Naked Peel: 12 Twelve Hours Later

Shedding intoxications through durational embodiment

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Abstract

This practice led research explored the nature of durational performances using a heuristic, self-as-artist approach, with a relationship to the spectator as central consideration. It investigated multiple states of embodiment in the extended performance and explored how entrancement, gazing, drifting and inattentional blindness could be part of the affective experience. It focused on the corporeal as a site for understanding pre-coded body information, trauma and one’s immanent desires. By using my own experience, I investigated the historical accumulation of coded information through the body’s memory, dreams and lived experiences. I located these as an embodied cultural mythos, the presence of which lies within the body. The solo performer was used as a conduit for somatic methodologies to collect materials based on chance discoveries for solo investigations, for collaboration, and for three live durational performances.

Performances of six, eight and twelve hours were drawn from the research, specifically crafted for an art gallery space, an adult night club and a theatre space, to explore the differences in engaging self and audience over extended periods of time. The theatre work consisted of two parts with a seven-hour improvisational performance leading up to a one-hour crafted performance. The research is based on these three performances and the stages of practical experimentation.

Theorist Elizabeth Behnke influenced discussions in this inquiry, with findings from psychologist Linda Holler and the references to one’s physical sensations influenced by neurologist Antonio Damasio. This dissertation reports and reflects upon the findings from my practice.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

The thesis comprises only my original work for the MFA (Dance) except where indicated.
Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to the theoretical references and how materials have been used.
The thesis is less than 20,000 words in length, exclusive of appendices and bibliography.

Signed:   Date:  21, December 2015.
Acknowledgements

In memory of Evanthia Linou: 1928 – 1997

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Pre-amble: How I got here

Preceding the body of the argument I would like to summarise my artistic experience of not just being a dancer but a cross-disciplinary and body based artist inside three decades of work in dance, opera, theatre, film, TV and community arts.

As a child, I was expected to be a bricklayer like my father and his father and at the same time my mother required the family to attend the weekly ritual of the Greek Orthodox Church where religious practice carried with it a range of body codes e.g, bowing your head down at the priest, crossing the body three times and kissing religious icons or standing and sitting at appropriate times to the chanting sounds from the priest. Dance was part of my experience from birth as we celebrated engagements, weddings, christenings and name days where the community came together through Greek Dances. Here I learned circle dances called Kalamatianós, the improvisational dances of Zeibekikos (dance of the blues) and the Tsifdedeli (dance of seduction) where one dances inside oneself and reacts to spontaneous emotions, triggered by memories, dreams and desires all driven by the music. These were the kernels of some of the physical patterns from my Greek heritage where movement and sensations come together coding information into my body.

I started developing my professional dance body late at the age of twenty-two, when I formally studied dance at the Adelaide Centre for Performing Arts. Here I learnt classical, modern and contemporary dance forms based on techniques drawn from Duncan, Laban, Graham, Limon, Horton, Alexander and Cunningham. After graduation, my work focused on anti-art and chance practices influenced by the DADA period and the Fluxus movement. I later developed an interest in surrealism, abstractionism and an understanding of post structuralism and post modernism that informed the development of my interdisciplinary practices. It was in this period that artists such as Pina Bausch, Marina Abramović, Sydney Front, and Stelarc were formative influences.
I participated in numerous body-based workshops with local and international choreographers, including Twyla Tharp, Sankai Juku, DV8, Merce Cunningham, Russell Dumas, One Extra Dance, Danceworks, and Lucy Guerin among others. I was one of the many artists who helped develop Dancehouse as a space for dance artists formally known as the Carlton Community Centre. Three key independents choreographers Sylvia Staehli, Helen Sky and John McCormick established it in 1992. This space was crucial for the development of my cross-disciplinary dance practice allowing me the freedom to experiment with the body, film, sound and the use of objects in performance and I devised solo and group works and taught contemporary dance. I was invited on their board from 1994 – 2002 and I participated in dance discussions and movement workshops that included, contact improvisation, Body Mind Centering (BMC), approaches to improvisation and vocal embodiment practices with artists such as; Deborah Hay, Rosalind Crisp, Sylvia Staehli, Helen Sky, Helen Herbertson and Kate Champion, among others.

I was involved with IHOS Opera from 1990 until 2012, where I performed in and choreographed large-scale experimental music theatre works with composer and director Constantine Koukias. The value of this experience was that it shifted my practice into a focus on the conceptual body. In 1999 I started a collaboration with visual artist Robert Mangion that has continued for five-years. Here we investigated the body as a site for interventions, associated with the everyday choreography in public spaces. Our work ‘Act of Refusing to Dance’ was part of the 2003 Melbourne Arts Festival.

My current practice combines film for live performance and for independent screenings. I have produced numerous dances on film, animations and experimental screen works in which I compose original soundtracks. I have toured solo dance performances in Australia, and internationally as well as choreographed for theatre and TV and directed small to large-scale community arts projects.
Research intention

As the artist I wanted to respond to the current cultural discrimination that has surfaced again in Australia and found myself being reminded how I felt as a child from Hellenic heritage, growing up with racial vilification. I wanted to ask whether, if I had a new skin, a skin made of something perfect like oranges, would I still be vilified?

In many ways this research for Master of Fine Arts (Dance) is a point of culmination for my artistic experiences and the starting point for the inquiry has been fundamentally based on a single sensation I experienced during a moment in a time-compressed performance. This single moment was a place where I could linger, and feel lost in the moment, inside a place of being empty and in-between states, occupied inside the action and not wanting it to stop, where time seems to stand still. I was interested how this ‘one moment’ could be extended over a period of time into the durational experience.

Over the span of the research and three live works my understanding of an experience of duration in performance has grown and deepened and in the writing I explain what I mean by durational performance. However, it is important to note that for the purposes of the presentation of my research practice for examination, I had to find a crystallisation of a durational performance that could be contained within a shorter time frame. This was to understand if a shorter work highlighted inside the durational art form could still capture the essence of a duration work.

The first two Naked Peel performances were intended to build the creative ideas and to understand the different qualities of time in a durational work. The third stage of the work shaped for my examination for Master of Fine Arts (Dance) had two time durations: first, seven-hours of ‘letting things happen’ as a dialogue with the spectators, and then one-hour as a distillation of the durational event, crafted for the audience’s attention with film, sound and lighting effects to follow the flow of action.
What happened to the performer and what the audience saw in the one-hour event was dependent on the prior engagement of seven-hours. This shift from a durational performance timeframe to what I call a time-compressed performance is discussed in the dissertation.
INTRODUCTION

I’ve gotten here by following the next thing that came along,  
the next thing that came into my mind, the next step. ¹

In this inquiry the focus has been on the complexities of a durational performance that examined a deep engagement with self, time, place and spectator over lengthy periods of time. This investigation used somatic methodologies to explore desire, memory and dreams to shape an autobiographical focus for the work. In seeking to investigate the nature and value of durational performances, the following questions have arisen. What are the different qualities of durational art practice? When is the spectator a participant or an audience? What is the difference in being captive to or captivated by something? How does one map a desirable body? Do sadomasochistic acts on the body re-live trauma? In what ways does a body become encoded with information? How does one rid trauma and vilification from these body codes?

In addition, as an artist attempting to deal with the imprint of childhood vilification and racial abuse, I wanted to use the arc of a durational performance to confront these scars. The purpose of using extended periods of time to frame the live experience was to be able to re-enter earlier childhood memories of joy and harmony so as to counteract the deeper layers of trauma, to find a way back to the innocence of childhood and the nurturing safety of the mother.

The practical outcomes from two years of research were accomplished in two phases. The first twelve months led to solo experimentations and collaborative works which fed into and influenced the making of three Naked Peel durational works for the second phase of the research. These performances were presented in different locations over different time durations, an art gallery, an adult nightclub and a theatre space, as a series of autobiographical experiments for installation and performance, exploring how spaces can

determine the process of making a work. I anticipated that the spaces would create different perceptions for audience and myself. I considered the gallery would allow spectators to be surrounded by the art taking their own time to experience the work and choosing when to be involved. Whereas I knew that at an adult nightclub people come to be involved in the frenzy and exhibitionism and arrive to ‘let their hair down’ and anything else ‘below the waist.’ I was aware the club was a sex-on site venue that encouraged interaction, dancing, drinking and hosted bizarre and absurd performances. I was fascinated by the interactive nature of the club and developed my work to embrace this element of excess. The two works were developed in order to experiment in these juxtaposing spaces so as to feed into the making of a work for a more formal theatrical environment. I know from experience that audiences in a theatre space prefer to sit back, without the demands of being involved, passive but attentive to experiencing the work of art. Hence the final work incorporated aspects from the first two works and I added new ideas and materials including film, objects, soundtrack, lighting states and stage design. More importantly I was interested in how the artist interacts and establishes intimate experiences with the theatre audience.

This dissertation consists of six chapters reflecting on my practical experiences as cross disciplinary artist and researcher. The research is drawn from an autobiographical focus where accumulated memory, sensations, dreams and desires have shaped the stages of practical experimentation and the three performances. This was complemented by reflective journals, video documentation and comments from professional artists, journalists and audience.

Chapter 1, Rethinking the Durational discusses an attempt to understand time from a simple starting point. I discuss the qualities of time difference through the simple task of ‘scratching an itch,’ my first durational embodiment task. I discuss durational practices as a research reference to understand the form of each of the performances. Chapter 2, The Addiction of Embodiment explains the use of somatic practices in order to understand the ‘felt sensations’ of a ‘painful and pleasurable body,’ used in the discovery of desires, dreams and real memories. Chapter 3, Hostage to Spectatorship, investigates being held
‘hostage’ in performance through a captive gaze. This entails the transformation of sympathy into empathy and I discuss the roles of a spectator from ‘watching’ a performance to ‘participating-in’ one.

Chapter 4, *Self as Subject* looks at the gathering of materials for the performances based on an accidental finding in a dream. This chapter investigates the zone of a ‘mother-child’ state and I discuss both how I found this state and the idea of pre-intoxication, where I ‘danced out’ my ‘language of bodily information.’ Chapter 5, *The Outcomes of Praxis*, summarises the solo and collaborative works and describes in detail the three *Naked Peel* performances. Chapter 6, *Gazing and Writing* reflects on my arguments and juxtaposes them with the complications and possible contradictions in the form. I note that my conclusions remain open and not fixed.

Over the course of the dissertation I introduce performance artist Marina Abramović whose body-based durational arts practice has spanned over four decades and discuss how her works have influenced my own research, both from the perspective of objectifying one’s body and from recollecting memories, trauma, dreams and desires. As a fellow performance artist I placed myself into prolonged embodiment states to understand a form of self-control in relation to the residue of traumatic experiences.

I include findings from psychologist Linda Holler to help support my argument that sadomasochistic practice can heal the hurt and shame of trauma, and highlight the interconnection between acts of harm and desire (pain and pleasure).

I refer to phenomenologist Elizabeth Behnke’s discussions of ‘ghost gestures,’ and ‘holding patterns’ to help me observe if my body has accumulated these behavioral codes, and ask whether, by modifying my body in extreme situations, these body codes could help me understand behavioral ‘cause and effect.’ Behnke also discusses the practice of ‘matching’ and ‘piecing together’ a body caught in trauma and habitual

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patterns and I place this discussion in the context of an ‘intuitive’ body that is alert to making ‘gut’ choices on the thresholds of chance and change.

I discuss this theory in the context of the argument, presented by neurologist and humanist Antonio Damasio, where he describes a series of biological and emotional body maps which work simultaneously to observe one’s sensations. He remarks, “This indicated that the mapping of body states has been significantly modified during the process of feeling.” 3 This concept facilitated the idea of mapping my body’s conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious trains of thought, reason, desire, memory and dreams.

I explain how durational embodiment states can help trigger a perceptual awareness of an inward body gazing, leading to a state where time seems incidental. The interest has been to understand when these phenomenal reverberations occurred.

In addition this research has been undertaken from the viewpoint of my Hellenic heritage. I gathered materials shaped by that culture influences on my behaviour, thoughts and feelings that are now embedded as conscious and subconscious experiences. I related this aspect of the research to Holler’s theory that one is part of a broad sedimentation of history:

From one perspective the skin stretches as far back into our evolutionary history as the first cell, attention to embodiment reveals selves and worlds constructed out of their inter relations rather than an isolated self. 4

I was influenced by this concept of the first cell with the skin stretching back in time to reveal from an autobiographic focus, how my body could be a conduit for the trajectory of a danced life (seen and unseen). From this viewpoint I explored how my lived experience left its sedimentary residue on my body and this became the impetus for the making of the three Naked Peel works.

The first, a twelve-hour performance at D11@docklands Gallery used 1,200 oranges and examined the cultural metaphors of migration and racism. The second, a six-hour performance using 600 oranges at Club Church in Amsterdam, investigated stereotypes, desire, erotic-morality and notions of the pleasure victim, shaped by sadomasochistic acts on the body of ‘myself’ and others. The third brought together the two previous experiences for the Masters examination, as an eight-hour work in two parts, using 800 oranges to recreate a dream. Within its parameters, I wished to highlight the different qualities between the one-hour crafted experience and the preceding seven-hour durational chance performance. I discuss this in Chapter 5.

