Over the Threshold, Into the World
Experiences of Transcendence in the Context of Staged Events

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Abstract
The aim of the thesis is to develop an apparatus of theory and method for performance analysis, the purpose of which is to analyse potentials for experiences of transcendence. These experiences are contextualised in terms of the metaphysical, the religious, and the spiritual. The theoretical basis is a combination of Erika Fischer-Lichte’s the aesthetics of the performative and Dorte Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience. In the development of the theoretical discussion, a variety of experiences is explored in the context of contemporary theatre, ritual, and installation art in Sweden, Denmark, and Aotearoa New Zealand. The dissertation contributes to the methodology of performance analysis as it emphasises experience as research, and to the interdisciplinary research field of performance, religion, and spirituality, as it draws on theatre and performance studies, philosophical aesthetics, philosophy of religion, theology, sociology, and anthropology.

The result is a practical model that allows the analysis of experiences of transcendence as created in the staged event through the complex interplay of material properties of staging and cognitive capacities for experience in the spectator’s or congregant’s process of reception – all of which are conditioned by the event’s contexts.

Keywords: performance analysis, model, staged event, aesthetics of the performative, metaphysics of experience, immanent transcendence, theatre, ritual, installation, religion, spirituality, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Dorte Jørgensen.

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For Daria and all who make the impossible possible. In loving memory of my parents Ulla-Britt Marianne Skjoldager-Nielsen (1931-2007) and Mogens Skjoldager-Nielsen (1929-1995)
# Content

List of Illustrations ........................................................................................................... 1

Note on Orthography .......................................................................................................... 5

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. 7

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 9
  Subject and Purpose ......................................................................................................... 9
  Contexts ............................................................................................................................. 12
    Ghosting the Context .................................................................................................... 14
    The Return of Religion and Spirituality .................................................................... 23
  Making a Claim for Religion and Spirituality in Theatre and Performance studies .... 29
  Aim, Approach, Assumptions ......................................................................................... 32
  Over the Threshold, Into the World .............................................................................. 36
  Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 44
  Encounters with My Research Material ......................................................................... 45
  Disposition of the Thesis ............................................................................................... 48

Chapter 1: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations: Charting Research, Terms, Concepts, Theory, and Method ................................................................. 53
  Charting Previous Research ......................................................................................... 54
  Performance Analysis .................................................................................................... 55
    Semiotics and Communication ..................................................................................... 58
    Phenomenology and Performativity .............................................................................. 64
  Theatre, Ritual, and Religion ......................................................................................... 75
    The Expanding Scope of the Field: Performance, Religion, and Spirituality ........ 81
  Individual Studies of Performance, Religion, and Spirituality .................................... 87
  Terms, Concepts, and Theory ....................................................................................... 96
  The Staged Event: An Aesthetics of the Performative ................................................... 100
    Fischer-Lichte’s Aesthetics of the Performative – Overview and Key Concepts ... 107
    The Re-enchantment of the World – Reintroducing Religion to the Aesthetics of the Performative ........................................................................................................ 119
    Calibrating the Aesthetics of the Performative for Performance Analysis and Experiences of Transcendence ................................................................. 132
  Dorthe Jørgensen’s Metaphysics of Experience ............................................................. 146
    Calibrating the metaphysics of experience ................................................................. 164
  Religion and Spirituality ............................................................................................... 168
A Multi-Dimensional Concept of Religion ..............................................................170
A Multi-Dimensional Concept of Spirituality ..................................................181
Developing Analytical Tools ............................................................................193

Chapter 2: Foreign Encounters with Oneself Through the Spiritual – Staged Events in Aotearoa New Zealand .................................................................210
185 Empty Chairs ...............................................................................................215
Reflections on 185 Empty Chairs .......................................................................223
The Pōwhiri ..........................................................................................................228
Preamble to the Analysis ....................................................................................228
Account of the Pōwhiri Event .............................................................................235
Reflections on the Pōwhiri ..................................................................................244

Chapter 3: Encounters with the Divine In Between Ritual and Theatre – Two Churchplays in the Lund Cathedral ......................................................................253
Return to a Native Context ................................................................................253
A Cultural Event In Between Theatre and Ritual within the Swedish Church ....258
Jag är den jag är .................................................................................................259
Reflections on the Spiritual Potential of Jag är den jag är ................................272
The Open Church Doors – Some Historical, Theological and Poetological Perspectives on the Swedish Churchplay .................................................................276
The Hartmanian Legacy .....................................................................................278
Hittefågel ............................................................................................................283
Reflections on Hittefågel as Political Experience .............................................293
Political Perspectives .........................................................................................298

Chapter 4: Close Encounters with Biblical Alterity in Hotel Pro Forma’s jesus_c_odd_size .................................................................................................301
jesus_c_odd_size ...............................................................................................302

Chapter 5: Presenting the Model for Experiences of Transcendence in the Context of Staged Events ..............................................................................325
A philosophical perspective on the model .........................................................327
The key concepts ...............................................................................................330
Staged Event ......................................................................................................331
Properties of Staging .........................................................................................334
Capacities for Experience ..................................................................................339
Notion of Immanent Transcendence .................................................................343
Transformation .................................................................................................346
Experiences of Transcendence: Metaphysical Experience, Spiritual Experience, Religious Experience ........................................................................347
How to Use the Model .......................................................................................350
Research Perspectives .........................................................................................352
From Children’s Theatre to Experiences of Transcendence of the Second Order....355
Bibliography ........................................................................................................... 359
Summary in Danish................................................................................................ 390
List of Illustrations


Note on Orthography

Māori words are used in accordance with the convention in Aotearoa New Zealand: they are not italicised and the first time they occur in a chapter they are translated contextually. Current orthographic conventions of macron used to indicate the long vowel are observed, except for those instances when quoting sources before the introduction of these conventions. Likewise Māori usage in earlier sources is not adjusted.
Acknowledgements

“To travel is to live,” the Danish author of fairy-tales and poet Hans Christian Andersen wrote in *The Fairy-Tale of My Life* (1855). This is just as true of Andersen’s outer journeys as of his inner journeys. In the context of my thesis, the Andersen quote has a similar double meaning. I have been on a spiritual journey that geographically has taken me from Denmark to Sweden and to the other side of the world – to Aotearoa New Zealand, with many trials and detours on the way both on the inner and outer levels. The journey has allowed me to grow and develop not only as a scholar but also as a person; it offered me the possibility to combine my passion for theatre and research with a spiritual quest. Although the purpose of research was always clear to me, many unexpected discoveries and encounters were made on the way, and it would not have been possible to complete this journey without the many people, who helped me.

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Introduction

Subject and Purpose

Theatre has the power to call into presence a mental dimension beyond what is empirically on the stage. Ever since I was first introduced to theatre in primary school back in the 1970s, I have had a lasting fascination with what it can do. I experienced how the touring children’s theatre productions that had installed themselves in the school’s dull gym hall had induced a sense of extended reality. The material elements of the performance became something else or more than what they immediately appeared to be. The actors, the props, and the set design took on the meanings and functions assigned by the narrative that they conveyed. The event had an affective and cognitive impact on me – an effect which was very real despite the fact that the cause was imaginary. For example, when the main character of one of the performances got lost in the woods, I became anxious that he might not find his way out; and when he finally did, I felt relief.

Today, with the vocabulary of theatre and performance studies, I can explain this phenomenon cognitively as the recognition of theatricality: an intended doubling of sign systems that combines with one’s power of imagination to evoke the fiction of the performance.¹ In a sense, this is nothing exceptional; it is what any spectator may experience in the theatre. Yet, even if the explanation is perfectly sensible, it is not quite adequate in grasping the entire effect I experienced. Rather than just a shift of meaning, the mental imaginary dimension brought about by the performance qualified as transcendence qua its psychosomatic impact. Something, which was not really there, had made a perceptible difference to me. The situation transcended, that is, went beyond what was actually physically occurring on stage, and triggered an affective response in my body. One may recognise my reaction as the ‘paradox of fiction’, another well-known capacity of theatre: the staged action affected me as if it was of real consequence to the actor involved, even while the staging itself made it obvious that this was not so.² I

² Cf. David V. Mason, “Religious Experience as a Model for Emotional Experience
was perfectly aware that the actor portraying the main character was in no real danger, and still I reacted as if he was. Appreciation of this paradox of fiction as transcendence consists exactly in the retained awareness of actual physical objects, living beings, and situations, whilst one experiences their shifting meaning and emotional effect; the transcendence occurs in excess of the performance’s materiality, in the switch to the immaterial mental dimension of the beholder. In this situation, it is the imagination that allows for the transcendence or the mental going-beyond of immediate reality to make sense of what is staged in terms of fiction or an altered reality. The Danish theologian Lars Sandbeck Nielsen discusses the nature of imagination as a capacity which both creates order out of the constant chaotic flow of sensations and impressions that one receives and transcends the order that one has constructed in the attempt to test reality. The function of the transcendence of imagination, he observes, is to try out hypotheses about the world and to learn from the process.  

Transcendence is a concept often connected with religion and religious experience, and perhaps to a lesser degree theatre and theatrical experience. What I do in this thesis is essentially to propose a re-consideration of transcendence’s meaning in relation to staged events and experience. Even if I, as an adult, have sometimes associated the mental transcendence of theatrical or ritual performance directly with religious or spiritual experience, I do not claim that it is intrinsically connected with such experience; religious or spiritual experience may be similar to theatrical experience qua their mental, imaginary transcendence, but it does not follow that they always coincide.

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4 Not that the idea of theatre having the capacity of transcendence is novel; the theologian Hans Urs von Baltasar holds that “in the theatre man attempts a kind of transcendence, endeavouring both to observe and to judge his own truth, in virtue of a transformation [...] by which he tries to gain clarity about himself. Man himself beckons, invites the approach of a revelation about himself. Thus, parabolically, a door can open to the truth of real [divine] revelation” (my italics). Hans Urs von Baltasar, Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory: 1: Prolegomena, San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1988 [1983], p. 12. Along another utopian, though strictly non-theological line of thought and without explicating a concept of transcendence, the theatre scholar Jill Dolan argues, “Live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world”. Jill Dolan, Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005, p. 2.

5 Mason suggests that religious and theatrical experiences are similar in that they
First of all, transcendence in theatre is an experience of that which extends or lies beyond physical stage reality; yet, this transcendence should not in any way be considered absolute in the sense that it exceeds the immanence of this world and attains direct access to a divine or ultimate reality. The transcendence is contained within the immanent. As will be explored in this thesis, the religious or spiritual experience is rather an interpretation following and gaining its strength from mental transcendence. In those cases, the immediate mental transcendence leads to an experience that one’s reality could be different or that the world effuses an overflow of meaning, as suggested by the staging of the theatrical or ritual performance in question. But there is nothing exclusively mystical about the initial mental transcendence; it is an experience that all theatregoers or congregants may have. Hence, I consider this kind of mental transcendence an experiential potential of the staged event per se.

The transcendence I first experienced as a child was brought about by theatre performed on a stage with the spectators positioned in front of it. In other forms of staged event, such as immersive and interactive theatre, art installations, and rituals, I have experienced transcendence taking on a physical and spatial dimension that enhanced its mental and interpretative scope. In these forms, the position of the spectator is challenged, destabilised, or abolished altogether as the participant is drawn into the performative space of the event and unquestionably assigned agency and often a specific role to fulfil. Here, in its first instance, transcendence is the stepping into another space, in the sense that one goes beyond the anticipated safe, distant horizon of the spectator (associated with conventional theatre) and engages in some kind of action that lies beyond one’s control. From that point on, transcendence may be associated with close encounters with the performers or other participants, whose minds and intentions naturally lie beyond what one can know. This uncertainty can only be overcome by means of communication.

Immersively engaging in the event, this bodily transcendence combines with the imaginary dimension that is called forth by the staging and the performers, and it may forge a compelling grip on the participant’s mind. Through physical action, one is directly involved in what is staged, the sur-

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both are paradoxical: “In other words, the religious person acts (and reacts) as though things were much different than all the evidence suggests. In fact, a dogged disregard for the divide between the empirical world and the unverifiable seems to characterize religious experience. The experience of theatre can be much the same, as we act or react […], not because of our senses, but in spite of them.” Mason, 2008, p. 8.
rounding environment, the compelling narrative, or the symbolism of certain acts, and relating to the interpretative implications of this involvement becomes imperative: what does participation mean compared to one’s norms, values, and worldview? What happens might confirm or challenge one’s convictions and identity, possibly leading to lasting change – in psychological terms, ‘self-transcendence’. Self-transcendence must not be confused with the experiences of transcendence produced in the encounter with staged events themselves, yet it may be influenced or caused by such experiences. Self-transcendence, as I shall apply the term, designates “the capacity to expand self-boundaries intrapersonally (toward greater awareness of one’s philosophy, values, and dreams), interpersonally (to relate to others and one’s environment), temporally (to integrate one’s past and future in a way that has meaning for the present), and transpersonally (to connect with dimensions beyond the typically discernible world).” Thus, the event has the potential to make one become part of that which is greater than oneself, of what one cannot control or possibly comprehend, and it therefore holds the promise of change. Depending on the properties of the staging and the context of the event, the experiences of transcendence may call for a variety of interpretations that exceed the quotidian and calls for the metaphysical, spiritual, or religious. In this thesis I interest myself in how the mentioned range of staged events may bring about experiences of transcendence that lend themselves to such interpretations, and I discuss how to analyse and conceptualise them, developing a model that includes all these varieties of experience.

Contexts

Why is it important to study experiences of transcendence in the context of staged events? How may such a study from the point of view of performance analysis contribute to society? Until now, I have only considered the effects of experiences of transcendence on the personal and individual micro-level; it is time to change the view by zooming out to the societal macro-level. This will make it possible to see and appreciate how the effects of transcending one’s acquainted daily perspective, in this case through performance, is the prerequisite of changing one’s behaviour as a concerned citizen of the world.

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I propose that experiences of transcendence, self-transcendence, and social change are intimately connected. According to the German philosopher Rüdiger Safranski, humans are beings who are open and inclined to mental transcendence exactly through their existential *being in the world*; not to acknowledge this openness is ‘betrayal of transcendence’, which may lead to one getting caught up in oneself, in self-reliance. This may be understood in either a religious sense, as Augustine has it, as apostasy\(^7\), or the renunciation of God and his will, or in a secular sense, as Einstein put it, denial of ‘being a part of the whole we call ‘the universe.’’\(^8\) Safranski stresses the social and global effects of these forms of betrayal of transcendence:

Augustine declared that man should not do justice to himself but to God. Einstein explains that man must free himself from his prison of self-reliance. He can, he needs only cease to act contrary to his intuitive awareness of belonging to the whole and end up betraying it. This is Einstein’s formulation of sin against the Holy Ghost. Even for Einstein, this sin simultaneously implies its own punishment: destruction of nature, hostility between humans and treason against humanity.\(^9\)

The world at the beginning of the 21\(^{st}\) century is undeniably in crisis; in fact, there are several on-going and coinciding crises concerning climate change, economic recession, refugees, democracy, inequality and poverty, as well as regional and global security. One is reminded of these crises by news headlines and social media on a daily basis, and one may respond to them in different ways, from resignation and apathy to concern and engagement. Some of them, like climate change, have long-term effects and the need for everyone to take responsive action does not necessarily appear to be urgent in daily life\(^10\), all the while the events of other crises such as terror attacks close to home, like the attack on Drottninggatan here in Stockholm,\(^11\) and mounting tension between nuclear powers may strike one with instant worry

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 52; my translation.
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 52; my translation.
\(^10\) A recent psychological study shows that the more we know about climate change, the more probable it is that we will turn to live in denial. This reaction is known as “The Psychological Climate Paradox”. See: Per Espen Stoknes, *What We Think about When We Try Not to Think about Global Warming: Toward a new Psychology of Climate Action*, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015, pp. 3-8.
\(^11\) I am referring to the events of April 7, 2017, but also recent incidents in Copenhagen, Paris, Nice, Berlin, London, and Barcelona.
and apprehension about the future. All these crises represent complex issues for which there are no easy political or social solutions; yet, they call for collective and concerted efforts on all levels, the individual, the national, the regional, and the global. Certainly, theatre and performance alone will not save the world, but these cultural activities offer formats through which one may reflect upon the state of things and become inspired to act.

Theatre and performance address these crises thematically, and they hold the promise of engaging the individual performatively. Studying the stagings of theatrical and performative events and their conditioning of reception and interaction may allow one to understand how experiences of transcendence are brought about and facilitate the participants’ relating to and engaging in society and the issues at hand. Thus, experiences of transcendence as a hermeneutic phenomenological trait of staged events have very little to do with escapism but play a part in reconnecting the individual with the world and the community on a basic existential level; becoming part of that which is larger than oneself, mentally, physically, is a precondition for transcending one’s self to fully engage with other humans and living beings, with the planet, and ultimately the cosmos.

Ghosting the Context

Hitherto, I have considered mental transcendence in terms of the paradox of fiction and imagination. One other important way performance allows experiences of transcendence is through memory. Memory is a cognitive capacity that makes it possible to transcend the lived here and now and access the past. The past as another time and (often) place is not detectible in memories in any evident, empirical way, and yet, one holds the traces of this past in the neurological patterns of the brain and embody it – for it to be recalled in the

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12 For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the risk of a nuclear war seems to have increased with the mounting tensions between North Korea and the USA. See: Greg Price, “Trump’s North Korea Threat is Eerily Similar to Harry Truman’s Hiroshima Bombing Announcement in 1945”, in Newsweek, 8 August 2017; and “North Korea ‘considering strike on US Guam base’”, BBC News, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40871416 (both accessed September 1, 2017).

flicker of an instant so that distance in time and space, to a certain extent, are overcome. Thus, memory is one of the ways humans transcend the objective limits of their subject in order to reflect themselves in the past and to know and possibly change themselves for the future. The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty famously stated that one must consider “the subject as time and time as the subject”, and in that sense subjectivity is robustly intertwined with time, and the passing of time, which again affects the way one constructs and regards the past. Memories may change over time, as the subject is relocated in time and space, recalling its own past, and invariably shifting its views on the past in recognition of the difference between then and now, what one might call the “then-self” and the “now-self”. In recalling the past, humans use objects and activities to assist the process, and memories are always constituted in relation to somebody or something else. Theatre is one of those tools, which is ideally suited for recollection, since it is inherently social. For as long as has been known, theatre has provided society with a resource for critical reflexion, learning, and identity formation on the backdrop of the past and in anticipation of the future. In this capacity, Marvin Carlson has proposed that one may think of theatre as a memory machine:

Theatre, as a simulacrum of the cultural and historical process itself, seeking to depict the full range of human actions within their physical context, has always provided society with the most tangible records of its attempts to understand its own operations. It is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the process of recycling and recollection.

Carlson observes that the reuse of different materials in the theatre, narrative elements, actors, production concepts, set designs, and performance sites, creates in the audience’s reception a notion of what he calls “ghosting”: “ghosting presents the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context.” Although ghosting has a cer-

16 Ibid., p. 7.
tain ring of the supernatural, it has – unless, of course, one studies forms of staged event wherein ritual and theatre combine or blend – little to do with actual apparitions and materialisations of things of the past and from beyond this world. I suggest one may understand this kind of recollection by means of an analogy to photography – as a double-exposure: just like an earlier recorded image superimposed with a similar though somewhat different motif may seem ghost-like, what is staged might call to mind things and situations of the past, which are considered comparable.

With regard to the experience of transcendence, ghosting may reinforce the spectator’s affective and intellectual response to a performance, as the staging evokes and resonates with the memories of certain historical or legendary events and figures; hence, through the transcendence of memory it calls into presence that which was obscured by distances in time and space. Carlson points to Freddie Rokem’s observation of the historical play as one example of such ghosting: “the actors performing […] historical figures are in fact the ‘things’ who are appearing again tonight in the performance. And when these ghosts are historical figures they are in a [metatheatrical] sense performing history.” The idea of performing history, Rokem explicates, is “to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from this past will matter again.” As Diana Taylor has also observed, “ghosting [is] that visualization that contin-

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17 Examples of such combinations of ritual and theatre and the possible perceived blur of borders between them may be found in traditional cultures, such as the Yoruba, Māori, and Samoan; but it does also occasionally occur in modern European theatrical performances. One modern Swedish example of this is a staging of the historical chronicle play Den heliga staden (The holy town) by Olov Hartman at the Sigtuna Foundation in Sigtuna, 1952, which had interludes of monks praying and singing psalms between its different acts. These interludes left the audience in doubt as to whether they had attended a theatrical performance or participated in a church service. See: Olov Hartman, Färdriktning, Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1979, p. 228. In Yoruba, Māori, and Samoan theatre actors may enter liminal states between the immanent and the transcendent as channels for Gods or spirits, see respectively: Kacke Götrick, “Guddommelig Kommunikation i Femi Ososians Women of Owu – verklighet eller fiction?”, in Bent Holm (ed.), Tro på teatret, Frederiksberg: Multi-vers, 2006; Rua McCallum, “Māori Performance: Marae Liminal Space and Transformation”, in Australasian Drama Studies, Issue 59, 2011, p. 97; and David O’Donnell, “‘Spiritual Play’: Ritual Performance and Spirituality in Samoan Theatre” in Performance of the Real, 1 (1), 2017, pp. 29-32.

18 Rokem quoted in Carlson, 2001, p. 7; my addition.

19 Freddie Rokem, Performing History: Theatrical representations of the past in contemporary theatre, Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2000, p. xii.
ues to act politically even as it exceeds the live [performance].”  

Here, recollection of the past haunts or imposes itself upon the present to suggest ways to make sense of it in order to shape the future.

Carlson, however, is less interested in actors performing history itself, as he explores the way that theatre is first and foremost haunted through its text. As is known, in most theatre cultures, performance is based on a pre-existing text, a narrative either in the form of a written script, or orally transmitted. These dramatic texts are defined by the extensive recycling that has gone into their process of creation already before they enter the theatre, employing characters, names, relationships, action etc., materials which are reused from history, myths, and legends. Indeed, ever since the early development of world drama and the founding of dramatic theory in Bharata’s *Natyasastra*, Aristotle’s *Peri politikis*, and Zeami’s works on the *Nō* “the importance of not telling stories but retelling stories that are already known to their publics” has been emphasised.  

When these pre-existing narratives are recognised as they reappear in the theatre, in the form of more or less reworked or rewritten plays, they affect the reception process by establishing themselves in the present social context of the audience as reflexive and critical references. As such, the haunted narratives tap into the cultural memory of values, beliefs, and morals, which are reactivated by the performance. By helping to form society’s self-understanding, restaging the narratives of the past lends authority to the performances as they are made to “speak” to social and political issues of the present.

Recent examples of this kind of haunting are the many adaptations of Greek tragedy used to comment on the European refugee crisis, especially in Germany and Austria. As memory-machines, these narratives remind the spectator of values that lie at the foundations of our society. Greek tragedy is awash with characters who seek asylum, and the plays bear testimony to the responsibility of hospitality, *xenia*, which was a supreme ethical obligation to the Athenian community. In particular Nicholas Stemann’s version of Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Schutzbefohlenen* (2014-15) has attracted attention for its addressing of the refugee crisis. Aeschylus’s *The Suppliants* is merely a

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22 For a documentation of these performances, see: S.E. Wilmer, “Cultural Encounters in Modern Productions of Greek Tragedy”, in *Nordic Theatre Studies*, Vol.28, No. 1, 2016, pp. 15-26. The article does not analyse the performances in terms of ghosting; this understanding is mine.
source text for Jelinek’s play, in which the original’s African women have been replaced by the actual case of sixty asylum seekers from the border-area between Afghanistan and Pakistan. They came to Austria in 2012, were interned in a refugee camp, but then occupied a church, the Votivkirche in central Vienna, where they went on hunger strike protesting their poor conditions. The play not only tells their story, but it recalled and invoked the ethics of obligatory hospitality through the intertextual ghosting of Aeschylus’s tragedy, the situation of the suppliants echoed by that of the modern-day asylum seekers. This calling on Austrian society’s moral conscience was furthermore amplified by the fact that the refugees had chosen to occupy a church, as there is a tradition, going back to medieval times and even further, of Christian churches acting as sanctuary sites for the persecuted or refugee, thus opposing a governments’ retreat from a legal commitment to the protection of the individual. This tradition was revived in the late 20th century by activist Christian movements in the USA and, at about the same time, through “sanctuary incidents” throughout the Nordic countries, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, only to become more frequent in other parts of Europe as the refugee crisis has intensified in the new millennium.

In Stemann’s staging of Die Schutzbefohlenen, a sense of immediacy is created as the roles of the asylum seekers are performed not by actors, but by actual asylum seekers. This complicates the understanding of ghosting as mental transcendence: the casting of actual asylum seekers foregrounded the immanence of the contemporary narrative, whilst their roles were haunted by Aeschylus’s The Suppliants as well as the ghosts of all refugees who had preceded them. In my analyses of other events, I shall discuss this kind of ghosting drawing upon the authenticity of the performer in the staging as aspects of contextualisation.

Another example of intended ghosting, this time in response to the crisis of democracy, is the staging of yet another Greek tragedy, Sophocles’s Antigone. Following the 2013 riots in Husby, a suburb of Stockholm dominat-

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ed by a second-generation immigrant population, Rebecca Forsberg of RATS Theatre, in close collaboration with a local group of teenagers, adapted the plot of Sophocles’s tragedy into an interactive GPS-guided radio drama for a mobile audience. They called it *Antigones Dagbok (Antigone’s Diary)* (2014) referring to Antigone’s experiences, her defiance of the tyrant Creon in insisting on the burial of her brother Polynices, which ultimately lead to her death sentence. Carrying smart-phones with headsets, the mainly local school audiences followed a designated route pausing at 12 locations throughout the suburb. While tracing Antigone’s now re-contextualised story in the urban landscape, the purpose-designed application on the youngsters’ phones made it possible for them to read questions asked by Antigone at the end of each scene and respond with their own text-messages. For example, she asked the participants: “When is it permissible to refuse an order?” and, at the end of the play, when she had been arrested by the police and buried alive, she asked: “What is freedom to you?” Each location, more or less, corresponded to the scene listened to. Polynices’s burial, for example, took place in the park, in the barren and stony environment of a drained waterfall overlooked by a couple of pine trees. The final scene took place in the central square in Husby, which, in addition to Antigone’s last question about freedom, consisted of a sound recording from the mass protests in Tahir Square in Cairo; these had taken place only shortly before the performance.

I suggest this evocative, immersive staging may be seen as facilitating an intricate interplay between the immanent, the tangible surroundings well known to most of the participants, and the transcendent, the invisible only-heard characters whose appearances and actions had to be imagined. Thus, the physical setting of the performance was expanded to the mental space of the audience and became a “double exposure” – the past of the Antigone drama superimposed onto the present-day riot-ridden Husby. Yet, not only is Sophocles’s drama ghosted through the adaptation, so are, potentially, all other versions and staging’s of the play, as it has a history of being performed in response to the fall of dictatorships – and this time, the Arabic Spring. The transcendence of past events, far away and up close, the imaginatively-created scenes and characters who are not actually there, imposes itself on the immanence accentuated by the familiarit of the site, the immediacy of listened-to drama and the interactive capacity of questions asked; it

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26 RATS is the acronym for “Research in Artistic Technologies for Society”. RATS is part of the Department of Computer and Systems Sciences at Stockholm University.

27 Ernst and Sauter, 2015, p. 39.
may be that thereby an engaging effect even greater than in *Die Schutzbefohlenen* was created as the emphasis had shifted from the authenticity of the performers to the audience experiencing their own presence and agency in the midst of the unfolding drama. An audience survey was conducted combining participatory observation, interviews, and the collection of the text answers to Antigone’s questions. It recorded how the members of the audience had responded emotionally to what happened in the narrative, restaged as it was in their own hometown and framed by the recent events, and then at the end of each scene by their reflections and rational responses. This oscillation between emotions and rationality seemed to have reinforced the sense of participation. The survey concludes that the performance had the capacity to engage its audience in Swedish democracy.

For the young audiences, the performance paves a way for leaving the older generation’s traumatic histories, supported by the collective process of sharing their participation with friends and moving along neighbouring streets with Antigone’s classical dilemma in mind. As expressed in their comments, the young pupils realize that they are not only part of an age-old conflict, but that there might be a future that allows them – and which demands of them to become part of a democratic society: freedom, equality and sisterhood (on top of brotherhood) are no longer only a utopian ideal.  

The above examples of ghosting as a way of engaging audiences in society through experiences of transcendence are from the realm of theatre. Another site for ghosting, which Carlson does not consider but nevertheless is of great interest to this thesis, is ritual. Ritual may serve to stage the congregant as partaking through life in a larger whole, which is not only social but also cosmic, and thereby imbue her with a sense of identity or belonging. Ritual may be seen as ghosting its context of the transcendent, be it the spirits of ancestors or gods, through its symbols and representation. Through ritual repetition, those who have been present before shall be once more present, and exert their influence on the living.

The anthropologist Roy Rappaport understands ritual as a performance that calls into presence the hidden as being of import to those who perform: “Ritual […] is distinguished from non-ritual, not only by the analyst but by the actor [i.e. participant] as well, in that it derives its efficacy from the oc-

28 Ernst and Sauter, 2015, p. 40.
cult, and not the patent.” 29 Rappaport’s theory of ritual introduces three temporal micro-, mezzo-, and macro-“regions”, which inform the performance of ritual acts and makes them meaningful and efficacious to the participant: 1) the here and now of “the region of social time” referring to the on-going repetitious ritual community with other participants; 2) “the temporal region of the organic”, that is, bodily processes such as pulse, breath, brainwaves, hormone secretion, etc.; and 3) the “temporal region of the cosmic” relating to, primarily, notions of that which transcends the human lifespan, such as eternity, or the past and the future – the later region being what makes up the canonical order of religion that permits the participant to find her place in the cosmos. 30 It is from this cosmic region spirits and gods come.

Following Rappaport and Carlson, the semantics of the Protestant Holy Communion (here exemplified by the Eucharistic liturgy of the Danish National Church) could be seen as an invocation of a ghost, Christ, as the celebrant utters the Words of Institution:

On the night in which He was betrayed, Our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and gave thanks; broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

Likewise, after supper, He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sin. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

After the Words of Institution communicants go to the altar and kneel. To each communicant the pastor delivers the bread, saying:
The Body of Christ.

And then the chalice, saying:
The Blood of Christ.

Before each group of communicants leaves the altar, the pastor says (whilst making the sign of the cross with the chalice):

The crucified and risen Saviour, Our Lord, Jesus Christ who has now given you/us His holy body and blood for your/our redemption

30 Ibid., pp. 223-224; emphasis in the original.
may He strengthen and uphold you/us  
in true faith unto eternal life. 31

Thus, the Eucharist symbolically invests the bread and the wine with the ghost of Christ. Protestantism holds that the bread and wine remain fully bread and wine, while at the same time this sacrament consists truly of the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. 32 Understanding the sacrament as a symbolic “bridge” between immanence and transcendence, I suggest considering the etymology of the word symbol. ‘Symbol’ is derived from the Ancient Greek verb symbállein “to throw together, compare”, 33 and, in the context of the Eucharist, that would mean to mend that which had been broken and taken apart; hence the immanent and the transcendent paradoxically converge in the symbolism of the sacrament, allowing Christ to be perceptibly absent and present in the consumption of the elements. 34 But this is also a convergence between Rappaport’s temporal regions of the organic and the cosmic. For the participant believer, the Eucharist symbolically evokes a past, the Passion of Christ, and a future, the Coming of Christ and the hope of redemption and resurrection. As I shall discuss later on in this thesis, similar semantic structures of past, present, future may be found in rituals of other cultures, just as they may be found in theatrical performance – the above examples of Die Schutzbefohleneren and Antigones Dagbok testify to this.

In summation, I consider ghosting a phenomenological trait of theatre and ritual, whereby memories and associations are called forth as points and frames of reference for the spectator or congregant to contextualise the


32 This is different from Catholicism, which holds that bread and wine are in essence entirely transformed into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. The theological term for this process is ‘transubstantiation’. However, the theological debate on the differences between Catholic and Protestant understandings of transubstantiation is not by far in agreement on its meaning. See: Brett David Salkeld, Transubstantiation: Sign and Reality in Ecumenical Dialogue, Toronto: Toronto School of Theology, University of St. Michael’s College, 2013.


34 In this theological understanding, the symbol is not merely a reference to that which is absent, but it virtually contains the otherwise absent, making it present. For a discussion of this meaning of the symbol, see: Dorthe Jørgensen, “Sensoriness and Transcendence: On the Aesthetic Possibility of Experiencing Divinity”, in Margunn Sandal, Frances E. Hopenwasser, Leif Stubbe Teglbjærg, Nils Holger Petersen, Svein Aage Christoffersen, Geir Hellemo, and Leo Onarheim (eds.), Transcendence and Sensoriness: Perceptions, Revelation, and the Arts, Leiden: Brill, 2015, p. 16.
event. As has been shown, the staging of the event may utilise ghosting as a dramaturgical devise for things past to be recalled in such a way that it may have a bearing on things to come. In terms of experiences of mental transcendence, ghosting makes what is temporally considered transcendent, the past, come into play with the present, the here and now of the performance. When this mental transcendence combines with physical and spatial transcendence, as the spectator or congregation is turned into an immersed agent, the experience may appear more real to the one who undergoes it than would a mere representation of that same process by an actor. Thus, ghosting presents itself as an aspect of staged events one must take into consideration as a significant contextualising factor for experiences of transcendence. In my analyses, I shall pay particular attention to how the material staging of events allows for ghosting to occur. Here, the initial perception of the event is decisive for the participant’s interpretation.

The Return of Religion and Spirituality

Ghosting is only one representational effect of the event’s material staging facilitating experiences of transcendence; there are other more obvious reasons for studying these phenomena of reception. Whereas ghosting is more closely connected to the staging, that is, as a representational mode, there are other contexts for experiences of transcendence, which are found outside the event or are part of its institutional framing. These are cultural, social, and political contexts that influence and inform the participant’s interpretational competences, or, at least, challenge them. These contexts have to do with religion and spirituality.

According to the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, religion as a code for observation and communication refers to the relation between immanence and transcendence: “a communication is always religious, when it observes the immanent from the point of view of transcendence.”35 In Luhmann’s systems theory, the observational and communicative code is functionally upheld by its system, in this case religion. Consequently, Luhmann differentiates sharply between social systems and their assigned function, which might lead to a rather rigid understanding of where a certain type of communication may take place in society, in this case in ritual. In a sense, I have already questioned the validity of Luhmann’s assumption that communication about the

35 Niklas Luhmann, Die Religion der Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000, p. 77; my translation.
distinction between immanence and transcendence always need to be religious; in fact, if experiences of transcendence is a potential of theatre and other staged events per se – as I claim they are – then the religious experience of transcendence depends on the participant’s interpretation and not on the institutional framing of the event. Thus, the institutional frame suggests an interpretational strategy in accordance with the institution’s societal function, its tradition, and culture. However, in theatre and the arts both the artists’ and the audience’s interpretations might very well deviate from what is religious intention and dogma. Nevertheless, Luhmann’s concept might serve as a useful point of departure to understand what religious institutions basically communicate about and, interestingly, how similar communication occurs in theatre and other art forms; for herein lies the realisation that theatre and the arts have a creative and critical potential for challenging and changing the ways religion is understood. Richard Wagner realised this potential in his seminal essay “Religion und Kunst” (1880): “One might say that where Religion becomes artificial, it is reserved for Art to save the Spirit of Religion by recognising the figurative value of the mythic symbols which the former would have us believe in their literal sense, and revealing their deep and hidden truth through an ideal presentation.”

It is better, therefore, not to distinguish too sharply between religion and art, as would Luhmann, but seek out the perturbations or intertwinements, which occur between the systems or institutions, and to do so on the communicative level of events by means of performance analysis. In order to investigate such communications, one has to understand the larger societal contexts of religion and spirituality in the twentieth century, and why these contexts are important for the study of experiences of transcendence from the point of view of theatre and performance studies.

Ever since the 1990s in both Nordic and other European research and public debate, there has been much talk about the “return of religion” in culture, literature, theatre, visual arts, film, and television, and at the same

38 See, for example, Bent Holm (ed.), Tro på teatret, Frederiksberg: Multivers, 2006; Drude von der Fehr and Elisabeth Levie, Tro på litteratur, Oslo: Vidarforlaget, 2013; Barbara Baert (ed.), Fluid Flesh: The Body, Religion and the Visual Arts, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009; Geert Hallbäck and Annika Hvithamar
time, a “spiritual revolution” in opposition to institutional religion seems to be on the rise, where spiritual quests go elsewhere to find faith and forms of practice.³⁹

After a long period of gradual marginalisation and decline starting with the Enlightenment, religion once again seems to play a role in European societies. Religion is currently on the media’s agenda and, perhaps more frequently than previously, our attention is caught by topics, events, and incidents that are, in one way or another, related to religion or spirituality.⁴⁰ Scholars of the large-scale interfaculty and internationally-profiled research project at the University of Copenhagen Religion in the 21st Century (2003-2007) have suggested that the phenomenon is much more complex than the phrase “return” might suggest; rather, one may understand religion as ubiquitous, that it is “intertwined” with various social institutions, and that it takes different forms, which can have a larger or lesser effect on society.⁴¹ The reasons given for the increased public attention paid to religion are mostly related to politics, crises, conflicts, and war.⁴²

(eds.), Recent Releases: The Bible in Contemporary Cinema, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008; Stig Hjarvard, “Medialisering af religiøse forestillinger,” in Hans Raun Iversen and Morten Thomsen Højgaard (eds.), Gudstro i Danmark, Copenhagen: ANIS, 2005. ³⁹ See, for example, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, The Spiritual Revolution: Why religion is giving way to spirituality, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. ⁴⁰ Morten Thomsen Højgaard, “Gudstro i den danske offentlighed efter Grøsbøll,” in Hans Raun Iversen and Morten Thomsen Højgaard (eds.), Gudstro i Danmark, Copenhagen: ANIS, 2005, pp. 186-189. ⁴¹ Hans Raun Iversen, “III.1: Common Narrative and Report for Religion in the 21st Century. A Research Priority Area at the University of Copenhagen 2003-2007,” in Copenhagen Conference on Religion in the 21st Century: Transformations, significance and challenges (information booklet), Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2007, p. 146: “As cultures are increasingly interlacing with one another, religions are interlacing with all sorts of dimensions of our societies in – as it seems – unpredictable ways. Alongside the work with the program for the concluding conference we have come to use the term intetwinement to describe the relationship between religion and its surroundings. Religion is adoptable, adaptable and potentially available everywhere. Religion may mean and do almost anything, including absolutely nothing. It is often hard to include religion, but it is also often hard to exclude it.” ⁴² Ibid., pp. 124-125. When it comes to European theatre, it is noteworthy that during the last 15 years there has been a series of conflicts involving fundamentalist believers, who have protested and campaigned against performances, which they saw as blasphemous. For example, the British musical Jerry Springer: The Opera by Richard Thomas and Stewart Lee (2003-2006) received 55,000 written complaints from Christian viewers against the BBC televised performance, and during the 2006 UK tour several venues saw protests; in 2006 Hans Neuenfel’s staging of Mozart’s
As of September 11, 2001, these reasons have mainly to do with the increase in radical Islamist terrorism and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis, and events in its wake, as well as the rise of US, Turkish, Polish, Indian, Russian, Hungarian right-wing politics supported by fundamentalist religious movements. These developments easily overshadow beneficial dimensions of religion and religious actions, for example, movements and efforts for peace and reconciliation\(^{43}\), interfaith relations\(^{44}\), churches’ support for LGBTQI through accept of same-sex marriage and introduction of new liturgies\(^{45}\), or Pope Francis’ call on the world’s Catholics to adopt an ecological spirituality in response to the climate crisis.\(^{46}\) But there is much more to be said about the significance of religion today than the political.

opera *Idomeneo, re di Creta* at Deutsche Oper Berlin was closed down for fear of an Islamist terror attack, as it – among other religious figures – featured the severed head of Muhammad; at Theatre de la Ville in Paris 2011, Romeo Castellucci and Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s performance *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* was disrupted by angry protesters; and, finally, the performances of Argentinean Rodrigo Garcia’s play *Golgotha Picnic*, which first in Toulouse and Paris were met with protests and demands that the play be banned, and then, at the 2014 Polish Malta Festival in Poznań, it was withdrawn from the programme due to massive pressure from the Catholic Krucjata Różańcowa za Ojczyznę (Rosary Crusade for the Homeland) movement. In the case of *Golgotha Picnic*, the Polish directors’ guild responded by staging readings and video screenings of the performance all over the country, and it lead to street protests and attempts at preventing its supporters being able to gain entry to the events. A resident of Łódź at the time, I attended the screening in the city and witnessed the protest there. For an overview of the *Golgotha Picnic* scandal, see: Aneta Kyzioł, “Krucjata przeciw Golgoty”, in *Polityka*, June 30, 2014.

\(^{43}\) Examples of some efforts are Desmond Tutu in South Africa, or the clergy’s work in peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, as well as the American Black Lives Matter movement.

\(^{44}\) One interesting example of theatre used for interfaith relations building is American feminist theologian, ordained Catholic priest, writer, director, and teacher of theatre Victoria Rue’s play *Mary/Maryam in Christian and Islamic Traditions*. The play explores the common figure of Mary/Maryam in the Bible and the Qur’an, the differences and similarities. Christians, Muslims, and others are brought together to experience the play allowing for four interruptions for table talks and ending with the audience sharing a meal. For a description and discussion, see: Claire Maria Chambers (ed.), “Forum: Devised Theatre as Activism in a Religious and Spiritual Context”, in *PRS – Performance, Religion, and Spirituality*, 1.1, 2017.

\(^{45}\) The Church of Sweden introduced same-sex marriage in 2009, followed by the national churches of Norway and Denmark in 2012 and 2017, respectively.

In order for one to be able to talk about the return of a phenomenon, it must be assumed that it has been gone for a while. It may be true about religion in the sense that it had disappeared as a dominating political power factor in the highly secularised democratic societies of the Western world. However, it is not true about religion as a profession and practice of faith. Secularisation as cultural disenchantment and the gradual vanishing of religion under the influence and growth of science and rationality is a Eurocentric misconception that, for the most part, is due to the exceptional impact of the enlightenment project in Northern Europe. As religious philosopher Mark C. Taylor points out, in some periods it may very well seem as if religion is absent, but that does not mean it has disappeared.\textsuperscript{47} Today, most of the world’s population is to some extent religious in one form or another. Instead of focusing on religion having been “absent” for a time, one should rather ask what has happened to religiosity and spirituality in secularised societies.

Nordic churches do show a decline in their membership, although, at the same time, sociological surveys show that belief in some higher power is still important to many people, as shown by recent Danish and Swedish surveys.\textsuperscript{48} The theologian Niels Henrik Gregersen seems to be right when he claims that

in spite of all secularity, the world still affords the presence of events and processes that continue to trigger a religious sensitivity. The sun still rises, the air in the lungs still feels refreshing, birds continue to sing and cats to move, children are born and grow up, people mourn for their lost friends, family life still goes on, and the neighbour remains a source of both surprise and irritation.\textsuperscript{49}

Secularism does not mean that religion and belief disappear, but that a de-institutionalisation or de-dogmatisation of belief and practice takes place; that the way to believe and practice one’s belief apparently has changed.

from being uniquely denominational to be more private and subjective and thus less visible. At the same time, there is an indication that the God people believe in is no longer the same: rather than believing in a personal God, now more seem to believe in God as a spiritual force – at least, according to the latest Danish survey. Among other reasons, this gives rise to the fact that some – including myself – would characterise themselves as being “spiritual but not religious.” To the extent they do not agree with the doctrines of belief maintained by religions and religious institutions, these people seek the spiritual and sacred in places other than the church, mosque, synagogue, or temple, either in addition to elements of a traditional belief or as a complete replacement. More or less eclectic, they turn to philosophies and practices, ranging from mysticism over traditional Eastern philosophy and spirituality to Neo-Paganism and New Age, or they find what they are looking for in nature and/or the arts. A common feature of these spiritualities is that they seem to deeply engage with the body (in some form of practice), aesthetics (in the broad sense as aisthesis), and experience – aspects of religious life that primarily Northern European Protestantism is often accused of having suppressed. While spirituality as a term has had a long history of designating profound aspects of religious practice, there is a growing tendency within contemporary thinking to separate spirituality from religion and to connect it with other areas such as the natural sciences, studies of consciousness, and

50 For a discussion of the concept of secularisation, see: Lüchau, 2005, p. 34.
51 Ibid., p. 39.
52 For a discussion of this term, see: Philip D. Kenneson, “What’s in a Name? A Brief Introduction to the ‘Spiritual But Not Religious’”, in Liturgy, Vol. 30, Issue 3, 2015. When applying the term, Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR), I am aware of the difficulty that Kenneson points out with clearly distinguishing between concepts of spirituality and religion in teasing out what is really meant by it. Clearly there is fallibility in confusing rhetoricalised discontent with religious institutions, as an empirical indication of what is spirituality and what is not. As Kenneson argues, a diversification of SBNRs is needed to in order to better understand what it is that these discontenters react against in institutionalised religion. With this reservation towards the term, I shall nevertheless use it to designate experience, which is perceived as independent of any creed sanctioned by religious institution whilst observing the need to specify wherein any critique or dissidence consists. It might also be worth noticing that in a Swedish context, the mostly American term SBNR roughly corresponds with privatreligiösa – ‘the privately religious’, or what David Thurfjell sees as “the ambiguous stance toward religion by the majority of Swedes”; hence, advocating a nuanced view, which allows for a complex individual relation to religion without a sense of belonging. See: Thurfjell, 2015, p. 30.
economics. I shall, later on, return to unpack the complex relationship between the terms and concepts of religion and spirituality, and how they are to be understood in my analyses.

Making a Claim for Religion and Spirituality in Theatre and Performance studies

Challenged by an individualisation of spirituality, Christian theologians, religious scholars, and aesthetic philosophers in the Nordic countries have begun to take an interest in the body and aesthetics as pathways to religious and spiritual experience, whether it is in response to traditional institutional forms of practice or events and forms of expression outside the religious institutions. Only to a limited extent has the performing arts been included in this mainly theology-driven research, leaving the theatre’s potential for creating experiences of transcendence largely unexplored. Here, theatre and performance studies might offer theology and religious studies its knowledge of and expertise in analysing performance and reception processes. Theology and religious studies have established traditions of studying the meaning of ritual, related as it is to exegesis and dogma, whereas theatre and performance have developed theory and methodologies for understanding and analysing more contingent meaning-making processes of staged events, which cannot be understood solely in terms of representation (semiotics), but must also include the phenomenology and performativity of the staging.

The aesthetic research of theology, religious studies, and philosophy of religion need to be complemented by a performance analysis approach to understanding metaphysical, religious, and spiritual experiences not only in the context of ritual, but also theatre and other staged events such as installations. Rather than analysing these phenomena from the point of view of religious and political discourse, I will align my analysis with the audience/congregants’ point of view and attempt to say something about the

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ways staged events may orchestrate and affect sensoriness and experience through their materiality.

Where the benefits of such a project to theology, religious studies, and aesthetic philosophy may seem rather obvious, the same might not be the case seen from theatre and performance studies. In his introduction to the anthology *Religion, Theatre, and Performance: Acts of Faith* (2007) Lance Gharavi argues the importance of theatre and performance studies making religion and spirituality a part of research and teaching: “[An] education in theatre or performance studies that does not take religion and spirituality into account is an incomplete one,” because, as he argues, “religion is an ineluctable part of the cultural context.”55 At the same time, he points out that theatre, performance, and religion hardly constitute an established research field today: “Though there are a few journals, groups within academic organizations, and scattered specialists dedicated to studying the intersections of theatre/performance and religion, these have largely operated at the margins of the professional discourses.”56 This neglect may seem strange when theatre and religion, historically, have been intimately linked and still are creative forces culturally; but as Gharavi states, it may also be understood in light of the sometimes strong animosity and mutual suspicion which have characterised the relationship, and this antagonism has rubbed off on the academic disciplines of the two areas. Thus, Gharavi sees that theatre and performance studies are inhibited in their contact with religion and spirituality by a number of “discomforts” that, to some extent, are rooted in an outdated conception of research, which insists on keeping the disciplines apart, and in doing so is fuelled by popular opinion, prejudices, and myths. He mentions the associations to “fundamentalism, irrationalism, and reactionary politics” that religion provokes in otherwise serious researchers and artists, and which can “eclipse more complex and nuanced views of religion”. Consequently, the “extreme epistemological crisis” of critical post-modern thinking has led to an excessive academic scepticism of religion as such, because religious institutions and authorities maintain “moral and epistemological certainties and absolutes” that were incompatible with scientific epistemology. Finally, the secularisation myth has misled researchers into believing the idea that religion was in decline and therefore no longer relevant to study.57

56 Ibid., p. 8.
57 Ibid., p. 11ff.
Reading Gharavi’s critique with my research in mind, the implied recommendation would be to steer clear of discursively driven approaches, which risk confirming and consolidating existing misconceptions, prejudices, and myths. Consider, for example, a political discourse whose agenda it is to build critical readiness, because religion *per se* is seen as a threat to the development of democratic society. Or a gender discourse that has previously decided that religious performance reiterates a patriarchal worldview, because religion *per se* is born of a patriarchal society. This does not mean that research in religion and spirituality should not be critical of its subject – on the contrary, news reports remind one constantly about the necessity of that alertness. What is of essence is to incorporate a critical attitude towards theory and methodology, so as not to impede new approaches and discoveries in the process. The observation that religion and spirituality again play a powerful political role in society fits all too well into the tradition of discourse analysis, and one could easily overlook the need for other approaches than the one that relates to all religion and spirituality as a power play, whether that takes place on the geopolitical or local level. As theatre and gender scholar Elaine Aston has pointed out:

> [W]e can find ourselves digging the same old theoretical spaces without looking at the local sites of theatre, performance or culture in ways that might persuade us to excavate elsewhere with different tools and methods. In brief, critical strategies […] that variously encourage us to revisit, rethink, rearrange, reconceptualize or recover are important strategies to keep in mind as means to renew and progress our contributions to bodies of theatre and performance knowledge.\(^{58}\)

Whatever negative image of religion and spirituality a public discourse generates and unconsciously embeds in the researchers’ minds, let it not be denied that religious and spiritual outlooks and activities are essential to the everyday lives of billions across the globe. In this context, the highly secularised Nordic countries are exceptions. As Taylor and Lührchau have argued, secularisation, rather than being culture’s disenchantment and religion’s decline, should be seen as an increased individualisation of belief, practice, or spiritual quest. In response to such change, both ritual and artistic events may constitute a critique of fossilised religious practice and outdated institutional culture, as already argued by the Swedish theologian, psalmist, drama-

tist, and cultural debater Olav Hartman in the 1950s⁵⁹, and recently repeated by what is known as “cultural theology”.⁶⁰ Along with prevailing traditions, these critical implications may be points of departure for theatre and performance studies to study staged events through which contemporary religiosity and spirituality are given forms of expression, allowing for a complexity which is not always obvious to the theatre and performance scholar.

To understand their sensorial and experiential potentials, the exploration must start from the inside of the staged events, with the researcher participating and making observations in order to verify theories based on both her own experiences and accounts by others. Metaphorically speaking, there is a process of participation in religious and spiritual performance which “theatricals relate to their signified as snow to pepper, not as salt to pepper,” and where “[t]he problem is, sometimes snow looks like salt. […] Therefore, tasting is recommended,” as theatre scholar Anita Hammer has insisted upon in her investigations of spiritual performances.⁶¹ The transition between what could be perceived as an aesthetic expression and that, which is spiritual or religious, is vague: salt looks like snow. What Hammer proposes is a method whereby experience becomes the subject of research, or what James McNicholas in a review of Hammer’s book aptly named “experience-as-research”.⁶² In my work, I interpret this as a hermeneutic-phenomenological analysis of the event the staging is related to, which will allow for a spiritual or religious context and possible critical perspective to be drawn. This is the kind of investigation that is necessary in this thesis.

Aim, Approach, Assumptions

I have made it my aim to develop an apparatus of theory and method for performance analysis, the purpose of which is to analyse the potentials of staged events in order to facilitate experiences of transcendence, contextualised in terms of the metaphysical, the religious, and the spiritual.

My interest lies in conceptualising experiences of transcendence from the perspective of performativity in contemporary staged events in order to understand the facilitating conditions of the events in terms of their staging, and relate them to contexts that may provide participating audiences or congregations with frames of reference. Of course, not all events or performances (in the sense of the German Aufführung; Danish opførelse, Swedish uppförande) may affect metaphysical, religious, or spiritual experience – not even institutionalised rituals; obviously, not everyone is susceptible to having such experiences. Here, personal and cultural competences are decisive. Nonetheless, experiences of transcendence are considered a potentiality to be found in all performances. Not using the term ‘performance’ about the events in their entirety but staged event underscores the complex and dynamic interplay between the staging (what I understand as the constructed meaning-constituting frame set by the artist/the institution), and what transpires within that frame, the event. The staging might not have been intended to facilitate religious or spiritual experience; and yet the materiality might have been organised in such a way as to still inspire such experiences, for example, through forms of immanent transcendence, i.e. aesthetic forms which affect sensation and perception\(^{63}\) as to instil experiences of going beyond everyday experience,\(^{64}\) often referred to as threshold experience or border experience (cf. German Schwellenerfahrungen, Grenzerfahrung).\(^{65}\) I understand these two concepts as interrelated as the threshold is a spatial and mental state that sometimes may lead on to another state, through a passage of some kind, and at other times do not, as it may face the impenetrable border

\(^{63}\) The phenomenologist Alva Noë makes the differentiation between sensation and perception. Often, sensation is considered part of perception; but it might be useful to make a distinction between sensation as sensorial input and perception as the meaning-making process of making order out of sensation. For a discussion of the distinction, see: Alva Noë, Action as Perception. Representation and Mind, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004, pp. 113-117.

\(^{64}\) In this regard, my object of research differs from that of Hammer’s: in her conception, spiritual performance is a performance that is meant to “call into being a spiritual presence”. Hammer, 2010, p. 26. I am equally interested in instances of unexpected transcendent experience produced by artistic events that do not announce themselves as being metaphysical, spiritual, or religious.

\(^{65}\) Walter Benjamin, Das Passagen-Werk, Vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983, p. 617f. Without any reference to Benjamin, Erika Fischer-Lichte has a similar view on the difference between border experience and threshold experience. She discusses them both as exterior space and inner state, seeing the border experience as excluding, often unnegotiable, whereas the threshold experience is both ambivalent and full of potentiality for transformation for the one participating in such an event. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 204-205.
of absolute transcendence, the cosmic reaches beyond attainable knowledge; 
yet, this kind of unfathomnable experience may also hold potential for trans-
cending the self and subsequent change.

As it should be clear by now, I assume – as a starting point – metaphys-
cical, religious, and spiritual experience to initially develop from sensorial 
impression and perception created by the materiality of staging. The under-
standing of this process will later be developed through an initial example 
(“Over the Threshold, Into the World”) and theoretically in Chapter 1. Here, 
it ought to suffice to draw on the above observations and discussions in un-
derstanding the process as one that allows the participant to transcend the 
self and become part of that which is larger than her and her conceptions. 
This experience of transcendence may depend on the participant’s capacity 
to 1) recognise that which is actually not there in the event and mentally call 
it into presence (memory/association and imagination triggered by representa-
tion and ghosting); and 2) to sense and perceive how the staging’s phys-
cal/spatial properties affect the situation and relations to performers and oth-
er participants (immersive, interactive); in 3) a zone and/or period of contin-
gency/liminality with regard to positions and status (beholder/agent) as well 
as meanings and concepts; and, finally, be able to reflect on the way this situat-
dedness influences interpretation (the metaphysical, the religious, or the 
spiritual).

Experiences of transcendence may challenge norms and established no-
tions of the world, and in exceeding the familiar and habitual, they may be 
characterised by certain qualities: they may hold a fascinating and awe-
inspiring grip on the one undergoing the perception of otherness/alterity, 
possibly notions of the absolute; these mystical states may be transient and 
leave the undergoer with a certain sense of passivity, and typically they are 
ineffable in that they purport meaning that is difficult to interpret and put 
into words, but, nevertheless, holds a noetic quality in that they stay with the 
one affected; and they may (or may not), influence that person’s worldview

66 The paradox of fascination and awe as constitutive of the mystical experience of 
the numinous or godlike are qualities introduced by the theologian Rudolf Otto. He 
used the Latin mysterium tremendum et fascinosum as designation for this complex 
of feelings that he claimed to be distinctive of the sacred. See Rudolf Otto, Das 
Heilige – Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum 

67 Ineffability, the noetic quality, transience, and passivity are qualities used by Wi-
lliam James to describe the mystical experience in his seminal work The Variety of 
through self-transcendence. Thus, the aesthetic process is open to an excess of meanings, which are likely to invite metaphysical, religious, or even spiritual interpretations. As I see it, the metaphysical interpretation would reflect on the experience in terms of philosophy, without any wish to connect it with personal belief or faith. Both the religious and the spiritual would relate to what is considered sacred such as a person, a being, an object, a principle, or a concept that transcends the self, and which belongs to the divine, an ultimate reality, or ultimate truth; but whereas the religious has non-sacred goals in life (identity-building, belongingness, meaning, health, etc.) and is socially and institutionally grounded and validated in terms of means and methods (ritual, prescribed behaviours, etc.), the spiritual focuses on feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that develop through seeking the sacred. Hence, the interpretation depends on the contextualisation of the event, which can be an institutional staging of ritual, church, theatre, museum, etc., or the context can be of the participant’s subjective selection, which might go against any institutional or social intent. Given the overlap between religion and spirituality when it comes to the sacred, there might be co-occurrence of the two in the individual interpretation.

With Anita Hammer’s methodical recommendation in mind, I shall proceed to give a “taste” of what an experience of transcendence and its conditioning by staging might be like. The example is chosen specifically because the staging of the event does not present an explicit frame of reference to guide its interpretation; engaging with the staged event is the only way of finding out what kind of experience it may produce: if it is at all transcending, and if it gives rise to metaphysical, religious, or spiritual interpretation, or, perhaps, something else. The example will, later on, serve as a baseline for observing the potentiality of transcendent experiences conditioned first by the materiality of staging. It is also chosen because it clearly shows how physical/spatial transcendence and mental transcendence combine in creating the experience.

68 Garcia-Romeu, 2010, p. 28.
In 2011 the Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson presented an installation called *Your Blind Passenger* at the Arken Museum of Contemporary Art in Ishøj just south of Copenhagen.\(^7\) It was the final part of a three-year exhibition series on the theme of utopia in our times.\(^7\) The experience I had with the installation provides a concrete understanding of how and under which circumstances the staging of a performance may facilitate an experience of transcendence to its audience. I invite the reader to follow me into the installation as I give an account of my visit.

It was a weekday afternoon in June 2011 when I visited Arken and there were not many other visitors. I had come specifically to experience Eliasson’s installation. Alone, I entered into the long main hall of the museum where it was exhibited – a 150-meter grey, concrete building, quite distinctive in its outline of the hull of a ship. When turning towards the middle of the building, there was, in front of me, a rather curious looking wooden installation, painted black with light-wooden carrier-beams on its outside. Although it did not look much of an art installation, it did impress me by its length; it seemed to stretch almost to the end of the hall. Later, I read in the

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\(^{72}\) Olafur Eliasson is internationally renowned for his often large-scale installations, which, with a scientifically inspired approach, facilitates the audience’s exploration and perception of natural phenomena, typically involving light, colour, atmosphere, landscape, set either in doors or in surprising exterior environments. Some of his best known work includes the large artificial sun of *The Weather Project* suspended below the ceiling of the tall former turbine hall of the Tate Modern in London (2003) and the unexpected sight of *The New York City Waterfalls* (2011) cascading into the city’s harbour at six different sites, one beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. From August 20 2014 to January 4 2015 he took a section of an Icelandic riverbed, removed it stone by stone from nature and put it on display at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, in Humlebæk north of Copenhagen. From October 3 2015 to January 17 2016 his exhibition *Verklighetsmaskiner (Reality Machines)* could be visited at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. The title of the later exhibition suggests that a sense of reality can be constructed through staging.

\(^{73}\) In the description of the exhibition series on Arken’s website it says: “UTOPIA at ARKEN debated the utopia, the grand shared notion of the perfect society. Whatever happened to it? Does it still exist today? And if not, what has taken its place? Individual dreams of the good life, conceptions of globalization, tiny enclaves of communities?” (http://www.arken.dk/content/us/art/exhibitions/past_exhibitions/2009 (accessed September 20 2013).
exhibition catalogue that it was 90 meters, that is, the equivalent of a European football field.


Since I had read about and seen a few pictures of the installation on the museum website before going, I had some notion of what awaited me. Still I was very curious as to what it would be like to actually enter and navigate the interior. The entrance was at the end of the installation, a double door. I approached it resolutely and grabbed the handle. It opened onto a small dimly lit antechamber. On the other side of the chamber there was another double door. As I opened that door, I realised that the chamber was an airlock; its function was to keep the fragile environment inside stable. A dense fog instantly rolled toward me as I entered.

From one instant to the next I was deprived of my normally perceived world. Were it not for my curiosity and fascination with this fog – a phenomenon known to me from nature but here artificially created – I might have been overcome by unease and fear of taking a single step inside, so dense was the fog. Upon entering I had no sense of distance, my field of vision had dissipated in the glare of a brightly lit whitish blur. In fact, I felt as if I had gone blind. The fog itself seemed to be strangely luminous in its materiality. It was not possible for me to assess the depth of the space in front of me or figure out where the light sources were placed. A few steps in and I had to stop. I felt as if I had truly gone blind. It was a very unsettling feeling. I had to fight the urge to turn around and leave the place. I stood still as my eyes strained to make out any contours ahead of me. I looked to the sides and I could barely make out the walls, and I estimated that the range of visibility was down to a couple of meters.
With no fixed points of orientation ahead of me, my next steps forward into the passageway were very tentative and careful. The delimiting disorientation of my visual sense forced me to renegotiate what it meant to walk. Were it not for the sense of gravity pressing my body weight onto my feet, I could as well have been walking in mid-air inside a mysteriously glowing cloud. At first, I quickly lost my balance, but then I regained my footing. I started to associate the sensation with how I imagined it to be like to be a child again, taking my first steps. I tried out very slow paces, until I started feeling more confident, and then I dared increase my speed somewhat, but not too much.

Adding to the wobbliness of my barely regained walking skills, instinctively I concerned myself with how I could avoid collisions. There was the concern that if I walked too fast, I would suddenly get too close to either wall, and I could hurt myself. There was the concern that another visitor might come toward me from the other end of the tunnel or come from behind and bump into me. I listened to hear if anyone was approaching me. I heard no steps resonate off the wooden floor, reassuring myself that that would, for sure, be the warning I would receive well in time for evasive manoeuvres.

At this point, it was not only my sight and hearing that were put on alert but my whole sensory apparatus. I gained a strong awareness of my surroundings and the interplay between my body and the environment. The fog was not just outside of me; its palpable materiality reached inside of me as I took a breath. It was almost as if being in flux with that which was my body and that which was not. The few meters of visibility around me felt as if it were an almost tangible extension of my body, underscoring my sense of exposure and vulnerability. In one sense, it was as if having my personal inviolability zone amplified, expanded, and made visible by the fog; but it was not just an intimidating notion, it was also an exciting sensation of interconnectedness with my surroundings and the seemly boundless fog.
As I continued walking, the colour of the fog had long since changed from white to a full orange. It struck me this was a colour I had seen in a documentary on TV about space probe missions to Saturn’s moon Titan, the only moon in the solar system with an atmosphere.\(^{74}\) For a moment, I was upheld by weird imaginings of not only standing on this alien world but at the same time breathing its atmosphere, a deep-freezing nitrogen environment which would be instantly lethal to humans were they directly exposed to it. But I was beyond this, imagining I was a nitrogen-breathing alien creature. Of course, I was not on Titan; yet, the otherworldliness of the staging was so absorbing that it easily gave birth to such flights of fancy.

Then, with another twist of my imagination, I was left with an equally nonsensical notion of breathing not only the fog, as I was actually doing, but its colour! Breathing orange itself. If the imagining of breathing the air of Titan was weird and perhaps farfetched (considering the required knowledge of space exploration), this was even weirder, surreal, belonging to the realm of dreams, where logic was suspended. Indeed, at this point, I felt like I was having a waking dream. Yet, this imagining was provoked, again, by factuality, the material: the dense quality of the fog and the way it refracted the waveband of light to make it seem almost tangible.


\(^{74}\) I am here referring to the Voyager I and Cassini-Huygens missions, which reached Titan in 1980 and 2005 respectively. See: Paul Olding’s documentary Titan – A Place Like Home? from the BBC series Horizon, season 42, episode 7, first aired on October 20, 2005.
As I continued forward, the light started to fade. The orange shifted gradually to a light green, which a little further down the corridor subtly shifted into murky grey tones. Those hues, again, gradually grew darker and darker. Soon, I was faced with another challenge: zero visibility. I struggled with my instinctual urge to stop and turn back, but somehow I overcame my anxiety. I took one step at a time trying to walk in the direction I believed to be still straight ahead. I inexorably stretched out my hands in front of me, just in case I should go astray and come too close to the walls. The darkness was complete. My eyes could not make out anything in front of me. I had a sensation of being totally blind, not even the slightest patch of light reaching the retina. This time it was not my associations and imagination, which were set in play by the installation; the absence of light itself facilitated my state of blindness.

Finally, after having groped my way through empty darkness for what seemed an eternity, I was relieved to see a grey-blue haze ahead of me. I started to walk – despite the still demanding conditions – with a self-confidence I had not hitherto felt since I entered the installation. The blue colour surrounding me had now lost its grey murkiness and sent me into reveries about walking on a sea floor and breathing the water like a fish. Then, the light changed to a milky white and I started to wonder if I was not indeed too human after all, and that I just drowned and was now passing over into eternity. As if an ironic comment on this last flight of fancy, I suddenly found myself in front of the double door of what I presume must be the end of the corridor (a rather disappointing “Pearly Gates”), and sure enough, a few seconds later, I was back in the stark concrete-grey reality of the museum hall.

I could have left it there, and not thought much more of the experience; just held it to be a curious one, or even an entertaining one, not much different from the attraction in an amusement park. But the awe-inspiring and fascinating staging of my sensation and perception had completely taken hold of me, and I re-entered the installation two more times. Every time I came out even more enthralled by how its staging created very delicately balanced physical/spatial conditions, which allowed me to transcend my lifeworld through bodily sensations and perceptions. These impressions

76 Lifeworld (Lebenswelt) is a phenomenological concept introduced by Edmund Husserl to describe the taken-for-granted-ness of the individual’s lived experience of
stayed with me, and I returned to ponder their meaning over and over in the following days.

Right from the onset of the event, the dense intensity of whitely glowing fog had affected my eyesight as there were no visible contours in front of me to focus on. Phenomenologist Alva Noë refers to this as “perceptual blindness,” i.e. a state of blindness, which is not caused by disruption of the optical nerve, but temporarily induced by deprivation of sensory inputs; this phenomenon is similar to being “snow-blind” where there is not enough information for the brain to perceive the surrounding space, only the colour white.\(^77\) When I regained a limited orientation in space, I had to renegotiate what it meant to walk under these unusual circumstances, the perceptual system of sight, proprioception, and kinaesthesia having been disturbed. According to Noë, perception is a mode of action, which not only engages the brain but the whole organism. We actively engage in our surroundings through several perceptual systems at once, sight, hearing, smell, touch, proprioception and kinesthesia, and a complete experience of the visible, audible, and tangible environment is created. Furthermore, Noë contends that perception is a skill we acquire.\(^78\) This means that perception is acquired through childhood, that it is culturally determined, and that it is, to a certain extent, malleable. When the physical/spatial surroundings suddenly changed as they did when I entered Eliasson’s installation, I became aware of this acquired nature of perception in a quite unsettling and awe-inspiring way. In a rather concrete sense, I had stepped over a threshold and was in a zone of contingency, i.e. that which, out of necessity, is one thing but could have been different, the possible other. I felt as if I were a child again; in a mental sense, I transcended myself – a transcendence which was only made possible by the somatic effect of the staging, the immanent; the physical immersion in the installation had expanded to the mental, like Antigones Dagbok, although with the use of vision instead of sound.

\(^{77}\) Noë, 2004, pp. 3-4.
\(^{78}\) Ibid., p. 2.
Soon, the overwhelming feeling had abated and a fascination with the environment had set in. The physical/spatial conditions had continued to trigger associations to that which mostly belonged to the category of the impossible: walking mid-air through a cloud, becoming an alien being on Titan, breathing the colour orange, becoming a fish, and finally, and most inconceivably, being dead. All of these imaginary states are to be considered contingent, as the fog might have inspired some other thoughts, but did not because I was who I was, and I did what I did at that exact moment; some one else might have associated differently. The museum institution had decided on a rather unobtrusive framing that made it easy to ignore the intended theme of the installation, which was utopia; although in hindsight I found that the installation did provide a very interesting take on that theme: utopia as a real constructed place.79 The thematic unobtrusiveness, however, meant that the meaning of Your Blind Passenger in effect was left to be decided by the individual visitor; each brought to the encounter with the installation her own frame of reference, her own cultural and aesthetic competences. Here, memory and ghosting is of importance to understanding the process. To me, the density of the fog and its orange colour had been haunted by the memory of a television documentary on Saturn’s moon Titan and its CGI rendition of its atmosphere. Furthermore, the final stretch of the walk through the tunnel had been ghosted by a popular notion of what it might be like to die, namely the many renditions of near-death experiences found in literature, television, and movies. Subsequently, these ghostings and imaginings were supported by the very real physicality and materiality of the environment, as it in itself constituted an unusual situation with qualities of transcendence: the state was transient and passive, in the sense that I was the undergoer of fleeting sensations and perceptions instigated by the fog and its changing colours (this does not mean that I had no agency: I could freely decide how to navigate and explore the passageway, my walking pace, how far I would go, my direction, etc.); and the event was almost ineffable in the sense that it gave rise to notions which had evaded easy description, calling upon nonsensical formulations like “walking midair through a cloud” and “breathing the col-

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79 Eliasson himself commented on the theme of the exhibition: “For me Utopia is tied to our ‘now’, to the moment between one second and the next. It constitutes a potential that is actualised and transformed into reality; an opening where concepts such as subject and object, inside and outside, proximity and distance are thrown up in the air only to be defined anew. Our sense of orientation is challenged, and the coordinates of our spaces, collective and personal, have to be renegotiated. Mutability and motion lie at the core of Utopia.” Olafur Eliasson, “Din Blinde Passager”, https://artmap.com/arken/exhibition/olafur-eliasson-2010 (accessed July 4, 2018).
our orange”. The event was noetic as it had left me with impressions that stayed with me.

In this sense, the installation was not merely a distraction for a couple of hours, it became a proper, lasting experience. During my return-journey back home on the train and the following days and months, it lead me to contemplating what is sacred to me, and that sacredness may be found in how I regard connectedness: how my body is intimately connected to the air I breathe, to space that I negotiate and share with others, to sociality, to nature, and ultimately to the cosmos. It had reminded me of my fragility and mortality, and it had made me think about eternity and the afterlife – if it exists. Here, my focus was on the profound feelings and thoughts that the visit called forth, and how they might inform my future behaviours and experiences: how do I relate to the environment of the planet? How do I relate to other people? And it made me wonder about life on other worlds and life after death. I do not hesitate in saying that Eliasson’s installation had provided me with an “experience of transcendence”, which might be called “spiritual” but not “religious”; for the later concept to be applicable to the experience it would have had to connect with some institutional, denominational beliefs and a wish for the communal belonging and identity such beliefs could instil. I found nothing in the installation to be religious. Rather, I would say that the installation functioned as a transcendence machine that heightened an awareness of connectivity and wonder as something sacred in and by itself. Such a claim finds support in studies of consciousness, which holds spirituality to be the culmination of consciousness.  

In conclusion, my experience of Your Blind Passenger shows that staged events, which initially seems to have nothing or very little to do with the spiritual (cf. the intention of exploring the contemporary concept of utopia) might still take on such a meaning to the participant – exactly because of the physical/spatial staging of immanent transcendence. Thus, in terms of aesthetics, the issue of calling forth spiritual and religious experience of transcendence in contemporary theatre, performance art, and art installations might reflect the findings of the research project Religion in the 21st century, namely that religion and spirituality are phenomena that have to be approached with the concepts of intertwinement and potentiality: “Religion

80 Peter Malekin and Ralph Yarrow are even concerned with what they consider spirit in performance, which “operates across all channels and, in functioning as an integrated whole, provides more than the sum of the parts, so opening into the realm of the more than ordinary, the magical.” Malekin and Yarrow, 1997, p. 148.
[and spirituality are] adoptable, adaptable and potentially available everywhere.\textsuperscript{81}

Research Questions

Based on my experience with \textit{Your Blind Passenger}, I have formulated a set of research questions to be pursued in my other analyses in this thesis. With regards to such key concepts as ‘staged event’, ‘experience of transcendence’, ‘immanent transcendence’, ‘religion’, and ‘spirituality’, the questions refer to the preliminary/assumed concepts and qualities presented above; these will be further unpacked and developed for analysis in Chapter 2, primarily drawing on theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte’s \textit{aesthetics of the performative} and philosopher, historian of ideas, and theologian Dorthe Jørgensen’s \textit{metaphysics of experience}. The research questions are divided into two sections: one which concerns the analysis of the staged event (questions 1, 2, 3, and 4), and one which is about the development of an analytical model (questions 4 and 5).

1) In which ways do the \textit{staging} of the event structure and affect the experience of audience members’/congregants’ participation in the event?
   a) How are sensation and perception activated by the event’s materiality?
   b) What kind of qualities are involved in the experience of transcendence?
   c) What kind of agency is assigned/proposed to the audience member/congregant and how is it established?
   d) Does agency create instances/states of transcendence that affect the process of reception?

2) How is the self experienced against not-self, i.e. otherness/alterity as
   a) emphatic or un-emphatic space (inviting or intimidating/awe and fascination)?
   b) something transcending one’s physical realm?
   c) oneself as another in relating to another person or the materiality of the staging?
   d) Does the aesthetic form of the event actualise an embodied narrative and/or ethical self through role-playing?

3) How is interpretation affected by contexts of the event?

\textsuperscript{81}Iversen, 2007, p. 146.
a) Is the context institutional/non-institutional, cultural or artistic, traditional/modern?
b) To which extent do individual/personal contexts (cultural and aesthetic competences) influence interpretation?
c) How is meaning produced (through representation, symbolism, ghosting, representation as effect)?
4) How may theories of religion and spirituality, transcendence and experience, and performativity be adopted for an analytical model?
5) What would be an analytical model of transcendent experience in the context of staged events, building on the selected theories?

