection. In becoming more aware of the identification mechanism that fosters emotive investment, stimulates affective influence and value judgments, and triggers active responses, one can, thus, also disrupt the habit that makes one play in the river of time and perform the theatre of the self in the architecture of reality.

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