Along the way I have interwoven concepts, theories and thoughts from my own periods of self-reflection in order to help elucidate the complex nature of a durational work. I also acknowledge the other voices and writings I have included in this dissertation in order to illuminate and support my findings.
Chapter One: RETHINKING THE DURATIONAL

Duration is problematic because it is presented as a solution for art’s social contradictions [...] we have to stop keeping tabs on our own use of time. Let’s think instead about delay, interruptions, stages, flows, of instantaneous performance and lingering documents, of temporary objects and permanent mementos, echo and seriality and break with this binary opposition altogether. 5

Introduction

In order to explain how I began developing material, this chapter first examines the task of ‘scratching an itch’ as a way to observe one’s sensations under different time durations. I discuss my use of ‘entrancement’ and ‘gazing’ as a means to understand my perception of time and its affect upon emotional states that trigger memories as well as the immediacy of pain and pleasure in durational acts. Finally, I summarize a range of durational performance and arts practices that have influenced this research.

**Durational:** an extended period of existence, a continuance in time, a time-based phenomena. 6  **Meditation:** Focus one’s mind for a period of time [...] as a method of relaxation.  **Entrancement:** The action of filling (someone) with wonder and delight, holding their entire attention. 7

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Scratching an itch; from the flesh to the thought

If you have an itch, consider waiting sixty-seconds before scratching it and observe your changing body sensations. This might illuminate the idea of self-control and how waiting in discomfort can trigger memories, dreams and desires. The aim is to distance yourself from the pain through calming the mind by meditation, breathing exercises, or talking and singing to oneself: ways that aim to distract and deceive pain receptors to stimulate a pleasurable state. So then a sixty-second task can support a longer state of self-control and concentration.

My methods of training my attention start with closing my eyes, relaxing, listening to my breathing and gazing internally, looking for any light or images in the black space in front of my closed eyes. Now I can chart and observe all areas of my body from the single itch sensation that may now have migrated to other parts of my body until “I’m itching all over.” Over time the intensity of the discomfort moderates and I find pleasure in this long waiting. I extend the task to thirty-minutes both to see how I can cope in a longer state of waiting and as a means to condition and train my body for the stamina required for durational performance. Furthermore, by staying patient I can better understand the different mind and body sensations one might experience, I can trigger entrancement states and encourage myself to settle inside a prolonged task. I will discuss other methods of experimenting with my body over lengthy periods of time in Chapter 5.

I discovered by doing this exercise how to be ‘hostage’ to myself in an extended timeframe, and how by focusing on my body’s sensations, I could develop a distance from pain and transform it into pleasure. This also allowed me to settle into a self-reflective state and to observe how memories and emotional states were triggered. In her essay ‘Dancing States,’ dance writer Meg Stuart defines a similarly self-reflective engagement with ‘states.’
“A state is activity plus intention, and the gap between what you project and what actually comes through is revealing. My research with states stemmed from wanting to show an uncertain body, one which is vulnerable and questions itself.”

Throughout this period of training I was writing reflective texts as a kind of poetic understanding of what time meant to me. I saw myself from the idea of one’s autobiographical conscious and unconscious life. The text seemed to be scratching away at my thoughts throughout the research and I used it as mantra, to talk to myself, to calm down and to hold my attention during the challenging physical and mental states of the practical research.

“What is my life? How has the history of things altered, changed and shifted my perspective on how I look at myself and the world that I occupy? What is my life but a brief moment in time? Everything that has come before me, is manifested in me, yet my life is not historical until I have passed, died, moved on, vanished, disappeared, vacated, left. Time is rhythmic, cyclic, folding upon itself in time, folding upon other points in time. Time proper constitutes a life proper constitutes a death proper. I dance as a slippage in time.”

Influential durational performances

Exploring alternative forms of movements, calling the traditional parameters of dance into question.

Durational performance practices are widely divergent, challenging, multidiscipline, provocative and confrontational and within the scope of this paper it is not possible to

9 Research journal entry and script developed for Naked Peel 3, October 2013.
cover all their forms. I have highlighted works that have provided inspiration and influence throughout this research and my career.

I have always been fascinated with the growing attention given to different forms of durational art in the (late) modernist movement. Beginning with the Fluxus Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, a range of artists from different disciplines produced significant works that addressed durational issues. Artists such as John Cage, Trisha Brown, Bruce Nauman and Andy Warhol used different media to test the limits of time and the possibilities of long-form attention.

The report on Joseph Beuys’ 1974 durational work, ‘Coyote, America Likes me I like America’ particularly captivated my attention during the research. In an approach to desentization, Beuys covered himself in a felt blanket and, upon his arrival in the United States, arranged to be met by an ambulance that took him directly from the airport to the New York gallery in which he was to perform. This was his method of denying himself any immediate sensory response to the country, so that living in a space with a coyote for three days would be his first experience of ‘America.’ In so doing, he focused his emotional response to the country entirely through proximity to its indigenous animal.

He commented:

If people are trained and are really interested in art, they could develop more senses. But I don’t think vision only plays a role and there are twelve other senses at least implied in looking at art. 

I have always been captivated by body based art practice as a vehicle for clashes with the self. Marina Abramović’s work continues to inspire me through the scope and range of its ideas, and the way she uses her body in extreme situations to uncover and reveal the human condition. I have been influenced by the similarities between the strict religious

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11 In a similar vein, I ‘lived with’ oranges to stimulate senses and sensations that arose through the durational experiences. The oranges stimulated a mother-child state that I will discuss in Chapter Five.

Orthodox upbringing Abramović faced and my own childhood experiences, and by her ability to rise above the dogma of a strict upbringing and shape that into the art.

I consider her work as the epitome of durational arts practice particularly in the way she uses the length of a performance to find a cathartic place of change. In her work *The Walk*, she traversed the Great Wall of China with artist and lover, Ulay. The durational process of the project was as epic as the wall itself and in the interview with Andrew Furlong she said, “It took eight years to get permission to walk the Great Wall of China.”

The performance started with both artists at opposite ends of the wall and over a period of three months, they walked to meet in the middle where they planned to be married. However the solitary experience of walking, fifteen hours per day, placed Abramović in deep stress and fatigue because of the strain of knowing she was going to break her relationship with Ulay. To cope with the pain during the solitary walk she used a range of meditational practices relying on, Buddhism, Tantric, Sufi, Shamanistic and Indian philosophies, to sustain her through the ordeal. In the same interview with Furlong she notes that the break up with Ulay was an important change in her life and gave new direction for her arts practice.

Her 2010 work ‘The Artist is Present’ an enduring 736-hour static silent piece where she sits at a table and gazes into the eyes of each person sitting with her for three minutes, is another example. Sean O'Hagan from *The Observer* writes that there were “850,000 visitors, many of whom queued all night for a one-to-one audience with Abramović.”

This work was influenced by her ‘Nightsea Crossing’ project that was performed by Abramovic and artist Ulay at Melbourne’s ‘First Sculpture Triennale’ in 1981. The task the pair gave themselves was to see who could out-stare the other over an extended time-span while remaining in complete stillness. They intended this as an image of the first

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form of human presence and performed the work in galleries around the world as a five-year project.\textsuperscript{15}

Her 2011 work ‘Seven Easy Pieces’ was a seven-night marathon of seven works each lasting seven hours in which she re-enacted her repertoire, including adaptations of Beuys ‘How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare’ and Gina Pane’s ‘The Conditioning part 1.’\textsuperscript{16} In 2014, she established the ‘Marina Abramović Institute’ (MAI) dedicated to durational arts practice.\textsuperscript{17} In the same year, she launched the on-line digital-journal, ‘IMMATERIAL’ that features works exceeding six hours or more.\textsuperscript{18} My work Naked Peel has been published in the catalogue of durational performances on the website.\textsuperscript{19}

Other contemporary artists link bodily experience as a time-based performance act. The durational performance by Austrian artist Herman Nitsch, ‘Aktion 48\textsuperscript{th} Action,’ investigated body ritual in reference to ancient Dionysian and Christian ascetic rituals. During this six-hour work the spectators were confronted with a challenge for their participation, as he suspended a live naked body from its ankles alongside the skinning of a carcass of a dead animal.\textsuperscript{20} Visual artist, Gina Pane used her own body as a site for pain and ritual and in her work ‘The Conditioning Part 1’ she lay on an iron bed over fifteen burning candles as they melted over the course of six-hours.\textsuperscript{21} Australian performance artist Stelarc modifies his body within extreme durational experiences, such as his ‘Body Suspension Series’\textsuperscript{22} and his current ‘Ear On Arm’ has been a fifteen-year on-going art project that has involved growing an ear on his forearm.\textsuperscript{23} Since 1990, French performance artist Orlan has been transforming and modifying her face through plastic surgery as an ‘ongoing body art project.’ Amongst other body modifications she has changed her forehead to look like Michelangelo’s painting of Mona Lisa and her chin to

\textsuperscript{14} ibid. p.289. (For Further reading see Marina Abramović, ‘7 Easy Pieces,’ New York: Charta, 2007).
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. p.165.
resemble Botticelli’s *Venus*. Linda Holler describes her in the following ways: “Diva of dissection,” the “biomorph Queen,” a “one-woman slasher film,” the “doyenne of divasection,” […] “her wounds are shamanic in the sense that the wounds in her body manifest the sickness of a society that overvalues eugenic ideas of physical perfection.”

On the other hand, there are works that do not embody an orgy of pain but instead focus on the playful entertainment of durational captivity. In Melbourne artist Neil Thomas’s ‘Urban Dream Capsule,’ five performers live in a department store window for sixteen days and go about their everyday routines under the gaze of a consumerist public. In cities around the world, each experience has been shaped by chance and durational cause and effect. The excitement generated for audiences belies the tensions produced inside this extreme situation of co-existing and performing in a small space for a prolonged period under the watchful gaze of the spectators and inside the reality of being hostage to the whims of the other performers.

The work ‘Infinite Jest,’ (2012) by German performance artist Matthias Lillenthal, a 24-hour site-specific performance work, traversing the city of Berlin and staged in iconic structures left behind after World War II. It wasn’t a single durational performance work but range of small performances that challenged the audience within the parameters of a durational event. The audience could commit to the 24 hours or leave at their own will. Australian critic Marcus Canning wrote of the work, “I just left wanting more of them in return for 24 hours of endurance.”

Video artist Francis Alÿs negotiates a relationship with memory in his durational work ‘Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing’ where he pushed a large block of ice through the city of Mexico until it melted.

For her 2013 work ‘Intermission,’ visual artist Maria Hassabi constructed an oversized
staircase on which three dancers individually took two-hours to cascade down the stairs, repeating the choreography for eight-hours a day for the seven-week exhibition. Finally perhaps the most extreme durational work is an ongoing extension of John Cage’s *Organ²/ASLSP (As Slow As Possible)*. Cage was interested in extending a 70-minute work to be as ‘slow as possible’ and on an organ housed in Germany’s Sankt-Burchardi-Church dedicated to the playing of his compositions, the performance began in 2001 with a musical pause lasting until 2003. The first chord was played until 2005, and the composition will continue for 640 years, ending in 2640.

**Durational differences**

I base my discussion of durational performance on the premise that it shifts away from traditional time constraints to allow ‘time’ itself to be the actual experience. Art theorist David Beech was asked to comment and write about five European durational public art projects as case studies into the form. In the book *Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art*, Beech discusses solutions and complications in durational practices based on the projects criteria that it must last 100 days or more and engage the local community.

The ideology of duration dovetails with the reading of the post minimalist legacy of contemporary art, linked to the ontology of endurance in performance, installation, video art, Land Art and so on. This provides the ideology of duration with an artistic pedigree that recommends it in the highest terms.

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32 David Beech, op.cit. p.318.
Beech also believes that “Duration is required to allow the artwork to test its own hypotheses.” 33 This can be seen when artists embody themselves in their works, in that they become the material of the work, which is similar to my Naked Peel performances where I embody the orange skin and its flesh as the material to the work. Paul McCarthy in his early work, “painting as action,” drank fluids such as mayonnaise, paint and tomato sauce only to vomit them out of his body onto the canvas. In such a work, time constructs the situation. As McCarthy says, he ‘needs to wait’ until his body reacts to the fluids. 34 Welsh artist Eva Dent’s ‘Just Below the Surface / Hide and Seek,’ a durational embodiment installation, sees her on the floor, head submerged between the floorboards, suggesting the threshold of death drive, (Eros and Thanatos). Sara Rees describes the work as follows:- “She has slipped between the floorboards, between interstices of day and night, the twilight hours of uncertainty. Here, at once captive and fugitive, she finds immunity from the gaze.” 35

Another painful intersubjective work is Mike Parr’s ‘Malevich’ where he nails his hand to the gallery wall for 24-hours, setting it up so he could also be viewed ‘live’ via the Internet. 36 Tracy Emin’s work ‘My Bed,’ was a 192-hour autobiographical ‘live-in’ performance art installation, the durational is a cathartic cleansing. 37 Emin slept, ate, urinated, orgasmed, laughed, cried and menstruated in the bed as a ritualised cleansing in the aftermath of a nervous breakdown. Ironically this 1998 work was bought in 2014 for £2.2m by the Tate Modern in London and is currently on exhibition, without the artist’s involvement. 38 This purchase paradoxically alters perceptions of durational experiences as a fixed moment in time, in that it places a commercial value on the phenomenon of a lived experience, and opens up the possibility for re-enactment outside the frame of the original duration.

