

The Passive and Disappeared:

Expanded Immersiveness in Sisters Hope's Performance Art

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Independent Study

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Forward

Lacan said the desire of man is the desire of the Others.

I always wonder what desire is actually calling from my own soul;

What is the truth I am searching for my own heart;

And what is the movement moves from my own body.

Only when I became mindful to the passive voice,

be called, be seen, be moved,

can I desire my desire——

“Trusting the connection.”

From the untamed roars

Of the Pacific's depth

To the serene whispers

Along the Atlantic's breathe

Savor each flake of snow on departing leaves

An embrace untasted beneath the palm's eternal eaves

After pain in the vein

After glow in my soul

If to see is to be seen

Dwell this moment longer

Before the surrender came

To a stranger's gaze

If to feel is to be felt

Gently lost in the consciousness

Where time and space interlace

until we are no longer you and I

If to move is to be moved

Let the body express intensity

While affect infold into this encounter

If to touch is to be touched

Tie me up while pushing me away

Leave myself to set me free

Hear my vulnerability's silent plea at last

Grasp a handful of snow, from last winter's vast

Holding tight while letting go

To move (with) sensations, perceptions, and feelings

Is to desire and to be desired.

Abstract

Immersive theatre refers to a genre of theatre performance in which the traditional boundaries between performer and audience are dissolved, thereby emancipating audience members by facilitating a multi-sensory and interactive experience. However, academic discourse and reviews on immersive art have recently fallen into an overindulgence with the concepts of ‘presence’ and ‘active participation.’ With the evolution of advertising and media technologies, an increasing number of projects are labeled as immersive, yet this designation drifts further from its foundational meaning of forging connections and evoking sensations. Drawing on my ethnographical observations and residency at Copenhagen-based performance and activist group Sisters Hope’s project *Inhabitation Life* from February 2 to 12, 2024, this paper seeks to critically reflect upon and broaden the notion of immersiveness in the intersection of immersive theatre and performance art. Specifically, I advocate for a reevaluation of the roles of

‘absence’, ‘disappearance’ and ‘non-action’ (Wu-wei, 无为 within immersive experiences and explore how the interplay of chiasmus (Merleau-Ponty, 1969) and intersubjectivity in performance art catalyzes the immersion of participants. Shifting the focus to what has disappeared, an expanded sense of immersiveness diverges from mere feelings of activeness and presence, resonating with the dissolution of self-ego, the blurring of the dichotomy between subject and object, and a transformed perception of time.

Immersion and Immersive Art

In the new millennium, the rise of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) and the neoliberal ethos (Alston, 2013) has significantly reshaped the artistic landscape. These developments have catalyzed a heightened interest in forms of art that prioritize

embodied experiences, hypersensations, and interactivity—among these, immersive art stands out prominently. Immersion can be defined as an individual's experience of 'a state of deep mental involvement in which their cognitive processes (with or without sensory stimulation) cause a shift in their attentional state such that one may experience dissociation from the awareness of the physical world' (Agrawal et al., 2020). This definition shares similarities with other concepts, for example the dissociation from real towards virtual worlds experienced in presence (Sanchez-Vives & Slater, 2005), the deep mental involvement experienced in transportation (Green & Brock, 2000), narrative engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009), and narrative absorption (Hakemulder et al., 2017). The distinct ways in which individuals become immersed are sometimes classified as different types of immersion: e.g. narrative immersion, emotional immersion, and sensory/perceptual immersion (Nilsson et al., 2016; Ryan, 2001). To a cognitive psychologist, the descriptions of immersion will sound very reminiscent of William James' (1890) much quoted definition of attention as 'taking possession of the mind... of one out of what seems several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought'.

The quest for understanding the nature of artistic legitimacy and spectatorship is an enduring pursuit within the art world. An intriguing illustration of this discourse can be seen in a 1908 postcard from Restaurant BONVALET in Paris, which captures the Grand Cinema-Orchestre et Chants event. Here, the elite audience, dispersed and engaged in leisurely strolls, conversing and sipping drinks, presents a stark contrast to the post-1914 era when cinema was absorbed into the fabric of daily life, leading to the standardization of spectator behaviors within the darkened, orderly confines of theaters and cinemas. As the nineteenth century waned, avant-garde artists, particularly those identified with Dada, represented by luminaries such as Fernand Léger, Tristan Tzara, Henri Bergson, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, and Hans Richter, championed a reintegration of aesthetic experiences into the quotidian life; later in the mid twentieth century, conceptual artists like Marcel Broodthaers were inspired by Dada's example to delve into the post-medium condition.