Encounters with My Research Material

In selecting my research material, I have been interested in encounters with a variety of staged events, which are both artistic and cultural, and which display some geographical and cultural diversity. The aim is to be able to address issues of tradition and secularisation as most of the examples are not clear-cut but crossovers of the artistic and the cultural event; equally, differences between Western and Non-Western culture may be observed, not to limit my studies to my native cultural context but also to provide other perspectives; as I have already pointed out, the Nordic countries are exceptional when it comes to their degree of secularisation. In contrast secularised Aotearoa New Zealand is particularly interesting as it still has an indigenous culture with living ritual traditions. The events display structural and aesthetic similarities, although their institutional and cultural contexts are very different. These institutional differences are most distinctive in the cases of the cultural events, since all of these events take place within local and indigenous religious or spiritual institutions; they are thus intended to serve as experiential contrast to the artistic events, whose initiating contexts are non-religious/non-spiritual. In the Nordic examples (besides *Your Blind Passenger*) the impact of secularisation are pronounced as the artistic is introduced inside cultural institutional frames in such a way as to be considered a secular intervention in what would otherwise be a traditional cultural event and/or an attempt at reviving tradition (Christianity) and/or traditional forms (ritual) for contemporary society.

For my analyses, I have chosen a total of six examples of contemporary artistic and cultural staged events, of which four took place in my two home countries in Scandinavia, Denmark and Sweden, and two in the Southern
hemisphere in Aotearoa, New Zealand. I attended all of the events myself and will base my analyses of their potentials for experiences of transcendence on my own experiences.

Besides Olafur Eliasson’s *Your Blind Passenger*, there are two examples of artistic events: the Danish performance theatre company Hotel Pro Forma’s *jesus_c_odd_size* (Copenhagen, 2002), a performance exhibition on the theme of Jesus and the Christian heritage, staged in a former church, now a contemporary arts venue, Nikolaj Udstillingsbygning; and *185 Empty Chairs* (Christchurch, South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2012), an art installation in the middle of the earthquake-ridden city to commemorate the victims of the disaster in 2011.

There are three examples of cultural events: a pōwhiri (welcome ceremony) in the tradition of Aotearoa New Zealand’s indigenous peoples, the Māori, which took place at a marae, the communal and spiritual centre of the local iwi (tribe, community), and at which I was one of the guests of honour (2012); and finally, the contemporary liturgical drama or *kyrkospel* “churchplay”, *Jag är den jag är* (*I Am that I Am*) (2005) and *Hittefågel* (*Foundling-Bird*) (2011), both performed in Lund Cathedral, Southern Sweden.

In terms of creating participation and subsequently experiences of transcendence, the examples are chosen with attention to their specific stagings. All of the examples are characterised by *immersiveness*; although only *jesus_c_odd_size* might be said to belong to the genre *immersive theatre*, they all, to a varying degree, utilise full environments within which the audience/congregants are situated, as mobile visitors (*jesus_c_odd_size*, *Your Blind Passenger*, and *185 Empty Chairs*), or through shifting positions (the pōwhiri and the churchplays). These different environments affect sensation and perception in various ways: in *Your Blind Passenger*, the pōwhiri, *jesus_c_odd_size*, and in *185 Empty Chairs*, there are pronounced tactic elements and moments involving different senses; *vision* in Eliasson’s foggy tunnel; *touch* in the pōwhiri’s individual acts of greetings and in taking a seat.

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82 I list these staged events as artistic events as artists initiated them; this does, however, not mean that there are no overlaps with the cultural event in other regards.
83 These staged events are categorised as cultural events in accordance with their purpose and institutional organisers; this does, however, not exclude that the cultural event contains elements that are aesthetic and artistic in some regards.
in the chairs installation; taste in the Eucharists of the churchplays and Jesus, in the later also a coffee-table klatch, and in the concluding meal of the pōwhiri; and hearing affected by the acoustics of the cathedral spaces in the churchplays and ambient music and soundscapes of Jesus. Most events are staged indoors (Your Blind Passenger, Jesus, Jag är den jag är, and Hittefågel), while one is outdoors (185 Empty Chairs) and one partially outdoors and indoors (the pōwhiri), all of which creates different atmospheres. All events play on proxemics (the distances between bodies) and involve the crossing of thresholds of spaces, whether these are demarcated by architecture/interior/installation/stage and/or are virtually created by performative acts (Eucharist, greeting) and/or the interaction of bodies (Your Blind Passenger, in the pōwhiri and Jesus). As a variation on the concept of site-specificity, the pōwhiri and the churchplays may be said to be institution-specific events, since their efficacy depend on the specific ritual frame of the Māori pōwhiri protocol and the liturgy of the Christian mass, but not on a certain marae and a specific church space, respectively. 185 Empty Chairs could only be installed in the city of Christchurch where 185 had died in the 2011 earthquake. Here, the specific environment of the destroyed city provides context and gives meaning to the event. All events, except Your Blind Passenger, involve ghosting as an intentional dramaturgical devise that makes the past, the ancestors, myths, drama, fictional figures come alive. In Your Blind Passenger ghosting is a representational effect of the encounter with the materiality of the installation. Both the pōwhiri and the Eucharist in the churchplays use symbolism in their renderings of the ancestors and the divine, respectively. In Jesus the performers both appear as authentic persons and representations of biblical figures. In the dramatic part of the churchplays, the actors represent figures/characters. Different agencies are assigned participants through role-assignment and role-taking: in Your Blind Passenger the participant becomes a visitor-co-creator; in the churchplays a spectator and – if she chooses to – a guest at the Eucharist; in the pōwhiri and Jesus what Augusto Boal termed a ‘spect-actor’, i.e. here understood as a participant who shifts between taking the positions of spectating and acting.85

This last part of the chapter has offered an overview of the staged events to be analysed. Rather than comparing the different events, the analyses aim at providing an understanding of the variety of staging in creating the poten-

tial for experiences of transcendence. This variety is needed for the development of the analytical model.

Disposition of the Thesis

Overall the chapters of the thesis are arranged so that theory and methodology form a framework for analyses. The discussed theories and method are employed in the analyses, and together the analyses constitute a variety of the explored phenomenon, experiences of transcendence, which inform the development of the practical model for performance analysis. The relative wide spectrum of events ranging from installation art through ritual to theatre serves to demonstrate the applicability of the model. Instead of presenting the analyses in the chronological order of events, the analytical chapters are relatively independent. Still, the order is not random: the order observes a movement from foreign to familiar staged events, i.e. events belonging to environments, cultures, or traditions that I was either accustomed or unac-
customed to when I participated. This is a conscious methodological choice. Beginning with the foreign events I deliberately displace myself somatically and semantically by entering into contexts and forms of staging, to which I do not have habitual access (through prior experience and acquired competences, e.g. linguistic, cultural), or for which there is no explicit metaphysical, religious or spiritual frame of reference. These displacements force me to pay attention to the events’ nonverbal and bodily aspects that otherwise easily is bypassed by semiotic analysis. Then I apply this phenomenological approach to the events that are familiar or native to me hoping to expand the register of analysis to their performative processes. Furthermore, there is a certain progression in the exploration of the concepts in the analytical apparatus, however without abandoning the complexity of the analyses.

The first chapter opens with a charting of previous research within performance analysis as well as the emerging interdisciplinary field of performance, religion, and spirituality. Recent individual research projects, which are of particular relevance to my research, are reviewed. The charting then proceeds to the theories, concepts, and terms, which are unpacked and discussed in developing the analytical apparatus. The main theories, Fischer-Lichte’s *the aesthetics of the performative* and Jørgensen’s *metaphysics of experience*, are discussed and calibrated for the analysis of participant experiences of transcendence, i.e. as notions of immanent transcendence occurring in staged events. Complex concepts of religion and spirituality is devel-
oped. Contemporary tendencies of distinguishing between religion and spirituality are considered, and the typological range of metaphysical and religious experiences suggested by Jørgensen is expanded, adding the spiritual-but-not-religious experience. A set of analytical tools aimed at the two main dimensions of the event, the material properties of staging and the cognitive capacities for experience and their interplay in the process of reception, is developed. The method to which these tools are to be applied is described as a performative analysis, in which the analytical material is generated through participatory observation by the researcher. It takes into consideration complex relations of the participatory positions of agent and beholder, as they emerge in different categories of staged events. As of particular interest to the analysis of experiences of transcendence, the concept of ‘significant moment’ is identified as useful to focus the performance analysis on certain moments, which pose affective and cognitive challenges to the participant when coming to terms with perceptions and interpretations as evaluated against personal outlooks and worldviews dominant in society.

The second chapter investigates the emergence of experiences of transcendence in the contexts of two very different staged events in Aotearoa New Zealand, the memorial art installation *185 Empty Chairs* and the Māori pōwhiri ritual. The analyses proceeds in three steps: first, a fairly detailed participatory account of the events explores what circumstances triggered their transcending effect and what it was like undergoing it; second, the properties of staging or performative generation of materiality within the event are analysed; and third, specific attention is paid to significant moments of the events, which were crucial in forming my experiences of transcendence. The interplay between the properties of staging and my capacities for experience and personal context are discussed and related to the interpretation, employing the metaphysics of experience. In both events I am interested in the phenomenological paradox of bringing the absent, the earthquake victims and the ancestors, into presence through the potential effect of the staging on the participant. In *185 Empty Chairs* this notion of immanent transcendence is especially observed in the interplay between the installation’s material directedness and the participant’s imagination, while in the pōwhiri is it is created by the progression through stages of the ritual gradually approaching the host people, the participant’s reactivity and acquired cultural competences in preparation for the ritual. Both events are considered to be potentially transcultural, as both stagings invite the foreign participant to engage sensitively on a personal level, hence recognising herself in the encounter with the other.
In the third chapter the exploration of events and experiences returns to my native Scandinavian cultural context, in which two instances of the – to me – well known tradition of churchplays in the Lund Cathedral are analysed. As a context for interpretation of the churchplays, I give an account of my complex personal relation to Christianity and the church charting my spiritual development. As a crossover of ritual and theatre, *Jag är den jag är* enacts the Old Testament scenario of Moses encountering God on the mountain followed by a celebration of the Holy Communion (Eucharist). These first two parts of the event symbolically calls into presence the divine, and is then followed by the performance of a play by Jon Fosse *Sov du vesle barnet mitt*. The event is analysed with particular attention to the performers’ phenomenal bodies, their presence and directedness toward the spectator as they perform Fosse’s agnostic-meditative text on themes like knowledge, cognition, presence, and eternity. The performed text becomes a cultural context for my non-dogmatic interpretation of the event: its all-female cast and the acting’s emphasis on presence and the all-pervading quality of womanhood turns the cathedral space into a cosmic womb of constant creation. Thus, this complex synthesis of meaning created between Fosse’s neo-existentialist play and its framing within a Christian liturgy and a cathedral space may be seen as a dialogue between secularisation and tradition, allowing for spiritual seekers to recognise themselves in the event. As a way of providing perspective and a backdrop of reference for the analysis of the second churchplay *Hittefägel*, the historical, theological and poetological background for the Swedish churchplays is presented. The analysis of *Hittefägel* then forms a contrast to *Jag är den jag är*. *Hittefägel*, which enacts the narrative about the refugee child Nadja and her fight to avoid deportation, is framed by the Grimm Brothers’ fairy-tale *Foundling-Bird*. Staged as it is in the cathedral it may be perceived as a ghosting of the medieval function of the church as sanctuary as well as the ancient Greek concept of hospitality towards the outcast. Through its theatrical immanent transcendence *Hittefägel* invokes the story of Nadja offering an opportunity to experience the refugee child’s precarious situation as seen from the inside or first person’s perspective; but it does not provide me with what I would call a spiritual experience. The political rhetoric is too strong. Whereas the celebration of the Holy Communion preceded the Fosse play in *Jag är den jag är*, the ritual immediately followed the theatrical play in *Hittefägel*, allowing role-taking in the ritual to seen as a commitment to the play’s admonishment to protect refugee children and identification with Christian belief and morality. To me *Hittefägel* is a political experience within a religious context,
not a religious or spiritual experience. At the same time, I argue that it functions as a cultural performance, in that it reflects Christian culture in such a way that it is visible for both Christians and others to either recognize themselves as belonging to it or being opposed to it. Therefore it is possible – as I do – to only identify with the humanism of the performance.

The fourth chapter explores the performance theatre company Hotel Pro Forma’s performance-exhibition *jesus_c_odd_size* in the former church now contemporary arts venue in Copenhagen, Nikolaj Udstillingsbygning. Contrary to the other cases the analysis does not merely reflect a single completed visit but an accumulation of visits, which gradually increases the basis of my experience. The old church building draws attention to the religious context; but as the building now functions as an art museum the staging creates room for exploring Christianity on artistic premises. The format of performance-exhibition allows for a mobile audience, who roams the venue freely to explore performances and installations throughout the building. The performers are staged as people of our time as well as biblical figures with whom one can interact. Interactivity and proxemics are important properties of staging in creating notions of immanent transcendence in the paradoxical close encounters with what should be impossible, namely living biblical persons. The possibility to explore one’s own relationship to Christianity, in the fluctuation between empathic engagement and reflective distance, is analysed. I find that the process offers me an examining gaze, which is not only directed towards the performers and the exhibited artefacts but also towards myself, while I interact with my surroundings and my thoughts on believing. In the context of *jesus_c_odd_size* a question of dogmatic belief in Christianity gives way to finding faith in the very way I relate to other people and the world, always hovering over the threshold of the encounter. I see this as a spiritual-but-not-religious experience, encountering the other as immanent transcendence, i.e. with unreserved confidence in the relationship that is greater than oneself and recognition of oneself in the other. This experience is not necessarily opposed to traditional Christian spirituality, but the Bishop of Copenhagen’s prohibition against priests celebrating the Holy Communion as part of the event prevents the parallel between Christ’s incarnation in the ritual and in the encounter with the other human being – a situation which ideally demands that the visitor transcends herself and her reservations, as it is possible in the encounter with the biblical performer.

Finally, the fifth chapter presents the analytical model and summaries the established theoretical and methodological apparatus. It begins with a philosophical perspective on the model’s basic elements of scientific inquiry, that
is, the ontological, epistemological, and methodical dimensions that lie behind the model and place it within a wider context of research. A graphic rendition of the model is presented with a summary of its key theoretical concepts. This summary offers a concise overview of the aesthetic theories that translate into the practicable model. Every concept is illustrated with examples from the analyses. A practical introduction to the model itself serves as an instruction in how to read and apply it to analysis. Based on the analyses, some general observations are made. These observations are aimed at further research into the phenomenon of experiences of transcendence. With particular attention to the future development of the model, some theoretical and methodological issues are addressed: in what way may the selection of staged events in the present study have influenced a certain conceptual bias in the construction of the model? What are the limits of observation set by the chosen theoretical concepts? Last not least, it is considered in more general terms what value of its own the model and method may have in the development of performance analysis and how the study of experiences of transcendence may contribute to the general understanding of theatrical and staged events.
Chapter 1: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations: Charting Research, Terms, Concepts, Theory, and Method

In this chapter, I present my theoretical and methodological considerations, leading to the analytical apparatus and method that I will apply to the examples, and which will form the basis of the model. First, I present an overview of previous research within the sub-discipline performance analysis and the subject field “performance, religion, and spirituality”, which offers a theoretical and methodological background for my research; second, I present and discuss the theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative as a foundation for my conception of ‘staged event’; third, I present and discuss the philosopher, historian of ideas, and theologian Dorthe Jørgensen’s experiential metaphysics for my understanding of ‘experience’ and ‘transcendence’; fourth, I present and discuss the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ as I employ them for conceptualising the categories of religious and spiritual experience; and finally, fifth, based on the previous considerations, I discuss my analytical apparatus and method of analysis – which leads to the development of the final model.

For this chapter, I use the metaphor of charting – as in plotting something onto a map. This implies thinking of previous research and theories in terms of a mental landscape or topography in which concepts and terms can be located. But, as in all the early exploration of land, the landscape only revealed itself partially and gradually and the plotting of locations and features would be considered incomplete for a long time. It would take additional exploration to complete a map of the landscape, and in this process maps would have “white areas”, which were then to be filled with the information gathered on new expeditions. In this sense, I orient myself in the landscape with the help of the key concepts that I have chosen (‘staged event’, ‘experience’ and ‘transcendence’, ‘religion’, and ‘spirituality’) as landmarks from where the rest of the theoretical areas (the aesthetics of the performative, metaphysics of experience, religion and spirituality) can be surveyed; thus I do not attempt to give complete overviews of each theoretician’s research – the topical areas are simply too vast to be covered, only the parts that are observable to the outlook offered from my landmark viewing points or key
concepts are charted. By exploring the theories this way, I will unavoidably leave white areas behind that others may then explore, while I discover some uncharted areas that have been left by the theoreticians in whose footsteps I follow.

As I deal with research and theories produced at different times, I extend the metaphor to be not only spatial but also temporal, in the sense that the temporal dimension is conflated into the spatial, meaning that the distance in time between concepts and terms do not interfere with connecting their dots or locations in the landscape; in other words, the charting is not bound by temporal linearity but may “jump through hyperlinks” and hence make connections across time that would otherwise remain hidden and unexplored.

Charting Previous Research

Within theatre and performance studies this thesis contributes to the sub-discipline of performance analysis and to the emerging subject field “performance, religion, and spirituality”. In the following, I chart the previous research within the two areas. As already mentioned, I do not pretend that my overview is exhaustive and complete with regard to what has been achieved and published, I merely point to the main achievements, tendencies, and developments as I see them theoretically/methodologically, and in terms of seminal publications, journals, and activities, e.g. conferences, symposia, research projects and working groups, which have helped define performance analysis and “performance, religion, and spirituality”, and brought them to their current states. In this sense, I chart or plot some trajectories and turning points in the histories of the two areas, but without proceeding in any strict linear or chronological way. Finally, in order to position my own research, I review recent work and PhD research, which has also dealt with the analysis of religious and/or spiritual experience in the context of performance, whether ritual, or theatrical, or both.

Since my project includes a study of the traditional Māori pōwhiri I would like – as a courtesy to Māori readers and as a shift of perspective for others – to offer up this charting of previous research as the whakapapa (genealogy) of my project.⁶⁶ In this sense, it shows where it all comes from, and

⁶⁶ According to the entry on whakapapa in the online Māori Dictionary, whakapapa as genealogy is concerned with the lineage of persons in order to determine the identity of individuals. The reciting of whakapapa, in its verbal form, is considered “an important skill and [reflects] the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms
where I come from as researcher. Whakapapa is a spiritual concept linking the Māori with their ancestry, not merely in the biological, historical-chronological way that contemporary Europeans’ think genealogy. Rather in the way that the ancestry makes the Māori who they are in terms of identity, social status, knowledge, etc., whakapapa might in accordance with Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal be thought of a real presence and resource of knowledge and wisdom in the lives of the living. Although I am well aware of the fact that the analogy to my research overview is not complete (many of the scholars I reference are still alive, and a research overview is not a spiritual concept), the general idea of previous research being a resourceful genealogy might shift the way one, as a Western scholar, considers the heritage of those within research who came before. Hence, I consider this research overview not as a part of the thesis that I do out of obligation, but as a kind of storytelling which increases my own sense of identity and provides an active resource for theoretical and methodological thinking.

Performance Analysis

As I locate my research project within the sub-discipline of performance analysis, it calls to attention some of the defining problems of theatre studies, as it has asserted itself as an independent academic discipline. Exploring experiences of transcendence brings to attention the tensions that has characterised the development of performance analysis from the very beginning, namely those between semiotics and phenomenology, intention and experience, staging and event, or text and performance. These bipolarities has had an overall tendency to split performance analysts into either-ors, either semioticians or phenomenologists. A survey of the development of performance analysis provides a backdrop for understanding the necessity of a combinatory approach if one is to successfully negotiate the challenges of analysing of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status.” See: https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=whakapapa (accessed 28 January 2018). Obviously, I do not use the term here to mean bloodline, but apply it in the sense I believe the Māori also use it to describe the decent of various phenomena including inanimate things. See: John Patterson, Exploring Maori Values, Wellington: Dunmore Publishing, 2009 [1992], p. 77.

experiences of transcendence as they occur in the context of staged events. With this as my approach, I make my endeavour.

One may consider performance analysis as the sub-discipline that best defines theatre studies (and perhaps also its newer off-shot performance studies). At the end of the nineteenth century before theatre studies became an academic discipline in its own right, theatre was studied as drama under literary studies, or as it was known in Germany back then, Germanic studies. From its very beginnings at Humbolt Universität in Berlin 1923, Max Herrmann’s theatre studies, or Theaterwissenschaft as the new discipline was called, set out to differentiate itself from literary studies by identifying the object of research as the art of theatre, of which the dramatic text is merely one element. Already Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his Hamburgische Dramaturgie, authored between 1766-69, had, through studies of acting, recognised that the substance of theatre is a transient artwork, which contrary to its text only exists in the *hic et nunc* of its stage realisation in front of an audience.  

With Lessing, Herrman realised that if one were properly to understand the phenomenon of theatre, one would have to study the performance (German: *Aufführung*), that is, how it, as a fleeting and dynamic work of art, brought together all its elements, including text, space, acting, and audience in an event.

In the long struggle with Germanic studies prior to the recognition of theatre as an independent subject, it had, for rhetorical reasons, been of importance to emphasise its nature of event. Herrmann’s historical studies of German middle age and renaissance theatre, however, reveal that his concept of theatre art was far more complex than it is often claimed to have been: he considered the relation between dramatic text and performance relativistic to culture and age; some periods put more emphasis on the text while others more on the performance. It was never a matter of one of the two completely taking predominance. His conception may also, in some respect, be seen as an early precursor of later phenomenological approaches to performance

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analysis as he held that “theatre art is a spatial art”,\textsuperscript{90} “the audience is so to speak the creator of theatre art”,\textsuperscript{91} “the art of acting produces the real, the purest work of art, which the theatre is capable of producing”,\textsuperscript{92} and to the totality of “[t]he theatrical spatial experiences” the audience react with their individual and collective “corporeal feeling.”\textsuperscript{93}

With his pioneering work and through some of his students, Herrmann became an inspiration for establishing theatre studies at Nordic universities.\textsuperscript{94} While slowly gaining a foothold\textsuperscript{95}, these theatre scholars continued the struggle to legitimise theatre as worthy of academic study, and rather than engaging with contemporary performances – as had Lessing and to some extent Herrmann – the nascent discipline looked to the study of history for its methodological development. Historical performances, or, more precisely, their remains and traces became the focus of theatre studies, as the performance and its experience could only be approached indirectly.\textsuperscript{96} In the dominant attitude of positivism, attempts were made to reconstruct performances taking its impetus in the historiographical utopian principle “wie es eigentlich gewessen”,\textsuperscript{97} by Herrmann reconceived for theatre as “a representation of the lost performances of the past, until they appear for us as an immediate reflection of an image”\textsuperscript{98} and in a modified understanding by his onetime Danish student and first professor of Theatre Studies in Denmark, Torben Krogh, applied to finding “the scenic artistic will” (“den sceniske

\textsuperscript{90} Max Herrmann, Forschungen zur deutschen Theatergeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1914, p. 6.


\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., pp. 152-163.

\textsuperscript{94} One of these students was the Dane Torben Krogh who became the first professor and chair of the programme “The History and Aesthetics of Theatre” at the Dept. of Literature, University of Copenhagen in 1953.

\textsuperscript{95} In the other Nordic countries, programmes of theatre studies were first established in Sweden 1946, in Norway 1965, and in Finland 1977.


\textsuperscript{98} Herrmann, 1914, p. 7.
kunstvilje”) of performance. For its descriptive reconstructions theatre studies drew on archival studies, e.g. manuscripts, machinery manuals, financial documents, written accounts of performances, reviews, as well as iconography, archaeology, historiography, and primary source critique (German Quellenkritik).

It would still last till the 1970s before performance analysis started to become a sub-discipline in its own right mainly aimed at contemporary performance. It then chiefly evolved, first under the influence of semiotics and later communication, reception studies, and phenomenology, taking it through a paradigm shift, the so-called “performative turn” in the 1990s that changed its object of research from work to event (from artist-intention-oriented to audience-experience-oriented). Thus, the development reflects the issue of the relationship between text and performance, which seems to keep haunting theatre studies, not yet having reached a satisfactory resolution. It is also interesting to observe how difficult it has been to include the audience in performance analysis, even though it had already been recognised as the completing factor by Herrmann.

Semiotics and Communication

The first theoretical steps towards the development of actual performance analysis for theatre were taken in Prague in the 1930s and 1940s by a diverse group of Eastern European scholars and practitioners who were to be known as the Prague School of Structuralism. Taking their point of departure in linguistics, Saussurean semiology, and Russian formalism, they applied their theoretical thinking to a wide range of cultural phenomena, language, literature, visual art, cinema, folk culture, ritual, and theatre. Due to the language barrier and the intervening world war and subsequent political division of Europe, their achievements went unnoticed by international English speaking theatre scholars until the seventies, when individual works, collections of texts, as well as other, later Eastern European research influenced by the school, were translated and published in the West. This break-through


came to boost the establishment of performance analysis, and much of the theory is still considered relevant to this day.\textsuperscript{101}

The main achievements of the Prague School were to identify the structures, signs, and components of theatre.\textsuperscript{102} They appropriated the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s concept of the sign, understanding it as consisting of a \textit{signifier} (material form) and a \textit{signified} (mental concept), and established a complex comprehension of how the theatrical performance works as a system of sign systems orchestrated and communicating in accordance with, for the main part, the artists’ intentions, and to some extent the audience’s perceptions. They determined what differentiates the theatrical sign from other signs, that is, the dynamics of the relation between its material form and meaning; they described how the sign may change its meaning during a performance, its “mobility” or transformability and polyfunctionality; they asserted that everything that happened to be on a stage, intended or unintended, would bear meaning to the spectator, a principle later to be known as the “law of semiotisation”\textsuperscript{,103} and they suggested that the meaning of the theatre performance in its totality, as a macro-sign, was determined by a dominant organising and subordinating the structure of other signs. One of their most well-known and useful inventions, though, is the terminological triad of ‘actor’, ‘stage figure’, and ‘dramatic character’ introduced by Otakar Zich.\textsuperscript{104} It not only conceptualises the specific relation between dramatic text and performance through acting (first addressed by Lessing and Herrmann), it also explains how it is possible for the spectator to perceive layers of meaning as being present at once: the spectator sees the stage figure, which the actress creates as an amalgam of her body, costume,
actions, etc., and interprets all of these signs in terms of the dramatic character in the play. The cognitive principle of conceptual blend of actor, stage figure, and dramatic character is repeated in Zich’s distinction between the ‘stage’ as a real geometrical, architectonical space and ‘dramatic space’ as the imagined time and place that is produced by the interplay of set design and stage figure.  

Rather than making up a consistent whole, the work on theatre of the Prague School consists in its contributors’ many different writings that build on, take inspiration in, comment and discuss each other, but never come together in what might have been a complete approach to theatre semiotics. Building on the Prague School, the first attempts at what may be call a comprehensive sign theory start with the Polish semiotician Tadeusz Kowzan’s essay “Le signe au théâtre: introduction à la sémiologie de l’art du spectacle” (1968), which was also published in an English version. It became the first introduction to the Prague School for many Western European theatre scholars. Besides reasserting and synthesising the existing theory, Kowzan initiated a complete typology of theatrical signs divided into 13 sign systems, which either classify signs as auditive or visual, connected or unconnected to the actor. Kowzan’s scheme takes its point of departure in the spoken text of the actor, which reveals his view of the dramatic text as the basis of the theatre performance; equally revealing is that he does not include the audience in his theory. This inventory of signs and its theory were later to be elaborated upon by Erika Fischer-Lichte in her Semiotik des Theaters (1983).

Further theoretical progress is made in the 1970s as the rather rigid and self-contained Saussurean semiology develops into what is now known as semiotics by adopting the American philosopher C.S. Peirce’s sign theory. Already in its inception, Pierce’s theory goes beyond Saussure’s linguistic orientation to include non-verbal signs, which is evident in his typology – icon, index, and symbol. What is more, it allows for a complex comprehension of signs and their dynamics in meaning-making processes, one that will eventually bring the audience into the scope of performance analysis.

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In Sweden Kurt Aspelin was the first to introduce theatre semiotics building on, among others, the Prague School. See: Kurt Aspelin, “Text och teater”, in Kurt Aspelin (ed.), Teaterarbete, Stockholm: Bokförlaget PAN/Norsteds, 1977.


For Peirce, the meaning of a sign is not merely a linguistically and culturally given but always requires an individual interpreter who, in effect, decides its meaning: “I define a sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former.”¹⁰⁹ In this triad of sign, object, and interpretant, the latter aspect is crucial to the actual significance of the sign as the interpretant is established in the situation, where the sign appears to the sign user. Building on this triad, Peirce’s most prominent European heir, Roland Barthes, contended that connotation occurs when the sign produced by object and interpretant is turned into another sign by additional interpretation. Subsequently, Barthes also drew attention to the impact of socio-political codes on interpretation.¹¹⁰ Along the same lines, Umberto Eco established how the theatrical context, with its potential for connotations and allowance for a variety of interpretational strategies brought by the spectators, necessitates the complexity and variability found in Peirce’s sign.¹¹¹

When the importance of interpretation within the societal and historical context came to the attention of semioticians, the theory of theatrical signs began to open up; if the communication processes and their regulating rules in theatrical meaning-making were to be fully understood, the thinking had to evolve past the autonomic sign and the level of sign function and embrace the dialectical tension between performers and spectator. An important contribution in this regard came from the Russian semiotician and cultural historian, Yuri Lotman of the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School. In his cultural typology, Lotman is the first to introduce the concept of code.¹¹² According to Lotman the code takes precedence over the sign in the analysis, and it does so because the code is information that encodes a sign system. In consequence, the meaning of a text or performance may appear to be different to different interpreters depending on the codes they have chosen to apply to their decoding of sign systems. Hence the attention of researchers should not

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be so much on the microstructure, but rather on the communication process within its cultural totality.

In the Nordic countries, the Danish theatre scholar Jytte Wiingaard was the first to apply this kind of contextualised analysis to practice, building rather on Barthes and the film theory of Metz and Eco than Lotman. In *Teatersemiologi* (1976), she summarises the approach and the scope of her method, which suggests performance analysis as a tool for understanding not only the performance, but also how performances are related to theatre culture and the culture of society as such.

The theatre performance must thus be perceived as a place where the signifiers are produced and where this production precisely depends on the overall and specific code systems. The performance thus becomes a representation of moving images that open to an infinity of signification, but whose system of codes are part of stage-conventional and socio-cultural contexts.

By reintroducing the signifiers into possible contexts, they are inscribed into the human world, which the contexts tell us something about. We can hereby contend that the contexts determine our perception of the signifiers and that they will further determine the contexts.\(^\text{113}\)

In practice, it took some time before Wiingaard had established her own best practice for performance analysis. Wiingaard’s initial analysis from 1976 is influenced by the positivism that has hitherto dominated Danish theatre studies (with its basis in historical research) and it is caught up in too minutely registering its empirical basis of sign systems before moving on to the interpretation in accordance to the external codes. The pernickety nature of systematically observing the performance structure for which there is evidence, e.g. photographic, also tends toward an analysis, which leaves the reader with little impression of the dynamics of the performance; instead, one is left with an exhausting charting of codes that is not always convincing in terms of its relevancy for the overall interpretation. However, Wiingaard’s achievements lie in demonstrating that the object of performance analysis is not bound to contemporary performances, but may also be applied to the source material of historical performances. At the same time, she opens up the analysis to the interdisciplinary employment of theory. Firstly, she bases the practical approach to the performance analysis on the Freudian interpretation of dreams by adopting a similar analytical structure dividing the pro-

cess into levels of ‘manifestation’, syntagmatic reading of signifiers through separate performance-specific codes with the use of isotopes (analysis-specific sign combinations), ‘transformation’, paradigmatic reading of codes as they relate to coherence/incoherence in an interpretation of segments, and ‘generation’, dedicated to the socio-cultural contextual analysis (the overarching codes), which then invites theory from other disciplines to be used for the interpretation. At a later stage of her work, she also introduced hermeneutics as a tool to be applied on the transformative and generative levels to make the analyst aware of her own subjectivity in selecting codes for the interpretation of the performance. In going beyond the performance to relate it to society, Wiingaard refers to Jürgen Habermas’ ‘metahermeneutics’, which includes the socio-historical context of a work.

In Germany, Erika Fischer-Lichte independently had arrived at a method, published in *Semiotik des Theaters* I-3 (1983), which basically followed the same process as Wiingaard’s but went much more into detailed instructions on how to register signs on levels of the ‘elementary’, ‘classematic’, ‘isotopic’, and subsequently select, combine, and segment codes. Whereas Wiingaard put particular emphasis on the societal context by adding the third level of generation, Fischer-Lichte’s method has no such level; instead she discusses at length the importance of applying Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics to the selection of all codes, both those which are internally established in the performance and externally in relation to society. She emphasises Gadamer’s concept of historically conditioned ‘prejudice’ (*Vorurteil*), or foreunderstanding that the individual brings to the reception of a work. Hermeneutics is as far as both Fischer-Lichte and Wiingaard go in terms of critically considering the conditions of meaning-making in performance – and this only concerns the hermeneutics analyst who is an expert on theatre, not the ordinary member of an audience.

Approaching the communicative aspects of performance in the 1980s, the introduction of communication models became important to the analysis of codes. When Keir Elam applied a communication model (based on among others Eco) to his method, it became possible to observe the whole of the communication process as something that is conditioned by a multitude of

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factors; it had to take into account the theatrical, dramatic, and cultural codes known to both the sender and the receiver.\textsuperscript{117} Elam also drew attention to factors of the performance that had been underdeveloped in performance analysis, such as the study of space, to which he adopted the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall’s ‘proxemics’ ("interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture")\textsuperscript{118} to elicit the code or rules that govern the use of highly flexible space in modern theatrical performance.\textsuperscript{119}

With the introduction of communication, the concept of representation had become more complex and relativistic, and during the 1980s the semiotic approach to performance analysis entered a crisis, it has not since recovered from, largely heralded by postmodernist philosophy’s deconstruction and questioning of established meaning systems. In particular, the emergence of this postmodernist influence is seen in the theory of performance analysis by the French scholar Patrice Pavis, who went from subscribing to a dual analysis of artistic intention and expression (employing Peirce) to reject the sign and code altogether and instead shift attention to the experiential and entertaining aspects of performance\textsuperscript{120}; equally, the American, Michael Kirby, favoured sensory experience’s primacy over encoded meaning in his “anti-semiotic” approach.\textsuperscript{121}

Phenomenology and Performativity

More or less coinciding with the decline of semiotics, an interest in the phenomenology of theatre and performance slowly evolved, and in recent years this direction of performance analysis has become increasingly important as a supplement or even replacement of semiotics. Phenomenology employs two other concepts that have entered performance analyse as well, the already mentioned hermeneutics and, more recently, performativity to make

\textsuperscript{119} Elam, 2002, p. 50ff.
them available for the understanding of spectator experiences and meaning-making processes. To my project, this turn toward phenomenology is important; but I do not see it as a replacement for semiotics, rather it complements the theory and methodology of performance analysis.

Phenomenology is a philosophical sub-discipline whose purpose might be summarised as the study of how phenomena appear to human consciousness, that is, with “the ways we experience things, [and] thus the meanings things have in our experience.” Phenomenology is often thought to be about the description of qualities connected with mere sensations, and their interpretations in social and psychological contexts are seen to be opposed to this, but that is a mistake. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy lists as part of its objective to study “the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity.”

Phenomenology has mainly been developed by German and French philosophers of the 20th Century, starting with the classical phenomenologists of whom Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are the most famous, and continued in the more hermeneutic phenomenology of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, as well as the sociological phenomenology of Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann. More recently, the so-called “New Phenomenology” has evolved in Germany with Herrmann Schmitz and Gernot Böhme’s work on feelings, corporeality, and

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atmosphere\textsuperscript{127}, and neurophenomenology conceptualised by Chilean biologist, neuroscientist, and philosopher Francisco Varela\textsuperscript{128}, as well as analytical phenomenology with proponents such as the American philosopher Alva Noë\textsuperscript{129}, both of which correlate phenomenology with biology and physics. In Denmark Dan Zahavi has studied the self and subjectivity\textsuperscript{130} and Ole Fogh Kirkeby the event.\textsuperscript{131} Each of all of these philosophers has his individual take on phenomenology, which makes Merleau-Ponty’s famous (early) statement that there are not one but many phenomenologies as relevant as ever.\textsuperscript{132} Abandoning his attempt at finding a unifying thread between them, Merleau-Ponty contended that all of them basically constitute “a style of thinking”\textsuperscript{133} whose aim is a “re-learning to look at the world”\textsuperscript{134} and an effort to “bring back all the living relationships of experience.”\textsuperscript{135} However, what does bind them together is that all of them recognise Husserl as the founder of phenomenological thinking and more or less relate to his method. Therefore, I shall dwell on a few of Husserl’s key concepts before introducing phenomenology as it has been applied to performance analysis.

Husserl, who originally trained as a mathematician, initially turned his attention toward phenomenology when he was working on his \textit{Logische Untersuchungen} (1900-01). He contended that logic does not rely on the human mind, but is a universal law following its own set of rules. Whereas the mind is able to handle contradictions such as a thing being both A and not-A, logic demands that only one description be true. This observation made Husserl wonder how the mind perceives of any object in such a way that what is said about it remains true; in other words, how would it be possible to develop a

\textsuperscript{132} Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., p. viii.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., p. xx.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. xv.
theory that could account for our observations of the complex non-logical ways consciousness works? To tackle this problem, he avoided taking recourse to psychological explanations, instead looking to the activity of consciousness itself, what he called, \textit{noesis}. As he found, there is a correlation between consciousness and things that appear to the mind, this would lead him to his famous dictum “back to the things themselves”\textsuperscript{136}, or that which “manifests itself” (Greek: \textit{phainomenon}), that is, he sought a method of observing the way that things are actually given in experience. Observing in this way how things appear to consciousness, he refuted the prevailing Cartesian notion of the mind as an inner, self-contained realm and claimed that the mind is always, in different respects, directed upon objects external or imaginary to it. Husserl called this object-directedness “intentionality” with inspiration from his onetime teacher, Austrian psychologist, and philosopher Franz Brentano. Consciousness is an “act” about something, whether this thing is material or immaterial, concrete or conceptual, real or unreal: one cannot perceive, feel, love, or judge without it being directed at something/someone. The object of the intentional act is considered ‘external’, that is, transcendent to the act itself, and called the “transcendent object”.\textsuperscript{137} To further structure the process, Husserl introduced a conceptual triad that distinguishes between the intentional ‘matter’ of a conscious act, its intentional ‘quality’, and the object itself. The intentional quality, or the type of act, consists in something being a perception, belief, desire, memory, etc. The intentional matter, or the meaning of an act, is derived from what and how the act is about an object. In Husserl’s view, not only objects are transcendent, external to the act, but so are their meanings as they transcend the act and, in this sense, are ideal (not spatio-temporal). Husserl’s aim for phenomenology was for it to describe intentionality, not explain or reduce it in importance.

Since Husserl’s time, the term ‘intentionality’ has taken on many variations of meaning depending on the philosopher’s specific understanding of phenomenology, its emphasis, and application. Both Heidegger and Sartre saw intentionality, or the directedness toward an object, as essential to what it means to be human, a fundamental transcendence, which defines the condition.\textsuperscript{138} Merleau-Ponty took the concept of intentionality and inflected it

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., pp. 126-127.
\textsuperscript{138} Martin Heidegger, \textit{The Basic Problem of Phenomenology}, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988; Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Transcendence of the Ego:
towards the body in terms of its engagement with the world in his concept of ‘operative intentionality’ and the ‘intentional arc’. Operative intentionality further explicates and adds to the structure of how the subject – in the Husserlian sense – has its objects: “[it] projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physiological, ideological and moral situation”; as a consequence it “brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility.” Merleau-Ponty goes on to relate intentionality to motility as a “basic intentionality”. Through its impetus in the body, it is to be considered a capacity (I can) rather than a form of knowledge (I know). Perception does not require the activation of certain knowledge in order for it to make sense to the observer: “Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us access to the world and the object […] which has to be recognised as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world without having to make use of my ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying function.’”

In order to observe how things appear to the mind, Husserl introduced a method, the ‘reduction’ or epoché. Essentially, the reduction is about bracketing phenomena, that is, removing them from their quotidian contexts and attempting to cancel out the taken-for-granted presuppositions about them. Hence, it is a critical attitude toward one’s assumptions about one’s way of being in the world that may direct one’s attention to how the world comes to exist to one’s consciousness and how it comes to be considered true and real.

One interesting aspect of Husserl’s reduction is its resemblance to theatre. As Derrida commented, the “phenomenological reduction is a scene, a theatre stage.” What seems to be overlooked by many theatre scholars is that Husserl actually relied on theatre to develop his idea of the epoché. In the dramatic theatre that Husserl observed, there was a clear perceptual analogy between what the spectator could experience on stage (material objects, persons, text, etc.) and what to be observed off-stage, in the surrounding society. In order to distinguish between the stage and everyday reality, it was, as Pennil Camp points out, required by the spectator to perform a kind of perceptual act comparable to the phenomenological bracketing in the sense that “the thing under view is temporarily unbound from what ties it to an actual

140 Ibid., p. 138.
141 Ibid., p. 137.
142 Derrida, 1973, p. 86.
This allows the spectator to put out of action the presupposition that a person is who that person appears to be and instead, perceive of the actor as if she was the character being portrayed. The proscenium theatre that Husserl was inspired by made the separation concrete, but the function of the reduction does not depend on this; it relies on the mental distinction that can be made anywhere.

If not leading to it being discarded altogether – as Heidegger did – the introduction of hermeneutics to phenomenology led to abandoning the ontological purity of the Husserlian reduction in favour of relating experience to context in order to analyse its meaning. As Merleau-Ponty contended, “the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction.” In terms of performance analysis, the reduction as such may be a tool to focus on a particular experience of a certain aspect of a performance; but in general, it makes more sense to relate the described experience to the socio-cultural circumstances that attribute meaning to the performative event.

Since the 1990s the applications of phenomenology to performance analysis have steadily increased. In his survey of phenomenology in theatre and performance studies around the world, the Australian performance scholar Stuart Grant sums up what he sees as reasons for the usefulness and appeal of phenomenology to performance analysis.

First, phenomenology aims to be a revelatory participation in the moment of the experience itself. Temporally, performativity distinguishes itself as the cleaving of the action or the utterance to the moment of its coming forth. The performative moment is the utterance which does what it says, the collapse of action and meaning. Phenomenology promises to gain access to this performative moment, as methodological insinuation into the moment of coming forth, speaking from the experience, opening it up and bringing it back for reflection. Second, this structure reveals phenomenology as a performative act in itself; a method which is implicated in the intrigue of the coming-forth, making

144 Here it is worth noticing the connection with Otakar Zich’s conceptual triad of actor, stage figure, and dramatic character, which was, in fact, based on Husserl’s reflections on the theatre.
it a potentially powerful tool for bringing force and clarity to the much-debated and misunderstood question of the ontology of performance.\(^{146}\)

Dance, with its non-verbal, kinaesthetic expression, made for an obvious first in-road into phenomenological analysis, which was pioneered by Maxine-Sheets Johnstone in *The Phenomenology of Dance* (1966). Since then, Johnstone has developed and consolidated her phenomenological method in dance analysis, centred on such key concepts and understandings as ‘qualitative movement’, ‘the primacy of kinesthesia to human understanding’, and ‘the fundamental role of dance in an evolutionary perspective on embodiment’, all of which is summarised in her seminal work *The Primacy of Movement* (1999).\(^{147}\)

One of the first to apply phenomenology to theatre was Bruce Wilshire in *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (1982). His interests lay in how the self and the experience of the audience were formed by theatrical events, issues that have proven to be pivotal for theatre and performance studies to explore.\(^{148}\)

In direct response to the semiotic dominance of performance analysis, the Shakespearian, Bert O. States’ *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms. On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (1985) introduced what he called a “binocular” approach that recognised a need for not simply replacing semiotics with phenomenology, but rather supplementing it.\(^{149}\) Perhaps learning from the futility of full-fledged semiotic inventories of a performance’s sign systems, States chose to take the “stand-point of the actor” to engage in an exploration of relations to text and audience. Other performance analysts have later revisited both of these approaches.

In *Bodied Spaces* (1994), Stanton B. Garner, Jr. expands the scope of phenomenological inquiry into performance by bringing together embodiment, performativity, and spatiality. His point of departure is still the drama of which Garner studies stagings from the twentieth century with an empha-

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\(^{147}\) Another early pioneer to introduce a phenomenological method in dance analysis was Kirsten Gram Holmström at Theatre Studies, Stockholm University. Kirsten Gram Holmström, “Metabalett och totalteater. Diaghilevs Ballet Russe i Göteborg”, in *Dans*, No. 2, 1980.


sis on the “perception and corporality” they realised. He is critical of the semiotic or poststructuralist influence on performance analysis, which he sees as an “analytic desiccation” which “loses contact with human corporality,” and is at “risk [of] losing the very livedness that theatre so boldly puts into play.”

Following these pioneering works, the applied phenomenology has left behind the realisation of the text and turned to engage more in the event of performance itself and its audiences. Here, one may briefly mention Simon Critchley’s exploration of comedy; Jan Mrazek and Benjamin Fisler’s raising issues of post-colonialism and race in puppet theatre; Susan Kozel’s research on the performative correlations of bodies and technology; Meike Wagner’s approach also to puppet theatre through intermediality; Helena Grehan and Simon Bayly’s Levinasian takes on ethics and performance; Stuart Grant’s work on audience, laughter, rhythm, and place; and Jens Roselt’s comprehensive project in Phänomenologie des Theaters (2008). In the Nordic countries, the journal Nordic Theatre Studies published a volume dedicated to phenomenology, and recently an anthology edited by Maaike Bleeker, Jon Foley Sherman, and Nedelkopoulou, Performance and Phenomenology (2015), presents a collection of articles on phenomenological traditions and practices of application to performance analy-

151 Ibid., p. 16.
In an attempt to further the research and use of phenomenology in performance studies, an association was formed in 2011, the APPS – Association for Phenomenology in Performance Studies of which Stuart Grant is one of the co-founders.

Two contributions to phenomenology in performance analysis are of particular interest to my research, one being Willmar Sauter’s work on ‘the theatrical event’ and the other being Erika Fischer-Lichte’s ‘aesthetics of the performative’. The latter will only briefly be touched upon here as I return to discuss it at length for my theoretical approach to analysis of performance and experiences of transcendence. Whereas Fischer-Lichte has a broad take on the materiality and performative effects of the event, Sauter is mainly concerned with the event’s communication with the audience through the actor. In my approach, Sauter will supplement Fischer-Lichte in some important respects, which will also be explained later.

Coming from audience research and reception studies, Sauter is interested in the actor as his surveys have indicated that the actor is the pivotal factor in the communication process of performance, and his model of the theatrical event is built around the spectator’s perception of the actor – a model presented and expanded upon in Understanding Theatre (1995), The Theatrical Event (2000) and Eventness (2008 [2006]), and in his work with the “Theatrical Event” working group of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR). In terms of phenomenology, the key term of Sauter’s model is ‘appearance’: without taking discourse to a reading of the drama being

160 Bleeker, Sherman, and Nedelkoupolou, 2015.
161 With his interest in the communication and hermeneutics, Sauter may appear less of a phenomenologist; nonetheless there is a phenomenological basis for his approach to the theatrical event. See Jacqueline Martin and Willmar Sauter, Understanding Theatre: Performance analysis in theory and practice, Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, 1995, pp. 55-59.
staged, the focus is on what and how the actor appears to the spectator in the *hic et nunc* of the unfolding event. Among others, Sauter refers to Martin Seel’s aesthetics for his conception of appearance as a key concept for understanding art.\(^{165}\) Inspired by Bert O. States,\(^{166}\) who, observing the artist’s points of view, distinguishes between three modalities of communication: a self-expressive mode – I, the actor; a collaborative mode – You, the spectator; and a representational mode – He, the character.\(^{167}\) Sauter shifts the perspective and divides the spectator’s perception into three communicative levels: ‘the sensorial’, which is attentive to the phenomenal bodily appearance of the actor; ‘the artistic’, which is appreciative of the artistic work encoded by theatrical conventions, acting styles, and other contexts; and ‘the symbolic’ or, as it was first called, ‘the fictional’, which is about attributing meaning to the action.\(^{168}\) By understanding the event as communication, Sauter combines phenomenology and semiotics, and observes the dynamics and complexity of the theatrical process, which was missing in the exclusively semiotic approach. Sauter also furthers the phenomenological method of performance analysis by implementing Gadamer’s hermeneutics to access the dimension of spectator experience and relate it to the different contexts that the event is framed by and which, historically, situates and influences interpretation: theatrical contexts, e.g. conventional, structural, conceptual, and non-theatrical contexts such as the social, the cultural, that is, what Sauter with a Husserlian concept sees as making up ‘the lifeworld’ of the spectator.\(^{169}\)

Fischer-Lichte radicalises the understanding of eventness. Influenced by Maturana and Varela’s biological concept of *autopoiesis*, Fischer-Lichte’s *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004)\(^{170}\) emphasises the emergent and contingent nature of the performative event as it is co-created in the bodily co-presence of performers and spectators, and, hence, affected by somatic processes that lie beyond the conscious and intentional control of the participants of the


\(^{166}\) Sauter, 2010, p. 249.

\(^{167}\) Although unacknowledged by Sauter, there is an affinity between States and the phenomenology of Otakar Zich’s conceptual blending of the actor’s body, the created appearing stage figure, and the imaginary dramatic character.

\(^{168}\) Martin and Sauter, 1995, pp. 78-91; Sauter, 2000, pp. 31-34; and 2008, p. 56-63.


event. Fischer-Lichte, thus, shifts the analysis away from artistic intention to what occurs in the encounter with the audience. Here, the concept of ‘presence’ becomes central. Not only does the presence of the performer affect the perception of the spectator, but also the total materiality of the event through the phenomenal categories of ‘corporality’, ‘spatiality’, ‘tonality’, and ‘temporality’. Phenomenological theories by Merleau-Ponty and the anthropologist Thomas Csőrdas on ‘embodiment’ as well as Böhme’s ‘atmosphere’ (the ‘ecstasy of things’) combine, with an expanded conception of ‘performativity’ based on J.L. Austin and Judith Butler, to explain how performance produces aesthetic, or, as it were, transformative experiences for its audience.

Compared with her *Semiotik des Theatres, Ästhetik des Performativen* is a methodological turnaroud, which downscalms semiotic analysis and hermeneutic contextualisation in an attempt to reduce the performance to its non-semantic elements. Methodologically, this has its advantages as it forces one to take into consideration what is empirically there in the event to effectuate experience, one might call this its “experiential performativity”; but it is not enough to explain how it materially comes about, and also what it means in a wider sense – a realisation already made by hermeneutical phenomenology. In this chapter, I return to Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics to critically discuss it in greater detail and implement it for my analyses of transcendent experiences.

It would, however, be unfair not to add that elsewhere, Fischer-Lichte – both before and after *Ästhetik des Performativen* – has asserted the necessity of combining phenomenology and semiotics in performance analysis. Rather than following the somewhat enforced foregrounding of the performative and phenomenology in *Ästhetik des Performativen*, I subscribe to the combinatory method as suggested by both Fischer-Lichte and Willmar Sauter of analysing different levels or layers in the meaning-making process. In practice, this means that I do not pursue disparate phases of applying phenomenology and semiotic analysis, but rather interweave or let the two modes of analysis interchange; e.g. sometimes the semiosis comes to the foreground, while at other times it is the phenomenology that is relevant. Which mode is relevant where and when depends on the event. This does

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not, however, mean that semiosis is not always part of perception, as Fischer-Lichte holds; but the incessant semiosis is not conscious to us, as, according to among others biologist and biosemiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer, it is part of the complex communication that takes place both within our organism, from the cellular level to higher cognitive levels, and in the organism’s interplay with its environment and other living beings. To try to track the overall semiotic operations in the perception of a performance – like the first performance analysts tried to do – is not relevant, not to say impossible.

Theatre, Ritual, and Religion

Currently, there is no established research area within theatre and performance studies, which is dedicated to religion and spirituality, although initiatives have been taken to form one in recent years. I shall return to those initiatives shortly. However, throughout theatre history, religion has been continuously connected with theatre in what the Israeli scholar Shimon Levi has characterised as a “love-hate relationship”; often, relations have been antagonistic, while at other times the two may be said to have been intricately associated with each other. A brief overview of how these relations have been approached by theatre and performance studies is necessary in order to serve as a backdrop for my own research project within this subject field.

In written history, theatre studies has described and analysed these connections. Mainly, this work has had to do with theories of origin and revitalisation concerning Greek tragedy, medieval theatre, and avant-garde theatre of the twentieth century. With regard to the first two, theatre studies inherited theories and historiographies first presented by classical philologists, literary scholars, and anthropologists contributing to the diehard general notion that European theatre had dual roots in the religious rituals of ancient Athens and the medieval Roman Church, and evolved into more advanced secular and independent forms. When it comes to avant-garde theatre, especially

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172 For an introduction to biosemiotics, see: Jesper Hoffmeyer, Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life and the Life of Signs, Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2008.


174 To the theories of Greek origin belong Friedrich Nietzsche’s Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik (1872), the work of the so-called Cambridge-anthropologists, and early theatre studies research such as the Dane Egill Rostrup’s Den attiske Tragoidia i theaterhistorisk belysning (1921), while the rebirth of theatre
the second avant-garde of the 1960s including directors Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, and Richard Schechner, it took inspiration from the alleged origin in religious rituals, both European and Asian, and adopted their structures, exploring new formats of theatre; as the influential Canadian theatre scholar Christopher Innes has it, the religious project of “transmuting the flesh” was even taken over by some artists in a profane, secular response to the Christian Church, instigated by the theatre poet Antonin Artaud.¹⁷⁵ These theories of origin and adaptation have been challenged, some scholars proposing alternative theories based on the concept of theatricality hypothesising traces and potential in Nordic rock carvings¹⁷⁶, the Egyptian rites of the dead¹⁷⁷, Sumerian Inanna ritual¹⁷⁸, and the Old Testament¹⁷⁹; others again have either abandoned such theories as speculative and unproductive¹⁸⁰, or

directly disputed them for epistemological reasons\textsuperscript{181}, or complemented them with theories of local pre-colonial cultural origin.\textsuperscript{182}

Early excursions into an expanded field of theatrical phenomena which oriented themselves towards a structural rather than historical understanding of their inception were undertaken by the Russian theatre director, dramatist, and theoretician Nikolai Evreinov, who introduced the concept of ‘theatricality’ (teatralnost) and relocated the origin of both theatre and religion to this mimetic mental capacity of the human mind\textsuperscript{183}, and, among others, Jindřich Honzl and Petr Bogatyrev of the Prague School, who studied religious ritual\textsuperscript{184} and folkloristic performative culture\textsuperscript{185} respectively as being theatrical, in what has been seen as proto-performance studies expansions of the field of theatre.\textsuperscript{186} But the largest infusion to the research in theatre and religion has come from anthropology in the second half of the twentieth century, gaining momentum with Milton Singer’s \textit{When a Great Tradition Modernizes} (1959), in which he introduced the concept of ‘cultural performance’, which allows one to conceive of rituals and other cultural events as sites that focus enactment of and reflection on the culture of a society for both those native to the culture and those foreign to it.\textsuperscript{187} Following Singer, a large number of anthropologists such as John MacAlloon, Sally F. Moore, Barbara Myerhoff, Roy Rappaport, and Victor Turner turned ritual theory towards performative thinking and lay the foundations for future research. Supportive of much of this work was the American anthropological Wenner-Gren Foundation funding a series of symposia on ritual, theatre, and performance

\textsuperscript{182} One such non-Eurocentric example of research is the Māori musicologist and theatre scholar, composer, musician, performer, and museum director Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal’s doctoral studies on the whare tapere of Aotearoa New Zealand, i.e. traditional pre-European iwi/community based houses of storytelling, dance, music, games, puppetry, and other performative forms of expression. Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, \textit{Te Whare Tapere: A New Model for Māori Performance Art}, unpublished doctoral thesis, Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 1998.
\textsuperscript{184} Jindřich Honzl, “Theatre and Ritual”, in Drozd, 2016.
\textsuperscript{185} Petr Bogatyrev, “Folk Song from a Functional Point of View”, in Drozd, 2016.
\textsuperscript{186} Drozd, 2016, pp. 14-15.

It was in this context that the highly inspirational collaboration between Victor Turner and New York theatre director Richard Schechner took shape, coinciding with Schechner as theoretician and professor at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, establishing the now internationally recognised research school of Performance Studies in 1980. As anthropologist, Turner had started out doing fieldwork in Africa studying the Ndembu tribe of Zambia in the 1950s, research which was foundational to his concept of ‘social drama’ that accounted for the “re-dressive machinery” employed by the Ndembu to handle conflicts and crises. Turner soon applied this concept to other societies, both historical and contemporary, including modern, secular Western society to understand how comparable institutions maintained similar functions. He developed the ambition to understand the dynamics of social development through the rituals of a society, and addressed these processes through the concepts of ‘structure’ and ‘anti-structure’, ‘liminality/liminoï’ and ‘communitas’. Particularly Turner’s elaborations on van Gennep’s *rite de passage* at life’s great transitions –

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188 For a list of Wenner-Gren symposia, see: http://www.wennergren.org/history/conferences-seminars-symposia/wenner-gren-symposia/cumulative-list-wenner-gren-symposia (accessed 1 February, 2018)


which had first been observed in Africa – became a central concept for explaining individual processes of social transformation in terms of status and identity – in fact, it proved so successful in analysis it soon lost its rootedness in traditional society from which it had first emerged. The collaboration with Schechner inspired Turner’s interest in how liminal-like, or, as he called them “liminoid”, states in twentieth century post-industrial society might facilitate change and playful creativity. Turner observed these in between positions of statelessness (“betwixt between”) in the arts, in particular the second avant-garde performing arts scene during the 1970s in New York; but even though there are parallels between van Gennep’s stateless rite participants and Schechner’s performers, negotiating identity between their own and the character they played, these are not anchored in a stabile tradition that would recognise transformations as permanent. Nevertheless, performance studies has made the Schechnerian concept of liminality integral to its ideology and self-understanding, as, in the words of Jon McKenzie, “we have come to define the efficacy of performance and of our own research, if not exclusively, then very inclusively, in terms of liminality – that is a mode of activity whose spatial, temporal, and symbolic ‘in betweenness’ allows for social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed.” Beyond performance studies, Erika Fischer-Lichte has employed the Turnerian liminality (while largely ignoring it’s variation the liminoid) to conceptualise aesthetic/transformative experience in the context of all theatrical and performative events. I shall return to discuss the problem of Fischer-Lichte’s adaptation as it occurs especially in Ästetik des Performativen later in this chapter.

The limitations of both Turner’s and Schechner’s approaches, as I see them, lies in how they – despite attempts to resist rigid system theory thinking – remain reliant on structures and symbolic functions of performance to understand them within the larger context of society, which tends to neglect the empirical experience of the participants and, in fact, fails to access much of the potential for social change, which – I would argue – first takes place

on an individual level. Additionally, religion and spirituality, as lived practices, were not the research object of performance studies as it was originally conceived and practiced by Schechner and subsequently by many of his colleagues and peers; this has led to criticism of Schechner’s theoretical adoption of ritual and other religiously related concepts for the study of secular Western performances as disregarding the indigenous purposes and meanings – a critique which has sometimes even addressed the possibility that the Schechnerian school is neo-colonialist and imperialist.

The subject field that has been designated “theatre and religion” throughout the 1980s and 90s – and to some extent still carries that name – is currently experiencing a rapid transformation. A growing number of scholars with specialisation in performance studies, performance philosophy, cultural studies, and the like are coming to recognise both the social and theoretical importance of religion as a reality shaping not only dramatic works and theatrical production, but the performance of culture itself – especially in an increasingly globalised context. Because of this, theatre and performance scholars continue to debate the relevance of “theatre and religion” as a title. They are looking for a better way to describe this particular intersection of concerns, which now includes a wide field of topics such as the performance of national, ethnic, and gender identities; the articulation of ethical relationships; the creation of community; individual and group spiritualities; spiritual practice and its relationship to politics and culture; emerging religions vs.


200 At the PSI #17 conference in Utrecht on 28 May 2011, the International Committee of the PSI organised a round-table discussion under the title “Re-Considering Inter- and Intra-”. One of the questions raised was about imperialism and colonialism. See: the conference programme *Performance Studies international conference #17: Saturday 28th May: Technology, memory, Experience*, Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2011, p. 56.
institutionalised religion, as well as the long history of theatre and drama as both disdained and embraced by various churches and religious groups; the use of theatre and drama in colonisation and conversion, and theatre and the performing arts as spiritual or religious practices in and of themselves even (and sometimes especially) within a secular context. Given this complex interweaving of concerns, working groups have been formed. Since 1999, the “Religion and Theatre Focus Group” with the USA-based Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) and the “Performance, Religion, and Spirituality” Working Group (2011-) with The International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR), which have continuously organised conference programmes that specifically seek to expand and renew the terms of engagement. Recently, representatives of the two groups have launched a new journal PRS – Performance, Religion, and Spirituality, with the ambition of establishing a global platform for the field. Since “Theatre and Religion” now includes a cloud of related terms such as ‘ritual’, ‘spirituality’, ‘secularity’, ‘atheism’, and ‘performance’, there might be good reason for the suggested name-change in the title of this new journal.

The Expanding Scope of the Field: Performance, Religion, and Spirituality

The need for making visible the large number of dispersed research activities within the subject field is evident. Many individual researchers work independently all around the world and it is impossible to trace all of them. During the last few decades, major conferences for studies in literature, theatre, drama, and the arts have hosted increasing numbers of papers and panels focused on ritual, religion, and spirituality, not forgetting conferences and symposia, which have been dedicated to the subject field, e.g. the IFTR 1996 conference “Theatre and Holy Scripture: Ritual and Mythological Dimensions” at Tel Aviv University, Israel, and the “International Conference on Religion and Theatre” at the Dramatic Arts Centre, Tehran, 2007. Innumerable papers have been published in theatre and performance studies journals, some of which have had themes on religion and spirituality, for instance,

201 PRS – Performance, Religion, and Spirituality, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2017: “Spiritual and Religious Dynamics of Activism and Protest”. PRS is co-founded by the editors Claire Maria Chambers (Sogang University, Seoul, Republic of Korea), Joshua Edelman (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), Edmund B. Lingan (The University of Toledo, Toledo, OH, USA), and Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen (Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden).
Performance Research\textsuperscript{202} and Performance Matters\textsuperscript{203}, while others like PRS are dedicated or closely related to the subject field, e.g. Journal of Theatre and Religion\textsuperscript{204}, Ecumenica – Journal of Theatre and Performance\textsuperscript{205}, Performance and Mindfulness\textsuperscript{206}, and Consciousness, Theatre, Literature and the Arts.\textsuperscript{207}

In the Nordic region, major and individual efforts have been made. In 2005-2007, Theatre Studies at the University of Copenhagen ran a sub-project under the university’s major focus research area “Religion in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century” (2003-2007). I was part of the organising team with associate professor Bent Holm and a group of students. The focus research in its entirety collected subjects from the university’s various faculties to explore the complex interactions between religion and other aspects of society. A large number of international conferences were held and approximately 40 publications were published. The theatre studies project included two international conferences (2005 and 2006) and a research seminar for an invited group of scholars (2006) that resulted in two publications, Tro på teatret (2006)\textsuperscript{208} and Theatre, Ritual, Religion (2009).\textsuperscript{209} The project was interdisciplinary as it harboured dialogues with theologians, scholars of religion, psychologists of religion, anthropologists, ethnographers, media scholars, art historians, and practitioners of both ritual and theatre. In the beginning, the key concepts for this project were ‘performance’ and ‘imagination’ as a bridge between theatre and religion, while towards the end it assumed a more anthropological element that gathered around ‘rituality’ and ‘ritualisation’. Volume 18 of Nordic Theatre Studies (2006) featured the theme “Approaching the Spiritual in Theatre, Ritual, and Performance”. Both editors, the Norwegian theatre

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{202} Performance Research, 13.3, 2008: “On Congregation”.
\bibitem{203} Performance Matters, Vol. 3, no. 1, 2017: “Special Issue: Performing Religion”.
\bibitem{204} Journal of Religion and Theatre was published from 2002-2010 by members of ATHE’s Religion and Theatre Focus Group. The issues are still available through the journal’s online archive: http://www.athe.org/members/group_content_view.asp?group=130356&id=354912 (accessed January 31, 2018).
\bibitem{208} Holm, 2006.
\end{thebibliography}
scholars Keld Hyldig and Anita Hammer have pursued the subjects of spirituality and ritual in several studies published in articles and books.²¹⁰ The Danish dance, theatre, and performance scholar Karen Vedel has undertaken research on ritual and the spiritual in, for instance, modern African dance.²¹¹ And through many years, the Swedish theatre scholar Kacke Götrick has investigated the ritual Nigerian Apidan theatre and its impact on modern drama.²¹²

Interest has also come from theology and religious studies, with an increasing number of theologians and scholars of religion turning to performance as either a productive metaphor through which to understand the workings of spirituality and religious life, or even as theatrical-liturgical practice. Major conferences in religion include increasing numbers of titles dealing with performance.²¹³

Early on, in the 1950s, the Swedish theologian and dramatist Olov Hartman collaborated with the director Tuve Nyström at the Sigtuna Foundation centre just north of Stockholm to reinvent liturgical drama for a contemporary audience. Based on their collaboration, Hartman developed a poetics for this crossover of ritual and theatre within the liturgical frame of the Christian Mass, in Swedish called kyrkospel (literally meaning ‘churchplay’ in Swedish²¹⁴). This poetics is presented in a series of books and essays of which

²¹³ For example, if one searches through the most recent programme for the American Academy of Religion, the word “performance”, “perform”, “performativ”, and “performing” occur in paper titles twenty-two times out of 286 pages.
²¹⁴ In English one would normally separate the word “church” from “play”; I have, however, chosen to use “churchplay” as a terminus technicus to designate this specific cross-over genre.
most have never been translated into English215, and they have largely been overlooked by theatre studies.216 So too have the performances, perhaps because of their status of amateur theatre since the director, Nyström, and most of the players were non-professionals. The performances and work in Sigtuna were, however, very influential and sparked a whole “liturgical movement” in the Swedish Church through the association FLOD (Förbundet för liturgi och dramatik) and its training courses for the so-called churchplayers groups that popped up all over the country. They also inspired dramatists and the formation of groups in the neighbouring countries of Denmark and Finland.217

Hartman’s and Nyström’s legacy lives on in the annual performances staged by the Lunds stifts kyrkospel in Lund Cathedral in southern Sweden. Having both been members of Hartman’s and Nyström’s original Sigtuna group of churchplayers, the former Bergman actress, Birgitta Hellerstedt, and the priest Ingemar Thorin moved to Lund to become the initiators of the churchplayers group there in 1960. Until Hellerstedt’s death in 1990, they jointly lead the activities, Thorin as the liturgical leader of the plays, while Hellerstedt was in charge of directing the players. Throughout the years, they developed the format of the churchplay for the space (and even urban surroundings) of the cathedral, its thematic interplay with current issues of the times, and were incremental to the establishment of the annual plays as a tradition.218 The development has continued in the 1990s and until today, especially under the liturgical leadership of Lena Sjöstrand and the artistic direction of Lena Ekhem between 2004-2011. Besides staging the plays,


216 One of the few to have written about the Swedish churchplays in a theatrical context is Gunnar Ollén. See: Gunnar Ollén, Svensk amatörteaterhistoria 1865–1978, Stockholm: LTs förlag, 1979.

217 In Denmark, for example, Holte Kirkespilsgruppe was established by the actress Lise Gjellerup Koch in 1968, with inspiration from Hartman and the Lund stifts kyrkospel. The priest Niels Johansen has written several churchplays especially for this group. In 1993-2003 the Sønderjysk Forsøgsscenes Kirkespilsgruppe was active. In Mårsl Church outside Århus the churchplayers association Åben Himmel produced Ann Sofie Oxenvad’s problem play Legenden om de tre ringe in 2002 about Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

they organised interdisciplinary seminars under the Swedish title “RiTeateR iT”, which explored the complex relations between the two performative forms and eventually ventured into issues of health and performance.

Much of the newer theological research in the subject field “theatre and religion” owes its genesis to the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar’s “theo-drama”\(^\text{219}\), work which has been developed by, among others, Kevin J. Vanhooser\(^\text{220}\) and Wesley Vander Lugt\(^\text{221}\) in what has become known as “the theatrical turn” of theology. Instrumental to this development has been the Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, under the leadership of Trevor Hart. An anthology \textit{Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition} introduces much of this work and subsequently a conference at St Andrews on “Theatrical Theology” in 2012 resulted in a collection of the same name.\(^\text{222}\) To the extent these engagements use theatre as a model for understanding the performance of belief, they, however, deal with a relatively older or less developed view of theatre, and few engage with the full philosophical and methodological breadth of contemporary developments in theatre and performance studies.

Coming from the Balthasarian school, Shannon Crago-Snell’s recent \textit{The Empty Church} will introduce a generation of religion and theology students to performance, seeing the enactment of Christianity both in the church and outside in everyday life through the lenses of different theatre models such as Schechner, Brecht, and Boal.\(^\text{223}\) In the Nordic countries, the Norwegian priest Kari Veiteberg has introduced a performance studies perspective in her doctoral study on the Protestant liturgy of baptism.\(^\text{224}\) Through the employment of performance-oriented anthropology, especially Fritz Staal’s provocation that rituals are “meaningless”,\(^\text{225}\) the Danish systematic theologian Bent Flemming Nielsen has challenged the dominant semantic or semiotics approach to liturgical communication and entered into dialogue with theatre and performance studies for a more enactive understanding of the

\(^{219}\) Balthasar, 1988 [1983].
meaning-making processes. In her PhD thesis Tenna Mose Rhiger has taken the enactive approach into practice-as-research proposing an innovative training programme for priests to improve their performative presence in the church service using puppetry. The Swedish theologian and philosopher of religion Ola Sigurdson has contributed to understanding the bodily dimension of Christian forms of worship by approaching it through hermeneutical phenomenology. Other theologians such as the Germans Ursula Wolf and Alexander Deeg, as well as the Swiss David Plüss, have all found inspiration in theatre studies for their writings on liturgy, in particular Fischer-Lichte’s Ästetik des Performativen. In light of the development of performance analysis, it is interesting to note that systematic (or as it is also known as, practical) theology seems to repeat the same extreme pendulum trajectory in the studies of liturgy, swinging from a text-based to event-based understanding, and then aiming for equilibrium somewhere in-between (cf. the combination in Sauter’s communications model). The movement becomes very clear, if one contrasts Bent Flemming Nielsen’s enactivist view with the textual approach by the literary scholar Erik A. Nielsen who, in Den skjulte gudstjeneste (first published 1987), proposed a reading of the liturgy as Aristotelian drama without taking into consideration the loss of tradition and decline in religious and liturgical – let alone theatrical – competence among contemporary church visitors.

The expansion of scholarship and debate within theology and performance studies needs to be accessible, visible, and international, under a heading that speaks to the subject field’s openness to continued exploration.

228 Sigurdson, 2016.
of what terms like ‘religion’, ‘spiritually’, ‘performance’, and ‘theatre’ can mean, in a theoretically, philosophically, theologically, and religiously rigorous way. Modern criticism made “religion” an embarrassment in academia and exiled the study of religion to its periphery; but today, scholars recognise that religion and spirituality need to be approached on their own terms. An effort is needed to overturn the bias that religion and spirituality have no recourse to serious inquiry outside theological study or as an anthropological phenomenon. This bias is simply no longer viable. Since Victor Turner’s *From Ritual to Theatre* (first published in 1982), “theatre and religion” as a serious subject of academic study continues to inspire debate because it puts its finger on the pulse of a human drive for the spiritual search, the moment of spiritual insight, and the ethical connection with the Other that structures so much of daily experience as well as the most celebrated achievements in our art. From *King Lear* to *The Gods are Not to Blame* to *Angels in America*, Candomble to Wicca, theocracy to democracy, the subject field that is now best described through the intersection of performance, religion, and spirituality asserts that practitioners and scholars alike are already working within a religiously inflected world. Addressing this reality is to more fully appreciate our global context. This subject field continues to expand and professionalise itself, and this thesis is only one index of a much larger movement.

Individual Studies of Performance, Religion, and Spirituality

Recently, a number of theatre and performance scholars as well as theologians have conducted individual research projects, which I find are related to my own. All of them take a performative approach to staged phenomena of religion and spirituality, whether they occur in ritual or theatre, or in related events such as installation art – or in all of them. Some of them are more closely related to my project, and I draw on them directly in my theoretical deliberations and analyses, while others mainly serve as a frame of reference to other “neighbouring” performances and performative aspects and thus complement my survey of the burgeoning field of performance, religion, and spirituality.

One of the leading Nordic theatre and performance studies contributors to the field, Anita Hammer (Queen Maud University College in Trondheim, Norway), has written extensively on connections between theatre and ritual in both contemporary and historical contexts as well as in both live and me-
In Between Play and Prayer. The Variety of Theatricals in Spiritual Performance (2010), she attempts to expand and develop the theatre and performance studies approach to ‘spiritual performance’, from symbolism and function in the vein of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner (whom she acknowledges as important pioneers) to include the participant experience or the first-person view. Hammer sets out to research practices of faith by defining the object of her research as “that which takes place when humans perform in order to call into being a spiritual presence.” Through extensive fieldwork and participatory observation, she bases her analysis on her own experiences. Following the ethnographer Ruth Behar’s methodology of “the vulnerable observer”, she allows herself to relate to the on-going on a personal level and identify, i.e. engage emotionally, with them, as this gives access to the event’s full potentiality of experience. In accessing the qualities of performance, she goes far beyond the methodology of performance analysis, paying attention to the social communication of the event and how this is co-created by the individual, the community, and the spiritual or transcendent. In doing so she stresses the importance of participant experience in understanding and analysing performances, which is not only of future relevance to research into the topic at hand, but also to the methodological development of performance analysis as such. It is this experiential approach to the analysis that has inspired my own approach.