33 ibid p.314.
In order to discuss and understand the full extent of durational works, I will highlight works that have influenced me from a theatrical experience. Such works can create a grandeur and epic scale in ways that keep the attention of the audience engaged through a series of well-crafted scenes, impressive staging, beautiful sounds and dazzling imagery. An early example of a grand-scale spectacle work is the ‘Der Ring des Nibelungen’ (Three Rings Opera) by Richard Wagner, a sixteen-hour opera that took him twenty-two years to write. Since its 1876 performance, it has been re-staged many times and documented onto film and video. 39 ‘Einstein on the Beach’ by Robert Wilson, Phillip Glass and Lucinda Childs is a four-hour operatic dance-theatre work that is considered a meditation in watching rather than a dance, opera or theatre work. It also has been re-staged many times since its original performance in 1985. 40 Peter Brook’s direction of ‘The Mahabharata’ portrays an epic ancient Indian tragedy in a three-day performance event. It has since been adapted into a TV series. 41 More recently, The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma’s ‘Life and Times’ a ten-hour physical theatre event was performed at the 2013 Melbourne Festival as a development stage to extend into a twenty-four hour work. 42 All these works have impacted on the research in various ways over the past two years, although they form only a small portion of the multiple durational practices that are continuing to occur throughout the world.

40 Mark Obenhaus, dir, ‘Einstein on the Beach,’ Santa Monica CA: Obenhaus Films, 1985, DVD.
Chapter Two: THE ADDICTION OF EMBODIMENT

It is impossible to satisfy desire, because desire itself designates a state of non-satisfaction. 43

Introduction

This chapter discusses a self-hostage state where I subjected myself to pain and pleasure. In it, I suggest that over time pain can induce a state of satisfaction. In relation to this, I introduce the concept of the ‘pleasure victim,’ arguing that this assumed role can facilitate a release from the residue of traumatic experiences. In this context I distinguish the difference between various forms of somatic engagement and the bluntness of sadomasochistic body modifications practices.

Somatic: “a field of study that addresses the soma or the body as it is viewed from within.” 44

I outline how I subjected myself to extreme embodiment states in order to understand that I could shed ‘the skins’ of the inscriptions of physical and psychological abuse I experienced both in childhood and adult life. This raised the legitimate questions, when I am tightly wrapped in tape, ropes and belts, or held down and locked in small spaces, of whether I am experiencing pleasure or claustrophobia and if the reenactment of these experiences activates and releases the deeply buried trauma or causes more distress?

44 See Leena Rouhiainen’s, “Somatic dance as a means of cultivating ethically embodied subjects.” Research in Dance Education Helsinki: Routledge. 2008. p.242, footnote #5. She discusses somatic studies by Thomas Hanna who coined the phrase Somatic, “a field of study that addresses the soma or the body as it is viewed from within.”
Linda Holler’s psychological concept of ‘biocultural feedback’ helped me to elucidate how experiences can be embodied in memories, dreams and desire. I also drew upon phenomenologist Elizabeth Behnke’s studies of ‘holding patterns’ and ‘ghost gestures’ in the body, which reveal how negative and positive thoughts and actions affect bodily behaviour. In my practical research, I undertook to observe how my experiences shaped my actions, in the hope that through a physical release I could liberate myself of these negatively coded patterns of behaviour.

**Intercorporeal Captivity**

Holler discusses the past as something traced deep in the corporeal, existing before our learning, knowledge and external reality have had a chance to shape us. She argues that “for human beings, evolution carries with it implications of biocultural feedback. The environment that moulds our sentience is continually transformed through culture into new material and social realities […] the more we interact with our environment in unreflective ways, the smaller this biocultural feedback loop becomes.” ⁴⁵

In the studio and then in performance as a way to trace my past through a depth of reflection, I executed and repeated as many dances as I could remember, always to the point of exhaustion. The improvised movements of my Hellenic Heritage such as the Zeibekikos (dance of the blues) and the Tsifdedeli (dance of seduction) merged with the classical and contemporary dance techniques of my formal training. Arabesque, pirouette, jump, circle steps and the grapevine were interwoven, clashed and bumped up against each other. I wanted to exhaust myself, to recall all known movement language from my body, in the hope that this remembering and repetition could bring me to a point of physical and mental serenity. The aim was to dance so as to generate a self-empowerment and a refueling of mind and body. In this I was influenced by Abramović’s work ‘Freeing the Memory’ where she used a video camera to record every

⁴⁵ Holler, op.cit. p.128.
word she could remember, to free herself of the residue of language.  

Westcott notes her endurance saying,

After one and a half hours, Abramović ran out of words and the performance came to a natural halt […] Plucking words from her memory required concentration and painful dredging […] until she reached a point of emptiness, or at least mental exhaustion.”

Holler discusses emotional sensations as part of an evolutionary biology and quotes neurologist Antonio Damasio’s claims that “Sensations and emotions are expressions of our being on the world; they are the means by which the world is interpreted and becomes embodied in our flesh.” This suggests that one is part of a wider circle of cultural experience and that one’s behavioural patterns are inclined to repeat themselves.

Abramović’s early work ‘Rhythm O,’ for instance, was intended to uncover sensations for herself based on trauma derived from parental mockery, cruel insults about her body image and her repressed desires. The work was meant to be a quiet meditation based on a trust relationship with spectators. However, as she explains, it escalated into a violent attack on her body:

The experience I learned was that … if you leave decision to the public, you can be killed … I felt really violated: they cut my clothes, stuck rose thorns in my stomach, one person aimed the gun at my head, and another took it away. After exactly 6 hours, as planned, I stood up and started walking toward the public. Everyone ran away, escaping an actual confrontation.

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46 See the film of ‘Freeing the Memory’ on Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfeMdspSy7c


48 Holler. op.cit. p. 61.

49 Tiroche De Leon Collection, “Abramović placed 72 objects for participant interaction, which included fruit, feathers, whips, chains, hammers, knives, and loaded pistol.” http://www.tirochedeleon.com/item/610081 (accessed September 17, 2014).
Like Abramović, I experienced how an act of trust can turn into a frenzy of participation, where the audience becomes out of control and pushes the mundane into the dangerous. The *Naked Peel 2* performance presented in Amsterdam was at a ‘sex-on-site’ nightclub where body modifications, erotic fetishism and sadomasochistic desires were indulged.  

In the work I intended to break these stereotypes by modifying the desirable body into an ugly manifestation of the human form that would question the fetishisation of body image. I allowed participants to help me strap my body tight with tape and orange peelings during the six-hour work. The aim was to create a new body skin with the peelings, to become a ‘perfect’ image that would lead towards the sadomasochistic act of a tight body wrapping. I recalled a *Cowboys and Indians* game that had escalated into violence, the seat of this childhood distress. I still retain the memory of my peer group taunting me: “*Can’t you handle it wog-boy, look he’s crying, let’s wrap his head to shut him up. Shut up you wanka, you little poofia boy.*” As children we are so unaware of how far something can be taken before it becomes ‘trouble,’ these simple games can be the seeds of unintentional acts of psychological abuse.

The ‘acting out’ of these experiences in the nightclub paralleled the insistent behaviour in the adult audience. It wasn't as dangerous as ‘*Rhythm O*’ but what I was doing created tensions between personal and private space. It caused unexpected sexual arousal; some spectators removed their clothing, touched my body, grabbed my genitals, pulled my hair and rubbed orange pulp over their body and mine. When this ‘trust act’ got out of control, I would improvise an erotic dance based on Greek Antiquity so the spectators would leave the stage. At 4am, five-hours into the work, having peeled over 400 hundred oranges, most of the skin was strapped onto my naked body, I danced and stumbled on the stage with my grotesquely modified and distorted frame, wrote provocative messages on the walls and washed myself under a shower of orange juice. In reaction to the spectators’ participatory response to my naked body, the passive act of peeling oranges escalated into provocative activity on my part that I will discuss further in Chapter 5.

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50 See Appendix 2, pp.xiii-xiv.
It should be noted, too, that prolonged embodiment states that use sadomasochistic practices may also induce a transgressive, excessive kind of pleasure – ‘a Jouissance.’ During ‘jouissance’ as psychologist Jacques Lacan puts it, “Nothing forces anyone to enjoy except the superego. The superego is the imperative of jouissance – Enjoy!” 51 Here one can consider that one’s desire, sublimation and submission can free one from traumatic experiences. Psychologist Lynda Hart says:

Sado-Masochism cauterises our hurt, mends our shame, helps clear out the psychic basement, undoes memories of the past. 52

Thus, by the experience of wrapping my body with tape and orange peelings, I found a strengthening and a way to overcome and enjoy the claustrophobic fear generated by the hurt and shame I had experienced as a child.

**Pleasure Victim**

In the practical research I investigated ideas of deriving pleasure from pain through ‘role-playing’ sadomasochistic practices within a studio process to prepare for the endurance required in the interactions of a durational performance and to understand the limitations of how much my body could take over the extended period. In this context one may ask how sadomasochism differs from asceticism. Religion at an ascetic level demands self-discipline of one’s body since denying bodily desires is fundamental to removing oneself from the ‘poisonous’ effect of these desires. I comment on this because of the codes of conduct that were required by my religious upbringing: how one is dressed, how one speaks, acts and behaves in public, all under the watchful eyes of a punishing God. As an artist I relate to Lacan’s comparison of the deity as the ‘Big Other’ with self as the ‘little other.’ Acts upon my body belong to me in this concept and I have the privileged

position to alter my behaviours and ideologies.

**Sadomasochism**: defined as the giving or receiving of pleasure, often sexual, from the infliction or reception of pain or humiliation. Ascetic: Characterized by severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons. Asceticism: (from Greek: “to exercise,” or “to train”), the practice of the denial of physical or psychological desires in order to attain a spiritual ideal or goal.

One who practices Asceticism can use multiple embodiment methods to achieve enlightened states through spiritual devotion so as to protect oneself from the ‘poisons of a desirable body.’ I experienced these versions of ascetic practices from the Greek Orthodox Church forced upon me as a child. I remember crawling, bowing, kissing the priest’s hand, chanting, fasting, slapping, head shaking, squeezing my thumb and the first two fingers together on my right hand to make the sign of the cross. Only then could I bow and kiss icons and symbolic objects.

Holler believes that ascetic practices can enhance the sense of being alive, whilst asserting that one may get caught in the dogma of ideology and ‘shrink’ into its codes of conduct:

This kind of asceticism shrinks morality into control over sexual behaviour, often reducing it to a list of illegitimate pleasures identified with persons who, on the basis of their gender, race, class, or sexual preference, are especially given to lascivious behaviour.

In this context, Holler also discusses French performance artist Orlan who constantly modifies her features through plastic surgery. Holler argues that “the wounds in her body

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56 Holler. op.cit. p.154.
manifest the sickness of a society that overvalues eugenic ideas of physical perfection.” 57

Orlan has written in her ‘manifesto of carnal art’ practice that “I can observe my own body cut open without suffering! … I can see myself all the way down to my viscera, a new stage of gaze […] Carnal Art loves parody and the baroque, the grotesque and the extreme.” 58

This discussion brings my attention to the endurance of a durational performance where pain can induce states of bliss to a point of release from suffering. This was the conduit in the Naked Peel works through which I addressed the pains and tensions caused by experiences of vilification in my life. By modifying my body through bondage and sadomasochistic embodiment practices, I could dance through these traumatic memories and rid myself of the scars of denigration. In his essay ‘The Theatre of Cruelty,’ Antonin Artaud implied that the body is a sacred vessel and can easily be tainted by poisonous sexual activity. He wrote that “Eroticism is a transaction of darkness and in committing it we make the darkness rise in the light of life.” 59 I believe that this disturbed perception of Eros is a symptom of body censorship, where desires are defined as acts of darkness. The sadomasochist enjoys the role of the pleasure victim without censorship, in order to experience physical liberation, to allow ‘the darkness [to] rise in the light of life,’ through occupying both passive and authoritarian roles. As Holler says:

Many SM practitioners say that the most important element in the whole drama is consent and trust and that it is mutuality, along with the highly ritualized elements in the performance, that allows pain to be cathartic and transformative. Besides the SM draws the mind back into the body, people are drawn to consensual sadomasochism in the attempt to relive their past, often recreating the pain of being abused but under ritualized conditions in which their subjective lives are left intact and therefore become stronger. 60

57 Holler. op.cit. p. 151.
60 Holler. op.cit. 149.
Sadomasochism is, as she says, also used as a means of reconnection with the desirable self:

On the other side are those who use sadomasochistic practices to reconnect with their bodies and feelings, […] a reversal of Plato’s cave in which the body leads the self back into the physical world and the mind obediently follows. ⁶¹

Philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek notices the growth in sadomasochistic sexual dependencies as a place of sublimation and interaction. “In these relationships,” he argues, “people derive libidinal satisfaction from freely becoming slaves or submissive to masters or dominance as a way of liberating transgressive-ness.” ⁶² My performance was aimed at transforming an experience born out of self-harm into a self-desirable state. To exhaust myself of everything and return to myself through a process of ‘becoming empty’ and find a way to rebuild with a body-proper, not subjected to coded ideologies on how one must act and where one has a grasp of the self.

**A Painful body of memories**

Can I hold the attention of the audience if they can see the pain I’m going through and is there ‘pain in remembering”? In the *Naked Peel* performances I aimed to invoke a sense of pity and a sense of fear: pity in response to the autobiographical content, and fear aroused in the audience in relation to their own strain or potential distress. In the process of gathering materials I mapped my family’s experiences as new migrants to Australia from the 1950’s, sifting through photographs, letters, home movies, heirlooms and mementoes. This process of recollecting reminded me of the joys of being together with community, but also of the countless times I experienced and witnessed racial hatred towards me, my family and other ethnic minorities growing up in Australia. I remember dancing with my Uncles for hours on end at family celebrations to the Greek Rembetika

⁶¹ ibid. p.149.
⁶² Tony Myres. op.cit. p. 52.
music (dance of the blues) and this triggered me to explore and execute dances from my Greek heritage. In the studio I would play Greek music for hours and let the sounds vibrate through my body and movements and sensations cascaded out of my body into the dance. The Rembetika dance is improvisational to activate a trance like state to unlock memories, dreams and desires. The dance was used as choreographic material for the three performances.