The 1960s witnessed a revolutionary challenge to this tamed spectatorship, spurred by advancements in psychology, particularly in the study of psychoanalysis and hallucinogens like LSD. Initiatives like EPI and USCO's expanded cinema sought to dismantle passive viewing experiences by invoking a sensory overload through simultaneous film projections, live music, and performance art. This approach not only simulated hallucinogenic experiences but also evoked preobjective sensations, allowing the audience to navigate the space freely, immersed in confusion about their roles and actions. This period also saw Allan Kaprow introducing the concept of "happenings," unscripted and spontaneous events that emphasized art as an immersive experience rather than a mere object, fostering a dynamic interaction where participants could not remain passive observers. In the following decade, Augusto Boal further envisioned the audience as active "spect-actors," engaging directly against societal oppressions. From this trace, the emergence of immersive experiences can be interpreted as a robust counteraction to the established norms of art's legitimization and the restrictive modality of audience engagement. This evolution reflects a broader philosophical and cultural critique, aiming to reclaim the agency of the audience and reassert the experiential dimension of art in a way that challenges and expands the boundaries of traditional spectatorship.

In immersive theatres, the audience presently wanders through finely hyper-sensational settings, discovering a non-linear narrative and open-text (Eco, 1989), interacting with the surroundings and occasionally the actors (Alston, 2013). Each audience member will have a unique, personal experience challenging the usual passive character of spectating (Govan et al., 2007). Thus, mass audiences become participants and even immersants (Bouko, 2017). However, beneath the initial intention to liberate audiences, the industry's development today has unfortunately fallen into a pernicious pursuit of what is termed 'Interaction' and 'Presence.' Fans of Punchdrunk crowd theaters and watch the same performances hundreds of times

merely for the chance of a one-on-one interaction with their favorite actors. Similarly, the use of virtual reality (VR) to animate static paintings aims to create a sensation of being "in the shoes" of the artist themselves. Yet, is not gently reading a character's diary alone in their room setting sufficient to forge an intimate bond with them? Does not standing before Van Gogh's Sunflowers and ponder suffice to feel the caress of a gentle breeze?

Presence is generally conceptualised as an individual's perception being oriented from the real world towards the world of the media (Waterworth et al., 2015), often described as a sense of 'being there' (Biocca et al., 2003), most commonly in the form of feeling spatially located within the environment (Witmer & Singer, 1998).

Presence and liveness have long been prioritized in performance arts since Phelan, no matter in artistic practices for example Marina Abramovic's *the Artist is Present* (2010), or art review writing. However, Diana Taylor (2020) pointed out the "colonial epistemologies" of the over-emphasis of presence which denies art as the knowledge that can linger and transmit. Amelia Jones (1997, 2011, 2012) encourages a more nuanced view that considers how the supposed authenticity of presence is constructed and how these constructions influence the reception and interpretation of art. Presence as an artistic encounter is inherently mediated by the participants' subjective experiences, the physical setup of the performance, and historical representations. Thus, Jones (2012) explores how documentation and other forms of secondary engagement with performance art can also convey presence. Despite presence and immersion being used interchangeably by other authors (Nilsson et al., 2016), Hammond et al (2023) also found no relationship between immersion and self-reported narrative presence through their rigorous physiological experiments, offering a more scientific and data-proved critique.

In my 2023 study of audience immersion in relation to Punchdrunk's play *The Burnt City* in

London, I explored the phenomenological description of immersion and the elements that successfully shape such experiences. The study, employing fourteen in-depth, semi-structured phenomenological interviews and thematic analysis, highlighted mindfulness as central to immersiveness. Key contributing factors were identified as the sensations of ‘the flow state,’ ‘ego death,’ ‘disappearing,’ and ‘without expectations,’ rather than ‘one-on-one interaction’ or ‘presence.’ Consequently, this laid the foundation for my reflections here, shifting my focus to audience's feeling of being absent from the self-ego, instead of being physically or mentally present in the theatrical space. When we talk about the immersion as a feeling of ‘being transported,’ too many works put a focus on how to build a new world authentic enough, rather than how to let a participant’s ego disappear from their old self.

The excessive valorization of active interaction has inadvertently imposed a competitive pressure on audiences. The original intent of interaction and participation now instead burden them with expectations and strive to jostle for a chance at close contact with performers. Thus I question the connection of ‘active’ to interaction and suggest that interaction can be passive and should take many forms. In Taoist philosophy, Wuwei (无为, non-action), suggests taking no action or effortless action. In Buddhism, Wuwei is considered the ultimate truth of detachment from *nidāna* (causes and effects). Wuwei represents a metaphysical form of Youwei (有为, action), distinct from an actively persistent ‘doing,’ and embodies a natural state of ‘acting without acting,’ allowing nature to take its course and to adopt a *laissez-faire* approach. This in-between state of activity and passivity unfolds mindfulness and immersion therefore is a useful balance for immersive theatre design. Besides, interaction should not be confined to actors alone but extend to the perceptual field, space, ambience, and other audience members.