The primary examples in the book inscribe themselves into the typical performance studies “broad spectrum”, as they cover a local popular gathering, a so-called “mimrestund” (moment of memory) in a Norwegian fisherman’s village Rågvåg and its annual festival to commemorate the past, Rågvågdagene. She also participates in spiritualist session circles at the Barker Rd. Spiritualist Church in Napier and a Māori tangihangi (passing of the soul or funeral) at, among other places, Petane Marae, both in Aotearoa New Zealand; and then back in Scandinavia, an experimental church service for the homeless in Tøyen Church and a theatre performance, Over Evne III, including a funeral rite by a real priest, Kari Veiteberg, and a mock-

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Ibid., p. 31.
spiritualist session, *Dead Diana*, by Kate Pendry, all in Oslo, as well as *Jag är den jag är*, the same churchplay in Lund Cathedral that I analyse. However, this is not just to reassert how the variety of spiritual performance reaches beyond traditional ritual, whether Christian or Māori; Hammer makes an important point in contesting diehard distinctions between aesthetical and spiritual performance, with reference to philosopher, psychologist, and pedagogue John Dewey’s critique of modernity’s compartmentalisation of human experience as alienation from the 1930s. She argues for a more complex, interweaving approach in understanding the activity of faith in its interacting with the (imagined) transcendent, building on Willmar Sauter’s notion of the theatrical event. In this, both theatricality and playing combine. She argues determining the quality of performance, its “theatricals” as Hammer calls it, and thereby the meaning perceived by the practitioners, requires the involvement of the researcher in the practice as informant along with the other participants. The research object is complex in that the imaginary doubling of theatricals is both performed and perceived by the event’s individual participants – they are, in the words of Dewey, both “doers” and “undergoers”, and Hammer emphasises the contingency of experience, depending on the individual participant and the kind of event, which, when it comes to researching the spiritual potential, requires engagement and an open mind.

Like the anthropologist Edith Turner – although without reference to her – Hammer acknowledges the practitioners’ faith in the supernatural, spirits in particular. In this regard, Hammer refers to the psychologist William James’ pragmatism, and from whose seminal work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) the subtitle of her book is derived. James conceived of religious experience as a reality to the believer, something not to be questioned if the researcher wants to understand its implications. Hammer criticises preconceptions and prejudice in research, which obstruct open-minded investigation. Hammer does not, however, ask of the researcher to give up her personal beliefs, only to pay attention to how performances in terms of aesthetics, dramaturgy, and performance techniques might bring about spiritual experiences for practitioners in their life contexts – an understanding without which spiritual performance cannot be adequately conceptualised.

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236 Hammer, 2010, p. 27.
237 Ibid., p. 41.
238 Ibid., p. 28.
and theoretically developed. Spiritual performances are integral life practices and, in due respect of its practitioners and indigenous traditions, one must explore the relational context in order to fully understand their meaning and impact.\textsuperscript{241}

At the same time, Hammer’s performative investigation tries to circumvent the context, i.e. doctrinaire and institutionalised understandings of what spiritual performance is. Here, her distinction between \textit{faith} and \textit{belief} becomes pivotal, and forms the basis of the distinction that I make between spiritual-but-not-religious (faith) and religious experiences (belief). Contrasting belief understood as institutionalised credo with faith, she sees faith as “the ground from which the human senses opens up to uninterrupted sensations of the mind and body that does not depend on a construction of system of belief, other than opening up to the possibility of unexplained experience.”\textsuperscript{242} This opens up to a truly performative understanding of faith as something which may lie underneath and sustain or subvert practices of belief and even, as Hammer suggests, extends beyond that. Understanding the tension between faith and belief, Hammer suggests what I find an interesting and useful analytical interconnection between concepts such as \textit{play} and \textit{prayer}, drawing on the creative interchanges between the play-full and the serious in religious practice, which might provide lenses for seeing the often overlooked space of interplay between imagination and credo in individual experience – a space which, in turn, might set free artistic and religious creativity.

Taking a more theoretical approach than Hammer, the Canadian theatre scholar Megan MacDonald’s doctoral study \textit{Performance Art, Liturgy and the Performance of Belief} (2011)\textsuperscript{243} also addresses religious belief in the institutional sense through the lens of the performative to expand the notion of what belief is or might be beyond its conventional dualistic binding to the transcendent. Beginning with tracing in Western metaphysics how the history of the concepts ‘belief’ and ‘representation’ are connected from Plato through Nietzsche to Derrida, MacDonald enters into a discussion of contemporary theological concepts that interweave body and soul (Nancey Murphy) and connects language and belief (Malcolm Ruel and Jean Pouillon). Being critical of the predominant secular notion that belief is an intellectual activity, MacDonald shifts the view of belief to connect its verbal utterance

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid., p. 405.
as Austinian performatives in the thinking of John R. Searle, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. MacDonald then reflects not only on the actions of the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Mass, but also nonverbal actions of attending Marina Abramović’s performance art event *The House with the Ocean View* (Sean Kelly Gallery, NYC, 2002) in terms of liturgy. This, as I see it, offers a useful cross-fertilisation of how one thinks about the two forms of performance, which might – as MacDonald claims – make one re-appreciate the often overlooked (or deliberately ignored) religious and spiritual roots of Abramović’s and others’ work as well as realise that there is an artistic and theologically creative potential located in the tension between the two performative formats or modes of belief. I am interested in exploring similar tension in the Swedish churchplays and in Hotel Pro Forma’s *jesus_c_odd_size*, as it reflects the concept of transcendence in performative ways, which call upon a reassertion of its coupling to ‘belief’, or rather ‘faith’ as a ground for belief in Hammer’s sense.

Like Hammer, MacDonald draws on her own participation in the analyses of events (although not exclusively). To better access the physicality and materiality of the Mass, a tradition MacDonald is familiar with, she displaces herself by conducting fieldwork in the Czech Republic, where she is not distracted by the meaning-making of understanding the liturgical language, but instead has to rely on observing the actions and use of objects, thus foregrounding the performative dimension for her analysis. Contrasting her performative analysis of liturgy with her analyses of Abramović’s performances and her own experience of *The House with the Ocean View*, MacDonald proposes that liturgy in performance art is not to be understood as a repeatable sacred script, but rather is constituted by bodily performative aspects and their contemplative qualities as expressions of embodied belief, and she discusses these in more generic terms of ‘rhythm and structure’, ‘meaning and content’, ‘participants’, and ‘engagement’. In my analysis of the Māori pōwhiri, I employ the method of displacement to an unfamiliar ritual tradition and language that I do not understand in order to foreground the materiality and physicality of the ritual event in the meaning-making process of participation. By doing so, I also attempt to show how the pōwhiri as a ritual for welcoming the stranger (to Māori culture) may work as a transcultural/trans-spiritual performance format through its aesthetics of the performative.

Silvia Batista’s PhD thesis, *In Search of the Numinous: Performative Ap-

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244 MacDonald, 2011, pp. 291-304.
paratuses of Experimentation with Technologies of the Self (2014)²⁴⁵ pursues one of the qualitative aspects of spiritual performance art through theatrical and performative devices of staging in two performance art events, Ansuman Biswas’ CAT (South London Gallery, 1998) and Marina Abramović’s The Artist is Present (MOMA, NYC, 2010). To approach the dual experience of artist and spectator as a spiritual experience, Batista uses the German theologian Rudolph Otto’s phenomenological concept ‘the numinous’ (from Latin numinosus, from numen: the divine or divine power), which is a paradoxical experience of astonishment facing the mysterious and “wholly other” – an overwhelming and uncanny awe, of overpowering majesty and religious dread, and, at the same time, an irresistible attraction and fascination, summarised in the Latin mysterium tremendum et fascinosum. The other key concept to her approach is the French philosopher Michel Foucault’s ‘technologies of the self’, which designates a self-subjectification achieved by the implicated individual through an embodied process (in the original Greek sense tekhnologia, the application of systematic treatments) and that may lead to transformation and attainment of a certain preconceived goal.²⁴⁶ Such technologies of the self might be reclusive as “the retreat and the intimacy of spiritual or religious contexts” to inclusive as “the public sphere of performance.”²⁴⁷ In Biswas’ case, he isolated himself in a black box in the midst of the gallery space for ten days, where he meditated inside while the audience could not see him, only observe the mysterious black box. In Abramović’s performance, she sat on a chair in the museum atrium for three months inviting members of the public to sit on the chair in front of her “to reciprocitate her gaze”.²⁴⁸ Batista makes the point that these staged events became laboratories through which traditional spiritual practices were re-contextualised “within contemporary art galleries and museums” and thus “generated a series of significant dynamics of spectatorship that are particularly useful for the analysis of the concept of the numinous in performance. They offered the possibility to interrogate what is culturally considered secular and religious, material and spiritual, within the overarching context of art production and consumption.”²⁴⁹ Batista’s observation holds some interesting parallels to my encounters with the self-reflexivity of navigating Olafur Eliasson’s Your

²⁴⁶ Batista, 2014, p. 35.
²⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 15.
²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 15.
Blind Passenger, the reciprocity of gazes between I as newcomer and the host people in the Māori pōwhiri, and the perceived presence of the absent – the deceased – in the memorial art installation 185 Empty Chairs – in that these events offer performative insight into the numinous qualities of immanent transcendence.

Considering the experiential turn of performance analysis that all of these individual projects represent (my own included), the performance studies scholar and theologian Claire Maria Chambers offers an important critical memento to this approach. Performance Studies and Negative Epistemology: Performance Apophatics (2017) explores the connection of apophatics – negative theology – and performance in traditional religious praxes and contemporary political activism. Apophatics is a theology, which maintains that God and other entities or realms of the transcendent cannot actually be known through experience. It has a long tradition within mysticism that, in terms of practices, has interested itself in contemplative forms of unknowing. These forms are negative epistemologies in the sense that they negate what one can learn through experience. Chambers suggests that performance studies may be enriched by an apophatics perspective opening it up to the serious study of religion and theology, especially by pointing to performance as ways of not knowing, i.e. presenting and embodying that which cannot be known, said or explicated on the stage, in ritual, or in social life. Chambers asserts that performance apophatics holds a significant democratic potential, which is called for in these years of Trumpism and post-truth. I find Chambers’ book a critical intervention into my own thinking reminding me of the limitations of experience in the encounters with otherness and the transcendent of the staged events that I study.

In the Nordic theological context, Jette Marie Bendixen Rønkilde’s article in the journal Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift, “Kroppen som troens spejl – hen imod en teologisk somatologi” (2008) is the first to specifically introduce a methodological performance analysis approach to the church service – in what is an outline of a somatic and potentially unknowing understanding of the liturgy. Criticising the semiotic dominance of systematic theology,

251 Ibid., pp. 279-284.
252 Jette Marie Bendixen Rønkilde, “Kroppen som troens spejl – hen imod en teologisk somatologi”, in Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift, 77. årg., 2008. Later on, Rønkilde wrote her doctoral thesis on the nineteenth century Danish priest, writer, and thinker N.F.S. Grundtvig claiming that he was an early precursor of the performative understanding of the church service. Jette Marie Bendixen Rønkilde, Det Lille Himmerige.
Rønkilde introduces Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative as a complimentary lens to the semiotic one (in the article represented by Michael Meyer-Blanck’s study). Following Fischer-Lichte’s assertion of Merleau-Ponty that meaning-making already occurs on a pre-cognitive bodily level, Rønkilde makes the – in theological circles – provocative claim that the religious symbolic meaning of the service is a secondary meaning; the service already acquires its primary meaningfulness through what happens in the doing of ritual acts in the bodily co-presence of the congregants through the feed-back loop between celebrant and congregants, and their engagement as embodied minds. Rønkilde sees the aesthetics of the performative as a theory, which allows for analysis of experiences of the unsaid or unknowable in the church service. Thus, Rønkilde establishes a Nordic theological example for applying Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative to the church service.

With training in systematic theology and a background of many years of practical experience of liturgical development in the Diocese of Lund and as liturgical leader of the Lunds stifts kyrkospel, the priest Lena Sjöstrand wrote a PhD thesis, *Mer än tecken. Atmosfär, betydelser och liturgiska kroppar* (2011)\(^{251}\), which approaches a phenomenological analysis of the church service applying theory from theatre studies as well as liturgical theory that partially builds on performance analysis. Her research, which is mainly a survey of theories, takes both its point of departure and finds its reflexive conclusion in the analysis of the 2007 churchplay *Mot hjärtats mitt* in Lund Cathedral asking how applying different theories in a “multi-disciplinary” (*flervetenskaplig*) method comprising systematic theology, linguistic anthropology, phenomenology of the body, and theatre studies might approach this event semiotically and phenomenologically – and producing knowledge which is applicable to the analysis of ordinary church services as well as churchplays. Embarking on this extensive survey, she plots the development of practical theological thinking in the late twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century gesturing at its performative turn. In conclusion, Sjöstrand subscribes to the same solution to the problem of semiotic dominance as Rønkilde that Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative allows for the most promising approach in that it allows an analysis that takes into account the two *modi* of observation, the

phenomenological, or atmospheric (as Sjöstrand prefers with reference to Böhme) and the semiotic; as also Rønkilde pointed out, there exists a productive dialectic between the two levels. Sjöstrand deliberates on its practical theological implications:

Erika Fischer-Lichte has helped us see that we do not have to choose between either atmospheric or semiotic levels. By visualising both levels, we can more easily discover how there is a movement between them in a performative event. It is about two modes that the individual moves between. Contrary to this, we have clearly seen how problems arise when everything in a performative event is incorporated into semiotics and when text and language are expected to capture the entirety of what is happening. The living bodies escape such an approach. Something is lost. Atmosphere, however, is not the opposite of meaning. In both Fischer-Lichte and Merleau-Ponty, we find a meaning level embedded in the body, which not always finds expression in language. Something else can be meaningful even if you do not fully sense the meaning of the act. Meaning and significance are not once and for all but occur in encounters with the situation and the world. Some of this meaning is expressed in language, other parts not. In accordance with this view, meaning and significance is not an indivisible core that we can seek out, identify, and then possess. In the long run, this also applies to theological work.254

In this theological work with understanding the church service, the connection to Fischer-Lichte goes via Sjöstrand’s discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body, in which she takes particular interest in his observation of the fundamental transcendence that the body opens to in relation to the other: “Merleau-Ponty describes a transcendence which is rooted in immanence, yet precisely in the matter exceeds immanence.”255 Sjöstrand connects this concept of transcendence to Merleau-Ponty’s claim that the vertical transcendence is collapsed by Christianity: “The figure of Christ shows to Merleau-Ponty how God cannot completely be God without sharing the conditions of man and that this has consequences for how we understand transcendence.”256 The rethinking of transcendence also implicates the experience of the church service event as a locus for the encounters with the divine.

Applying a performative perspective, the eventness of liturgy becomes evident. […] The performed service is not a representation of the texts of the rit-

255 Ibid., p. 199; my translation.
256 Ibid., p. 293; my translation.
ual book but constitutes its own reality and is influenced by space, participants, context, and atmosphere. It constitutes this interplay. The performance has an event character, Fischer-Lichte maintains. This means that there is something unforeseen, an opening to what cannot be planned or controlled and that becomes part of the experience. This dimension is described in the Lutheran worship concept using the terms anabatic and catabatic. The anabatic perspective of the ministry of service concerns human action while, from the catabatic perspective, God is the one who acts. To consider liturgy as an event allows these two perspectives to interact.  

Sjöstrand’s coupling of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of immanent transcendence to Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative offers an obvious inroad into modelling experiences of transcendence in the contexts of staged events.  

In relating these research projects to my own thesis, it is useful to sort them out in terms of concepts, perspective, disciplinary, and participatory, and the type of event that they connect to. Coming from theatre and performance studies, Hammer’s, Batista’s, and Chambers’s projects are clearly concerned with the staging of spiritual and religious experience – Chambers’s, to be exact, the negation of it, “non-experience” – while taking different participatory points of view – that of the congregants/audiences (Hammer), the performance artist (Batista), and both congregants/audiences, artists, and instigators/leaders of events (Batista, Chambers, and MacDonald). As theologians Sjöstrand and Rønkilde are concerned with the congregant’s experiential dimension of Christian liturgy, but established through performative and phenomenological theory and practice, influenced by theatre and performance studies. Overall, the projects may be said to be part of an interdisciplinary turn towards experience in both performance analysis, ethnography (with a possible linkage to the research of anthropologist Edith Turner), and practical theology, in all of which I see my own project positioned.

Terms, Concepts, and Theory

As is apparent from the account of my visit to Olafur Eliasson’s Your Blind Passenger, the materiality of the installation facilitated an experience of transcending my lifeworld; the event and process of entering into and passing through the unfamiliar environment of dense coloured fog called upon

257 Sjöstrand, 2011, p. 293; my translation.
varying attempts at meaning-making, which, in my case, resulted in a spiritual-but-not-religious interpretation: I had come to regard my walk as a negotiation of the sacred leading to an appreciation of connectedness with and wonderment about the world as incremental aspects in the development of a spirituality whose goal could be considered a heightened consciousness about my being-in-the-world.

Eliasson’s installation was an open work: without any explicit context except for the exhibition’s generic and unobtrusive theme of utopia, Your Blind Passenger offered itself up for the museum guest to navigate its environment and make sense of it. The installation staged the visitor as a co-creator, not only realising and completing it as a performative event, but also attributing meaning to it. In these efforts of enactment, sensation, perception, and interpretation, the materiality of the installation had been ghosted by my associations and recollections influenced by affects and feelings, as well as biography, knowledge, prior art experiences, etc., as frames of reference. Certainly, religion and spirituality belong to spheres that often connote utopianism, and making the connection to religion and spirituality lay well with in the interpretive potential, especially as embodying some of the installation’s phases brought it close to popular imaginings of mystical or spiritual experience. Hence, the meaning-making process of the visit was not – if it ever is – unequivocally predetermined by the event’s staging but unfolded within its perimeter as a perceptual encounter between the materiality and the visitor’s personal frame of reference, imagination, and interpretation. This encounter, in turn, realised a performative space within which the meaning of such terms and concepts as religion and spirituality, as well as related theoretical notions of transcendence and performativity, could not only be activated but also explored and negotiated; an occasion arose for a traditional and established understanding of terms and concepts to be challenged and possibly reconceptualised.

So far, in the introduction and the analysis of Your Blind Passenger, I have only used the terms ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’, ‘experience’, ‘transcendence’, and ‘staged event’ in a preliminary understanding. In the following, I shall clarify the meaning and my use of these key terms, consider their conceptualisation in research, and present the theoretical framework to which they belong and which I will employ as basis for developing the analytical model.

These key terms all represent concepts that are contested by scholars of different disciplines, e.g. studies of religion, theology, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, sociology, even theatre and performance studies. It is
beyond the scope and aim of this thesis to offer thorough in-depth discussion and elucidation of each of the concepts and their theory, let alone to provide philosophical, theological, anthropological, sociological, psychological, or religious studies’ argumentations that would do proper justice to these disciplines; rather, from the point of view of theatre and performance studies, it is to provide critical understanding that will interpret the terms and produce concepts applicable to the proposed analytical model. Here, it is the aspiration that theatre and performance studies may not only develop performance, religion, and spirituality as a research subject field in its own right but, consequently, may have something to offer the other disciplines in the study of religion and spirituality.

Given the application of the key terms and concepts to the experimental and creative field of staged events (ritual, theatrical, and installation art events), it seems wise not to get caught up in concepts that are too set and rigid; one should allow for a certain openness and negotiability in order to acknowledge the capacity of staging practices to incite innovative ways of engaging with traditions and doxa, that is, thinking terms and concepts anew through Austinian performatives whether these acts are verbal or nonverbal. In a paper on sacred space in virtual and real physical space, the theatre and performance scholar David V. Mason suggests that the understanding of such terms as ‘space’ and ‘sacredness’ be coupled to the performative act that actually realises the phenomena, instead of attempting to delineate the terms semantically, which, as the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein asserted, does not allow for the unmitigated transferral of meaning but allows for meanings to happen.²⁵⁸

Language does not do meaning. At least, not inherently. Language, first, acts. Because language performs an action on time/space, speaking is just one among a myriad of performative acts. We first perform space, by speaking or some other act. Meanings may adhere to a term like space subsequent to the performative act.²⁵⁹

Thus, by allowing terms and concepts to be submitted to a reflective effect of performative acts, one may employ staged events as a laboratory for ex-

²⁵⁹ Ibid.
perimenting with meaning. Just as space and sacredness, in the rituals that Mason discusses, are created or actualised as both perceived and conceived reality through performative acts, ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’, ‘transcendence’, even ‘staged event’, are malleable terms and concepts subject to the reflection on an instance’s specific performative acts; it raises questions like what kind of religion is enacted; how do acts constitute transcendence; in what ways may the (artistic) creativity of events influence the understanding of concepts, etc.

From the point of view of the participating analyst, performance within the frame of the staged event may become a way of testing and possibly rethinking the meaning of terms and concepts. Without abandoning its grounding in theatre and performance studies, this experimental approach comes close to how Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe and Anita Hammer conceive performance as a form of philosophy. In their Socratic dialogue on the subject, Hammer proposes that

[i]n viewing performance as philosophy, all material elements may be considered as philosophy enacted by means of spatial imagination of matter. The quality of the materiality unfolding in the performance may be considered as constituting images of philosophy, irreducible and true to human experience.260

The advantage of such an approach to terms and concepts is a “philosophy understood as experience that can be enabled or achieved in or through performance”.261

Performance that plays with imagery by means of the bodily and the sensuous, on a variety of levels or fields of experience, has the capacity for uprooting blockages of pre-conditioning. Performance, seen in this way, functions as philosophy of ideas that, were it not for their embodiment, would not be visible.262

Interesting myself in the performative, empirical thinking of terms and concepts does not, however, require that I replace a survey of normative terms and concepts in setting up a theoretical framework; for only within the

262 Ibid., pp. 105-06.
frame of normative understanding could any altering meanings and conceptions be performed.

While the analyses of the stage events themselves will serve the purpose of developing concepts and the proposed model, the following sections will introduce and discuss the terms, concepts, and theory that are key to the analytical apparatus. As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, first, I will approach ‘staged event’ through the theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *aesthetics of the performative*; second I will discuss the concepts of ‘experience’ and ‘transcendence’ as they are developed in the philosopher, historian of ideas, and theologian Dorthe Jørgensen’s *metaphysics of experience*; third, I will look into the terms ‘religion and spirituality’, their historical development and relation to current concepts and theory, the aim being to establish contexts for understanding experiences of transcendence. I have chosen this progression for my deliberations and exploration of the theories as it will plot the eventual trajectory of analysis from the materiality of performance to the cognition of reception, from the concrete to the abstract; this progression is intended to engender the performance and thinking of the process. In terms of theoretical scope, it will allow for a gradual expansion and complementation of each theory. Despite her popularity with German, Danish, and Swedish theologians, Fischer-Lichte quite explicitly does not concern herself with potentials for religious experience nor employ transcendence as a concept for aesthetic experience. Bringing in Jørgensen compensates for this deficiency as well as providing a philosophical and theological ground for my understanding of experiences of transcendence. Jørgensen, however, does not – as I do – differentiate between religious and spiritual experience, which is why I discuss the concepts of religion and spirituality drawing on different theories from studies of religion.

**The Staged Event: An Aesthetics of the Performative**

As shown by my research overview of the sub-discipline performance analysis, the introduction of reception and audience research, hermeneutics, and phenomenology led to a turn away from semiotics. This meant the abandonment of a hitherto widely held belief, by Fischer-Lichte and others, that it was possible to argue for a correct – or at least most convincing – reading of a performance, and that that reading concurred with the director’s intentions. The pendulum of change had now swung almost to its opposite extreme where the director’s intentions were of very little or no concern at all; what
mattered was what kind of experience and interpretation the audience could get out of the performance.

Surprisingly, Fischer-Lichte – a prior hardcore semiotician – had become the one to most radically promote this paradigm shift in her Åstetik des Performativen, downscaling intentionality to adopt the view that the ontology of performance is one of emergence. Emergence designates phenomena whose appearance cannot be predicted based on the composition of their individual components. According to Fischer-Lichte, it is the outcome of bringing together the event’s materiality and participants that is unforeseeable. Emergence is originally a term used in, among other areas, natural sciences and consciousness studies. The emergence of consciousness in man is a typical example of an emergent phenomenon. As suggested by other theatre scholars, Fischer-Lichte’s influential book has to some extent devalued the understanding that the theatrical performance is also an art work created by a director as representation of something that exists in other media or expressive formats (dramatic text, stage concept, ritual protocols, etc.)

Instead, what I find has taken predominance in Fischer-Lichte’s Åstetik des Performativen is the contingency of the performance as an event unfolding in the encounter between actors and spectators – in effect, overstating its unpredictability as an “autopoietic feedback loop”. What Fischer-Lichte’s analyses fail to properly consider is to what extent the staging might have actually conveyed representation, or symbolic meaning, to its audience – something possible even in the examples that are mostly oriented towards corporeality and immediacy.

The analyses remain preoccupied with performative strategies that foreground the self-reflexivity and self-referentiality of somatic processes and the bodily co-presence and co-creation of the event as a profound source of existential humanist meaningfulness by itself – as it

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264 Risum, 2011.
266 Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 164: “Generally, the autopoietic feedback loop is affected only by what actually happens in the performance regardless of what was discussed, decided, and planned.”
267 For a discussion of this with a basis in Fischer-Lichte’s own main analytical example, see: Janek Szatkowski, “Person og rolle”, in Peripeti, Særnummer, 2011.
were, a non-religious, science-inspired “re-enchantment of the world”. The predominance of emergence and contingency as constituents of the performative event are further evidenced by the absence of contextual analysis in Fischer-Lichte’s examples. Meaning becomes emergent and contingent phenomena, whose analysis seems solely to rely on the spectator’s associations, which occur due to the performance’s materiality; the cognitive impact of institutional, cultural, and societal frames is hardly accounted for.

These are points of critique, which have prompted me to approach Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative through the concept of ‘staged event’. Staged event is not an established concept. I have constructed it based on Fischer-Lichte’s own discussion of the relation between staging and the event nature of performance, which I shall look into shortly. Introducing this concept, I intend to bring to attention the creative tensions and potentialities between the contextual framing and the unfolding event that may be activated by the use of certain staging devices developed from key concepts of Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics. In order to address the issue of staging experiences of transcendence, I will modify and combine key concepts in accordance with the work of several other scholars. Those theoretical modifications that are most crucial to an expanded understanding of the engagement of members of an audience or congregation in experiences of transcendence I will discuss first, while others, I will wait with till the analyses of the staged events. With respect to contextual analysis, ‘staged event’ mostly draws on Willmar Sauter’s ‘theatrical event’, which allows for analysing the relation between audience reception and the different contexts within which the event is embedded; this aspect is especially important to understanding the potentiality of religious and spiritual interpretations. I also refer to the relative openness of Sauter’s concept when it comes the delimitation of the event. I expand the concept beyond the physical, material event itself – which Fischer-Lichte quite narrowly focuses on – to include a particular interest in the experience (in German Erfahrung; Swedish erfarenhet; Danish erfaring) or the learning from the event, that is, the potential for long-term subjective effects.

In the following, I shall proceed by describing the staged event as a lens for focusing my view of Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics, while paying due attention to both what I perceive as its advantages and limitations in performance.
analysis in general, and in the analysis of experiences of transcendence in particular.

First, I will pay attention to Fischer-Lichte’s conception of staging and how it is related to that which happens in the encounter with the audience, the event itself. Based on this, I will explicate how I see the staged event.

By determining performative strategies for generating materiality, the process of staging creates a specific situation into which actors and spectators enter. Principally, the situation is open since it cannot be predicted how actors and spectators will respond to one another. By default, the process of staging leaves space to play with the unplanned, the un-staged, and the unpredictable in performance, even if some artistic and non-artistic mise en scène will attempt to minimize that experimental space as far as possible. The history of theatre and culture is full of instances in which performances did not go according to plan and the participants utilized the resulting experimental and ludic space to utterly change the performances’ intended trust.

Thus, I shall define staging as the process of planning (including chance operations and emergent phenomena in rehearsal), testing, and determining strategies which aim at bringing forth the performance’s materiality. On the one hand, these strategies create presence and physicality; on the other, they allow for open, experimental and ludic spaces for unplanned and un-staged behavior, actions, and events. The mise en scène provides a strong framework for the performance and the feedback loop’s autopoiesis but is nonetheless unable to determine or control the autopoietic process. The concept of staging thus always already includes a moment of reflection on its own limits.\\footnote{Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 187-188.}

As shown, Fischer-Lichte sees staging as an activity which is firmly placed in and delimited to a pre-event phase. Staging is preparatory: it comprises the artists’ or organisers’ generation and selections of materials and performers’ modes of presence, which strategically affects rather than delimits what will happen during the event and leave room for the unpredictable. Fischer-Lichte identifies staging as a strategy rather than a selection, which is an opening for her emphasis on the uncertainty of the event. She seems to overstate this uncertainty. It is in the nature of a planned event that it may not evolve as intended; this may happen in all theatrical and cultural events. This raises the question if unpredictability is the most significant feature to distinguish this kind of event from all others. I would say that it is not. It is rather the fact that it is staged; that there is intentionality and selection behind it, which influence possible outcomes. Exploring the interplay between
the material staging and the unfolding event is then what makes accessible the experiential potential of the event, whether this is in accordance with the intentions or not. Of course, there is in staged events always freedom to respond to and interpret what takes place, in this, I agree with Fischer-Lichte; but it is not always manifested in a physical space for playfulness, it may just be the meaning of the performance left for the spectator to complete. What I mostly object to, however, is Fischer-Lichte’s inconsequentiality as she states that the staging sets powerful perimeters for what can happen and by which means this will be attained (through the feedback loop); but she does not proceed to discuss how this impact of intentionality is, or might actually be achieved through the (artistic) selections made. To arrive at a better understanding of the complex relations between staging and the unfolding event, I will introduce my concept of staged event.

I have chosen to use stage as an adjective, staged, which reflects the past tense of the verb to stage, to indicate the importance of the event being a prepared, hence intended and created, event. It is not just any event that might occur in nature or culture, it is one that specifically sets itself apart from all other events of everyday life by taking place within an artistic, ritual, or otherwise mediatised framing. The past tense also captures the fact that the staging is over before the event takes place; it is preparatory as selection and organisation of material, yet not without intent and power to influence what happens during the event. Staging shapes the material of the event in two ways: 1) it is directorial in that it sets the stage, i.e. determines the where, the what, the why, and the how of the event, and 2) it is constitutive of the possible range of what might happen during the event. Contrary to Fischer-Lichte, I am interested in the fact that participants’ reactions and responses are, to a certain extent, predictable as indicated by the selected material. So far, this accounts for the material or tangible side of the event. The other side is the process of reception, what happens to the participant during the event as well as in the wake of it. Here, I extend the event beyond the limits Fischer-Lichte sets. As I will later discuss further, she is only interested in the meaning-making processes that takes place during the event delimited in time and space. I believe that in order to investigate the more long-term transformations participants undergo, such as metaphysical, religious, or spiritual experiences, one will also have to include in an analysis what happens after the event is officially concluded. The interpretive process that is required if one is to have an experience of lasting effect extends beyond the event itself; the interpretive process may last for a long time, even be resumed after ended in the first place if something reminds the participant...
of the past event, and/or it may involve a resumption of the encounter with the staged event.

To understand the effect of the material staging, I divide it into two levels: the event or what happens is 1) *performative*, i.e. it is an enactment of material effects upon the participant’s perception (phenomenology), and 2) it is *theatrical*, i.e. it makes itself stand out against its surroundings and produces connotative meanings (semiotics).

As will be apparent shortly, Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative does not concern itself with theatricality, or what she has elsewhere explained as the doubling of signs\(^{273}\); what she calls the “semioticity” of the event is only to be considered as an emergent process, which is not a predetermined and controlled coding by the director and actors, but as much co-created by the individual members of the audience.\(^{274}\) I agree with this understanding; but I retain the import of theatricality, although with emphasis on it being the result of a meaning-constituting and -recognising process, which is constituted by the staging, enacted by the performers, and fulfilled by the participant, that is, a *theatricalisation* of phenomena that appear in the event. Here, I understand theatricalisation as two complementary modes of staging and reception: 1) the way by which the material staging makes the performative process of the event conspicuous to the observer; 2) the assignment of connotative meaning to what is perceived by the observer. Even in staged events where the staging strategy is aimed at dissolving the dichotomy between art and life, stage and surroundings (as is the case in many of Fischer-Lichte’s examples), there is a certain level of theatricalisation taking place, which makes the event distinguishable from other events. One may conceive of this aesthetic difference in terms of Janek Szatkowski’s Luhmannian conception of theatre as that which makes communication observable across the threshold in between reality (life) and imaginary reality (art) – as a second order observation.\(^{275}\) Szatkowski disagrees with Fischer-Lichte’s claim that the difference may be suspended and the event still effectuates an aesthetic experience; in order for any experience to be made, he asserts, there has to be a discernible threshold that makes reflection upon an aesthetic difference between life and art possible. Reflection during the event, Szatkowski contends, is not, by default, entirely prevented by aesthetics of the performative. Instead of ruling it out, as does Fischer-Lichte, he suggests that the staged

situation maintains the difference between reality and imaginary reality through the establishment of a communication (in Szatkowski’s example about the performer both as person and as role) as well as an interaction, which is performative in its engagement of the spectator’s perception and possible involvement (in actions), but on the level of a fiction.\footnote{Szatkowski, 2011, p. 130f.} Hence, the theatrical level is not discarded; on the contrary, Szatkowski’s suggestion calibrates the aesthetics of the performative for seeing the interconnection between performativity and theatricality, that is, how performative acts create the theatrical in the mind of the observer. The theatrical as semiosis or the doubling of signs, denotation and connotation, is what sustains the paradox of fiction – that something is both perceived as reality (or what the object immediately appears as) and imagined reality (what the object is interpreted as). Hence, the theatrical is the cognitive blend of what Otakar Zich saw as the actor’s figure and role, as well as the overlap between architectural space and fictional space formed around the actor.\footnote{Zich, 1986 [1934].}

To further understand the theatrical level, it is necessary to include the contexts. Fischer-Lichte is not interested in the contexts of the event. I maintain that the material staging does rely on these contexts in order to activate the participant’s meaning-making process in particular ways, which are socially, culturally, and institutionally preconditioned; the contexts whether that of the theatre, the ritual, the museum etc. create certain expectations that influence the impression and interpretation of the event. The contexts of the staging also sustain the theatricalisation (i.e. the attribution of connotative meaning) through memory, beyond the duration of the demarcated event, and it must be taken into consideration if the long-term impacts are to be accounted for.

Despite its shortcomings, I find Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative useful in the way it draws attention to the phenomenological efficacy of staged materiality itself; it presents an array of phenomenological concepts which makes it possible to analyse and discuss how the materiality produces the somatic foundation of all interpretation and experience. In terms of analytical practice, this focus on materiality suggests a method which postpones the connotative level of semiotic analysis until the performativity of the staging is established through exploring its materiality. How it affects the participant’s perception during the event bears a significant impact on interpretation. Establishing this impact is what I find the performative level of analysis to be about.
In summation, this conception of staged event means that I basically adopt Fischer-Lichte’s analytical approach, yet with the important modification that I ascribe as much significance to the reception process as to the performative process. In the following, I shall discuss Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics in more detail to further explicate how I modify it for analysing experiences of transcendence.

Fischer-Lichte’s Aesthetics of the Performative – Overview and Key Concepts

The whole premise of the aesthetics of the performative rests on Fischer-Lichte’s claim that the so-called “performative turn” taking place in the arts since the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s calls for a new aesthetics for theatre. This turn has had significant bearings on “the conditions for art production and reception”, shifting the paradigm from the work of art as an object, which, once it is completed, exists separated from and unchanged by its creator and recipient, to an event whose whole realisation involves and is affected by actions of both artists and audience.278 This event ontology, Fischer-Lichte argues, destabilises the connection between the material and its semiotics status in such a way that the meanings attributed to objects and actions by the artists are no longer crucial to the realisation of the art; rather, the effect is to be found in the material’s impact upon the audience’s sensations and perceptions and its prompting of affective responses, making it possible for them to gain experiences of their own and potentiality go through a “metamorphosis”.279 This metamorphosis, first and foremost, takes place on the bodily level, but she does not rule out more long-term effects on the outlooks of the spectator as gained through the somatic experience, for example in terms of ethics.

Fischer-Lichte’s paradigmatic example is Marina Abramović’s extreme body art performance Lips of Thomas, performed in 1975 at the Krinzinger Gallery in Innsbruck, Austria.280 It comprised of several acts of excess and

279 Ibid., p. 23.
280 Later on, Abramović has redone Lips of Thomas in a series of what is known as “re-performances” of famous performance art pieces at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City 2005. A re-performance is, according to Jessica Chambers, a phenomenon, “whereby scantly documented performances are recreated for the purpose of re-experiencing, documenting, and preserving them. These recreated performances from the late 1960s to mid-1970s are not mere repetitions of the original works, most of which were not meant to be repeated either live or in photos or on videotape.

107
self-mutilation conceived to test the limits of psychophysical endurance of
the performer: the consumption of two pounds of honey and a full bottle of
wine, the cutting of a five pointed star in the skin of her belly, intense self-
flagellation, and then lying on her now bleeding back on a cross of ice
blocks under an infrared heater facing her stomach, hence increasing the
bleeding from the star-shaped cuts. Obvious to anyone present in the audi-
ence, these acts were very painful to the performer, and after enduring two
hours of this self-torture it became too unbearable for some spectators to
witness and they decided to intervene by lifting Abramović from the ice
blocks and carry her off stage. Although Fischer-Lichte acknowledges that
the audience may have attempted to interpret the performance symbolically,
in terms of religious and political connotations, she postulates that such
interpretations “remain incommensurable with the event of the performance”
itself. Fischer-Lichte assumes “that the affects that were triggered – obvi-
ously strong enough to move individual spectators to intervention – by far
transcended the possibility and the effort to reflect, to constitute meaning.”
Later on, she uses this understanding in relegating semiosis to a secondary
process, one that can only take place retrospectively through memory, and
therefore is secondary – in fact, not part of the event. The primary aim of
*Lips of Thomas*, she maintains, was to convey an immediate experience, not
understanding, and to facilitate an opportunity to cope with an unfamiliar
experience in art at its time, in terms of aesthetics and ethics. Fischer-Lichte
points to how the performance destabilises and cancels out the relationship
between object and subject, between performer and spectator, making every-

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Most of the re-performances of this ephemeral art have been presented for the pur-
poses of historical preservation, including Marina Abramović’s *Seven Easy Pieces*
[...]. Curiously, the preservation of work whose authenticity once expressly relied
on its not being preserved has not met any resistance, even from those who had
previously insisted on ephemerality as performance’s defining feature.” Jessica
Chambers, “Marina Abramović and the Re-performance of Authenticity”, in *Journal
of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Spring 2008, p. 23. A video documentation of
the 2005 re-performance of *Lips of Thomas* is available on DVD. Babette Mangolie,
*Marina Abramović: 7 Easy Pieces*, San Francisco, CA: Microcinema International,
2010.

281 In her analysis, Fischer-Lichte actually offers the historical religious background
for self-flagellation as well as some biographical data on Abramović, which very
well might have been known to the gallery visitors and informed their encounter
with the performative acts. Such knowledge would have provided an interpretative
context that could hardly have been ignored. Cf. Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 13-14; 16.
283 Ibid., p. 17
284 Ibid., p.16f; 155-156.
one participants and co-creators of the event, and how this foregrounding of
the materiality of the performance must make one reconsider its relation to
semioticity, or “realigns the interconnection between feeling, thinking and
acting.”285 The observation of this realignment is important to the under-
standing of the performativity of perception and meaning-making; although I
do not buy into her claim that interpretation is incommensurable with the
event itself:286 rather, I see it as a matter of fluctuating states of conscious-
ness shifting between affect and reflection.287 In performances of such phys-
cal transgressions as *Lips of Thomas*, the state of reflection may indeed be
difficult to maintain for a long time; but this is not even the case in the most
conventional performances of Ibsen, for example, where the spectator, at
certain points, may also react affectively in response to the stage actions.

Coming theoretically to terms with the changed conditions for theatre in
the twentieth century, Fischer-Lichte calls for the development of new aes-
thetic standards that take into account the phenomenology of perception in
performance. As key concepts for her aesthetics of the performative, Fisc-
her-Lichte proposes a combined use of performativity and performance, refer-
ing to both J.L. Austin’s and Judith Butler’s understandings of performative
acts, and appropriating Max Herrmann’s conception of performance for what
she sees as a transformative event rather than an objective work of art.

Fischer-Lichte explains how Austin (in the mid-1950s) introduced the
concept of the performative to language philosophy in a series of guest lec-
tures at Harvard, later published as *How to Do Things with Words* in 1962.
Whereas a ‘constative’ is a linguistic utterance that serves to make a state-
ment, Austin’s ‘performative’ designates an utterance that does or performs
an action, i.e. effectuates a change of something in a social context. Austin’s
examples includes acts of baptism, “I name this ship the ‘Queen Elizabeth’”,
and acts of marriage, “I do [take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife]”. These
utterances do not refer to any pre-existing ontological or essential
condition and they cannot be evaluated as true or false; they are self-
referential in that they produce a new social reality. While Austin is only
concerned with the functions of language, Fischer-Lichte expands the con-
cept of the performative to include physical actions in artistic events, and she

286 Alone the signs of the cross and the five-pointed star are saturated with connota-
tions to such an extent they invariably attract the attention of the spectator and in-
stantly provoke reflection on the meaning of the performative acts.
287 Chambers, who refers to testimonies following the 2005 re-performance of *Lips
of Thomas*, documents the possible range of spectator responses to the piece. Cham-
bers, 2008, p. 32.
points to the self-referentiality of Abramović’s actions and their transformative effects on the audience to argue the similarities. There is, however, one aspect of Austin’s performative which is not readily transferred, and that is the criteria of success and failure determined by social institutions: “Unlike the institutional conditions of a marriage ceremony or baptism, the institutions of art simply do not provide any definite criteria for reaching a confident verdict on the success or failure of a performance shaped by audience intervention.”

This circumstance, notes Fischer-Lichte, is further complicated as the artistic performance “exhibited elements of ritual as well as spectacle”, and the extent to which these colliding genres were transformed would ultimately decide the outcome.

Fischer-Lichte continues her conception of the performative by connecting Austin and Butler. Fischer-Lichte explains how Butler, in her seminal essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay on Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (1988), conceives of gender as a non-ontological and non-biological category, which is unremittingly produced by stylised bodily acts. Again, it is the self-referentiality of the acts as constitutive of a social reality that Austin’s and Butler’s concepts have in common, and that allows for the correlation. Fischer-Lichte observes: “The stylized repetition of performative acts embodies certain cultural and historical possibilities. Performative acts, in turn, generate the culturally and historically marked body as well as its identity.” Fischer-Lichte points to the tension that Butler describes between socially imposed performative acts constituting gender and identity and the possibility for individuals to realise themselves by challenging norms and defying sanctions; this tension she sees enacted in Abramović’s Lips of Thomas and other performances that offer up repertoires of historically established acts not merely for repetition, but aesthetic modification.

According to Fischer-Lichte, both Austin and Butler “view performance as the epitome of the performative,” that is, the performative unfolds through ritualised and public behaviour. This behaviour may then be re-enacted and re-negotiated in theatrical performance. Fischer-Lichte readily reaches for the foundation of this kind of aesthetic performativity in German theatre studies. She reads rather selectively Max Herrmann as the precursor

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289 Ibid.
290 Ibid., p. 27.
291 Ibid., p. 28.
292 Ibid., p. 29.
to her own view of performance aesthetics. She claims that he abandoned the
notion of theatrical performance as a work of art based on text and deve-
loped a concept of event to replace it. As I have already noted in my research
overview this is only partially true. However, Fischer-Lichte is right that
Herrmann’s performance concept holds the phenomenological seeds for a
redefinition of the actor–spectator relationship, and he does have an interest
in the blend of subject/object and materiality/semioticity, yet he does not
give up the fiction and dramatic representation to consider materiality on its
own.291 Herrmann’s concept in Fischer-Lichte’s reconstruction is given as
motivation for the consecutive investigations of “mediality, materiality, se-
mioticity, and aestheticity” as ways of realising Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics
of the performative.294

The focus of Fischer-Lichte’s investigation into the basic mediality of
performance rests on the relationship between actors and spectators. The
transience of this mediality is instantly evident as it consists of “bodily co-
presence”.295 It is achieved and maintained by “a self-referential and ever-
changing feedback loop.”296 Due to the variances in actors’ performances and
spectators’ responses, the event is “unpredictable and spontaneous to a cer-
tain degree.”297 Fischer-Lichte explains how, since the eighteenth century,
 attempts were made to reduce the uncertainty until the performative turn in
the 1960s heralded contingency as the new ideal. With the body as constituent
element she turns to the cognitive biologists Humberto Maturana and
Franscisco Varela to offer new terminology to describe the feedback loop as
a “self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpr-
edictable process.”298 The feedback loop Fischer-Lichte understands as the
connection established between the actor and the spectator, and it consists in
exchanges of energy. In terms of strategies for staging that may affect the
feedback loop, Fischer-Lichte identifies three devices: “first, the role rever-
sal of actors and spectators; second, the creation of a community; and third,
the creation of various modes of mutual, physical contact that help explore
the interplay between proximity and distance, public and private, or visual
and tactile contact.”299

295 Ibid., p. 38.
296 Ibid.
297 Ibid.
298 Ibid., p. 40.
299 Ibid., p. 40.
Where the mediality is relational in that it positions participants and decides the conditions of their relationship, the materiality makes up the fleeting substances and the somatic efficacy of the event. The materiality is generated performatively by what could be considered a series of agencies held by both living entities (actors) and inanimate matter to exert certain effects on the audience. These agencies manifest themselves through four phenomenological categories: 1) “corporality”, 2) “spatiality”, 3) “tonality”, and 4) “temporality”.

The first category “corporality”, or what Fischer-Lichte sees as the “tension between two states of existence, between ‘having’ and ‘being’,” consists in the “processes of embodiment”, which places “the phenomenal body at its centre and takes the bodily being-in-the-world of humankind as the condition for any cultural production.” These processes draw attention to the circumstance that “cognition must be understood and studied as embodied activity – that the mind is always embodied.” Performance is an event that “mark(s) corporality as fundamental to embodiment, regardless of whether they simultaneously bring forth a fictive character […] or not, as is often the case with action and performance art.” This means that whether or not one studies performance that relies on some form of representation or another, the starting point should always be the processes of embodiment. The other aspect of Fischer-Lichte’s category of corporality, “the phenomenon of presence”, brings into consideration the basic mode of the actor’s addressing of the audience. She subdivides it into concepts of “weak presence”, which describes “the sheer presence of the actor’s phenomenal body”, “strong presence”, which indicates “the actor’s ability of commanding space and holding attention”, while “radical presence” takes on a more complex meaning that has to do with how the actor might affect the spectator’s notion of co-presence: “Through the performer’s presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming – he perceives the circulating energy as a transformative and vital energy.”

With the second category, “spatiality”, Fischer-Lichte introduces the first of the inanimate elements. Spatiality plays itself out between the stable and

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300 Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 77.
301 Ibid., pp. 89-90.
302 Ibid., p. 90.
303 Ibid.
304 Ibid., p. 94.
305 Ibid., p. 96.
306 Ibid., p. 99.
fixed “architectural-geometrical space” and the unstable and fluctuating “performative space”, i.e. the place where the performance takes place. In many cases the actor is the one who initiates and delineates the performative through her bodily presence and actions, but in performance art and environmental-based performances the audience may play a significant part in co-creating that space through direct interaction.

Another pervasive dimension of spatiality, which affects the audience, is the “atmosphere”. According to Fischer-Lichte, atmosphere is created by space and objects placed in it. It may be the architecture of the performance site, whether a theatre or some found space, that provides a certain atmosphere, or it might also be the scenography or objects in it, which lends space and things emphatic presence. Here Fischer-Lichte is drawing on Gernot Böhme’s phenomenological concept from which she applies two aspects to the aesthetics of the performative, namely that atmospheres constitute to the perceiver what Böhme has called “spheres of presence”, and that they are simultaneously located in between the exuding object and in the person who perceives the object. The sphere of presence is a certain mode by which an atmosphere appears to the perceiver; what Böhme has termed the “ecstasy of things”. This presence makes itself felt not only by the so-called secondary qualities like colours, odours, or sounds, but also the form of things. Things in spaces have effects on that surrounding space through its physical properties of dimension and volume; as Böhme suggests, they create tension and make certain movements possible, and they attribute weight and orientation to the space they inhabit. To Fischer-Lichte, the characteristics of atmosphere in performance and its impact on the audience is comparable to those of corporeal presence:

In performance, atmosphere is to the creation of spatiality what presence is to the generation of corporeality. Through its atmosphere, the entering subject experiences the space and its things as emphatically present. Not only through their primary and secondary qualities, they also intrude on and penetrate the perceiving subject’s body and surround it atmospherically. The spectators are

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308 Ibid., p. 114ff.
309 Ibid., p. 116.
310 Quoted in ibid., p. 116.
311 Quoted in ibid.
312 Ibid., p. 116.
not positioned opposite to or outside the atmosphere; they are enclosed by and steeped in it.  

She further sees this as a way “the spectators become aware of their own corporality in atmospheric spaces. They experience themselves as living organisms involved in an exchange with their environments.”  

Even if she agrees to their experiential physicality, Fischer-Lichte interestingly enough does not, as Böhme, see atmospheres as a complete antithesis to semiotics or meaning, but these might evoke subjective responses: “Each of these elements [odours, sounds, and light effects] might recall [individual] contexts and situations or trigger memories that carry strong emotional connotations for the perceiving subject. It is hard to imagine that this dimension of meaning is of no consequence at all to the workings of atmosphere. I would assume instead that such meanings indeed contribute to the power of atmosphere.”  

The third category of materiality is “tonality”. Sound makes up “aural spaces” that scatter and reverberate throughout the architectural-geometric spaces as it is carried through the air. Aural space exceeds performative space, as is clearly the case in the proscenium theatre, where it extends into the auditorium. Sound, whether voices or music, is the most transient element of performance, yet – as Fischer-Lichte points out – its effects are immediate and they may bear a lasting impact on the listener. Sound has the capacity to access the nervous system in a way that the spectator cannot control and may set off physiological reactions that again may induce moods and bring up recollections – which may also be caused by a certain type of atmosphere. “Tonality carries a strong affective potential.”  

The vocality of actors has been particularly dominant in European dramatic theatre; but sound in all performances does, of course, not only include what is intentionally created by the performers, also various accidental sounds, noises, interruptions coming from the spectators and sometimes even from the environment outside the venue may affect, change, or expand the performative space.  

Finally, the fourth category, “temporality”, cannot be considered an element of materiality itself. It rather comprises the condition through which
materiality appears and disappears. As Fischer-Lichte says, “performances take place in time.”\textsuperscript{318} The duration of a performance conditions materiality in terms of its emergence, varying periods of stability, and disappearance. Certain “structural procedures [are required] to regulate the duration and sequence of the different materials and their relation to each other.”\textsuperscript{319} Fischer-Lichte mentions the conventional theatre procedures such as intermissions, the raising and lowering of the curtain as well as the dramaturgy of plot and psychological characters, which, since the 1960s, have been replaced by other structural devices in order to emphasise the phenomenon of emergence:

If the audience’s attention is to be directed at the phenomenon of emergence, a temporal organization that supports a causal chain of events or reasoning becomes irrelevant. Plot and character psychology recede. In this context we need [...] time brackets [...] and rhythm [...] to explore their ability to sensitize the audience to the emergence of materiality.\textsuperscript{320}

Time brackets may simply be understood as time frames set to decide the duration of the performance, while rhythm helps to structure materiality across the categories of corporality, spatiality, and tonality:

In rhythm, the foreseeable and the unforeseeable interact. The exchange between repetition and deviation produces rhythm. [...] When rhythm turns into the primary, if not sole, organizing principle of performance, it produces constantly fluctuating conditions for the interplay between corporality, spatiality, and tonality, regulating their appearance and disappearance through repetition and deviation.\textsuperscript{321}

Fischer-Lichte sees rhythm as particularly important in creating a successful engagement with the audience, as humans have a pronounced ability to perceive rhythms and attune their bodies to them. This is of consequence to the feedback loop of the performance:

The feedback loop bases itself on the alternating rhythmic tuning, also realized in the direct and reciprocal physical interaction of actors and spectators. This suggests that a rhythmic structure provides the autopoietic feedback loop with particularly favourable conditions for its fulfilment. [...] By organizing

\textsuperscript{318} Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{319} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{320} Ibid., p. 131.
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid., p. 135.
and structuring the performative generation of materiality, rhythm also enables the material elements “to emerge as an agent in the feedback loop’s autopoiesis.”

When it comes to the semioticity of performance, I have already mentioned how Fischer-Lichte completely shifts away from her prior interests in decoding meaning invested by the director in the performance. Instead, she takes the view that meaning-making in performance has to be understood as generated through the process of perception, yet cautions: “The generated meaning does not facilitate the comprehension of the performance but enables an experiential range.” The meaning of what appears in front of the spectator is established with perception: “[M]ateriality, signifier, and signified coincide, precluding all possibility to ‘decode’ its meaning. Meaning cannot be separated from materiality or subsumed under a single concept. Rather, meaning is coterminous with the object’s material appearance.”

She describes two ways that meaning may emerge or be generated in the spectator’s encounter with the materiality: either through immediately recognising the meaning of the phenomenon or through ascribing meaning by associations that suggests themselves to the spectator. In the latter instance, the semiosis has been opened up as “[t]he phenomenon is perceived as a signifier that can be linked to a diverse range of signifieds. The meanings ascribed to phenomenon are not dependent on the subject’s will but appear in consciousness spontaneously….” This associative generative meaning-making is, in principle, open-ended or infinite, yet nevertheless connected to

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323 Ibid., p. 158.
324 Ibid., p. 156.
325 Fischer-Lichte further explains these two meaning-making processes by drawing a parallel to Walter Benjamin’s distinction between ‘symbol’ and ‘allegory’. She explains: “The symbol invokes its intrinsic meaning. […] Even the symbol created by a subject [artist] receives and reveals its meaning in the same way as things did in the stage when meanings where awarded to them by God in paradise before the beginning of history: materiality, signifier, and signified coincide. Hence, the symbol’s meaning seems neither random nor subjective but given in the symbol itself. […] The allegorist’s ascription makes the things at once insignificant and significant: insignificant, because the intentionality of his subjectivity precludes all possibility to reveal the object’s original, divinely granted inner meaning; significant, because such intentional subjectivity reinvests it with meaning. By investing meaning into things, by turning the originally signified into a signifier, the allegorist opens up the possibility for things to revert to their status as signifieds in the historical world. The things-turned-signifieds refer to each other as signifieds in a theoretically infinite process.” Ibid., pp. 144-145.
the biography of the perceiver, who actualises meaning that she herself brings to the performative event. In accordance with their appearance during the performance, the spectator switches between these modes of meaning-making. Hence, Fischer-Lichte limits her interest in meaning-making as aesthetic experience to the unfolding event:

[T]he spectators generate meaning in a performance by virtue of the peculiar fact that they themselves partake in creating the process they wish to understand. Only once the performance is over does this situation change. In retrospect, the spectators can try to relate each perceived and remembered element to the whole in order to understand, or fail to understand, the performance. This retrospective attempt to understand is no longer part of the aesthetic process, which ends with the performance. Any retrospective attempt cannot be integrated into the actual aesthetic experience, which occurs only during the performance.326

She goes on to make the quite radical claim that attempting to understand the performance retrospectively is problematic since memory is fallible and linguistic descriptions are incomplete.327 One can hardly disagree with Fischer-Lichte that these are indeed challenges one faces when trying to understand and interpret a performance, especially in performance analysis. However, as I have already touched upon in the above, I would assert that delimiting the aesthetic experience to the unfolding physical event is a mistake, which owes itself to Fischer-Lichte’s failure to distinguish between sensual impressions and proper experience—a distinction which tends to be conflated in the English experience but which is absolutely possible in German, between Erlebnis and Erfahrung respectively. Using this distinction, I shall later, when discussing Dorthe Jørgensen’s experiential metaphysics, develop the concept of experience as an interpretation that follows the performance and still may affect and change the participant significantly.

Fischer-Lichte develops her theory gradually through offering a multitude of historical performance examples—although with a predominance of neo-avant-garde and experimental performances from the 1960s till the more recent past—to show how instances of liminality can occur. In terms of aestheticity, she discusses the potential liminal moments for short or long-term transformation of the participating audience. Here, she employs Victor Turner’s original term “liminality”, without discussing how this concept in

327 Ibid., pp. 159-160.
Turner’s later work became reserved for the process of rites of passage in traditional, preindustrial societies, where it relied on a stable frame of social institutions that did in fact manage to transform social status and identity permanently. Turner identified, under the influence of Richard Schechner, the occurrence of liminal-like or “liminoid” states in late modern experimental theatre for both performers and spectators, which did not have the same reliable capacity for prevailing transformation. Fischer-Lichte risks conflating the two different processes by only using the term liminality as she wants to show how the non-aesthetic and the aesthetic experience may collide in experimental performance such as Lips of Thomas. She does, however, acknowledge that the liminality, she is suggesting, builds more on the supposed somatic experience of the participants in the performative event than on the social and institutional contexts that the proper rite of passage requires.

The transformations caused by liminality are predominantly temporary; they take effect but for the duration of the performance or for limited periods of time within the performance. Such transformations create physiological, affective, energetic, and motoric changes to the body. They can also achieve an actual change of status from spectator to actor status, or they produce communities. Whether the experience of the concerned subjects – caused by the destabilization of the self, the world, and its norms – leads to a reorientation and lasting transformation depends on the individual case. Spectators could also dismiss their transitory destabilization as silly and unfounded when leaving the auditorium and revert to their previous value system. Alternatively, they might remain in a state of destabilization for long after the performance’s end and only reorient themselves much later upon reflection. In both cases, the participation in the performance provides a liminal experience. As we have seen, liminality lacks two traits that apply exclusively to ritualistic liminality: first, durability (irreversibility); and second, social recognition.

It is interesting to note that here, Fischer-Lichte is willing to consider effects of liminal experience, which extend far beyond the physical limits of the performance, even if she earlier stated that that kind of retrospective meaning-making or understanding lay outside of the bounds of aesthetic experience. This supports that a modification of her concept of aesthetic experience is justified.

Fischer-Lichte applies liminality to the description of aesthetic experience to understand the way that artistic performance may adopt the strategy

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of non-artistic performance, such as ritual, while at the same time she insists on the difference: “That is to say, aesthetic experience concerns the experience of a threshold, a passage in itself; the very process of transition already constitutes the experience. Non-aesthetic liminal experience concerns the transition to something and the resulting into this or that.” The question is, if it is that easy to distinguish between aesthetic and non-aesthetic liminality? Or if the development of analytical concepts is not better served with liminality being reserved for proper rites of passage?

Towards the end of her book, Fischer-Lichte continues to analyse how both autopoiesis and the breakdown of dichotomies, especially between art and reality, play a part in creating liminal incidences, suggesting that these moments of liminality make it possible for an audience to perceive the world as “enchanted”, a view which “transforms” the spectators and whereby “performance achieves the reenchantment of the world.” I discuss this re-enchantment at length below, as this will lead me to the core modifications of the aesthetics of the performative that are needed for its application to the analysis of experiences of transcendence.

The Re-enchantment of the World – Reintroducing Religion to the Aesthetics of the Performative

I have explained how Fischer-Lichte understands the performance as an event whose course it is not possible to control completely: any execution of a theatrical or ritual performance is unique as it evolves differently in the individual encounter between co-present participants. How the staged event will proceed cannot be predicted. How an audience will react is also unpredictable – or at least subject to variation within the perimeter of the staging. The participant’s experience of the performance will be subjective. The actual impact and perceived meaning can therefore only be considered as potentials. The materiality of the event and its structure or orchestration is what allows one to observe how the involvement of the audience first occurs at the somatic level. Fischer-Lichte chooses examples from experimental performing arts, where the audience is drawn into the action, but claims that involvement – even where it is obtained by way of less radical strategies – can lead to a threshold or liminal experience, which she equates with having an aesthetic experience. This experience may again change the participant’s

330 Ibid., p. 181ff.
view of herself and her being in the world and relation to other (human) beings. In the description of the threshold experience, the theory draws on Turner’s anthropological concept of liminality, whose origin is closely related to both ritual process and concepts of the sacred; but even so, it makes it no less problematic to connect Fischer-Lichte’s theory with religion and belief.

Making such a connection seems to require – using a theological term – an ‘apologetics’, whereby I mean, “a systematic argumentative discourse […] in defence (as of a doctrine).”\textsuperscript{331} The “doctrine” to be defended here would be what is called a ‘hypothetical theology’ that does not contradict the findings of contemporary natural sciences, which to a large extent informs Fischer-Lichte’s theory. It would also involve concepts of ‘belief as non-knowledge’ and a ‘negative theology’ for developing a way to approach the divine that would be compatible with the aesthetics of the performative.

Surprisingly enough, several theologians, among others Lena Sjöstrand whom I discussed in my research overview (p. 93-95), have applied Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics without addressing her apparent atheist stance and resolving the issues of an adoption by theology. Even though I am not a theologian, nor a philosopher of religion for that matter, I find that the theologians have missed out on an opportunity to explain how contemporary theology is not necessarily incompatible with the aesthetics of the performative. As a theatre scholar, I find – as I intend to demonstrate in my analytical examples – the seemingly paradoxical application of Fischer-Lichte to the research of religion and spirituality as an exercise of performance philosophy, i.e. the re-thinking of concepts through performative practice, which, in this case, would also engage with theology. In preparation of such a re-thinking, I find that further explication is needed, especially with regard to establishing the research field performance, religion and spirituality (cf. pp. 80-86).

Let me quote a passage, in which Fischer-Lichte explains the purpose of the aesthetics of the performative and contemporary art’s relation to religion:

\begin{quote}
The reenchantment of the world is accomplished through [the] linkage of art and life, which is the aim of the aesthetics of the performative. Yet, it should not be read as a relapse into the religious world view of the seventeenth century or even into the magical consciousness of those long-gone times in which wishful thinking still made a difference. With the dawn of the Enlightenment,
\end{quote}

the magic has irretrievably vanished that once was inherent to a world created and held together by God and pervaded by HIS invisible forces. Even the arts could not revive this magic. We must come to terms with this loss.332

Re-enchantment refers to a reaction to what the sociologist Max Weber saw as the rationalisation and intellectualisation of science and the modernisation of society that had led to society’s gradual deprivation of religion, understood as both demystifying and banning of religion to the private sphere – what is also known as disenchantedment and secularisation. When Fischer-Lichte describes the purpose of performing aesthetics, she takes a clear position in favour of the enlightenment project and rationalism by declaring that “there is very little space for […] a conception [of the divine, numinous dimension]”333 in her aesthetics; but at the same time, she also recognises that there is a need to reassign meaning to contemporary life. This task entails art, including in particular the performative sort. Fischer-Lichte does not, however, use the term re-enchantment to denote a counter-motive to the disenchantedment, rather she relies on a new understanding of the deep relationships between the individual and the surrounding world. To better understand what Fischer-Lichte means by re-enchantment, it may be useful to refer to the conception offered by the historian Joshua Landy and the scholar of French literature Michael Saler. Re-enchantment is not necessarily the same as something gained through (a return to) the belief in supernatural and divine powers; it may also occur on the grounds of secularisation as a “filling of a God-shaped void” that may, in various ways, be confirmative of human existence without professing a religious belief. Such secular re-enchantment is intentionally achieved, Landy and Saler argue, by strategically searching for ways in which the world can again be filled with meaning. They do not exactly escape the religious in their choice of terms, but it happens by filling the world not only [with] mystery and wonder but also with order, perhaps even with purpose; there must be a hierarchy of significance attaching to objects and events encountered; individual lives, and moments within those lives, must be susceptible again to redemption; there must be a new, intelligible locus for the infinite; there must be a way of carving out, within the fully profane world, a set of spaces which somehow possess the allure of the sacred; there must be everyday miracles, exceptional events which go against (and perhaps even alter) the accepted order of things; and there must be secular epiphanies, mo-

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333 Ibid., p. 189.
ments of being in which, for a brief instant, the center appears to hold, and the promise is held out of a quasi-mystical union with something larger than oneself. Piece by piece, in a largely unwitting collaboration, modern intellectuals and creators have put together a panoply of responses to the Weberian condition, offering fully secularized subjects an affirmation of existence that does not come at the cost of naiveté, irrationalism, or hypocrisy.\textsuperscript{334}

I would claim that it is possible to see Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative as a way for stage arts to realise the kind of secular re-enchantment that Landy and Saler propose; although the re-enchantment effect of the performance should not necessarily be thought of as the organiser’s conscious intention. For Fischer-Lichte, re-enchantment is rather a quality that is constitutive of potential experience – something that might emerge from the encounter between participant and event and therefore is unpredictable. Neither may every item that Landy and Saler list be readily recognised in Fischer-Lichte’s text, but at least some of them appear quite explicitly while others again may be extrapolated from the context.

One of these items of re-enchantment is epiphany. In his introduction to the aesthetics, the Danish theologian Bent Flemming Nielsen draws attention to the fact that Fischer-Lichte “at one point, turns to a terminology of epiphany.”\textsuperscript{335} Nielsen refers to Lichte’s theory about the generation of meaning, in particular the following passage.

The sudden, unmotivated emergence of a phenomenon directs the spectators’ attention to that particular gesture, that specific thing, or that one melody. As a result, the spectators’ perception might gain a special quality, which precludes the question of other possible meanings, functions, or usages, or also of other framing contexts for the phenomena’s emergence. Perception unfolds as a kind of contemplative immersion into that gesture, thing, or melody, in which the perceived elements themselves to the perceiving subject as what they are: they reveal their ‘intrinsic meaning.’ Such revelation occurs when the perceiving subject experiences the presence of an actor or the ecstasy of a thing. A secret is seemingly unearthed in that moment: the secret ‘given’ in the phenomenal being of the object is ‘uncovered,’ or rather brought forth, in the act of perception.\textsuperscript{336}


\textsuperscript{336} Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 141-142.
In itself this passage may just be held to point to a likeness of revelation and perception in a certain moment when the staging foregrounds an object to make it profoundly significant to the observer. But this is not all. Unexpectedly, Fischer-Lichte allows this opening to further widen to let in a modern metaphysics in the shape of Walter Benjamin’s thinking.

As I accounted for above (see: p. 114-116), Fischer-Lichte focuses on the meaning-making processes that take place during the performance. She distinguishes between two different processes of perception: one in which the meaning of the phenomenon is immediately recognised for what it is, the other in which the meaning is ascribed by way of associations that suggests themselves to the spectator. The terminology of epiphany cements itself when she further explicates the two meaning-making processes by drawing a parallel to Walter Benjamin’s understanding of symbolic and allegorical meaning (cf. footnote 325):

Symbol and allegory constitute a binary opposition that appears to be mutually exclusive. The chasm of history keeps them apart, even if both categories ultimately refer ahead to the state of messianic redemption in which things revert to expressing the meanings bestowed on them by God. Yet, in performance, the perception of a phenomenal being and the associative generation of meaning, enabled by the process of emergence, form a different interrelationship. One can switch to become the other at any moment: what is perceived as the phenomenal being of something, can in the next be perceived as a signifier to which the most diverse chain of signifieds can be attributed. Perception can suddenly switch from identifying something as ‘symbol’ to perceiving it as ‘allegory’.  

By referring to the potentiality of divinely bestowed meaning, Fischer-Lichte clearly permits that even the religious symbol, or “what is perceived as the phenomenal being of something”, manifests itself in perception; which would consequently mean that even the revelatory nature of the Christian Catholic Eucharist, for example, is possible within the paradigm of the aesthetics of the performative. According to Catholicism, the symbol does not merely refer to the transcendent but literally makes the transcendent immanent, the essence of bread and wine are entirely transformed into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Hence, to the believer, the symbol constitutes not only imagined reality, in a theatrical sense, but de facto reality.

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Another dimension of secular epiphany may be extrapolated through a contextual reading of Fischer-Lichte. In the introduction to the English version of Fischer-Lichte’s book, her American colleague Marvin Carlson has noticed “the utopian” trait of her thinking. He compares the aesthetics of the performative with Jill Dolan’s concept of ‘utopian performative’, that is “transformative powers” at work in performance, “the new worlds it creates with each shoring, the potential […] of feeling myself part of a public newly constituted, held together in the moment of performance by a filament of faith.”

Like Fischer-Lichte, Dolan attributes these powers to the co-creation that is achieved by embodied minds that are co-present: “[T]he synergy of the actors embodiment and the spectator’s willing imagination creates possibility, the potential for new understanding and insight charged by the necessity of intersubjectivity.”

According to Carlson, both Fischer-Lichte and Dolan are preoccupied not with a particular teleology of performance pertaining to ideology, but a potentiality in a much more general sense. What Dolan would call “small but profound moments” (340), Carlson equates with “moments of enchantment” (341) in Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics. On a par with both of his colleagues, Carlson does not attribute these performative moments to divine intervention, but they are nevertheless revelatory in the secular sense that material performance brings them about: “resulting in a sudden deeper insight into the shared process of being in the world.”

Thus, performance as a phenomenological process may hold a promise of epiphany without resorting to a religious or spiritual interpretation. On the other hand, one could also choose to see, as the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar has suggested, this epiphany of performance as merely anticipatory, a vague notion of what is yet to come:

In the theatre man attempts a kind of transcendence, endeavouring both to observe and to judge his own truth, in virtue of a transformation – through the dialectics of the concealing-revealing mask – by which he tries to gain clarity about himself. Man himself beckons, invites the approach of a revelation about himself. Thus, parabolically, a door can open to the truth of the real [divine] revelation.

340 Dolan, 2005., p. 5; quoted in ibid.
342 Ibid.
343 Balthasar, 1988, p. 12; my addition.
Another item of re-enchantment that Fischer-Lichte brings up is mystery. Despite all secular self-confidence during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the sciences did not supersede religion and provide exhaustive explanations of the universe and everything in it; instead, the sciences have produced a paradox in which the more they learn the less they seem to actually know. As Fischer-Lichte has it, “The modern sciences have contributed significantly to the notion that within the human being itself mysterious forces are at work that elude their conscious will and knowledge. […] Paradoxically, the greater the progress of science and the more spectacular its results, the quicker vanishes the Enlightenment illusion of the infinite perfectibility of man and the world.”

Thus, Fischer-Lichte attributes the re-enchantment effect to an indirect consequence of science’s development and the Enlightenment movement; this development is unintended and has evolved out of the seeming shortcomings of both science and religion. Yet to Fischer-Lichte, the new insights that science has brought us, commits us to knowing our place in the cosmos and to recognising our connectedness with the world and other living beings, thus adding meaning to existence.

It has turned out that our world is, as Fischer-Lichte puts it, “suffused by invisible forces”, which form the basis for a new ontology based on the emergence, i.e. the development of collective features that are not displayed by the individual units in the collective, whether this applies to the body’s cells or the individual members of society. The forces of the emergence are physical, and no matter how fleeting and ungraspable they are, “they can be explained rationally,” for example by using “chaos theory or microbiology.”

In this concluding part of her book, it becomes clear how fundamental an inspiration natural science is for Fischer-Lichte. The key concepts of ‘emergence’, ‘feedback loop’, and ‘autopoiesis’ are all used in the cosmology of physics, cybernetics, and biology, respectively. These concepts are borrowed to establish the ontological foundation of her aesthetics. Performance is an emergent, i.e. unpredictable, event phenomenon that is not once and for all determined by a conscious entity, here the director or artist, but unfolds as an autopoiesis, i.e. self-governing and self-organizing process in the simultaneous bodily presence of performers and spectators. To explain how the impact and perception of presence is brought about in the performance is further explained by introducing a feedback loop as the basis for...

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345 Ibid.
346 Ibid.
understanding how the relation between participants are generated and regulated – in this case, by the direction of energetic and affective flow and energy. By shifting the direction of the flow from being directed towards the actor to going toward the spectator, the status of the spectator can be changed, which again may – at least to some extent – affect the whole evolution of the event and emphasise its emergence and autopoiesis. Whether or not her application of these concepts from the natural sciences are in accordance with their original use, or if the transferal to theatre and performance studies is sufficiently argued for, lies beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss. What is of concern here is that this influence from the natural sciences causes Fischer-Lichte to explicitly reject the association of religion with her aesthetics, especially since there is very little in her understanding of re-enchantment that speaks against such a rejection. On the contrary, if one takes into consideration developments of secular notions of spirituality and new strands of thinking within theology that reconciles with scientific cosmology, Fisher-Lichte’s re-enchantment is highly compatible. She claims that the aesthetics of the performative “marks the limits of enlightenment time by undermining confidence in enlightenment to descriptions of the world through binary contradictions, and by allowing people to appear with bodily consciousness.” And for her, the new aesthetic values nothing less than “a ‘new’ enlightenment” as it implies the recognition that both the inner and outer world are beyond human control, and calls for man to establish “a new relationship between himself and the world.” “This relationship,” she continues, “is not determined by an ‘either/or’ situation, but by a ‘both and’. The world’s reenchantment is open and not closed, and it asks everyone to act in life as in a performance.” The last wording may appear cryptic, but on the basis of Fischer-Lichte’s performance examples and their asserted potential for secular epiphany, it may refer to a learning potential: the performance can create new knowledge of being in the world through the aesthetic experience of the audience – a kind of performative epistemology, which is not – as I intend to show through my analyses – by itself in conflict with religion or spirituality.

As I have shown, the aesthetic of the performative may very well be aligned with a secular project of re-enchantment, such as Landy and Saler propose. But it may, as I would suggest, also be re-aligned with a more up-to-date understanding of religion than the one of the seventeenth century Fischer-Lichte seems to subscribe to. Fischer-Lichte ignores a range of facts,

348 Ibid.
which is telling of religion’s continued impact on the world, and that it still is to be reckoned with as an interpretative reservoir: 1) That most of the world’s cultures have not gone through the same process of enlightenment as Protestant Northern Europe. 2) That even in highly secularised societies, quite a lot of people still believe in God in one way or another. In Denmark, a survey from 2005 shows believers count for 48 % of the population – a number, which has not changed since 1948; what has changed, though, is the God they believe in. 3) Religion, like anything in society, is subject to transformations, and some strands of theology have undergone the same paradigmatic shift as science, most significantly, incorporating basically the same ontology of emergence as the aesthetics of the performative. In order to explore the latter aspect, allow me briefly to refer to what is suggested by a few leading and trailblazing figures in contemporary theology, social science, and performance studies. For it is through the capacity of rethinking religion that the aesthetics of the performative reveals one of its easily overlooked potentials for instigating reflection.