I will explain the performances in detail in Chapter 5, but first I need to honor the memory of my mother to whom the work is dedicated. Evanthia Linou endured decades of physical ill health, pain and cultural vilification and without knowing, I think she suffered a ‘deferred reaction to trauma’ when leaving her home in Cyprus. My mother dealt with the pain through her love of family and devotion to the church that she considered a ‘spiritual-body-testing.’ I was influenced by her deep devotion and wanted to honor her life in the artwork. I saw my use of a large number of oranges, the fruit that I recall her cooking, as a way to immerse myself in my conscious and subconscious desire for the innocence of childhood and the nurturing safety of the mother.

I view my body since childhood as caught in the flux that philosopher Jose Gill has called ‘paradoxical.’ Such a body Gill says is one “that opens and shuts, that endlessly connects with other bodies and elements, a body that can be deserted, emptied, stolen from its soul, as well as traversed by the most exuberant fluxes of life. […] That is: A paradoxical body.” 63

This idea led me towards the question of how one can easily open or shut oneself to sensations or states of being, where the mind and body balance between harmony and sorrow. Belgian choreographer Meg Stuart’s remark that “one is vulnerable and questions itself,” 64 helps define for me an attempt to relive past experiences, when the pain in remembering triggers deep states of harmony and sorrow.

Chapter Three: HOSTAGE TO SPECTATORSHIP

*Durational Performance is a form through which TIME is manifested in its original (natural) purity and brought to the forefront as pivotal to the experience [...] Durational performance challenges audience’s habitual patterns of full consumption of cultural products.*

Introduction

Spectatorship has been central to my inquiry. Questions arose as to the different types of spectatorship. When does the balance shift from passive audience to active participant? What are the differences between being captivated by something and being captive to something? Does a durational performance imply the artist being hostage to the artwork? Does the spectator feel hostage to the attention of the artist? How does the spectator experience empathy in performance or to the work being watched? What do we mean by a fixed gaze and by inattentional blindness to things?

The findings for this discussion are based on the, six, eight and twelve-hour *Naked Peel* performances, where the spectators could make choices in engagement affected by each specific time frame and presentation circumstance. These experiences gave me an insight into the differences in spectatorship and the chance to observe what states spectators may experience within performance. I explain the perceptual effect of ‘the captive gaze’ and

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in what ways this is associated with the term ‘inattentional blindness’ where things in plain sight may not be seen. I discuss the affectivity of emotional states that aim to captivate the spectators’ gaze and how, through the gaze of watching, they may become hostage to the sensations of the performance. I briefly discuss hostage-like states caused by consumerism and the media and the psychological hold that religion and sport wield.

**Public and private codes of behaviour**

In Chapter 2, I referred to Abramović’s explanation of her confrontation with an audience: “If you leave decision to the public you can be killed.” 66 This implies a hostage-like relationship between the artist and the spectators – a relationship in which the artist feels captive to the audience. One may ask whether, in such an extreme situation, the outcome will be worth it?

| Spectator: A person who watches at a show, game, or other event: Audience: The assembled spectators or listeners at a public event: Participant: A person who takes part in something: Hostage: A person seized or held as security for the fulfillment of a condition. 67 |

In contrast, let us look at a situation in which the audience is hostage to the work of art. In her review of Henrik Ibsen’s *John Gabriel Borkman*, art critic Jana Perkovic describes it as an,

“arts events we co-made, not simply witnessed, an arts event that had physically exhausted us. […] We sat, dear reader, in orderly theatre rows, for 12 hours,

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leaving only for food, water and toilet, and rushing back in to see where the performance had gone. And it went everywhere [...] Some audience members were kidnapped. Whether it represents the future of theatre is hard to say, if only because 12 hours can only be an exceptional investment of time.”

Perkovic uses the term ‘kidnapping’ to describe the relationship with the audience; although the term ‘hostage’ can conjure up the notions of violence, torture, rape, terrorism and war. In my own work I did not intend to create a violent hostage situation, but to have the audience captivated by a durational work. I wanted their experience to parallel a sense of captivity and I was concerned to develop an authentic dialogue with them where sensations they were experiencing could turn from sympathy to empathy. I wanted to disturb the viewer in the manner suggested by Artaud’s comment that “The audience should not leave the theatre ‘intact’ morally or emotionally.”

The notion of being held psychologically captive over a lengthy duration is not an unfamiliar cultural experience. One can be captivated for years by soap operas or by reality TV programs, where the participant is willing to be held in a house by ‘Big Brother,’ engaged in activities that mirror the lives of the spectators hooked on the programs. In the sporting arena athletes endure physical extremes over a prolonged period and spectators gather for hours in the exhausting see-saw experience of winning or losing. In religious ceremonies thousands give themselves over to active devotional entrapment over long periods. The department store can hold one hostage to consumerist desire, stimulated by the bombardment of propaganda from the media and advertising. Indeed, even within each one of these activities there are several forms of physical and psychological stimulation that keep one self-captive to situations (eg; the television viewers vs the participants, the athletes vs the spectators or the voluntary religious devotees vs those involuntarily hooked by advertising). What I am suggesting is that there are differences in how one’s attention is held captive to something ‘out of the ordinary.’

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69 Susan Sontag, ed. Antonin Artaud, Selective writings,’ (1976) p. 34.
One may involuntarily adjust one’s appearance or behaviour in public spaces automatically yet unknowingly modifying one’s body shape and gesture in restaurants, banks, entering elevators, obeying traffic signals and other daily situations. This lack of awareness of one’s own actions and of the behaviour of others suggests a blindness to one’s perceptual sensations.

One may be voluntarily be fixated to one’s body image like an anorexic or a body-builder trapped by particular ways of behaving. As Behnke says:

> We might also note that wearing a business suit (whether the traditional male version or more recent female version) enables some movement patterns and styles of corporeal comportment and hinders others.

Moreover, she asks, “are there micromovements that have to do with ‘wearing’ this body and even when one is not actually wearing a suit?” 70 This suggests an involuntary hostage to cultural codes. Next, I wish to elaborate on the notion of being ‘captivated by something’ and how it can hold one in a state of ‘gazing,’ ‘drifting’ and an ‘inattentional blindness.’

**The captive gaze can be infectious**

The research practice I was engaged in led me to consider how looking at something over long periods of time can induce states of ‘entrancement’ and ‘drifting.’ I wondered whether the spectator also slips into these states without knowing, and whether this in turn involves an ‘inattentional blindness’ to things outside the immediate zone of attention.

Inattentional blindness: is the failure to notice a fully visible, but unexpected object because attention was engaged on another task, event, or object. Entrancement: The act of filling someone with wonder and delight, holding their entire attention.

These states can happen at any time; our senses can be triggered by sounds, smells, images and thoughts; but we can also limit our perceptions and attention and be ‘blind’ to actions and sensations actively going on around us. Siobhan Murphy discusses a ‘selective seeing’ where we unintentionally take in, or don't take in, experience:

The ways in which our corporeal style creates our mode of perceiving the world is not something we ordinarily pay attention to. We tend to elide the manner of perceiving and focus our attention instead on that which we perceive. This renders us unaware of the extent to which we are invested in what we perceive.

Drifting: A state in which one’s attention may digress or stray to another subject, for instance, “I noticed my audience’s attention drifting.” Gazing: Looking steadily and intently especially in admiration surprise or thought.

In the film component in the Naked Peel 3 performance, I crafted a word collage of a conversation between my projected thoughts and myself. I edited words randomly at four words per-second that flashed past quickly but just comprehensibly enough to read. I was

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71 See Daniel J. Simons, article on ‘Inattentional Blindness.’ The term was coined by Arien Mack and Irvin Rock in 1992. [http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Inattentional_blindness](http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Inattentional_blindness) (accessed May 25, 2014). For further information see, Didn’t spot the dancing gorilla in famous video? Why people suffer from ‘inattention blindness.’ [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1378228/Didnt-spot-dancing-gorilla-famous-YouTube-video.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1378228/Didnt-spot-dancing-gorilla-famous-YouTube-video.html) A documentary on this theory was made to visually explain the concept. There are two basketball teams and one is asked to count the number of times the white team passes the ball to each other. At some point a person wearing a gorilla costume walks into the game. At the end of the task, one is asked if they saw the gorilla, and 80% did not notice the gorilla, the colour of the background change or see a player walk out of the game. This examined the brain’s ability to see or not see things in plain sight. Our perceptions apparently can take in only five pieces of information at once, thus we can be blind to other senses. However, one can train oneself to increase one’s awareness to the senses and their surroundings (recall Beuys suggesting we have twelve extra senses to tap into).


influenced by Tristan Tzara’s ‘poetry of chance’ and ‘randomness’ that he devised during the DADA period.  

The word film was projected onto thirty sheets of paper, stuck onto the wall to make it seem that the image on screen wall would at some point in time shed its skin. The offensive words in the film aimed to provoke an ‘inattentional blindness’ as a metaphor for being blind to things in plain sight, such as vilification. This was juxtaposed behind me as performer, sitting on a suitcase of oranges, looking at family portraits and letters and reminiscing of good and bad times.

The following is a sample of the words on the screen:


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75 See Tristan Tzara, “Take a newspaper. Take a pair of scissors. Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem. Cut out the article. Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag. Shake it gently. Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag.” Copy conscientiously. The poem will be like you. And here you are a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar.” [http://www.dadart.com/dadaism/dada/037-Tzara.html](http://www.dadart.com/dadaism/dada/037-Tzara.html) (accessed December 15, 2014). See David Bowie, ‘Lyric-Cut-Up game,’ shown at 3.45min into the film. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85ZwK12nSRU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85ZwK12nSRU) (accessed December 15, 2014). For further reading see Hans Richter, *DADA Art and Anti Art*. Thames and Hudson: London, 1964.

76 See film made for performance in Appendix 4, DVD Disc two at 5.50min.
I believe that looking at something over a long period of time alters our perceptions of a situation and in a sense captivates our gaze. As methods for experimenting and exploring the idea of a durational gaze, I would look at objects with a fixed stare for long periods of time. This evoked a type of mediation and trance effect, where I found myself captive to time and became lost in the moment.

I aimed to entrance and take captive the gaze of the spectator throughout the performance through the stimulation of a multitude of sense perceptions, some of which were intentionally introduced to establish blindness or a selective seeing to perception. The use of film and lighting states helped create this notion of how light alters one's attention to perception. There was a sense of this entranced involvement evident in the comment that fellow artist Jenny Kemp made after the one-hour performance of *Naked Peel 3*: “Christos you seemed to move so slowly and then it was over so quickly.” 77 It is there too in the response of a colleague and friend Fotis Kapetopoulos after the same performance: “Wow, I thought I was dreaming for a moment and then realised I was watching you.” 78

Both of these comments are examples of the perceptual mode provoked by my attempt to activate, consciously or unconsciously, a huge amount of perceptual input in the spectator, to hold their attention. The performance was crafted to put into play multiple stimuli. I wasn’t just working with one thing, I was investigating how the mind and body could be held between states of perception. Jenny Kemp thought the performance was moving so slowly. It felt like a moment was being held for a long time and then suddenly the spectator realized it was over. Fotis felt like he was dreaming, then in fact realised he was watching something that affected his perception on a subtle level. His body had become activated and he felt his own presence in the performance. I believe this is one of the strengths of a durational performance in that it alters our common sense of time where sensations seem to slip in and out of a strictly time-based logic.

Feelings and Emotional Empathy

The final section to this chapter investigates the emotional sensations for the spectator in a durational performance and asks whether it is a rewarding experience. This is particularly in question in performances such as the bloody body rituals performed by Hermann Nitsch where the unsettling nature of the content shatters the spectator’s comfort in watching. Here two sides of the hostage situation are brought into collision as one needs to consider whether, it is one thing for a performer to endure discomfort, does the audience deserves the same experience? Performance artist, Gina Payne has argued that “pain has a purifying effect: such a work was necessary to reach an anaesthetized society.” 79 This implies that we are too complacent, that our emotions and feelings need to be shaken up. Perhaps this is one of the roles that art can play in our society.

One can understand the feeling of being together on a journey and the importance of being physically present in the space during a prolonged experience. This enables people to feel each other’s presence, to be collectively open to the sounds, smells, sights, touches and tastes of a durational event. I shaped the autobiographical content in my performance to counteract experiences of vilification. I hoped to develop responses of reason and empathy in the audience. In discussing the importance of empathy, Damasio uses the term ‘mirror neurons.’ 80 His studies have indicated a range of changes in brain activity when one experiences feelings for others. “It is apparent” he says “that the brain can stimulate certain emotional body states internally, as happens in the process of turning the emotion sympathy into a feeling of empathy.” 81 He continues by citing the example “of being told about a horrible accident in which someone was badly injured. For a moment you may feel the pain of the person in question … you feel as if you were the victim.” 82

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81 ibid.
82 ibid.
Psychologist Malcolm MacLauchlan believes that “If these ‘mirror’ neurons also exist in humans, it would help us to understand why other people’s gesticulations and possibly facial expressions are so meaningful to us - because we are ‘mirroring them’ in our own bodies. Your smile makes me smile.”

I used this mirroring affect in the *Naked Peel* performances in the hope to arouse empathy in the audience. *Naked Peel 1* set in D11@docklands Gallery space allowed the spectators to be up close to the activities. I was asked many times; ‘Are you ok, do you need help peeling the oranges?’ The simple task of peeling hundreds of oranges created an empathy as the image suggested a lonely migrant figure with a huge domestic task. As I sat sewing the orange peelings together to form a new skin I can recall a female spectator sitting and chatting alongside me for more than two hours, reminiscing about her own childhood and feeling very sympathetic while questioning the role of a man, sewing, peeling, cooking and reminiscing though family letters and photographs.