The core of immersion lies in the in-between state—a neither-nor, balancing active and passive interaction, representing a moment of potential freedom and liberation from fixed forms. Similarly, the re-evaluation of ‘absence’ and ‘disappearance’ follows the same logic. By reconsidering what should disappear, I am not denying the feeling of ‘presence’ but arguing against persuading the audience to feel ‘here and now’ instantly. The real practical focus should be on how to allow old paradigms and the self to dissipate, thus leading the experiencer into an ‘in-between state’ of absence and presence—a desire for becoming rather than being, unfolding rather than forming.

For French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, the force of becoming makes the world worlding. In visual art, it renders images moving, as he argued in *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation* (1981): “This is the relationship not of form and matter, but of materials and forces making these forces visible through their effects on the flesh.” Immersiveness can also be expressed by traditional art form even without direct interaction and multi-sensory design. Just as in Bacon’s paintings, Ivana Bašić’s sculpture moves. The amorphous bodies recurring in her sculptures *SOMA* (2017) seem on the verge of losing their integrity and corporal shape, as if revealing something not meant to be seen. When I invest more time, I perceive gravity dragging this creature’s hair; I sense that in the next moment, its curved spine will assist the body in making a full turn around the steel bar. In this way, Bašić’s minimal and non-theatrical sculpture also becomes an immersive art for viewers. My willingness to simply stand beside it, stare at it longer, ponder, waste time, and let the imagination wash over me, allows mindfulness in becoming.

This in-between state resonates with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of intersubjectivity and intercorporeality. When we still distinguish between active and passive, present and absent, subconsciously the binary division between self and others, body and mind, acts up. As Machon (2013) describes, “... to ‘immerse’ is to ‘dip or submerge in

a liquid', whereas to 'immerse oneself' or 'to be immersed', means to involve oneself deeply in a particular activity of interest." Since to immerse and to be immersed are two sides of the same coin without demeaning either the object or the perceptual field, the so-called passive and active become invalid in this harmonious oneness, one organism shared by object, subject, and the environment. Merleau-Ponty's (1969) insights on the chiasmus of the embodied self/other, subject/object, enable a critique of activeness in immersive theater, placing corporeality at the forefront of studying intersubjectivity, which aligns exceptionally well with the embodied nature of immersive theater.

Sisters Hope's *Inhabitation Life*

Sisters Hope is a Copenhagen-based performance-organization and movement offering participants interactive and immersive experience with the aim of transforming the current economy guiding society into a more sensuous and aesthetic world, unfolding in the intersection of performance art, research, activism, pedagogy. During my artist residency I participated in its current initiative, *Inhabitation Life*, in February 2024, I underwent a complete immersion at the Sisters Hope Home. This retreat, nestled near the natural surrounds of Hedehusene, offered a 24-hours seven-day digital detox.

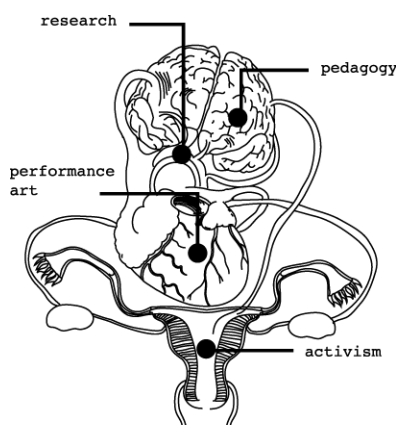


Figure 1. Positioning of Sisters Hope (Hallberg, 2021)

Upon my arrival at Sisters Hope Home, I was gently led into an initiation rite of passage by a Sisters Staff dressed in black with a lace veil. This process, characterized by silence and blindfolded darkness, significantly heightened my senses of touch, smell, sound, and taste. A subtle detail revealed to me a deeper understanding of immersion. I was blindfolded, lying on the floor waiting for others to arrive, when the voice of the Octopus instructing me to lie down was right next to my ear, while at the same time, the voices of other participants chatting casually came from the distant right, and I also caught someone on the left saying, “*Hey we get a new friend here she must just have arrived.*” This was the first time I felt that a sense could bring such a rich layering and impact. When discussing immersive art, we often focus on the perceptual field, which is a dive into multiple strong sensations simultaneously, akin to a psychedelic experience, but immersion can also be about exploring the extremes of one sense, where singularity can achieve fission through multiple dimensions and intensities.