Christian theology in its progressive forms is by no means in opposition to science. For example, in Adventures of the Spirit (2008), the influential American theologian Philip Clayton presents a new philosophical theology, which does away with the reductionist either-or of science and religion, proposing the third way of a hypothetical theology, one that is in dialogue with science, Christian tradition, and what he calls “the secular believer”. The latter may be seen as the one epitomizing this theology: the one who “may address scepticism using the formulations of his religious tradition. But, because doubts are no longer external to his religious belief, the effort to answer them in a generally acceptable manner becomes an intrinsic part of the life of faith.” And Clayton continues:

The point here is that this effort does not need to be external or reductionistic to religious belief, but it can instead be internal to the dynamics of belief. Secular believers might take the well-known quote from Diderot as their motto: ‘Doubts in the matter of religion, far from being acts of impiety, ought to be seen as good works, when they belong to a man who humbly recognizes his ignorance and is motivated by the fear of displeasing God by the abuse of reason.”

\[349\] Lührchau, 2005.
\[351\] Ibid., pp. 24-25; italics by the author.
The spiritual stance of Clayton’s theology is indeed adventurous as it re-thinks Christian doxology, yet without abandoning it. It acknowledges and enters into a dialogue with what is both popular belief’s conception of God as a panentheistical force, i.e. one permeating the entire universe, simultaneously including God in the immanent and containing the universe in the transcendent God, and science’s new ontology of emergence describing the occurrence of still more complex structures such as neural networks as prerequisites of consciousness. In his argumentation both in *Adventures of the Spirit* and elsewhere, Clayton makes it – at least – scientifically plausible that divine agency could interfere with the unfolding universe on the level of human consciousness:

Just as no natural law is broken when one explains the behavior of human beings in terms of their thoughts, will, and intentions, so also no laws are broken when one explains their behavior in terms that include the causal influence or ‘lure’ of certain higher spiritual values on their thinking and consequent actions.\(^{352}\)

Thus, without subscribing to Intelligent Design or the like Clayton is proposing a theology capable of thinking God within the very same paradigm of emergence as the one Fischer-Lichte claims has very little space for God.

In his Luhmann-based research on knowledge, the Danish media sociologist Lars Qvortrup discusses the function of religion in contemporary post-Christian society, and relates it to the scientifically produced disenchantment of the world and consequent loss of knowledge about God:

However, a renaissance seems to be on its way. Today, it is not just an epistemological insight, but also an everyday experience, that knowledge does presuppose non-knowledge. What we know could also be known otherwise. The more that we know, the more we know that we do not know.

This means an increasing demand to act and reflect upon non-knowledge. Not to turn uncertainty into certainty, but to strengthen our interaction with that which we cannot know or master.\(^{353}\)


Qvortrup is thus concerned with the paradoxology of knowledge, which is not only central to what he has termed the “hypercomplex society” of our day, but also to Christianity as such: Jesus Christ as the paradoxical unity of Man and God, of what can be known and what cannot be known; that which contrary to Wittgenstein’s claim in *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* is possible, namely to “draw the borderline of our thinking” and “imagine what our world is like seen from a position beyond the world.” This is a thought that is not unlike Clayton’s hypothetical theology and panentheism. We cannot know God as such, but all our knowledge is constituted by the fact that there are things which we do not know, that which we are nonetheless able to imagine. The concept and the figure of Jesus Christ give shape or form to what appears self-contradictory, an ‘as well as’, immanence as well as transcendence. Relevant to my discussion with Fischer-Lichte is Qvortrup’s point that based on Jesus Christ, the church has “a resource of paradoxical semantics”, which may make us come to terms with the fact that there are things we do not know or control; this semantics includes rituals, that is, performative forms of non-knowledge. According to Qvortrup, religious belief is non-knowledge or a negative epistemology – a way, as he says, for humans to “know that we do not know that which we do not know.”

Interestingly enough, the same issue of how one may consider performance as negative epistemology has recently been addressed from a performance studies perspective by one of the scholars I mentioned in the overview of previous research. Claire Maria Chambers, in her *Performance Studies and Negative Epistemology: Performance Apophatics* (2017), addresses the need to recognise in the epistemology of performance the risk of overestimating what can actually be known through the performative event. Whereas Qvortrup holds belief as such to be a negative form of knowing, non-knowledge, Chambers is concerned with a certain type of negative epistemology that stems from religious mysticism and meditative practice and has evolved into what is known today in Christianity as negative theology or *apophatic* theology. Apophatic theology is concerned with ‘apophasis’ or a

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355 Qvortrup, 2005, p. 111; my translation.
356 Ibid., p. 116; my translation.
358 Qvortrup, 2005, p. 122.
certain way of describing God beginning with what God is not, or rather the insufficiency of knowing God through human perception and concepts. What Chambers is proposing is a denial of even the experience of not knowing God, which immediately seems to be the antithesis of phenomenology and performance as event. Chambers explains her ‘performance apophatics’ in the following way:

I use the term performance apophatics to signify the performative operation that traffics through the denial of denial, which can be felt in the restless dynamic of the unknowable that structures performance itself. As I wrote in the preface, ‘performance apophatics describe not only the way performance may deny, resist, or fail, or the way that performance may depend upon the absent or processes of disappearance, or the creation of the indistinguishable, the contradictory, and the im/possible, but also the way that through such performances we may end up in a place where the negation itself is no longer enough.’ At this point, the negation of negation through the denial of experience opens into the void of unknowing, as participation with the void, encountering the otherness at the heart of self, which both dissolves the self and explores its nature as other. Performance apophatics is participation in the unknowing and indeterminacy that constitutes the cosmos.

Chambers explicates further:

To be sure, performance apophatics occur in the denial of experience, but this denial is part of a larger operation that seeks participation in the knowing of non-knowing. To deny experience as constitutive of knowledge is to negate any concept of negation that may result. It is appropriately ironic that theatre and performance, just like negative theology, is saturated in the sensuous and the experiential, and deploys artistic means of encountering the limits of that experience. When I say that apophaticism denies experience, this should not be taken to mean that negative theologians are saying that experience itself does not exist. Of course it does; our lives are built upon experiences. What

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359 Chambers, 2017, p. 2: “[W]hen we speak about God, the divine, or the absolute in any form, we absolutely do not know what we are talking about—and this, incidentally, is the starting point for the whole of the apophatic tradition. You may not believe that God exists, or you may be undecided; perhaps you believe in God but suspect that humans can never say anything completely adequate about her, even though there are several holy texts that purport to do just that; or, you may maintain that all speech about God kataphatically expresses an exquisite emptiness and a nothingness that can never be filled, and that the question of belief doesn’t enter into such an operation. It doesn’t matter.”

360 Ibid., p. 10.
they are arguing is that one may not assume that within that experience anything was precipitated or executed by God, and therefore, the experience itself cannot be equated with an experience of God. God is not within an affective experience, not even within mass euphoria, such as at a football match or in the midst of group meditation. This is why negative theologians were so careful not only to work through their denials (God is not this or that) but also to deny the denial: God is not to be found in the experience of being denied, either.  

If one is to understand Fischer-Lichte’s claim that there is very little space for God in her aesthetics as saying God cannot be experienced directly through performance then, in accordance with Chambers’ apophatics, even Fischer-Lichte’s denial of the experience of God could be denied. The mere feasibility of such a mental operation I would take to mean that evidently there is space for God or, rather, the reflection upon the possible relation between humans and God. In this case, even a little space is space enough, especially as one might be talking about a power which, according to Clayton, exerts itself on the level of the sub-conscious. There is certainly, as Chambers points out, a “restless dynamic of the unknowable that structures performance itself” to be found in the ways one engages with many staged events. One such example would be my experience of Olafur Eliasson’s Your Blind Passenger.

Clayton, Qvortrup, and Chambers all provide arguments for an inclusion of religion and spirituality as interpretative contexts for the aesthetics of the performative. Perhaps the most convincing argument for such inclusion, however, rests implicitly in Fischer-Lichte’s own writings. Regardless of how urgent it may seem for the rationalist Fischer-Lichte to remove God from the equation, it remains a contradiction in terms in the context of the proclaimed openness and complexity of the aesthetics of the performative (see: the quotes above on pp. 120, 125). As the bio-semiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer has put it: “The difficulty lies in protecting rationality against itself without renouncing it. When rationality thinks to be the only legitimate source of true insight in all areas of life, rationality has taken the place of the god whom it otherwise denied.” Using Clayton, Qvortrup, and Chambers, it might – as I would suggest – just as well be argued that it is indeed possible to reintroduce God within the performative paradigm in the form of emergence, non-knowledge, denial of denial without compromising Fischer-

Lichte’s phenomenological and ultimately political endeavour. Maintaining the opposition between science and religion is an antiquated antagonism. Excluding religion as an interpretative factor in the arts and the development of society may very well prove to be counterproductive for Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative, in particular if this aesthetics is to be perceived as the utopian transformational discourse launched by Carlson, what one, in the light of re-enchantment, may see as a “new covenant” between Man and the world – or as Fischer-Lichte puts it herself: “It [the aesthetics of the performative] does not call upon all human beings to govern over nature – neither their own nor that surrounding them – but instead encourages them to enter into a new relationship with themselves and the world.”

This new relationship acknowledges the complex interplay between human consciousness and that which lies beyond it in terms of physical, biological, social, political, spiritual, and hitherto unknown powers that the individual is either not aware of or cannot (readily) control. In the context of global ecological, economic, and security crises, the aesthetics of the performative would rather benefit from being put into play in a discussion of how to stage transcendence and faith for our times. Especially because it may offer an aesthetic vocabulary for reconsidering transcendence and faith that does not solely belong to religion and ritual, but also to the arts and theatre.

Calibrating the Aesthetics of the Performative for Performance Analysis and Experiences of Transcendence

I introduced the concept of ‘staged event’ above with the intention of re-focusing Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative to analyse the complex dynamic relation between staging and the unfolding event. In this context, it is my hypothesis that the potential for experiences of transcendence is already established in the organising and orchestration of the materiality of performance through its staging. Of course, an experience of transcendence is not generated by the properties of staging alone as it depends, to a large extent, on the individual who undergoes the experience; nevertheless, the material staging is what sets the parameters of such experience – without them the experience would surely not be possible. I shall discuss the nature of these experiences, the circumstances and capacities for undergoing and learning from them, in the section on Dorthe Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience. Here, it shall suffice to identify and consider a couple of central

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staging devices, which may precondition and make possible experiences of transcendence. Later on, in my analyses, I will explore these devices in their concrete contexts as well as introducing other concepts, where needed, to understand how the staged event may facilitate and affect the participant’s experiences. Identifying these staging devices will inform the development of analytical tools for the proposed model.

As a first step, this process requires the modification of some of Fischer-Lichte’s key concepts as the aesthetics of the performative was not conceived for analysing experiences of transcendence. Indeed, as will become apparent, the aesthetics was not even calibrated for performance analysis in the first place. Two devices, or analytical concepts, that Fischer-Lichte does not include are, as far as I can tell, basic to the analysis of audience/congregant engagement in the staged event: ‘directedness’ and ‘role-playing’. Both of these concepts entail levels of phenomenological and semiotic analysis as well as contextualisation, thus moving beyond the mere agency of the staged materials to acknowledge its intentionality and explore activation of participant expectations, involvement, and interpretation in ways that Fischer-Lichte’s concepts do not allow for.

The Norwegian-German theatre scholar Siemke Böhnish, as a reformulation of Fischer-Lichte’s feedback loop hypothesis, proposes connecting it to the concept of ‘directedness’. Böhnish does not abolish the ‘feedback loop’, but rather recalibrates the concept as a performance analysis lens by, so to speak, increasing its “resolution of details”. A feedback loop manifests itself bodily not merely through co-presence, but more specifically through directedness, i.e. how the bodies of actors and spectators are physically directed towards each other, and how material staging frames support and sustain this bodily directedness. This also entails the necessity of reinstating intentionality as a phenomenological aspect of the event. Without this recalibration, understanding how exactly the potential for experiences of transcendence is generated on the somatic and pre-semantic level is simply not possible.

Böhnish does not consider her recalibration in terms of transcendence. To connect directedness and feedback loop with a concept of transcendence I shall draw on the Husserlian tradition in phenomenology, developed further by, among others, the hermeneutic phenomenologists Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, in which intentionality, in fact, is conceived as the directedness of the body towards an object. Husserl held the object to be transcendent to the observer; Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty saw in intentionality, or the directedness towards that which is beyond the subject, a fundamental transcendence which characterises the human condition – that the
body is constantly open to that which is greater than itself, and hence the subject must relate and understand itself in relation to this transcendence (see “Charting Previous Research,” p. 66). This corresponds to what I already in “Subject and Purpose” (pp. 8-11) established as a mental transcendence, which occurs in theatrical events per se. Transcending oneself is how one engages with the otherness of the stage, whether this otherness comprises the actor as the physical other or her enacted character as the imagined other – the latter being “someone” empirically beyond what is actually there on stage, but nevertheless someone who makes a real impact on the spectator, affectively, emotionally, intellectually. By employing Böhnish’s concept of directedness one may observe how the experience of this kind of transcendence is dependent upon the performativity of the participating bodies and other staged materials in the first place. On the level of fiction or imaginary reality, which neither Fischer-Lichte nor Böhnish discuss, the spectator mentally engages with the character on stage, or even engages physically in the event by taking on a role in an immersive narrative, as is evident in interactive theatre or ritual. After discussing Böhnish’s directedness, I shall employ David V. Mason’s concept of role-playing to further explain how the spectator may transcend herself in engaging in the staged event on the level of imagined reality.

In Böhnish’s critique of Ästhetik des Performativen, she argues that Fischer-Lichte overstates the autopoiesis or self-generation of the feedback loop in the co-presence of actors and spectators, and in effect abolishes intentionality with the sole purpose of making the paradigmatic turn from artwork to event plausible. This preoccupation with the unpredictability of the event seems to distract Fischer-Lichte from attaining the needed level of detail in the analytical calibration of concepts. Which is why ‘autopoiesis’, ‘co-presence’, and ‘feedback loop’, Böhnish argues, cannot be used as operational concepts for performance analysis:

Fischer-Lichte’s hypothesis does not ultimately aim at describing and analysing how the reciprocal influence of actors and spectators upon each other occurs, but only points out the fact that this influence effectuates the non-plannable and uncontrollable of performances, at least to a certain extent. Based on this criticism, I reformulate the hypothesis for it to include both the controllable and the non-controllable, the planned and the unplanned. While Fischer-Lichte focuses on the mutual influence of actors and spectators in performances and the fact that this process can never be fully planned and controlled, I suggest looking at how such processes actually take place, and to what extent and in what way they are controlled by those involved. That is, I
restore intentionality and shift focus to processes of control without excluding the uncontrollable and non-plannable. Then the unplanned, non-verifiable, and unpredictable may be assigned the status of an inevitable and at the same time potentially productive challenge for those involved.  

According to Böhnish, Fischer-Lichte takes for granted that the co-presence of actors and spectators always generates a feedback loop in performance. Whereas the co-presence certainly makes the feedback loop possible, Böhnish contends that it only increases the probability of the feedback loop occurring. She points out that it is easy to imagine a situation where the feedback loop falters or ceases. Even if the actor and the spectator remain bodily co-present in the event, the spectator may not be able to maintain her contact with the actor, visually, mentally, or otherwise: the spectator might fall asleep; look at someone/something else; or be distracted by her own thoughts and lose the invested focus and energy in directing her full attention towards the actor. Hence, Böhnish suggests that one should rather understand the feedback loop as an individual event-specific relation, which depends on both the actor’s and the spectator’s directedness towards each other.

Instead of building on the phenomenological tradition of ‘intentionality’, Böhnish develops her own experience-based concept of ‘directedness’ drawing on meanings of the Norwegian word henvendthet (a derived noun from the reflexive verb å henvende seg or the noun henvendelse), which is related to how one positions one’s body and face in relation to someone else, and how this affects one’s sensation, attention, communication, even – in a more figurative sense – the activity of thoughts (for example, addressing God in prayer). Inspired by George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s bodily-based cognitive linguistics, Böhnish’s choice of this term observes, “how humans function on the bodily level” in accordance with their conceptual spatial differentiation between

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365 Böhnish, 2011, p. 71; my translation: “Bodily co-presence facilitates the mutual influence, mutual directedness makes it probable.”

366 The most obvious translation of the Norwegian reflexive verb form å henvende seg would be “to address” or literally “to turn to”, while the noun henvendelse would translate into “the [act of] addressing”. Instead I have chosen “directedness”, as I find it captures the quality of someone or something being directed towards someone or something much better than “addressing”. The act of addressing also seems to be bound to human communication. As I will discuss shortly, directedness might also be a quality of inanimate matter – although perhaps in a more figurative sense.

front and back.\textsuperscript{368} “In basic terms, being turned toward someone means that the side of the body we perceive as the front and/or the face is facing that someone. Correspondingly, being turned away that the front has been redirected, the back now facing the person. The logic of the concept of directedness is based on the fact that the person addressing has an ‘inherent’ direction, a front side and a back side.”\textsuperscript{369}

Böhnish points out that there are many different forms of directedness in performance and that these forms are applicable to understanding variations in the feedback loop. In other words, one cannot – as Fischer-Lichte does – refer to feedback loop in the singular only; it is a contingent phenomenon, which may be generated by many different forms of mutual directedness between actor and spectator. Feedback loops may be differentiated in terms of the degree of reciprocal influence, the way control is exercised, to what extent control is possible, individual contributions by actors and spectators, and variations between individual performances of the same production.\textsuperscript{370}

Consequently, feedback loops must be assessed based on the analysis of specific events and experiences. Forms of directedness, however, may be described in generic terms, which are practically applicable to performance analysis.

Böhnish develops a theoretical framework. On the overall level she distinguishes between “cultural frames” and “physical frames” that condition and generate the forms of directedness.\textsuperscript{371} The forms of directedness comprise ‘actions’ and ‘perceptions’ of both actors and spectators. Action and perception are typically interconnected when it comes to the actor, whereas the spectator’s perception tends to be disassociated with action – that is, action with the intention to attract attention.\textsuperscript{372}

Identifying the cultural frames of directedness requires the analytical contextualisation of the event in relation to “convention of genre”, “acting style”, and “audience style”.\textsuperscript{373} These frames are activated – manifested – through “overt directedness”/ or “covert directedness”,\textsuperscript{374} which are modes of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{} Böhnish, 2011, p. 78
\bibitem{} Ibid.; my translation.
\bibitem{} Ibid., p. 78.
\bibitem{} Ibid., p. 85; my translation.
\bibitem{} Ibid., p. 81; my translation: “The audience’s directedness towards the actors takes on the mode of perception and not the mode of loud action.”
\bibitem{} Ibid., p. 87; my translation.
\bibitem{} Ibid., p. 79. Böhnish uses the Norwegian terms direkte henvendthet and indirekte henvendthet. I have chosen “overt” and “covert” (instead of “direct” and “indirect”),
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action or perception performed by actors or spectators. The cultural frames
determine these forms of directedness. For example, a naturalistic-
psychological acting style observes the convention of the so-called fourth
wall, which does not allow any overt directedness in the form of looking at
or verbally addressing members of the audience. What is used instead is
covered directedness: “the actor projects his entire expression to the audience,
-speaks so loudly and articulates so clearly that even whispered words or
small gestures can be heard and seen in the rear row of the auditorium.”

Often the genre or acting style is connected with a certain audience style, i.e.
a pattern of behaviour typically associated with the theatrical convention. In
-case of the naturalistic-psychological acting style observing the fourth wall,
it is expected that the spectator sit quietly, watch, and listen to the actor.
The mode of directedness is perception, not action. Correspondingly, this
-audience style would be characterised as covert directedness: it does not
intend to distract the actor. Of course, as Böhnish notes, it is possible that the
-spectator’s form of directedness may change in conflict with an acting style,
-for example, when individual spectators overtly direct their discontent to-
ward the actor by shouting “booh”, or get up and slam the door upon leaving
the auditorium.

Besides convention of genre and acting style, Böhnish also mentions ot-
-her factors that might determine the audience style such as those characteristic
-of certain audiences, factors such as social identity, age, or disability. Audience
-styles may also vary synchronically and diachronically. This is par-
cicularly evident in some events like football matches where the supporters
-of various teams exhibit distinctive patterns of behaviour, which distinguish
-one supporter group from the other. Likewise, synchronous behaviour is
-collectively sustained or weakened by the mutual influence of spectators
-upon each other in the theatre: “When, as a spectator, one is part of an audi-
-ence that is strongly directed towards the actors – in perception or in action –
-this intensity could ‘infect’ the individual spectator. And conversely, it is
difficult to listen intensely or watch what an actor does, if people around do
not.” When it comes to diachron or individual patterns of behaviour, his-
torically there are examples of the theatre allowing this kind of behaviour; I

375 Böhnish, 2011; my translation.
376 Ibid.
377 Ibid.
378 Ibid.
379 Ibid., p. 84; my translation.
might, for example, mention the eighteenth century opera, but also contemporary performance exhibitions.\textsuperscript{380}

The question whether or not a feedback loop is maintained between actor and spectator remains related to the specific performance event. The feedback loop or the reciprocal influence of actor and spectator on each other is directly reliant on contact. Contact is a basic function of directedness.\textsuperscript{381} In most theatre, contact is only established by the means of eyesight, whereas in some theatre like street theatre the actor speaks directly to the audience. Böhnish suggests that in some rare instances it could also be touch,\textsuperscript{382} which is a form of directedness I shall explore in some of my examples. The type of contact determines which senses are involved in the communication and directs and delimits the perception.

When it comes to the spectator maintaining the feedback loop, the perceptual directedness involves attention. Böhnish explains that directedness and attention are not the same, but closely related.

\textbf{Attention implies directedness towards what has caught one’s attention. Hence, directedness can lead to attention and vice versa, and this applies not only to the directedness of perception, but also of action. Colloquial expressions point to these two aspects. Attention is something we can both ‘give’ and ‘get’, we can ‘devote’ our attention to something and we can ‘demand’ or ‘catch’ others’ attention. Our own attention can be directed, both by ourselves and by others. These two sides of directedness correspond to the active and passive aspect of feedback loops: Actors and spectators both influence and are affected by the counterparty. When examining feedback loops, it is appropriate to investigate how attention is gained, strengthened, impaired, or lost.}\textsuperscript{383}

One may say that Böhnish, with directedness, establishes the basic communicative function of the actor as the one who is directing the spectator’s attention, that is, in terms of drawing attention to her own actions and thereby often directing attention to other actions on stage as well.

As far as attention goes, what may maintain it and the feedback loop is the ‘energy’ or ‘intensity’, which is invested in the directedness. Böhnish gives examples of how direct verbal addressing may be delivered by the actor with more or less energy behind the words, and how the susceptible

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\textsuperscript{380} Böhnish does not specify the historic examples. The mentioned examples are mine.

\textsuperscript{381} Böhnish, 2011, p. 82.

\textsuperscript{382} Ibid., p. 79.

\textsuperscript{383} Ibid., p. 84; my translation.
spectator may be energised by this overt directedness – or drained of energy if the delivery is weak. Energy or intensity also applies to covert directedness both in action and in perception, even if the genre convention, acting style, and audience style observed upholds a fourth wall: the actor may still project her voice or use action with intensity, but directed beyond this imaginary wall, yet targeted at no spectators in particular; and the spectator – or more often the spectators as a collective – by watching and listening with intensity may assert an energetic impact upon the actor that – as many actor’s anecdotes supports – assists the actor in her acting and delivery. This assistance inflects itself upon the audience through the flow of a feedback loop, and may heighten the engagement of the individual spectator. As noted above, the spectators affect each other’s attention and thereby also build up energy. Böhnish points out that in terms of theory and analytical method the energetic aspect of directedness is inadequately elucidated. Nevertheless, she recommends that it is included in the analysis of feedback loop.\textsuperscript{384} In my opinion, this will then have to rely on the individual assessment of the analyst – preferably someone who has been present at the staged event.

The other main category of conditioning factors that Böhnish develops is the physical frames. Here, she starts by observing a connection between the cultural and physical frames, which is very relevant for my understanding of the potentiality of transcendent experiences, namely that not only genres, acting, and audience styles may affect the spectator’s “expectations, actions, and perception”, but also places.\textsuperscript{385} Expectations, actions, and perceptions will be different depending on where one attends a performance. In other words, the cultural frames condition the feedback loop according to the conventions of behaviour in, for example, a museum, the street, a church, or in a theatre; and the place also sets up the perimeters that have to be considered when the expected pattern of behaviour is broken, whether intentionally or accidentally.\textsuperscript{386} One might add to Böhnish’s observation that going against the cultural convention may be part of the staging of the event; in fact, as will become apparent, this is the case in several of my examples.

The physical frames that Böhnish suggests for analysing the conditioning of directedness and feedback loop are the part of her framework which seems least developed. She divides it into ‘organisation of stage and auditorium’, the ‘volume of space’, ‘acoustics’, and ‘technology’ such as P.A.-system and lightening design. The last three physical factors are the most

\textsuperscript{384} Böhnish, 2011, pp. 84-85.
\textsuperscript{385} Ibid., p. 85; my translation.
\textsuperscript{386} Ibid.
straightforward to understand and explain how they may affect the mutual
directedness between actors and spectators. The volume of a space deter-
mines the kind of relation that may be established, whether collective or
mass-based. The organisation of stage and auditorium, she says, is a well-
known factor in establishing communication between actor and spectator,
and she leaves it at that without unpacking these organisational principles or
strategies much further. Her view of this is mostly limited to the convention-
al theatre, as she gives the example of how the seating arrangement in the
auditorium positions the spectators’ bodies frontally in an overt directedness
towards the actors. She does suggest, however, that this directedness might
vary if the audience is placed on swivel chairs or pillows on the floor (as in
children’s theatre), or if they are standing, allowing them to choose in which
direction to point their bodies. The spectator will have the most freedom in
street theatre, where she can easily turn away and leave.\textsuperscript{387} Still, Böhnish
leaves out a lot of other ways that the directedness can be conditioned by the
organisation of stage and auditorium – or, to be more inclusive in terms of
staged events, of actors/celebrants and spectators/congregants – considering
such forms as contemporary experimental theatre, performance-exhibiton,
churchplay, and ritual. This omission leaves one with space for suggestions.

Here, I would like to reach back to my research overview and bring forth
Keir Elam’s approach to space in performance analysis. In order to analyse
the highly dynamic ways that space may be organised in performance, he
adopted the proxemics developed by the American anthropologist Edward T.
Hall, which attempts to understand “the interrelated observations and theo-
ries of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture.”\textsuperscript{388} Of par-
ticular interest is Hall’s typology of ‘proxemic modalities’ that Elam em-
loys for the organisation of performance space: 1) ‘Fixed-feature space’,
which is “static architectural configurations” such as “the playhouse itself
and, in formal theatres (opera houses, proscenium-arch theatres, etc.), to the
shapes and dimensions of stage and auditorium”; 2) ‘semi-fixed-feature
space’ referring to “movable but non-dynamic objects”, which in a theatre
would be “the set, auxiliary factors like the lighting, and in informal theatric-
al space, stage and auditorium”; and 3) ‘informal space’, which is divided
into “the ever-shifting relations of proximity and distance of proximity and
distance between individuals, thus applying in the theatre to actor-actor,
actor-spectator and spectator-spectator interplay”.\textsuperscript{389} In modern theatre, Elam

\textsuperscript{387} Böhnish, 2011, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{388} Hall, 1961, p. 1; quoted in Elam, 2002, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{389} Elam, 2002, p. 56.
(like Fischer-Lichte) observes a marked tendency “to transform architectural fixity as far as possible into dynamic proxemic informality.”.\(^{390}\) This has manifested itself in “less an absolute stage-auditorium divide than a flexible and, occasionally, unpredictable manipulation of body-to-body space (for example in the theatre of Beck and Schechner).”\(^{391}\) To study this informality and dynamics, Elam applies Hall’s four-phase segmentation into “‘intimate’ distance (physical contact and near-touching positions) to ‘personal’ distance (1½–4 feet), ‘social’ distance (4–12 feet) and, finally, ‘public’ distance (12–25 feet).”\(^{392}\) All of these concepts are lenses that would “sharpen” Böhnish’s analytical apparatus of directedness when it comes to analysing the physical factors. Reaching back to Fischer-Lichte, analysing proxemic relations will also sharpen one’s view of the dynamics of performative space within the architectural-geometrical space of the venue.

Finally, I would like to point out an overall limitation to Böhnish’s recalibration of the aesthetics of the performative, which is particularly relevant for me to discuss. Böhnish claims that her concept of directedness “is not directly transferrable to art forms or media without bodily co-presence.”\(^{393}\) In a footnote, she makes a distinction between situations of bodily co-presence versus other situations of two-sided contact; while both of these situations produce a feedback loop only the first one relies on both parties being present physically. Böhnish mentions that communications such as phone conversations, Internet chat, and videoconferences establish feedback loops without co-presence. But what about situations, where there is not even two-sidedness? Or there is no other living entity performing – except oneself? Actually, such a situation occurred when I visited Eliasson’s *Your Blind Passenger*.

The artwork did not involve any actor(s), and the first time I went through the tunnel, I did not even meet another visitor. Yet, I did experience that the installation exhibited directedness towards me; but this directedness was implicit and manifested in the staging of its materiality. First, I felt enticed to enter via the *door* leading into the installation; in a sense, the door was di-

\(^{391}\) Ibid.
\(^{392}\) Ibid., p. 58. In the metric system it would be ‘personal’ distance (0.3–1.2 meters), ‘social’ distance (1.2–3.6 meters) and, finally, ‘public’ distance (3.6–7.6 meters). Hall makes it clear that these distances are to be considered culturally specific and they may therefore vary from one part of the world to another. Hall based his estimates on American culture, which is, at least, comparable to Swedish and many Western cultures.
\(^{393}\) Böhnish, 2011, p. 88.
rected at me, Eliasson had intended for me to go inside, and thus the obvious situational meaning of the door, *to enter*, had presented itself to me. Second, the fascinating quality of the fog and its colours prompted me *to explore* it – each new colour directed at me was intended to create varied sensations, perceptions, and associations. In the latter aspect, the environment affected me as *atmosphere* in the Böhmian sense Fischer-Lichte adopts – making me recall and thereby create contexts for my experience. In other words, I had the notion that the environment was addressing me, that it had intentionality, “wanting” me to take on agency and attribute meaning to the artwork. In her generic conception of installation art, the Danish art historian Anne Ring Petersen observes the importance of contexts, which Fischer-Lichte overlooks, as the installation as medium “often has been used to reject the modernistic notion of autonomous art and articulate a very high degree of awareness about the specific historic and spatial contexts the artwork is part of.”

Furthermore, installations “extend the work into the dimension of time and hence attain the characteristics of situation and process.” This Petersen sees as the “deliberate coordination of an interval-like structuring of space as a form of reception unfolding as successive temporality,” a feature she considers a spatial dramaturgy, which in its situational reception process resembles the theatre. The installation is a kind of staging which “forms an environment around the beholder,” which then “prompts the beholder to direct the body and the gaze in different directions. In that way it may sharpen the beholder’s awareness of how the body navigates in the artwork, i.e. an awareness of the phenomenological dimensions of the reception process and of subjectivity as a basis for aesthetic experience.”

Thus, in terms of directedness, one may think of this agency of installation art in the way that Fischer-Lichte ascribes performativity to the different phenomenological categories of corporeality, spatiality, temporality, tonality, and temporality; each of them can be staged in ways that activates a certain relation – even a *mutual* directedness – between the participant and the artwork/environment. To explain the paradoxical mutuality without feedback loop, one may simply consider another situation, namely how the Christian priest often leads the church in prayer as she turns away from the congregation and directs herself bodily towards the altar (which is often adorned with some mimetic representation of the crucified Jesus Christ). Here, the priest enters into a commu-
communication with someone who empirically is non-present, that is, the imagined other, God; nevertheless, the believer perceives this act as meaningful, two-sided directedness.

If I were to sum up what this elaboration on Böhnish’s directedness means in the context of my project, it is this: directedness is not always established by a (verifiably) living entity or materiality; in the case of the art installation, this relationship might even be perceived as one-sided or without a feedback loop and still be termed directedness – that is, as a covert or implicit directedness instigated by the artist behind the artwork, or an overt, or explicit directedness by the perceived presence of extrasensory entities.

Directedness, as I have discussed it above, is a physical precondition for the experience of transcendence, a staging device in creating potential for this kind of experience. What both Fischer-Lichte and Böhnish fail to consider, however, is how the feedback loop and directedness are connected to imagination. Imagination, or to be precise, the power of imagination in its Kantian understanding, is what needs to be activated if the beholder is to engage in the event through what I have called mental transcendence. This is what I have also called the theatrical level of the staged event, the level on which a doubling of signs occurs. This theatricalisation of objects is realised by the imagination of the beholder and facilitated by the acts of performative agents, both animate and inanimate ones. Here, the concept of ‘role-playing’ as conceived by the American theatre scholar David V. Mason enters my theoretical framework.

Mason operates with a two-sided role-playing concept that not only takes into consideration the role-constructing activities of the actor, but also the imaginary as well as affective work that the spectator performs during a theatrical event. This work is a cognitive response to the character the actor creates (or as any object is perceived as creating), in fact, a cognitive blending of the imaginative reality of the play and the reality of the theatre. Hence, as I already touched upon in “Subject and Purpose”, as spectator, one may react on a bodily affective level to the fiction as if this was empirical reality, cf. my childhood memories of a fearful reaction to a character getting lost in the woods. Or Mason’s own example of an exclamatory spectator reaction of disgust to the triumphant character of a sword fight digesting the blood of his victim, what Mason calls the “Eww!-Effect.”397 Of interest to my project are the similarities between religious experience and theatrical expe-

perience that Mason finds and which make him suggest this kind of experience as model for understanding spectator responses.

[T]heatre audiences [...] approach productions from a position of cultural conditioning (to which theatre itself contributes), and, in their uncomfortable seats beneath the exit signs, enter into play which combines both the world inside the production and the world of the theatre. In this way, theatrical experience is religious experience. Both seem to defy reason, and both develop through the same mechanism, which is the audience’s creative activity. Emotional experience of theatre, the kind which seems to be at odds with a production’s explicit fabrication, is, thus, less the consequence of the production itself—its realism, style, expression, the peculiar power of its *artistry*—than it is the result of the production’s harmony with an individual audience member’s worldview and that individual’s peculiar propensity for play.  

The idea of religious experience as a model for emotional experience in theatre stems from the Swedish psychologist of religion Hjalmar Sundén, who, in the 1950s, studied religious experience in terms of social role-playing behaviour—presented in his seminal work, *Religionen och rollerna* (1959). Rather than discussing Sundén’s religious role-playing concept and Mason’s adoption at length here, I shall briefly summarise it; later on in my analyses, I will return to discuss how it concretely manifests itself in my experiences of staged events. Sundén’s role-playing concept consists of four components that all come together in a self-transformational or self-transcending process: 1) the acquisition of a religious tradition and its roles, typically from known written narratives such as the Bible; 2) the taking of a role, i.e. association of the self’s circumstances with a traditional pattern, e.g. the experiences of a mythic or real historic person; 3) adopting a role in anticipation of the resolution of the traditional pattern in the self’s own circumstances, i.e. that what happened to one’s role model may happen to oneself; and 4) a culminating phase shift, which restructures the self’s perception in anticipation of God responding in the same way toward oneself as He had done toward the role-model. Mason sees a similar process, taking place in the way a spectator might relate to fictional characters on stage resulting in a strong affective response such as the *Eww!*-Effect.

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We can read dramatic literature as scripturally paradigmatic, and fictional characters—dramatic characters—as enjoying an ontological status similar to the roles of Sundén’s theory. In the same way that an individual facing a difficult surgery can experience the comforting presence of God by identifying with the biblical Isaac, a theatre-goer can experience the displeasure of tasting blood by identifying with the Calderonian Clindor. An audience member takes and adopts roles relevant to stage action in a way that is similar to the way subjects of religious experience take and adopt paradigmatic and divine roles.\footnote{Mason, 2008, p. 19.}

Besides the emphatic response to the actor’s character work in more conventional theatre, Mason also develops another type of role-playing which may – at least – be observed in ritual. Whereas the role-playing by the audience, as described above, occurred as a cognitive process, this other ritual role-playing is also an \textit{enacted} process. Mason illustrates this process in the devotional attitude that practitioners attain in the worship of the Infant Jesus of Prague, which is the mimetic caring for and dressing of an eighteen-inch wooden and wax statue, representing a toddler-age Jesus. A ritual activity, he maintains, is the contemporary equivalent of the medieval theological concept of \textit{imitatio}:

\textit{Imitatio}’s present manifestation in devotion to the [Infant Jesus of Prague] expressly models the fundamental elements of Sundén’s role-playing theory. The practice relies on a well-developed narrative tradition in which are embedded roles that the tradition explicitly valorizes as models of right behavior. Devotees can easily map these roles onto their own circumstances. Where the scriptural and mundane circumstances do not neatly coincide, the small statues and dolls involved in this devotional practice facilitate the mapping of the archaic tradition on the present. Given the devotee’s familiarity with the narrative tradition of the infant Jesus, his or her playing of a ceremonial or contemplative role leads the devotee towards the culmination of the narrative as tradition would have it. The consequence for the devotee is a truly lived role—a self that is, in a very real sense, what it plays.\footnote{Mason, 2012, p. 13; my insertion.}

It is possible to conceive of many other ritual and theatrical events than the ones Mason has studied in which the Sundénian narrative role-playing occurs as a basis for experiences of transcendence, whether religious or merely aesthetic. Applying this role-playing model to an aesthetics of the performative further calibrates it for the study of experiences of transcendence – es-
especially how the physical and the mental, the material and the spiritual, are interdependent factors in the generation of such experiences.

Dorthe Jørgensen’s Metaphysics of Experience

While the calibration of Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative provides the theoretical approach to the staging properties and perimeters that condition the event, analysing the potentiality of experiences of transcendence requires looking into what more specifically could constitute such experiences of the spectator/congregant, as well as circumstances and capacities which would render them possible. As a theoretical framework for this part of the analysis, I employ the metaphysics of experience developed by the Danish philosopher, historian of ideas, and theologian Dorthe Jørgensen.

The raison d’être of this new metaphysics is the need to address the variety of transcendent experiences that people of post-Christian Western societies may still have, while relating them to similar experiences throughout history, their occurrence and representation in the arts, and their conceptions in philosophy and religion. Based in hermeneutic phenomenology it is a timely attempt to explore the consequences such experiences have for the development of aesthetics within both contemporary philosophy of religion and theology – a thinking which, to a large extent, is still underdeveloped both in the Nordic countries and elsewhere.402 Of additional and particular interest to my project, Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience is also aimed at addressing what she sees as the tendency in the philosophy of the arts and arts theory (and this includes theatre and performance studies) to underprioritise the dimension of experience in the methodologies of analysis, hence overlooking the profound existential potential of the arts.403 In this regard, Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience may be considered an appropriate response to Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative, given its promise of accommodating experiences of transcendence.

In the following, I will present Jørgensen’s metaphysics with emphasis on the concepts that are relevant to the understanding and analysis of experiences of transcendence from the point of view of performance analysis and in relation to Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative. I will not undertake a complete review of Jørgensen’s research project, nor go into its philosophical genealogy and reasoning, since this lies beyond the scope of this

403 Ibid., p. 43.
thesis. In addition to the presentation, some calibration of concepts is needed before Jørgensen’s metaphysics can be applied to performance analysis. Jørgensen’s concepts are developed for a generic aesthetics and not with a specific application to the performative sphere in mind. In order to make this application of her aesthetics, I shall combine her concept of ‘immanent transcendence’ with Alfred Schütz’s socio-phenomenological concepts of transcendence, which allow for a pragmatic differentiation of transcendence related to concrete situations involving the subject, different states of consciousness, and the subject’s interplay with its surroundings. This calibration, in combination with what Jørgensen develops as conditions of experiences, will then provide me with the needed framework for analysing and modelling experiences of transcendence.

What I have hitherto referred to as the metaphysics of experience is Dorthe Jørgensen’s own designation for a longstanding research project that has become the hallmark of her scholarly career. As such it does not refer to a single work – which was the case with Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative. The metaphysics of experience is an aesthetics developed throughout many years, roughly since 1995, and its development may be traced through many publications, including articles and monographs as well as essays addressing the general public. In my presentation, I will mainly rely on the books Skønhedens metamorfose – De æstetiske idéers historie

404 Jørgensen seems to take a negative stance towards the performative and performativity; see, for example, Jørgensen, 2014, pp. 390-391: “the so-called aestheticisation, which exactly to a high degree prioritise the tangible side of the aesthetic, i.e. the material and rhetorical form, performativity, (self-)staging as well as the body and sensoriness.” Certainly, Jørgensen is right in being critical towards any over-emphasis of the performative; yet, she does not herself pursue the possibilities of combining her metaphysics with performativity. The more reason to do so from a theatre studies perspective.

405 Currently, Dorthe Jørgensen holds the position of Professor of Philosophy and History of Ideas with Special Responsibilities at the Department for Philosophy and History of Ideas, University of Aarhus, Denmark. The Danish academic title “Professor with Special Responsibilities” refers in this case to her responsibilities of developing mainly the metaphysics of experience as a new field of research and education at an international level. For an official explanation of the title, see: http://www.hum.au.dk/engelsk/engsv/mso-en.htm (accessed 16 April, 2018). Besides her PhD in the history of ideas, the work on the metaphysics of experience has earned her the Danish honorary degrees Higher Doctoral Degree in Philosophy (dr.phil.) and Higher Doctoral Degree in Theology (dr.teol.). For a full CV, see: http://pure.au.dk/portal/en/persons/id(5252a995-bcf4-4431-92b7-38fc09c770a0).html (accessed 16 April, 2016).
(2002), Skønhed – en engel gik forbi (2006), and Den skønne tænkning. Veje til erfaringsmetafysik. Religionsfilosofisk udmøntet (2014), and the articles “Profan metafysik – Om det guddommelige i metafysikken” (1999), “Guddomlighedserfaring i en moderne verden” (2002), and “Sensoriness and Transcendence: On the Aesthetic Possibility of Experiencing Divinity” (2015). The monographs taken in the order in which they are mentioned above may be said to describe the overall development of Jørgensen’s metaphysics from the point of view of the history of ideas, via a more essayistic philosophical exploration related to culture and history, to a stringent contextualisation in philosophy of religion and theology. While the articles, in the order they are mentioned, reflect this development, they highlight different conceptualisations of the divine in philosophy and religion, from pre-Socratic metaphysics, via profane metaphysics in early twentieth century modernity, to metaphysics of experience in a contemporary context. From the on-set, Jørgensen’s work has had a clear objective, which was summarised in the programmatic article “Guddommelighedserfaring i en moderne verden.” At that time, the project did not have a theological aim of also launching a theological aesthetics, which was a turn it took in later years. Taking its point of departure in the German eighteenth century philosopher Alexander G. Baumgarten, who established the aesthetics as a form of epistemology based in sensitive perception or philosophical aesthetics, and mainly inspired by the early twentieth century thinking of Walter Benjamin on “higher experience,” Jørgensen has developed the concept of metaphysics of experience as a profane metaphysics in response to late-modern secularised perceptions of the world. These often lack the interpretative frame of reference earlier provided by religion and religious belief and need to be addressed through a new metaphysics.

My suggestion of a profane metaphysics rests on the recognition that it is necessary to get out of classical metaphysics, but that this should happen without renouncing any kind of metaphysics. The task consists of developing a thinking that neither overrides our experiences of eg. profane aura [Jørgensen’s concept of profane surplus meaning, which is the opposite to Benjamin’s ‘cultic aura’] nor ignores our need to interpret these experiences metaphysically.

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The classical speculative metaphysics must therefore be replaced by a new form of metaphysics, which is anchored in experience and for which I [...] have launched the term metaphysics of experience. In general, philosophy identifies experience as empirical experience, and hence it places experience and metaphysics in opposition to each other. However, there are also other types of experience, eg. profane auratic experience, experience of immanent transcendence, metaphysical, religious, and aesthetic experience, or all in all the experience of divinity. The new metaphysics, which I argue for, explores these other forms of experience, instead of – like classical metaphysics – to focus on transcendent objects as the classical metaphysical concept of God. It must be the philosophy of a form of experience that transcends the normal world of experience, and it must be a profane metaphysics in the sense that it is not theological. The new metaphysics must be a profane (meaning non-theological) theory of the experience of divinity.  

Hence, Jørgensen’s metaphysics is still a metaphysics building on the philosophical tradition in which the nature of existence relates to the transcendent or to a reality beyond what is perceptible to the senses; yet, it differs from the speculative tradition in that it interests itself in what is, after all, accessible to human sensoriness and perception in an event and from which experiences of transcendence may evolve. In this sense, the metaphysics of experience “takes seriously the phenomenological circumstance that even modern people may experience the world as meaningfully coherent and characterized by an interplay of truth, goodness and beauty, and that such experiences, which in modern times have been called ‘aesthetic’, are related to the experiences previously called ‘religious’. “ In other words, the metaphysics of experience is a phenomenology of experience; it interests itself in the conscious process of gaining an experience in a specific historical context, i.e. how to interpret and learn from impressions, in this case, those that may challenge our norms and outlooks and defy comprehension on the verge of the unknowable, uncontrollable, and impossible. At this stage, it is important to take a closer look at what Jørgensen understands by ‘experience’ as well as ‘transcendence’ – not only for understanding her philosophy, but also for understanding how the two terms hereafter inform the way I apply them to my theoretical framework and analyses.

The English language does not accommodate the nuances of the philosophical concept that Jørgensen employs to understand experience. Danish and German (as well as Swedish) have different single words with particular meanings for that which English only has the one word “experience”: Danish oplevelse and German Erlebnis (Swedish upplevelse) designate what is best translated into “impression”, whereas Danish erfaring and German Erfahrung (Swedish erfarenhet) describe what one may gain from the impression. Based on this linguistic circumstance, Jørgensen offers the following qualification of the philosophical concept of experience:

Experiences require sense-based impressions, but differ [...] from these. This makes experiences more specific due to the element of reflexivity that causes impressions to become interpreted impressions. While the sensual impression is stimulating, the experience is lasting and transformative by nature: it allows us to see the world in a new light. My distinction between impression and experience refers not least to Walter Benjamin, who [...] in German precisely distinguished between Erlebnis and Erfahrung. Gadamer also operated with such a distinction, and to emphasize the transformative nature of experience, like Gadamer did, one may use the term metamorphosis (German Verwandlung).\textsuperscript{410}

For something to qualify as an experience, Jørgensen asserts, it has to have a lasting effect on the one who undergoes the process, and as an undergoing it is characterised by a certain reflective responsiveness on behalf of the undergoer, otherwise no insight is given: “Experience is a process, one as a subject does not control, but which has a changing or even transforming influence on the subject and conveys substantial insight. On the other hand, an event [opplevelse] may be enjoyable, but the pleasure it brings is just automatic response to external stimuli and it leaves nothing of self-worth.”\textsuperscript{411} It is interesting to note the correlation which exists here between Jørgensen and Fischer-Lichte. Fischer-Lichte conceptualises aesthetic experience as liminal experience “which can lead to transformations or which is in itself already experienced as transformative.”\textsuperscript{412} While Fischer-Lichte does not explicitly and consequently distinguish between impression and experience, her understanding of aesthetic experience, at least in its lasting transformative effect, comes close to Jørgensen’s, although Jørgensen – as I will shortly discuss – does not employ Turner’s anthropological concept of liminality to conceptu-

\textsuperscript{410} Jørgensen, 2014, pp. 611-612, n. 1477.  
\textsuperscript{411} Jørgensen, 2003, p. 237; my insertion and translation.  
\textsuperscript{412} Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 190.
alise experience. What is more important still, however, Jørgensen does not attribute the same degree of significance to sensation as Fischer-Lichte does. In fact, Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics qua its orientation towards the somatic and sensuous would not qualify as an aesthetics in the philosophical tradition beginning with Baumgarten’s *Aesthetica* (1750); it is art theory or, at best, an aesthetics of the senses, as it does not emphasise the reflexivity or “sensit"itive perception” in Baumgarten’s thinking that Jørgensen is seeking to develop for her own philosophical and theological aesthetics. Jørgensen challenges what she sees as both inadequacy and scientism in the aesthetics of art studies: “The sensitive perception originates in a conglomerate of sensation, feeling and presentiment, in which sensation only plays a smaller part. The sensation is important as the foundation for the rest, but it cannot stand alone, for existential realization requires an element of spirit.” Jørgensen wants “philosophical aesthetics and art studies to supplement and inspire each other.” On the level of conception, the inadequacy and scientism of Fischer-Lichte’s theory becomes apparent: Jørgensen addresses the necessity of interpretation to the process of experience, whereas Fischer-Lichte excludes this part from the event relying only on sensoriness and perception to produce experience. Thus, Fischer-Lichte derives all answers from the bodily presence in the event, while Jørgensen is not content with presence alone but demands afterthought.

Turning to the forms of ‘transcendence’ Jørgensen is interested in, the impressions it generates are of such a nature that these impressions call for reflection and interpretation, a call the subject may be more or less ready to respond to depending on the possession of any adequate interpretation resource (aesthetic, philosophical, or religious). Before introducing Jørgensen’s own understanding of the concept transcendence, it might be useful to broaden the perspective somewhat in order to place Jørgensen in relation to the particular way I refer to the concept in this thesis.

In contemporary philosophy, transcendence on a generic level is often considered in terms of “vertical transcendence” and “horizontal transcendence”. According to the American professor of English literature, Regina Schwart, the category of the vertical “suggests leaving the immanent world, leaving the phenomenal, for another world, either in a transascendence to the heights or a transdescendence to the depths,” whereas the horizontal dis-
tinction “[o]n the one hand, […] is the project of self-transcendence, the understanding that we are incomplete, thrusting ourselves into an incomplete future”, (of which death is “the heroic grasping of the last possibility”), while on the other hand, it “also includes the rethinking of transcendence in the context of ethics: here, the subject is less the self-transcendence of the ego than the relation to the transcendent other embedded in social life.” As Schwart remarks, these categories are merely heuristic, as they “ultimately break down, for the vertical inflects the horizontal, and vice versa.” Hence, one may think of the point of convergence between the two axes as the point where the spatio-temporal dimension of the horizontal mutually informs the cognitive-imaginary dimension of the vertical, or, to use Schwart’s apt quote by Levinas: “There can be no ‘knowledge’ of God separated from the relationship with men.” Like Jørgensen, Schwart sees transcendence as an immanent phenomenon, i.e. accessible to humans only from within the limitations of immanence: “Transcendence is a delirious rupture in immanence, an erotic claim made by it, a gap in the Real, a question put to subjectivity, a realm of the impossible that breaks into possibility.” Hitherto in this thesis I have distinguished between what I have called “mental transcendence”, referring to the spectator’s imaginary going beyond what is – in an empirical or positivistic sense – actually physically appearing and occurring on stage, and “physical transcendence” as the abandonment of the habitually separated spectator in conventional forms of theatre to positions moving into fluctuating and mobile agencies of spectator/co-actor in ritual, installations, and performance theatre (see “Subject and Purpose”, pp. 8-22). Although perhaps not exactly similar to the vertical/horizontal in substance, they certainly share the feature of convergence, as I have already given several examples of in the introductory chapter as well as in the above discussion of Böhnish’s directedness and Mason’s Sundénian role-playing. Jørgensen’s concept of transcendence brings further philosophical substance to understanding what the metaphysics of experience might mean in the context of the stage event.

Like Schwart, Jørgensen understands transcendence in terms of a dynamic vertical/horizontal convergence that tests the boundaries of experience. Traditionally, the concept ‘transcendence’ is used in binary opposition to ‘immanence’, as the “divine/metaphysical/otherworldly and secular/physical/the worldly”: “However, the words immanence and transcen-

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417 Ibid.
418 Quoted in ibid., p. xi; Levinas, 1969, p. 79.
419 Schwart, 2004, p. x.
ence can also have a more verbal character, meaning ‘remaining in’ and ‘going beyond’. To the extent that the words in question have been used as verbs, they have traditionally been linked with the aforementioned version of them as nouns. Immanence and transcendence has denoted ‘to remain in the immanent’ and ‘to go beyond the immanent by slipping into the transcendent’.¹⁴⁴²⁰ But instead of remaining caught up in a binary thinking that sees immanence and transcendence as opposites, Jørgensen introduces the complex conception of the two dimensions in which transcendence is folded into immanence as a perceptible disturbance, interruption or tension that allows the observer to mentally go beyond what is otherwise physically the conditions of the situation. This idea of ‘immanent transcendence’ is the basis of all that I consider to be experiences of transcendence.

One may […] imagine immanence that do not requires anything transcendent, from which the immanent itself is different; – thus not relying on any absolute referent outside immanence itself; – but nevertheless contains gaps and cracks, which generates experience of immanent transcendence. One may more specifically imagine the experience of immanent transcendence, which is without any object in the form of something transcendent; hence, it does not provide knowledge of something beyond the immanent but nevertheless it interrupts the opaqueness of the pure immanence. One may imagine such an objectless experience of immanent transcendence, in which transcendence is not substantiated by something transcendent, but on the contrary is pure motion and more specifically a movement on the spot, as it does not lead the thought to something other than the immanent, the experience being without an object. One can imagine such a dance of thoughts on the spot because there is testimony that it is happening, and because the imagination are nourished by them, when it creates its hypothesis of what could also be possible.⁴²¹

The experience of immanent transcendence, which Jørgensen describes here, may either be the equivalent of what she elsewhere understands as late-modern man’s incapacity to interpret an event that traditionally has been recognised as a religious or metaphysical experience: “he or she has no clue to the meaning of what occurred”⁴²², or it may be seen as a procedural phase, during which confusion or reorientation is the prerequisite of gaining any experience of transcendence, that is, “[a]s the interpretative beings we are, we may therefore always already be on our way to leave behind the experi-

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⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 544; my translation.
⁴²² Jørgensen, 2015, p. 83; my translation.
ence of immanent transcendence to enter e.g. the religious experience or the experience of beauty, although typically without being aware of it.\textsuperscript{423} Here it is worth noticing that Jørgensen emphasises the difference between the words “transcendence” and “the transcendent”, which are often confused or used interchangeably, especially in English-language philosophy. For Jørgensen, the term ‘the transcendent’ is inextricably connected to an identifiable object and should be reserved for describing this kind of object-oriented perception, whereas the term ‘transcendence’ applies to the process of going beyond one’s normal perception of the world or of one’s self:

The word \textit{transcendence} I prefer to reserve for designating a movement, whether it moves from the outside and in as in the case of the incarnation or inside and out, such as when it is a matter of self-transcendence. In particular, it is wise to use only the word transcendence to denote the transcending process constituted by the experience of transcendence, no matter what direction the movement takes, and regardless of whether it has an object or it just does not have it.\textsuperscript{424}

The historical changeability and variation to this kind of experience, as well as its recurrent and persistent traits of transcendence, prompted Jørgensen to coin the generic term ‘experience of divinity’ (\textit{guddommlighedserfaring}). As a concept, she explains it has “no discourse of its own”\textsuperscript{425}, as it does not identify a particular object, i.e. the “experience of a ‘something’ of divine character. The experienced divinity […] only exists as a divinity-revealing dimension – a kind of intangible and incomprehensible ‘excess’ – in metaphysical, religious as well as aesthetic experiences.”\textsuperscript{426} She further qualifies the concept in direct contrast to a concept of God/the divine: “[E]xperience of divinity is purely and simply the same as experience of transcendence, while experience of the divine, on the other hand, is equivalent to experiencing some particular transcendent entity, which is then called by the name of a god.”\textsuperscript{427} Furthermore the concept is “extra-historical”\textsuperscript{428}, which means the term mainly serves the purpose of a common denominator of the phenomenon’s historical variety. Jørgensen explains that she constructed the concept in critical opposition to what she

\textsuperscript{423} Jørgensen, 2014, p. 613; my translation.
\textsuperscript{424} Ibid., p. 566; my translation.
\textsuperscript{425} Jørgensen, 2002, p. 105; my translation.
\textsuperscript{426} Jørgensen, 2003, p. 21; my translation.
\textsuperscript{427} Jørgensen, 2014, p. 574; my translation.
\textsuperscript{428} Jørgensen, 2002, p. 104; my translation.
had noted as a general suspicion against historical continuity in much research on modernity, asserting the period’s/the mentality’s rupture with tradition.\textsuperscript{429} As a consequence, one may find that Jørgensen’s concept of the experience of divinity may have less practical value as an analytical concept, whilst ensuring an awareness of the familiarity of such experiences across history. Jørgensen traces the phenomenon’s history to its original disassociation from religion in the natural philosophy of pre-Socratic philosophers,\textsuperscript{430} in Homer’s description of the origin of poetry in the “divine madness” (Greek \textit{theia mania}) taking hold of the poet, i.e. a state of trance or ecstasy; the metaphysical experience of the Platonic idea of beauty; the medieval religious experience of the transcendent God’s presence either felt as an immanent presence or through the beauty of the Creation.\textsuperscript{431} Only when Jørgensen describes the phenomenon in a modern or late-modern context does it change in one significant way: it becomes the experience of immanent transcendence, i.e. the notion of surplus meaning or becoming part of that which is greater than oneself without being able to explain this notion. In this case, Jørgensen seems to be aware that calling it experience of divinity might be somewhat misleading, as it is easily confused with experience of the divine or religious experience, and that to those who are repelled by religion, the abstract term experience of transcendence might be more agreeable.\textsuperscript{432}

Another important term in Jørgensen’s metaphysical vocabulary is the ‘experience of beauty’. According to Jørgensen, beauty is an experience — an experience of beauty. Jørgensen’s understanding builds on different philosophers such as Plato, Baumgarten, Kant, Benjamin who, in their historical contexts, all saw beauty as a profoundly existential experience\textsuperscript{433}, and she arrives at a modern phenomenological concept of beauty that abandons ontological or metaphysical attempts to understand what beauty is. Beauty cannot be objectified, she argues; beauty rather consists in \textit{qualities} associated with the experience of transcendence. Jørgensen tries to deal with a widespread superficial understanding of beauty in our culture. Basically, the experience of the beautiful has very little to do with gazing at a well-proportioned face or finding pleasure in the experience of art. Contrary to what many people

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\textsuperscript{429} Jørgensen, 2014, pp. 574-575; my translation.
\textsuperscript{432} Jørgensen, 2014, pp. 573-574.
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today would probably assume, the experience of beauty can also accommodate the sublime, the hideous, the disharmonious, or the terrifying and incomprehensible. The beautiful is that which “has value in itself” and that which cannot – without subduing it – be turned into “means for something else.” The experience of beauty leaves an impact much deeper than the mere impression of external forms, whether they are natural or artificially constructed. Albeit the experience of beauty is certainly sensual and stimulating at first, it is also characterised as being reflexive and transformative; it allows one to learn that not all things in the world have their purpose outside themselves, but in themselves.

The actual experience of beauty is associated with an elation that is reflected in the excitement or enthusiasm that may take hold of one, in the encounter with art, another human being, or natural phenomena. This feeling may bring a soothing joy because it allows one to be present with the object in a state in which one is out of one’s mind or not controlled by one’s intentional everyday subject, and in which the object has come out of itself and no longer appears as that which it is usually perceived as, but just is. This is the experience of immanent transcendence that “appears like a hint about something that is greater than and beyond man himself, and which is not found outside of, but rather in the middle of what is immanent, i.e. the world that immediately surrounds man as a finite being.” It is “experiencing a surplus of meaning” that precedes interpretation. It is an intense notion of collectively being, which lets one sense connections between things in the world. These moments of beauty are joyful because they open themselves to a horizon of meaning. I might add that this also means that the experience of beauty is not devoid of any sense of awe (in its double sense of wonder and fear) that may accompany the realisation of openness – of becoming part of that which is greater than oneself or facing what might be perceived as the “Wholly Other.” In this sense, moments of beauty are constitutional of meaning depending on who the interpreter is. These under-goings can be interpreted as an aesthetic, metaphysical, or religious experience. Thus, Jørgensen argues against those opposed to the concept of beauty, primarily

434 Jørgensen, 2006, p. 7; my translation.
435 Ibid., p. 7.
436 Ibid., p. 206; my translation.
437 Ibid., p. 58; my translation.
438 Here, I refer to the phenomenological concept of the ‘numinous’ or god-like, which Rudolf Otto developed and described as the sentiment of mysterium tremendum et fascinosum; see: Otto, 1917, pp. 25-32. Jørgensen does not make this connection.
art historians influenced by avant-garde and postmodernist thinking who claim the experience of beauty makes one unworldly and ignorant of the world’s problems; on the contrary, Jørgensen contends: “The experience of the meaning that it represents evokes the abysmal question of what meaning is at all, while it puts all the world’s meaninglessness in critical perspective.”

While Jørgensen’s concepts of ‘experience of divinity’ and ‘experience of beauty’ are common extra-historical denominators for experiences of transcendence that allow one to observe historical continuity and iteration of experiential qualities, the terms ‘aesthetic experience’, ‘metaphysical experience’, and ‘religious experience’ all refer to specific interpretations of experiences of transcendence. Here, in reverse order, I will review these forms of experience as Jørgensen sees them, contrasting the ones that involve the most elaborate frameworks of interpretation, the religious and metaphysical, with what Jørgensen seems to hold as the foundational form of experiences of transcendence, the aesthetic.

In Den skønne tænkning Jørgensen relies on a concrete example to illustrate what the three forms of experience mean, namely that of the miraculous phenomenon of Myrna, a Greek melkitic-catholic woman who lives in the Syrian capital of Damascus. She and her husband have turned their home into a place of pilgrimage, drawing people from all over the world, because of her stigmata, visions, and the olive oil that, on a recurrent basis, has flowed from her hands while praying as well as from a small icon. This oil has healing powers, as evidenced in numerous documented cases of spontaneous patient recoveries. Jørgensen visited Myrna in 2010 and witnessed the miraculous appearance of olive oil on her hands. This event made Jørgensen ask herself whether what she had seen and heard in Myrna’s home was religious or aesthetic. Comparing herself to Myrna’s and her family’s understanding of what is going on, it would seem Jørgensen leans toward a

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440 Ibid., p. 58.
441 Ibid., p. 59; my translation.
442 Jørgensen refers to her as Myrna Ahkras. A Google search on the Internet informs me that Ahkras is her maiden name, while Nazzour is her married name. In her capacity as a stigmatic and visionary, she is also known as Myrna of Soufanieh – Soufanieh being the name of the Damascene suburb in which she lives – or simply Myrna. Cf. the account in Niels Christian Hvidt, Mirakler. Møder mellem himmel og jord, Copenhagen: Gyldendals Forlag, 2001, pp. 121-137.
443 Here, I rely on Hvidt’s comprehensive account on the phenomenon Myrna, which contains more information than Jørgensen’s short description.
metaphysical rather than a religious interpretation. According to Jørgensen, whenever Myrna and her family undergo “that which qualifies as experiences of transcendence, they invariably perceive this as signs from God, testimony to his presence, etc.” Based on her observations, Jørgensen arrives at a conception of religious experience.

Whoever gains a religious experience, would say that he or she has perceived the presence of the power that person believes in. No matter how intangible it is, religious experience, in other words, has an object in the sense that it is directed at something or someone beyond oneself. The experiences of Myrna and her fellow believers are not merely experiences of transcendence, but religious experiences, because as noted they interpret their impressions religiously and that determines the nature of their experience. It is not the mere impression, but the interpretation of the impression that constitutes the experience as experience – here, as religious experience.

In contrast, Jørgensen imagines a modern Westerner who “perhaps could be inclined to interpret aesthetic […] in the sense of a reduced version of the [philosophically] aesthetic […], in which the aesthetic is merely consisting of external forms and sensoriness.” This would mean an interpretational emphasis on the empirical, “Myrna as body, her appearance, the pattern of stigmata, the red colour of the blood, the aroma of the oil, her distorted facial features, the plastic stools in the chapel her home has been transformed into, etc.” However, a genuinely aesthetic experience would be more than the exceptionally sensorial, it would also be an experience of beauty:

Sitting in the Myrna’s home you can be seized in a way that later on you may think that for a moment you had the impression of cohesion and meaning that you yourself would call by the name beauty. Again, the interpretation is decisive, and it determines that this impression, which takes hold of you to such a degree that you get significantly involved and thus also change yourself, exactly qualifies as an experience of beauty. This is not a religious experience because in spite of Myrna’s own understanding of what is happening you do not yourself explain the experience religiously. It is, however, an aesthetic experience…

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445 Ibid., p. 610; my translation.
446 Ibid., p. 611; my translation.
447 Ibid.; my translation.
448 Ibid., p. 612; my translation.
This aesthetic experience I would argue is also a metaphysical experience as it is explained with reference to a given philosophical system concerned with a concept of beauty.\textsuperscript{449}

In Jørgensen’s thinking, the religious and the metaphysical are categories that are easily distinguishable as separate categories through their contextual systems of reference and interpretation. The aesthetic, however, is not so easy to single out and keep apart from the first two. This is so for a good reason:

[W]here the term aesthetic experience indeed means aesthetic experience, which [in the metaphysical sense] basically equals the experience of beauty, the terms aesthetic and religious experience according to my theory denote different interpretations of the same experience of surplus meaning. In addition, now that this experience may be so complex in itself that not only can it be interpreted in several ways depending on tradition, mindset and language; should it be described adequately, it may be characterised as both religious and aesthetic (as well as phenomenological and hermeneutical) and may be described more specifically as both at once.\textsuperscript{450}

One may be inclined to think of the aesthetic experience as foundational, that it comes \textit{before} the religious and the metaphysical experience; yet, Jørgensen sees it as \textit{always already} religious (meaningful) and metaphysical (insightful) since the aesthetic constitutes the basic notional observation of all experience and realisation.\textsuperscript{451} The overlapping of experiential forms is therefore an indication of their equal origin.

On the basis of joining philosophical aesthetics (Baumgarten) and hermeneutical phenomenology (Heidegger, Løgstrup, Böhme), Jørgensen constructs a theoretical framework for understanding the origin of experiences of transcendence in certain capacities that may be attributed to the participant. As a common term for these capacities, I choose the term ‘reactivity’. Reactivity designates the state or power of being reactive. The term accommodates Jørgensen’s view that experiences of transcendence are phenomena that happen to the participant of an event and that the participant cannot avoid undergoing. The framework consists in the concepts of ‘sensitivity’ (Baumgarten), ‘attunement’ (Heidegger, Løgstrup), and ‘atmosphere’ (Böhme), which are to be seen as factors in the generation of experience.

\textsuperscript{449} Jørgensen, 2002, p. 106.  
\textsuperscript{450} Jørgensen, 2014, p. 755; my insertions and translation.  
\textsuperscript{451} Ibid., p. 796; my translation.
Sensitivity as “sensitive perception” is developed by the eighteenth century German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. Sensitive perception is a complex interplay of ‘sensation’, ‘feeling’, and ‘presentiment’. Jørgensen describes how she understands sensitivity as a capacity for experiences of transcendence.

The sensitive perception differs from that which generally is the topic of epistemology, namely logical reasoning and sensory impression respectively, since it does not originate primarily in reason or sensation but by interaction between sensation, feeling and presentiment. Unlike the logical reasoning, the sensitive perception does not provide analytical anchoring knowledge of something of an objective nature, but insight of a synthesizing kind into something that transcends the subject matter. Due to the source of sensitive perception found in sensation, feeling and presentiment it is truly an experience. But the sensitive perception is an experience, which in itself constitutes a form of recognition because the experience in question does not consist in empirical experience, but in the experience of transcendence. Furthermore, in Baumgarten’s legacy it became an increasingly urgent thought that this experience of transcendence is objectless, also in an abstract sense. It is not an experience of something particular transcendent, but an experience of immanent transcendence: a sudden opening of the world that provides insight, which, however, requires interpretation.452

In other words, one may consider sensitivity as a reactive openness that is facilitated by sensation, feeling, and presentiment as cognitive capacities.

To relate this reactivity or reactive openness to hermeneutical phenomenology, Jørgensen adds two related concepts of ‘attunement’, one developed by Martin Heidegger and the other by the Danish theologian and philosopher K.E. Løgstrup. This adds a philosophy of existence to the philosophy of consciousness that Baumgarten’s aesthetics represents. Heidegger connects attunement with both being-in-the-world and understanding: put simply one always already understands the world by one’s being in it, and at the same time the being-in-the-world is in a certain way attuned as a conditioning of the participant’s very existence, without which there would not be recognition. Jørgensen sums up what this means: “Because how-one-finds-onself-ness [Befindlichkeit] is open, there is per definition understanding (but not necessarily recognition), and vice versa: Understanding is not possible without the recognition, because all understanding is attuned and thus envelopes

one in a mood." In other words, the mood that one feels in a certain situation affects one’s attitude to that same situation. Løgstrup uses attunement in a similar way. Jørgensen explains:

Understood as something for the mind quite basic the attunement is not only a mood or a feeling, but a disposition for the specific moods and feelings we experience. However, we do not experience the attunement as such. Once we know that it exists and is important for what we feel, and thus also what we think and do, we can only thank the memory for this […]. We cannot describe the attunement we currently find ourselves in, but if a former attunement is awakened by recollection, we can articulate it poetically. […] Or to return to the relationship between sensation and attunement, it was not the sensation as such, but the attunement associated with sensation that was Løgstrup’s concern, and the attunement exceeds physics. Attuned we are not just a body or, on the other hand, only reason. In the attunement we move beyond the body and the mind into the intermediate world of feeling, sensation, and presentiment; – the corporality, […] Gernot Böhme call it […]. Or it was through the attunement that Løgstrup most approached this intermediate world, in which things are not objects for us as subjects, but where both they and we are still there with each other.  

So far, in this framework of concepts, one may observe how a connection between reflexivity and corporality emerges, going from Baumgarten towards Böhme. It is with Böhme’s concept of ‘atmosphere’ that the abstract becomes relatively more concrete, steeped in materiality, and that Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience meet with Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetic of the performative in the common goal of overcoming the binary opposition of subject and object in the metamorphosis of aesthetic experience. Jørgensen gives an outline of Böhme’s phenomenology of atmosphere:

The central concept is the concept of the atmosphere, because “the constitutive observation event is a notion of presence,” and its first object is the atmosphere. Böhme also talks about the atmospheric, which, however, follows the atmosphere. The observation, as it were, is a unity of subject and object, a “switching state”, a “coexistence,” and the atmospheric is more distinctly separated from the subject than the atmosphere is. Without actually being a thing, the atmospheric can be experienced somewhat like a thing, and one does not have to be affected by it in order to know its ‘what-being’ (German Was-Sein). Böhme mentions the night, the autumn and the lighting as examples of

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454 Ibid., pp. 631-634; my translation.
something atmospheric. On the other hand, one cannot be distanced completely from an atmosphere, without it breaking down or condensing into a thing. Either one is dissolved in the atmosphere in terms of mood, or one is a little distant from it, but still affectively influenced by it. Both atmospheres and the atmospheric are characterized by being spatially unlimited, but in the atmosphere there is always a subjective part. It is only in the current experience one is affected by it and it is a subjective reality, i.e. only as touched by it one knows its ‘what-being’. At the same time, the atmosphere understood as the attuned space reveals a quasi-objective status, and it can be perceived and discussed by several people. As examples, Böhme mentions the sad November atmosphere, which makes one depressed, the tense atmosphere of a meeting, which is upsetting, and the cheerful atmosphere of a spring morning, which makes one happy. These atmospheres are neither states of a subject nor properties of an object, and yet they belong to both the subject and the object – they are co-constituted by both. […] Atmospheres are the connection between subject and object that precedes the differentiation of specific sensory experiences and prior to the formation of actual subjects and objects. They are “the common reality of observers and observed”, experienced in a simultaneous sense of one’s own and one’s own bodily presence and how it is to be present.\footnote{Jørgensen, 2014, pp. 413-414; my translation.}

While Fischer-Lichte’s use of Böhme tends toward objectificating or reducing the atmosphere, taking her point of departure in the way an atmosphere emanates from things to affect the surroundings and the subjects (the “ecstasy of things”, p. 112), Jørgensen is clearly interested in the reciprocity and relational aspect of atmospheres and the atmospheric; this means reading Böhme in the light of Baumgarten, Heidegger, and Løgstrup to combine sensitivity and attunement with atmosphere. Interestingly, Jørgensen’s thorough foray into the thinking of the four philosophers leads her to the same conclusion as Fischer-Lichte, that aesthetic experience is a metamorphosis achieved through overcoming the divide between subject and object. Fischer-Lichte, however, seeks the transformative power in Turner’s anthropological concept of liminality – a social anti-structure adopted from traditional African society; a spatio-temporal lacunae of betwixt-betweenness that allows the passage from one symbolic state to another. Within the ritual institution, liminality generates transformations of social status; but its transformational power rely on the sanctioning of the process by the community. Fischer-Lichte has proposed a concept of aesthetic experience as liminality for the performing arts in secularised Western societies that may achieve
effects of lasting change; yet, in order to work, the liminal process requires a consensus on rules, norms, values, and beliefs that is not to be found in these societies. Instead of building on an external social structure, Jørgensen’s hermeneutical phenomenology explores the inner structures of experience and their interplay with other forms, and proposes a concept which, at a glance, may seem similar to Turnerian liminality. The three experiential capacities of sensibility, attunement, and atmosphere all constitute an in-betweenness, which Jørgensen denotes as the “intermediate world” (mellemverdenen). The advantage of this approach is that the intermediate world does not rely on specific societal circumstances to function but draws its experiential potentiality from the three capacities.

It is namely the intermediate world, which harbours the surplus meaning of experiences of transcendence that became the subject of systematic philosophical analysis by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s introduction of aesthetics. [Since then] the intermediate world became more specifically thematised not only with an interest in a special form of recognition, but also understood as an entire law in itself. In the form of among others Martin Heidegger’s analysis of the how-one-finds-oneself-ness, K.E. Løgstrup’s idea about attunement, and [...] Gernot Böhme’s concept of atmosphere this even happened in a way that consciously sought beyond the philosophy of consciousness. As far as the how-one-finds-oneself-ness, the attunement, and the atmosphere go, we have to do with a layer of experience in which what is going on is of a sensating, emotional and presentiment nature, and in which there is no subject or object in the sense of intellectual recognition. […] These experiences are [...] of an open but unmistakably meaningful nature, and they are events, which, despite their attractiveness, are not so unrealistic. Perhaps the world itself in the most everyday situations can open up in experience, that is, the meaning of another order, a surplus of meaning, can emerge. In that case, we are dealing with an aesthetically conveyed possibility of the experience of transcendence that [...] can be understood as a poetic dimension of the world.