*Naked Peel 2* was set in an adult night-club in Amsterdam. With the increase of refugees in the Netherlands, the sentiment at the time was one of distrust and unease of the other. My image as a naked man in a bath tub of oranges unearthed the gypsy, the outsider, the barbarian. I felt stereotyped and reminded of the unease of my own childhood vilification. From the age of eight until my teenage years I reacted to the street aggression and verbal abuse I experienced. I could either fight or flee and being part of a gang forced me into situations that were violent, claustrophobic and psychologically cruel to others and to myself. How would you feel, if you were always vilified? How could you overcome the trauma of remembering these thoughts? In the performances I used the wall to write, “Where do you come from?” “Are you perfect?” “How do you see me?” “Would you like to be called wog boy,” “filthy foreigner,” “greasy new-Australian,” or listen to people repeatedly saying “Go back to your own country?”

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In the performances I intended to dance with a physical grace that would slowly shift to states of uncertainty and brutal body modification. Nevertheless even the darkest tunnel had to have a sense of hope and light and in the final scene I undertook the ritual of washing my body clean. I felt that this liberating cleansing might invoke a deeper understanding. Through the intensity of watching the spectators become fully immersed in their own sensations and affected in such a way that their sympathy shifts to a sense of compassion. What they see, hear, taste, smell, feel or dream in response to the work might up a ‘mirroring-affect’ in their own state of being.

This is supported by the comment of one spectator at the *Naked Peel 2* performance in Amsterdam. He said to me later, “Christos, when I walked into the club I thought, oh sure you’re just another act, but over time you were still there, a little different but still there and you started to grow on me, then I couldn’t take my eyes off you and I had to interact with you.”

What I also argue is that the spectator is willing to commit time to a durational performance whether they are given the choice to be ‘passive’ or ‘active.’ With either of these choices what remains open is the phenomenon of being present in the ‘same-place’ over the ‘same-duration.’ I argued that a durational engagement is crucial for an interpersonal experience, in contrast to the effects of modern technological communication that creates gaps and disruptions in one’s attention, thereby also disrupting the relationship between perception and experience.

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84 In conversation with Mark Bennett, Club Church, Amsterdam. November 30, 2013.
Chapter Four: SUBJECT SELF AS MATERIAL

I am convinced that mental process are grounded in the brain’s mapping of the body, collections of neural patterns that portray responses to events that cause emotions and feelings. 85

Introduction

In the process of developing these durational works, I needed a variety of body maps in order to find different perspectives for understanding and choreographing the works. This section considers the following questions: How do I use myself to gather materials? How many body maps does one have as resources to use?

The complexity of the research practice involved an observation of self over extended periods of time. During the first stages of the research my intention was to explore bodily sensations in response to tasks such as scratching an itch and somatic practices. This helped me chart and then map my body. For the initial body maps, I referenced reflexology, chakra and body energy points and as the research progressed I was drawn to the body maps based on neurological templates and those to do with memory, emotion, culture, history and dream. I also sought to map the five senses of touch, taste, smell sight and sound. Damasio’s studies have defined a ‘massive mapping’ of the body which I will discuss in reference to Behnke findings on ‘ghost gestures,’ ‘holding patterns’ and ‘body matching practices.’ In these involuntary bodily movements one is taking the fragments of a traumatic experience and ‘piecing them together’ into inbuilt codes of behaviour.

85 Damasio. op.cit. p.12.
Accidental findings and chance discovery

The performances of *Naked Peel* were first based on a Greek Cypriot orange peel recipe and a dream connected to that recipe. One afternoon I was planning to cook a Cypriot dinner taught to me by my mother when suddenly my eyes fixed on a bowl of oranges and I got caught in a momentary daydream in which I was entranced by the colour, shape, and history of oranges in my life. I could smell the alluring sweet scent of the cooking peel and I started to gently rock back and forth as if I was in ‘the cradle’ of my mother’s kitchen. I closed my eyes and could imagine her beside me. I jolted my head and accidentally hit the bowl and the oranges scattered onto the floor. I opened my eyes, looked at the mess and suddenly thought what if the kitchen was filled with oranges and they needed to be peeled? Later that night I went to sleep and had a dream of my mother sitting on a huge pile of oranges in a dark room and smiling at me. The room was glowing from the colour of the oranges, yet the walls were desecrated with graffiti and words of vilification connected to events in my life. She was cooking orange peels in the sweet syrup of sugar, cinnamon, rosewater and cloves; the steam clouded the room and it began to resemble a human form dancing out of the pot of boiling water. “I’m making *Botokaliko,*” she said, “*Come and help me, I’ll show you how to peel the oranges, then we can cook and soak them in this delicious syrup, and after that, we can dance.*”

This dream arrived when I was least expecting it, during the struggle to settle on a single idea for a durational performance. The dream became the foundation for developing a performance series that I now understood would have to be a ‘durational saturation.’

The tactility of the orange skin, its smell, the cooking and its taste brought up feelings and images from the past. These sensations, memories, dreams, desires, seemed to lure me into a state of intoxicated entrancement. To this day I question whether that was a dream or not and I wonder if a dream can haunt one as in an actual experience.
This dream sensation reminded me of Holler discussion of “a biocultural feedback” “stretching back in time.” 86 I imagined my life caught in a vapor, where things seemed to stand still and exist in ways that I could not fully comprehend. The research and the durational performance gave me the time to step back towards this entranced state.

**Mapping a felt body, coding and decoding**

In Maori culture, a person’s rite of passage and cultural codes are tattooed onto their body. Using the same image metaphorically, my cultural, social and political experiences have been internally tattooed and coded into my body and brought to the surface in obsessive bodily behaviour such as ‘ghost gestures’ and ‘holding patterns.’ This is not a simple process of de-codification of the internal codes, as internationally renowned dance artist Deborah Hay points out.

Each new performance practice signifies a conscious reinvention of the mind. Beginning with a puzzlingly simple feeling of integration experienced while I am dancing I attempt to articulate and then devote myself to exploring and measuring the consequences of this fleeting logic […] I feel like a tower of Babel. Millions of voices speak from my body at once. 87

Hay continues to discuss the body dancing as an agent for empathy and says, “From what I understood about human interaction, I felt the need to experience compassion for myself before I could extend it to others.” 88 Deane Juan’s psychological studies suggest we need to understand sensations deep within one’s psychophysicality and describes touch as “the chronological and psychological Mother of all senses.” 89 The maps of family and culture

86 Holler. op.cit. p.3.
88 ibid., p.25.
have been built into the psychophysicality of my body, as have the social, cultural and political sensations arising from vilification and gender stereotyping. My research took the form of a bricolage, a gathering, selecting, editing and collecting of the materials from a range of sources, which became physical actions of cooking, smelling, preparing, dancing with and washing my body with oranges.

There is, as Damasio has pointed out, “abundant evidence of emotional reactions” even at the level of the single cell. “Think of a lone paramecium.” He says, “a simple unicellular organism, all body, no brain, no mind, swimming speedily away from a possible danger […] The events I am describing in a brainless creature already contain the essence of the process of emotion that we humans have.” Damasio points out that in configuring the mechanical and biological of the bodies requirements the single cell contains three basic chemical elements, thirst, hunger and reproduction. He considers how memory and feeling come into play drawn from one’s desires and sexual instincts and asks, “Are hunger and thirst that different from sexual desire? […] “That is the reason why all three can blend so easily and at times even compensate mutually.” I recognised that desires shape our experiences and that tapping into or mapping back into memories one can understand a body that feels first, before it’s mind thinks first. Damasio continues to make the distinction between the single cell and one’s behaviour,

The main distinction comes from memory, I would say, from the manner in which the recall and permanent rearrangement of our personal experiences play a role in the unfolding of desire, more so than the they usually do in hunger and thirst.

Given all the information about my past and my culture and the ways in which the habitual behaviours have been coded into mind and body, it became important for me to find ways of translating this into performance. I was drawn to the whole idea of mapping

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92 Damasio. op.cit. pp. 40-41.
93 ibid. p.95.
94 ibid. p.95.
the body and particularly Damasio’s description of mapping as a neurological and emotional process.

How can I map my performance and the performance space in a way that it will become expressive of the internal processes that are linked to how I have been coded by history, culture, family, vilification and ecstasy?

The starting point to mapping the performance was based on drawing a chronological map of my family’s history, from my mother’s birth in 1917 in Cyprus to the *Naked Peel* performances in 2014. Against this chronology I looked at how each year shaped my own life so as to feed into the autobiographical content of the work.

I juxtaposed important historical events against how each year shaped my mother’s life and my own, for example when my mother was born it was the beginning of the Russian Revolution; the British army defeated the Ottoman Empire and took control of Bagdad; illusionist and escape artist Harry Houdini performs his “Buried Alive” act as an endurance test; Tristan Tzara wrote the first DADA manifesto and Marcel Duchamp made his controversial work ‘Fountain” a porcelain urinal signed, “R. Mutt.” the Pulitzer Prize started awarding works in Journalism; Albert Einstein published his first paper on cosmology and British science fiction author Sir Arthur Charles Clarke and Jazz singer Ella Jane Fitzgerald were born. 95 When I was born in 1962, Sir Robert Menzies was the Australian Prime Minister, Ranger IV was the first US rocket to land on the moon, the film *West Side Story* was released, Marilyn Munroe was found dead, the Beatles recorded ‘Love me do,’ and the first packet of ‘salt and vinegar’ chips were produced. 96

Through this process I also considered my body as an atlas and looked at mapping my physical sensations - what I could see, hear, touch, taste smell and observe as an arrangement of biological and mechanical parts. My skin, limbs and torso became the receptors to the sensations of the space. Words and outlines of my body were literally

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drawn onto the floor and walls, mapping out my pathways. I chalked spiral patterns and circular shapes on the floor based on the spiral wrist action of peeling an orange. I shifted the circular wrist pattern into others parts of my body allowing the unfolding of the spiraling action to affect the movement of my hips, head, neck, arms and legs. I was able to draw on a range of movements in these spiral patterning as I danced out these spontaneous gestures through the maps drawn in the space. I was interested in observing how micro-movements, twitches, itches, voluntary and involuntary reflexes would become points of reference for mapping my emotions.

As Damasio suggests a single Paramecium cell has an emotional ability to map the boundaries of its membrane, as do the billions of cells, which Hay suggests as a Babble of voices in one’s body. I was interested in how Holler’s idea of a ‘biocultural feedback loop’ could lead me back to the sensations of the mother. As noted in the introduction I was influenced by the concept of the emotional cell and the ‘skin stretching back in time’ to reveal, from an autobiographic focus, how my body could be a conduit for the trajectory of a danced life (seen and unseen).

Damasio also discusses body governance and self-preservation through self-observation:

In order for the brain to coordinate the myriad body functions on which life depends, it needs to have maps in which the state of varied body systems are represented moment by moment. The successes of this operation depend on massive mapping. It is critical to know what is going on in different body sectors so that certain functions can be slowed down, halted, or called into action, and so that appropriate corrections in the governance of the organism’s life can be made.  

In applying a process of slowing down or halting actions through a conscious mapping led me a state where, in Elizabeth Behnke’s words, “rather than considering myself to be a collection of separate parts - this muscle here, that one there, and so on - I began to feel like a creature of one large muscle, elegantly differentiated into many intricate details,

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contracting here and lengthening there, but always moving as a whole.” 98 This state enabled me to observe or map myself as a whole, rather than drawing a distinction between a felt body and a thinking mind.

**Ghost gestures in the corporeal**

_When I'm painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing, I've no fears about making changes for the painting has a life of its own._ 99

New studies in neurology have started to reinvestigate Freud’s research into how one’s subconscious states can control the conscious self. A number of neurologists are exploring how the brain’s functions affect one’s behaviour. Kat McGowan, a contributing editor to the science magazine, ‘Discovery,’ discusses a “default mode network,” which takes up a huge amount of brain function time, yet resides behind our conscious actions. Neurologists believe that this network triggers subconscious states and drives our emotions and actions before we are aware of them. “This network of neural regions,” she remarks, “is active during mind-wandering, daydreaming, free association and other dreamy introspective states. It seems to be fundamental, accounting for as much as 80 percent of the brain’s energy consumption.” 100 She further explains:

Below the surface of our consciousness our minds are absorbed with ruminating over memories and feelings, dreaming up fears and fantasies of the future, generating all the raw material that the talking cure taps into. 101

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101 ibid, p.61.
This suggests that the brain has chosen its body action within microseconds; in this way spontaneity, improvisation and chance take their place in our decision-making. I would argue that dance can tap into the subconscious, as thoroughly as Freud’s ‘talking cure.’ 102

It seems that it is from such pre-conscious actions that ‘ghost gestures’ emerge as unplanned physical expressions of our sub-surface concerns. As Behnke describes it, “Ghost gestures are thus one example of bodily “sedimentation” as the effective presence of the past.” 103 These gestures “do not necessarily “haunt” the body permanently. But they do tend to persist.” Behnke views “ghost gestures” as:

A special type of experience that explores certain nuances of bodily movement that we usually take for granted, and in this way allows us to bring into question the very movements we usually simply rely on. Such ghost gestures are usually relatively temporary echoes - micromovements ‘shrunk’ from larger repetitive movement patterns one has recently been engaged in. 104

She describes ‘ghost gestures’ as forms of disturbance in the body that can continue to haunt an individual. “Ghost gestures of this sort,” she says, “seem especially likely to become ‘trapped” in the body, migrating all too readily from one part to another, haunting us far beyond the original occasion.” 105 She gives a specific example that places the concept in the more readily understood everyday action:

After a long day of digging in the garden…I may stretch out in bed that night to go to sleep. […] I am somehow still “inwardly” prising up rocks…feeling the jerk when the rock comes loose. 106

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104 ibid. p.182.
105 ibid. p.191.
106 ibid. p.188.
In my case, the peeling of hundreds of oranges reshaped my hands and their grip on things. Days after the performance my wrists still had the sensation of twisting and peeling an orange, even though there was nothing in my hands. Early memories of my childhood, which would unravel as I felt the residue of the oranges coming from my trembling hands, held me in a state of deep connection to the act within and after the performance.