The nature of Inhabitation Life lies in the intersection of immersive theatre and performance art, where participants immerse in the environment and their own poetic selves instead of any form of narrative or theatre stories. During a day, there will be six 30 minutes improvised performance art sessions offered by the artists conveying different themes. As elucidated on their website, “*Your journey inside Sisters Hope Home will be dependent on what you contribute to the experience*”; the residency did not impose fixed objectives, allowing participants the liberty to meander, immerse in contemplation, engage in deep conversation with the other inhabitants, or, more traditionally, congregate in the central hall for assignments dispensed by the Octopus—a figure akin to a manager, orchestrating attendees' engagement with various performers' sessions based on individual predispositions. This communal living setup encouraged participants to cook, dine, rest, and cohabit with fellow

performers, yet without dictating a specific trajectory for each inhabitant.

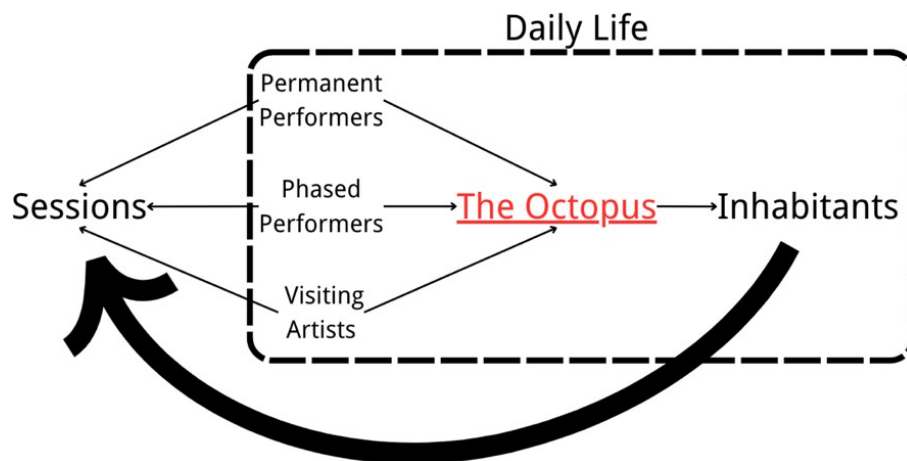


Figure 2. 24-hour Stay at *Inhabitation Life*

By discovering the in-between space of performance art and everyday life, Sisters Hope achieves democratizing aesthetic experience and inhabiting participants' poetic self, instead of emphasizing the presence and ephemeral embodiment at the performance space. By evoking the potential of letting the old self disappear, the stay opens the door of a poetic self which permanently inhabits and can be brought outside.

1. The Disappeared Self-Ego

"It started by me and my poetic sister doing like a performative practices for ourself in public space. So that was, for example, drinking ceremony on the top of the National Bank in Copenhagen." (Hallberg)

Hallberg described Sisters Hope's foundation and initial status as activism where an altar-self that is more poetic and sensuous than the current ego is at the core. Even if the Sisters performed for themselves, at the same times, their bodies were clear

images for the general public as intervention and activism. Then in 2008, Hallberg wrote the *Sensuous Society Manifesto* as a response to the financial crisis and the ongoing ecological crisis as a more clear and framed action. However, Sisters Hope's activism is not only in response to the practical crisis, double-layeredly Hallberg would like to democratize the aesthetic at the same time by which she meant to open the access of the more sensuous and poetic modes of being to the public:

“when I was about 16,17, I answered a question by saying ‘everyone should have access to the mode of being that was activated in me while I was performing’. So in a very early age, I realized how healing the mode of being of performing world to me and how exclusive that was, you know, how few people actually find their way into the art system.” (Hallberg)

In all the theatre/performance projects, finding and relating to their poetic mood and mode is the meaning and task for performers and participants. Gry Hallberg shared with me, “in this space everybody is just themselves, this is not a play or a narrative, the performances are just the expression from their poetic self.” Thus the stylistic and methodological approaches of each performer also varied significantly. One morning, the Unnamed led me to the garden, tenderly washed my hands, and enveloped me in velvet blankets on the bed she had built outside—an experience of unparalleled relaxation amplified by the gentle sound of wind chimes. Conversely, an evening session with Spreading Fire had us seated on the bathroom floor consuming raw onions, an experience that provoked intense physical discomfort and emotional turmoil. This diversity in practice, ranging from the therapeutic to the painful, underscores the unique language and style of each artist. This heterogeneity aligns with Gry's innovative tripartite method of training the performer staff: *finding the poetic itself, externalizing the poetic self, and relating from the poetic self*. Sisters Performance Method – Sensuous Learning by Hallberg forms the foundation of training for Sisters

staffs fosters a broad spectrum of immersive, sensuous learning experiences that do not confine artistic freedom but rather encourage a rich tapestry of expressions.