It is this world poetry – actually the poetry of the intermediate world – which from the beginning has interested philosophical aesthetics and later as well became the subject of hermeneutic phenomenology, and it is also the one that the metaphysics of experience will now illuminate. However, if we are to have access to the poetry of the intermediate world, we must enter into the space of how-one-finds-oneself-ness, the attunement, the atmosphere, as they are just synonymous terms for this intermediate world.456

The resemblance with liminality becomes clear when Jørgensen, along with the Spanish philosopher Eugenio Trías, describes the intermediate world as a “border” or rather a “threshold space in which the immanent meets the transcendent” in a “symbolic occurrence”. Like Jørgensen, Trías, in terms of hermeneutical-phenomenology, observes the border of the intermediate world as something a human cannot cross, only God in symbolic form can pass (cf. e.g. the Eucharist). But on the side of the immanent it is possible to transcend the intermediate world in the intermediate world itself through openness.

The openness is our access to the transcendent, but as it appears in how-one-finds-onselness, the attunement, the atmosphere, i.e. in the intermediate world – not as it exists by itself in a remote and foreign world. Right there is the boundary of our aesthetically mediated experience, the other side of which, dialectically considered, it is not meaningful to deny the existence of, but which, on the other hand, we cannot say anything about except for what the same other side itself communicates to us in the form of the intermediate world experience.

In my analyses, I will pay particular attention to this kind of communication.

Calibrating the metaphysics of experience

In his socio-phenomenology, seeking to understand what constitutes the human life-world, Schütz operates with the concept of “immanent transcendence” as a rather pragmatic understanding of transcending based on what one would usually experience in the world. To Schütz, transcendence is an everyday experience, which is an “indistinguishable” part of the individual’s “biographical situation”. It is found both in nature and the social as temporal and spatial dimensions that constitute and thereby determine the everyday experience of existence. At first, it may seem that Schütz’s concept

459 The following text has appeared in another version and analytical context in Kim Skjoldager-Nielsen, “Scenens ikke-viden”, in Drude von der Fehr (ed.), Den levende kroppen, Oslo: VIdarforlaget, 2015.
of immanent transcendence is more inclusive than Jørgensen’s, the latter applying it mostly to extraordinary experiences; yet, Jørgensen is not dismissive of the idea that experiences of immanent transcendence may be much more part of the life-world experience than one would tend to imagine, and that one might become more aware of them through the arts. Due to its concreteness and everydayness, I find it appropriate to use Schütz’s concept to calibrate Jørgensen’s somewhat more abstract concept as a practical application for analysing the experience of materiality in performance.

Schütz has defined three categories of transcendent experience in everyday life. The little transcendence signifies one’s experience of having only a limited sense radius here and now. Nevertheless, we assume that the world continues beyond this radius; that if we move, at one point we will get beyond the horizon, to find a reality with its own horizon, beyond which we again will meet another reality with its horizons and so on; that there is something behind our back when we turn around; that what is currently beyond our immediate reach may come within range. The fact that one can imagine such events in the future is based on one’s past experiences. The intermediate transcendence is known by the opposite experience, i.e. what one sees stands for something else that cannot be made available to our direct sensation, even though it belongs to everyday occurrence. This applies to experiences of the encounter with other people. One can recognise the expression of feelings and thoughts of the other, but one does not have access to the other’s consciousness; one cannot feel or think like the other. The other’s consciousness is an immanent transcendence, which is only partially accessible through language and nonverbal communication.\footnote{Schütz and Luckmann, 1979-84, pp. 151-57.} Finally, the grand transcendences are characterised by the fact that something refers to something else that escapes our immediate perception while it cannot be said to belong to everyday life’s ordinary, tangible, and comprehensible reality. To these great transcendencies belong the dream and death. In dreams, one surrenders to a reality, which transcends the precepts of everyday life. Death defines the ultimate border of whose other side no one has had any experience. According to Schütz, religious experience also belongs to the category of great transcendencies. Religious experiences are, in the form of ecstasy and meditation, transient states in which the borders of everyday life dissolve and provide access to a different reality that defies description in a language that belongs to everyday experience.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 168-70.}
In the context of this thesis, Schütz’s experiences of transcendence are understood from a perspective that is interested in how humans negotiate transcendence to either overcome or, at least, relate to it. This is done by means of a cognitive process, which Schütz calls “appresentation”. The concept originally derived from Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology is used by Schütz as the designation for the process by which we intuitively make a connection between an object or an event that is immediately part of our experience and that which through experience and memory refers to an object or event that lies outside this experience. In other words, it is that which is present, whose appresentation in our consciousness – so to say – “awakes” or “proclaims” the absent, the appraised.\textsuperscript{463} Appresentation may refer to more than the physical world, intangible phenomena such as memories, fantasies, and dreams.\textsuperscript{464}

It is evident that appresentation refers to a semiotic handling of transcendence. Schütz designates different types of sign to the three transcendences. For example, the “indication” is characteristic of the little transcendence. An indication is an object or event that does not immediately allow us to experience its appresentation, for example, footprints of animals in the wild, or the fact that a mist over the moon indicates rain. If I am to use the indication to analyse my impressions of Your Blind Passenger, it may then be applied to my act of listening for sounds that could indicate if any other visitor were coming toward me in the fog and, thus, it would describe my semiotic handling of the little transcendence.

For the intermediate transcendence, Schütz reserves what he calls the “sign”. The sign is what people use to communicate with each other regarding “objects, facts, or events in the outer world, where the understanding [of the sign of communication] for the interpreter is the representation of a fellow man’s thought process.”\textsuperscript{465} It is the case that the two parties in a communication do not have access to each other’s consciousness, but can only understand each other through signs belonging to and developed in the sphere of everyday life. The most important thing in human sign systems is language. Unlike indications that, as we have seen, can relate to the individual’s understanding, i.e. subjectivity, signs and languages have evolved in the interaction between individuals in an intersubjectivity.

\textsuperscript{464} Schütz and Luckmann, 1984, p. 337.
\textsuperscript{465} Schutz, 1962, p. 324ff.
This brings me to the appresentation of the grand transcenders, which is the symbol:

The symbol serves as an appresentational reference of a higher order in which the appresenting member of the pair is an object, fact, or event within the reality of the everyday life-world, whereas the appresented member of the pair is an idea that transcends our experience of everyday life.466

In Your Blind Passenger, the colours appear as symbols of distant places (Titan) or states of being (moving or floating through a cloud; the near-death experience). The noteworthy characteristic of these symbols is that they only unfold their appresentational complexity in conjunction with the participant’s situatedness in the installation event: thus, physical movement, sensation, and perception affect the interpretation of the symbols that my associations add to them when their colours appear. In Jorgensen’s terminology, this is an immanent transcendence that already leads to a beauty or divinity experience, but which is entirely dependent on my own ability to contextualise perceptions within the personal frame of reference when I bring myself into the event. Jorgensen sees the transcendent as already present in the symbol467, whereas Schütz sees the symbol as referring to the transcendent beyond the symbol, in a more conventional semiotics. Jorgensen’s understanding of the symbol is dependent on belief in the transubstantiation; Schütz’s only rely on the knowledge of tradition and doctrine. Hence, the symbol of the sacrament may be seen as produced by a reference framework established through tradition, namely the ritual institution: Christ is present – wine and bread are his blood and body.

467 Jorgensen, 2015, p. 70; my translation: “A symbol does not point beyond itself but into itself – to an extra layer of meaning found there. It does not symbolize something distant that the symbol reaches out to but can never entirely reach because the symbol and the symbolised are different – immanent and transcendent, respectively. On the contrary, the symbolised is totally present, thanks to the symbol, which does not refer to anything in a distant transcendence, but points to what in the symbol itself is constituted by the symbolised. The meaning that the symbol contains in the form of the symbol-ized is thus given with the symbol and found nowhere else than in the symbol, which in its immanent presence is itself thus saturated with transcendence. So when we experience the meaning of a symbol, we are quite literally experiencing immanent transcendence.”
Religion and Spirituality

To describe different kinds or more or less overlapping aspects of experience, Dorthe Jørgensen operates with the range of concepts ‘aesthetic experience’, ‘experience of divinity’, ‘experience of immanent transcendence’, ‘experience of beauty’, ‘metaphysical experience’, as well as ‘religious experience’. Together the interconnecting concepts captures very well the variety and complexity of what I with my collective term consider experiences of transcendence; and yet, not quite well enough. As it has been shown, Jørgensen offers only one concept, ‘the religious’, which is related to a god (primarily the Christian God), or, rather the experience of the presence of a god. Derived from a Christian theological point of view, this concept is too narrow, as the transcendent may inhabit other concepts, the spirits of ancestors (in indigenous cultures such as the Māori or even in contemporary Western spiritualism, cf. Hammer) or more abstract the realm of Ultimate Reality.

To allow for these variations in the experience of the transcendence there is an alternative interpretive context, which could further calibrate the analytical apparatus to match variation in expressions of belief or faith observable in society today, namely ‘the spiritual’ or ‘spirituality’. This expansion complicates matters to a degree that Jørgensen as a theologian would seem to be interested in avoiding, emphasising as she does man’s need to have anchors or fixed reference points in life; these anchors, she finds in religious tradition (though not necessarily Christianity), whose values have proven themselves through a long history and in institutionalised forms. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this view, and it does include other traditions than the Christian; but it must not stand in the way of understanding belief and faith as they find expression in society, in – by and large – new and still-to-be proven forms of spiritual practice and searching outside of the institutional frame. Therefore, I propose to supplement Jørgensen’s

468 According to the sociologist of religion Linda Woodhead, the criticism of ‘religion’ covers such views that religion is a modern concept based on secular presuppositions, which has a narrowing, distorting, and sucks the living truth out of that which it attempts to dissect. It is also often objected that the concept of religion is a specific Christian construct rather than too secular. This line of argument has been further expanded by Postcolonial critiques claiming that the concept of religion has ethnocentric imperialist biases, and fails to do justice to non-Western tradition and practice. Linda Woodhead, “Five Concepts of Religion”, in International Review of Sociology/Revue Internationale de Sociologie, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2011, pp. 121-122.
range of experiences with adding ‘spiritual-but-not-religious’ to it, knowing that this vague and fluffy term needs to be elucidated. Implied by the reservation ‘but-not-religious’, spirituality is conceived in opposition to religion, more specifically its institutionalised forms, and as will become apparent spirituality cannot be properly understood without religion. The development of the terms and their concepts are closely interconnected. One needs to understand both.

Religion and spirituality are highly contested terms and concepts by experts; no general consensus on their meaning and conceptualisation exists within studies of religion and theology. Nor do I attempt any definitive proposals on how to conceptualise the terms. The following is only to be considered a tentative normative frame of reference, within which the performative investigation of the performance analyses may unfold. As touched upon in the introduction, the shift from secularisation to post-secularisation in a globalised world seems to have complicated matters making the phenomena of religion and spirituality harder to fully grasp and capture by means of concepts. Religion is not – as the Copenhagen research project “Religion in the 21st Century” found – merely intertwined in an increasing number of social systems and institutions, it is also being met with challenges from competing claims to spirituality that are breaking away from institutional forms of religion or religion altogether. Whereas in pre-modernity and even modernity religion and spirituality might have been used and understood almost as synonyms, in contemporary late-modernity spirituality is increasingly identified as signifying something different from religion. The schism is not total, however, as spirituality is still considered an integral part of traditional religious practices, e.g. Catholicism and Sufism. In order to better understand the implications of the socio-semantic transformations of the terms, and why it is necessary to distinguish between religion and spirituality, I do a comparative survey of the terms, tracing their etymologies and contrasting those with contemporary conceptions. Given the vastness and complexity of the topics of religion and spirituality, this can only be a charting of some significant conceptions most relevant to my research and not an exhaustive survey.

I approach the etymologies of the terms religion and spirituality as a way of indicating origins, and some changes and developments throughout history that give a backdrop for understanding contemporary uses of the terms. One might question what such an etymological survey can bring to the discussion of the late-modern significance. I believe that it might hold a critical potential that opens up overlooked dimensions and meanings of the terms.
To the reader who is not that well versed in the studies of religion or theology, it might lead to the realisation that neither religion/the religious nor spirituality/the spiritual are as straight-forward to comprehend as hitherto suggested by my accounts of Jørgensen's focus on the experience of God’s presence and Fischer-Lichte’s claim that there was no room for God in her aesthetics.

A Multi-Dimensional Concept of Religion

In the etymology of the term religion, there are two strands of development, which suggest divergent meanings and implications, impacting how one may understand religion as phenomenon in a contemporary context, and especially how one may conceive of it in terms of performance. Both of them specify the nature of a power relationship, of which the first one is of human subordination and obligation towards the gods, and the second one is about the differentiation between the divine and human spheres, or the sacred and the profane, and the consecration or desecration of that difference.

The etymology, which is most widely held to be the correct one, has it that religion refers to that which binds and unites humans and the gods, i.e. the first etymological strand. Around 1200 the English ‘religion’ referred to “state of life bound by monastic vows” or, more generally put, “conduct indicating a belief in a divine power”. These meanings of the term are influenced by the Anglo-French religiun and Old French religion “piety, devotion; religious community”, which stem directly from the Latin religionem (religio (n.)). In the Romans’ use of the word it designated “respect for what is sacred, reverence for the gods; conscientiousness, sense of right, moral obligation; fear of the gods; divine service, religious observance; a religion, a mode of worship, cult; sanctity, holiness”. Later on in Christian times (fifth century) it took on the meaning “monastic life”.

There are different opinions on the origin of the Latin word. Cicero held that the term is derived from the verb relegere meaning to “go through again”, i.e. reread or rethink (from the prefix re- “again” and the stem -legere read), which hint at the ritualistic or repetitive practice of religion. Later ancient thinkers such as Servius, Lactantius and Augustine suggested the etymology, which has become the predominant one in our time: religare

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170
“to bind fast”, based on “to place an obligation on,” i.e. “bond between humans and gods”.

The other etymology is proposed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben; it has is that the relationship is much more complicated, opening the concept of religion up to a relationship, which is both in reverence of the difference that upholds the realm of gods and the sacred in the world of humans and recognizes in the profanation or “pollution” of the sacred an existential, creative, and political necessity. Agamben’s point of departure is the sacrifice (of humans or objects) to the gods, which serves the function of removing the sacrificed from the human sphere and reserving it for the gods (consecration); that is taking it out of human affairs and usage and transferring it to the realm of the gods, so that only they may dispose of it. In ritual terms, this means strictly observing what separates men and gods. Agamben says:

The term religio does not derive, as an insipid and incorrect etymology would have it, from religare (that which binds and unites the human and the divine). It comes instead from relegere, which indicates the stance of scrupulousness and attention that must be adopted in relations with the gods, the uneasy hesitation (the ‘rereading [rileggere]’) before forms- and formulae – that must be observed in order to respect the separation between the sacred and the profane. Religio is not what unites men and gods but what ensures they remain distinct. It is not disbelief and indifference toward the divine, therefore, that stand in opposition to religion, but ‘negligence,’ that is, a behavior that is free and ‘distracted’ (that is to say, released from the religio of norms) before things and their use, before forms of separation and their meaning. To profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignores separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use.\(^{470}\)

Agamben’s notion of profanation as negligence manifests itself in two forms: one, which is politically negative in the sense it transgresses the difference between sacred and profane by turning what was prior a worldly activity into something sacred, as in his adaptation of Benjamin’s view on capitalism as a religion – a consecration Agamben sees as so totalitarian in effect it suppresses its profanation; and another form, which is positive as its negligence does not exhaust a remnant of the sacred, or otherworldliness, in the profaned activity. Agamben finds this positive side of profanation in play, whether through games which originally bore a sacred significance, a

myth, but of which the rite or activity remains intact, or child’s play which adopts an object with an otherwise serious purpose and temporarily liberates it for use in whatever imaginary narrative is made up. “This means that play frees and distracts humanity from the sphere of the sacred, without simply abolishing it. The use to which the sacred is returned is a special one that does not coincide with utilitarian consumption.”

Whereas the positive profanation retains the possibility of recovering the neglected, or forgotten, unconscious sacredness of the activity, the negative profanation is in fact secularisation (or the abolishment of the divine sacred), which Agamben holds to be “a form of repression”: “It leaves intact the forces it deals with by simply moving them from one place to another. Thus the political secularization of theological concepts (the transcendence of God as a paradigm of sovereign power) does nothing but displace the heavenly monarchy onto an earthly monarchy, leaving its power intact.” One may observe a similar transferral of divine power in the economical and political reverence with which capitalism is regarded in global society.

It is, Agamben asserts, the task of the philosopher – one might add the scholar – to be negligent towards the manifestation of the sacred, whether religious or secular, in the same way as the child is; one may in this naïve vein consider intellectual playfulness as a kind of modus that makes it possible to negotiate concepts of the sacred and religion through positive profanation that seek to reinvest human activities, such as theatre, with their lost capacity for transcendence. Hence, by introducing his alternate etymology of ‘religion’ as *relegere*, Agamben has opened up for a critical perspective on religion that does not imply the rejection of religion as such or more specifically its institutional forms; instead it allows for critical thinking from within religious tradition which recognises the creative potential of profanation – much in the same way that the Swedish reinvention of liturgical drama for modern times as churchplay was made possible through the mutual “pollution” of theatre and liturgy.

Since the inception of the churchplay happened through practical experimentation, in fact through staging, I consider the playful profanation not only in terms of intellectual reflection but also as the conduct of performance. Thereby, I reconnect to my introduction of David V. Mason’s performative approach to terms and concepts and Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe’s and Anita Hammer’s performance philosophy, maintaining that understanding terms and concepts evolve through the doing and observation of perfor-

471 Agamben, 2007, p. 76.
472 Ibid., p. 77.
Moreover, play as a positive profanation of religion is further supported by the central conceptual construct presented by Hammer in her book *Between Play and Prayer*, which comprises the two pairs of concepts ‘play’ and ‘prayer’, and ‘belief’ and ‘faith’. To Hammer the first pair refers to the performative qualities of spiritual performance, where prayer as experience with John Dewey and William James designates not so much the specific act of praying as the receptive, surrendering position in any communicative act of religion or worship, and play is as a paradoxical improvisational attitude towards prayer, which might set James’ notion ‘prayerful communion’ free in religious experience – what Hammer calls “playful communion”. In conjunction to the first pair, Hammer places the second pair, belief and faith, as conceptions of the inner life of the undergoer and doer of acts in spiritual performance. Belief is connected to the dogmatic system or *credo* in relation to which the meaning of spiritual performance often is determined, whereas faith is an open attitude towards the unexplained rather than any clarified conviction. Whether considered in terms of *religere*, as either religious reverence towards the divine, or as the opposite, playful profanation, Ham-mer’s construct of four interrelated concepts, may serve to analyse creative or subversive tensions between the participants’ experience of staged events in the contexts of religion.

As is evident, the point of departure in the etymology of the term ‘religion’ has opened a critical perspective on how to analyse in staged events the ways the boundaries of the sacred and profane is observed, transgressed and negotiated. In analysis, it is, however, not a matter of choosing Agamben’s etymology rather than the most widely used one; by operating with both etymological interpretations in my understanding of religion and the religious I will allow for a more complex analysis: religion is both *religare*, that which binds humans to the gods, and *religere*, that which has to scrupulously and attentively be observed in order to keep the spheres of the sacred and the profane apart; and it also implies the potential of disruption and profanation – what form or kind of religion takes depend on the performance of the staged event.

The etymological approach has clarified ways of relating to the sacred; but this alone is not enough to understand religion as a contemporary phe-

\[\text{\textsuperscript{473} Hammer, 2010, pp. 40-41.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{474} Ibid., pp. 280-281.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{475} Ibid., p. 42.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{476} Ibid., p. 406.}\]
nomeron. My performative analysis requires a concept of religion, which is multi-dimensional. Both Agamben’s and Hammer’s relational understandings of religion suggest that more than one conceptual dimension of the phenomena are in play at once; e.g. profanation involves both the idea of the sacred, the experience of the participants, and a power-play with the religious institution; as well as the playful performative act of prayer activates concepts of belief and faith in the constitution of the religious or spiritual experience.

Knowing that a complete clarification of what religion might mean is neither possible nor desirable, I still find a fairly comprehensive overview of theories of religion useful – as it is to provide the theoretical framework within which I can observe religion in the staged events of my analyses. The sociologist of religion Linda Woodhead has proposed one such overview that takes into account the many different ways research has attempted to describe the phenomenon by suggesting five interrelated concepts.477 Although Woodhead’s point of departure is sociology, it does not mean that she excludes important theories of other disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, and theology; she even observes where the approach of other disciplines differs from sociology and may supplement the sociological approach.

Instead of different concepts, I propose to see Woodhead’s construct of five main concepts as dimensions of one mayor concept of religion. As Woodhead points out, applying her multi-dimensional overview as a roadmap to analysis does not mean that all dimensions and aspects of those dimensions are relevant at once, of course; yet often one will find that more than one conceptual dimension/aspect of religion is of importance to an analysis.478 Woodhead proposes that any given analysis of a religious phenomenon explicates its selection of theory to show that this selection is a conscious choice excluding some other possible way of understanding the phenomenon in question: “it is necessary to have some critical awareness of what concept(s) of religion are in play, and to be able to justify their applicability in particular contexts of use.”479 Introducing Woodhead’s multi-dimensional construct, I acknowledge all of the conceptual dimensions, as all my analyses more or less will engage with all of them. I shall, however, not go into giving a full account of all the dimensions and the theories that belong to them, but here only focus on the dimensional aspects that most apparently resonate with my event examples. In the following, I shall briefly

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477 Woodhead, 2011.
478 Ibid., p. 138.
479 Ibid., p. 122.
introduce and discuss those aspects.

Woodhead’s summation of religion consists of the five concepts – or dimensions as I prefer to call them – which are then subdivided into a certain number of aspects. Marked in italics in the below are the aspects of particular interest to my analyses. Presented as a bullet-point list for easy overview, the multi-dimensional concept of religion look like this:

- Religion as culture: 1) *belief and meaning*; 2) meaning and cultural order; 3) values; 4) discourse; 5) ideology and mystification; 6) *tradition and memory*.
- Religion as identity: 1) *community-creating and boundary-forming*; 2) identity-claim; 3) organisational belonging.
- Religion as relationship: 1) social relations; 2) *super-social relations*; 3) experience.
- Religion as practice: 1) *ritual and embodiment*; 2) quotidian practice; 3) ‘popular’ or ‘folk’ religion.
- Religion as power: 1) ‘compensator’ and ‘capital’; 2) economical and political power; 3) status at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels; 4) *status and recognition*.

Rather than seeing religion as a phenomenon independent of culture, it is most often considered part of culture, even as a foundation of culture through ritual, and some understandings of religion do not see it as significantly different from other cultural activities. One of the most popular ways that religious studies has conceptualised religion is as *belief and meaning*. Obviously, belief is the aspect of religion concerning the inner life of the religious person, but in this kind of conception it is closely related to an external context. Historically Woodhead traces this conception to what she calls the “confessionalization” during the post-Reformation period, when different forms of religion, mostly within Christianity, began to distinguish between themselves and assert their particularities of belief in terms of dogma. Especially evangelical and fundamentalist Protestantism were influential in this development. The influence of positivism on some branches of sociology after the Second World War has further reinforced belief as a concept of religion as its cognitive nature is definable in accordance with distinctive religious doctrine and confession, and hence has allowed it to be quantified.

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Ibid., p. 127.
for and measured in statistical surveys. This empirical quantifiability has made belief easily accessible, and belief as the core component of religion is an understanding that has been widely adopted by other disciplines. With the rise of so-called new atheist criticism spearheaded by biologist Richard Dawkins, the cognitive concept has been even further reinforced by reducing religion to a matter of belief in the supernatural, which can be scientifically falsified and conveniently dismissed.\textsuperscript{482} Today belief remains the dominant concept in much religious study, although it is increasingly criticised from within the field by sociologists, psychologists of religion, systematic theologians, and postcolonial scholars for its reductionism. Woodhead herself does not dismiss the cognitive approach but is a proponent of a cautious use that justifies itself within the research design and acknowledges the contingency of its choice. In this context, I find the suggestions of two prominent critics whom Woodward does not mention, namely that of the psychologist of religion David Wulff and the systematic theologian Hans Raun Iversen, useful: both Wulff and Iversen observe the dominance and reductionism of belief as a central concept to understanding religion during processes of secularisation, and suggest that if not doing away with belief altogether as a defining concept then research ought to at least adopt more complex theoretical and methodological approaches that take accord of religions’ non-cognitive, or non-semantic and non-verbal dimensions.\textsuperscript{483} I will return to some of Wulff’s and Iversen’s specific suggestions as they apply to my project in terms of the other aspects of religion in Woodhead’s taxonomy.

To my project belief and the meaning-making processes that are connected with belief are important. It should not be underestimated that growing up in a culture shaped by Lutheran-Evangelical Protestantism has influenced my views and habits of thinking religion and ritual practices. As I explore especially the events associated with tradition and institutional-religious ritual practices I am aware how my leniency toward a cognitive understanding of religion activates concepts of belief in my responsiveness and interpretation. First of all being a participant in the events I am confronted with my personal discomfort with confessional, dogmatic belief, or a tendency to assess them on cognitive terms. However, being aware of this problem of reducing potential meaning of the event, I do subscribe to a more complex


and critical approach to religion as belief, as suggested by Wulff and Iversen, moving beyond a concept merely based on cognition. In his article, Wulff points to the study of the historian of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith as an opening towards a more complex understanding of religion. Smith distinguishes between belief, which is the holding of certain ideas, and faith, by which, according to Wulff, is meant “the fundamental orientation or total response to the objects of one’s experience, including oneself, other persons and the natural world.” Thus, limiting the understanding of religion to belief is too reductive, as it just one expression of faith. Faith is a much more inclusive concept, that may contain many aspects. Similar to Wulff, Iversen is interested in pursuing a multi-dimensional concept of religion beyond cognition. Among other approaches Iversen refers to the proposal by Drude von der Fehr that belief may be understood on a level below cognition, as a sense of conviction originating in bodily sensations and notions. (See my discussion of von der Fehr and connections to bio-semiotics, pp. 190-191.) My adoption of Anita Hammer’s concept of faith as a performative attitude expressed through embodied playing meets the critique of religion as belief raised by Woodhead, Wulff, and Iversen. Furthermore, it is followed by methodological approach, which meets Wulff’s call for more studies of individual experience as it challenges religion in contemporary professions of spirituality as an alternative: “the research methods will have to be radically idiographic, allowing the investigators to take the broad range of individual differences as fully into account as possible.”

Another cultural aspect of religion that Woodhead proposes, meaning and cultural order, expands meaning-making processes beyond their reliance upon confessional belief. This aspect is still cognitive but has a much wider scope, as it connects religious meaning with everyday life and society. It is common in sociology and anthropology and offers a way of understanding religion, which “interprets religion as an embracing system of meaning which covers the whole of life.” One of the perhaps most influential and complex concepts of religion is Clifford Geertz’s anthropological conception, which places religion at the centre of culture. Rooted in interconnected myths, rituals, symbols, and beliefs culture generates its meanings through systems that are enacted and embodied – i.e. performed – by its participants; hence, these systems serve the purpose of making order out of an otherwise

484 Wulff, 1999, p. 6-7.
chaotic world and they are semiotically “readable” and interpretable to the ethnographer. Geertz’s conception serves as a reference to my project as it takes into account not only the intellect but also emotions, as they play a formative part in religious interpretations. As it is summarised in Geertz’s definition, religion is constituted by: “(1) a system of symbols (2) which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men (3) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”

488 A similar approach to Geertz’s meaning and cultural order approach has evolved in sociology. It dates back to Max Weber, insofar that he understood religion as an interpretational system that could be applied to the modern world in terms of meaning, values, and symbols. Peter Berger has developed this conception of religion from the point of view that religion provides a meaning-making system that makes it possible to cognitively handle the contingency and messiness of reality and cover it with a canopy of sacredness and taken-for-grantedness. According to Berger the greatest challenge religion is faced with in secularisation is not the collapse of social community, but the cognitive pluralism that emerges in societies, when individuals encounter other belief systems. 489 Iversen has described this challenge as a “cross-pressure” or exposure to different, incompatible worldviews, which he primarily ascribes to the collision of religion and science in attempts to cope with, in particular, existential crises in case of life-threatening or terminal illness. 490 This cognitive cross-pressure is, however, a general condition that individuals of secularised societies like the Danish is living under. It creates what Iversen calls “ambivalence in the existential formation of meaning”, which he holds to be another way of characterising the individual’s experience of secularisation. 491 As I subscribe to a worldview, which is just as much informed by science and what I prefer to call spirituality rather than religion, I recognise this emotional ambivalence in coming to terms with the experiences that I analyse in this thesis. Recognising this ambivalence and considering it an important finding, I see it in my research context as a contribution to further understanding the complex and paradoxical qualities of the experiences of immanent transcendence

490 Iversen, 2012, p. 43ff; my translation.
491 Ibid., p. 34; my translation.
that late-modern man might be faced with; in my analyses I will pay particular attention to these moments of ambivalence.

The aspect of tradition and memory is another potent cultural aspect of religion that I consider in the meaning-making processes of events, compare my discussion of Marvin Carlson’s ghosting (“Ghosting the Context”, p. 13ff.). Woodhead describes this aspect as distinctive of religion: “a defining ability to make the past come to life in the present”, whether this is through collective memory or associative processes.\(^\text{492}\) I disagree with Woodhead, however, that tradition and memory are distinctive traits of religion or rather religious events, since the appearance of religious tradition and memories through representation or association may just as well be produced by non-religious events, i.e. not organised by religious institution, as is the case of Hotel Pro Forma’s performance-exhibition \textit{jesus_c_odd_size}.

The second dimension of religion is identity. Of course, this is a particular complex aspect of religion, and I shall focus upon the one that I find most relevant to analysing staged events, namely community creating and boundary-forming. Woodhead ascribes this approach to the sociologist Émile Durkheim, to whom religion functions as society’s self-reflexion, self-confirmation, self-assertion, self-renewal, and self-generation. As Durkheim’s concept has it, religion serves as identity-formation through “beliefs and practices” in relation to that which is sacred and “set apart”, which unite into a “single community” those who adhere to them.\(^\text{493}\) Considering staged events as performative manifestations in the Butlerian sense, I employ community creating and boundary-forming as a lens for observing how religious events may facilitate the creation of community or the exclusion of potential members through their acts, whether these features of the staging are intentional or not. In connection with the assertion of confessional belief in some rituals, for example the Lutheran-Evangelical service in Denmark and Sweden, the liturgy may be perceived as boundary-forming to those who are not clarified about their faith or who do not confess to Protestantism or other Christian forms of belief, whereas a Māori pōwhiri may be seen as community-creating to newcomers as its purpose is to welcome and include them in the local community.

The third dimension is religion as relationship. Here super-social relations are of particular interest to my project. As sociologist Woodhead points out that “relations with ‘non-empirical’ beings are often important in social

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\(^{492}\) Woodhead, 2011, p. 126.

life, and that such relations are accessible insofar as they are culturally and symbolically mediated (whether we are speaking of a relation with a dead relative, the glorious dead of a war, an iconic fictional character, an evil spirit, or the Christian God). Woodhead, 2011, p. 131. I take a similar approach, as I am interested in how the material properties of staging may facilitate experience of relationship with supernatural entities, which at least to some degree concerns or affects social relations.

In the fourth dimension religion as practice, obviously, I consider the two aspects experience and ritual and embodiment as relevant to my project. Experience in itself is not a phenomenon that sociology is concerned with, Woodhead asserts; yet, it does take religious experience under consideration, not as a distinct kind of experience, but “any experience – from grief to joy – which takes place in the socio-symbolic setting of a religious regime.” Woodhead, 2011, p. 132. As is evident, experience is the aspect of religion, which is most important to my project, primarily the metaphysics of experience as developed by Dorthe Jørgensen. I do, however, add to Jørgensen’s key concept of immanence transcendent by understanding it in terms of experiential qualities as described by Alfred Schütz as well as Rudolph Otto and William James. Ritual and embodiment I approach as performative sites and forms that may convey religion depending on their contextual framing. I share Woodhead’s view insofar that when working in a religious setting they “engage individuals in orchestrated and formalized social performances, serving to co-ordinate bodily movements in synchronized and harmonious ways which may have the effect of reinforcing and intensifying certain emotions and commitments and banishing others.” Woodhead, 2011, p. 131.

Finally, the fifth and last of Woodhead’s dimensions religion as power concerns my project in terms of the aspect of status and recognition that may play itself out in the staging of an event and how the participant may respond to this in terms of recognition or alienation. Woodhead gives the example of how women may be attracted to holistic spirituality “in terms of the way in which it provides an interpersonal setting in which women’s ‘issues’ which are otherwise dismissed, ignored or downplayed can receive proper recognition and treatment.” Woodhead, 2011, p. 137. In the same way, one may consider forms of staging as means for a church or religious institution to accommodate certain existential needs of groups in society such as doubters or spiritual seekers that

\[494\] Woodhead, 2011, p. 131.  
\[495\] Ibid., p. 132.  
\[496\] Ibid., p. 131.  
\[497\] Ibid., p. 137.
might increase the potential for them to feel themselves seen or recognised by the institution. This aspect of status and recognition especially applies to the churchplays.

A Multi-Dimensional Concept of Spirituality

Discussing the term ‘spirituality’ and its possible conceptualisations, I shall follow the same pattern as with ‘religion’ and begin by surveying the etymology and then contrast it to contemporary understandings. The aim is to develop a similar multi-dimensional concept of spirituality, in order to allow for a complex analysis. The group of psychologists Peter C. Hill, Kenneth II Pargament, Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Michael E. McCullough, James P. Swyers, David B. Larson, and Brian J. Zinnbauer suggests such an analytical concept, which promises to encompass and unravel the entanglement of religion and spirituality.498 I adopt their concept as a tool for understanding spirituality, which I later on shall apply to my event examples. First, I ask, what could be meant by the term ‘spirituality’, as people nowadays frequently use it to distance their spiritual outlooks and devotional activities from religion? As first mentioned in the introduction, ‘spiritual-but-not-religious’ is often used as a phrase in this capacity of disassociation. Recognising the close historical relations between the terms, however, how can one conceptualise difference between spirituality and religion? How can one conceptualise spirituality in a way that it may encompass both affirmation of faith through practice and searching as well as critical distancing itself from religious traditions and institutions?

The etymology of ‘spirituality’ is obviously related to the noun ‘spirit’ and the adjective ‘spiritual’.499 In the mid-thirteenth century ‘spirit’ meant “animating or vital principle in man and animals,” coming from Anglo-French spirit and Old French espirit “spirit, soul”, again directly derived from Latin spiritus “a breathing (respiration, and of the wind), breath; breath of a god.” As we know from Genesis God breathed life into Adam. In the Vulgate the Greek pneuma and Hebrew ruah is translated with the Latin spiritus. The first use of spirit in the meaning “supernatural immaterial creature; angel, demon; an apparition, invisible corporeal being of an airy nature” occurs in the mid-fourteenth century. From the later part of the century,

498 Hill et al., 2000.
spirit started being used in the colloquial meaning, “ghost”. At the same time it was used in theology to designate “divine substance, divine mind, God;” also “Christ” or “His divine nature;” “the Holy Ghost; divine power.” In the later sense it could include man: “extension of divine power to man; inspiration, a charismatic state; charismatic power, especially of prophecy.” Another profane meaning is “essential nature, essential quality.” Texts from the 1580s attest to metaphorical use in the sense “animation, vitality.”

The adjective derivative ‘spiritual’ is known from around 1300 in connection with that which is “of or concerning the spirit”. This use is especially seen in religious context. In this sense, it stems from the Old French spirituel or esperituel (twelfth century) or possibly directly from the Medieval Latin word spiritualis used in ecclesiastical texts in the sense “of or pertaining to breath, breathing, wind, or air; pertaining to spirit,” from spiritus “of breathing, of the spirit”. The meaning “of or concerning the church” occurs from mid-fourteenth century.

What may this survey of the etymology of the term ‘spirituality’ bring to one’s understanding? Obviously, the origin of the term does not tell how it is used today. However, since one would be interested in an understanding of how spirituality and religion is related through institutions and parlance, I think comparing the terms reveals a complex historical interrelatedness that does not support simple opposition between concepts, ‘spirituality’ versus ‘religion’. Rather, in light of the etymologies, it is wise to understand ‘spirituality’ as something, which may indeed be considered part of ‘religion’, as theological and clerical parlance still informs the use within traditional practice as well as studies of religion. The meanings that transpire from my survey suggest how they are related.

Nowadays spirituality as a word that stands for the clergy might be not be so obvious outside of theological circles, whereas the meaning “quality of being spiritual” indicates a certain state of being, an orientation towards immaterial aspects of life, a way of thinking based on the human condition and certain deep values, a mindset which comes to expression in a certain practice drawing on tradition. Spirituality as an activity is introvert – even if it may involve acts that are external such as folding your hands in prayer; in Dewey’s aesthetic terms, the doing of acts affects and conditions the inner life of the undergoer of those acts, as Hammer has clearly shown in her research of spiritual performance. In this connection, it is worthwhile to implement Mason’s view on religion as role-taking in that acquiring a role in the religious context is a performative way of committing to the grand narrative of religion, or at least the ritual or theatrical performance in question;
hence one may understand role-taking as constitutional of spirituality as a religious practice. This, then, has further implication, as ‘religion’ in its meaning “bond between humans and gods”, cf. Latin religere, provides a social framework within which spirituality is expressed. In this respect, Peter C. Hill et al. refer to David Wulff’s identification of at least three historical usages of the term ‘religion’ that all put emphasis on the practitioner’s attitude to some power greater-than-human: “1) a supernatural power to which individuals are motivated or committed; 2) a feeling present in the individual who conceives such a power; and 3) the ritual acts carried out in respect of that power”.

In this understanding, spirituality is seen as the individual’s practice of religion.

Conceptualising spirituality for our times, however, must include considering it a phenomenon completely separate from religion.

Hill et al. points to Bernard Spilka, who has put forth three categories for a “multidimensional construct” that might capture contemporary understandings of spirituality: “1) a God-oriented spirituality where thought and practice are premised in theologies, either broadly or narrowly conceived; 2) a world-oriented spirituality stressing one’s relationship with ecology or nature; or 3) a humanistic (or people-oriented) spirituality stressing human achievement or potential”.

As I understand this categorisation, each category may exist independently. But this is problematic, since it is possible to conceive of each of them in combination. One such example is philosopher André Comte-Sponville’s “atheist spirituality”:

[W]e are finite beings who open to infinity. It can now be added: we are ephemeral beings who open to eternity, and relative beings who open on to the absolute. This ‘openness’ is the spirit itself. Metaphysics means thinking about these things; spirituality means experiencing them, living them. This is what distinguishes spirituality from religion, which is merely one of its possible forms.

This is what I would call a combination of a world-oriented and humanist spirituality. It abolishes the god-component and sanctifies existential and experiential openness as “spirit”, again a certain attitude towards that which is greater-than-human – recognition of the absoluteness of nature and the limitations of man.

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500 Hill et al., 2000, p. 56.
501 Ibid., p. 57.
In the book *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (1997) where he discusses the impacts of all sort of (religious) superstition on society and the role of science, the astrophysicist and science communicator Carl Sagan considers spirituality in a world-oriented and humanist fashion similar to Comte-Sponville; what is of particular interest here is the emphasis Sagan puts on profound emotions such as elation and humility, which may bring to mind both Otto’s phenomenology of the holy, *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*, and Jørgensen’s experience of beauty, although disconnected from any religious belief.

‘Spirit’ comes from the Latin word ‘to breathe’. What we breathe is air, which is certainly matter, however thin. Despite usage to the contrary, there is no necessary implication in the word ‘spiritual’ that we are talking of anything other than matter (including the matter of which the brain is made), or anything outside the realm of science. On occasion, I will feel free to use the word. Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. When we recognize our place in an immensity of light years and in the passage of ages, when we grasp the intricacy, beauty and subtlety of life, then that soaring feeling, that sense of elation and humility combined, is surely spiritual. So are our emotions in the presence of great art or music or literature, or of acts of exemplary selfless courage such as those of Mohandas Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. The notion that science and spirituality are somehow mutually exclusive does a disservice to both.⁵⁰³

Comte-Sponville and Sagan leave religion behind, and their spiritualities are fairly easy to understand as oppositions to religious belief or unverifiable truth-claims. Pursuing Spilka’s concept further, what complicates the understanding of spirituality as something separate from religion is that all of Spilka’s categories may come together in religion – as a certain devotional attitude prescribed by doctrine or teaching. One such recent Western example is the *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home* (2015), which combines all three categories:

216. The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity. Here, I would like to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in

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how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an “interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity”. Admittedly, Christians have not always appropriated and developed the spiritual treasures bestowed by God upon the Church, where the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us.  

In the context of my research, which includes the indigenous traditions of the Māori, it is, however, not necessarily so that any spirituality, even when including all of Spilka’s three categories, is a religion. In studies of non-Western traditional cultures, it is often pointed out that religion is a Western concept that is and has been imposed upon existing traditional practices, beliefs and values; to see these traditions through the lens of religion might distort them. Most importantly coming from a highly secularised Northern European culture, I must beware of the tendency in my society to isolate religious activities, beliefs and values from everyday conduct of life – a segmentation which is a completely foreign idea to indigenous cultures. Some researchers hold that Māoridom is a religion, but then they certainly see it intertwined in the everyday; others again, mainly scholars of Māori studies, do not use the term religion about their own tradition, but rather the Māori term tikanga. According to the foundation professor of Māori studies Hirini Moko Mead tikanga could refer to a ‘rule’, ‘plan’, or ‘method’, but also ‘reason’, ‘motive’, ‘purpose’, and, in a general sense, to ‘custom’ and ‘habit’. In colloquial meaning tikanga Māori is understood as ‘the Māori way’, which is also connected with a sense of ‘correctness’, as implied by the root word tika. Moko Mead elaborates on tikanga’s meaning in practice, which is highly complex, as tikanga does not consist in one uniform way of all Māori (like the religious ordo and credo of the Roman Catholic Church that unites and conforms its congregations in an overall way) but in local iwi or family manifestations that are connected and even specific to certain ritual events:


[T]ikanga is the set of beliefs associated with practices and procedures to be followed in conducting the affairs of a group or an individual. These procedures are established by precedents through time, are held to be ritually correct, are validated by usually more than one generation and are always subject to what a group or an individual is able to do.

Tikanga differ in scale. Some are large, involve many participants and are very public. The tangihanga [a passing of the dead; funeral] is an example of an intricate and public cultural event. It is a complex of several tikanga which are interrelated and underpinned by a body of mātauranga Māori and a set of beliefs. The number of people involved in it can vary from between a modest 100 to 10,000. Other tikanga […] are small in scale and are less public, and at other times participation is limited to the immediate family. There are thus great differences in the social, cultural and economic requirements of particular tikanga.

Tikanga are tools of thought and understanding. They are packages of ideas which help organise behaviour and provide some predictability in how certain activities are carried out. They provide templates and frameworks to guide our actions and help steer us through some huge gatherings of people and some tense moments in our ceremonial life. They help us to differentiate between right and wrong in everything we do and in all of the activities that we engage in. There is a right and proper way to conduct one’s self.

In this introductory passage of his book, Moko Mead does not mention the spiritual, but later on and by cross-reference to other sources it becomes clear how tikanga is connected to and resting on a spiritual worldview and set of concepts and values that are recognisable to all Māori. Māori may refer to this holistic multi-dimensional concept by its basis wairua (‘spirit’) or wauruatanga (‘spirituality’). Wairua stems from the gods, and there is a “divine spark” to be found in everything, living and inanimate matter alike. By the addition of the suffix -tanga to the noun wairua the word wauruatanga suggests the spiritual quality of relating to someone or something. The Pākehā philosopher John Patterson in his comparative study of European

507 Ibid., pp. 44-61.
508 See, for example, Vivienne Kennedy, Fiona Cram, Kirimatoa Paipa, Kataraina Pipi, and Maria Baker, “Wairua and cultural values in evaluation”, in Evaluation Matters – He Take Tō Aromatawai 1, 2015.
510 Pākehā is typically used about a New Zealander or foreigner of mainly European decent.
and Māori philosophies discusses this spirituality and rather than focusing on the metaphysical understanding of its various concepts draws attention to their connectedness to values and value-based judgements in the everyday, which serve to help Māori in assessing and making choices and conduct themselves in ways considered proper by the local community. Based on their research as Māori evaluators of social relations with and amongst Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, Kennedy et al. summarise how they see wauruatanga Māori as a “spiritual dimension un-linked to religious [European] dogma” accessed through a “level of consciousness” that allow for “an everyday practice, that is not necessarily some mystic, esoteric, other-worldly practice, but that is also a part of everyday life”. And they see this understanding as resonant “with [their] own experiences and how [they] have tried to write about wairua as an everyday practice that builds and strengthens caring and respectful relationships between Māori, between Māori and the environment, and between Māori and the cosmos”. Being in tune with the wairua of the world is even considered incremental to one’s health and wellbeing.

One may here notice a similarity between the Christian ecological spirituality prescribed by Pope Francis, and the wauruatanga Māori in terms of all the three ways that Spilka suggested, an orientation towards the divine, an orientation towards the world, and an orientation towards the people. What separates them is then the institutional power-relationship of religion; rather than following a decree from above, wauruatanga Māori is growing from below, out of the lived experience of the people, passed on from generation to generation, through the local customs and habits of the community and family.

One may consider wairua in terms of something, which is to be treated as sacred. To Māori all life and land are sacred or tapu (‘untouchable’) and have to be circumspect with caution, respect, and care. As one might have noticed, Comte-Sponville also did maintain a sense of the sacred in his proposal for atheist spirituality. Comte-Sponville seeks a profane sacredness without reference to a supernatural power, but which involves a human capacity for openness towards the cosmos that is deemed vital for survival and,

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512 Kennedy et al., 2015, p. 86.
513 Ibid., p. 103.
514 Ibid.
515 Ibid.
516 Ibid., p. 87.
hence, sanctified. It infers that life and nature is also sacred to Comte-Sponville. Then, what seems to be imperative in determining whether or not something might be considered a spirituality or not, is that spirituality needs to be oriented towards a notion of something sacred in order to be considered a spirituality at all. In their discussion and development of conceptual criteria, Hill et al. makes this argument:

When some people invoke the concept of spirituality, they are indeed referring to an ideology or a lifestyle [...] that is an attempt to articulate and respond to the sacred. However, when the term “spirituality” is invoked to describe ideologies or lifestyles that do not invoke notions of the sacred in one way or another, they are not spiritualities at all, just strongly held ideologies or highly elaborated lifestyles.517

Of course, this criterion then raises the question of what is to be considered sacred nowadays and in which context. Hill et al. offers a generic conception, which seems precise enough to identify an object of the sacred and the qualities of perceptions it evokes in the subject and broad enough to include profane notions of the sacred:

The Sacred is a person, an object, a principle, or a concept that transcends the self. Though the Sacred may be found within the self, it has perceived value independent of the self. Perceptions of the Sacred invoke feelings of respect, reverence, devotion and may, ideally, serve an integrative function in human personality. Such respect or reverence may, or may not, involve the personal commitment to live a life that is congruent with the principles or characteristics of that which is considered sacred. In the context of religion, this sacred content is often defined through institutional mechanisms such as ecclesiastical authority, sacred writings, and traditions. Such institutionalized sources of knowledge work together in religions to provide religious adherents with a picture of what reality is like (e.g. whether or not God exists, the meaning of life, the essential nature of people and the world, etc.), and recommend actions to respond appropriately to this reality.518

In order to provide criteria, which allows for spirituality as a concept both independent of and intertwined with religion, Hill et al. have come up with following model for analysis:

517 Hill et al., 2000, p. 64.
518 Ibid., p. 64.
Criterion for spirituality
A. The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that arise from a search for the sacred. The term “search” refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform. The term “sacred” refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.

Criteria for religion
A. The feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours that arise from a search for the sacred. The term “search” refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform. The term “sacred” refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual.

AND/OR:
B. A search for non-sacred goals (such as identity, belongingness, meaning, health, or wellness) in a context that has as its primary goal the facilitation of (A);

AND:
C. The means and methods (e.g., rituals or prescribed behaviours) of the search that receive validation and support from within an identifiable group of people.519

According to the model, it is only within criterion A that spirituality can occur. Conditioning it in terms of a search means that spirituality does not have to come fully developed with a set of values related to something sacred; the process of looking or striving for the sacred may also be considered in terms of a spirituality. This condition of search is of particular interest to my analyses, which prompts me to look for indications of the experience of transcendence turning into a spiritual interpretation. Such indications, then, will include the sacred in the interpretation.

Next, the model shows the intertwineement between spirituality and religion. Spirituality, in its manifestations as feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviours, is to be considered the basis of religion, the A criterion. Spirituality may become part of religion either as the search for the sacred combined with non-sacred goals like knowing who you are, where you belong, a sense of meaningfulness, wellbeing, or becoming healthier, or the search for the sacred can, at first, be secondary as it gradually grows out of finding and reaching, in religious ways, one’s non-sacred goals, criterion B.

In my analyses, indications of non-sacred goals in the interpretation of the transcendent experience might point toward a religious experience. Finally, the C criterion of religion concerns external forms and expressions of the search, which has to be recognised as valid by a community or congregation.

519 Hill et al., 2000, p. 66.
Hence, in the analyses, the staging of the event in the institutional context would be a further indication of the religious as a possible parameter in the interpretation of experience.

The strength of Hill et al.’s model is its combination of internal and external constituents of spirituality. Obviously, one has to take into account the internal parameters when trying to access the experience of staged events; the external parameters are not enough. As I have so far shown in the case of *Your Blind Passenger*, the material staging may affect one’s perception (even sensation) in ways that influence the participant’s interpretation of the event significantly. The same goes for ritual events, which are more directly and explicitly related to the sacred through institutional framing. Even so, one cannot infer that the external parameters of the staging will always lead to a religious interpretation of the event. The analysis of transcendent experiences will have to correlate the inner and outer conditions of experience. Nevertheless, in distinguishing between spiritual and religious experiences the external perimeters do have a potential impact. The institutional frame conditions the experience in terms of the participant’s horizon, i.e. prejudice (in Gadamer’s sense as *Vorurteil*) and expectations based on aesthetic and cultural competences. Theatre performed in a church, and moreover as an integral part of a mass (cf. the churchplay), clearly presents itself differently to the theatregoer than theatre presented in the frame of a theatre institution. One may, then, think of the institution as the parameter of experience that makes the difference between spirituality and religion and determines something as religious; yet, it does not rule out that the participant of the event may still have an experience which is best described as “spiritual-but-not-religious”. What kind of experience transpires from the event will have to be decided in each case through the analysis of individual interpretation.

One aspect that Hill et al.’s model does not take into consideration, and which I think might be of importance when differentiating between experiences of the spiritual and the religious, is Hammer’s conceptual pair of ‘belief’ and ‘faith’. Despite their conception, Hill et al.’s introduction of the condition ‘search’ deems the subject’s interpretation of the sacred object relative, and the term seems not quite sufficient to determine the nature of that process; belief and faith might help to qualify what the attitude of that search is, and, hence, how it affects perception and interpretation of the sacred. When considered qualities of attitude towards the sacred and what happens in the event, the terms belief and faith appear to hold meanings that are quite different and devoid of the synonymy found in colloquial usage. This is already apparent in Hammer’s delimitation, where belief is connected
to the dogmatic system or credo in relation to which the meaning of spiritual performance often is determined, whereas faith is an open attitude towards the unexplained rather than any clarified conviction. However, referring to some established theological and philosophical concepts might further elucidate the difference between them. The aforementioned Canadian historian of religion and theologian Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s delimitation comes quite close to what Hammer is suggesting.\textsuperscript{520} According to Smith, belief is the ideas, imaginations, and images that the individual may believe in. Faith, on the contrary, is “a quality of life”, “a quiet conviction and joy that makes it possible to feel at home in the universe and to find meaning in the universe and in one’s own life, an opinion that is deep and definitive and stable no matter what happens in one’s immediate life.”\textsuperscript{521} Just as Hammer understands it, Smith sees faith as the foundation of belief; but faith is not bound to belief – faith transcends belief as credo:

Of course, this is exactly what one would expect if faith is what certain theologians have always claimed: A direct meeting with God – conveyed, of course, through the involved holy rituals, doctrines and moral regulations, but precisely significant because it exceeds them and allows the person to exceed them. That’s exactly what a humanist or an atheist would expect. And in any case what the historian finds.\textsuperscript{522}

As historian of religion, Smith observes that belief is historically situated, whereas faith as an attitude is constant: “What kind of belief one has depends on the circumstances, but the faith itself is central.”\textsuperscript{523}

The Danish journalist, writer, and science communicator Tor Nørretranders summarises the implications of Smith’s delimitation, which is quite useful for exploring the notion of spirituality as first and foremost an attitude:

There is in man a capacity that is about faith. This feature is present in all cultures, in all people, at all times, but has had vastly varying expressions. What it is all about, this faith, is very difficult to formulate because faith constitutes

\textsuperscript{521} Smith 1998, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{522} Ibid., p. 11.
\textsuperscript{523} Ibid., p. 138.
a kind of underlying relationship with the outside world and oneself, a relationship of trust with other people, the universe – and thus oneself.524

Since Nørretranders published his thoughts in 2003, attempts have been made to try to formulate what this underlying relationship with the world is in terms of faith. These attempts are connected to the theologian Hans Raun Iversen’s and the comparative literature professor Drude von der Fehr’s critique of belief as merely an intellectual aspect of religion that I referred to above. As both Iversen and von der Fehr point out, belief seems to be based on or related to the biology of the human body as a more or less unconscious survival mechanism. Here, Iversen builds on von der Fehr.525 In her conception of belief, von der Fehr does not, however, distinguish between belief and faith, as I do here, but she sees belief as a Peircean abduction or a kind of intuitive hypothesis construction that make it possible for human beings to engage successfully with the world and survive.526 It is not a theological belief, which believes something specific about God (fides quae creditur), nor is it exactly the act of believing such as theologians would understand it (fides qua creditur); von der Fehr’s concept of belief – or faith as I see it – is a certitude based on bodily notions and perceptual judgements that originate in biosemiotic processes. This is a conception that the biosemiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer supports:

That the body [...] deliberately acquires knowledge is not in a biosemiotic understanding in any way mysterious, but is exactly what to expect. And in a very deep sense, bodily knowledge, as Drude says, is belief. We must necessarily believe our own eyes, otherwise we could not live (and yet it is easy to show how easily the eyes are deceived and how much they are instilled by our own expectations), we must believe in humans’ sense of humanity (despite all disappointments), we must believe that the sun will rise tomorrow, we must believe in the livingability of life, etc. Without bodily faith, the infant could never learn to commit himself. Our bodies ‘believe’ because they are in many, often unconscious ways, in an inseparable communicative interaction with their outside world. We know the world already before, we know it. The concepts and ideas are not the source of our knowledge of the world – rather they

525 Iversen, 2012, p. 41; Drude von der Fehr, Når kroppen tenker, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 2008, p. 87.
are an indispensable resource for analysis of the body’s inexhaustible – and
unbearably partial – certainty.

Our world is derived from a body that believes. ⁵²⁷

To think of faith in terms of a bodily certitude based in biosemiotics is to
qualify Nørretranders’ underlying relationship of trust as an attitude character-istic of spirituality. The hypothetical nature with which this certitude pre-sents itself to human consciousness allows for a certain openness toward the
world that permits the testing of concepts and ideas in practice, including
those about the sacred. In my context of performance analysis, building on
Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative, the biological connection
seems important, not only because biosemiotics probably could better inform
the understanding of the unconscious bodily processes that Fischer-Lichte
merely hints at (as the autopoi-eis of the event) ⁵²⁸, but more so because it
shows that there is no contradiction between her aesthetics and contempo-rary ways of thinking concepts of faith and spirituality, even belief and reli-
gion.

To summarise all of the above deliberations on spirituality and faith, I
suggest the following broad but comprehensive concept that distinguishes
spirituality from religion, while acknowledging their historical connection:
spirituality is an attitude of faith and value-based acts oriented towards a
notion of the sacred, which is informed by the body’s interplay with the
world as well as different traditions, cultures, worldviews, even when prac-
ticed in opposition to religion.

Developing Analytical Tools

Building on my previous critical assessments and discussions of theories, I
will proceed to develop tools that will facilitate analysis of the potentials of
staged events to create spiritual experience for their participants. These tools
will later on become part of the analytical model.

First, I will establish tools for analysing the differences of the staging in
staged events with regard to material factors that condition participant expe-
rience. By participant experience I refer to that of an audience member or a
congregant reflecting the nature of the event. Second, I will develop a model
for analysing the potentials of experience that staged events might offer par-

⁵²⁸ An exploration of this field, however, lies outside the purpose of this thesis.
Participants, covering the spectrum of the aesthetic, the metaphysical and the spiritual. Concurrently, I propose that applying these tools and models, in the same sequence as they are presented here, constitutes the methodological progression in analysing the potentials of experience starting at the concrete level of what appears to the participant (staging), then moving on to the abstract, immaterial level of cognitive and reflexive processes (reception).

The staging of staged events I consider to be the conceptually determined material frame that delimits the event in space and time, defines its thematic and structural organisation, and sets patterns, rules, and roles for actions of and relations between its participants, all of which refer to contexts of community, society, culture, life-world. The staging is the durable component of the staged event that enables the reiteration of actions and relations, and imbues it with the quality of artwork or tradition depending on the intention of the event, artistic, or cultural. The other component of the staged event is the eventness, its unfolding here and now, which is not entirely controllable, but certainly conditioned by the specificity of the staging.

In analysing the staging, I am particularly interested in the material factors of structural organisation and what relations certain forms of staging allow between the positions of agent and beholder in the unfolding event. By approaching these structural and relational forms from a generic view of typology, one may obtain an overview of elements that are characteristic of various stagings and make possible different relations (Fig. 1, see p. 196). The types of staging are: art installation, performative exhibition, performance art, performance theatre, theatre (conventional), immersive theatre, ritual, and churchplay (kyrkospel). I have chosen these types of staging knowing full well that the listing only reflects the research material of this thesis, and by no means is exhaustive of all staged events. The elements of structural-organisation are: stage, feedback loop, material directedness, and mobile audience, interactive, institution/environment-specific.

Rather than constituting a fixed physical boundary, the element of stage designates an acting area upholding a division between agent and beholder that plays itself out both on a physical and mental level. This division may be maintained throughout the event as in conventional theatre, by upholding distance; but it may also be momentary and migratory distributed throughout the space and time of the event. Thus, stage is an analytical concept that may refer to physical as well as virtual space, in terms of what Fischer-Lichte calls architectural/geometrical space and performative space. The occurrence of a feedback loop requires at least two participants and an agent who directs actions towards a beholder (cf. Böhnsch). In case there is no one acting in
front of someone else, the staging may only rely on a *material directedness* of objects to engage the beholder. *Mobile audience* refers to participants following either a prescribed or self-chosen itinerary throughout the space of the event. *Interactive* describes an encounter between participants that reciprocally affects or changes their actions in unplanned for ways. *Role-playing* refers to the assignment of a role to the beholder and its acceptance effectively turning her into a co-creator of action in accordance with the staging. Finally, *environment/institution-specific* designates the relation between the staging and the site or place of the event implicating the surrounding physical environment or the institution lending authority to it. Charting these elements of any staged event will give one an understanding of the materiality it consists of and how it defines relations between agent and beholder. The variety of events will allow one to see how different types of staging engage participants in different ways and create different preconditions for experience.

Rather than slavishly going through each generic type of staging that I cover in the thesis and explain its elements, I shall draw attention to those instances that stand out. Thus, the complexity that the relations between agent and beholder may hold will become clear.

There is one type of staging, which does not rely on a feedback loop, namely the art installation. In principle, this would mean that the visitor is alone, and consequently distinguishing between acting and beholding is pointless; and yet, in practice, the visitor is both agent and beholder negotiating her way through the installation (wandering, halting, looking, touching etc.). In terms of feedback, there is no other living presence intentionally affecting the visitor’s sensual impressions; only the visitor’s own shifts between acting and beholding can energise and intensify her sense of presence in the art installation. In another instance, that of the performative exhibition, a feedback loop may occur, but this would have to mean that the staging in question includes moments of live performance, i.e. relations between an independent agent and beholder that could intensify the visitor’s sense of being present. Even without live performers an installation or environment may instil into the visitor a heightened sense of presence by the means of pure material directedness, that is, in the form of an object perceived to be bestowed with agency or a quality of living presence, or in its mere immersive properties, which may affect the visitor to take further actions, cf. Elisson’s *Your Blind Passenger*.

Another peculiarity of my charting is the ritual, which perhaps unexpectedly may include some kind of stage, i.e. a division of congregants into
agents and beholders; yet, this division is quite common as it, for instance, occurs during the Christian Mass when the priest gives the sermon, or when some congregants attend the Eucharist while others wait for their turn (or remain seated throughout the ritual). This implies interchangeable positions or turn-taking within a congregation, even if it is traditionally (or theologically) held to be a homogeneous group without divisions and hierarchies, bound together as it is by common beliefs, values, and morals. In this sense, a notion of belonging may be attributed to ritual, which is not to be affected by differences of office (celebrant vs. congregant) or shifts between positions of agent and beholder; rather these shifts strengthen the sense of belonging through mutual confirmation of being present. The sense of belonging may further be reinforced if the congregant recognises herself as taking on a role either specifically prescribed by the ritual staging as acts or implied by participation as an enactment of mythological drama; in these ways, ritual might serve the purpose of constructing identity (cf. Mason).

Realisation of role-playing are even more decisive for the development of the event in forms of immersive theatre, which invite interactivity, especially the work of such companies as Ontroend Goed, Poste Restante, and SIGNA. In the context of this thesis, I consider Hotel Pro Forma’s Jesus as belonging to the category of immersive interactive theatre. Whereas ritual follows a predetermined script of ceremonial or liturgical acts, no specific actions are prescribed in immersive interactive theatre; the establishment of interaction is dependent on the agent’s ability to engage the beholder in improvisational playing. The ideal of these forms is that the beholder gives up her position as beholder and takes on a role, more or less explicitly suggested by the staging and by the agents, the actors, who in effect will turn the beholder into a co-agent in the creation of an unfolding drama as in Gary Izzo’s conception of interactive theatre. Depending on the theme of dramatic acts, the co-agent may perceive of her involvement as interfering with her personal belief, values, and morals, thus challenging her own self-image and self-understanding. The stable positions of agent and beholder so habitual to the theatregoer have been brought into a state of fluctuation, and to the beholder-now-turned-co-agent the share in co-creating the

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530 Gary Izzo, The Art of Play: The New Genre of Interactive Theatre, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997, p. ix: “interactive theatre is both inclusive and reactive to its audience. It changes in response to the audience’s influence.”
event may become less agreeable, or downright disturbing, depending on her outlooks.

Complexities like the above make it necessary to consider different forms of *presence* in the relation between agent and beholder. These forms of presence are consequences of the structural organisation of staging, and do not register themselves in the materiality of elements; they unfold or emerge in the event.

Fig. 1: Model of agency and presence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staged Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence (self-reflexive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togetherness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent &gt; Beholder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agent = Agent ~ Beholder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agent ~ Beholder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Installation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
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<td>Performance Art</td>
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<td>Exhibition</td>
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<td>Churchplay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance Art (some)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As already shown in my examples above, it is necessary to include other forms of bodily presence than the “co-presence” between actor and spectator, which Fischer-Lichte has claimed is constitutive of the aesthetics of the performative.\(^{531}\) Building on co-presence only, it is not possible to use her theory to explain what is perceived as presence either in installation art nor staged events such as ritual, churchplay, interactive theatre, and some forms of performance art. Co-presence, Fischer-Lichte posits, transcends the dichotomy of actor and spectator, and yet most of her examples are actually surprisingly conventional in that they generally require a sharp spatial division of performers and spectators as between theatre stage and auditorium. Therefore, the concept of co-presence in performance art, performance theatre, or (post-dramatic) theatre, as I see it, can only be used to suggest how it is to be simultaneously physically present with other living beings at the distance established by a stage, not how presence is experienced by the beholder when she is also the agent, and while no other is present as part of a

\(^{531}\) Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 32.
performance, as in the case of art installation. As I mentioned, the art installation as staging imbues the visitor with a heightened feeling of presence that I shall call “self-reflexive presence” (Fig. 1). This means the visitor is present within or in front of the installation as a three-dimensional construction, and it is through the choice of actions that the visitor realises the installation, or let it unfold as an event in time and space and through movement, whereby it appears to her section by section or as seen from different sides or angles. The visitor becomes aware that she breaches the division of beholder and agent, both of these positions now contained and made interchangeable within the agency bestowed upon her by the installation’s staging. Thus, the visitor occupies a self-reflexive presence during which shifts between the agent and beholder position may be observed, and whereby the bodily sense of being there is intensified.

If we then turn to the other types of staging, ritual, churchplay, interactive theatre, and some cases of performance art, there is another kind of change taking place in terms of the nature of presence. Ritual and churchplay – to the extent that the latter is embedded in the liturgical framework of a mass – inspirer the participant with a notion of belonging-together-with-others based on the anticipation of shared belief, values, and morals. Even on the level of sensual impression, this notion of belonging might be seeded. In doing certain prescribed communal acts such as singing and chanting, as these are perceived as common contributions to or efforts of bringing the event to fruition, ritual may create a feeling of what I – in want of a better term – shall call “togetherness”. Everyone knows the sensation of being energetically and emotionally lifted by a song sang in unison with many others. Ritual can have that and similar effects depending on the act that makes one feel being part of something, a “body” that is greater than oneself. Togetherness is the sensation of achieving something together that one could not accomplish on one’s own.

Togetherness is also significant to immersive interactive theatre in that the accomplishment of dramatic action in these staged events not only requires co-creation or co-agency, but, as I have pointed out above, even role-playing by the visitor. In realising the (dramatic) action, the roles in question refer more or less to a fiction, and they may be assigned to the visitor in different ways: by means of introductions and instructions given by the organisers before the visitor enters the event, or it is simply expected that the participant is familiar with the performance convention or ritual protocol; or preparations might be integrated into the fiction; and the given role might oblige the visitor to perform certain tasks, wear a costume, and/or even re-
spond to a fictional name; during the visit the visitor might even be inspired to create a proper character. Such means of role-playing facilitate the togetherness in playing with actors or ritual co-participants in that you truly attain the sense of achieving co-creation; this even to the point that the positions of agent and beholder fluctuate effortlessly, and shift unnoticed to the visitor, as if they were as natural as in everyday social communication. However, if the meaning of the action becomes objectionable to the visitor, the fundamental sensation of achieving something together turns upon itself; then one realises the togetherness serves a purpose in conflict with one’s wishes, self-understanding or integrity, and continuance of the role-playing could prove impossible. Due to the unpredictability of interaction, it might be more difficult to attain togetherness in immersive interactive theatre than in ritual.

So far, I have developed tools that will allow me to observe how different forms of agency and presence are established by different types of staging. I have touched upon what kind of experience certain forms of presence might offer, but I have not explained how I will observe experience as such being made. In order to analyse this I will need a model explaining the participant’s process of reception, that is, how sensual stimuli are cognitively turned into that which may be considered an experience.

I understand the participant’s reception as a process, which unfolds and evolves in the encounter with the physical space and agents of the staging. This does not, however, exclude that the process may stretch beyond the defined spatiotemporal borders of the staged event. Information about the event obtained before and after it takes place may affect the reception. Impression initiates the chain of reception that moves from one phase to the other, including perception and interpretation, and possibly leading to change and development of self-transcendence. (Fig. 2) Impression is immediate stimulation of the nervous system through the participant’s senses. This process is by and large unconscious; except for sudden changes of light, sound, or smell, and changes that affect the body significantly, for instance, the creation of disorientation, vertigo, nausea, etc. Perception is the ordering of impression, making it accessible to further processing that become conscious to the participant. Interpretation is the process of assigning meaning to what is perceived. During the event this might involve adjustments of hypotheses (interpretation), regulation of behaviour informed by interpretation, or alteration of personal social status and/or self-understanding through performance. Finally, change may lead to, or, at least, cultivate a (stable) capacity of self-transcendence, that is, an ability to experience connectedness “to oneself, to others, to the environment, and to unseen cosmic forces,”
an ability, which has become associated with one’s identity (cf. Garcia-Romeu).

The chain of reception may appear to be running on its own, but this is not so. During its run the reception interacts with the participant’s agency through a cognitive feedback loop. This means that action is regulated through impression or interpretation, and perhaps by self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is not necessarily the end of the chain or its product; it may in fact influence the very sensitivity of the participation from the very beginning of an event, as it may be a pre-acquired capacity. In such cases, instead of linear progression, one may perceive of reception as circular, as drawing on previous experience; hence the addition of the parenthesis at the end of the chain.

Fig. 2: Model of reception

Impression → Perception → Interpretation → Self-transcendence (⇒ Impression)

So far, I have not considered how the chain of reception is connected to the formation of experience, which is the final object of analysis. An experience is to be considered the outcome of reception, which starts with sensual impression and evolves through the different phases of the chain. Following Jørgensen, I understand experience never to be sensual or mere titillation bounded to the momentous or transitory impression: for an experience to evolve it requires a profound impact that interferes with one’s outlook; but what is more, any lasting effect is dependent on one’s capacities for attaining an experience in the first place. One must be capable of reactivity towards that which happens to oneself in the event; one’s imagination must be activated to relate to what is perceived and to test it in relation to what one is willing to accept as real. Furthermore, cultural and aesthetic competences will assist in making sense of staged event and provide frames of references and a vocabulary. Finally, faith and belief are capacities that activate religious and spiritual interpretations.

As my aim is to develop a model for analysing experiences of transcendence, I am particularly interested in the participant’s notion of immanent transcendence. As I have discussed earlier both Schütz’s and Jørgensen’s concepts of immanent transcendence are hermeneutic-phenomenological concepts.
Schütz’s approach is pragmatic as he conceives of immanent transcendence as that which lies beyond the limitations of the human senses and the physical world, cf. the concepts of little, intermediate, and grand transcendence. These limitations of everyday experience may be breached in physical, imaginative, or symbolic ways. In the capacity of such a transgression, the transcendence is constituent of an agent’s spatial or affective movement across or hovering above thresholds within the immanent. In themselves these notions of oneself or something else going-beyond quotidian life may be considered “experiential self-transcendence” (Garcia-Romeu), contrary to the identity-constituting, stable self-transcendence, which is not bound to a single event.

Jørgensen understands immanent transcendence in a more generic way, but at the same time one which is pointing towards interpretation, combining hermeneutics and phenomenology. Immanent transcendence is that which “acts as a hint about something that is greater than and extending beyond Man himself, and not found outside, but in the middle of the immanent, i.e. the world that immediately surrounds the human as a finite being.” The impression and perception holds “a surplus of meaning” as it opens out toward an interpretive horizon of possible meanings. Being in this openness is being in what Jørgensen calls the intermediate world, which is a hovering over the threshold before the border between the immanent and the transcendent. When faced with the absolute, e.g. God, the transcendent is a mental and physical border, which cannot be crossed by humans. According to Jørgensen one can only have a vague notion of what lies beyond. This notion of immanent transcendence is potentially a meaning-constituting moment, whose interpretation depends on who is the interpreter and what is her faith or belief.

Experience may form within different contexts, or with different frames of reference, which determine what kind of experience is involved. For instance, the staging of ritual will provide an institutional context, i.e. the one of tradition or religion. If the participant of the ritual event is not familiar with, or for some reason disagrees with this context, the frame of reference for interpretation may deviate from the intention of the staged event. As contexts and frames for experience, I distinguish between metaphysical, religious, and spiritual. These categories of experience more or less deviate from Jørgensen’s concepts: metaphysical is associated with a philosophical frame of reference, as is the case in Jørgensen’s conception; religious refers

to interpretations that rely on institutionalised forms of belief in god/gods; finally, *spiritual-but-not-religious* supplements Jørgensen’s category of the religious, as the spiritual may be understood as related to a faith that does not rely on institutionalised religious belief but is a more open experientially-based search for what is the sacred in life.

The Analytical Approach

The analytical tools henceforth developed are to be implemented in my performance analyses. The analytical approach requires some explanation as the chosen approach is not typical of what is considered established methodology of performance analysis.

Performance analysis is usually applied to analysis of theatrical performances. It investigates the meaning and meaning-making of performance (*semiotics*), and sometimes it includes the sensorial and affective impacts on the spectator (*phenomenology*). The analytical material, written text, is generated on the basis of the analyst’s own direct experience of the transient performance. Hence performance analysis requires being present at the time and often also in the space of the performance’s execution. Exceptions would be analysis dealing with historical productions or mediation of one kind or another, i.e. archival material, video recordings, fibre-optic live transmissions, etc. For obvious reasons such analyses cannot lay claim to analyse the experience of being present in the same space as the performers; yet, this may also be the case of analysing one’s presence in some performances in which performers are virtually present or even non-present – the latter being the case if the visit to an art installation or exhibition is considered to be a performance performed by the visitor and experienced as such by the visitor herself (cf. my discussion of agency and self-reflexive presence above, p. 196-197). Attending a performance is therefore not always –

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533 One example would be RATS Theatre’s performance *Lise & Otto* (2012), which had actors perform at two stages in different districts of Stockholm. One actor was physically present at each stage, while the other only appeared virtually via a fibre-optical video uplink. Willmar Sauter describes his experience of the virtual actor as “a yearning for the absent performer”, in the sense that physical presence would have unified the two actors on one stage and equalised the sensorial quality of the performance. However, as it were, the absence created an emotional tension, which was crucial to the dramaturgy of the performance. Willmar Sauter, “Interference between Present and Absent Performers: Time-Specific Performance as Phenomenal Experience”, in *Nordic Theatre Studies*, Vol. 24, 2012, p. 83.
as Fischer-Lichte would assert – a matter of being co-present with the performers; rather what is absolutely required is being present in the temporality of the staged event because only then can its full material and sensorial range be appreciated. The way I shall apply performance analysis builds on the event as it has unfolded and appeared to the attending analyst, and it takes into account the meaning that the performance took on in the analyst’s own experience, i.e. experience in the sense of “[k]nowledge or skill acquired from seeing and doing things.”

Obviously, such observations and under-goings are individual, as one pays attention to different things, is affected differently, and reacts in different ways during a performance; no one experience can ever be the same as the other. I shall further take account of the need for the analyst’s subjectivity to be acknowledged methodologically, especially since the types of staged event that I analyse assign agency to the beholder in ways that affect the very outcome of the performance.