When I dance, I sense my body in space, watching myself through the movement; and within a split-second one action triggers the next. Inside this experience I try to ignore how an action looks from the outside and to explore the sensations of ‘how it feels’ from within.

“When acting is properly understood, problems about unconscious intentionality do not arise,” writes psychologist Grahame Marshall, “there is and must be acting which is not goal directed and not totally desire driven so it is not to be constructed on the model of intentional action, which is goal directed and desire driven.” 107 This suggests an improvisational and ‘unconscious dance’ arises from inside the performing self, which is not driven by conscious desire-driven action. The dance in the performance, which interwove my formal dance training and the Hellenic dances I learnt as a child, was traced as pathways with chalk on the floor. As I danced on the chalk markings I could metaphorically trap and release movements and by dancing on the map; I could imagine that the ghosts were now ‘trapped outside’ my body. 108

Psychologist Malcolm MacLauchlan discusses embodiment practices as acts of wellbeing and ‘being grounded’ in our bodies, remarking that, “We have moved from a dualistic claim of disembodied reason (I think therefore I am) to one where reason is constrained by embodiment form (I can only think through what I am).” 109

Holding patterns

During the studio process of dancing and developing choreographic ideas, I observed my body retreat into body shapes and gestural ‘holding patterns’ that held negative connotations. For example, I remember being scolded as a young boy by my father because he saw me dancing naked in the bathroom after a shower. The harsh words and ‘smack’ made my body fold over to shield from the abuse, my breath and heart beat faster and my eyes gazed at the floor as he yelled:

“βρωμικό αγόρακι, είσετε τρόπη και απάθεια ταιριάζοντας, βάλε πάνω τα ρούχα σου.”
(“You dirty little boy, you are a shame and disgusting, put your clothes back on!”)

I re-enacted this in one of the films showing a naked figure dancing in shafts of light. The movement was choreographed as a series of patterns, to suggest a feeling of isolation and vulnerability. The dances were constructed as a string of emotional states and in the film I explored the memory of this event as a place for the erotic self, dancing naked in a shaft of light. Bringing together these memories, I wanted to reconfigure a sense of my whole self and in this I was influenced by Behnke’s idea that “the open-minded attitude of matching - the not knowing what will happen next or where a shift might occur - not only assumes that I can trust my own somatic wholeness, but helps me actually experience myself as an articulated whole.” 110 I was partly shaping the work based on separating myself from the stereotypical behaviours of masculinity, so dancing naked in the dark not only retraced the childhood bathroom memory but also attempted to understand the father son relationship. I added to the soundtrack of my father’s voice speaking about his experiences arriving by boat to Australia. I wanted to hear and feel his emotional struggle as a migrant leaving Cyprus, to counteract the image of his strictness with a feeling of empathy for his struggle and in doing so release the grip of his authority.

Marina Abramović suffered from patriarchal discipline, cruelty and overbearing authority. In writing about her childhood, her friend, the author James Westcott, discusses one of her experiences at the age of sixteen when her father, Vojo Abramović, frightened and traumatized her.

On one occasion, Marina snuck into the theatre near the end of her Father’s lecture, hoping not to be seen, only for her father to point at her and declare, “This is my daughter.” […] “I had a piece of grenade blown one of my balls out,” Vojo said, “I was thinking it was a disaster. But you see what daughter I made.” 111

Westcott continues, “She ran out of theatre crying, not knowing why everyone was laughing at her and decades later she found out the reason from Goran Djordevic, a student who had been in the theater that day.” 112 Abramović has carried childhood scars from the strict militant authority of her father and the negative body image projected upon her by her mother. These memories influenced the making of ‘Rhythm O’ and a series of other durational works that were based on the denigration she experienced.

In a similar way I saw Naked Peel as a form of release from some of the distress I had experienced, recognizing the ways in which childhood traumas have scarred the body by reflecting on one’s life to help define where the sedimentation of trauma started and how it affects one over a lifetime. In the words of Jungian-trained psychoanalyst and cantadora Clarissa Pinkola Estes when dealing with past suffering, “There is a lot to be said for pinning things to the earth, so they don’t follow us around. There is a lot to be said for laying them to rest.” 113 Estes also define the values of letting things go as acts of forgiveness.

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112 ibid. p.31.
“Let us look at four levels of forgiveness I’ve used in my work with traumatised people over the years. Each level has several layers. These can be dealt with in whatever order and for however long one desires.

1. to forego— to leave it alone
2. to forebear—to abstain from punishing
3. to forget—to avert from memory, to refuse to dwell
4. to forgive—to abandon the debt”  

My aim in the work was to remove myself of the scars through a deep, self-reflective, practical investigation as a way to forgive and forego the hurt and shame I experienced as a child.

**Matching and piecing together**

Behnke discusses ‘matching’ as a process of observing negative ‘holding patterns’ by ‘piecing them together’ with an alert and open mind. “The matching technique,” she explains, “involves overcoming a habitual I-it dualism; awakening our senses of the ongoingness of somatic experience; and relying on the wholeness of the soma while realizing that somas are interconnected in larger wholes.” 115 This realignment of the sense of the soma, she argues, results in “[a] body that is less rigid and more supple - one that is less likely to reiterate old responses to traumatic events, less likely to settle into routine ways of automatically moving along habitual pathways toward pregiven goals and more likely to respond creatively to fluid situations.” 116

A key strategy in the development of the work was to allow things to emerge by chance and spontaneity, allowing myself the time to wait for ‘something to happen.’ In Naked

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114 ibid. p.370.
Peel 3 I occupied the space for five weeks and each day I wrote and rubbed out statements of vilification as a means of naming the negative sentiments gathered around my life, and thereby erasing them. The words acted as a dialogue with myself and the spectators. I posed questions about cultural gender stereotypes such as “Do you think I’m perfect as this orange” or, “I have been called a wog, a freak, a homo, a new Australian, how do you see me?” To counterpoint the abusive written words, to overcome the fractured self and to trigger empathy in the audience, I reasserted my own position within the dialogue and sometimes answered my own questions by writing back onto the wall. “No I’m not as perfect as the orange but I’m juicy and sweet” or “Yes I’m a freaky homo sapiens, the new kid on the block.”
Chapter Five: THE OUTCOMES OF PRAXIS

To identify multiple presents in the dancing performance, to expand the notion of
the present from its melancholic fate, from its entrapment in the microscopy of the
now […] to reveal the intimacy of duration. 117

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the practical outcomes from my solo experimentations and
collaboration and describe how I crafted the three Naked Peel performances. At the
outset I was intent on making a body-based work that was not driven by how a ‘dancing
body looks,’ or how a ‘dancing body feels.’

Naked Beginnings: Seeding ideas with practical experimentations

In the first year of the research, I executed a series of physical experiments in the process
of understanding the durational form. I created small tasks similar to ‘scratching an itch’
as single sensations. This process took place in the everyday where I would prolong
domestic tasks and put myself in hourly long actions, as a way of observing myself and
conditioning the body. For example, I would meditate and try not to move my body and
examine the differences of thinking rationally or slipping into trance states. I forced
myself to chant sounds until I ran out of breath or had nothing else left to chant. I
executed dances and paused the action between movements, allowing myself to discover
the single sensation of the movement. I held heavy weights in my hands and toes over
my head for over two hours and used my naked body as a percussive object and filmed

2006, p.131.
myself slapping it for over an hour.

Marina Abramović has developed what she calls ‘The Abramović Method’ for exploring the body in lengthy situations. For example one method is an exercise in standing, sitting, laying down, and walking silently in slow-motion. Other tasks include staring into another persons eyes without moving or counting rice as a form of mental concentration, or lying amongst crystals for prolonged periods. 118 Abramović uses these methods as physically and mentally transformative where she can observe herself through time. In a video interview she explains,

“That kind of exchange of energy, which is invisible and immaterial for our eyes, actually has an enormous amount of information and something is happening on the scientific level not just the artistic.” 119

These methods are forms self-observations and meditations in order to stay focused and experience out of the ordinary body sensations. This fascinated me and I understood why I needed to lie in a bed of oranges as a way to find a transformative single sensation. I used these techniques to develop the ‘scratching an itch’ and other tasks to clarify and strengthen my understanding of how to stay in a prolonged action.

I made short films dealing with my childhood ordeal of being forced into claustrophobic spaces, locked in wardrobes and suitcases or having other bodies pile on top of me or pillows smothering my head. 120 During this period I was influenced by Dennis Oppenheim’s work ‘Parallel Stress’ 121 in which he creates sculptural forms to house his body; hence, I reconfigured my body to fit into everyday spaces, such as pressing myself into panels of wood, lying on logs, curving around a pile of soil, forcing my body into

120 See Appendix 4. DVD disc #4.
tight spaces, wrapping around objects and staying there for as long as I felt like it. Sometimes this physical reconfiguration would last for two-minutes, sometimes up to thirty-minutes in a fixed position as a form of durational experimentation. Each position was photographed and then edited into a film sequence. The film component in the *Naked Peel* performance had sections influenced by this exploration. In the 221-dance studio at the VCA, a small window lets in a shaft of sunlight and creates a stark bright rectangular white light on the black floor. As the sun sets, the light shifts and alters its size and position on the floor. I used this as a form of time-lapse and filmed my naked body in an improvised series of dancing, collapsing and rolling floor movements. I experimented in this space each week over two months and filmed sequences of my studio practice as a way of generating material for the performance and to strengthen the physicality of the research.122

I collaborated with visual artist Robert Mangion, interweaving movement, video, sound, sculpture and text. The idea, sustained throughout this collaboration, was that the artwork itself would be a durational event, rooted in elements of chance, indeterminacy and causal effect research and that the artwork could be a construction without a conclusion. As collaborators, we developed three video works shaped from joint drawings, sculpting the body with objects, and using the voice as a notion of sonic choreography.

**Naked Peel 1: Peeling back cultural tensions**

*D11@docklands Gallery, Melbourne: 30 September 2013, 9am - 9pm.*

*Exhibition and Performance. 1- 13 August 2013.*

The questions I asked in this first work were whether a dream creates a false experience and whether a dream could feel like a living memory? As discussed one night I had a dream where I saw my Mother in a room filled with oranges. This triggered profound

122 See video of works titled, *Multiplicity, Table and Scratching an itch*. Appendix 4. DVD disc #4 (1.55min - 4.25min).
feelings of loss and empathy and was the catalyst to start shaping the artwork from a deeply personal place, filled with memories, emotions and feelings centered on the intimacy of my relationship with my mother, her orange peel recipe and the wider context of my family’s migration to Australia in the 1950’s. I remembered at the age of eight helping my mother peel oranges, sew the peelings into strands and cook and ferment them in a syrup containing sugar, cinnamon, cloves and rose water. The orange peels were soaked in a sweet syrup for seven days until they were deliciously sweet ‘teaspoon delights.’ Forty-four years later, I found myself immersed in these sensations again.

The twelve-hour performance using 1,200 oranges stimulated by the memory of my parents’ struggles as migrants and by the wider perspective of the Diaspora of arrival and departure was the first stage in my understanding of how to re-create the dream. The venue at the D11 Gallery located in the Melbourne Docklands recalled a sense of arrival and departure, a gateway to the city and a symbol of migration. The elements in the gallery consisted of a laundry tub overflowing with oranges, a pot cooking the orange peels, its sweet syrup permeating the space with a fragrance luring the passer-by into the gallery. The large volume of oranges also acted to fix the audience’s attention through colour, scent, and natural beauty. This triggered both chance participation and a dialogical exchange with the people in the gallery that included eating oranges and drinking orange juice.

The white wall in the gallery was available for spectators to write their own stories of migration or any memories to do with oranges. One person wrote, “Someone told me that just before the ‘big bang’ the universe was the same size as a small orange, and then it burst into a universe, so I suppose we are all from the same ball of energy.” Another statement read, “On school sports day, I remember running as fast as I could and at the end of the race, we quenched our thirst with oranges cut into wedges.” Then someone responded to this with, “My mum would sprinkle citric powder over the oranges and this made me run faster!” I then wrote an ironical poem. “Christos is a racist, he really likes to race, he lines up with the other racers, just to be part of the race!”

124 See images of work in Appendix 1. p.xi.
On another wall I hung family photos and on the glass wall facing the street I displayed a filtering system constructed from three metal bricklayer’s crates that collected the falling orange pulp and separated its juice. This structure acted as a homage to my father’s fifty-years of work as a bricklayer in Australia and as an hourglass dripping through time. Over the hours I peeled hundreds of oranges and sewed the peelings together to form a new skin for myself, as a metaphor of the benign notion of cultural acceptance. As time progressed I allowed myself to be open to the sensations spontaneously associated in recreating the dream. Dances from my childhood emerged and I would traverse in and out of entrancement states, improvising movements to ‘how things felt’, sensations and memories running through my body.