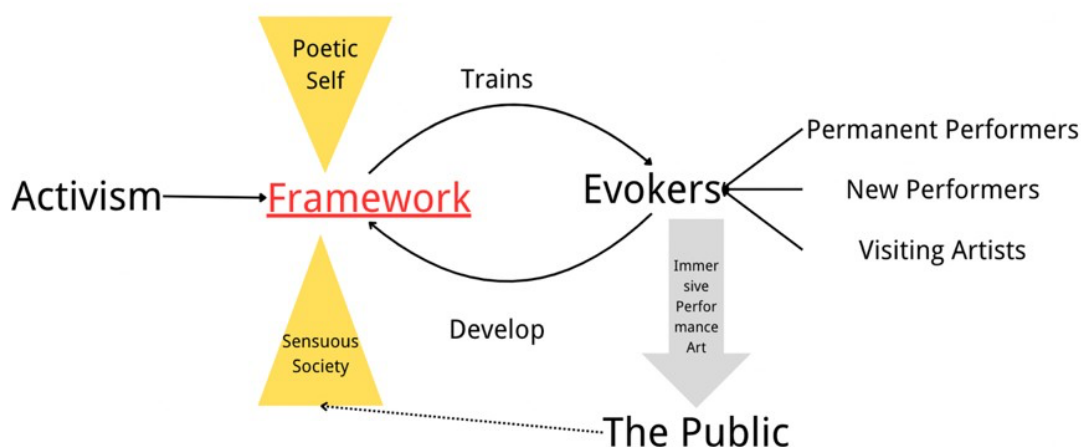


Figure 3. Sisters Hope's Organizational Culture: Poetic Self and Sensuous Society

During our sojourn, myself alongside three fellow visiting artists, bestowed upon Gry's paradigm our interpretations of a sensuous society and the poetic self. In a ceremony under the new moon, Blackmoon Lily and the Dream Weaver orchestrated a ritual where we pulverized charcoal—emblematic of fear, anxiety, patriarchy, colonization, and the rapacity towards nature—and sowed seeds of hope into the freshly turned earth; Crescendo curated a tableau with objects tracing his journey: withered branches, licorice, needles and threads, stones, and fragments of maps, all encircling parchment, inviting participants to weave a tapestry of memories; Plasma played with light and shadow behind curtains symbolizing the feminine, provoking contemplation on patriarchy, sexuality, unintended pregnancies, and the complexity of choice; Cicek, with her voice as a guide, led us, blindfolded, to swallow red beans, venturing into the ethereal realms depicted in her poetry. I, The Affect, moved an embodiment of the five elements—water, fire, wood, earth, air—through bodily movement and intuitive writing, allowing participants to intimately connect with the balance from nature.

Here is where the self-ego disappears and social identities and norms become absent. Like a new-born baby, after arrival participants will find their new name through the poetic-self exercise, a guided meditation leading them to their personal understanding of the theme like the relationship with time and space, mode and mood of being. This initiation was also a rediscovery of vulnerability. Here is my record of each participant at the start of the 24-hour period, during the first session:

Participants' arms were lightly draped over the shoulders of the person in front, following a figure dressed in black with a head completely covered by a black cloth, moving slowly towards the Moonhall. I felt as though my body couldn't keep up with the passing of time, and the gaze sweeping around the space slowed down.

Eventually, we reached Moonhall and after a gentle welcome, we faced a direct physical impact. Spreading Fire arranged us in two lines in the Moon Hall, then instructed us to turn and face each other, stranger gazing into stranger. Spreading Fire's voice——

“Choose to be comfortable, with the person opposite you. At the level you feel comfortable, get undressed.”

My motivation came from Blackmoon Lily's trust and her openness with her own body, and realizing deep down, there was a strange longing to have my body seen by someone. At one moment, as I looked into her eyes, I saw many people from my memories. All those who had seen me naked before. My past loves, my mother, the doctors who had operated on me, and even me myself seeing my own body in Gustave Courbet's 1860s painting *The Origin of the World* (Jones, 2003). While nakedness is always associated with connotations of actions before and after, for something, or because of something, I felt it as a simply state for the first time without any need of legitimacy

or explanation in the pure action of to see and to be seen, to gaze and to be gazed at.

Chiasmus is the entwining of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) "flesh" of the world with the self through Amelia Jones' process of "reversibility."