Besides the influence the analyst might have had on the performance, her phenomenological knowledge of the event relies on recollections of what she underwent in terms of sensations, affects, emotions, associations, etc., when participating in the event. In practice, these memories are assisted by note-taking either during or immediately after the performance, as well as by other materials (usually provided by the theatre), like photographs and video recordings. Sometimes, a physical revisit is possible, as in the case of a running theatre production or performance-exhibition. However, in such cases the analysis must still attempt to build on the impressions obtained during the first visit, when the performance was fresh to the visitor. Unless there is a particular point in considering recurrent visits a cumulative process of experience. By and large this is the kind of process on which performance analysis depends for its material, the written text. In fact, it places the analyst in a double role as both member of the audience, under-goer of the staged event (cf. Fig. 1: Model of agency and presence, p. 197), and researcher, author of text as description of, reflection upon, and analysis of the bygone event.

To a certain extent the role of performance analyst is comparable to that of the ‘participant observer’ position taken by the ethnographer, while the written analysis compares to the ‘ethnography’ produced from observation. Performance analysis might deal with its subjectivity problem in the way ethnographic text apply reflexivity. Charlotte Aull Davies explains

“[r]eflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference.” She continues to explain reflexivity’s significance to ethnography and participant observation:

In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research. These effects are to be found in all phases of the research process from the initial selection of topic to final reporting of results. While relevant for social research in general, issues of reflexivity are particularly salient for ethnographic research in which the involvement of the researcher in the society and culture of those studied is particular close.⁵³⁶

And:

[Part]icipant observation requires both involvement and detachment achieved by developing the ethnographer’s ‘role’ of stepping in and out of society […]. In order to incorporate such insights into research practice, individual ethnographers in the field – and out of it – must seek to develop forms of research that fully acknowledge and utilize subjective experience and reflection on it as an intrinsic part of research. Furthermore, given the contribution of the ethnographer’s sociocultural context too must be considered. They become a part of the research, a turning back in the form of cultural critique that has moral and political implications as well.⁵³⁷

There are three major differences between performance analysis and participatory observation, as far as I am concerned. First, participant observation would not usually be applied as a method for analysing a single event, e.g. a theatrical performance, but it would be part of the fieldwork during which the ethnographer stayed with a community (in which the performance took place) to observe and engage with its members in their activities and lives over a longer period of time, thus attempting to understand the event’s cultural context from the perspective of the locals or indigenous population.⁵³⁸ Furthermore, participatory observation would entail long and careful preparations, including the acquisition of new language skills, which are not necessarily required for doing performance analysis.⁵³⁹ Last not least,
participatory observation has ethical implications that might not apply to performance analysis, at least, not as it is practiced in a Western context. Participatory observation through its engagement with a community presupposes what is called an open approach, in which the observer presents herself and her project to the locals and asks for their permission to do the research, whereas performance analysis is hidden, as the attending of a public performance with regard to its analysis does not have to be announced to or approved by the artists or ritual organisers. In all of my cases, except for the Māori pōwhiri, I apply hidden approaches. To the extent it has been possible, I have, however, been in contact with the artists or organisers to inform them about my research and in some instances, I have presented them with my findings. I return to discuss the open approach to the indigenous ritual in Chapter 2.

It is my concern here that theatre and performance studies have paid very little attention to the performance analysts’ self-reflexivity or what may be explicated as the turning back on the experience itself for analysis. Nor has it concerned itself much with the critical and ethical implications of its methodology. Rather than acknowledging and coming to terms with the researcher as a participant in the analysed staged event, most performance analysis has made a claim for objectivity by eliminating the researcher, any personal interpretation and experience seen as undesired subjectivism. Thus, semiotic analysis in its structuralist strivings during its heydays of the 1980s and 1990s had very little or no interest in how the performance appeared to the spectator as it attempted to establish the performance as an integral system of signification; only how its textures of signs could be interpreted in accordance with the implied artistic concept mattered. Today most performance analyses are still oriented towards semiotics, although the application of phenomenology as a method is gaining ground (cf. “Charting Previous Research”, pp. 63-74).

With the prevailing predominant interest in the meaning of performance, both the event’s material and contextual conditions of reception are often precluded, taken for granted, even though there is no contradictory opposition between phenomenological and semiotic levels of analysis. Some methods have indeed incorporated phenomenological levels in order to describe how the sensoriness of spectating influences the perception of performance, e.g. the impact of the actor’s bodily appearance on the perceived character-
work,\textsuperscript{540} and phenomenology as method has been called upon when the strategy of staging foregrounds \textit{aisthesis}, e.g. in performance art and experimental, post-dramatic forms of theatre, such as is the case in Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative. In fact, the last twenty years or so have seen a slow increase in performance analysis employing phenomenological methodologies, which, according to performance studies scholar Stuart Grant, is a reaction to a predominance of discourse and political analysis, which “obscure the object itself in a primary concern with the social context from which it emerges as an expression of a power structure, culture or system of signification.”\textsuperscript{541} In applying phenomenology, there is “a desire”, he contends, “to escape from theoretical approaches which diminish the status of the creation, enjoyment and experience of the performance and to embrace methods which allow an access to the materiality and affective substance of the performance itself.”\textsuperscript{542}

As manifest in the tools, my approach first interests itself in how the materiality of staging affects the participation of audience/congregation; in other words: how it allows the participant to perform within its limits. Given the involvement in the staged events, cf. my typology in Fig. 1, the distance between the researcher and the object is diminished or positions destabilised and set in flux. The analysis has to reflect upon the activities and choices made by the analyst, as she negotiates and navigates in the event. Thus, the agency of the researcher affects the analysis to a higher degree than would be considered in a more conventional performance analysis. In terms of reflexivity, the written analysis comes close to reflexive ethnography as it has to give an account of the doings within the setting of the staging and explicate the individual experience of the researcher; for by only referring to its own preconditions as well as personal context may the analysis of the spiritual or religious potentiality extend beyond the mere subjective experience and become comparative to what others have described.

Furthermore, as a way to focus the analysis on the experience of immanent transcendence, I will employ what the theatre scholar Jens Roselt in his phenomenology of the theatre has called the significant moment (German: “Der markante Moment”). Roselt describes this as “characterized by the fact that an experience is had that can not be described as merely observing the execution of a scenic act, but which is completed in the perception of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{540} Cf. Sauter’s communication model of sensory, artistic and symbolic levels. Sauter, 2008, pp. 56-63. See also Sauter, 2000, pp. 6-9.
\item \textsuperscript{541} Grant, 2012, p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{542} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
spectator.” As the Swedish theatre scholar Joakim Stenhäll has observed in his discussion of Roselt’s concept, it is important to note that it refers to a completion that takes place in between the performance and the spectator, “in a sensitive intermediacy.” The qualities that both Roselt and Stenhäll ascribe to this kind moment are uncertainty, confusion, or ambiguity. Roselt describes it in terms of “the process of understanding in a strange way [becoming] delayed, developed and possible to experience. [...] It poses a possible irritation to the spectator, in which perception and interpretation are freed from their unambiguity.” As Stenhäll impotantly observes, this ambiguity does not have to relate to a scenic act, which is particularly “successfull/prety/emotionally evocative”; rather, it is significant in the sense that it occurs in the individual encounter with the spectator. Yet, at the same time Stenhäll contents that the concept of significant moment must also offer an aspect of “collectivity”, or the quality of being recognised by other, in order for it to be productive to analysis. In my context of immanent transcendence the significant moment equates Jørgensen’s intermediate world as a mental state, and it evokes paradoxical experiential qualities such as the awe and fascination Rudolph Otto assigned to the nouminous, and the characteristics William James found in religious/mystical experience, ineffability, the noetic, transiency, and passivity. On the intellectual level is also the moment of cross-pressure between different incompatible worldviews, e.g. the religious and the scientific, when one tries to come to terms with an incredulous occurence of immanent transcendence.

My overall approach to performance analysis in this thesis has several similarities with the performative approach with which the Danish art historian Camilla Jalving has analysed art installations. If one remains hesitant due to academic traditions, values, ideology, and merely consider what may be observed with an intellectual and physical distance to the artistic work, then one precludes oneself from phenomenal impressions by not investing

546 Ibid., p. 16; my translation.
547 Stenhäll, 2010, p. 67; my translation.
oneself bodily in the event. In immersive interactive theatre this would also mean denying oneself access to the information and stories that spaces and actors may hold. Hence, one has to situate oneself as analyst-subject within the staged event, while one makes observations of one’s own actions, which eventually inform the circumstances of analysis. In so far as these circumstances have an impact, it must be made explicit that the observation is the consequence of one’s analyst-subject, i.e. one’s own behaviour. However, this self-reflexive mode of analysis, or writing, prevents one in no way from deviating from the embodied, situated register of the analysis – of course, a retrospective rationalisation of experience – in order to momentarily “accent” to a vertical vantage point in order to summarise or describe larger structures, or to include the observations of others, for example, reviews or the accounts of other members of the audience/congregation/community (through conversation, interview) should a construction of an overview prove relevant to the analysis. Jalving considers such analysis, which operates through the analyst-subject’s performativity strategic analysis: “[...] because in any case they aim to show how they are the result of my own subjective encounter with the works, and not a response to any immanent meaning of these works.” Although the strategic approach to performance analysis thus necessarily tints one’s observations, it must also be emphasised that this approach is essential to understanding how metaphysical, spiritual, or religious experience in staged events may come about; in this kind of performance analysis it is crucial to place oneself in the

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550 Here, I refer to the “investments” that Amelia Jones proposes as “the desires of the interpreter”. Amelia Jones, “Art History/ Art Criticism: Performing Meaning”, in Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (eds.), Performing the Body/ Performing the Text, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1999, pp. 39-40. Cf. Jalving, 2005, p. 15; my translation: “Which naturally could be understood in many ways, for instance, as the desire of the spectator driven by personal, ideological as well as disciplinary political currents.” (My translation.) My desire of interpretation is – not surprisingly – directed towards the conceptualisation and exploration of the potential for spiritual experience and as such, reflecting a personal curiosity and a disciplinary political intention to expand and renew theatre and performance studies, and more specifically the methodology of performance analysis.

551 Cf. Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, New York, NY: Routledge, 1991, p. 190: “I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. Only the god-trick is forbidden.” Quoted in Jalving, 2006, p. 17.

552 Jalving, 2006, p. 19; my translation.
audience’s or congregation’s situation, for only then can the potentiality of the staging for instigating metaphysical, spiritual, or religious experience be assessed. Employing the analytical tools ensures comparability and generalisation of observations, so that the results do not merely reflect private experience but explain the conditions for bringing about experiences of transcendence.
Chapter 2: Foreign Encounters with Oneself Through the Spiritual – Staged Events in Aotearoa New Zealand

As demonstrated in the introductory example of my visit to Olafur Eliasson’s installation *Your Blind Passenger* walking through its otherworldly environment gave rise to associations and thoughts, which could be attributed to different capacities for experience such as my cultural and aesthetic competence, e.g. cultural references, religious imaginings, and prior experience with the arts, which in turn informed my spiritual interpretation of the notion of immanent transcendence brought about by the staging. This chapter will investigate the emergence of experiences of transcendence in the contexts of two very different staged events that I participated in during my stay in Aotearoa New Zealand, September 2012–January 2013. Whereas my visit to *Your Blind Passenger* took place in a context of the contemporary arts museum, without any obvious reference to the spiritual, the staged events that I will attend to here did actualise a spiritual dimension through their contexts, although their staging strategies were very different: an art installation in a public urban space of a modern city built by European settlers and a ritual performed in a secluded sacred area belonging to the indigenous Māori culture.

The first encounter I will analyse occurred under very different circumstances than my visit to *Your Blind Passenger* and created its effects within a geological and historical context quite unlike anything I – for the most of my life a resident of Copenhagen, Denmark – had ever met with before. Aotearoa New Zealand is situated right on what is known as “The Ring of Fire”, an immense boundary in the earth’s crust between drifting tectonic plates that collide and cause frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; a unique situation which provided an important background for my experience.\(^{553}\)

\(^{553}\) “The Ring of Fire” follows the entire rim of the Pacific Ocean and constitutes the largest and most geologically and volcanic active zones on our planet. Where the Pacific plate slides under the Indo-Australian plate there are several fault lines in the surface following the boundary right through the two main islands of the country, from the northern coast of the North Island past a line of active volcanoes, The Tau-
Unlike the museum installation *Your Blind Passenger*, I did not learn about this other installation through media coverage, and I had no time to prepare myself for the visit. I came upon the art installation, known as *185 Empty Chair*, completely by chance. The encounter took place when I was visiting the city of Christchurch on the Southern Island on December 21, 2012. Almost two years earlier, February 22, 2011, an earthquake of a 6.3 magnitude on the Richter scale had struck the city and severely damaged its Central Business District. 185 perished in the disaster. At the time of my visit, the city centre was still cordoned, office buildings, shops, restaurants, entertainment venues, and, in the midst of it all, the city’s pride, the Anglican cathedral, all prone for demolition or reconstruction. I had walked the perimeter of the disaster zone and taken in its ghostly atmosphere of hastily abandoned and half-destroyed property, when I came upon an empty demolition lot in which the installation was placed. As already implied by its title, it commemorated the victims of the September 2011 earthquake in a very concrete sense by representing them with individual empty chairs. The analysis will focus on how my encounter with the installation called forth the presence of the departed through imagination and lead to my spiritual reflection on being interconnected with nature and the cosmos.

The second event I will analyse is my participation in the pōwhiri. The pōwhiri is the traditional ritual performed by the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Māori, to welcome strangers to their local communities. Here, the physical context of the event was the marae, which is the communal meeting place, a fenced-off yarded complex of traditionally carved buildings, owned and maintained by the local people in a certain area,
rural or urban. Central to these complexes are the whare whakairo (meeting house) or whare tipuna (ancestral house). For the Māori, the marae has always been an essential cultural institution and it seems to have become even more so after the British colonisers arrived in the nineteenth century, providing local strongholds for Māori emancipation through fights for equal rights, parliamentary representation, education, lost land, along with the rediscovery of their traditions, language, values, knowledge, crafts, arts, etc., a movement that is often referred to as the “Māori Renaissance”.


In terms of spirituality, the marae provides “a standing place” (tūrangawaewae), i.e. a place of belonging, of spiritual connection with an-
cestry, the community of the past, present, and future; where one’s identity is affirmed through respect for customs, acknowledgement of ancestry, and mutual acceptance between members of the local kinship group (hapū). The marae is, in a concrete and spiritual sense, a secluded area not to be transgressed upon by strangers as these are untouchables (tapu) to the people of the land (tangata whenua), unless they are first properly received and allowed into the community according to the ritual protocol of the pōwhiri.

Admittance to strangers is only given to those who are welcomed through the pōwhiri, which serves the function of equalising the state of untouchability (tapu) between the visitors (manuhiri) and the hosts (tangata whenua), bringing both parties into a common state of being normal (noa). In this sense, it places its participants in a Turnerian liminality and transforms their social status through a rite of passage that allows them to enter the community. The tradition and the function of the pōwhiri goes back to pre-European times when the tribes (iwi) of Aotearoa were often at war with each other, and it was important to determine whether strangers arriving at the village were friend or foe. Featuring a symbolic, but physically expressive challenge (wero) by one or more warriors of the tangata whenua, the leader of the visitors’ group has to stand his ground without transgressing into the (performative) space of the warriors and at the end pick up a token of peace (taki) that is laid before him. Acknowledging this tradition, the New Zealand anthropologist Anne Salmond has called the pōwhiri a “ritual of encounter”, a term which has become accepted among Māori scholars. Even if most pōwhiri these days are much less formidable and much more symbolic, often excluding the wero, the ritual still attains its confrontational quality and liminal effect through its protocol and process, as I hope to show in my analysis.

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560 According to both Salmond and Mead the wero is only performed when welcoming to a local hui (gathering) prominent guests such as representatives of the state or church, the Prime Minister, the Governor General, overseas visitors, the Māori queen and her entourage, celebrities like the captain of a visiting rugby team; but it is also used in touristic enactments of the pōwhiri. Salmond, 2009, p. 119; Mead, 2003, p. 127. For the touristic employment of the wero, see also Margaret Werry, The Tourist State. Performing Leisure, Liberalism, and Race in New Zealand, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 164, 168. I have both witnessed the wero being performed in the touristic staging at the Tamaki
Bringing these staged events into consideration following Elliason’s installation will serve as a contrast between events that are not institutionally contextualised as spiritual or religious (*Your Blind Passenger* and *185 Empty Chairs*, as well as *jesus_e_odd_size* which will be discussed later) and those that are (the pōwhiri, and the Lund churchplays to which I shall also return). Hence, I intend to survey similarities and differences in the interplay between the context of the staged event, the material and dramaturgical properties of staging, and my individual capacities for experience as they all combine in creating the potential for experience. How does the staging invite the visitor to co-create the event as it appears in its materiality? What difference does cultural contexts such as environment, institution, and tradition make in terms of creating an experience of transcendence? To what extent does the prior knowledge of context affect the experience? If institution and tradition does not provide an explicit context, what then prompts the interpretation? I will revisit these questions in later chapters as the staged events analysed alternate between being set in obvious spiritual or religious institutions and outside of them.

The staging of the two Aotearoa New Zealand events is institutionally, traditionally, and in terms of their staging unrelated to each other. What the two events do have in common is a potentiality for bringing forth notions of immanent transcendence, in particular a sense of spiritual presence that calls for individual meaning-making. As will become evident, the pōwhiri I partook in involved preparation, performative acts and architectural features, carved figures that commemorated and called into presence not only the ancestors of the host people but my lost family members, too, while the Christchurch installation recalled deceased earthquake victims through the very materiality and potent symbolism of empty chairs, an absence anyone could relate to given the installation’s placement, environment, and historical context. Hence, the focus of the analyses is the phenomenological paradox of

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Māori Village in Rotorua, September 13, 2010, and at the welcoming of the Governor General at the Sacred Heart College, on October 20, 2012. To give the reader a taste of the variety of wero, I refer to video recordings of the ceremony performed to receive a Māori party at Manurewa marae (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdXDViMj9H0) (accessed May 20, 2018), former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s welcome at the New Zealand Parliament in Wellington, November 4, 2010 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fag_MhKBhyA) (accessed May 20, 2018), and the wero for tourists at the Tamaki Māori Village (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXxIkqTGEc8) (accessed May 20, 2018), as well as a rare instance of a wero performed by a woman (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GarQkz0BQs) (accessed May 20, 2018).
bringing the absent into presence through the potential effect of the staging on the participant.

The analyses, as suggested in the introductory chapter, proceeds in three steps: first, I will give a fairly detailed participatory account of these New Zealand events to provide the reader with a sense of what circumstances triggered their transcending effect and what it was like undergoing it; second, drawing on my first-person account I will analyse the performatively generated materiality within the event’s staging, applying my adaptation of Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative that focuses the analysis on properties of staging; and third, I will pay specific attention to significant moments during the events, which were crucial in forming my experience of transcendence. Here, I will discuss the interplay between properties of staging and my capacities for experience and context and relate it to the interpretation, employing my adoption of Dorthe Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience (based on the phenomenological concept of immanent transcendence) to decide the kind of experiences of transcendence I had: metaphysical, spiritual, or religious?

185 Empty Chairs

As already stated in the introduction to this chapter, my encounter with the art installation 185 Empty Chairs in Christchurch was a complete surprise. I came upon it without knowing anything about its existence beforehand. Unlike Your Blind Passenger, which was presented in a museum and therefore covered by the established arts circuit, I did not learn about this installation through any media advance publicity. Very much a local grass-roots project, 185 Empty Chairs is the initiative of a Christchurch artist, Peter Majendie, with no official funding or backing from the city authorities, relying on private donations and local volunteer labour to maintain it.\(^\text{561}\) The installation is placed in an open urban space, making it public and accessible to any random passers-by. Originally erected on February 22, 2012, the installation was intended to be temporary, but as of May 2018 it is still there, having become a memorial visited by the families of the victims and other locals as

well as a popular tourist site. A disaster-stricken area, the location is the least obvious one in which to find an art installation. This circumstance added to my sense of surprise. Being unprepared and attuned by the ghostly atmosphere of the Christchurch cordoned city centre had made me reactive to the materiality of the event to such an extent, it had a rather strong associative and emotional impact on me. The two visits I made to 185 Empty Chairs make for an interesting example of how a staged event, through an evocative material directedness, may activate the atmospheric context of a local environment and its history in bringing forth a spiritual experience of transcendence, despite the fact that the participant is a foreigner with no connections to the place of the event. In my analysis, I will first describe my visits and then reflect upon them in terms of relevant concepts of the theoretical framework.

I had walked along the empty streets in the circumference of the cordoned Central Business District, flanked by hastily deserted shops and restaurants and the half-collapsed theatre building of the Isaac Theatre Royal behind steel fences and propped-up shipping containers (for support and buffers against debris from any collapsing walls) when I came to an intersection and open area. In front of me, on the other side of the pedestrian crossing, that is, outside the cordoned area, there was another large empty lot like so many others in the city with only a few tell-tale-traces of its once buildings. Against the backdrop of the lot’s grey dust and gravel, a rectangular field of freshly laid grass stood out in stark, unreal contrast, the rare patch of green being a welcoming refuge for the eye. On the grass, there were orderly rows of pristine white chairs lined up, all of them facing in the same direction toward the east. I estimated their number to be a couple of hundred. Quite a striking sight! Whilst appearing to be oddly displaced, the assembly had an affirmatively aesthetic quality to it; that somebody had taken the effort to install it there was a clear sign of life and culture returning to the desolate heart of the city.

I was drawn towards the installation. I wanted to find out what it was about. Surely it somehow had something to do with the earthquake and the destruction of the Central Business District, why else would anyone place it there?

The arrangement of chairs into rows reminded me of a theatre, but there was no stage – except for the surrounding view of demolition lots, some still-standing buildings and the intersection of Cashel and Madras Streets by its northeastern corner. The rows of chairs and the rectangular outline formed by the ready-rolled grass also made me think of a church and its foundation. But there was no altar and pulpit to make the arrangement functional for celebrating services, and then again it was not made up of pews or rows of uniform chairs as one would find in a church. The chairs seemed to have been intentionally assembled to make a point of their variety. The different types included the regular chair, stool, armchair, office chair, bar stool, wheel chair, kitchen chair, baby stool, etc. The only feature they all had in common was their whiteness; it connected them and made them into a differentiated unity. Concurrently, the whiteness contributed to the sense of the otherworldliness of the otherwise ordinary chairs adding a quality of sacredness to them.

At first, I stood assessing the many chairs outside the edge of the grass lawn, hesitating to enter. However, unlike an art display in a museum there was no barrier and sign to keep one from entering and taking a closer look. I decided it was all right to enter, so I walked slowly, respectfully up and down the rows, taking it all in. I was not able to find any doubles of chairs; considerable care had been put into finding and collecting chairs that were all unique, and then to paint them all white to give them their strikingly pristine appearance, bourgeoning on the unreal. I could tell that they had all been very carefully painted; no upholstered seat, no metal fitting, no wheel, no part whatsoever had been left uncovered. I was impressed with the amount
of work that obviously had gone into collecting the chairs and preparing them for installation.

As I walked amidst them and stopped by chairs, one after another, my perception of them changed from the somewhat detached technical curiosity to a contemplative and affective engagement with the objects. I was there, present, inside the marked-out space of the installation, standing in front of each chair trying to make sense of them. I realised I was faced with an absence. The vacancy of the chairs invoked in me an expectation of somebody to come and sit in those seats. I began to associate the design and function of each chair with those who might have used them, first by the implied stereotypes: the office worker, the disabled person, the child, the bar guest, the grandmother in her rocking chair, etc., then I went on to flesh out individuals sitting in the chairs a bit more. In a cosy armchair I pictured a man in his 50s immersed in reading a novel. It was his day off from the office. In a baby stool I saw a toddler biting her rattle, then throwing it to the floor, and starting to cry as it was now out of her reach. My imaginings went on like this for a while and gradually gained in vividness until I could “see” images of non-present persons superimposed on my eyes’ real retina images of the chairs. These self-suggestive “double-exposures” became so powerful I not only had the notion of seeing half transparent figures, but I thought I could sense their presence in the nearby seats, too! It was as if ghosts had appeared before me in each of those chairs. I became frightened and had to snap out of my entranced state. I regained my composure. I hypothesised that I had come upon an installation that had to have something to do with the people who had perished in the earthquake of February 22, 2011.

What I did not pay attention to before I went into the installation was that at each end of it was a bulletin board with a small overhang for protection against rain. Now I went there to read the posts that were pinned to the board. Among other things, there was a laminated A4 sheet of text and images in colour print that told about the purpose of the installation. I had been quite right in assuming the connection with victims of the earthquake. The installation was “a temporary art installation reflecting on loss of lives, livelihood and living in our city following the earthquake on 22 February 2011”. It had the title 185 Empty Chairs, referring to the 185 who had perished. Thus, it was an art installation conceived as a memorial. The postings also told of the artist’s inspiration.

It was stated that the use of the empty chair as an expression of absence or loss is a recurring motif across time and cultures. A number of examples were given. When the artist Samuel Luke Fildes, illustrator of the last of
Charles Dickens’ books, heard about the author’s death, he added to the book’s illustrations *The Empty Chair, Gad’s Hill – Ninth of June 1870*, which showed Dickens’ abandoned seat at his desk. The illustration was apparently inspiration for two paintings which Van Gogh painted in November 1888, showing differences in character, temperament, and technique between himself and his colleague Gauguin. Last not least, there were references to the use of empty chairs in public memorials around the world such as the one which was temporarily set up at Bryant Park in NYC in memory of the 2753 victims of September 11th and in the permanent monuments of the bomb victims in Oklahoma City in 1995, and the one in Crakow, Poland, for the Jews from the ghetto during World War II. It was also clear from the announcement that *185 Empty Chairs* was no longer in its original place but had been moved, and that my associations to a church based on the rectangular plan of the installation turned out to be correct as it had been located at the collapsed Oxford Terrace Baptist Church, somewhere else in Christchurch. An affixed mark now indicated another church, St. Paul’s Trinity Pacific Presbyterian Church as supposedly the current sponsor or protector of the project, along with the Sidedoor Arts Trust, whose logo was printed next to it.

On another sheet of paper, I found the artist’s name, Pete Majendie. He had the following comment on his work: “185 square meters of grass depicting new growth, regeneration. / 185 white chairs all painted twice by hand as an act of remembrance. / This installation is temporary – as is life.” Above, on the same A4 sheet, he thanked the visitor for coming to this “Remembrance Space” and suggested some options for interacting with the installation. What I found the most challenging proposal was to choose the chair among all, which mostly evoked one of the victims in the earthquake and seat oneself in it. It was more than I could handle that day. I could not get myself to sit in a chair that I had seen as being taken by a deceased person. I lingered for some time and took some photos of the installation. I thought that this installation might be of importance to my research and that I might need documentation. By focusing on taking photos, I tried to distance myself from the strong emotional impact I had felt. But the feeling would not leave me, and I had to return.
On December 23 before I went to the airport to continue my round trip on the South Island, I had allocated time for another visit. Since I left the installation, I had not been able to free myself from the notion that I had kept myself from entering completely into the work. After all it was a public installation, and the invitation to use it was for anyone who could in one way or another relate to what had happened in Christchurch. Albeit I had no personal connection to the deceased, the city, or the events since the dreadful earthquake, my own previous experience of relating to the installation provided enough of a reason to come back. It was important that I did not do this just out of curiosity or because the installation was a useful research object but because I truly felt a deeper spiritual need for it. I had convinced myself that I should return to look for a chair and sit in it.

The intense presence of the deceased I had felt during my first visit still with me, I stepped hesitantly and warily onto the grass. I took my time to walk around to find the right chair. As I did not know anyone who was killed in the earthquake, I had to choose a chair that looked comfortable. And I found out an armchair that appealed to me. Still, it was not easier for me to get myself seated. Although I’m reasonably open-minded to phenomena that cannot be explained, I have never considered myself able to see, let alone communicate with spirits. I could not make myself believe I had been in contact with some of the victims of the earthquake. What I had experienced had to be pure power of imagination. Nevertheless, the experience was the
result of a very real encounter with the concrete materiality, the empty chairs in the middle of the ruined city. That I had further had my presumption confirmed that the installation was indeed dedicated to the 185 victims cemented the significance of the chairs: they were irreversibly linked to individual destinies, human beings who had had their lives abruptly cut short. No matter where the armchair came from, how it had been collected, and whom it used to belong to – an actually victim or someone else – emotionally, it belonged to one of the deceased. The chair seat was someone else’s. Carefully trying, I sat down and leaned back, took a deep breath and closed my eyes. I do not quite know what I expected to happen, but the notion that I now occupied the space of a deceased’s body made me shudder. Surely, this time it was not an actual presence, I felt, but the idea of this presence. It was no longer crucial whether I knew one of the victims. By placing myself in the same space that I had imagined a deceased soul occupying, I could allow my imagination to elaborate on my own experience of a small earthquake in Wellington.

A few months before my visit to Christchurch, a minor earthquake, 4.2 on the Richter scale, struck Wellington. I was at home in the house where I lived and had felt the sudden unreal sensation of the ground underneath me shaking and the whole house beginning to move laterally back and forth. It had only lasted a few seconds, but it made a deep impression on me. I thought if I had been in Christchurch on February 22, 2011, or had the earthquake in Wellington been much more powerful – the circumstances are not really crucial – I could have been dead now. As I sat there, immersed in thoughts, what was absent became again very present to me. I began to think of the absent as the contingent, as another outcome of my past life: that it was I who had become a victim of nature’s forces. Sitting in this seat, which I had previously regarded as belonging to someone else, the idea of an alternative reality formed, an already emerged past in which I was dead. But this thought also invoked the idea of a future in which I could die in a natural disaster. A feeling of dizzying emptiness spread from my midriff. What does it mean to no longer exist? If we ignore descriptions of near-death experiences that are not our own, but as we take over from popular culture, or as I “saw” it in Your Blind Passenger’s staging, it is impossible to imagine because the thought does not have access to that state of non-existence. We cannot fully enter its realm and perceive it, and still live to tell about it. (Here I am excluding the near-death-experience.) The best expression of death I could think of was actually the empty chair that I had seated myself in.
The circumstance that I found myself in Aotearoa New Zealand and was sitting there in that chair, in that particular installation, had made me imagine the earthquake as the possible cause of my death; even so, it was not crucial to my growing sense of existential precariousness. My thoughts sought out the outside world and that which was far greater than this little spot on the globe: that wherever I found myself, I would be inextricably linked to the earth and its enormous powers. I was thinking of the growing global climate crisis. No matter how safe and controlled the Copenhagen and Stockholm city environments I had grown up in and usually lived in, had occurred to me they were still part of nature. Because the cities are created and controlled by humans, one does not think about this daily. In recent years, severe storms and torrential rains seemed to be indications of the changes to come. In Copenhagen and Stockholm, people should no longer feel safe, I thought. What if I have children and grandchildren? What future will they meet? Climate researchers predict more frequent floods and storms. In 500 years, Denmark and the lower lying coastal areas in Sweden are likely to have disappeared from the earth’s surface. It would not affect me but future generations. However, I will have had a share in it. Might I have done what I could to reduce the greenhouse effect? Both personally, through my daily consumption, and politically by engaging in climate and environmental issues? In addition to my finite existence, I had a responsibility to those who would inherit the earth.

Amid these dark thoughts, it suddenly struck me that a devastating disaster could occur even in my lifetime. Earthquakes and hurricanes, even rising oceans, humans can survive, but if a previously undiscovered asteroid or comet was on a collision course with the earth there would be nowhere to seek refuge. The staggering empty feeling in my stomach took on this idea and got hold of me. I felt uncomfortable and had to take some deep breaths to collect myself.

Life as we know it, indeed our entire existence, depends on a fragile balance in nature. Had the laws of nature from the beginning, during the Big Bang, been slightly different, a stronger or weaker gravity, for example, then life would not have happened at all in the universe. Eons later, other factors have prevailed. The earth’s distance from the sun, the planet’s electromagnetic field, the lunar tidal effects, the presence of appropriate chemical compounds, evolutionary mutations, etc., etc. – all are factors that miraculously have come together in the creation of life. The fact that we exist at all is a gift, I thought. We are offered this gift by forces that are so infinitely greater than us, forces science has not yet by far understood (if ever scientists will
get to the bottom of these mysteries). I am inclined to believe that there is an all-pervading divine power, a panentheistic force in the universe that wills life and consciousness. I rememberered a phrase that I had heard, it is through life that the universe becomes aware of itself.663

This is not the traditional concept of a Christian God, to whom one could relate directly and personally, but a divine power, which was both the cause of everything and the sustaining power behind it all. Yet as I sat there, the most important thing was not that life, in one way or another, had been given me and every other living creature by a higher power, but it was the fact that it had been given to me and everyone else; I and every other creature had not chosen it, we had received it. That the gift of life is fragile should not discourage me from using it – live my life – I thought – but also to live it sensibly. This life that flows to me and everyone else, I concluded, must imply or infuse me with a responsibility: not to disrupt the flow of life. Living my life must not be at the expense of other life, for example, through my way of life destroying the planet for future generations. It seemed to me that life, as it is given to us and as it consists in all its fragility, must be kept sacred, i.e. something that must be maintained and appreciated in all its forms. I remained seated, in deep contemplation, for a quite a while, before I got up and continued on my journey.

Reflections on 185 Empty Chairs

The memorial installation did not establish a stage with the intention for somebody to act for someone else, which would have been the case had the event been announced as theatre (or, for that matter, as an exhibition, which also establishes an exploratory and reflective viewing mode). Of course, one could still observe others and oneself visiting the installation through what could be called the theatre researcher’s etic description, i.e. a description in which she used her professional knowledge and the vocabulary of research in a consideration of the installation as a theatrical event; yet, from such an etic viewpoint, it would be intrusive, perhaps even unethical, to infer that all visitors in their self-understanding would also see themselves as performing

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the installation or acquiring a certain role scripted by the staging. Such a lucid reflexive attitude might hardly be part of the experience, if one came to remember and mourn a deceased relative or friend. However, I do believe an approximation to the insider review or an emic description by the participating researcher could allow for a native visitor (here a resident of Christchurch), or (as in my case) an outside visitor to recognize herself in the event I underwent, and a point of common reference could be established between performance analysis and lived experience.564

In my view, 185 Empty Chairs created an experiential space and an analysis situation that is complex and, as such, exemplary of all my event examples. Here, as in the other analyses, I take a double position as both outsider (researcher) and insider (participant), and I therefore have the advantage of combining the two perspectives ethic and emic in my analyses. In this context, I am aware of the risk of confusing the two perspectives, or that either the etic or emic mode of view might distort the analysis. As far as possible, I endeavour to keep the two perspectives separate by first starting the analysis with a dense description of my impression and experience of the event, like the one I just presented to the reader, and then reflect on this description from the point of view of my analysis concepts with the development of the model in mind.

When I use stage as an analytical concept to reflect theoretically on the staging of spaces in 185 Empty Chairs, it is in the light of my experience of a temporal coincidence of being an agent and beholder. Although the installation is not a theatre stage, it can be understood as a scenic and performative space for the visitor’s imagination, whether the experiential process is rendered in theatrical terms or not. Thus, I propose that for an insider consideration it is possible to have a double look at what is happening in the event as an agent who at the same time sees herself doing and imagining. I recall the formula I set up in Chapter 1, p. 197: Agent = Agent ~ Beholder. What I am going to show with 185 Empty Chairs is how the installation, with its suggestive material directedness, has the potential to turn the visitor into an agent who observes her own agency within the frame of an existential and spiritual imagination. Starting from the stage concept, it is possible to observe how the event and its experiential potential unfolded through my encounters with the installation.

In Fischer-Lichte’s understanding of space, *185 Empty Chairs*, with its rectangular lawn in relation to the surroundings, amounted to a distinct geometric space that the visitor could enter. The rows of chairs with their different shapes and designs could be said to be a kind of displaced architecture or interior because the chairs were located in an unexpected place: outdoors on a demolition site in the middle of a disaster-sticken city. The fact that it was possible for the visitor to move about in the installation’s geometric space and navigate its chair architecture created a coincidence with the performative space; by simply entering the installation space, the beholder became an agent who shifted her view and engaged with its materiality. Eliasson’s installation, *Your Blind Passenger*, had been a walled closure with a hidden interior; *185 Empty Chairs* worked according to the same principle, the stage establishing a physical demarcation between an outside-space and inside-space, but with the inside-space in plain view: the lawn with the chairs surrounded by the cityscape. It constituted a distinction between one physical space, which was familiar, habitual, the urban space, and one which was unknown, untried, the installation space. The clearly demarcated installation space initially enabled my experience of Jørgensen’s intermediate world, or that which was my notion of immanent transcendence. Through its alienation effect, the installation transcended the urban space and triggered in me a hesitation in entering due to what I perceived to be an exalted, sacred space. The white painted chairs created an atmosphere of exaltation, in the sense of Gernot Böhme’s ecstasy of things, where the whiteness made the everyday objects transcend their profane banality and sanctified them, the way that Giorgio Agamben understands the sacred as that which is removed from everyday use in an act of sacrifice. White symbolised here the cleansed and clean which I associated with a certain spacious quality of inviolability or of something sacred. With Alfred Schütz it can be described as the little transcendence, i.e. exceedence of an event horizon between known and unknown space. As it appears from my narrative, it could have a contemplative and affective effect on the visitor to enter into this performative space, as one – as I did – would begin to reflect on the symbolism of the empty chairs and the subjective bodily relation to them. These moments of my visits became, what Jens Roselt and Joakim Stenshäll call *significant moments* as they challenged my lifeworld by interfering with profound questions that required consideration and clarification. Schütz’s concept, the great transcendence, was activated by my distinction between myself as the present to

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the absent or the living to the dead. Occurring at the transitions to the grass and the chair seat, the intermediate world unfolded as threshold experiences, in the first case as a physical border, which I relatively easily crossed, while the chairs were a nearly inviolable space despite the invitation to take a seat. Here, it was my attuned presence, or with Heidegger’s concept, the Befindlichkeit, in relation to the chairs that gave rise to the reflection. The installation became a performative space in which the visitor’s actions and reflections could interact with each other. As my contemplation shifted the focus of the physical actions, the performative space soared to expand into a mental space, a space of imagination that was no longer geometrically restricted, but which attracted the surrounding world and the cosmic through my associations and thoughts.

It was with material directedness as staging device that 185 Empty Chairs created the notion of immanent transcendence and the perceived presence of the dead. The installation affected the visitor’s imagination with its use of the chairs. The chair as construction is designed to maintain and support the human body; it therefore takes the form of the body in such a manner that the buttocks and the thighs are supported, while the lower legs and upper body are typically held at a 90-degree angles from the lower body and upper legs resting on the seat. What is interesting in this context is that the seated body has a direction as the front and the face are facing forward, and thus, with reference to Siemke Böhnish, it may be said to constitute an attentive directedness for those who may find themselves in front of it. When the chair is empty, its shape refers to the absent body and becomes itself a threshold for this transcendent object. It was this staging property that made it possible for me to imagine and sense the presence of the absent. This distinctive and paradoxical presence can be understood as a variation on Marvin Carlson’s ghosting, in as far as I realise the sense of presence through the imagination and recollection. The empty chairs reminded me of the earthquake victims, who became present to me as visual “double exposures” sitting in the chairs. Here, it was the material directedness of the inanimate objects and not, as in Carlson’s examples, an actor’s narrative character or the reuse of props or other elements in the theatrical production, which gave rise to the ghosting. Although there is no drama as reference for 185 Empty Chairs, there is still the historical event of the earthquake inscribed in the context of the installation, which supports the recollection.

However, in order to evolve into the contemplative and reflective space involving relationships between natural forces and existential fragility, which I further saw 185 Empty Chairs as a catalyst for, the staged event was
dependent on several other factors where material properties of the staging were only the first; they connected, in my reception of the installation, with my capacities for experience.

As I have shown, the installation’s location in the public urban space connected its performative space with its surroundings, through which its experiential potential could ultimately be affected. It was a performative space that drew its meaningful potential in the environmental specificity: only in post-earthquake Christchurch could it create its specific contextual meaning.\(^{566}\) In other words, the performative space extends beyond the edge of the geometric space of the installation and incorporates the surroundings of the earthquake-stricken and destroyed city centre in the mental transcendence, the space effected. Here, it contributes to the understanding of my experience that although unprepared for the encounter with the installation, I had been attuned to be receptive and open to the experience, which would leave me profoundly affected. I had known about the historical context of the earthquake. I had been touched by the ghostly atmosphere of the abandoned public squares, shops, and restaurants, and the collapsed tower of the Anglican cathedral, where I knew that several tourists had been killed. Not least, my personal background as a Scandinavian also played its part, since I had never, before arriving in New Zealand, felt at the mercy of natural forces to such an extent. The earthquake I experienced in Wellington had remained clear in my memory and had emotionally predisposed me to imagine being one of the victims of the Christchurch earthquake. That I could expand my human existential fragility to include the forces of nature in a broader, more cosmic perspective was associated with both my cultural and aesthetic competences, i.e. my knowledge of geology, climate change, space research, my past experience with installation art, especially Your Blind Passenger, as well as my spirituality or faith, which is the search for the sacredness of existence rather than beliefs rooted in a particular religious tradition. In my reflections, the sacred suggested itself through the consideration of the connections between being at the mercy of natural forces, playing a part in the climate crisis and a perceived call for cherishing the gift of life. The sacred revealed itself in the ecological sense of responsibility I felt towards future generations and the panentheistic cosmic force that will life.

The fact that my encounter with 185 Empty Chairs evolved into a spiritual but non-religious experience mainly relates to the circumstance that the

\(^{566}\) Installations of chairs in other contexts do also call forth the absent, but the ascribed meanings are different, cf. the chairs memorial in Ghetto Heroes Square in Cracow, Poland.
installation does not have an explicit frame of reference, which thematises the religious. Instead of inscribing itself into Christian references, which would have otherwise been obvious given its location on the former site of a church, the installation remained open to the concrete context of the earthquake-stricken city centre to make this active in the interpretation of the installation event. Hence, the use of the empty chair functions as a transcultural or universal symbol capable of creating an emotional resonance among visitors wherever they come from. This means that the visitor can bring both the environment and her own story, belief, or faith to the interpretation of the installation.⁵⁶⁷

From this encounter it should not be deferred, however, that the potentiality of experiences of transcendence are so simple that only an open contextual work as 185 Empty Chairs may have the potential to create such an individual spiritual experience. In the next chapter, it will become clear how an event, staged within a particular institutional and traditional framework, can also create a similar transcultural experience of transcendence, suggesting the importance of applying the experiential approach to performance analysis, at least when investigating metaphysical, spiritual, or religious potentials.

The Pōwhiri

Preamble to the Analysis

As a proviso to the scope of the pōwhiri analysis, it is important for me to state that I am not of Māori decent; I am a newcomer to Māori culture, and in the analysis of the pōwhiri, I merely build upon my own experience. Unlike the aim of ethnographic participatory observation, my performance analysis does not attempt to describe a native Māori view of the ritual and its experiential potential. I shall clearly distinguish between what is my interpretation of the ritual and what is the indigenous understanding of the ritual, ...

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⁵⁶⁷ With this view I approach the artist’s own view of his work. In a video interview in the web series Christchurch Dilemmas, Pete Majendie has said: “I met a guy sitting here [in a chair], who’d lost a relative on Malaysian Airline that went missing. In a sense, it transcends the earthquake, although it’s sort of rooted in the earthquake.” (My addition) Gerald Smyth and Radio NZ, Ep 7 – 185 White Chairs, Christchurch: Frank Film Ltd., 2017, https://www.chchdilemmas.co.nz/2017/185-white-chairs-stay-or-go/ (accessed May 26, 2018).
which I studied in preparation to my participation. Whenever I refer to any 
symbolic meaning of the pōwhiri, I refer to Māori sources and scholars. I am 
solely to blame for any misunderstandings and misconceptions of the 
pōwhiri’s meaning and spiritual dimension that my analysis could give rise 
to.

For further ethical and methodological considerations, I also find it prop-
er to present the reasons for choosing this particular kind of event, which is 
foreign to my own Scandinavian cultural background, and to explain the 
conceptual approach of the analysis. This will make clear my motivation for 
the analysis and what I hope it will achieve. Why did I choose to study an 
indigenous ritual in Aotearoa New Zealand, in the far south on the other side 
of the world? And why analyse the performance of pōwhiri?

The primary reason why I chose a Māori ritual was that I had been to the 
country in 2010 and acquired some prior knowledge and experience of 
Māori culture; this made me interested in learning more about Māori rituals.

Even before my visit to the country, when I was still developing my ini-
tial research proposal for Stockholm University, Anita Hammer gave me the 
very first impetus to interest myself in the Māori, their rituals, and spiritual-
ity. She sent me a preprint of her work on spiritual performance, Between 
Play and Prayer (2010). In the book, she analyses her experience of partic-
ipating in a Māori tangi or passing into spirit, what Pākehā would call a 
funeral. What intrigued me when reading about the Māori tradition was the 
connection between ritual and confirmation of personal identity in a context 
of ancestry, which by the Māori peoples is held to be a very real spiritual 
dimension affecting the lives of the living here and now as a felt presence 
and existential resource. In the case of the tangi, as experienced by Ham-
mer, it seemed to hold the potential of including the newcomer and outsider 
on a somatic and affective level in creating a collective, transpersonal space 
of grieving in which even she, as an outsider to Māori culture, could openly

568 New Zealander of European decent or foreigner, cf. http://maoridictionary.co.nz/ 
search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=pakeha 
(accessed May 24, 2018).

569 Hammer, 2010, p. 156. This is not merely Hammer’s interpretation; in an inter-
view with the psychologist Paul Bailey, he explains how the spirits of the ancestors 
play a part in the way he conducts his therapy sessions. Hammer 2010, p. 189. The 
very real impact of relating to the ancestors are confirmed by Māori scholars, for 
example, Royal, 2016, and Mead, 2003, p. 58, as well as a Māori contact of mine, in 
a conversation on November 20, 2012. My contact has wished to remain anon-
ymous.
mourn her deceased family members. \footnote{Hammer, 2010, pp. 155-157.} This encouraged me to look into other Māori hui (gatherings) that could hold a similar inclusive and profound effect of bringing people together across cultures.

It also struck me that in the midst of secularised New Zealand society, dominated by Europeans and shaped by modernist European thinking, the Māori peoples had maintained a widespread consensus on the importance of ritual and the honouring of ancestors as a real spiritual presence in life – concepts that have become so foreign to the disenchanted worldviews so common in Northern Europe that they no longer have a serious bearing on social life. Aotearoa New Zealand seemed to be the place to investigate living ritual tradition.

As I happened to be going to visit a friend of mine in that same year, September 2010, I felt inspired to learn as much as I could about the culture of the Māori peoples during my stay, and I did what was possible to do within my limited time frame. Unfortunately, my short round-trip itinerary did not allow me to stay in one place long enough to establish contact with Māori locals and be invited to partake in any gathering and ritual, which meant that I was left with the possibilities given to tourists.

In Rotorua, a prominent Māori cultural centre on the North Island, I visited the living village Ōhinemutu and the site of the Te Papaiouru Marae, whose grounds are open to visitors. \footnote{For information available to visitors about Ōhinemutu and the Te Papaiouru Marae, see: http://www.newzealand.com/int/feature/ohinemutu/ (accessed 18 February, 2016).} This visit gave me an experiential basis for understanding what I would later on learn about the marae and other related Māori concepts. For an introduction to Māori hui, including the pōwhiri, I went to the Tamaki Māori Village, which is a made-for-tourists total staging of a visit to a pre-colonial era village. \footnote{Tamaki Māori Village: http://www.tamakimaorivillage.co.nz (accessed 18 February, 2016).} Of course, I was well aware of the limits and risks of touristic representations of indigenous cultures \footnote{“In short, [ethnic performance for tourists] commoditizes culture – producing it as “a sign of itself,” objectified and inert, hypostatized and hyperbolized – and positions patrons as the arbiters of an authenticity based not on a deep understanding of cultural ethos, but on the performers’ consistent observance of the conventions of primitive realism.” Werry, 2011, p. 158. See also: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage, Berkley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998.}, and that the visit could never substitute participation in a real gather-
ing at a marae, but should only be taken as an introductory precursor to the engagement that I hoped for on my eventual return to the country. To put these provisional forays into perspective and test my idea for researching Māori rituals at all, I met with a Māori musician, researcher, and promoter of traditional Māori knowledge and performing arts, and then professor of Māori Development at The University of Auckland, Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, and we discussed the feasibility, ethics, and other problems that I might encounter. I also met with a Pākeha theatre director and scholar, Bert van Dijk, who had experience in collaborating with the Māori and had incorporated Māori concepts, philosophy and ritual structures into his own practice-based theatre research. Both of them encouraged me to proceed with my research ideas. For further in-depth study and preparation I bought books to bring home by Māori and recognised Pākeha scholars on Māori hui and rituals, including the pōwhiri; on Māori values and way of life (tikanga Māori), and comparisons between Māori and Western philosophy. These visits, talks, and books became important to me in forming a foundation of knowledge from which to proceed in developing my research concept.

Another reason for choosing the pōwhiri is to be found in my analytical method. As my analytical point of departure is the impact of the staged event’s materiality upon sensual, perceptual, and interpretive processes, i.e. the aesthetic reception, it made sense to expose myself to a ritual that I would not be familiar with, a non-European, non-Christian ritual event, especially one that would take place within an institution of indigenous tradition like a marae. There is no ritual tradition of indigenous culture still alive in Scandinavia, the Old Norse and Sami practices have all been effectively eradicated by Christianity. Understanding ritual as practice implicates a set of certain behavioural skills, which is acquired and internalised by the body through its prolonged iteration. My idea was to reach for a bodily openness toward and, at the same time, a cognitive awareness of that which transpires in the very ritual event – an approach which has also been used by Megan McDonnell (see Chapter 1, p. 91) and which is implied by Dorthe Jørgensen’s concept of intermediate world (see Chapter 1, pp. 163-164). By entering a foreign tradition of ritual, the idea was that I would find myself in a practice unaccustomed to me; I would not react to the on-goings with prompt bodily reflex – as I would in the familiar Christian Mass – and I would gain an enhanced reactivity to what would happen to me. As I have already explained, this did not mean that I ignored the cultural context by not acquiring

\[574\] For a description and critical analysis of the touristic performances presented by the Tamaki Māori Village, see: Werry, 2011, pp. 162-170.
any knowledge of it prior to the event. On the contrary, I considered being informed about customs, protocol, and symbolic meaning a necessary precondition, not merely out of respect to the Māori and their tradition, but to make possible, if at all, a situation, in which the ritual could bring me an experience of transcendence.

Upon my return to Aotearoa New Zealand two years later, I succeeded in being introduced to a Māori community with the help of contacts. Following the ethical codex of ethnographic research and the recommendations I was given, I presented my project to the Māori community leaders and had it approved before I was invited to participate in the pōwhiri. After my participation, I followed up by presenting my analysis and its results at a meeting and in following conversations with members of the Māori community.

Even if my method is informed by anthropology and ethnography, performance analysis remains my approach. This means the method deviates from what would be the normal approach to the study of indigenous culture. I have not become an ethnographer. I have not remained in the community for a yearlong stay observing the ways, customs, and traditions of the people. Neither have I studied Te Reo, the Māori language. My purpose has not been to describe the emic or insider perspective on the pōwhiri, but to understand its potential for creating an experience of transcendence for the newcomer and stranger. I relate to the pōwhiri as I would to any staged event from the outsider position. It is a cultural event that can be delimited in space and time, with a beginning, middle, and an end – even if its effects extend beyond its borders and may be long-lasting. This approach is a conscious choice made for reasons regarding the aim of the analysis: to keep the outsider perspective as much as possible in the analysis. For the same reasons, it may seem that I do not align my research with Māori interests. However, the outsider approach in performance analysis, especially when undertaken by a newcomer to Māori culture, allows insights into the functioning of pōwhiri as a widely used ritual event intended to receive and welcome strangers to the Māori community. In recent years, there has been quite some public debate in Aotearoa New Zealand on the use of the pōwhiri, on when to use it and for welcoming whom.575 In this context, the experiential analytical ap-

575 I became aware of this debate by watching a documentary from Māori TV. To make a point the documentary opens with an example of what many Māori consider inappropriate use: the welcoming of the Disney cartoon characters Mickey and Mini Mouse (actors dressed up in costumes). Kay Ellmers and Hone Edwards, Pōwhiri: welcome or not?: a documentary, Auckland: Tūmanako Productions, Māori Television and NZ On Air, 2010.
approach applied to the outsider perspective on the pōwhiri might be useful in understanding the ritual’s potential, including also its failure – as I will also show with the example of the welcoming of a Danish politician.

Obviously, there is the risk in taking this outsider position of performance analysis that I might reduce the ritual of indigenous life-practice by perceiving it through the performance lens as theatrical performance; I do, after all, use concepts for the properties of staging that stem from the theatre. The Māori performance studies scholar and performer Rua McCallum has discussed the outsider-position versus the insider-position of research on the pōwhiri. She refers to the anthropological concepts etic and emic: etic is the viewpoint obtained by the foreign observer, whereas emic is research done from the side of the social group. As a Māori brought up with the ritual tradition, she promotes the emic approach, but maintains that performance is a viable concept for understanding what is going on in the ritual, as long as one considers the performance as ritual, and not ritual as performance:

Emically […], the purpose of the pōwhiri is to transform visitors, to integrate them with tāngata whenua and mutually to share the purpose of the intended gathering. Although these seeming lifeworld experiences are perceived etically as extra-daily ritual to non-Māori, these formalised ceremonies are entrenched in important cultural and spiritual values which permeate the daily lives of many Māori. Thus, the pōwhiri would not be classified as theatre, but as ritual with theatrical elements. The ritual of welcome and encounter as a performance supports observers, but it is debateable whether ritual participants are also spectators. From an Indigenous perspective, the ritual is just that: a ritual.576

I believe that I have made myself aware of the emic perspective prior to my participation, through my studies of the tradition and symbolic meaning of the pōwhiri, its protocol, and ritual process, as well as through personal preparations that the protocol and due respect for local customs prompted me to undertake (I shall return to those in the analysis). Then, being welcomed in a ritual, I became the subject of the ritual process. I took on the social role of a ritual performer, which meant that I was both the doer of ritual acts and the undergoer of their effects; it was not possible for me to even distance myself from the process mentally: I accepted that I underwent the social and spiritual process that the Māori hold to be necessary in order to be accepted into their community.

However, undergoing the ritual did not mean that I achieved an emic view of what happened in the event; such a viewpoint is unattainable, of course: it would mean that I became Māori, which is not possible. What the ritual event allowed me to do was to combine knowledge of emic viewpoints, acquired through my studies, with my etic viewpoint as a theatre and performance scholar, and let the analysis of my individual experience inform these different, yet complementary perspectives. I could compare my own experience with that which is Māori understanding of the pōwhiri. Having access to the etic viewpoint of the event then enabled me to observe and reflect on the workings of the ritual with the lens of performance, or, more precisely, the aesthetics of the performative adapted to the purpose of analysing experience.

Hence, I agree with McCallum that considering ritual as performance allows for observation; but I am less sceptical as to the question if the ritual participant can also be a spectator—that is, speaking as the non-Māori visitor. As it will become evident in my description of the pōwhiri, the ritual acts through their linear progression establishes, occupies, and abandons performative spaces, which are either virtual or clearly physically demarcated by thresholds; these spaces position the participants in relation to each other’s acts as to allow them to spectate for shorter or longer periods. In fact, McCallum acknowledges that this positioning occurs by comparing the participants to Augusto Boal’s spect-actor who shifts between the two positions of actor and spectator; but what becomes self-contradictory and confusing in the end of her article (compare the above quote) is that she aligns the spectator with the non-participant who is practically impossible to imagine. I would deliberately refrain from using the noun spectator and shift it into the verb as I want to indicate that the ritual does not allow one to remain in one and the same position throughout. Of course, awareness and relevance of these periods as spectating might vary depending on who the participant is; it might be that it more easily occurs to the outsider and stranger than someone steeped in the Māori lifeworld, values, and customs. Nonetheless, I maintain that the lens of performance and staged event as applied to the culturally informed stranger allows a different perspective on the pōwhiri, especially when it comes to its potential for including the newcomer on a spiritual level.

In recognition of the spiritual dimensions that the pōwhiri entails for many Māori, my aim is to analyse the potential of experience of transcend-

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ence for the newcomer as it emerges from the encounter with the properties of ritual staging. By examining interrelations between experience and cultural contextualisation, i.e. prior knowledge of ritual protocol, this analysis approaches the welcome ritual as a possible trans-cultural meeting-ground.

To put my own pōwhiri experience into perspective, I will compare it with the one that a Danish politician had when visiting. It will show how dependant the outcome of ritual is on the preparation and inevitably the individual attitude of the visitor. I hope this analysis contributes to the knowledge of potential pōwhiri newcomer-experience that may benefit Māori research in the postcolonial political reality of Aotearoa New Zealand and, at the same time, give something back to the hosts who showed me the trust of inviting me.

A large group of people participated in the pōwhiri. Since it was not possible to obtain permission to write about the event from all those present, I have decided to keep the anonymity of all involved and not to disclose the marae site of the ritual by name, description, or otherwise. I do not implicate anyone else's internal, spiritual experience, but my own in the analysis of the event.

Account of the Pōwhiri Event

It was a rainy and dreary spring afternoon in October, when I went to my pōwhiri. In an email I had been told to meet up at the entrance to the marae, 15 minutes before the ceremony was to begin. Here I would meet the other guests who were to be welcomed that day. The principal of the marae would send someone who would take us into the compound, lead us in the ritual, and speak on our behalf, since none of us spoke Te Reo. I had been told that at this marae it was not permitted to speak English as it is the language of the colonialists.

I arrived well in time and waited for the others at the entrance to the marae. I shook myself under my umbrella and looked at the surroundings. It was a marae located in the city. Not unusual for that type of marae, the building complex lay hidden behind some houses facing the street where I stood. Only the high waharoa (portal gateway) in front of me revealed that there was a marae here. It was a prime example of Māori wood carving with extensive cuts of, what I perceived as both animal heads and human faces in out-of-this-world stylised forms, decorated with spiral patterns and painted with the characteristic deep red colour, kōkōwai, as seen on all traditional
Māori buildings, ornamentations, and statues. I had read that the colour had a spiritual significance as, according to the Māori myth of creation, it symbolises the clay that was coloured by the blood that Papatūānuku (Mother Earth) shed when she was separated from her husband Rangi-nui (The Sky Father). I studied the figures, admired the craftsmanship and was put into a contemplative mood. The portal oozed of an atmosphere that reached beyond this world. I prepared myself to enter a context where the everyday would lift itself and assume new dimensions. I was attuned for what was about to happen next.

My contemplative state was abruptly interrupted when a middle-aged man of Māori appearance approached me and asked if I was Kim. I confirmed somewhat absentmindedly but quickly collected myself to greet him properly. We shook hands and introduced ourselves to each other. He confirmed that he had been appointed to lead me and the other guests in the ritual and to speak on our behalf. While we waited for the other guests to arrive, he asked me some questions in preparation for my presentation to the host people: where I had come from, what my family name was, what I was doing, and why I had come to Aotearoa New Zealand. He asked if this was my first pōwhiri and I told him that it was, that I had only been to the show that Tamaki Māori Village in Rotorua put on, and that I was deeply honoured that he and the host people would welcome me to their marae.

We waited a few more minutes for the other two guests. When they – a man and a woman – arrived, we all greeted each other quickly. It turned out that they were also from abroad and belonged to another native people. Our leader repeated the question procedure with the woman, who was the reason that this pōwhiri had come into being in the first place. Then he briefly went through what was going to happen and gave us instructions on what to do. Eventually, almost as a whim, he asked me and the woman if we had prepared a waitata (song) that we could perform after he had presented us. That we had, and we agreed that I would sing my song immediately after her as she would be presented first.

There was some time left and our leader lit a cigarette. Judging from the informal and unpretentious way he had received us, I found that he had a very relaxed relationship with what was about to happen. I assumed that he had a routine in leading guests whom he had just met. I was actually surprised at how little information I had received from the host people in preparation for the ceremony – most of it just given to me in the man’s quick oral

578Alexander Wyclif Reed, Raupō Book of Māori Mythology, Rosedale: Raupō, 2008, p. 15.
account. In the invitation email I had received, there was no information and no instructions. I had followed up on the email by asking if there was anything I should prepare for. The principal of the marae had answered that there was no need; I just had “to keep my eyes and ears open.” That response had amazed me. Now I was glad that I had prepared myself by studying the pōwhiri custom and familiarised myself with the different phases of the ritual and their symbolic meaning. But not everything could be learned from reading.

At that point, I was grateful that my contacts had told me that I was expected to prepare a waiata (song) that I could perform even though I was not the main guest and that it was not permitted to be in English but preferably in Danish, my own tongue. At a gathering that my landlords had invited me to the weekend before, one of the Māori guests had told me the same thing and, in addition, explained what it means to a person of Māori origin to present herself at a pōwhiri: mentioning by name her ivi (tribe) and the waka (canoe) in which the ancestors had arrived, and recounting her whakapapa (family tree, bloodline) as comprehensively as possible, and, finally, describing her tū rangawaewae (domicile) by way of its characteristic landscape features, etc. If they had not told me these things, I would not have known that practical preparation was actually necessary. It had made it possible for me to think about how to present myself the best way possible and find a suitable Danish song and practice singing it.

Preparing my presentation and waitata had become very important to me as it made me think about who I am and where I am from; my parents and grandparents who are deceased; my living family on my father’s side with whom I had only recently reconnected; the importance of the connection with ancestors and knowing my roots, which in my culture have been forgotten. It was astonishing that I had not been formally instructed in how to introduce myself and that I had to have a song to sing for the hosts. Perhaps it was simply assumed that it was the duty of the visitor to inform herself of the tradition and the protocols. After all, I was the guest in their country. Considering colonial history, one could rightly argue that it was particularly important for me, as a European, to show respect by entering the ritual without the host people having to inform me of my duties. That was the explanation I found reasonable and that I had satisfied myself with.

It was time to enter our whakaeke (the going into the marae). Our leader stubbed out his cigarette carefully on a stone setting outside the gate and

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579 E-mail received October 3, 2012.
threw it in a waste container that was obviously placed there for that very purpose. In the broader context, this little act may seem insignificant, completely banal, but it nevertheless took on significant importance as it marked the transition into the ritual process. It is forbidden to smoke on a marae – not only because of the fire hazard it may pose – it is considered tapu (unclean) and therefore contaminates the site’s sacredness.\footnote{Mead 2003, p. 72.} He then told us to form a square, ready to go in procession with the female guest and I in front, followed by her companion and himself.

We walked through the portal and up the entrance between the buildings. I was seized by a sudden intense feeling of presence mixed with some anxiety: it was now about to happen, what I had come all the way from the other side of the globe to become part of, and that I had put so much time and effort into preparing myself for. I knew that I would be sized up by the tangata whenua (the local people, the people of the country) as the newcomer, such as is traditionally the purpose of the pōwhiri (cf. its function as a rite of encounter). I expected to be considered one who had to do my part for the ritual to be well done. It was nothing like going to church at home, where you can get away with sitting on one of the back rows and relate to the service as an observer: here I had been assigned the role as visitor.

Before we reached the courtyard, we heard a woman’s voice intone a “haere mai!” (Come here! Or: welcome!) that she continued to repeat for some time. This was karanga (the call) that prompted us to step in. We went in, and when we had gotten clear of the buildings, a space opened in front of us and to our left side. It was a large lawn that spread out in front of the whare tipuna (forefather house) and formed the marae ātea (courtyard). The site was enclosed between the houses that lay out to the street, and a group of trees and a fence that marked the border on the other side. The gable of the whare tipuna, which also contained the entrance, was richly ornamented with traditional ocher red woodcarvings along the roof edge and at the top end of the ridge was a single human figure, which I, in accordance with tradition, assumed represented the original ancestor of the tangata whenua (the people of the land). On each side, in front of the whare tipuna, as seen in many marae, there was a shelter under which the parties in a pōwhiri could sit opposite each other, separated by the open space between them. As the weather did not allow that the ritual could be held outdoors, it would take place inside the whare tipuna.

\footnote{Mead 2003, p. 72.}
Kaikaranga (the woman who had the role of making the ceremonial call) stood on the porch of the ancestor’s house. As our leader had instructed us, we went forward in formation until the half-way point in front of the whare tipuna. Here, the woman in our group stood one step in front of us as she was the chief guest, I placed myself next to her companion, while our leader stood behind me.

Kaikaranga then began on her second karanga, which, according to protocol, is dedicated to the dead. This applies to both those mourned by tengata whenua and manuhiri (visitors). Since I did not understand the words, it was the quality of her thin voice and plaintive tone that affected me. I looked down and bowed my head. The song made me think of my parents, both of whom I had lost too early; my grandmothers, who had passed away when I was still a child; and my grandfathers, whom I had never known. My eyes filled with tears. The song was followed by a moment of silence.

During my preparations, I had read that there is a widespread belief among the Māori that the deceased’s wairua (spirits) are never far away and can return on special ceremonial occasions, especially tangi (the passing into spirit), but also at other hui (gatherings). They are then perceived as truly present at the marae or ceremony. The knowledge of this belief in the wairua had influenced me. Even though I do not usually think of myself as someone who believes in spirits, I went to the ritual with an open mind. In my preparation, I had accepted this spiritual dimension of the ritual as a potential reality for my Māori hosts, which, at the same time, I perceived of as an empathetic opening that would play a part in what would happen. I missed my parents and grandparents as I stood there in those minutes of silence. There was comfort in the idea that my lost ones had come and joined me; that they stood there with me and now would meet with the tangata whenua’s ancestral spirits. The thought filled me with a warm feeling.

Now, kaikaranga signaled us with a hand gesture to come to whare tipuna. We went to the front porch and took off our shoes, which we placed in a row along the wall. The other guests went into the house first, I followed, and immediately after me our group leader.

The door of the house had a beautifully decorated frame of ocher red woodcuts. The doorway was low, so I had to bend my head going in. When I looked up, the first thing I saw was the host people who sat in rows of chairs on the left side of the house and looked directly at me. It affected me more deeply than I had imagined, suddenly to be watched by almost 30 foreign pairs of eyes in that setting. At that moment, I was so nervous that I, in my vulnerability, quickly scrambled for safety to the nearest chair in the front
row on the opposite side of the house. According to the ritual process of the pōwhiri ceremony, manuhiri, the visitors, are always placed in chairs or bench racks on the left side of the house opposite tangata whenua. The visitors’ side of the house is tapu (untouchable), while the hosts’ side is noa (normal). The space between the two parties, called pae kauka, must not be crossed, before an exchange of speeches and songs has taken place.\(^{581}\) Barely had I settled in the seat, before our group leader discreetly pointed out to me that the first chair was reserved for him. As our speaker, he should sit in the seat immediately opposite the host people’s speaker. We had agreed upon this before we went in; but in my nervousness I had completely forgotten it. It made me rather embarrassed because I had endeavoured to do everything correctly. Now I had to move and find my place next to the other two guests who had already sat down. I found my place and was soon focused on the next stage of the ritual: the formal speeches (whaikōrero).

A young man got up and made a short speech. He used the word “hui”, and I supposed he announced the purpose of our gathering that day. The young man finished and his sideman, an elderly gentleman more formally dressed in an immaculate grey needle-stitched suit rose to give a considerably longer speech, which featured some theatrical traits. He used a carved walking stick, a common prop of the kaikōrero (speaker)\(^ {582}\), to visualise what might be the whakapapa (bloodline, ancestry) related to the great ancestor to which the house was dedicated. I deduced this as I picked up the word tipuna (ancestors), and his movements with the cane seemed to describe relations between relatives and perhaps the journeys these ancestors had made in order to get to this place. Repeatedly he pointed out imaginary points on the floor and drew lines between them. He paused his speech now and then to emphasise what he had said or to recall the next thing to say. It was obvious that he recounted an orally transmitted narrative. Along the way he glanced at us as well as at his own people to include everyone in what he said. There was a dignity and strength behind each movement and every word. He took his time; nothing was enforced. He held back energy, creating intensity in

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\(^{582}\) “The carved walking-stick (tokotoko), a whalebone kotiate or a mere (hand weapons) are indispensable props for a dramatic performance, and some people say they repel mākutu (black magic) as well. They give the orator authority, and lead emphasis to his gestures. Sometimes the speaker has no walking stick, so he picks up an umbrella instead and uses that in his oration.” Salmond, 2009, p. 172.
his expressions that keep my attention on everything he did. After his initial presentation of what I presumed was his people, he considered the chief guest and her companion and spoke at length to them. Then he paused, shifted his gaze to now look directly at me, and began his address. It made me straighten up in the chair, for now I was the attention of everyone present. I understood almost nothing of what he said, only a few words like wakapapa, but I noticed what a little surprisingly sounded like “Sweden”. I perceived it as an inviting gesture that he had made an exception to the rule of not using English, to include me more in the speech.

The kaikōrero’s direct gaze, and the fact that words were directed at me, made me feel completely involved in the ritual: I had been seen with accompanying words. But one thing was to be seen by their kaikōrero, even stronger it seemed that his gesture was confirmed by the other hosts who were watching me at the same time. I returned their gazes and when, for a moment, I let my gaze wander along the two rows of the host people, it dawned on me that there were more of them than I had first noticed. Behind the tangata whenua the wall was intermediately decorated with carved wooden figures (poupou). They were made in the characteristic stylised, supernatural style and with the kōkōwai as the base colour, just like the figures that guarded the entrance portal to the marae. The fact that they represented individual ancestors was revealed by their various facial features and the different props they held in their hands, for example, one figure held a gun and another one a bible, which suggested their duties in life. However, it was their eyes that caught my attention: the big pāua shells (a kind of mussel) they had for eyes shone in the light and seemed alive as the host people sitting in front of them. I became aware that the deceased host people were thus also present: I had the distinct impression that they too saw me and welcomed me to their marae. I had not come alone, however, because they reminded me that I had brought my lost ones with me.

The elder’s speech ended with a short prayer. From the beginning I assumed that it was a prayer, for he had bowed his head and the quality of the sentences had changed; they were not characterised by the same light inflection but became more regular and metered. From the verse meter and

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584 When I got home, I checked in the Māori Dictionary what Sweden is called: Huītene. I would not have been able to figure that word out, and it made sense exceptionally to use the English name, which I could understand.
rhythm, it seemed to me that it was a prayer I knew: perhaps the Lord’s Prayer. Eventually he finished with an “amen” that everyone – including me – repeated. That amen came naturally to me, not so much because it belonged to the Christian tradition, often incorporated by the Māori into their rituals and beliefs, but rather in response to the inclusiveness that I had been met with in this ritual.

This was followed by the speech on our behalf. It was significantly shorter than the speech on behalf of the host people and less gestural and theatrical. Our group leader first presented the main guest at his side, as he sometimes turned to or gestured towards her, and then me. When he finished, he signalled to the main guest that she should perform her waiata. She was accompanied by her companion and I enjoyed listening to the tones of their foreign language.

When the song was over, the host people’s kaikōrero spoke again for a while. According to the custom of pōwhiri, the last word in the exchange of whaikōrero is always the host people’s. At that time, however, I felt a strong sense of disappointment: obviously our speaker had forgotten to mention that I had also prepared a song. According to what we had agreed upon, I should have presented my waiata immediately after the main guest’s. Now I felt that all my preparations had been in vain; but in the sight of my hosts, I struggled not to show my disappointment. After the end of the speech, all the hosts rose and sang their song. Later, the principal of the marae told us the song had been in honour of their ancestors, and that it served to keep their spirits alive by honouring their customs and their deeds.

The host people getting up to sing in choir became a natural transition to the end of the ritual, the exchange of the traditional Māori greeting, during which the visitors defile past the host people and greet each member. This greeting is not just pressing hands, although it is often combined with this gesture. Hongi, which is the name of the greeting, consists of the two parties facing each other, looking into each other eyes, pressing the forehead and the back of the nose against each other and breathing in deeply. At that moment, I realised that the whole ritual, in terms of movement and proxemics, consisted in the two groups’ gradual approach to each other until they finally crossed the space that had separated them and came within intimate distance.

As it was the first time I participated in a hongi, the unaccustomed action initially felt challenging because of the bodily proximity to complete strangers; but I fully accepted the gesture and reciprocated the confidence

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585 Mead, 2003, p. 121. This principle maintains the mana (prestige) or mauri (spark of life) of the marae and the tangata whenua.
that it embodied. Allowing strangers to come this close could potentially be dangerous, considering the ancient function of the ritual. But the hongi was more than just a social assertion of mutual trust; it also had a spiritual dimension. From my research, I was familiar with the symbolic-mythological significance of the hongi. The gesture has more than one explanation: first of all, the greeting parties are believed to share the breath of life, as it was taken by the first human, the woman Hineahuone, who received the life-giving breath from the forest god Tāne when he made her out of dirt.\footnote{Salmond, 2009, p. 177. For the myth of Hineahuone's creation, see: Reed, 2008, p. 32.}

In extension of this myth, the hongi has been assigned additional meaning, such as the one Dr. Rangimarie Turuki Rose Peri describes as an expression of faith: “the oneness of all that exists, […] which relate to the progeny of Papatūānuku, the earth mother, so that we are related to the birds, the fish, the trees, all the insects […]”\footnote{Global Oneness Project, \textit{What a Hongi Means}, Inverness, CA: Global Oneness Project LLC, 2007, https://www.globalonenessproject.org/library/interviews/what-hongi-means (accessed May 26, 2018).} In the hongi, she explains, “my eyebrows remind you of the wingspan of the birds, […] the tail of the whale […], and my forehead is the crown, it reminds us of the crowns of the great trees, my nose is the trunk, and so when we touch [with] the seeing eye, or the healing eye [in the forehead] we link in and we remember that we are interrelated and that we part of the oneness of everything that exists. We do not believe in separation, no.”\footnote{Global Oneness Project, 2007, my insertions. Also Anita Hammer has characterised the hongi as a transpersonal encounter: “it creates a sense of intimacy which goes beyond the individual level”. Hammer, 2010, p. 168.} Here, therefore, the past, the gods, the creation, nature, and the ancestors were included in what we did in the ritual now, pointing to the future – in a reminder of the common human responsibility we share with each other. In both this sense and as a form of embrace, the hongi was an expression of aroha (love).\footnote{Cf. Salmond, 2009, p. 177.}

We completed the hongi, whereupon the speaker of the host people – now in English – called us together to continue the gathering in a more informal manner. He asked us to take chairs from the rows and form an oval. We all sat, and we guests were now scattered and mixed into the circle of the host people. After a brief presentation by the speaker of the host people and some of the more prominent members of the community, everyone else took turns presenting themselves giving shorter or longer accounts of their lives. When it was my turn, I asked the speaker if I could use a little extra time for my...
presentation because I had a waiata that I wanted to sing for them. And he permitted me to do so. Before I started my song, I told them who I was, where my family came from (as far as I knew, which did not go any further back than to my grandparents), that I had both Danish and Swedish ancestors, and that in that sense I had two homelands, that Denmark was my paternal land, while Sweden was my maternal land. Since I had lived most of my life in Copenhagen, I had decided to sing a Danish song. I introduced Der er et yndigt land (There is a lovely country)\(^{590}\) by telling them that it is the popular national anthem, which – albeit briefly – describes the Danish landscape, the ancestors, some of the history, and the people. I filled my lungs and threw myself into the song and hoped for the best. I had never sung \textit{a capella} in front of strangers and I do not consider myself a good singer. After a while I noticed that my audience listened with appreciative facial expressions and supported me in my singing. When I finished, the speaker thanked me warmly for this unexpected but absolutely welcome “intervention”, an opinion many of the host people nodded to confirm. I was relieved. Not so much that it had gone well with my singing, but because I now felt that I had done my duty for the ritual to be successfully carried out in the Māori spirit. It is customary that everyone should play their part in the ritual.\(^{591}\) At the same time it was important for me to let my roots, my family, my lost ones come into this meeting, which to me had come to play out as much on a spiritual level as a social one.