The installation continued for two weeks and I would return to the gallery and continue sewing the orange panels together and maintain the decomposition of the oranges left behind as material residue from the performance. People entered the gallery and noticed the change of colour as the oranges started to rot, mould and turn green. I considered this as an ongoing durational deconstruction and performance of the work.

The Greek newspaper ‘Neos Kosmos’ published an article about this work and I had a radio interview aired on ‘SBS Radio’ preceding the performance, which attracted members of the Greek-Australian community to a contemporary art work they would not normally attend. I was delighted to welcome the first two Greek women, Kyriaki, and Andriane who arrived at 9.30am, were captivated by the huge amount of oranges and the work they could see lying ahead and insisted on helping me peel the oranges or sew the skins together. These women came back several times over the course of performance to see how I had progressed, their sympathy shifting to empathy. Their repeated presence supported me and as we got to know each other and shared our similar experiences, they became unexpected mother surrogates. Later, the women said to me in Greek:

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“Χρήστο αυτό που κάνετε είναι πολύ όμορφο και μπορείτε να γιατί ο κόσμος έχει αρχίσει να αποτελεί ένα χάος με τα λόγια που λένε δεν είναι καλό άλλο πρόσωπο αλλά δεν είναι το ίδιο με τα μάτια του Θεόν.”

(“Christos what you are doing is very beautiful and you must say this, because the world is becoming a mess with words that say the other person is not a good person, when we are the same under the eyes of God.”)

This performance experience became the foundation from which to further explore time, chance and the participatory elements of a durational work. Subsequently I explored how this gallery experience could be re-shaped for an adult nightclub.

**Naked Peel 2: Revealing a tactile and erotic core**

*Club Church. Amsterdam: 29 November 2013. 10 pm - 4am.*

At 2am a naked man sits inside a tub of peeled oranges. He won’t leave the stage; he urinates in bottles, drinks the contents and washes it over his body. He is nude and touching himself in front of everybody. He lets other people touch him! He then attaches orange peelings to his naked skin, to create a perfect body. His notions of beauty and perfection transform him into an erotic monster and the spectators are divided, some fill their glasses with his juice and eat the pulp. While others walked away in disgust!  

My friend Richard Keldoulis invited me to perform at his venue ‘Club Church’ in Amsterdam. “You can perform it naked with the oranges,” he said. It’s an environment I understand and have performed in previously and I realized such a performance would help me understand the difference between a ‘family friendly’ art gallery and an adult nightclub where I could explore erotic embodiment, the pleasure victim and

126 Journal notes from the performance December 2, 2014.
sadomasochistic practices at a ‘sex-on-site venue.’ Within this explicit environment, stage two of the performance, explored desires of the body without censorship, provoking responses to various stereotypes of body image.

The ethical considerations were discussed with Richard to ensure a duty of care for audiences who may involve themselves in the work and ‘get out of control.’ Warning signs were posted at the entry of the club, referencing nudity and a provocative all night performance. I was aware that alcohol and mind altering drugs would be consumed that changed people’s attention and perception. I considered how this would affect the performance and shaped the work so it blurred the boundaries to blend into the frenzy of the night and be a formal performance. I intentionally hung the crate of orange pulp over the bathtub hoping the audience would interact with me and use the orange juice as a mixer for their drinks. At approximately 1am Richard entered the performance as his drag queen persona, Jennifer Hoplezz and held up a bottle of vodka. The audience lined up to get a free vodka and orange from the installation.  

In Chapter One I mentioned Paul McCarthy’s ‘painting as action’ works where he drinks the materials into his body. I was influenced by this idea and in each of the Naked Peel works I would diet on oranges for two days prior to the performance to absorb the materials into my body. I needed to have a durational engagement with my materials and metaphorically become an orange from the inside, before I attached the peelings to the outside of my body. I was energized from the extra vitamin C and I would use this energy for the durational performance.

The six-hour work allowed time to slowly modify my body through participatory interaction. The stage-design, influenced by the dream, was shaped to simulate a domestic bathroom, my naked body in a bathtub of 600 oranges, alongside a kettle cooking the orange peels, filling the club with the aroma of sweet syrup, steamy and tantalizing.  

127 See images of work in Appendix 2. p.xii. f.11
129 See images of work in Appendix 2. p.xiii.
I hung a crate over the bath filled it with the orange pulp and its juice dripped onto my naked body and into the bath. Alongside the bath stood a plinth with rolls of clear sticky tape, chalk, a knife, bottles to urinate in and sewing materials. There was a stage for me to experiment with a dance based on the sculptures of Greek Antiquity, which I performed at varying intervals. This depicted a perfect body that slowly morphed into grotesque shapes that decayed over the course of the performance.

There was a wall for writing on and at 10pm I wrote my first question, “My spine is distorted, but do you think I’m perfect?” A spectator then wrote, “Yes, I think you’re perfect for me.” Over time, the words were erased and replaced with new statements such as, “Do you think my Greek arse is perfect for fucking?,” which prompted a spectator to write, “No I think your sweet arse is for licking.”

These provocations built into tactile responses. As I stood up and out of the bath I remember a spectator jamming an orange into my mouth forcing me into eating an orange ‘mouth to mouth’ with him. Clumps of orange pulp suffocated my mouth. I tried to pull away but the crowd cheered and roared louder. Someone’s hand on the back of my neck forced me back into his face. I was touched, fondled, scratched, pinched and poked by the spectators wanting a piece of me.

I felt an alarming sense of claustrophobia as I was held down and groped, so I shook everybody off, got out of the bath and wrote onto the wall, “Everyone in the club is now watching you grab my dick and balls, so why don’t you let them kiss your fat arse instead.” This reasserted a distance between myself and the spectator and he left the stage, breaking the spell of his involvement through reasserting my own separate position, shifting his spectatorship back into that of ‘audience-proper.’ As he realized he was being watched he put his hands behind his back, dropped his head and retreated into the darkness to watch from a distance.

Five hours into the performance my body was modified by lumps of orange peelings stuck to my legs, chest, and arms. I wrapped my eyes, nose and mouth with the sticky
tape to form a transparent facial mask. I was restricted, I couldn’t bend down to pick up the peelings. I couldn’t see where I was going but I could hear a muffled cry, “More Christos, more, lets stick more oranges to your head.” The spectators cheered and handed me more orange peels. I became an object for their modification and the line between performer and audience again blurred. The frenzied crowd seemed like a sexual lynch mob: I felt violated, as I was poked, groped, tugged and licked. My face and head disappeared under the clump of peelings suffocating me, and the citric acid burnt my eyes and flooded my ears. I couldn't see, hear or breathe and I began to panic. “I’m in pain, it hurts,” I said to myself. “I’ve been performing for over five hours and I want to scratch my ear. I can’t. It’s trapped in a slop of pulp and peels, stay clam, stay clam,”

The sticky tape cut into my skin, numbing my body, I was overheating and almost passing out. These were not the single sensations I was intending. Someone kept strapping more orange peels to my head and another fondled my genitals. I felt like a sex-puppet and yet I was supposed to be the puppeteer. I was gasping for air, my guts churned and convulsed. “If I vomit in this mask,” I thought, “they will think it’s part of the show and won’t see the danger signs for my body.”

In this state of panic, I recalled all my training and rehearsing to prepare me for this type of moment, focusing my attention on the internal sensations to calm down inside the hooded mask. I pulled away from the groping arms and the gaze of the mob and cut out a small hole in the mask to breathe. I was drained of energy and floating in a state where pain and pleasure swirled as one. A change had taken place, a phenomenal feeling of accomplishment and exhaustion, alive inside my body as if nothing could hurt me.

In Abramović’s ‘Rhythm O’ work, she allows the spectator to freely touch, tease, pinch, pull, cut, scratch, fondle and threaten her with a loaded handgun as a way of re-enacting aspects of violent abuse, where the touch of pain is considered a form of ‘matching’ to discover pleasure. “If I do these performances” she says, “it’s because I wanted to be a whore. My mother was calling me so many times a whore […] So I wanted to see what it
feels like if really you are a whore, and you’re like you’re nobody.”  

Abramović said to the audience, “There are seventy two objects on the table that can be used on me as desired. I am the object.”  

Finally however she had to stop the violence to her body and leave the space.

In a similar way I had to stop the frenzied participation in *Naked Peel 2* because it was feeling dangerous! This provoked in me notions of the performer and the spectator as captive to each other’s desire. Is one ‘asking for trouble’? I wondered in Abramovic’s situation whether the event created a new range of distressing experiences for her that would need to be overcome in the future. In a similar vein, I wondered at the time whether my exposure as an object of desire and ridicule, the acts of tactile interaction with the audience, or the verbal feedback “Your back and arse look lopsided and weird,” “I think you look better with your clothes on,” might be the seeds of new traumatic experiences. Yet creating a situation of my own choosing I feel I gained strength from this experience as opposed to being further traumatised.

In the performance I transformed into an undesirable manifestation of the human form. The lumps of oranges resembled a malignant growth on the body, an infestation, a vulnerable organism barely contained by a distorted membrane. In the final ten minutes, I cut myself out of the superficial skin and shed it’s toxins. There was no concrete transformation or miracle, what remained was the naked body proper. I turned to the wall and wrote the final statement, “At 3.55am, I am just another naked man.”

For the research this experience was crucial in understanding how far one could go with an interactive audience as well as highlighting the differences between performing in a public and a private space. I was able to explore what is normal and acceptable in a performance celebrating queer culture, where the self is objectified and subject to out of the ordinary experiences. This helped me understand to move towards the final stage.

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132 See images of work in Appendix 2. p.xiv.
133 Queer culture or queer theory is based on the subjectification of sexual gender. See Eugene Wolters, ‘What the Fuck is Queer Theory.’  
Naked Peel 3: *Shedding skin proper*

*VCA Studio 45, Melbourne, 29 July 2014. 12pm - 8pm.*

The eight-hour performance using 800 oranges framed the practical artwork for my MFA (Dance) examination. The performance was separated into two parts: a seven-hour preparation period for ‘chance things to happen’ and a one-hour crafted performance where I ‘made things happen’ all in response to the dream.

I was drawn to the Studio 45 space because of its ‘cave-like’ atmosphere, a hidden bunker, a space of solitude, a space to remember, to dream, to self-reflect. It became my Plato’s Cave unlike the gallery or the nightclub experience with the volume of its interior a potential threat to the dream image of a small room.

Minimal props revealed the flaws and imperfections of the space to juxtapose with my own singular, vulnerable body. The design components although similar to the gallery and nightclub, combined with Studio 45 set up as a theatrical experience with traditional front faced seating. Again, I used the wall in the space for writing and I hung a plastic crate in the corner of the space to filter the orange pulp and juice that later acted as a shower. I made use of a suitcase containing sewing materials, a knife and rolls of sticky tape. A corner of the space was designed to resemble the kitchen in my dream. There were piles of oranges tumbling in and out of large trunks and suitcases to suggest an ‘arrival and departure.’

Like Plato wrestling with his own demons in the darkness of the cave and using fire as the light source to see his shadows on the wall, I felt that rather than dissolving into this big black space, the films I specifically crafted could be used as a metaphor to reveal the specular self. My aim was to project out my thoughts, to give light to dark ideas. Film became the means to explore the specular-self acting as a mirror on the wall. I used a paper-collaged screen to try to capture this passing translucent image, to draw this image onto the paper, so that I could then peel it off the wall. The film also acted as my
‘apparitional narrator,’ talking back to me through images. In turn, I responded to the film, by looking at it, dancing with and against it, ripping the paper off the wall and superimposing its images onto myself.  

Žižek talks about the specular mirror of self when we catch our image in a mirror, looking back at us as a form of intersubjective perception of self. “When we see ourselves ‘from outside,’” he says, “from this impossible point, the traumatic feature is not that I am objectivized, reduced to an external object for the gaze, but, rather, that it is my gaze itself that is objectivized, which observes me from the outside, which precisely means my gaze is no longer mine, that it is stolen from me.”

**Pre-Dream, part 1: Chance and spontaneity (12pm – 7pm)**

The work in this long-form durational preparation stage was based on the action of chance, the action of peeling oranges that extended into movement sequences based on collapsing, supporting and rolling my body into prolonged shapes, as well as periods of sitting still while I peeled or sewed the orange peel. I danced to exhaust myself. My mother had taught me how to peel oranges in a single-spiral strand and I used this spiral-shape to create choreographic material based on twists, spirals and circular flowing actions for the dance. I established a small cooking table with the ingredients to make the ‘tea-spoon delight’ and when the steam that cooked the oranges and sweet syrup came out of the boiling urn, it filled the space with a perfume that reminded me of my mother’s kitchen and the innocence of childhood. I observed myself peeling, sewing and cooking as if I were watching my mother’s hands. I could drift into gazing at the orange object as if in the cradle of my mother’s arms. I could imagine myself rocking back and forth, inside the actions that were so familiar and I wondered whether these were ‘ghost gestures’ belonging to my memory of my mother, where the innocence of childhood and

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134 See Appendix 4. DVD disc #1.
136 See images of work in Appendix 3. p.xvi.
the safety of the mother provided a cocoon. Tom Eyers discusses Lacan’s notion of the mother-child state as a state of primary narcissism that we are dependent on. He quotes Lacan’s argument that “The child finds himself dependent on the desires of the mother, on the first symbolization of the mother as such and on nothing other than that. […] This subjectification consists simply in posing her as the primordial being which can be there, or not be there.” 137

This notion of ‘being there’ or ‘not being there’ seems to me to be enacted in the ‘ghost gesture’ of ‘rocking back and forth.’ I used this micromovement as a preparatory state for moving, my body held in suspension waiting for an internal impulse that would propel me into action. The rocking was enlarged into a pendulum type swaying in which I spontaneously improvise movements.