The relation to the self, the relation to the world, the relation to the other, all are constituted through a reversibility of seeing and being seen, perceiving and being perceived, and this entails a reciprocity and contingency for the subject(s) in the world. (Jones, 1998)

We drown into the stillness of gazing for a long time, until the stillness mobiles, and the division of object and subject reassembles as reciprocal Chiasmus. Boccioni (1964) considered sculpture body as a body in motion with a prolonged spiral potential that is already inherent to matter, a body moves without displacing itself. I can feel both of arms reached out to each other to share some comfort just through the gaze, a shared body, created, as we move the relation. To perceive the incorporeal, we must push the senses to the edge of what they can do. The durational force planted in Deleuzian idea of seies allows our body to go beyond as such, to move as a becomg-body, a still-moving.

2. The Disappeared Objectification

However, I fall into Erving Goffman's version of self who is staged in the social environment when I look back the experience now. I questioned whether I would have chosen to be completely naked if the stranger facing me appeared to be of the opposite gender. Did I consider gender at all or feel it as fluid in a shared

vulnerability? Or did I confront the body not as an object but as a participatory subject in that embodied moment? To understand myself and that encounter, I did a performance with Zrak for *Inhibition Life* which will be discussed below.

The Affect the Zrak

When Zrak led the audience into the bathroom and removed their blindfolds, they were met with the sight of my body, half-shrouded in the darkness of the shower, half-illuminated by a raised candle. I could see the moment they beheld me, their shoulders relaxing, their gazes tender. Zrak undressed and took the candle from my hands, using the flickering light to search for and display the birthmarks on my body. Then we took turns. "Birthmark?" we asked the two participants, who hesitated before Zrak extended her inviting hand. We began to alternate under the shower, tracing each other's birthmarks. At that moment, one girl laughed, "sorry my hair is too dirty." Laughter breaks the initial solemnity.

"We can wash our hair, do you want to?" Zrak responded. I was surprised, as this was entirely different from our pre-performance discussion. Zrak retrieves her shampoo bar—its scent of lemongrass and tea a comforting whisper. We all relaxed suddenly, beginning to spontaneously wash each other's hair, experiencing a texture that is both strange and familiar. The confined space filled with the mist of femininity. My refreshing body and the trust of others brought me a simple joy.

The session evolves into a serene spa ritual with the women lying on blankets, surrounded by candlelight, olive oil, freshly picked grass, and new soil line the floor prepared by us.

On every skin, a mark is etched—

a narrative of existence in each birthmark, mole, scar, or tattoo.

*These are the imprints of memories, teachings from life's lessons,
meeting society's gaze with a quiet defiance.*

We celebrate these marks, gently rubbing new soil over them, massaging with olive oil, and finishing with strokes of fresh grass. The next day morning, a participant left a drawing of me half in water and half in fire before her departure, and a note saying “The wisdom of human is to embrace a lot of death and rebirth.”



Figure 4. Drawing from the Blackmoon Lily

Understanding vision as an “aggregate of sensations,” Carolee Schneemann (1979) saw the body-in-space-time as an extension of painting. As she wrote: “The body is in the eye; sensations received visually take hold in the total organism. Perception moves the total personality to excitement.” By becoming a still image, I wanted to invite viewers to shed the subjectivity of themselves, and the subjectivity of the gaze itself to me by objectifying my body. Later, the Chiasmus between the viewing subject and the still object (me) is embodied visualized to the viewers when Zrak

moves my torso and spotlight my birthmarks, the reciprocity between the viewer and a self who is identified with the object (now me and Zrak) as its maker is embodied felt when they joint us in the “female shower painting”. In making the subjectivity and objectivity absent, the self and the world, or the seer and the seen, do not exist as separate entities but are intertwined in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship. This intertwining suggests not only the Chiasmus among our bodies, our perceptual capabilities and the world, but also an intra-action (Barad, 2007) where human, non-human, and nature connect within one shared consciousness as one entity.

Towards the end of *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty turns his attention to the ‘link between flesh and the idea’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1999), which he undertakes to describe – developing a passage from Proust’s *Un amour de Swann* – in terms of ‘musical or sensible ideas’ as opposed to ‘ideas of the intelligence’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1999). For Deleuze, it is not the thought ensure what it thinks, but the contingency of an encounter within which forces and affect rise up the necessity of others act of thinking. This is a performance barely with any language, and no thought about birthmarks is linguistically shared to the participants. As Erin Manning (2009) argues, when movement converges into its taking-form, or when thought converges into words, very little potential for creativity remains. Body art helps me to keep my thought prearticulated, where insights continue to evolve by propelling more thought through intra-action with others and the environment. Jones (1998) claimed that body art solicits rather than distances the spectator, drawing them into the work of art as an intersubjective exchange. For me the concepts of the chiasmus and affective intensity do not indicate sympathetic responses but are simply about the process of exchange. Immersive performance art attempts to install alternative models of social exchange and interaction, in which the participant is given the opportunity to complete the performance or to say, it can only be completed as exchanged, as the result of an artist relinquishing “creative authorship”. This shift is associated with Roland Barthes and the notion of the “death of the author”, as well as debates around Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics.