When the presentations were completed, they called us from the neighbouring dining house (whare kai): the food was ready. In the sharing of the meal, the ritual process ended with lifting the visitors’ tapu completely. I was now noa, part of the community, and could come and go on the marae as I wished, which I cherished as a great honour.

Reflections on the Pōwhiri

Understanding how the pōwhiri as a staged event could bring me a spiritual experience and what this experience consisted of, I relate to the analysis on the basis of concepts the I have developed from my theoretical adaption of Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performatives and Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience. Again, it is about the properties of the staging and my capaci-

\(^{590}\) \textit{There is a Lovely Country}. Text by Adam Oehlenschläger, 1819. Music by Hans Ernst Krøyer, 1835.

\(^{591}\) Mead, 2003, pp. 118-119.
ties for experience, in terms of which I examine how they influence my reception process and thus how the experience is brought about.

As mentioned above, I am particularly interested in the phenomenological paradox that can be observed in the moment when the absent, the dead, become present together with the living because it is in that significant moment I claim that the ritual’s spiritual dimension holds the potential to open up to a non-Māori participant and include this person in an experience of being part of a cosmic community that reaches both back and forward in time and across geographical distances and cultural boundaries.592

Prior to this significant moment of the pōwhiri, right on that material, sensual level, there is a gradual approximation between the living, which, if Schütz’s phenomenological concept of transcendence is applied to the process, transcends in a very real physical sense. I would like to remind the reader that I use Schütz’s concept to approach and understand the performativity that is lacking in Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience, but without abandoning her understanding of immanent transcendence and typology of experience. The ritual process involves all three of Schütz’s forms of transcendence. In the following part, I will relate these to the properties of staging, stage, and feedback loop.

First, I experience the little transcendence, whereby my view is limited by physical obstacles, such as the fact that I cannot see the marae from the street because of the adjacent buildings; that I cannot see kaikaranga at first (but only hear her call); and that the host people are first hidden from me in the ancestral home. I gradually overcome the little transcendence by moving through space. The fact that my view is first delimited to a certain extent, and that I move towards the space I cannot see at that moment, helps create the experience of transcending spatial boundaries, which, in itself, becomes an experience of uncertainty, over transition, a threshold experience: that I am about to enter into the unknown, an event whose outcome I cannot really predict, even though I understood the basic principle of the pōwhiri. Fischer-Lichte’s bodily-based liminality concept taken into consideration, this circumstance could be seen as support for the Turnerian symbolic transfor-

592 Here, I will remind the reader of the experience Anita Hammer had at the tangi she participated in, when this funeral ritual had allowed her to mourn her lost ones together with the foreign host people who had cared for their deceased relative. Hammer, 2010, pp. 155-157. Tangi and pōwhiri are different rituals, but as both forms refer to the ancestors, it seems to me – in my own experience – that it is reasonable to assume that they both have the potential to activate a longing by the newcomer stranger for her deceased relatives – at least, if one understands the fundamental meaning of the ritual and its tradition.
formation, which occurs during the pōwhiri through a separation phase from the surrounding community, entering marae through the portal, a liminality phase where visitors are untouchables in their still unsettled social relationship with the host people, and an integration phase, consisting of the visitor’s final approximation to the host people through hongi and the common meal (kai).

If I now change my point of view to observe the properties of the staging, momentary stages occur during this movement throughout the ritual. According to Fischer-Lichte’s categories of space, there is a significant use of architectural, geometric spaces – the fencing, the portal, the demarcation of adjacent buildings, the courtyard, the whare tipuna and its entrance, and the division of the participants in their confrontational seating – and of performance space, which is created through acts – karanga, kaikōrero, hongi, informal presentations, and the meal – but also constitutes a development towards a dissolving of the spaces that could be considered scenic or theatrical. These overlapping architectural and performative spaces form transitory and transient stages in the sense that the participants are alternately spectators/actors in relation to each other, and finally the observed separate stage space of the parties dissolves into the sharing of the same space (hongi and the meal).

If I return to consider the process through Schütz’s experiences of transcendence, the intermediate transcendence begins when I reach the point from where I can see kaikaranga, and later as I take my seat in front of the host people inside the ancestor’s house. Here, I am confronted with the other whose consciousness, thoughts, and intentions I do not have access to, and the only way I can overcome this transcendence is by reading the other’s facial expressions. Since I do not understand Te Reo, I am left with interpreting the non-verbal expressions. The intermediate transcendence becomes particularly challenging in the hongi, in which I enter within intimate proximity to the other. Parallel to Schütz’s experiences of transcendence, the process can be translated into Edward T. Hall’s proxemics, as a course of actions whereby bodily distance progressively decreases from public space to intimate space (see Chapter 2, pp. 242-243).

Considered as a property of the staging, the intermediate transcendence is established through Fischer-Lichte’s energetic feedback loop. Where kaikaranga, with her directedness through the call and song, had established herself as the one whom the feedback loop was directed at, the energy flow of the feedback loop made itself intensely felt during the exchanges inside the ancestor’s house. I noticed that attention was directed directly at me and the
sensation of the feedback loop culminated, as expected, during my presentation and song, at which point I addressed the host people directly. In Fischer-Lichte’s understanding of presence, I went from having a weak presence to a strong presence created through my actions. In this presence I was extremely exposed, and the intermediate transcendence is all the more applicable to the situation.

Via the physical movement through the phases of the pōwhiri and the encounter with the host people, I experienced transcendence in the very basic sense that I experienced it as entering an event that was greater than me, manifested through the marae’s architectural and performative spaces and the meeting with the other. Thus, to see an event and any such as transcending, as immanent transcendence, is, in relation to Jørgensen’s categories of experience, to have a metaphysical experience; but entering into the immanent transcendence of what I could not overlook, however, did not provide me with the reason that I had to interpret the event as spiritual. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the spiritual dimension is closely linked to the material.

Understanding the development of my spiritual experience, I apply my concept of material directedness; this concept may provide an explanation for empirically inanimate material reflecting the living person’s feedback and drawing attention to itself as if it were also alive. This phenomenon occurred as my gaze encountered the poupou, the ancestral figures, which in their material form could be said to constitute a strong mimetic presence in that – in an Aristotelian sense – the mimicry of the action to gaze was performed by the gleaming pāua shells. The most significant moment of the whole pōwhiri event became for me this moment when I was seen by both the living and the dead tengata whenua. The perceived presence of the ancestors’ spirits became an immanent transcendence through the doubling of the eyes, those of the living hosts and those of the figurines. Here, material directedness opened the possibility for me to enter mentally into Jørgensen’s intermediate world and to be receptive to the sensations, emotions, and premonitions that arise out of the encounter.

Rather than referring to any realistic depiction of the ancestors’ gazing act, it is the mimesis of the action itself, which is important: I perceive the poupou figurine as performing a living person’s gazing, and this had a significant impact on me. I see this gazing of the poupou as a parallel to Aristotle’s concept of mimesis, in the sense that the effect of Aristotelian mimesis lies not in the lifelikeness of dramatic actions alone, but in their recognisability through which men “find themselves learning or inferring” from observing the actions. See: Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, edited with critical notes and a translation Samuel Henry Butcher, London: MacMillan & Co., 1902, p. 15.
This situation is comparable to a multimedia performance analysed by Willmar Sauter, in which two actors appear but are physically separate: to the spectator, one is bodily present, standing on stage while the other is physically absent and only present in the performance virtually via the projection of a live-broadcast video feed. In his phenomenological analysis, Sauter claims that the performance’s playing on the presence/absence phenomenon creates a longing for experiencing the absent actor as physically present on the stage. I would even go one step further than Sauter and argue that it creates a phenomenological paradox in the spectator’s reception where the absent actor, through virtual participation in the performance, is actually experienced and reacted to as if present. In my pōwhiri experience, the video projection has been replaced by poupou, the ancestral figurine, which is symbolic in the radical sense it presents the possibility of recognising or sensing the transcendent, in this case the strong presence of the ancestor’s spirit. Here, I understand the symbolic in the same way as Jørgensen, not to be understood as a sign indicating something else (cf. Chapter 2, p. 115, n. 325), but which contains both the present and the absent, as an immanent transcendence, thus promising the healing of wounds that occurred when the deceased were separated from the living.

The situation in which I perceive myself as emphatically implicated in the ritual process is created by the social role-play staged in the event. Already in the invitation to the pōwhiri, a role as manuhiri (guest) is suggested to the invited, who is then supposed to meet with the other role players, the tangata whenua (hosts). The ritual process scripts the action through protocol and tradition, which projects the trajectory of the guest’s role development through an equalisation from being in the state of tapu (untouchable) to becoming noa (normal). As a guest, I sensed this liminal transformation as a changing of my social status on the somatic level, initially as a feeling of being self-conscious and vulnerable in the confrontation with the investigative gazes of strangers, which gave rise to physiological effects, bodily tension, and nervousness, until these feelings culminated in the hongi, and still to re-emerge before my subsequent presentation and song. In this sense, the pōwhiri can be experienced as entering an unempathetic space; but this feeling helps to focus the socially-conditioned liminal, transformative effect of the ritual. To me, vulnerability characterised the role of the guest; this was the emotional state that had to be accepted as an integral sentiment of the role. Without the sensations of release and achieving oneness with the hosts,

594 Sauter, 2012, p. 78.
595 Ibid., p. 80.
social role transformation would not be successful. When it comes to the speakers, the roles may involve the use of theatrical-rhetorical devices such as gestures and narrative techniques, but these are by no means instrumental in the creation of a fictional character. In accordance with the social convention of the pōwhiri, the participants present themselves to each other as themselves as the traditional aim of the ritual is to establish a sense of trust between guest and hosts, possibly identifying any hostility before it would erupt. In a contemporary context, animosities between parties would be subtle, and I could only imagine undesirable attitudes on the part of the guest to the social role-playing as merely pretense or dishonesty, disregarding the significance engaging in and going through the ritual.

As a principle of social role assignment – that is, on the individual level, the guest’s profound acceptance of her role – the role also implies a cognitive and emotional interplay with the tradition and cosmology to which the ritual refers. According to David V. Mason’s understanding of the Sundénian role concept of religious psychology as imitatio (see Chapter 1, p. 145), the ritual protocol and (originally verbally) transferred meaning constitutes the tradition of pōwhiri, of which I was familiar; but whereas the role of the guest contrary to Sundén’s concept does not refer to a mythological or historical person, the pōwhiri tradition and practice indicate a behavioural model for the guest that I had followed anticipating the status transformation from tapu to noa and thus acceptance by the host people. Hence, it does not allow for identification with another person through a mythical narrative, such as Sundén and Mason propose, but rather the cosmology inherent or implied by the ritual process as something which contribute to the guest’s social and existential self-reflection. Yet, the crucial element in my experience was that I perceived this role playing as having the attention of both my lost family members and the ancestors of the host people; both my forebears and theirs would be brought into the encounter, which would take place simultaneously on the planes of the living and the dead. Through my preparations, I had already acquired this profoundly engaged role. The preparation became the very premise for the ritual to be able to give me a spiritual experience.

The experience required that I was receptive to the ritual as transcending and spiritual, and both the preparations and my capacities for experience made this possible. The aesthetic competence that I had acquired through my theatre studies education, along with many years of going to theatre and museums and participating in rituals had provided me with the ability to reflect on my experience of performance in which both the material and sen-
sual aspects must be taken into account in understanding the event’s impact on the participant’s perception and interpretation of what is happening. The cultural competence, such as the knowledge that my prior studies of the pōwhiri (and other rituals) had given me, allowed me to basically understand the symbolic meaning of the various ritual phases and acts, which deepened the meaning of my participation. In this phase of the hermeneutics, the context is crucial: the event is institutional-specific, as the pōwhiri protocol sets an authoritative framework that draws its transformative potential from Māori tradition and history. This institutional specificity is further enhanced by the fact that the event is also environmentally specific: that it is a ritual that is physically taking place at a marae where the local people gather for common meetings of different kinds, honour the ancestors, and keep their customs, values, and knowledge, claimed for the benefit of present and future generations; a place that community members identify with as a personal standing place in the world. Within these limits, my personal background had a significant influence on my spiritual interpretation of the ritual’s transcendence.

Preparing to present myself in the pōwhiri had become very personal and emotional. At first, I realised how little was known to me about my ancestry and the origins of my family, and it filled me with a sense of not truly belonging anywhere, even if Copenhagen was where I had grown up. Learning about Māori beliefs, a strong sorrow took hold of me when I realised my deceased parents and grandparents would accompany me in the ritual to meet the ancestors of the tangata whenua. But then I took consolation in the fact that they would be there with me, and that just before leaving for New Zealand I had re-established contact with my cousins on my father’s side of the family, whom I had had no contact with since my grandmother died when I was seven. I began to consider the invitation to the pōwhiri as if I had been offered a gift – a chance for reaffirmation of my ancestry. Strangers who valued their bloodline and belonging to the land welcomed me and reminded me of these values. I had lost my family and repressed the loss as well as the importance of belonging to land and family, and the pōwhiri had reminded me of the sacredness of these relations, i.e. something that I ought to venerate. To me, the pōwhiri process affirmed the mending of these bonds. The spiritual meaning of the pōwhiri lay in the rediscovery of lost values of interconnectedness, my family, and homeland that would reaffirm my identity. Hence, this event in a foreign culture became an encounter with myself, which was not merely externally a self-transcendence in terms of its unfamiliarity on the somatic level, but also internally, as it had a transforma-
tive impact on the way I relate myself to the larger context of my past, present, and future. It is a multi-dimensional temporality that can be understood by Rappaport’s ritual theory, which includes what he calls the “temporal regions”. These regions are in mutual interdependence with each other and specifically connect the participant’s bodily temporality with the social and cosmic temporalities; thus, these two regions with their potential meaning may affect the participant and influence his self-understanding through the symbolic meaning of what is happening in the ritual.

I asked the question at the beginning of the chapter whether the pōwhiri can be a transcultural ritual, i.e. where there are universal rather than culturally specific elements of the ritual that are crucial for the bringing together of foreign parties. If that were the case, I would say that this effect is due to the ritual activation of the longing for absent family members and forebears, expressed both implicitly and explicitly in the ritual acts. This allows the parties to meet and share the longing for the deceased, who let us know who we are – a moment that at the same time also confirms the basic human-existential situation, our individual sense of mortality, the continued sense of being part of ancestry, humanity, and nature, relationships that exist across time and space, between past and present, common to all cultures, and ultimately point to the future, as the recognition of this existential cohesion may determine the destiny of the future generations of the planet. In order for this spiritual experience to happen, I assume, based on my own experience, that the participant has become familiar with the symbolic meaning of the ritual to some extent. Although the transcendence of the self, through the experience of immanent transcendence, is made concrete and embodied in the gradual performative approximation of bodies to eventually be brought together in the oneness of the breath (hongi), the full semiotic meaning of the ritual cannot be deduced by someone who is not familiar with the symbolism.

There is a symbolic risk connected with the performance of pōwhiri: the ritual may fail. Even today, when no Māori are at war with each other or with the Pākehā. The experience of beauty, which may be recognised in the remembrance of cosmic oneness in the hongi, is not for all, one may contend; as established in the discussion of Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience, it takes reactivity to experience beauty. Even when it comes to the pōwhiri’s effect on the Māori, McCallum agrees: “For some people, the change is minimal, offering only a sense of belonging; for others, it can be
profound and spiritually enlightening.” When analysing the pōwhiri based on one’s own experience, one has to keep in mind that that experience is merely one manifestation of the event’s experiential potentiality. Contrasting my pōwhiri experience with the one the Danish politician Marie Krarup of the right-wing populist Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti) had at the marae in Davenport Naval Base, underscores the ancient liminal quality of the event; anything can happen, friend can turn to foe, performance turn into misperformance. On her blog, Krarup described the pōwhiri in strong derogative terms showing no understanding of its purpose or the honour and trust shown to her in the invitation: she called it “less civilised” and “grotesque” and was apparently appalled by the wero performed by “a half-naked man” doing “strange rituals and poking his tongue out.” She compared the waiata to a Danish children’s song “The Eternally Happy Ladybird (Mariehønen evigglad) in Māori, complete with pedagogical guitar accompaniment”, and the hongi made her feel “like an idiot”, when she “had to press noses with 10 European looking naval officers.” She could not understand how European officers would allow this ritual (as it is custom to use the pōwhiri at naval and military bases), and she feared that New Zealand culture was dying out, and finished her rant: “Never let Denmark end like that!” According to news media, Krarup had been informed about the pōwhiri by the New Zealand navy officials and the Danish ambassador in Canberra – even better informed than I was by my hosts. It seems as if she never read the briefing. Or did she not care? We do not know.

596 McCallum, 2011, p. 94.
Chapter 3: Encounters with the Divine In Between Ritual and Theatre – Two Churchplays in the Lund Cathedral

Return to a Native Context

After the “visit” to Aotearoa New Zealand, I turn to explore two staged events, which belong to a cultural context that is familiar to me. In anthropological terms, this means that I leave that discipline’s tradition of exploring foreign cultures behind to pay attention to my own Danish-Swedish culture, which will frame both the events of the present chapter and Chapter 4, more specifically two churchplays599 in the Lund Cathedral in Southern Sweden and a Copenhagen performance theatre production on Jesus and the bible. Before I begin the analysis of the first churchplay, I will describe my personal background and faith as well as the institutionalised tradition of the events, as these are capacities and the contextual frame for my experiences. I give these accounts in recognition of the methodological importance of analysing the context, or rather several different contexts, as they affect my reception of the events; the capacities and contexts predetermine expectations and experiences and provide a frame of reference for the interpretation. In comparison to the previous event analyses, the churchplays involved large amounts of texts, both ritual and dramatic, which were spoken in Swedish – a language fully understandable to me. As verbal text is an element of the staging, I consider it part of the experiential context as well, as the text informs perceived acts with intention and meaning, which, then, may or may not correspond to the listener’s cultural and aesthetic competences; thus verbal text is included as a semiotic layer in the analysis.

599 In English, one would normally divide the word “churchplay” into two words. I have chosen to write it as one word using it as a terminus technicus to designate the specific Swedish genre of kyrkospel, as invented by Olov Hartman. See my discussion of the inception of the churchplay in the section “The Open Church Doors – Some Historical, Theological and Poetological Perspectives on the Swedish Churchplay” in this chapter.
Even if I do not share the background of some anthropologists (who emigrated growing up in a foreign country and then, later, returned to their origin as trained anthropologists), there is an aspect of what is known as native anthropology to this turning toward my own culture. As Ruth Behar writes: “‘native anthropology’ has helped bring about a fundamental shift – the shift toward viewing identification, rather than difference, as the key defining image of anthropological theory and practice.”

Although I have suggested in the examples of 185 Empty Chairs and the pōwhiri that there may be elements of staging, which on the phenomenological level activate participants’ affective and cognitive responses across cultural borders, one can only fully identify with one’s acquired, habitual cultures. When I analyse the churchplays, these are part of a particular Nordic post-Christian culture that I identify with as integral to my upbringing and spiritual development, and it is necessary to clarify my personal position within this context of analysis. In anthropological terms, I shift my participant observer position from the primarily etic view that I held as an ethnic foreigner in the analyses of 185 Empty Chairs and the pōwhiri to the emic view of someone who is born into secularised Scandinavian cultures and familiar with Evangelical-Lutheran traditions. This does not mean, however, that I abandon the etic viewpoint as theatre scholar; on the contrary, I maintain the reflexivity of the performance analysis while allowing it to be informed by my experiential familiarity with the culture and the ritual I participate in as well as my personal background and faith.

As I have already established in Chapter 2, I am of Danish-Swedish descent. My mother came from the Southern Swedish city of Helsingborg, while my father was a native of Copenhagen, hence my identification with and knowledge of both Scandinavian cultures and languages. My parents settled in Denmark, and I grew up in Avedøre parish in Hvidovre municipality, a southwestern suburb of Copenhagen. During my early years, my mother spoke Swedish to me, and I grew up spending ample time with my grandmother in Helsingborg and learned to speak Swedish at the same time I learned Danish. I became accustomed to both Swedish and Danish cultures and mentalities, and today I feel equally at home in both countries.

With regard to my convictions, I have gone from a childhood belief in the Christian God, through an atheist period of my youth, to currently considering myself a spiritual-but-not-religious seeker finding truth and wisdom in the spiritualities of the world as well as in science. I do not have any religious

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belief or belong to a confessional denomination, but I give credence to an open-minded search for truth and the sacred, which I think is best described as having faith in the connectivity of all life and matter in the universe as they evolve towards increasingly complex forms and the emergence of consciousness. If it is to be expressed in theistic terms, I put my faith in a panentheistic force that manifests itself through these emerging patterns. Developing a faith of my own borrowing from disparate sources is nothing unusual; according to sociologists of religion, this kind of spiritual eclecticism is quite common of many Scandinavians and a result of the highly developed secularisation process of society.601 I owe this “cross-breeding” of tradition and secular critical attitude as much to my education in the Danish public school of the 1970s and 1980s as to the way my parents brought me up.

I recognise the influences of the intertwining tendencies towards tradition and secularism in the path that my spiritual journey has taken. My father had a fervent interest in science and did not believe in God, whereas my Swedish grandmother and mother did. During her childhood and youth in the 1890s and the beginning of the twentieth century, my grandmother attended church regularly with her God-fearing father, and my mother had for a period during her teens in the late 1940s been a volunteer worker with the Swedish Church. When I was a child, my mother taught me to say the Lord’s Prayer and other prayers in Swedish. Having moved to Denmark, my mother was, however, not an ardent churchgoer, and I only began to attend church when I prepared for my confirmation at the age of 14. After my confirmation I turned my back on Christianity and became an atheist for the remainder of my teens and well into my 20s. However, the profound mysteries of the cosmos that science had left unanswered still held my fascination, and I never entirely let go of the idea that there were things between heaven and earth, which science could not provide answers to. By coincidence, in the mid-90s my interest in theatre got me involved in the activities of the church in Avedøre parish, where I had had my confirmation.

Inspired by the then senior pastor Paul Kühle, Avedøre Parish Council had started a project called “Active Church”, which in some respects proved to be a sociological experiment, in order to develop new ways of being a church and hence replenish the aging and ailing congregation. In 1994, the parish population had been invited to participate in the project under the daring motto: “Here is a church, what do you want to do with it?” At first,

inspired by a friend of mine, I joined the newly formed theatre group more out of a wish to perform than an interest in the church; but then gradually being exposed to the progressive theological and social thinking behind the project, I became increasingly interested in developing theatre activities within the frame of liturgy in an effort to renew the church service. The encounter with this project became an intellectual challenge in the development of my spirituality without me ever fully returning to the Christian belief I had held at my confirmation.

A group for developing new alternative forms of church services that would supplement the Sunday High Mass and better meet the needs of the local post-Christian population was formed, and eventually this group provided the framework in which I was to conduct the practice-based research into the dramaturgy of the church service that I undertook for my BA project in theatre studies at the University of Copenhagen in 1999-2000. In fact, it had been my engagement with the church theatre activities and the alternative services that had made me choose to enter the theatre studies programme in the first place, and my studies of theatre and performance fed back into my practical experiments in the church. With support from the parish council and the priests, I conceptualised and staged a series of liturgical events. The congregation was invited and the reactions and experiences of a focus group were documented and included in my BA thesis. Back then I had not been familiar with the tradition of the Swedish church plays in Lund Cathedral. My theoretical point of departure had been the high mass liturgy as a rudimentary Aristotelian text-based drama, yet restaging it applying an action-based dramaturgy of montage inspired by the work of Odin Teatret and Hotel Pro Forma. Thus, in terms of aesthetics, I had shifted the understanding of the liturgy from a semiotic to a phenomenological ap-

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603 For the documentation and assessment of the effects of the experiments I adopted the method of Theatre Talks, see Sauter et al., 1986; Sauter, 2000, pp. 174-186.
604 My inspiration was Nielsen, 2013. Of course, I was aware of the Aristotelian dramatic understanding of the mass and indeed the whole cycle of the church year dating back to the medieval bishop Amalarius of Metz, who wrote several treatises on the performance of liturgy, including *Eclogae de ordine Romano* (814 AD) and *Liber Officialis* (821 AD). See Amalarius of Metz, *Amalarii Episcopi Opera Liturgica Omnia*, The Vatican: Biblioteca apostolic vaticana, 1948-50. My rationale was, however, that developing new ways of staging the church service could not rely on a revival of medieval liturgical drama, such as the *Visitatio Sepulcri*, but would have to look to contemporary experimental theatre and performance theatre which had an affinity with ritual.
approach, which promised to make the ritual performance more appealing to secular participants and the effects more assessable in analysis.

This research coincided with my work as an elected member of the parish council in which capacity I liaised between Avedøre and its Nordic friendship congregations in the exchange of information and experience and planning collaboration and common seminars. Traveling to the Swedish congregations made me familiar with the liturgical practice of the Swedish Church. But it was only when I organised a two-day seminar on the connections between the church and the stage in Avedøre 2002 that I met the theatre director Lena Ekhem and was introduced to the priest Lena Sjöstrand, who, back then, were the artistic and liturgical leaders of Lunds stifts kyrkospel (The Churchplays of the Diocese of Lund). This became the beginning of an inspirational relationship during which I attended churchplays in the Lund Cathedral as well as participated as an invited theatre researcher in seminars and conferences in conjunction with the plays.

It was with this personal background and faith that I went to the 2005 churchplay with the title Jag är den jag är (I Am That I Am). It was an adaptation of the world-famous Norwegian playwright Jon Fosse’s text Sov du vesle barnet mitt (Sleep My Baby Sleep) from 1999. This late-modern tradition of churchplay merging artistic theatre work with ritual celebration requires some further contextualisation in order for the reader to appreciate its experiential potentiality and the appeal that it may hold for a secularised post-Christian society.


605 “Kirken & Scenen/Scenen & Kirken”, Avedøre Church, February 1–2, 2002.
A Cultural Event In Between Theatre and Ritual within the Swedish Church

The churchplay in the medieval cathedral of Lund, a small university town in Southern Sweden, is an annual event, taking place primarily during the month of August with occasional revivals in the fall. It has become a tradition having been produced and performed continuously since 1960 by the association Lunds stifts kyrkospel. In itself a major cultural attraction to many tourists and culturally interested people, the cathedral’s general appeal as a cultural institution is enhanced by the churchplays; the performances themselves have become an attraction, receiving attention from the press and they are renowned for their artistically high quality and involvement of professional theatre directors, actors, dancers, and musicians, as well as the use of texts by well-known contemporary Swedish and international dramatists, poets and writers. In acknowledgement of their churchsetting, the plays also have a liturgical function as a Eucharist service, i.e. including a celebration of the Holy Communion. This is a feature distinguishing the modern Swedish churchplay from other forms of church drama, which are not integrated into a mass. The theatrical performance is intertwined in the liturgy, the churchplay either being preceded by the Eucharist or leading into it. The integration of theatrical play into the ritual deliberately blurs the borders between the two performative formats. Still the churchplays are not to be seen as merely representing Christian belief and values but as attempts to stage a dialogue with secular society and contemporary

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606 According to the official website of Lund Cathedral, the cathedral is visited annually by more than 700,000 people. See http://lundsdomkyrka.se/english/information-about-the-cathedral/one-of-swedens-most-attractive-cathedrals/ (accessed June 15, 2018).
608 Over the years, texts by among others Bo Setterlind, Olov Hartman, Gunnar Edman, Mikis Theodorakis, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Britt G. Hallqvist, Jon Fosse, Kerstin Ekman, Ulf Nilsson, and Liv Elf Karlén have been used. Some texts were written as churchplays or commissioned specifically for Lund Cathedral, while others were adapted for staging from novels, poems, songs, or fairy tales.
spirituality, raising existential and political questions of interest to the general public.\footnote{Treated themes are characterised by an existential universality, which reaches beyond Christendom, such as ‘presence’, ‘compassion’, ‘precariousness’, ‘doubt’, ‘despair’, ‘displacement’, and ‘persons as examples’.}

Hence, the churchplays attract an audience with different motives for attending: nonbelievers may come for the experience of a theatrical performance in an unusual venue, others because they are believers or seekers seeing it as a mass – although an exceptional one. Accordingly, one may expect different responses from the groups of participants as each of them actualise different interpretations. Considering myself a spiritual-but-not-religious seeker, once again the analysis that I offer should merely be seen as an indication of the experiential potentiality of the staged event and by no means an attempt to extrapolate other participants’ experiences from my own. The reader may either recognise herself in the following description of my experience, the emic view of the secular seeker, or reject it in accordance with her personal motivation, ideological convictions or religious beliefs. Unlike the analyses of earlier chapters, I do not give descriptions before reflections, but merge my analytical reflections into the descriptions. Methodically, this demonstrates a variation in how a performance analysis can be written without thereby renouncing the importance of the participant’s impressions and experience.

Jag är den jag är

That Sunday evening, on July 31 2005, when I attended \textit{Jag är den jag är (I Am That I Am)}, was the opening night. Having attended the Lund church-plays before, I was full of anticipation and curiosity about that year’s play. I arrived at 4:45pm and the play should begin at 5pm. Stepping inside the cathedral’s nave, the summer evening light shone through the high windows casting its warm hue on the unadorned sandstone walls giving off a golden glow. A large electric chandelier hung over the mid-nave and highlighted a simple, robust ceremonial altar, which stood out in it modern minimalist design, and a broad staircase that lead up to the heavily decorated medieval Sanctuary with its dark wood-panelled choir chairs and golden high altar at its end wall. The strong electric light demarcated what I knew from my previous visits to be the performative space of the churchplay, that is, the raised floor level in the centre of which the modern ceremonial altar stands with the
high staircase behind it leading up to the sanctuary. Furthest away from the entrance at the top of the apse, the Danish artist Joakim Skovgaard’s mosaic from 1927 depicts Christ descending from heaven, raising the dead from their graves. This was a motif I had seen many times, and recognised as The Day of Judgment. The cathedral space was voluminous and impressive but unobtrusive in its largely unadorned warm sandstone embrace filling me with a sensation of calm comfort. To me it was an immediate emphatic space.

Walking up the aisle, I estimated the presence of about 90-100 attendees, mostly women around fifty and older. I went to the front row of chairs and found myself a seat. I wanted to be close to the players in order to hear well; the acoustics of the cathedral space are tricky and even if the players wear portable microphones it might be hard sometimes to hear what is said.

I was familiar with the liturgical cycles into which the play was inscribed. Ordinarily the churchplay was performed at noon and in the evenings on chosen weekdays when it replaced the regular midday or evening mass. Thus, performatively embedded into the liturgical practice of the cathedral, the churchplay was connected to the celebratory chronology and cosmic temporality of the church. When the play was performed at noon, this embedding became particularly obvious with the chiming of the cathedral’s famous astronomical clock from the middle ages, Horologium Mirabile Lundense (The Wonderful Clock in Lund). When the clock struck, it played the medieval hymn In dulci jubilo (In Sweet Rejoicing). This hymn had become the signature tune of the churchplay, always used as the introduction sung by the players when entering in procession. As the automatic clock was not about to strike until six thirty, instead, the play began with the steady bell-tolls in the towers high above my head calling to prayer, and then from down by the main entrance I heard voices intone the In dulci jubilo. With this slight variation, the procession entered.

Without me noticing, the church-players, actors, musicians, and a priest had gathered at the West Door, i.e. the main entrance. To me In dulci jubilo was the bodily attunement to the familiar performative practice; it made me

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610 Being one of only three of its kind in Europe, the clock adds to the cathedral as tourist attraction. The original clock was from 1425. Cf.: http://www.lundsdomkyrka.se/lunds-domkyrka/rundtur/uret/ (accessed June 16, 2018).

611 In dulci jubilo is usually sung as a Christmas carol, since the text celebrates the birth of Christ. The hymn is originally written circa 1328 in macaronic verse, a mix of Latin and German, its author thought to have been the German monk and mystic Heinrich Seuse.

260
feel almost joyful as the jubilant mood of the hymn itself lifted me into the event, full of expectation. I could imagine, though, how others might be curious about what was about to happen at the sound of Latin, which is highly uncommon in a Swedish church; while at the same time it might create a sense of wonder or an atmosphere of enchantment, which is only fitting for a medieval cathedral. One of the two male musicians accompanied the singing on his baritone clarinet. Slightly offset from one another, in canon, invisible voices joined in echoing the procession’s voices from the aisles, and soon the singing surrounded the congregation. Artistically this was clever use of the church space and acoustics, creating a performance space which was immersive to the congregants. The church-players while singing were now walking in procession up the aisle. In front came three women. The first was in her fifties wearing a liturgical vestment, a white alb, and carrying a simple wooden processional cross. Beneath the ceremonial dress I caught glimpses of what appeared to be her private clothes, brightly coloured jeans and matching modern sneakers. Next to her two women walked, both probably in their late thirties, carrying processional torches, i.e. elongated sticks fitted with candles. They were also dressed in albs with individually coloured “private” attire underneath, which made them stand out from each other. Then followed the two musicians dressed in casual off-white shirts and jeans. Eventually came the priest, whom I recognised as Lena Sjöstrand, the liturgical leader of the Lunds stifts kyrkospel. She wore the white alb with a green chasuble, the protestant priest’s vestment worn during the high mass.

The procession advanced to the area in front of the ceremonial altar. A couple of steps lead to the raised floor level, and when the group of church-players entered this level it appeared as if they took the stage. Strictly speaking it is not a stage, but the expectation of a theatrical performance might make one perceive this section of architectural space as serving such a function. Cross and torches were placed behind a simple wooden credence table in the nave’s left side. On the table there were a jug, two cups, and a bowl, all made of brown pottery of rustic design; I knew from previous use that they were for the sacrament. The table was decorated with buckets of seasonal flowers. From the aisles entered a couple of young girls in albs and individually coloured jeans and shoes. The group formed a line with their backs to the congregation. Thus facing the sanctuary and high altar, the men bowed and the women curtseyed showing their reverence for Christ. I saw this as to signify the tradition of the Swedish churchplay, a performance given as much before God as before the congregation; in terms of Siemke Böhnish’s directedness, it was clearly addressed to both parties as equally
present and worthy of attention. Next, the musicians took their seats, one on each side of the altar, facing each other and the performers in the middle. The three women left for the aisles, while the priest stepped forward to greet us both in Swedish and English (in consideration of the tourists, who might have come). Briefly, she informed us that the play would be preceded by the celebration of Holy Communion, which we all were welcome to participate in or, if one preferred, one could remain seated. The responsorial of the mass liturgy, she told us, we would find in the programme that had been placed on each seat.

The priest remained in her position in front of the mid-nave altar and turned once more her back to the congregation addressing Christ in prayer. Then she turned again, directing her attention towards the congregation and began recounting a story, which I recognised from the Old Testament, Exodus 3.612

Priest: Once Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up….

Actress 1 (off-stage echoing the priest, in a light voice): …it did not burn up…

Priest: …and he thought: what a strange sight!

Actress 2 (off-stage echoing the priest, in a dark mature voice): …what a strange sight!

Actress 3 (off-stage, echoing the priest, in a middle voice): … what a strange sight!

Actress 1, 2, and 3 (simultaneously, intertwined): I must go there and see why the bush did not burn up.

Priest: When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look God called him from within the bush: Moses!

612 The following text passage is a transcription of the video of the performance. I have used the New International Version as an English translation of the original Swedish text. For dramatic reasons, the performed text deviated somewhat from the bible text.
Actress 2: Moses!

Actress 3 (with emphasis): Moses! Moses!

Priest: Moses? Moses?
   He answered: Yes, here I am.
   The Lord said: Do not come any closer! Take off your sandals. For the place where you are standing is holy ground.

   (Actress 1 had entered and gone to the steps leading to the altar, where she removed her boots).

Priest: God said: I am that I am.

I was quite taken by this dramatisation of the Old Testament text. Instead of merely reading it, the interaction of the priest with the echoing voices off-stage and in the aisles had created the sensation of a presence larger than the human, as the spoken words seemed to be coming not only from the priest but the cathedral space itself. In terms of the staging’s directedness toward the congregation this played itself out through the dichotomies of visibility/invisibility and living/dead materiality: the priest stood facing the congregation while speaking directly to them, whereas the other speakers were hidden behind the stone pillars, and this made it appear as if the stone building had joined the addressing of the congregation. This created a notion of immanent transcendence: the biblical past had become present through the enactment of dispersed voices in the space, and the invisibility of the most part of the performers had shifted my attention to the cathedral space as a site resonating with centuries of performing the biblical texts; in this sense, the space haunted the staging and leant its symbolical authority to the event. Within this environment- and institution-specific framing, the simple act of the actress removing her footwear in response to God’s commandment underscored the sacredness of the area around the altar; yet, at the same time I recognised this act as paradoxical, a theatrical and ritual act, which initiated the whole event as a fluctuation between both performative modes, the one informing and expanding the other and vice versa.

An interlude of original music composed for acoustic guitar and bass clarinet began next. The music did not strike me as liturgical at all; it was more in the vein of modern folk music and reminded me somewhat of an acoustic number by Pink Floyd. It carried an appeal to a secular audience.
While the musicians played, the priest and the five women prepared the celebration of Holy Communion, or the Eucharist as this part of the liturgy is called. In this work the performers fulfilled the roles of deacons assisting the priest. As all were wearing the liturgical vestments there were no visual distinctions that could separate them in terms of theatrical versus ritual performers. Moving gracefully they brought the can, the cups, and bowl from the credence table to the ceremonial altar, poured the wine into the cups, and uncovered the wafers in the bowl. The smooth musical transition from the dramatisation of the Old Testament text into the Eucharistic liturgy made any attempt to distinguish between playacting and celebration seem irrelevant. I found that the beautiful, almost choreographed movements made the event appear as an integral whole.

Next the priest once more went in front of the ceremonial altar addressing the congregation, establishing what was to unfold as a feedback loop continuously shifting the agency between herself and the congregation in prayers. She started to say the Offering Prayer: “Lord, we bring to you only what is yours.” In the Swedish mass the congregation is expected to say the responsorial: “Receive us and our gifts in the name of Jesus Christ.” I noticed that congregants in my vicinity were looking to their programmes to find the text of the liturgy, in order to follow it and respond to the priest. It was interesting that the handed-out programme seemed to fulfil a quite different function as to what it is in the theatre: instead of providing information about the performance before and after, in the churchplay it served as a script allowing secularised attendees unaccustomed to the service to play their part as congregants. After this short Offering Prayer followed the Eucharistic Prayer. The priest said, “Open your hearts to God.” And I replied with the others: “We open our hearts.” The responsorial had a performative potential as it allowed a form of playing, which almost imperceptibly changed those who might have considered themselves spectators at a theatrical event to become congregants. I tried to notice how many joined in, and it seemed to me that most did. If participation for reasons of conviction were unacceptable, one could refrain from responding. Participation in the mass was not obligatory, as the priest had made all aware of in her introduction to the event. At least in principle, this left some room for the non-believer who had come to see a theatre performance and not celebrate the mass. The question, however, remains, just how conscious of and opposed to this liturgical staging of the respondent as a believer one would have to be not to join in with the rest of the congregation? Instinctively one tends to follow the flock. And in following the others one could easily get caught-up in the flow and rhythm of the
liturgy with little or no time to think about the meaning of the spoken words themselves. There was a seductiveness to this responsorial, its embodiment leading to the next logical step, partaking in the Holy Communion itself.

On the sensory level, my directedness or attention during the responsorial had shifted from resting on someone else performing to now self-reflexively including myself as one who was performing liturgical text together with others. This created in me a notion of what Fischer-Lichte has called strong presence, a profound sense of engagement. I was activated bodily through the act of speaking. Within the liturgical context I perceived of speaking as gradually taking on Sudénian ritual role-playing. Not in the narrative sense, or at least not immediately; first it worked in terms of a physical performativity: the unison recitation I associated with a communion of voices, a aural way of already being in communion with Christ, hence, affirmative of a Christian identity socially constituted in the congregation through co-creational co-presence or togetherness, as I have called it. But this might not be so bearing in mind Rappaport’s advise not to infer the identity of participant from her ritual participation. I did not consider myself a Christian even though I participated; rather I participated as I had faith in the power of the doing of ritual itself, celebrating the interconnectedness of the Cosmos, a divine power embedded in these forms which lies beyond efforts of religion to institutionalise it, beyond any words. To me not sharing the belief is a reason not for being a member of the church; this may be so for many others but not necessarily everyone, as pointed out by some scholars of religion.613 The prayer culminated in the priest invoking the cosmic temporal region of the ritual and including the congregants in the whole of Creation: “With your friends at all times / With all your angels and the whole of Creation / we praise thy name, we worship you, and say…” And the prayer lead directly into the devotional response, Sanctus (Isiah 6:3, Psalm 118):

Holy, holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are filled with your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest,
hosanna in the highest.

613 Wulff, 1999; Iversen 2012.
As the congregation had completed its worship, the priest continued the Eucharistic Prayer, which were to lead to the part containing the Words of Institution, i.e. the sacramental consecration: “Before you we present / bread and wine and ourselves. / You are not far away / from any of us.” To which the congregants responded, twice: “Come, Holy Ghost!” During this part of the liturgy I could not help thinking how this obviously was an invocation, a calling into presence of the absent. The priest took on the function of an intermediary with the transcendent: “Thank you for meeting us / in the bread and wine / and for becoming provisions for our journey.” Then followed the Words of Institution:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when he was betrayed, took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said: Take; eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he also took the cup after the supper, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, Drink of it, all of you. This cup is the New Testament in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

According to Protestant theology this consecration may both be understood on a symbolic level and as actually accomplishing transubstantiation, i.e. the bread and wine becoming, respectively, the body and blood of Christ. In the process of speaking these words the priest turned and took from the altar the bowl with wafers, and raised it up in both hands, then repeated the same action with the jug of wine. The combination of physical acts and words recalled and enacted the Last Supper, and worked in this way as a ghosting of the legendary – or historical – event, as well as a ghosting of every other consecration of the sacrament throughout church history. The congregants then replied with lines that make up a concise summation of the Passion and the anticipation of the Second Coming: “Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ shall come again.” It reflected the ritual’s invocative temporal structure of past, present, future working on the bodily performative level of the event imbuing the one who spoke the words with a sense of participation in the cosmic order.

After the Words of Institution the priest lead the congregation in the Lord’s Prayer. I assumed it was the prayer that most of those present knew best. It certainly sounded like that judging from the firmness with which the lines were spoken. The Breaking of the Bread followed. It was not actually performed but remained as a spoken part of the liturgy, as wafers were to be used. The priest: “In breaking the bread let us all share in the body of Christ”
And the congregation responded: “Despite being many we thereby become one body / for all of us are a piece of the very same bread.” Before the Holy Communion everyone were invited to greet their neighbour in the Pax Domini (“Fridshälsning”).

The next thing that happened amazed me. Almost everybody took part in the communion. Even though I myself took part, I managed to count all participants, and there were 41 who came up to approach the priest in one long line. I had expected much fewer the context of the churchplay as cultural, theatrical event taken into consideration. The priest stood in the middle with the two young girls. The priest distributed wafers with the words: “This is the body of Christ” I looked straight at her, she handed me a wafer, and I nodded as a sign of understanding. I went left, to stand in front of one of the girls, and I looked her straight in the eyes, too: she said, “This is the blood of Christ.” I dipped the wafer in the cup, which she held between her hands, and then I put it into my mouth. Before I returned to my seat, I stepped aside and stood for a moment and looked in contemplation up at Christ in the apse. I showed my respect by nodding my head slightly, not being comfortable with the Swedish practice of explicitly showing devotion by bowing, as most of the other male participants observed.

The Eucharist concluded with the Prayer of Thanksgiving. The priest said: “We have received Jesus Christ.” The congregation responded: “May He preserve us for eternal life.”

Without any further ado, the actresses and priest took their positions around the altar. As it was announced in the programme, the dramatic part of the event would follow immediately after the Eucharist. The transition into theatrical playing was indicated as the actresses brought props with them, modern suitcases on rollers, suggesting that they were travellers. The first actress stood to the left and the second actress to the right. On the stairs to the high altar the priest stood on the right side, the fourth actress at the top, and the fifth actress on the left side. A dialogue began:\footnote{This and all the following passages are quotations from the performance and not the dramatic text. The quotations present the spoken lines with notes on the movements by the performers. These moments deviates somewhat from not the stage directions given in the text. I have used a video recording of the performance as support for the notes I took during the performance. The quotations appear in my translation of the Swedish spoken in the performance.}

Actress 1 (looked around): But I…

Actress 2 (entered from the aisle): Yes?
Actress 3 (*said with confidence*): I have been here before.

Actress 1 (*asked doubtfully*): Are you sure that you have been here before?

Actress 3 (*calmly*): I have been here before. I have always been here, also when I wasn’t here I was here. This is my place I could almost say.

Actress 1 (*repeated in disbelief*): Are you sure that you have been here before?

Actress 3 (*to herself*): I have always been here

Actress 2 (*while she looked curiously around*): I am a little uncertain. It seems familiar. And at the same time completely unfamiliar. It does resemble my children a little. But at the same time nothing is here, only we are here, only with them or whatever it is that resemble my children (she looked at the congregation)

At first, the situation presented through the dialogue had appeared nonsensical to me. There was a conspicuous discrepancy between what the theatrical figures said and the actual architectural space: how could any of them have always been in the cathedral, especially when at the same time not being there? And how could the cathedral look like someone’s children? Of course, the play suggested they were not in the cathedral but somewhere else. At that moment, my attention was caught by Actress 5, who moved up the stairs towards the level of the sanctuary while spreading her arms, the wide sleeves of her white alb unfolding almost like angel wings. It occurred to me the bewildering but imaginative suggestions of the dialogue was that the cathedral space doubled as a theatrical nowhere, where the logics of known space and time no longer apply; and the appearance of the angelic figure had confirmed my hypothesis: that the imaginary space was *eternity* – or to the believer possibly Heaven. This realisation brought a new quality to my perception of what was going on. Being physically present myself in the space that had been established as eternity had created another notion of immanent transcendence, of me being present in two different dimensions of reality at once. In fact, this was the perception of immanent transcendence that theatre always has the potential to produce; but the institution-specific nature of the event, the liturgical frame and the church environment within which the event takes place, amplified the imaginative paradox, lending a certain authority to it and making it more convincing. This effect was also
sustained by the fact that the Eucharist had just been performed in the same space, the very ritual that is believed to literally create immanent transcendence through the presence of Christ.

The figures began a discussion of the claim that the space looked like children. The counter-argument was that it was not possible to compare the space to anything, and this incomparability was the only thing, which was certain, which was possible to know. Actress 2 maintained her stage figure’s claim, and when the others told her that they were annoyed with her insisting, she told them she wanted to leave.

Actress 3: But then go. (Pause)

Actress 2: But there are no doors here.

Actress 3: No doors, indeed.

Actress 2: No, there are no doors here.

Actress 3: Why would there be doors here?

Actress 1: Yes, do you see any doors? Are there any doors here? I don’t see a single door? And I don’t see a window. I just am here, and they are here. And I don’t know how long I have been here. It is… (she interrupted herself).

Actress 3: It just is like this. (A long pause followed.)

For me, this exchange called forth ghostings that shifted the mood of the situation from the curious to the awe-inspiring. The incitement to leave not coming to fruition was reminiscent of Samuel Beckett’s vagabonds Estragon and Vladimir in Waiting for Godot, and it was immediately replaced by another association to Jean-Paul Sartre’s Huis Clos (No Exit), although the scenario in the cathedral was even more claustrophobic, since the suggestion was that there were no doors or windows at all. The ghostings of these existential and absurdist plays added to my meaning-making process, Fosse’s text conveying a profound anxiety of being lost to circumstances that one could not control or even understand. This awe was the kind of affect Rudolf Otto had associated the numinous (godlike) with in his concept of mysterium tremendum et fascinosum, and which was characterised by a state of receptive passivity such as William James had described one of the main qualities of what he called mysterious experience. The situation had become the more
frightening as I was still aware of the empathic space of the cathedral, which at the same time was not acknowledged by the figures on stage. The intermediate world that Dorthe Jørgensen describes had opened up, in which distinguishing between subject and object became pointless. In my position as spectator, I perceived the situation from the theatrical figures’ point of view: that suddenly finding themselves out of this world was a both fascinating and frightening discovery.

The dialogue continued and circled around the incomprehensibility of the situation. Why were they there? How had they ended up there? As none of them knew or understood, they gave up on finding answers and they established that they just were there, and that they would always be there. As a way of insistence on simply being or, with Fischer-Lichte’s term, a strong presence, the movements of the actresses were highly stylised, kept at a minimum and tightly choreographed. While the three actresses in front of the ceremonial altar were mostly stationary, the two young actresses and the
priest on the staircase to the sanctuary moved about more, up and down the stairs, in an explorative dance in space. In a sense, they became the antithesis of the players in the front; although their restlessness also reflected the state of uncertainty that the three speakers addressed. There was also very little character-building in the acting; except for a few traits that their weak presence, their physiognomies, voices, and age, lent to their stage figure, in terms of maturity and agility, they only stood out from one another though the development of the dialogue. The way these non-characters, or figures as I have called them, focused on speaking made them appear to me less as persons and more as channels through which someone or something else spoke. Perhaps it was the cathedral speaking, or God.

Eternity was unimaginable, and as one of the figures argued, the concepts of ‘always’ or ‘being’ did not apply to their situation. At the same time, I made a note of the many repetitions and variations of the same lines and words as well as the alliterations that brought a musical quality to the event. Listening to the dialogue had a meditative effect, reminiscent of the musical compositions of Philip Glass. I realised that the form addressed the same philosophical issue of eternity that the figures grasped at intellectually; the repetitive vocal structure created a notion of eternity in a performative way, which could not be understood in terms of concepts. In this way, the piece’s material form had transcended intellectual content of the event and rendered words inadequate to describe the situation these figures were in. It reminded me of medieval Christian mysticism, the apophatic tradition in which knowledge of God or the divine was obtained through negation. However, the text also revealed a counter-voice insisting on the opposite epistemology, namely the cataphatic tradition, which allows for concepts and images known to humans such as love, light, and beauty to serve as vehicles for approaching the divine. This cataphatic voice was once more raised when Actress 1 asked why the “place” they were in resembled “the one she loved”. Her figure contended, “it is her and I who is this place”. The philosophical debate resumed, the use of “place” being disputed by Actress 3’s figure, maintaining a slightly superior attitude that she had shown from the beginning. Then the figure of Actress 2 also claimed that she now understood: “Now I am / in my love / it is as simple as that / Now I understand”. Again the figure of Actress 3 was dismissive arguing that there was no such thing as “understanding”.

The dialogue then took a new turn addressing the state of fear. Here Actress 3 took on the role of the mature one consoling the others, convincing them that their anxiety would dissipate and they would be all right. Eventual-
ly a sentiment of acceptance prevailed.

Actress 3 *(looked at the congregation)*: Now we are love. Now we are where love is. And the great repose. Now neither of you will say anything more. Now everyone be silent. Don’t think, don’t say anything. Now thinking is over. Now the words are over. Now it’s time for a love that no one can understand.

The other two actresses each looked with recognition at the congregation, Actress 1 calling them her children, while Actress 2 likened them to the one she loved. In both cases Actress 3, in a comforting tone of voice, confirmed that they both were right. I perceived this as a conciliation between the two conflicting traditions of the apophatic and the cataphatic epistemologies that had emerged during the play, suggesting that both were needed, which implicitly was an inclusive gesture towards those in the congregation who might hold either of these views, or combine both for that matter. This gesture was realised through the directedness of the three actresses looking directly at me and everyone else.

As a way of completing the event as liturgy, the priest, who had been moving about on the staircase to the sanctuary observing the on-goings came forward and performed the Aaronitic Blessing *(Numbers 6:23)*, “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace”. Christ, whom the believer might now imagine being seen by, complemented the directedness of the actresses and the priest who stood looking at the congregation; it was a calling forth of the absent to double the living in the imagination of the beholder.

Reflections on the Spiritual Potential of Jag är den jag är

To me, however, it was not Christ – or, at least, it was not the male manifestation of the divine – who had appeared: it was the astounding notion of the whole cathedral space turned into a cosmic, all-embracing womb, suggesting that the divine might not be male but could indeed be female. Or perhaps in origin was genderless but might morph into different appearances, depending on the historical, social, and personal contexts. Thus the ending had proved to be the most significant moment of the whole churchplay event. But how did this image of divine womanhood, or more specifically motherhood, occur to me, the reader may rightfully wonder. I have found that the
best way to describe this instance of noesis, that is, in Husserlian terms, the
correlation of elements in the structure of an intentional act,615 in this case
my perception of the event as a gradual accumulation of impressions which
were synthesised into an image. Already at the phenomenological level,
what one might call a feminist interpretation is founded, since the presence
of only women “tint” the lines of the text and the church space with woman-
hood. The title Jag är den jag är – I am that I am applies not just to God, in
the original Hebrew but a gender-neutral expression, which in a contempo-
rary context has a wide appeal, that is, might be perceived as more inclusive
than the church’s institutionalised use of male pronouns.616 In this light, the
all-female cast seemed contradictory, yet it could be seen as a necessary
overexposure of womanhood to make visible the contingency of God’s im-
age – as a counter-image to the established Christian patriarchal perception.
In my perception the indirect addressing of the congregants with the line “It
resembles my children” connected with its female speaker and with other
lines about always having been there and the church as a space without doors
and windows. (The cosmos or the universe is also a closed space that one
cannot leave.) It may well be that in the diegesis of the performance, it is
humans who are talking to each other about their situation, but as appearanc-
es in space they remained impersonal. As mentioned the performers were
more like channels than characters, as something larger than themselves
seemed to be given a voice, and there was a certain obvious logic in the con-
text of the voluminous and heavily symbolic church space to identify this
“something” as the divine. In my meaning-making process, I had cross-
referenced the line “It resembles my children” with the lines about the place
and the eternal presence, with the effect that the spoken lines had torn them-
selves loose from the figures and triggered an association to God as Our
Mother, who, finally, at the end of the play recognised Her children and em-
braced everyone present with love: “Now thinking is over / Now the words
are over / Now it’s time for a love / that no one can understand”. The fact
that Actress 3, who was the oldest, had been the one speaking those lines,
lent credence to my image of the female divine – a fluctuation between the
invisible and visible presence. In an associative leap of my mind, the cathe-

615 Fatemeh Rassi and Zeiae Shahabi, “Husserl’s Phenomenology and two terms of
Noema and Noesis”, in International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences,
616 Yehudah Mirsky, “Feminine Images of God”, in Jewish Women: A Comprehe-
sive Historical Encyclopedia, 1 March 2009, Jewish Women’s Archive,
https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/feminine-images-of-god (accessed June 5,
2018).
dral space itself coloured by the notion of motherhood suddenly had appeared as the Cosmos, a divine womb giving birth to everyone in every instant of their existence, in an eternal process of creation. This process of creation defies understanding but not presentiment; it might be felt through a mindfulness of presence, that is, the conscious perception of each moment of existence. It is similar to what Fischer-Lichte has called the radical concept of presence: “the spectator experiences the performer [here: also the space] as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming – he perceives the circulating energy as transformative and vital energy.”617 Hence, the line first attributed to God, “I am that I am”, might be said to have migrated through the play’s enactment of unquestioning accepting of presence – even if it took place in the afterlife – in order to apply to my situation as a living person: “I am that I am”.

At least since 2005, the Swedish Church while preparing a new updated worship book based on the new Bible translation from 2000 has been engaged in a theological debate on the liturgical use of personal pronouns to designate God. The argument for introducing more gender-neutral or gender-strategic wordings of prayers was mainly to increase inclusiveness in order to break what the church officially has termed “patterns that make invisible and belittle people.”618 I take this to refer to people often marginalised by religious institutions, especially women and LGBTQI people. When I participated in Jag är den jag är I was not aware of this on-going debate; although in hindsight it became apparent to me how much this churchplay had spoken to the gender issue.

The contingency of the image of God, however, I did not only consider in terms of gender politics; on a deeper level of epistemology, the play was about the ways one can speak about something which lies beyond the limits of human knowledge, what Lars Qvortrup has termed “non-knowledge” and Claire Maria Chambers “apophatics” (see my discussion on p. 128ff), and hence better facilitate a spiritual experience for those with secularised, post-Christian outlooks. Here, one solution to this philosophical problem is to refer to God or the divine using gender-neutral words, metaphors, expressions such as “love”, “the wellspring”, “the cloud of unknowing”, or “I am that I am”. Of course, this is nothing new, since – as I already mentioned – these are suggestions found in Jewish and Christian mysticism; but they may

617 Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 99; my addition.
618 This is according to the official website of the Swedish Church: https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/vanliga-fragor-och-svar-om-ny-kyrkohandbok-for-svenska-kyrkan-del-I (accessed July 31, 2018).
also correspond to the mindsets of contemporary spiritualities that are influenced by science, politics, world religions, etc. The fact that the churchplay had addressed this epistemological problem appealed in particular to me in terms of being a spiritual-but-not-religious person. Thus, I did not interpret the notion of immanent transcendence that I had encountered in the churchplay within the context of the established Nordic traditions of Lutheran Evangelic Protestantism. Perceiving God as a mother or cosmic womb is, at least, not consistent with the still prevailing understandings of church dogma in the Nordic countries. It might be that the Swedish Church was – and is – in the process of shifting such perceptions, but at the time I had my experience it only confirmed my position of spiritual dissent, as I subscribe to an open-minded searching and experimental attitude towards the sacred, not institutionalised teachings that tend to get fixated and fossilised and give rise to power-struggles, social oppression and marginalisation. I did appreciate the efforts of the Swedish Church to make the liturgy more accommodating to all different kind of views and outlooks, but it did not mean that I changed my faith.

What had opened up the intermediate world to me, in the first place, was the introduction of Fosse’s text into the liturgical framework. Both artistically and spiritually, it was a clever choice to adopt his play for the churchplay. In an almost literal sense it had driven a contemplative wedge into the liturgy and opened it up to its interplay with Fosse’s existentialist meditations on knowledge, cognition, presence, and eternity. Without this text I could hardly imagine that the churchplay would have had the impact it had on me. As I watched the performers enact their profound deliberations, I felt “seen” or acknowledged as the person that I am by the event, in a way that I had never experienced in a church service before. 

In the sense Linda Woodhead understands as religion’s ability to provide status and recognition (see pp. 180-181). Performatively, this occurred through the more or less overt directedness of the actresses and the priest as I sensed their gazes meeting mine, and this maintained the feedback loop between us. There is a performative similarity here with the pōwhiri, although the context that provides the cultural meaning is completely different, of course. In my research following my experience of Jag är den jag är, I have looked into Fosse’s work. He is often described as a minimalist and neo-existentialist playwright; at the same time there a mystical, agnostic thread in his writings, which actually makes Fosse ideal for staging in a church, especially if the church aspires to open a dialogue with spiritual seekers and non-believers, acknowledging their need to be “seen” or accepted. About his relationship with God, Fosse says: “Now
and then, I’m wondering if it is God with Man that I try to bring forth in writing. But God becomes too imposing a word. And the idea is all too imposing for me. But with the unknown – to use a modest word – it has most decidedly to do.”

Fosse continues in the same interview to define the sacred in relation to his language. The sacred he finds in “speechlessness”, and he considers his language as a language for that. It is linked with his distinctive use of pauses between lines, of silence and the aporia of the unsaid: “It is not the words but what lies behind, between them, that which is currently invisibly present, it is always about that.” This is where you get closest to the sacred, he thinks – he who does not profess to any belief, but during a phase of his life went for meetings in a Quaker congregation, where to sit together in silence is a mode of religious practice.

Certainly, the importance of the unsaid, or the synthesis of meaning between Fosse’s play and its framing within a Christian liturgy and a cathedral space, cannot be underestimated in Jag är den jag är. It is what convinced me that the churchplay might function as a dialogue between the Swedish Church and the surrounding secularised, post-Christian society. Indeed, if one looks further into the historical background of the Lund churchplays, one will find that it is exactly this kind of dialogue that the founder of the Swedish churchplay tradition Olov Hartman had had in mind. As a way of providing perspective and a backdrop of reference for the analysis of the other churchplay Hittefågel (Foundling-Bird), I present an overview of this background. Within theatre and performance studies, the history and concept of these churchplays have been largely overlooked.

The Open Church Doors – Some Historical, Theological and Poetological Perspectives on the Swedish Churchplay

From 1952 until the 1970s, the Swedish theologian, writer and dramatist Olov Hartman collaborated with the autodidact director Tuve Nyström on a series of modern churchplays at the cultural and ecclesiastical centre Sigtunastiftelsen, situated in the small town of Sigtuna some 40 kilometres northwest of the Swedish capital Stockholm. Their work sought to bring
contemporary issues into conversation with biblical stories and allegory, and during this process they re-invented liturgical drama for modernity and inspired an entire popular movement of church-player groups within the Swedish Church throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Employed by the association of church-players, FLOD, which had been formed for this purpose, Nyström gave classes on how to act as a church-player, and eventually ended up training more than 5,000 performers from all over Sweden.\footnote{In Swedish FLOD stands for “Förbundet för Liturgi och Drama”. See Hartman, 1979, p. 235.}

During its 58 years of continuously presenting churchplays, the Diocese of Lund has maintained the Hartman/Nyström legacy by supporting the work of the association \textit{Lunds stifts kyrkospel}. The association was founded at the initiative of the former Bergman actress Birgitta Hellerstedt and the priest Ingemar Thorin, both of whom had been members of Hartman and Nyström’s original troupe. Hellerstedt became the artistic director and was soon hired by the diocese as a consultant on matters of culture and art. Thorin, who was working in the cathedral congregation, became the liturgical leader of the performances. They brought much inspiration from Hartman and Nyström to their own productions, but also allowed for a varied experimentation with the churchplay genre: biblical mime performances in the 1960s, political and social commentary in the 1970s, and myth and symbolism in the 1980s.\footnote{Thorin, 2001, pp. 55-67; Lena Sjöstrand, “Teater och kyrka”, in \textit{Mitt i församlingen}, No. 1, 1998: http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=673234 (accessed February 21, 2012).}

After the passing of Hellerstedt in 1990, development of liturgical drama in Lund has continued and in recent years there have been several practice-based research projects by \textit{Lunds stifts kyrkospel} under the playful Swedish name \textit{RiTeateRiT}.\footnote{The title’s linguistic playfulness does not really translate, as it plays on the Swedish words \textit{rit} (rite) and \textit{teater} (theatre) by orthographically combining them, thereby reflecting the project’s research into the intertwining of ritual and theatre. These experiments, including workshops, seminars, and conferences, were organised by the priest Lena Sjöstrand and the director Lena Ekhem, between 2003-2005.}

Although this large body of original work of churchplays, possibly unique to the world, which covers more than half a century, has been almost completely overlooked by theatre research, a full history and analysis is not my project here.\footnote{Very little has been written about the Swedish churchplays and the movement. An exception is a chapter in Ollén, 1979. All writings on Hartman and Nyström, which I have found, are by theologians: Claes-Bertil Ytterberg, \textit{Olof Hartman och}...}{624} Instead, I outline the innovative ontology of Hartman’s...
poetics relating to its theological potential for transforming religious practice and creating dialogue with contemporary secular society. This will provide a wider context for understanding my experiences of Jag är den jag är as well as Hittefågel and how they might be said to actualise two different kinds of transcendence and interpretation, the spiritual contrasted by the political. Including the political shows the potential for experience to move beyond the metaphysical, religious, and spiritual, whilst still being part of such contexts.

The Hartmanian Legacy

One may wonder if Hartman’s re-invention of liturgical drama is an ecclesiastical avant-garde project, in as far as it aims at merging life and art and religion.626 Indeed, the merging of life and religion may be true of Jesus’s mission but not necessarily the reality of the church, if religion and politics are kept apart. At the same time, Hartman’s project may come across as counter-modernistic, reminiscent of the medieval Easter re-presentation or re-enactment of Visitatio Sepulcri and even later Christian didactic dramas. The inception of the project, however, has nothing to do with tradition; it sprang from purely economic considerations. As the director of Sigtunastiftelsen, Hartman wondered if a summer performance could be a new source of income.627 The first 1952 collaboration between Hartman and Nyström, Den heliga staden (The Holy Town), was not even a churchplay, although it was performed in the open-air church on the grounds of the Sigtunastiftelsen centre; it was a historical drama of ideas celebrating the 1000-year old town of Sigtuna. Between scenes the performance had actors singing psalms, kneeling, and praying in front of the altar. This confused the audience; they were uncertain as to whether they had attended a theatre performance or participated in a service. The response inspired the idea of staging real liturgical drama.628

In addition to writing texts for churchplays, Hartman has published several essays on his and Nyström’s work and defined the modern churchplay det kosmiska dramat, Örebro: Libris, 1986; Thorin, 2001; and recently Sjöstrand, 2011.

626 Cf. Peter Bürger’s conception of the avant-garde: “[T]he attempt to organize a new life praxis in art.” (My translation.) Peter Bürger, Theorie der Avantgarde, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979, p. 49.
627 Hartman, 1979, p. 222.
628 Ibid., p. 228.
as a performance genre with emphasis on its liturgical nature, rather than its theatricality. This conception proposes two functions: the churchplay as an intercessory prayer and as a prophetic sign of the times. I shall return to these functions shortly.

Of course, Hartman knew about the medieval tradition; but he also realised that liturgical drama meant for a secularised society would have to open a dialogue with the audience. Preaching alone would not suffice. Characteristic of Hartman’s theology is a desire for dialogue: he writes about listening with “secular hearing,” that is, the necessity of having an interest in the conditions of secular life, in people’s existential problems and in the lack of belief.629 “The churchplay is like a gust of wind from the square towards the altar. It requires open doors,” as Hartman repeatedly puts it.630 Introducing theatrical playing in the church, however, should never compromise liturgy. Hartman made it clear that “the churchplay is liturgy,”631 and that it is “subordinate to liturgical laws.”632 It is not supposed to be a public relations trick by which people may be enticed into coming to church. Churchplay is still a form of worship, a service, but with an artistic, theatrical impetus. The churchplay is live church art acting directly on the level of real reality: “It is reality ‘here and now’,” Hartman said, “as intercession and Gospel. As intervention. Whereas [theatre] performance is reflection, illusion, indirectness.”633 The churchplay as intercessory prayer means that it makes someone’s cause its own and presents it to God and man alike. The typical Nysström staging would dress the players in a medieval inspired white alb, reminiscent of deacons, and employ a stylised acting-style with a tendency towards the stationary, emphasising the spoken words, all in line with the preaching of the Gospel.634 In this sense, Jag är den jag är is a typical example of this tradition. The addressing of God was clear in Nystöm’s stagings as the playing took place in front of the altar; it could include praying and singing of psalms, but the performance was not part of a mass and thus did

633 This view on the theatre has to be understood in its historical context of Sweden in the 1950s, where the illusionary strivings of naturalism and realism had a firm grip on the audience’s conceptions of theatrical styles, including Hartman’s own.
634 Thorin, 2001, p. 61.
not include the celebration of the Holy Communion. This was to be an innovative addition made by Hellerstedt and Thorin in Lund.\footnote{Thorin, 2001, p. 64. At first the Holy Communion was celebrated separately in the crypt of the cathedral, a procession after the churchplay taking all participants who wanted to join in downstairs. Then, later on, it was integrated in the event, taking place mid-nave.} Nothing in terms of set design was done to create illusion or evoke a fictional space. The churchplay derives its efficacy by exposing or exhibiting its illusion by using what Hartman, referring to theatrical forms, primarily Brecht, calls an “open illusion”: “Church drama has its own effective means, for example the open illusion. (By open I mean that the church-player, when he identifies with the person he represents, does not bother to conceal either his techniques or himself.)”\footnote{Hartman, 1970, p. 49; my translation.} Recognising liturgical roots and using liturgical costumes and movements, the churchplay, however, was, in Hartman’s opinion, “still […] free to vary and styleise these means and in respectful consideration of the roots – or in contrast to those – bring in new means.”\footnote{Hartman, 1968, p. 49; my translation.} As intercession, in Hartman’s understanding, equals intervention in society as commitment, comment, or criticism, it is – given the churchplay’s emphasis on the spoken word – a fair assessment from the point of view of the audience that this intervention was perceived of on the symbolic level of the performance, or as delivered by the verbal text. Hartman’s plays, especially the later ones, in their historical context, show an obvious social commentary by relating to specific socio-economic, political and ecological conditions. Herein lies the second function, in what I termed prophetic sign of the times. First, prophetic in the sense Swedish theologian Jayne Svenungsson understands it: that the prophetic is not about predicting the future but allowing a voice from inside the church to formulate a criticism, just like the prophets of the Old Testament drawing on tradition pointed to that which, in religious practice, was petrified, excluded, or displaced because of fixed beliefs.\footnote{Jayne Svenungsson, “Den profetiska rösten”, in Mikael Larsson, ed., Kultur och kyrka. På väg mot en kulturteologi, Stockholm: Verbum, 2008, p. 166.} Second, sign of the times in that the play took upon itself to relate to current issues. In combination, prophetic and sign of the times would mean posing criticism in terms of the chosen subject matter at what had become alienating pastoral practice without real societal commitment. For these later plays, Hartman himself used the term semaphore (from ancient Greek sêma, “sign”, and phoros, “bearing, bearer”) as they literally were to bear signs of the times, for instance, the struggle for world peace in Kontrapunkt (Counterpoint)
1967 and the awareness of the mounting environmental crisis in the rendition of the myth of Noah in *Efter oss (After Us)* 1970. We may link this second function of the churchplay to Hartman’s early vision of the “ministry of art”, which is one part of a larger “ministry to society.”

According to Hartman, art allows insights into human relationships, insights that other systems of societal functions cannot provide. Not only has art a function that reflects social situations, it is a sanctuary away from modern society’s “totalising worship of efficiency”, as it is supposed to be “the fellow human’s understanding eye;” art “sees” or recognises the individual in order for her to feel appreciated. Along this line of reasoning, Hartman develops his ministry of art as a faculty for articulating and defending art as a much-needed critical agency both within the church and outside. Art or the *semaphoric* churchplay may challenge the congregation’s habitual perceptions and totalising demands in terms of what may serve its interests best, as the “public opinion” of the congregation often does not recognise the need for challenge and innovation, which again influences its appearance to the public as well as its capacity for attracting new members. Hartman’s ministry of art is an intermediation of art, which “recognizes [...] the art world as part of God’s creation and when needed saves the church from itself,” that is, from becoming fossilised and detached from society.

Hartman’s vision for the church and his engagement in culture and society – he was also a frequent commentator in mass media – has earned him the role of father of “cultural ministry”, which has since become known in Sweden as “cultural theology”, or in the English speaking world as “public theology.” These new international developments within practical theology resemble Hartman’s notion of a ministry to society in as much as they deal with questions about how Christianity relates to different issues in public, in what is both relevant to belief and doctrine, and thereby likely to have relevance for the whole of creation, as both Christians and non-Christians are believed to be God’s creatures. This theology must, however, be practiced in the recognition that it is only one voice among many in the marketplace. According to the South African theologian Andries van Aarde, public theol-

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639 In theology, ministry refers to a priest’s service to the congregation, cf. its origin in the Greek word *diakonos* meaning serving the table. Hartman, 1956, p. 171; my translation.

640 Ibid.; my translation.

641 Ibid., p. 172; my translation.

ogy must pragmatically face up to the situation in which institutionalised religion meets the competition of what he calls postmodern spirituality. It is not theologians, who in public develop practices of belief, he argues. Rather, public theology is “the activity of the film directors, artists, novelists, poets, and philosophers” — and one may add dramatists and theatre directors. In the same vein, it is proposed by the Swedish theologian Stefan Klint as one of the basic theses of Swedish cultural theology that “the theology of the church is shaped by artistic expressions.” This impact is achieved when cultural theology recognises the use of contemporary art in church communications. And the theological reason it must be allowed is that otherwise, the church’s voice would be weakened in secularised society where the church’s power to define the religious is already strongly reduced. Yet another of Klint’s theses takes the point even further: “An Evangelical Lutheran cultural theology is a liberation theology,” and it is so in accepting that “profane art can [...] formulate a liberating critique of an irrelevant theology and a hierarchical church structure.” This seems to be fully in line with what was the prophetic aspect of Hartman’s view on art’s function in the church. Through its use of an aesthetics of the performative within the frame of the liturgy, the Old Testament and Fosse’s neo-existentialist texts on presence, it may be argued that Jag är den jag, as a churchplay, opened up the ritual for the imaginative co-creation by the participant, whether devout Christian, spiritual seeker, or atheist. But one may wonder about the outward sign-of-the-times aspect. Could a practice of Hartman’s semaphore today also mean liberation theology being closer to its original political meaning? Could we even talk about the churchplay as political performance? And if this is the case, what happens to the potentiality for experiencing transcendence?

Bearing these questions in mind, I will turn to the second churchplay, Hittefågel.

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645 Ibid., pp. 174-75; my translation.
646 The leading theoretician of the movement, Gustavo Gutiérrez, defines liberation theology based on the Catholic principle of social teaching preferential option for the poor: “Preference implies the universality of God’s love, which excludes no one. It is only within the framework of this universality that we can understand the preference, that is, ‘what comes first.’” James B. Nickoloff (ed.), Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 145. In its South American origin, liberation theology sides with the poor and outcast. In its later, globalised versions, it has been adopted as a means of speaking for other marginalised groups in society, as in feminist theology.
That Friday evening, on September 14, 2011, when I attended Hittefågel, the churchplay was listed as the first part of the programme for the so-called “Night Church”, an evening of open church for all of those who crave contemplation away from hectic city life, or who wish to experience the arts in a spiritual setting. Thus the churchplay was framed by a different context than the usual one, in which it appeared separately without any accompanying events. I assumed that the Night Church would attract different visitors to the churchplay, than would the regular performances at noon on summer days.