During the seven-hours of interaction spectators occasionally asked me questions and I would respond with verbal replies, write words on the wall, execute dance patterns or hand them objects, such as oranges, juice, photographs and spices. Most people would sit quietly and just watch, drink the juice only rarely entering the performance space. I do remember holding a bowl of cinnamon, smelling its aroma and handing it to a spectator who mirrored my actions by smelling its contents. We both looked at each other and smiled.

On reflection, Studio 45 in Melbourne winter was a harsh space in which to endure a personal embodiment. Over the course of the seven hours my body became exhausted, the concrete floor was unforgiving. I suffered skin grazing, bruising and other injuries occasioned by dancing on a cold surface without flexibility. Peeling hundreds of oranges with a sharp knife caused small cuts in my hands, letting citric acid seep into my wounds, intensifying the pain. My hands cramped into the shape of the orange or a fist for holding a knife. The performance space held my body ‘hostage,’ and by exhausting it and emptying it, I achieved a fatigued blissful state that would not have been possible without this long endurance.

The Dream, part 2: *Making it happen (7pm – 8pm)*

At 6.30pm I got a cue from Jennifer Hector, technical design facilitator that we were ‘going live.’ Jennifer had maintained the improvised lighting states during the afternoon, and now operated the planned lighting, film and soundtrack. At 7.00pm I sensed the presence of people sitting in the seats.

The space felt so big, I felt tiny, I submerged my head into a suitcase full of oranges resting in the comfort of their texture as I prepared to begin. I felt like I was glowing from the proximity of the oranges which permeated through me and out onto the audience. I was attracted to the pile of orange peels and twisted my torso, spun my hips and followed through with the rest of my body in this spiral pattern towards the floor, rolling in the oranges’ sticky excess. My father’s voice in the soundtrack triggered my first emotional state and the suit I had been wearing all afternoon, my father’s suit of authority, was soiled as the orange juice soaked into the fabric. It was clammy and cold on my hot skin.

I sensed an image of myself projected onto the wall. I reacted by mirroring its’ dance before returning to the orange pile to sew the peelings into sections and attach them to the suit. 138 This echoing between dance and film was repeated over and over. I re-traced chalk markings on the floor that had been left as residue from the seven hours preceding. These markings outlined the start and end positions for my movements and dance.

As a way to understand Holler’s biocultural feedback, I wanted to propose that I was part of this loop, so I recorded my voice in the soundtrack as an amplification to thoughts about my life, asking questions to the self about the self. The recording was treated with delays and different speeds, overlaying the voices to create a cacophony of sounds. I used this as a theatrical devise to create a spooky atmospheric narration in the performance. I synchronized the sound and film with superimposed images of my naked

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138 See images of work in Appendix 3. p.xviii.
body, suggesting a going in and out of time as they morphed into each other. This was idea of my ‘skin stretching back in time.’ The film showed two images of myself naked revealing my back and my front and acting as a mirror. I morphed other images of the skeletal, muscular and biological system over one another and onto my naked image as a reference to my body map. I added universal elements such as fire, earth, wind and water, suggesting that I too come from these common chemicals compounds.

The following text was used in the soundtrack;

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What is my life
What is your life
I am before the Big Bang
I am the Big Bang
I am after the Big Bang
Am I before me
Am I after me

I am in a bind, in a celestial dance with the Big Other
The Big Other
Am I a little other
What is my life
What is your life
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The performance progressed through various stages of cleansing, erasing and rubbing out words and ripping the paper film screen off the wall. Eventually I carried a burdensome suitcase of oranges to the kitchen area to start the orange peel recipe. When I lifted the lid of the cooking pot, hot steam flowed out like a trapped ghost, dancing out of the bubbling syrup. My heartbeat was racing as the smells, sounds, film images and objects began to merge reminding me of the delight of the dream that had initiated the concept for the work.
I moved back to the pile of oranges, removed the soiled suit back to the vulnerable position of being naked. I strapped my body and head tight with orange peelings to create the perfect skin, the crackling sound from the sticky tape binding the sections of peel and reminding me of the sadomasochistic acts I performed in Amsterdam. I was on my own with no help from the audience and forced haphazardly to stick orange peels onto my head and body. 139 I could have stopped the film and soundtrack, turned the house lights on and encouraged the audience to help me, yet this would have broken the spell of entrancement and flow of the performance. It seemed incidental whether or not my entire body was covered. I didn’t care how I looked, I cared only how I felt. I danced semi-blind with the objects strapped to my head, I could just make out a collection of blurred chalk markings on the floor. I attempted to dance the external patterns while trapped in this internal black space. I hoped I wouldn’t stumble and fall in the dark, dancing through all the stops and starts, stringing together the ‘ghost gestures’ and ‘holding patterns’ as my body revealed them. 140 The floor markings were my ‘ghosts’ and I could leave them behind, a stripping off and washing away. The delight of the dream had peeled itself back and I ended in a naked, empty, desirable state. 141

139 See images of work in Appendix 3. p.xix.
140 See images of work in Appendix 3. p.xx.
141 See images of work in Appendix 3. p.xxx.
Chapter Six: GAZING AND THINKING

When you set off on a path as an artist, you have to do it with a big dose of faith, blindly believe that it’s going to be worth it going… and you don’t know that before you start.\textsuperscript{142}

So now after it’s all over, I’m lying down motionless in a warm bath looking at the ceiling with a fixed gaze. I’m comfortably numb. I don’t feel anything. Am I suffering the ‘philosopher’s disease,’\textsuperscript{143} where my thoughts are split from my sensational body? Dancers who lie down must get up and move, to think and feel simultaneously. Elizabeth Dempster remarks that “The dancer does not ‘present’ the choreography as its instrument but is, ideally, both doing and undergoing choreography in an ever-present moment of ‘writing’ the dance.”\textsuperscript{144} Brian Massumi has commented on Stelarc’s reflective writing method, which places the bodily practice as the prime act. “Only after the manifestation of the ideas began in the body,” he writes, “were they able to be disengaged enough from it to enter speech and writing.”\textsuperscript{145}

The writing has been a method of active reflection, not to locate conclusive evidence but as ongoing findings that illuminate the qualities of dance and body-based durational performance. By constantly engaging in writing and doing as parallel activities, this research has helped to formulate responses to my practice that are not fixed but are always open to new interpretation. For this reason the research has not lead to simple conclusions, the ongoing negotiations and interactions it opens up builds an experience and knowledge that will no doubt lead to fresh practical experimentation.

\textsuperscript{143} See Linda Holler, Erotic Morality, op.cit. “Schizophrenia is like the ‘philosopher’s disease’ insofar as it involves relentless, obsessive self-reflection.” p.81.
Durational complications and contradictions

As I repaired my injured and strained body from the durational experiences, I faced the possibility of doing it all again: would it hurt or feel as good as the first time? All three works took their toll and the body can take months to recover but the complementary states of pain and pleasure are part of a dancer’s training and necessary skills, techniques to endure pain. These challenges are what Twyla Tharp has called ‘mighty demons.’ Tharp has developed a body-focusing method to prepare herself, but in the end, as she says, “I combat my fears with a staring-down ritual, like a boxer looking his opponent right in the eye before a bout.” 146 I imagine this determination is what drives many dancers, and I know from my experiences that it drives me; hence the dancer who lives inside the practice will find methods for bodily recovery.

I question the use of durational performance for the purposes of ‘art for art’s sake.’ As I quoted in Chapter 2, art critic Jana Perkovic mused on the very future of it as a performance form: “Whether it represents the future of theatre is hard to say, if only because 12 hours can only be an exceptional investment of time.” 147 Although I placed Abramović’s work as a key component in my discussion, it is true also that commentators diverge in their preference over those aspects of her work that are ideologically based and those that appear to be commodity fetish. Abramovic established ‘MAI’ where you can experience the Abramović Method, a set of three-hour mind and body cleansing exercises. Sarah Lyall, an art writer for the New York Times has remarked about the Abramovic institute, “She is in danger of disappearing down the rabbit hole of her own mythology, betraying not only her own roots but also perhaps, the true nature of performance art itself.” In the same article, Antonio Acconci, an artist and friend of Abramović, asserts that “performance art should be ephemeral and performed only once.” “I think what she is doing,” he says, “is turning performance into theatre.” 148 This distinction between

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performance and theatre remains a key issue in current theoretical discussion. This research has enriched my position as an art maker, performer and person. What challenged me the most was trying to construct a one-time performance event that housed a seven-hour and an hour-long dance piece. Following the experience I believe there is a position for the theatrical element inside the durational. I will continue working as both a durational performance artist and the maker of ‘dance-theatre,’ “trying” as Sally Gardner has put it “to move towards a dance and a body that would be regarded both more objectively and as more constitutively unstable.”  

I have learned that where this takes me allowed me to remain open, where my response to how I feel or how I see my surroundings affect my reaction to things, as the artist who uses the body as a site for exploration and creative practice.

Open and not fixed

*Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings, Conquer all mysteries by rule and line, Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine - Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made.*

When time constraints are lifted, dancing in the dark, dancing through ghosts, dancing without thinking, dancing by chance and dancing for change have the opportunity to emerge as elegant organised manifestations, radiating out from the single cell, rupturing the social, familial codes that shape our lives.

Hence, durational performance allows one to slow down and be inside a felt experience, because, in dealing with time, such performances leave themselves open to chance, to observations and not solutions. Witnessing such performances can also involve the psychological experience of observing the self and the environment one occupies. In a


durational performance, something out of the ordinary has time to take place, and the experience of a prolonged exposure to this may affect the performer and the spectator profoundly. Furthermore the durational performance constructs situations that may cause disruptions in the steady flow of things, and discover new meanings.

As an intertextual artist and researcher, I believe in the necessity for a deep artistic investigation that doesn’t operate as ‘art for art’s sake,’ within which my skills, experience, sensitivities and knowledge operate as agents of change to comment on the human condition. Furthermore, my research does not aim to find solutions for issues such as vilification, trauma or racism, but questions, through the lens of something simple and ordinary like an orange, how we perceive each other beneath the surface of our appearances.
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Films

Einstein on the Beach. Directed by Mark Obenhaus. Santa Monica CA: Obenhaus Films, 1985, DVD.


Appendix 1:

Naked Peel 1. *Peeling back cultural tensions*

12-hour performance. 9am – 9pm. October 5, 2013.

D11@docklands gallery. Melbourne.
Appendix 1: Naked Peel 1. *Peeling back cultural tensions*

f.1. Preparing to peel 1,200 oranges.

f.2. Discussing cultural similarities.

f.3. Questions about migration on the gallery wall.

f.4. Participating and sharing stories.

f.5. Pulping the peeled oranges.

f.6. Sewing peels into panels.

f.7. Strapping on an outer skin.

*Photos by Lucia Rossi*
Appendix 2:

Naked Peel 2. *Revealing a tactile an erotic core*

6-hour performance. 10pm - 4am. November 28, 2013.

Club Church. Amsterdam.
Appendix 2. Naked Peel 2. Revealing a tactile an erotic core

f.8. Peeling the first of 600 oranges.

f.9. Writing provocative thoughts on the club’s wall.

f.10. Posing in a Greco freeze.

f.11. Interacting and serving juice.

f.12. Altering one’s social identity.

f.13. Sadomasochistic strapping.

*Photo’s by Mark Bennett and Panagiotis Panagiotakopoulos*
Appendix 2. Naked Peel 2. *Revealing a tactile an erotic core*

f.14. The grotesque transformation.

f.15. The pleasure victim.

Photo’s by Mark Bennett and Panagiotis Panagiotakopoulos
Appendix 3:

Naked Peel 3. *Shedding skin proper*

8-hour performance in two parts. 12pm – 8pm. July 29, 2014.

VCA Studio 45. Melbourne.
Appendix 3. Naked Peel 3. *Shedding skin proper*

f.16. Preparing for a durational intoxication with 800 oranges.

f.17. Exhausting body codes.

*Photo’s by Lucia Rossi*
Appendix 3. Naked Peel 3. *Shedding skin proper*

f.18. Traced residue of a ghost gesture.

f.19. Allowing a ‘holding pattern’ to surface.

f.20. Releasing the body of coded gestures.

f.21. Dancing in a state of entrancement.

f.22. Re-tracing coded actions.

f.23. Dancing inside a subconscious self.

*Photo’s by Lucia Rossi*
f.24. Reflecting on memories and projecting the spectral self.

f.25. A durational intoxication that searches for a mother-child state.

f.27. Reconfiguring the body image.

f.28. A sadomasochistic embodiment.
Appendix 3. Naked Peel 3. *Shedding skin proper*

f.29. Dancing blind and retracing gestures.

f.30. Replacing and matching vilification.

f.31. A spectral impression on one’s super ego.

*Photo’s by Lucia Rossi*
f.32. The cause and effect of a body in deconstruction.

f.33. The cathartic cleansing.
Appendix 4: DVDs

(Back sleeve and electronic file attachment)

Disc 1. Naked Peel 3. (14min edit)
Disc 2. Film made for Naked Peel 3. (9min edit)
Disc 3. Photographs Naked Peel 1, 2, 3. (13min)
Disc 4. Solo experiments. (4min)
Author/s:
Linou, Christos

Title:
Naked peel: 12 twelve hours later: shedding intoxications through durational embodiment

Date:
2015

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/116677

File Description:
Naked Peel: 12 Twelve Hours Later. Shedding intoxications through durational embodiment

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