“The behaviour of another expresses a certain manner of existing before signifying a certain manner of thinking. And when this behaviour is addressed to me, as may happen in dialogue, and seizes upon my thoughts in order to respond to them...I am then drawn into a coexistence of which I am not the unique constituent and which founds the phenomenon of social nature as perceptual experience founds that of physical nature.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1963)

I was struck by my longing to be seen as a pure body—devoid of organs yet brimming with desire. Yet, what truly captivated me during the performance was Zrak's spontaneous decision to wash our hair clean. While performance art as an extension of everyday life has been discussed through my academic journey, from this practice, I came to appreciate that its significance extends beyond mere thematic or locational elements; it also encompasses the self-care and fundamental needs of both participants and performers. Zrak confided post-session, ‘I cannot find my poetic self when I’m dirty. They (participants) can’t neither.’ It prompted me to reflect: if we had merely ‘performed’ the act of showering without actually cleansing, would all involved still feel as comfortable and receptive to the unfolding events? The intrinsic link between the authenticity of physical experience and the openness required for participatory engagement requires intuitive empathy and honesty.

1. The Disappeared Time

Here is where time and the sense of time disappears. At Sisters Hope Home, all digital devices are forbidden including watches. Everyday, our schedule is marked by the Octopus’s bell. The language of number is also transformed by new poetic expressions of nature elements:

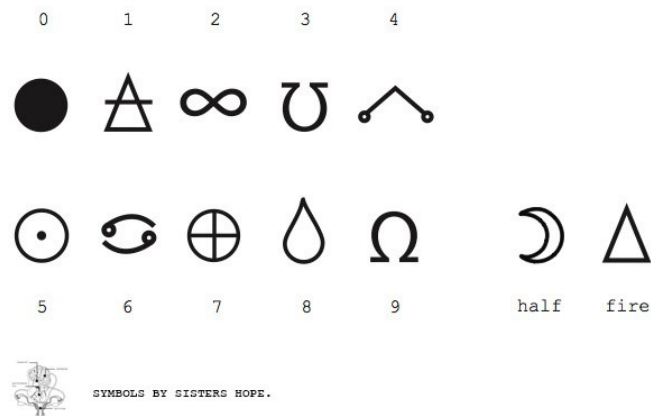


Figure 5. Time and Number Expression at Sisters Hope 1 (Hallberg, 2021)

- Stone
- △ air
- ∞ infinity
- ∩ life
- ∪ magnet
- ⊙ sun
- ∞∞ union
- ⊕ earth
- ∇ water
- Ω death

Figure 6. Time and Number Expression at Sisters Hope 2

Sisters Hope's challenge to the paradigm of 'presence' also lies in their emphasis on archiving and documentation. Each participant is given a notebook and pen upon entering the experience, where they are encouraged to record their insights or reflections anytime throughout the 24 hours in any form. Life Inhabitation thus has been thoroughly documented with personal *memories at the present moment* and all documentation has been donated and collected in Sisters Academy as open recourses for public researchers. Reason (2003) extrapolates 'An Archive of Detritus', which is

his vision of an archive mimicking the positively valued characteristics of archives (preserving the live experience) and the memory (the individual preservation of the live experience) by accumulating the detritus of the performance (also see Nelson; 2013). The detritus of Sisters Academy consists of a multi-faceted scope of e.g. letter exchanges within the academy, gifts, notes passed around, objects left in corners and cracks of the Academy etc. Furthermore, The Archive includes analog student, staff and visiting artists/teachers/researchers notebooks (+ 2000), drawings, and blogposts (text, sound files, images, film), providing a very full understanding of what is at stake in the practice and in the experience of it (Nelson, 2013). The Archive operates from within as it transports thousands of recorded in-situ-reflections on the immersive experience out of the *Inhabitation Life*.

Conclusion

“As dreams arise from affections, and plays arise from dreams.” This is how Chinese dramatist Tang Xianzu described it in his work, *The Peony Pavilion (1598)*. However, Tang did not assume that emotions are the intrinsic source of dreams and drama; instead, he felt, “Affections, not knowing where they arise, deepen as they go.” By placing affect in a state of uncertainty, he surrenders to passivity and acknowledges the subjectivity and autonomy of affect (Massumi, 1995). The external nature of affect constitutes a spatial structure, an emotion-realm, whereby the subject is embedded and embodied within ambiance, rather than the other way around. Thus, to immerse and to be immersed, to see and to be seen, to feel and to be felt is akin to the interplay of yin and yang. Immersiveness is found not only in the overt demands for active participation and presence, but in the subtle, while overlooked realms of absence, disappearance, and non-action. Sisters Hope’s performance art facilitates a sense of being absent from the self-ego, thus weaving the chiasmus between subject and object, self and the world, as a continuous process of unfolding.

Appendices:

Zrak and Spreading Fire

In the Moon Hall, amid echoes of running water, the enigmatic presence of Zrak, clad in a flowing black gown with cascading dark hair, confronts a participant with a near-cruel routine of brushing teeth. Simultaneously, Spreading Fire, dressed in a sleek black suit, mirrors this rhythm in the adjacent open restroom, creating a symphony of ordinary sounds turned ceremonial.

As minutes fold into a quiet tension, Zrak gestures to the onlookers, inviting them closer. A participant, perched on a stool, receives a cup of water from Zrak, who orchestrates the act of gargling into a performance, handing over the cup. The participant mimics, and Zrak begins to brush the participant's teeth, his voice rising in a folk song from a foreign tongue, syncing the brushing strokes to the melody's tempo.

In another space, Spreading Fire ushers two participants into his domain, assigning them roles in this intimate act of care. One participant brushes for the other, a gesture that unsettles yet soothes. Meanwhile, I am blindfolded with lace, surrendering to the unfamiliar touch of a stranger caring for the minutiae of my teeth, evoking vulnerability and a nurturing simplicity.

Post the brushing, Spreading Fire whispers, "Tell me your truth." My reply: "I am afraid of love." In response, Zrak unrolls a toilet paper across the floor, its white stark against the black carpet, inviting participants to guide its path—an improvised act

symbolizing dignity, an exposure of hidden shadows.

In our dialogue, Spreading Fire reveals the session's inspiration: a critique of "cleaning energy" and mental clarity—while we can scrub our teeth endlessly, our innate darkness and trauma remains. There is nothing in need to “be cleaned”, and souls can only save themselves by noticing and accepting the darkness. As Carl Jung’s notion: “enlightenment isn't about envisioning light but embracing the dark to uncover the profound simplicity within.” Zrak reflects on her spontaneous act with the toilet paper as a metaphor for dignity and exposure of the dark. This session unfolds twice per day at dawn and dusk. Spreading Fire notes that morning participants often share their truths openly, while evening souls remain reticent.

Crescendo

As evening crept in, a gentle fog settled outside the dorm where we sat on the floor, nestled just between two rows of bunk beds. The narrow corridor, had just enough room for two souls.

She pulled out a rolled-up piece of parchment and a small, worn metal box from under her bed. Slowly, she spread the parchment out and arranged an assortment of items from the box around its edges: withered branches, licorice, needles and threads, stones, a brooch, a ring, a little bottle with an unknown liquid, colorful cards, and pieces of a map some there in nature...

"These," she whispered, her gaze tender and deep, "are the markers of my memories. I invite you to place upon this parchment those objects that resonate with you. Sketch and share a memory between us."

Her gentle motions with care made me feel these insignificant trinkets are priceless treasures, guarded and cherished. My connection to them was instant. Surprisingly, all the memories popped up into my mind found their denouement in joy.

I picked eight items and told her a story of my change and new beginnings. With a gaze of appreciation, later she reset the parchment and shared her memory in the same way. I feel connected when there is common metaphor and symbol in the objects, while amazed by the huge differences of individual pasts and the gesture of sharing.

"Now, write down a bad memory of you," she said next. I hesitated, a momentary concern for sharing too much in a written form. But the serenity of our little corner, the dimming light of the sunset, the warmth of a candle, and the stark whiteness of our bunks forged a sanctuary of trust and intimacy. I complied, sharing my tale without utterance.

She read it not, but folded the parchment into a small square and placed it in my hand, closing my fingers around it and four hands intertwined. She whispered, "Take this with you to the outside world. After your left, when you feel ready, burn it gently."

Right there, Crescendo just did a session besides her own bed, nowhere else, while taking me to somewhere unknown yet. Art with healing and therapeutic nature is about to be aware of the wound and trauma, not to cleanse them. Whether to heal, should leave to the participants to decide with time and should be guided outside of the performance. In clinical therapy, a common phenomenon is that when the patient builds a strong connection with the therapist through time, they will feel the pressure to feel and behavior 'better' to reward the therapist. Sometime, awareness and

acceptance to the darkness is where the processing of trauma should begin and end with.

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