When I arrived, it was 8:45pm, and the churchplay was announced for 9pm. Stepping inside the cathedral’s nave, the contrast between the nightfall outside and the illuminated interior of the cathedral space enhanced the familiar golden-warm glow of the unadorned sandstone-clad walls contributing to the welcoming atmosphere I had experienced at prior visits. Flanking the brightly lit mid-nave performance space surrounding the ceremonial altar, the chapels of the transepts lay in the dark. Candelabras hanging on the walls provided light throughout the nave. The flickering flames made the medieval architectural space vibrant and enchanting.

Guests were arriving and gathering in the nave right up to the front rows of chairs. Remembering the difficult acoustics, I took a seat on the third row to hear well. As I settled in, I counted 35 guests, mostly women. There were three children. With a few exceptions, the visitors occurred to me all to be of Swedish or Nordic ancestry, between 35-55 years of age. This seemed to be a younger group than usual, both for a church service and the churchplays in particular. As they sat there, talking softly to each other or studying the programme, they seem to be excitedly anticipant of what to come. Some sat alone like me, but none of those, whom I could see from my seat – without having to turn completely – seemed to be engrossed in prayer, clasping their

Night Church is an urban church event, which was originally organised by the Cathedral of Oslo in the 1990s. In 1999 it was introduced by the Cathedral of Copenhagen, and developed into a version inviting the participation of outside musicians, artists, poets, and theatre groups. The concept has migrated to churches all over Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Island. Visit the websites of the Night Church in Lund: http://www.lundsdomkyrka.se/larande-motesplatser/vuxen/nattkyrkan-en-motesplats-i-natten/ (accessed February 21, 2012), the Night Church in the Cathedral of Copenhagen: www.nattkirken.dk/ (accessed February 21, 2012), and Open Church in Oslo Cathedral: https://kirken.no/nb-NO/fellesrad/kirkeneioslo/menigheter/oslo-domkirken/apen-kirke/apen-kirke1/Mer-om-apen-kirke/.
hands, bending their heads. The visitors appeared more like a theatre audience than a church congregation; yet, based on my own prior experience I did not take this as any definite indication of their inner lives and attitudes toward what was about to take place.

Suddenly the performance began. Following the tradition, church-players, musicians, and a priest had gathered at the West Door, or main entrance. They intoned the familiar hymn *In dulci jubilo* and walked in procession up the aisle. In front were three middle aged women. The first was in her forties in an off-white linen dress carrying the processional cross. I recognised her as the actor and co-director Anette Lindbäck, whom I had seen perform in another churchplay some years before. The two women beside her carried the processional torches. I made a note of a deviation from the use of the alb in other churchplays: the two women wore saffron-coloured long dresses of a loose classical cut, which made me think of the ancient Greek chorus. Then came two young girls at about the age of 16. The first one was of Middle Eastern appearance, dark skin, thick semi-long black hair, and brown eyes. She was wearing an off-white linen dress and a blue denim jacket. She clutched a pillow in her arms. The other girl was Scandinavian, blond hair and blue eyes, and wearing black pants and blouse, and a short blue denim skirt. I noticed that their costumes complemented each other in the blacks and whites, and that one had the denim jacket, the other the denim skirt, in matching counterpoint. After the blond girl followed the musicians dressed in casual dark shirts and jeans. Eventually came the young priest, about 35, with heavy curly blond hair, wearing traditional liturgical vestment, white alb and green chasuble. The churchplayers’ varied costume styles made the priest stand out in her conventional garment, and the churchplayers seemed more theatrical to me than the deacon-like and angelic figures of *Jag är den jag är* had been. They did not as easily blend in with the cathedral space, and visually suggested the introduction of another dimension, the fictional.

The procession advanced to the area in front of the ceremonial altar, where they followed the liturgical protocol, formed a line backs turned on the congregation, and saluted Christ in the apse above the sanctuary, thus ritually calling Him into presence. The churchplayers and musician withdrew to the sides leaving the priest in front of the altar. She prayed in silence for a moment then turned and faced the congregation. She bid everyone welcome and gave a brief introduction to the Night Church and the churchplay in Swedish and English. In the introduction of *Hittefågel*, she informed the

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congregants that the play would be followed by the celebration of the Holy Communion, and that participation in this part was optional.

The priest then joined the saffron-dressed women, who had gone out to flank the altar on the right side of the staircase leading to the sanctuary, all the while singing: “Give counsel; grant justice! / Make your shade like night / at the height of noon. / Give counsel; grant justice!”

The two young girls came forward. They performed a silent choreography signifying that they were friends, as their complementary clothing might already have hinted at. Suddenly the dark-haired girl Nadja stiffened. (I will use the girls’ role names as presented in the programme.) Nadja’s facial expression became moody and absentminded; she used a dismissive gesture towards her co-actor, as if to say she wanted to be left alone. The following dialogue between them confirmed this. Lena, the blond girl, expressed wounded feelings and retracted to sit on the staircase. Nadja receded behind the ceremonial altar, clutching on her pillow, and lay down quietly on the left side of the sanctuary stairs.

The choir of women now standing on the stairs sang again while moving down: “She sleeps, she sleep, she refuses to see. / She sleeps, she sleeps, she refuses to see. / Not to see anymore. Not to see anymore. / Not to see anymore.” Lena went up to Nadja and stood looking at her. The woman in the white linen dress followed Lena and took on a narrator’s role: “She doesn’t want to wake up, she doesn’t want to remember.” Lena pulled away. She tried to call Nadja on a cell phone she had in her pocket, but Nadja did not answer; she was lying as if undisturbed in her sleep. In a worried tone, Lena said that she did not understand what had happened to Nadja, and that she had spoken with her family. We were then told that Nadja’s family risked deportation.

Nadja was still lying on the stairs. Suddenly a voice not heard before erupted into the space. It was an adult female voice. It spoke authoritatively and confidently: “Her pulse is weak...” Where did that voice come from, I wondered. I looked around and realised that the voice did not come from anyone; it had an almost unreal quality, a volume and tone that could only be artificially produced on the PA system in the church.
The disembodied voice “spoke” to Lena, as a recording seemed to be played back to coincide with the spoken dialogue. The voice appeared to represent a person of authority, probably an emissary from the Migration Board. The woman had come to check on Nadja, whether or not she was “transportable”. The choice of word reminded me of the euphemism used by the Nazis to designate the deportations of Jews to the death camps during WWII. Suddenly the play was ghosted by the historical event of the Holocaust. This ghosting stood out as a significant moment as it was even amplified by the fact that the voice was disembodied and appeared to come out of the cathedral space. In religious drama the use of a disembodied voice has been used for presenting God on stage, and as I was reminded of this I dismissed the idea that the voice I had heard could be God. Rather it had to be the Devil or, in this case, the incarnation of evil in the representative of the migration authorities. In the play, Lena did not understand what was going on. The voice explained itself: it should be established if Nadja was fit for travel, so she could be brought home. Lena responded completely incomprehensibly: “But she is already home.” The narrator repeated the line, as if to emphasise this. The choir started to sing: “Home, feel the scent of home.” Nadja’s reply came promptly: “But I don’t want to go home.” With this exchange the dramatic conflict was sharpened.

A short interaction with the narrator developed, the narrator asking questions, and Nadja repeatedly responding that she did not want to go home; but
gradually she also let us in on her situation. The music was quietly accompanying the interplay of questions and answers, and stopped abruptly with Nadja’s last reply, revealing that there were memories she would rather forget. Her repeating that she did not want to wake up created a contrast between the actor’s real actions (she had risen from the stairs and gone down in front of the altar and now stood and spoke facing the audience), and an implicit symbolic level, that what we actually saw was only to be understood as a dream in the narrative, Nadja’s dream. Hence the acting style may be called symbolic, even though the girls’ expressions often touched upon a psychological realism. Narrator and chorus were epic elements, both actors in the story and insightful and ignorant commentators, who sometimes could be perceived as representatives of the spectators. The narrator and priest prayed to God for guidance. The choir continued their prayer in singing: “Give counsel; grant justice! / Make your shade like night / at the height of noon. / Give counsel; grant justice!”

Abruptly Lena told the choir to shut up. She tried desperately to wake up Nadja.

The narrator invoked Sleeping Beauty as an analogy for Nadja’s situation, while she and Lena pulled Nadja up supported her slack body and walked with her, to force her to wake up. Nadja suddenly responded by rejecting the analogy, but still as if asleep; there would be no prince to rescue her, she insisted. The narrator began frantically searching for another fairytale and finally stammered: “A man went into the forest...” And Nadja helped her along: “A forester...” As if it was a sudden realisation, the narrator presented Foundling-Bird as a suitable analogy for Nadja’s story.

The narrator’s epic presentation of the analogy to Foundling-Bird, a fairytale by the Brothers Grimm, worked, of course, on the semiotic level of playing as a meta-commentary on Nadja’s real life contemporaries: refugee children could be seen as foundling-birds, strangers brought into the Swedish society but not accepted by all. To me this was another significant moment as this intentional ghosting of the play by the Foundling-Bird story made for a powerful political statement in the space of the cathedral. Although I sympathised with the characters of Nadja and Lena and the cause of refugee childrens’ human rights, I was not accustomed to such strong political rhetoric being used in a church. Contrary to the Swedish Church, this was not something one could get away with in the Danish National Church without
The extra layer of connotation, which slid into my understanding of Nadja, paved the way for a use of theatre-in-theatre, as, it soon became apparent, the performers began to enact the characters of the *Foundling-Bird* tale.

Next the scene changed with a lullaby sung by Nadja and the choir. Nadja recounted childhood memories, and the narrator expressed through simple gestures that she was now her mother. Nadja remembered her dog. That we were back in Nadja’s homeland was suggested by the music, which had become Middle Eastern-style. It never became clear what was Nadja’s country of origin; not that I found that it really mattered. The general idea that it was somewhere in the Middle East was enough. It included several conflict-ridden countries. It was left to the spectator to imagine which.

The disembodied voice once again sounded and proclaimed that the decision to deport Nadja could not be set aside. Lena was upset and addressed the audience directly and asked for help. This overt directedness of the actress I perceived a very intense and I felt implicated. She acted frustrated that no one had done anything to help Nadja. The disembodied voice arrogantly dismissed Lena’s behaviour suggesting that Lena had just made a fuss of it.

Certainly, the Swedish media’s reception of *Hittelfågel* when it first premiered in 2010 did not cause any controversy. It was rather welcomed that the churchplay brought the issue of refugee children’s precarious situation in Sweden to the attention of the public. Marie Starck, “Kyrkans rum klarar starka berättelser”, in *Dagen*, August 3, 2010.
all because she suffered from a teenager’s sickly want of attention. This was an outrageous claim, and it made me angry. In making the representation of the authorities this unpleasant and arrogant, it became even easier for anyone to feel empathy for the characters of Nadja and Lena.

Nadja started to tell her own narrative: the story about her escape from home.

The choir sang and the priest commented: “[…] But how could we sing the Lord’s songs in a foreign land.” (Psalm 137)

A complex process, which I found complete, dynamic and well played, followed. Singing and music continued to interweave with the actresses’ actions and spoken lines, accompanying and emphasising the acting, thereby evoking emotions in the spectators. The girls’ performances kept me engaged in their characters. With simple and strong but still restrained expressions they created a strong presence for themselves and made the characters come alive. It was well done by the two girls, probably amateurs. Annette Lindbäck, who played the narrator, is a professional actor, mainly in children’s theatre, and a veteran church-player. She mastered abrupt shifts between different roles and used her voice and whole bodily register to produce fairytale figures.

The narrator told us how the cook wanted to boil Foundling-Bird. Lena took on the theatre-in-theatre role as the forester’s daughter also named Lena (in the original German fairytale it is Lenchen), whereby the churchplay and fairytale narratives began to merge with each other. Lena asked the cook why Foundling-Bird must be boiled. “She doesn’t fit in here!” was the harsh answer. The priest commented, “Now she lives amongst foreign people and finds no rest.”

The off-stage voice sounded again; this time it wanted to initiate the deportation.

The priest and the choir responded in a prayer: “Give counsel; grant justice!”

The narrator continued the tale, about how Lena helped Foundling-Bird to flee. Lena enacted the narrator’s story, now speaking directly to Nadja.

The lullaby was repeated, as if to remind us that this all still took place in Nadja’s dream. It was my perception that the use of repetition not only interconnected the different levels of narrative but also enhanced the play to make a stronger emotional impact; the rhythm, the breathing of the performance, affected my body by raising my hearth beat and breathing. I hope to have captured some of that intensified rhythm in this account.

Then in a narrative shift to another memory image, it was revealed that
Nadja had lost his father in a terrorist attack in her home country.

The narrator took over and continued the fairytale.

“If you will not abandon me, then I shall not abandon you.” This line was Lena’s and it would be repeated three times. Lena helped Nadja to conceal herself, first escaping the servants. The first time they came to look for them, Lena and Nadja transformed into a rose bush. The second time Nadja became a church and Lena a chandelier in it. This image was yet a significant moment as it implied the sanctuary of the church and invoked society’s ancient obligation of hospitality to the outcast and refugee. (See my discussion of this in Introduction, pp. 17-18.) The third time the cook herself set out after them, and they transformed into a lake under a starry sky. As the cook attempted to pluck a star, she fell into the lake and drowned. All during this, the narrator had changed her vocal quality to lend voice to the cook and the servants. There was great comedy in the hoarse, creaking cook pitched against the obscurantist servants. In between, the actor commented with her objective narrator’s voice. I laughed heartedly; it was a much-needed comic relief. It was like very good children’s theatre, although mostly aimed at adults.

The fairy-tale ended with the cook drowning, it being understood that Lena and Nadja evaded the authorities and escaped.

But it was not over. The play shifted into one final scene, an epilogue: Nadja told us that she received help from a doctor. The narrator’s voice changed to become the mild doctor. The doctor treated Nadja in a friendly way. She even spoke Nadja’s language of birth. During the dialogue that evolved between them, the doctor examined Nadja by shining a light into her eyes. Nadja commented: “My eyes needed light to be able to see all that is beautiful in this life.” For those who had come to the play with a religious competence, the doctor and the light could be interpreted as Christ, or the Good Samaritan. Thus, the subject of the vulnerability of refugee children was implicitly connected to Christian morals. I noticed how there was a resonance between the content of this scene and the way the play had slowed its pace, reflected as it was, in the peace of my own body, relieved from the play-acting’s prior affective intensification of its rhythm.

At this point the priest entered and put the scene into perspective by making a comment, which was almost epic in the Brechtian sense: it interrupted my going into the spirit of the final scene, and brought me to see not only the play in the political-religious context but see it with a much wider humanistic appeal than the specific Christian one: the UN human rights charter applies to everyone, the priest proclaimed, but still children lack sufficient
legal protection in Swedish society. It was implied that not all stories end well, as did Nadja’s. And by making this humanistic appeal explicit, it was made sure that the moral obligation of being a citizen was not lost on the congregation.

Now the choir sang, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” And they continued with the now familiar “Give counsel; grant justice! / Make your shade like night / at the height of noon. / Shelter the outcasts; do not reveal the fugitive!” It became an admonition and the verse was repeated twice. Finally, the priest repeated it once more, speaking the verse, and the words by now had got stuck in my head: “Shelter the outcasts; do not reveal the fugitive”.

The celebration of the Holy Communion began without introduction; setting the table spoke its own silent language in a smooth transition from theatrical playing to ritual celebration. As in Jag är den jag är the church-players now assisted the priest as they took the jug, bowl and cups from the credence table at the nave’s left side and brought them to the ceremonial altar. The church-players, whom I before had perceived as theatrical agents, were now performing the role of deacons. But for those who had come to see a theatre performance, was it just a continuation of the theatrical playing? Of course, any attempt at maintaining the spectator position would be interfered with by what happened next in the Eucharistic liturgy. The liturgy commenced following the – to me – well-known pattern of prayers leading to the Words of Institution. This was not different from Jag är den jag är (compare my analysis on p. 260ff.). What was different was the connotation of the whole ritual within the cognitive frame established by Hittefågel. Participating in the responsorial liturgy seemed to imply a principal commitment to Christ and with that followed the moral obligation to help refugees, children in particular. It became a significant moment in which I found myself in conflict with myself: should I participate in the ritual even I did not believe in the dogma of the church, that Christ was the only truth? I had done so in Jag är den jag är as my way of connecting with the cosmic; but whereas that event’s staging had offered openness to explore the concept of the divine and feel spiritually connected, Hittefågel in my perception only involved the divine as an authorising power to legitimise what was the play’s moral admonition. I decided to participate because I sympathised with the churchplay taking on the task of speaking the course of refugee children, not because I felt this course needed to be anchored in religious authority. It was a case of standing up for the human rights of refugee children – a humanist course, which the
church had sided with. The churchplay as theatre had transcended real immediate reality in invoking the imaginary reality story of Nadja – an opportunity to experience the refugee child’s situation as seen from the inside or first person’s perspective, a perspective unfamiliar to me and probably many others; but it did not provide me with what I would call a spiritual experience. The political-religious rhetoric was too strong. This does not mean, however, that the churchplay had no potential for religious experience. Someone who was a committed Christian might have had no trouble perceiving the moralising activism of the churchplay as deeply religious; indeed, a course that lay at the heart of what it means to be Christian.

Given the event took place as part of Night Church which appeals to spiritual seekers and people in need of a contemplative space, I was surprised that almost everybody took part in the Holy Communion. I counted all participants, and there were 30 who approached the priest in the line that had formed in the aisle. I would have expected far fewer. The priest stood in the middle with the two young girls who had played Lena and Nadja on either side. As constant reminders of the play, I had just watched, they never become merely deacons assisting the Eucharist. In this sense, the play ghosted the celebration. The priest distributed wafers with the words: “This is the body of Christ” I looked straight at her, she handed me a wafer, and I nodded as a sign of understanding. I went left, to stand in front of the blond girl (Lena), and I looked her straight in the eyes, too: she said, “This is the blood of Christ.” I dipped the wafer in the cup, which she held in her hands, and then I put it into my mouth.

At the end of the Holy Communion the congregation was sent off with
the priest’s reminder of the play’s admonition, “Shelter the outcasts; do not
reveal the fugitive!” Then she performed the Aaronitic Blessing, “The Lord
bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be
gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you
peace”.

After a break in the programme the Night Church continued with music,
but I have chosen to end the description of my visit here. It should be noted
that most who attended the churchplay left the cathedral after the celebration
of the Holy Communion. Together with them I went out into the night, car-
rying with me the priest’s last reminder as the tagline of Hittefågel, “Shelter
the outcasts; do not reveal the fugitive!”

Reflections on Hittefågel as Political Experience

To me Hittefågel had become a political experience within a religious con-
text, not a religious or spiritual experience. The priest’s repetition of “Shelter
the outcasts; do not reveal the fugitive!” presented a political activist call to
the one who engaged with the play and this engagement could be further
turned into a religiously informed commitment by the one who participated
in the Eucharist; indeed it addressed the believer’s obligation to go beyond
what is legal and commit civil disobedience if so needed to protect refugee
children – as did Lena in the play. I sympathised with this activist call of the
churchplay, which I presumed would have had to be sanctioned first by the
Diocese, in order to be performed; but the humanism of the play would have
done well without the authoritative religious frame. Still I thought of it as an
experience of transcendence. Even the political relies on a metaphysics of
experience. Considered on it own, the theatrical staging had accomplished a
ghosting of the Grimm Brother’s Foundling-Bird that brought a humanist
authority to the event. The contemporary issue of the refugee children’s
missing rights had furthermore invoked the ancient Greek obligation to give
protection to the outcast. Thus, the staging had recalled the past and its po-
tential bearing on the future, and in this sense made the transcendent im-
manent.

At the same time there was no question: this was political theatre in the
Swedish Church. Hittefågel was liberation theology by artistic means, as I
had suggested that the churchplay might be (see p. 282). The play implied
Christ’s preference of the outcasts as it interprets Christianity through their suffering. Hartman believed in the close following of Christ, and in his later writings, he did suggest a “revolutionary theology,” in which the oppressed was to be considered central in the Christian view of history, indeed an understanding of the human being as sacramental or sacred.

Following this view Hittefågel is a true Hartmanian semaphoric device, both bearing a sign of the times, in this case, society’s marginalisation of foreigners and refugees, and potentially raising an internal, prophetic critique of the church and/or its members. With respect to Graham Holderness’s suggestion that political theatre may only be effective if it disrupts established aesthetic forms, I content that the churchplay’s political attitude as opposed to its cathedral setting and conventional liturgical framing makes a case for Hittefågel’s “politics of content” to be rhetorically strong enough to make a lasting impact on the attendee – and not only the believer but even the non-confessing spectator. Most people in Nordic secularised societies would probably not expect a political play in the church, and could very well be taken completely by surprise. The surprise is not so much created by means of form, “estranging, alienating, self-reflexive”, and function, “de-stabilising the conventional relation between spectator and performance, disrupting traditional expectations of narrative and aesthetic coherence, de-familiarising and interrogating the oppressive power of naturalized cultural forms,” it rather has to do with the controversy of the subject matter itself.

“Shelter the outcasts; do not reveal the fugitive!” stems from the Old Testament, Isaiah 16:3. In Hittefågel the verse takes on the function of a prayer for protection, then in the end of the play it becomes admonishment, and, finally, after the Holy Communion it ends up being the call for action. In its addressing of the spectator the play may be seen as staging the spectator’s identity, attributing the role of the committed, the one who will receive the Eucharist and thereby identify with Christian values and morals (in Woodhead’s sense, religion as community creating and boundary-forming; see p. 179). In literally digesting and thereby incorporating the symbols, if not the very flesh and blood of Christ himself, the participant of the Holy Communion performs an act indicative of, at least in principle, the willingness to follow Christ in His bidding, that is, in the case of expelled refugee children like Nadja to protect them. To the one well-versed in the Bible the play di-

651 Graham Holderness, “Introduction”, in Graham Holderness (ed.), The Politics of Theatre and Drama, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992, p. 13. – this is info about the publisher I have found – please check
rectly identifies the refugee and outcast with Christ in the line sung by the choir: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew. 25:35),

which in effect is a calling to practice the same compassion towards refugees as that which Christ himself was met. But the connection to the play is also made on the somatic, performative level: in receiving the Eucharist, I was reminded of the play, as it was one of the two girls who faced me with the wine.

In terms of cultural performance, entering the performative space of the Eucharist and receiving the wafer and wine, participants had presented themselves as believers to the bystanders in a Goffmanian sense. This is assuming that everyone has the general wish to appear to the others in accordance with their own self-image, i.e. to present their selves in the way most advantageous to themselves and their self-esteem.

The performative form of the Holy Communion and its obvious religious connotations taken into consideration, it would seem probable that the participant considered her act as a nonverbal confession in front of the others. Even though I have made a point out of the liturgy’s seductiveness – that it is easy to get caught up in the responsorial and to be carried away by the verbal, communal flow of recitation – it is still a significant move to leave the anonymous togetherness of speciating behind to become exposed to everybody’s gaze as an individual performer in the ritual. According to Eli Rozik’s ontological differentiation between theatre as mediation (of a narrative) and ritual as action, one would have to shift from one mode of presence to another, from beholder to agent. In this religious context, such an act is supposedly not to be taken lightly. The embodiment of the Eucharist brings about a communicative difference on the performative level by Austinian principle; the doing – this time not by means of words but acts of receiving – transforms one’s state of engagement in the event from non-commitment to committed.

Taking into account the communicative complexity of the situation, whereby no one’s spiritual inner life can really be determined (the Eucharist

652 I recognised the verse from having seen a video of the National Theatre’s production of The Mysteries (1985). Christ speaks it while separating the redeemed from the damned in the scene “Day of Judgement”.

653 Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1959, p. 252: “the performed self [is] seen as some kind of image, usually creditable, which the individual on stage and in character effectively attempts to induce others to hold in regard to him.”

is not a life-determining *rite de passage*; you could change your mind about your belief afterwards), one may now take into account the view of the one who during the whole event remains a spectator. To non-confessional (or just theatrical-minded) spectators, the performance’s smooth transition from theatre to ritual may seem to be the continuation of *playing*, in which now congregants participate, investing it with a *transformative potential* (as opposed to a play’s dramatic finality). In Josette Férál’s understanding of theatricality, the participants may be seen as entering into the virtual, ghosted space of the Eucharist, where they are theatricalised by the spectator,\textsuperscript{655} i.e. assigned excessive meaning: that they are others than the ones they are on the immediate sensory level, namely Christ’s followers. Even if the agent is aware of this possible theatricalisation by the beholder, it cannot, of course, make her become a believer, but it holds the interesting prospect that it allows for a *playing with the idea of being one*, which might appeal to spiritually seeking participants. This self-reflexive theatricality is derived from Andreas Kotte, who has proposed that theatricality is something, which will have to be accessed by its consequences, whether or not it is merely theatre and hence inconsequential.\textsuperscript{656} In this case the consequences would be the subsequent actions of the congregant in her life, not the act of participating in the Holy Communion itself.

If this conception of the Holy Communion as a theatrical event and as a device for testing potential identity was to be taken seriously, it could allow space for the participant’s indecisiveness, doubt, or her just-not-thinking in terms of implications and commitment. After all ritual commitment is in theological thinking only concerned with ritual logics, not with what participants themselves believe. With reference to Roy Rappaport’s theory of ritual, the theologian Anders Klostergaard Pedersen has pointed out that: “Accordingly, the ritual does not necessarily in religious context create belief or in a secular context social coherence, but it sets the rules and norms, by which behaviour within the meaning system should ideally follow. This means that you can subsequently be held accountable and judged according to the ritual scale.”\textsuperscript{657} According to Pedersen we may see how Rappaport’s


\textsuperscript{657} Anders Klostergaard Pedersen, “Rituælet som betydningsstabiliserende faktor – mellem symbolicitet og indeksikalitet”, in Mette Birkedal Bruun and Kim Esmark
ritual theory brings stability to the production of meaning. It does so with the use of Peirce’s relation between index and symbol.

It is one of Rappaport’s main points that indexes play a major role in ritual communication, in that the attendees’ bodies are indexical. As an example of a physical act of indexical nature he draws our attention to the kneeling person. To kneel is not only to acknowledge submission. It is to fundamentally perform this submission in the form of a certain act. In the kneeling position the person who kneels becomes one with the meaning world of which the kneeling position is part.658

Yet, there is, as I have suggested in case of my own participation, the possibility that the participant may interpret her act differently, for instance, as a playing with the ritual framing and identity, for “[t]he symbolic communication may only work under the condition that its participants agree upon certain axioms,”659 and there is no guaranteeing that all will adhere to the logics of ritual behaviour.

It was Christ who through the churchplay was hailed and awaited when the choir sang the Old Testament verse “Give counsel; grant justice! / Make your shade like night / at the height of noon. / Give counsel; grant justice,” (Isaiah 16:3) and it is through the idea of His symbolic and real presence in bread and wine, the obligation to comply with the bidding “Shelter the outcasts; do not reveal the fugitive!” is made applicable to the participant. This is your duty as a Christian, it implies. At the same time the play presents us with such a clear basis for humanistic identification through its politically based story of human betrayal, marginalisation, and suffering that it interferes with the religious framing. We have to consider the impact it may have had on those who may have come for the experience of watching theatre only. Out of the 35 who attended five did not receive the Eucharist. Might they have been against participating because they sympathised with the humanistic content of the story but did not recognise themselves as being Christians? Is it possible to conceive of the event as equally identity reflecting to believers and non-believers, providing a basis for theorising the churchplay’s inclusiveness to visitors?

The crucial dramaturgical device, as I have already described it, the blurring between theatre and ritual, is what allows mediation and action not just


658 Ibid., p. 16; my translation.

659 Ibid., p. 17; my translation.
to co-exist as suggested by Rozik but to interfere with each other, get intertwined. I think it is a fair assessment to say that *Hittefågel* functions as a cultural performance, in that, referring to Milton Singer’s definition, it reflects our Christian culture in such a way that it is visible for both Christians and others to either recognise themselves as belonging to it or being opposed to it. The Holy Communion might be considered a presentation of one’s self to the other, the beholder, and the preceding play to be constitutive of Christian identity associated with selfless charity. For those who do not participate in the Eucharist, the play then also holds a reflexive potential, as John McAloon suggests, as participant in a cultural performance one “might eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others.” In an inversely unintentional way, it may be non-identification with Christian belief, which allows the non-believer to remain the same. It is very unlikely that the outlooks of the non-believer who came to attend a theatrical performance may be transformed. As Kacke Götrick points out, “When the performance in combination with the spectator’s competence has established a strategy of interpretation, it would take a lot to change it.” Nevertheless, through *Hittefågel*’s qualitatively high artistic level and its affective impact, a non-religious spectator may still have engaged with the characters and developed empathy for them. Thus, theatrical appeal to humanism may exceed and extend beyond the liturgical framing to a recognising of the obvious shared values of Christianity and humanism, cf. charity and the UN human rights treaties. This would then be efficient political theatre in terms of what Holderness would call “politics of content”, as it does not interrupt conventional liturgical or aesthetic form.

Political Perspectives

Perspectives on *Hittefågel* as cultural performance with a political agenda are many. Depending on one’s knowledge of Swedish society and immigration and refugee policy one may or may not miss out on some of *Hittefågel*’s references. In testing how I as the analyst might relate to the event with the competences that I brought, I had postponed any research of the Swedish Church’s views and policy on refugees until after I attended the churchplay; I wanted to analyse the performance starting with the immediate associations

660 Singer, 1959, p. xii.
662 Götrick, 2006, p. 84.
that would come to mind.

As a Dane who has witnessed 10 years of tightened immigration and refugee policy under right-wing government, I was reminded of an incident with Iraqis in Brorson’s Church in Copenhagen in 2009. The church offered asylum to the expelled refugees, and the police eventually intervened and removed them by force. Then afterwards, in my research on the role of the Swedish Church in public debates on refugees, I found an example of the church effectively supporting expelled refugees in 2005. “Påskuppropet” (the Easter Petition) was the initiative of then archbishop of the Swedish Church K.G. Hammar, who, together with the Swedish Christian Council, started a petition to ask the government to change its asylum policies. 157,000 signed the petition and it resulted in a special law, which allowed the refugees’ asylum proceedings to be resumed. Thousands of asylum seekers were eventually allowed to stay. A direct inspiration for the dramatist Oline Stig when she wrote Hittefågel, I discovered the case of the “apathetic refugee children”, which referred to actual occurrences among asylum seeker’s children of apathy or catatonic states in response to their precarious situation, awaiting the migration authorities’ processing of their parents’ applications. In 2005 it had attracted a lot of media attention, which was revived in 2009 by Gellert Tama’s provocative book De apatiska. Retrospectively, these incidences expanded the context of Hittefågel and invigorated the event in my memory.

With the Iraqi incident in Copenhagen on my mind, Hittefågel had made a strong impression on me as the Diocese of Lund allowed the church-players to stage a performance with such a blatant call to protect refugees, even if this meant resorting to civil disobedience against the state. This would be unthinkable in Denmark, where no priest in the church may express anything political publically that can be perceived as the church’s official stance. The Danish National Church is a state church under the auspices of the secretary of the church. The Swedish Church has its own independent decision-making body: The Church Council. Furthermore, the Swedish Church has been disestablished as a national church since 2000, which may have improved its ability to be a significant democratic player. In the Swe-

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dish Church’s manual for its employees, which was implemented on the level of the local parish councils in already 1993, it says, “To many refugees the process of applying for asylum becomes an inhumanely prolonged and difficult experience and this calls for action. The church should act on all possible levels, assist each individual, try to influence law-making and familiarise itself with the international contexts moving to effect change on this level, too.” The policy is subject to interpretation, and interestingly enough it was not changed or regulated after the Easter Petition. Making visible the refugee situation of children in a political church play is one possibility, which might inspire spectators to take action.

Chapter 4: Close Encounters with Biblical Alterity in Hotel Pro Forma’s jesus_c_odd_size

In this chapter I leave behind the staged events contextualised by institutionalised religion to explore a religious topic in an artistic context. Hotel Pro Forma’s performance-exhibition jesus_c_odd_size was presented at Nikolaj Udstillingsbygning (today Nikolaj Kunsthall) in Copenhagen from 9 March to 5 April 2002. During the day, the staged event functioned as a conventional exhibition of art objects. In the evenings, between 6 and 9 p.m., performances were presented within the exhibition, hence the designation performance-exhibition. I was in attendance four times during the run, and always in the evening, since I was interested in the full experiential potential of the event. The present analysis is therefore mainly focused on my encounters with the performers, though I will take the spaces and several art installations that were part of the exhibition into account as well. The repeated visits, which affected and expanded my experience, present me with an analytical challenge on which it is worthwhile to dwell.

My analysis does not merely reflect a single completed visit, as in the other cases, but an accumulation of occurrences, which gradually increased the basis of my experience. I had more time to explore the encounters and try out possibilities than I had in the single visits: the more encounters I had with performers, and the more rooms and installations I explored the more I got out of my visits. Between visits, I had time to reflect on my experiences from previous visits, and I could continue to build on this experience in my next visit. When relevant, my analysis therefore involves observations on my gradual familiarisation with the personal character of the encounters. Obviously, this is a crucial observation with regard to the experiential potential, which may seem greater for the returning analyst than for the ordinary guest who only visits once. Nevertheless, I will claim that the structures that the staging established for the interaction of the first-time visitor created a complete potential for the development of a transcendent metaphysical, religious or spiritual experience.

In order to avoid unnecessary repetition in the presentation in which each visit would be described and analyzed separately, I have chosen to select episodes and significant moments from all of my visits and compile them in
one description on which I base the analysis of their experiential potential. I begin by giving an overview of the staged event, its context, material structures, and creation that constitute the experience, which is not just my own but which can reasonably be assumed to be recognisable to all participants. Where I take into account what is a more personal, individual experience, this is stated. Hence, I do not give uninterrupted descriptions of the unfolding event but merge my analytical reflections into the descriptions.

The performance venue was Nikolaj Udstillingsbygning, situated at the centre of Nikolaj Plads in central Copenhagen, a few steps from Christiansborg Palace, the Danish parliament, and the shopping street Strøget. To someone unfamiliar with Nikolaj Udstillingsbygning, the name might generate misleading expectations regarding the performance venue. Few would expect the building to be an old church. The massive, dark-red brick walls rise before the visitor arriving from Strøget. The church is in gothic style with tall windows with pointed arches lining the nave and side aisles. The belfry looms high above the surrounding buildings, while the heavy buttresses dominate on the street level, concealing the main portal entirely when seen from the side. Apart from some posters and a sign by the door, there are few indications that the building is an exhibition venue for contemporary art.

The first time I visited jesus_c_odd_size, I had not been to Nikolaj Udstillingsbygning before, and the immediate architectonic impression of a church put me in a solemn mood that might be more suited to a religious service than to an art performance; and yet that solemnity did not seem out of place, considering the theme of the staged event. It seemed like the right place for an art institution such as Hotel Pro Forma to stage an encounter with Jesus and the conceptual world of the Bible. The tension between the symbolically loaded church building, with its reminiscences of a sacred aura, and the art institution, which lent legitimacy to the staging, might generate expectations regarding the creativity in the visitor: what might the performativity of the artistic approach contribute to the Christian tradition, which might be lost to the institutional framework of the latter as we know it from a

functioning church? Might it be possible to create an experience of transcendence, which it might not be possible to create through the rituals of the church? Would the environment of the church space favour or inhibit the potential of the performance?

Visitors arrived through the main portal in the tower, entering a large high-ceilinged and whitewashed antechamber. The light fell through the arched windows, which were placed in deep niches high above floor level on both sidewalls. A human silhouette could be seen in one window niche. The first time I entered, the unexpected sight made me startle. I did not expect to find a performer in that place. I then realised that I was not looking at a live person: the light shone through the immobile form. The spectral effect was both beautiful and eerie. The outlines of the figure suggested a female shape wearing a long dress and a long veil as a headdress. I recognised her as the Virgin Mary. Her full human size added to the impression of a living person, but it was only her abandoned shell that enveloped the empty space: the material substance of her body was lacking. On closer look, I realised that the figure was made of a type of transparent tape, as if it were the cast of an actual person. To me, Mary was simultaneously present and absent. This tension announced and attuned me for the transcendent nature of the expected encounters with biblical characters in the exhibition.

From the antechamber, another double door led to the reception, ticket sale and book store of the exhibition. Here I showed my pre-bought ticket to the receptionist. I was given a map of the building and the exhibition. It appeared from the map that the performance exhibition covered the three floors of the building as well as the cellar. Its centre was the grand nave of the church, which was described as a marketplace, and it spread into the side aisles and the large lofts, and further into the chambers of the tower. As I already knew from the description of the concept on Hotel Pro Forma’s homepage, the performance exhibition involved a wide range of media and staging formats, including a conventional exhibition of artworks, photography, video, installation works, a performance installation (with the visitor as performer), as well as live and interactive formats, such as tableau, theatrical monologue, lectures, a coffee room, personal encounters and conversations. The map indicated the sites of various selected objects and installations, such as “Sand Bible”, “Observatory” and “Mirror”, and not least the night’s performances. These were specified through the names or designations of the biblical characters they involved, e.g. “The Lepers”; through a biblical event, e.g. “The Last Supper”, or through a biblical location, e.g. “Golgotha”. A few performances had names that did not refer to known bib-
lical figures or events: designations like “The Grandmothers of the Disciples” and “The Apology of Judas” were invented and might generate curiosity in those with a reasonable knowledge of the biblical stories. Some performances were set to occur at a certain time and place, and the map allowed visitors to arrive in time. Obviously, the map helped when it came to orientation and getting a sense of the awaiting encounters; but this does not mean that it neutralised the feeling of being left to a situation that might seem daunting or uncomfortable at first, which does not happen to the stationary spectator in a traditional theatre. I spent some time orientating myself on the basis of the map before I continued into the building.

The large church building allowed the staged event to play out in a complex of architectonic and geometrical spaces of which it was impossible to get an immediate overview. By using the exhibition format, furthermore, which distributed the events to different parts of the building, *jesus_c_odd_size* created a performative space in which the audience—adopting the code of conduct expected in a museum—became a mobile audience moving through the showrooms. This formed the basis of the experience of what Schütz calls the little transcendence, the visitor’s visual and auditory horizon being limited by the building’s architectonic division into different rooms and floors; and of the experience of becoming part of something larger than oneself, which exceeds, temporally and spatially, what it is possible to experience in one evening. Unlike the spectator in a traditional auditorium, the visitor was unable to get a complete overview of the stage at once. Depending on one’s aesthetic competence, this wandering format might generate irritation or work as an incentive to explore. Map in hand, one was shown into the grand central nave and left to finding one’s own way through the rooms to the different parts of the exhibition and the different performances. Within the opening hours, the visitor was allowed to roam freely, to make his or her own choices, or to follow sudden impulses. Here chance might come into play. Scenarios with the performers played out simultaneously in many places, constantly requiring people to make decisions about where to direct their attention. One was free to choose whether to stay till closing time or leave when one had had enough. The map did not indicate any routes, the event allowing the visitors to create their own individual progression through the exhibition. This experiential mode was described in the concept: “A non-linear sequence of sculptural acts can be experienced by a small or a big audience at the same time. The performance has an underlying
web of meanings, which the audience can explore, be seduced by, loose track of or renounce as they proceed.”

The encounters with the performers were determined by the performative space, which through my staging lens, *stage*, either took the form of what may be described as *use of stage*, i.e. performance in a space physically dedicated to this purpose, or of *creation of stage*, i.e. performance in a dynamic space that involves interaction with the audience.

The use of stage was especially clear in the tableau with the Last Supper, where a podium in the apse of the central nave was used for the performance. A long table with a bench was placed on the podium. Here thirteen young men of different ethnicities and appearances took their seat several times during the evening. The disciples conversed peacefully with each other, Jesus sitting in the middle, unmistakable with his loincloth and long blond wig. Occasionally, one of the disciples rose and introduced himself, sometimes in a foreign language. Here the distinction between performers and spectators was clear. In one of the side aisles, the apology of Judas presented on a stage raised high above the floor and the heads of the audience who thereby were given a position as spectators. Golgotha was an installation consisting of three vacuum-packed performers, hung in a cross-like posture and each kept alive through a breathing apparatus. This took place on a platform in the tower, which both marked the event as a stage and allowed the audience to ascend the platform and behold the act as closely as they wished. The last supper, the apology of Judas and Golgotha were signif-

icant tableaux, which served to establish the biblical frame of reference through their iconographic or narrative recognisability. They did not invite the audience to interact with the performers, unlike several of the other scenarios.

In most cases, stage in \textit{jesus\_odd\_size} should be understood as a fluctuating performative space, since this was created through encounters between audience and performers. Though the performers were located on certain sites and in certain rooms in the building, as indicated on the map, they were always immediately accessible, since there was no spatial separation between them and the audience. When many visitors were present in the grand nave, and I beheld the situation from some distance, it was often difficult to determine who the performers were. The performers stood out by wearing costumes that corresponded to their theatrical figure; but the limits of the performative space was blurred in the crowd and in the close encounters with the audience. This appears from the documentary materials, which show the many close encounters. In principle, both parties were situated “on stage”, where the performers frequently turned directly to the visitor, trying to implicate the latter in a feedback loop that turned both into performers. But depending on how open or courageous one was as a spectator, one would relate differently to the performer: one could remain spectator by keeping a distance, or one could seek contact by getting closer. Here the distance between two or more individuals turned into an affectively loaded space – either empathetic or unempathetic – which affected the outcome of
the encounter. Voluntariness was important, but no one was involved in an interaction they had not chosen themselves.

In this connection, it is relevant to take a look at the participants’ use of space in *jesus_c_odd_size*, and on the effects of the distances between bodies on behaviour, communication and sociality. The cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall has called the study of these relationships *proxemics*. If we apply proxemics to the performance exhibition, we can observe how the tension between the two approaches to staging, *use of stage* and *creation of stage*, brought different zones into play, which allowed the visitor to experience a concretely spatial transcendence of him or herself, and hence a surrender to the encounter with the performers, which was beyond the control of the individual participant. Immanent transcendence may here be understood as a combination of Schütz’s intermediate transcendence, i.e. the inaccessibility of the consciousness and hence the intentions of the other, a transcendence about which we can only speculate, and the external bodily zones that proxemics actualise as a social and affective space. Hall divides human interpersonal distances into four zones, which are psychologically connected by different types of relations: intimate space (15-46 cm) is reserved for close friends, lovers, parents, children, or other family members, and it allows for touch; personal space (46-122 cm) is for conversations with friends, acquaintances and colleagues; social space (1.2-3.7 m) is observed in relation to strangers, in newly formed groups, or towards new acquaintances; and public space (3.7-7.6 m or more) relates to situations like speeches, lec-
ture and conventional theatre. We may observe cultural variations in the distances across the world; but this circumstance is not crucial in this context where it was the Northern European/American standard that counted.

I experienced the tableau The Last Supper, which took place at a distance, in the public space, and which therefore was the one that got closest to the theatrical experience as we know it, as a point of reference for the various distances between myself and the scenes that I sought out deliberately or encountered more or less incidentally on my way through the performance exhibition. During my first visits, I experienced some cases in which the performers invited me to take part in encounters or actions that would invade my personal and intimate zones, e.g. when Mary Magdalene offered to wash my feet. In the marketplace, down in the central nave, I met Mary who made that offer to me, just as she is thought to have washed the feet of Jesus. Suddenly I was faced with the choice: should I accept or decline the offer? To most people, the washing of the feet is a quite intimate and private phenomenon, and so it is to me. The performer made the inquiry in a welcoming and smiling manner, a little seductively, but she nevertheless tried, respectfully, to signal trust, as this was a truly transgressive ritual. When a stranger transgresses our personal or intimate zones, we will find it psychologically disturbing and unpleasant. Doubtless, this is a feeling that most people know. I was unable to accept the offer at my first visit, and also later on. It was simply too intimate, but not primarily in a psychological sense; to me, it was about the symbolic implications of the roleplay and the theatrical scene in which I was invited to participate. It was not so much that a woman offered to wash the feet of a man. I realised that the ritual, due to the Christian tale of Mary’s Washing of the Feet, suggests devotion and love and not the oppression of women, as a simple feminist interpretation might lead one to

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But I felt that I was not the one to receive the Washing of the Feet. In my interpretation, that ritual would cast me in the role of Jesus, and I did not want to assume Jesus’ place in the scenario. This was no problem, apparently, to many others whom I saw participate; but it was to me. Reflecting on the incident today, I can see how I had gotten stuck in a perception of the action as theatrical rather than ritual; and the idea of assuming a Sundëñian role gave me an inhibitive awareness of how I would appear in the eyes of those beholding the scene, i.e. as a Jesus figure, not as someone resting in inner receptiveness towards an act of love (in principle, a statement of cohesion, as in the hongi of the Māori, see Chapter 3, pp. 139-140). In Dorthe Jørgensens’s terms, the intermediate world thereby closed itself to me, and I was unable to enter the liminal state where I might have taken part in a moment of immanent transcendence with my body.

While I renounced on Mary Magdalene’s Washing of the Feet, I realised that the entire event was staged with a view to making the encounters with the biblical alterity of the supernumeraries happen, the obvious idea being that the interaction should prompt the visitor to reflect on his or her own relation to Jesus, Christianity and the Christian imagination, which today’s secularised Danes carry with them as an “odd-size” cultural baggage. As it

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670 In Christianity, the Washing of the Feet is not only performed by women. Jesus also washed the feet of his disciples; see John 13: 1-19 NIV. In our time, Pope Francis has been noted for washing the feet of both men and women, Christians and non-Christians; see e.g. this video from a Mass where the Pope washes the feet of a group of refugees: Rome Reports, 2016/03/24 https://www.romereports.com/en/2016/03/24/pope-washes-the-feet-of-muslim-refugees-we-are-brothers-we-all-want-to-live-in-peace/ (accessed May 28, 2018).
appeared from the description of the concept, the performers were “all people of our time,” while they at the same time were staged as biblical figures. Rather than acting, i.e. portraying a role, they appeared as themselves, neutral in their expression and actions; the focus was on their physical appearance and special attributes, and the role was created through the biblical context in which these selected, real people were placed, whether they were recognised as being due to the scenario, or whether they were named and localised by the map. I once more had an experience of ghosting, especially when the international group of younger men assembled on the podium to perform The Last Supper. The similarity to Leonardo da Vinci’s famous supper painting was striking; and at the same time it seemed unreal that the scene played out in this moment in the very room in which I was standing. Seeing the biblical figures of the past suddenly appearing in my time felt like a strange temporal dissonance, as if they were indeed transcending their own time. They felt out of place and obtrusively real, like odd-size Jesuses, and I was not entirely comfortable being in the same room as them. Because they invaded my time corporeally with everything, which that involved in terms of questioning my rationality. It was immediately possible to recognise oneself in the disciples; the performers were authentic people who had been selected – found – and staged within the conceptual biblical framework. There was a black Bartholomew, a Simon with Down syndrome, a James with a pierced and tattooed face, and a very Danish Judas. In principle, they could have been anyone: I could have been one of them as well. As I saw them, the historical biblical figures had been haunted by the young men; and in their symbolic duality – their immanent transcendence – they haunted me too, demanding that I consider who I might be in this exciting biblical reality. That made me ask myself whether I truly had a place in this Christian world drama. Did I have sufficient faith for that?

Since what was played out in the encounters seemed to respect the visitors and their personal boundaries and wishes, I gradually overcame my initial reservations and entered the encounters more actively and openly. I became interested in exploring the interactive potential in order to find out how


672 As maintained in the concept description, it was not only Jesus who was “unaccommodated” by his own time; “[w]e are, each in our own way, an odd size”. Hotel Pro Forma, 2002, http://www.hotelproforma.dk/project/jesus-c-odd-size/ (accessed May 28, 2018).
the performance might challenge my perception of Christianity as I knew it, especially from the ritual practices of the Church of Denmark.\textsuperscript{673}

Although the apology of Judas involved the use of a stage, and especially of an elevated stage, it seemed to me as a combination of the public and the personal space, as we shall see; and therefore it can be seen as a transitional stage to the more intimate encounters in which I took part.

Judas’ apologetic monologue, which was delivered with great expressive power in one of the side aisles by the late Danish actor Henrik Sartou, was spoken from a platform that rose high above the ground, a reflecting ceiling weighing over it. Since proxemics, according to Hall, can function vertically like a status relationship as well, I got the paradoxical experience of Judas, the traitor, rising high above me, while the mirror at the same time made him seem fragile and vulnerable, empathetically appealing. When he spoke, he often addressed the mirror, or perhaps God, turning his face away from me, and yet his face was fully visible. As the only performer in \textit{jesus\_c\_odd\_size}, Sartou performed a dramatic text, which was about being an outcast for two thousand years. In other words, he identified with a fictional level, while the construction of the stage and self-reflexivity of the text at the same time created a combined alienating effect, which gave a sense of dis-

\textsuperscript{673} Here it is important to note that in 2002 I had not yet experienced the liturgical plays in Lund Cathedral. I saw the first performance there in 2004. In 2002 my knowledge of the ritual practices of the church primarily came from Avedøre Church where I had worked as a volunteer since 1995, collaborating with the local ministers on the development of the service, and since 1996 as a member of the parish council (1996-2007).
tance to the role. “A Judas always walks first...” was an important line in the text, which summarised the theologically interesting point that Jesus could have completed neither his self-sacrifice nor his resurrection as Christ without Judas. During the session, an angelic figure appeared: a middle-aged woman with a gentle angel face and long blond hair, wearing a scarlet dress. She placed herself next to me and listened to the speech with an air of sensitive serenity. Whereas Sartou addressed me, though indirectly through his monologue, it was not necessary for the angel performer to say or do anything. Her silence and subdued energy gave her a strong presence that affected me; her presence in itself seemed like a forgiving gesture, though it seemed more human than God-given to me.

When Judas left his elevated stage, a rope with a noose (for hanging), which hung from the ceiling, began rotating around a chair in the middle of the floor. The thick rope caught the chair and literally smothered it in its grip. The chair rotated violently and finally fell over. From my analytical perspective, the installation was a material address that, in continuation of the humanity of the scene, brought me to tears. Although the actor had left the stage, his symbolic relation to the chair and the rope was obvious: an image of Judas hanging himself.

Already during the monologue, I had a strange feeling of immanent transcendence, of a surplus of meaning, which I could not explain merely with reference to the actors’ symbolic representation of Judas and the angel. Their acting effected a grand transcendence, in Schütz’s sense, since the immanence exceeded the symbolic and the acting and pointed to the transcendent, to the biblical figures. When I came to see the scene, I expected to see a the-
atrical performance, and this expectation doubtless affected my growing sense of immanent transcendence. This already emerged in the phenomenological, or sensorial phase of the reception process, and hence before the arrival of reflection and interpretation. Simply due to their strong bodily presence, the two performers had such an effect on me that the distinction between performer and character began to fluctuate; the performers seemed to be more than themselves. My interpretation of this feeling was not frustrated by the fact that I was lacking the frame of reference that Jørgensen otherwise uses to define the experience of immanent transcendence; here it was the unreal feeling of encountering real biblical figures that brought me into conflict with my perception of reality: the character – the symbol – was not able to constitute something real by merely pointing to itself. The unreality of the situation was enhanced when the actor left the stage and left the acting to the rope and the chair; for even in his absence I experienced him as being present. As an effect of the corporeal as well as of the symbolic, the Judas scene was real: it created the feeling that Judas and the angel were real and present. This is not to say that the actual historical figures had become real. The experience was ineffable and noetic in William James’ sense: it was difficult to verbalise, whilst making a lasting impression. It was as if these people were animated by the biblical figures, as if they were media for the souls of the departed who continued to haunt me in the material directedness of bodies. If I were to describe it less empathetically, i.e. with analytical detachment, I would describe it as ghosting, using the term of the theatre scholar Marvin Carlson: it was the recognition and the memory of Judas and the angel that created the effect, assisted by my cultural and aesthetic competence.

My notion of immanent transcendence would grow stronger in my more intimate encounters with the performers. During my first visits, I had developed an openness that allowed me to experience the immanent transcendence again. I never abandoned myself entirely to my imagination, however, which would have made the biblical characters real. But my sense of entering a dimension of reality that aspired to exceed my view of the world by collapsing distinctions between the present and the absent, between immanence and transcendence, was a persistent cause of irritation in the cognitive exchanges between the associative biblical staging and my active, corporeal investment in the various encounters.
Perhaps the most emphatically and visually concrete example of this was the Golgotha tableau with its vacuum-packed performers. To the reader of the Bible, the biblical Golgotha creates a violent inner image; here being updated to a contemporary performative idiom enhanced it. The large plastic packings hung from the ceiling in the top chamber of the tower, above a massive lumber platform that resembled a scaffold, and which was accessible through a stairway in the middle. In this way it was possible, within the personal space (cf. Hall), to get close to the three hanging performers who were hermetically enclosed in transparent plastic. Their recognisable everyday clothing emphasised that they were people of our time. The facts that there were three performers and that their arms were stretched out in a cross-like position made the spectator see the iconographic similarity with the Golgotha scene as it appears on countless altarpieces, paintings, and in films, and with which most visitors must be expected to be familiar. This was another case of theatrical ghosting, concentrated in an exciting somatic moment of immanent transcendence. The first time I visited the tableau, I was deeply struck by this strong feeling of simultaneous immanence and transcendence. Without being hung on crosses, the bodies seemed to defy gravity and hover before me as in a feverish vision or a revelation. The plastic had changed the qualitative experience of the textiles of the clothes, altering the colours and giving them a glassy gloss; the faces were squeezed and distorted, and their features blurred. The effect of this was a material transcendence of the individual who was anonymised and elevated cognitively to the sym-

674 The tableau had originally been created by the Belgian installation artist Laurence Malstaf in another context, but it was curated as part of Hotel Pro Forma’s performance exhibition.
bolic sphere: here was the essence of the contemporary human being in all its existential vulnerability, distended in a void between the vertical and the horizontal, with the memory of the meaningfulness of earlier times: Christ. At the same time, the immanence of the performing body had an empathetically urgent effect on me due to the risk aspect of the vacuum-packing: the suffocation was only kept abreast by two hoses; one supplying oxygen, and another pumping out exhaled breath. The situation made me instinctively uncomfortable: I feared for their safety, although my intellect told me that they were probably being taken well care of. While they were able to breathe through their lungs, I was aware that the body also emits heat and transpires through the skin. For how long would they be able to hang there before becoming overheated? The answer was fifteen minutes. After this span of time, which seemed to last an eternity, technical assistants came and asked me and the other spectators to leave the platform. They drew a large curtain to cover the stage; but I was able to hear how they lowered the plastic containers with the performers down to the floor of the platform, broke the vacuum seals, and helped them out. After the quarter of an hour, a new team of performers were ready; the curtain was drawn, and the tableau was repeated.

Elsewhere in the large church building, I saw what looked like a contrastingly peaceful and friendly scene, but which nevertheless posed another challenge to me. The attic over one of the side aisles had been turned into an old-fashioned living room, furnished in Victorian style, where a group of elderly women drank coffee. The cosy atmosphere was contagious. According to the map, these were the grandmothers of the disciples. I thought that the disciples must have had grandmothers as well, of course, though the Bible tells us nothing about them. On two tables stood pictures of their grandsons, and they spoke lovingly and admiringly of them to me. I was even lucky enough to be offered a seat at the table for a while, where I was of-
pered coffee and cookies and had to listen to a grandmother reading misogynistic texts from St. Paul. The situation confirmed the strange theatrical duality of the performers; for here I was conversing with entirely ordinary people, whom I at the same time saw as free fabrications, and who were verbalising actual biblical texts. As in the pōwhiri ritual, a somewhat different type of ghosting than the one described by Carlson was taking place here. I had no knowledge, and therefore no memory, of the characters that I felt the performers embodied. And yet they succeeded in realising the idea of grandmothers in such a performatively convincing way that they appeared as reality.

Although I still had a problem accepting or believing in the total convergence of the immanent and the transcendence at this point, in this case of the performing and the fictive person, the symbol’s tension between sign and referent nevertheless threatened to collapse in every single encounter with the performers. The two components were brought closer together through the vital co-presence of the performers and myself, and my rationality was unable to rid me of the feeling of actually facing the impossible: biblical figures who purportedly lived almost two thousand years ago. This circumstance later gave rise to a number of realisations related to my faith: not as a profession of Christian faith; rather an insight into the significance and necessity of spirituality as corporeal-reflected performance, whether as part of a Christian religious practice or as part of a spiritual-but-non-confessional faith.

The Virgin Mary received visitors in the two chambers of the tower: one chamber for men and one for women. Having no choice, I accepted the gender division and waited for the consultation hour in the men’s chamber. Here she sat at a table and invited us to a conversation, shrouded in a textural read
neon light, as if she sat in a cardiac chamber. “Where there is room in our hearts, there is room in our houses,” I thought, and I therefore experienced the light as creating a welcoming atmosphere. Due to its almost tangible materiality, I had the feeling – to an even greater extent than in the other encounters – of crossing a threshold and entering another space, Jørgensen’s intermediate world, the entire sensuality of which would mix with my own still somewhat reluctant sense of the intimate zone of my body. It was the fascination of the space, the red unreal reality, which enticed me to join the event of this encounter: literally an alien space, a theatrical space that belonged to the notion of Mary. I realised that I expected her to be Mary, since the person facing me was real; but she was not, of course. Facing me sat a woman named Helle, an ordinary person who talked to me about whatever important or trivial matters on which the conversation touched. To some people, the disappointment could be quite big, unless they adapted to the premises of the event; but the disappointment also included the realisation that Mary, however distant she might be in some parts of the Church (especially in the protestant Church), once was an ordinary woman with whom it was possible to have an everyday conversation. In this way, the staging introduced the notion of the biblical Mary into our own life-world as the realisation of an almost intuitive understanding of the circumstance that it was a quite ordinary woman who had been chosen by the Lord Our Father to give birth to the Son – in other words, that the divine was able to incarnate itself in the most unexpected form of all. This meeting with Mary caused me to further reflect on whether the performance of jesus_c_odd_size in any way could be said to incarnate the divine: did it hold any potential for experiencing traces of the divine performatively?

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675 This is a both a Swedish and a Danish saying, which I originally learned from my Swedish grandmother.
676 In principle, it was the same effect that I experienced with Olafur Eliasson’s Your Blind Passenger, but in the reverse, since this scene suggested a safe and friendly atmosphere.
677 One of my friends, who had also visited Mary, later told me that she had been disappointed that the performer did not portray Mary as a psychological character. She had gone into the encounter expecting a conventional theatrical performance. Conversation, 20 March 2002.
On my wanderings, I could not avoid meeting the lepers. Two disabled girls (lame from the waist down) were driving around the large marketplace of the church nave, sitting and lying on roller-boards. Like real lepers, they had ringing bells that warned of their arrival. It would have been awkward to escape this sudden encounter in the personal zone. The girls looked up at me and sought eye contact, while they sang the most beautiful songs in German. Shy and polite, like most of us, I felt uncomfortable in the situation (for already as I child I learned not to stare at disabled people), until I was able to accept it fully, reassured by the genuine proximity and insisting presence of the girls. Both parties were exposed in the encounter, but through the insistence on the mutual vulnerability a space for the event was created in which all physical differences and disabilities seemed unimportant: self-recognition in the humanity of the other was established. Such an encounter made me transcend whatever hidden prejudices I might have had as a visitor. I realised that an altruistic gaze could arise in this meeting with the other person. We were equals, face to face. I remembered Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Might it be possible that the divine had incarnated itself in the exchange of accepting glances? Did it not say in the concept for jesus_c_odd_size?: “The Jesus figure appears as several different characters, as many different acts. But always hidden or disguised in the most visible, the most concrete. There is the secret, it is right there.” If this was the case, the staged event had actualised the divine performatively as that which I primarily saw as a spiritual experience, but not necessarily as a religious, confessional experience: by joining the event and crossing the threshold of the personal encounter, into the reactive intermediary world, I became able to reflect on the significance of the performance as transcendence. Through the external bodily action of relating to the other on the
threshold, face to face, it was possible to impress my internal mental relation to my values and my faith, and to see these as an exchange where they affected each other reciprocally and grew in significance.

I also found other traces of the divine in the performance exhibition; but few of them had the same profoundly impressive power as the encounter with the lepers. And yet they contributed to the creation of a mystical atmosphere that, as in Böhme, enfolded and permeated and set the stage for all the other things that went on. On the marketplace, right inside the entrance to the central nave, a lane made of thin sheet metal had been set up throughout most of the length of the nave. The blank elongated surface reflected the surroundings. Suddenly, the reflecting images of the surface were distorted, when points in the surface were affected and drawn downwards towards the floor (perhaps with the help of strong magnets on the reverse side). The points were gradually displaced across the surface, and it suddenly looked as if an invisible person was walking across the surface, leaving temporary footprints. The reference to Jesus walking on the water was obvious. The rooms in the attic were filled with spherical ambient music that enveloped everybody with its evocative sounds. A deep rumble that resounded in the vaulted attic spaces suddenly interrupted this calm atmospheric soundscape, and made the massive walls and floors vibrate as in a minor earthquake. The effect was awe-inspiring, invoking the numinous in Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*. Was it the Holy Ghost passing through the old church building? In a room with dim lighting there was a showcase with

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678 I am referring to installations all of which had been created by Lawrence Malstaf.
679 This ambient music had been composed by the Swedish composer Carl Michael von Hauswolff.
an old book. The book was open, but instead of text one saw a hole that had been cut in it, and which was filled with fine-grained sand. The surface suddenly began vibrating for a while, after which patterns were created in the sand, like the manifestation of mystical signs from God. At the other end of the church attic was a large plexiglass silo. In the middle of the silo was a heavy armchair. The floor was covered with a thick layer of polystyrene balls, and four electrical fans were placed by the transparent wall that surrounded the armchair. A door in the plexiglass gave access to the silo. A sign told visitors to sit down and push a large button placed by one of the armrests of the chair. Giving into my curiosity, I entered, sat down and pushed the button. The fans began blowing, and gradually a powerful whirlwind made a white wall of polystyrene balls rise around me. I felt completely severed from the outside world, in a concrete form of immanent transcendence, seated in the storm’s eye. One thought that occurred to me was that I was protected by God.

The installation that made the strongest impression on me, however, was downstairs. In a little chamber next to the church nave a chair had been placed in front of a mirror. When I sat down, the mirror began shaking violently, and my reflection was blurred. When it finally settled down, the light in the room changed almost imperceptibly, and as if by a miracle I was now able to see behind the mirror. There I saw a chair completely similar to the one I was sitting on. But it was empty. It felt as if I had disappeared in the reflection. I suddenly had the feeling of having seen my own passing, and of being invisible because I was a spirit. I later changed my view of what the event meant to me, however. One of my friends whom I met that same evening in the exhibition told me that he had seen himself as one of the disciples who had taken his seat in the chair opposite to him. Since then I was unable to let go of the thought that I was not one of the followers of Jesus. My seat had remained empty: there was no recognition in the other. In the Sundénian understanding of religious experience, I had been given no basis for identification with the biblical narrative, no model to follow.

Having the staging in an old church building emphasised the religious context; but since the building now functioned as an art museum, the staging was free to create room to explore Christianity on artistic premises. The staged event had released me to explore my own relationship to Christianity, in the fluctuation between empathic engagement and reflective distance that emerged in encounters with installations and performers. The exhibition

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680 Conversation, 5 April 2002.
format had equipped me with what the stage director Kirsten Dehlholm has called “the examining gaze”. This was not only the gaze I directed towards the performers and the exhibited artefacts; it was just as much the inverted, introvert gaze I directed towards myself in interaction with my surroundings and my thoughts on believing. To me, faith in the context of Jesus was no longer a question of belief in the dogma of Christianity but of finding faith in the very way I relate to other people and the world corporeally-reflexively; this was the secret, right before me in my doing with the outside world or the immanent transcendence. I saw this as a spiritual-but-not-religious experience. This experience is not necessarily opposed to traditional Christian spirituality; but through one of its scenes – the last one I shall discuss here – Jesus made clear to me that many Danish theologians and priests of the Danish National Church have disparaged it.

My map had informed me that the Holy Communion would be celebrated upstairs in one of the side galleries of the church nave at a certain point during the evening. Before I entered the performance exhibition, I had been told that a real army chaplain participated in the performance every evening. I saw him take Judas’ empty seat as the apostle Matthias in the tableau The Last Supper, dressed in a green camouflage uniform, and I decided to go to the gallery and participate in the communion. To me, it seemed natural that it should be possible to meet Christ not just through the implicit Christ-encounters with the performers, but also through the traditional symbolic form of the communion. To me, the two formats, performance and ritual, were equal to each other: in principle, both of them could bring about the incarnation of the divine. There was the one difference, however, that whereas the idiom of the communion is abstract, the performers can create a concrete experience of immanent transcendence: this does not require much imagination, as is apparent in this performance analysis. Perhaps the two forms would be allowed to illuminate and enhance each other through the introduction of the communion in this theatrical context? But I was deeply disappointed. When I entered the gallery, I realised that the communion had been cancelled. No army chaplain would come to perform the ritual. The altar was there with its row of empty communion chalices. I went to talk to the priest; and when I found him, he told me that the Bishop of Copenhagen, Erik Norman Svendsen, had prohibited the ritual. When I came home, I read

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on the website of Kristeligt Dagblad (the Christian Daily) that the bishop’s reason for banning the communion was that the categories of church service and performance must be kept separate: “Communion and baptism are sacraments the character and significance of which must be protected.” His argument was that people would not have the right attunement to receiving communion if they also attended a performance. This claim was in stark contrast to my experience. I had not yet become acquainted with the tradition of churchplays in Lund Cathedral at this point; but seen in that perspective it is striking that the aesthetic mixing of the categories causes no problems in the Swedish Church, just across the strait of Øresund from Copenhagen.

The prohibition disappointed and angered me; it confirmed my growing scepticism towards institutionalised religion where it was more important to administer the forms and expression of belief according to more or less clear sets of regulations, legal and theological, than it was to create a fertile and creative environment where people can develop their faith on the basis of their own needs and imaginations. I was not the only one to be displeased, however. The ban gave rise to a debate in Kristeligt Dagblad, which continued even after Jesus had stopped playing. The theologian Hans Raun Iversen from the Systematic Theology Section at the University of Copenhagen claimed that the bishop’s decision contributed to the locking of the communion in the liturgy of the High Mass where it is celebrated regularly every Sunday in church. This practice is not a very old tradition, since it was introduced with the Church Service Regulation in 1992. Iversen pointed out that formerly it was normal only to celebrate communion a few times during the year. Iversen also thought that communion should not be

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preserved for the dwindling crowd of churchgoers who go to the altar on Sundays but should be celebrated wherever people want to meet in the name of Christ. Instead of passing a ban, Iversen concluded, the bishop should have received the loving kick that the performance had delivered like the ass of Balaam.683 But the decision remained unchanged, and could nourish popular conceptions of the Danish National Church as obdurate and regressive. In the meantime, the biblical performers had continued to unfold that potential for experiences of transcendence that the Holy Communion originally had been instituted to realise: the incarnation of the divine in the human encounter. And the provocative question remained whether they did not fulfil that function better than the church ritual did. The interpersonal encounter in the framework of the church building created a sense of presence that I had not felt could be created through Christ’s symbolic presence as bread and wine in the Eucharistic ritual. In principle, the encounters with the performers seemed able to do the same as the communion, but they had a greater effect—at least on those who sought that encounter with an open and thoughtful attitude.

Chapter 5: Presenting the Model for Experiences of Transcendence in the Context of Staged Events

The aim of this thesis has been to understand and conceptualise the potential for experiences of transcendence in the context of staged events and propose an analytical model to be used in performance analysis as well as in the emerging interdisciplinary field of performance, spirituality, and religion. I have arrived at this model based on analyses of the different experiences generated by events, all of which I myself have taken part in. In studying the potential for experiences of transcendence and developing the model for this specific kind of performance analysis, I have applied a combination of aesthetic theory from theatre studies, primarily Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *aesthetics of the performative*, and philosophical aesthetics in the context of religious philosophy and aesthetic theology, primarily Dorthe Jørgensen’s *metaphysics of experience*, to a self-reflexive analysis of staged events informed by participatory observation, a method proposed by the theatre scholar Anita Hammer.

Especially, the combination of Fischer-Lichte’s theory on performativity with Jørgensen’s hermeneutical phenomenology has proven useful in describing and understanding the experiences that I had and in explaining their emergence out of the interplay between properties of staging and capacities for experience. The application of these theories has allowed the realisation of a shift from a generalised performance analysis that ignores the analyst as the informant to one that actively acknowledges and makes experience the very object of self-reflexive analysis, building directly on the situated knowledge of the first person perspective, such as Hammer has proposed. The addition of the first-person perspective to Fischer-Lichtes’s aesthetics of the performative has thus proved crucial for an increased and extended understanding of aesthetic experiences. Contextual analysis, which I introduce with my model, creates a hermeneutic framework for the phenomenologically based performance analysis and allows a more complex analysis of the meaning of the event than the one permitted by Fischer-Lichte’s unmodified aesthetics. The feedback loop can advantageously be modified by the close analysis of the relationship between actor and spectator applying the concept of directedness, as proposed by Siemke Böhnish. By proceeding with this concept and include non-living materiality, what I call “material directedness”, Fischer-Light’s aesthetics can be calibrated to better apply to staged
events not co-created in an interplay between co-present participants, but where one party is perceived as a non-living, or objectively physically absent, participating or performing in the form of an object.

Studying experiences of transcendence would be inconceivable without paying particular attention to the first person perspective. Experiences of transcendence are generated in the inner life of the analyst and is only accessible thorough the renderings of what the analyst underwent in the encounter with the event. Furthermore, the interpretations of the event whether metaphysical, spiritual or religious, are always of a personal nature. However, transcendence as an experiential process is not only a subjective phenomenon, but ought to be seen as a key feature of aesthetic experience in a broader context of staged events: without transcendence in a phenomenological sense, of a going beyond one’s quotidian, everyday perception of being-in-the-world through performativity and reflectivity, there cannot be transformation; and without any transformation there cannot be any experience – so goes the arguments of Fischer-Lichte and Jørgensen.

In this final chapter, I present the model I have developed, beginning with a philosophical perspective on its basic elements of scientific inquiry. This discussion of the ontological, epistemological, and methodical dimensions of the model will remind the reader of the points of departure for investigating experiences of transcendence in the first place and place it in a wider context of research. The graphic model is presented with a summary of its key theoretical concepts, which offers a concise overview of the aesthetic theories that translate into the practicable model. Every concept is illustrated with examples from the analyses. A practical introduction to the model itself serves as an instruction in how to read and apply it to analysis. Based on my analyses, I proceed to make some general observations. These observations are aimed at further research into the phenomenon of experiences of transcendence. With particular attention to the future development of the model, I address some theoretical and methodological issues: in what way may the selection of staged events in the present study have influenced a certain conceptual bias in the construction of the model? What are the limits of observation set by the chosen theoretical concepts? Last not least, I consider in more general terms what value of its own the model and method may have in the development of performance analysis and how my study of experiences of transcendence may contribute to the understanding of theatrical and staged events in general.
A philosophical perspective on the model

In terms of a philosophical perspective on the elements of scientific inquiry, a model ought to reflect a consequential relation between ontological, epistemological, and methodical dimensions. Questions regarding these dimensions create coherence between my analyses and the development of the model to ensure theoretical consistency between ontology, i.e. understanding of the world under investigation, epistemology or the theory of knowledge, especially the limits of what can/cannot be known, and, in the affirmative case, how it can be know, as well as the method, i.e. what I see as the overall conceptualisation of performance analysis methodology, and, more specifically, the applied technique of analysis. I understand with Lars Henrik Schmidt these dimensions as theoretical levels in my research project, which mutually legitimise each other. This means ontology, epistemology, and method must necessarily be in dialogue and support each other. Ontology has consequences for epistemology, and epistemology for the method. The correlation between them is crucial to the theoretical consistency of the whole construct. Together they create the philosophical basis for the analytical model, which provide a larger context of science philosophy than what has previously been discussed in this thesis, namely the levels of performance and experiential analysis. Such a philosophical view at this point serves to pay attention to some theoretical aspects of my model. Albeit I have already touched upon these aspects in the theory section in Chapter 2, they will now appear in a perspective that will further clarify the purpose of my research project ontologically and epistemologically: in other words, what is the foundation of existence and knowledge for the model – the conception of reality it will reflect and reiterate through its application?

My model for analysing experiences of transcendence is based on the ontology of emergence. The ontology of emergence is a worldview, which sees the world as having emerged through self-organizing processes, i.e. processes whereby properties of a whole, larger entities, patterns, and laws appear as a result of the interaction between smaller parts, although these properties do not characterise the individual parts. Consciousness, for example, is considered by biologists to be the result of emergence in which the development of an increasingly complex organism has produced consciousness. Other examples of particular interest to my field are found in recent biological research, religious philosophy, and theology, in which the sacred is an emergent prop-

e of natural processes, or the actual ontology of emergence is believed to be compatible with the idea of a panentheistic god, which at once encompasses and penetrates the immanence and is perceived as emerging. This last aspect I discussed in connection with Fischer-Lichte’s assertion of the aesthetics of the performative as a secular re-enchantment of the world, which does not yield much room for imagining the divine. But the ontology of emergence is not necessarily in conflict with the idea of a god and the divine; it depends entirely on which theology is put into play. As a counterpoint to Fischer-Lichte’s rationalism and scienticism, I presented Philip Clayton’s hypothetical theology together with Lars Qvortrup’s concept of religion as non-knowledge, and linked them to the performative of Claire Maria Chambers’s so-called performance apophatics, as a possible negative epistemological approach to event’s experiential potential (see pages 127-132). Thus, it is possible to argue for the introduction of a concept of god in the aesthetics of the performative.

From the point of view of the model’s practical application, the analysis concerns the ontology of emergence manifested on a small scale, i.e. in and around the staged event. In my theoretical approach, there is a consistency between the ontology of emergence as a paradigm and the ontology of both the conceptual theory and the philosophy of religion that the model builds on. In Fischer-Lichte’s the aesthetics of the performative the performance is an event whose exact impact on the audience is unpredictable, as it emerges from the complex interplay between its different staging elements and the participants’ capacities for experience. In Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience the transcendent, God or the divine, appears as a trace in the immanence to the one who is receptive and believes. Accordingly, I refer on the epistemological level of the model to a pragmatism that has been proposed with some internal deviations by the Americans C. S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. In short, pragmatism as a whole may be understood as a philosophical way of thinking, which suggests that knowledge does not reflect reality objectively but is a tool, whose relevance must be tested in practice. James, for example, claimed that religion is not about asserting God’s

existence as objective truth, but rather that it poses the question if it is appropriate for an individual to believe in God in order to live a good life: “The true is the name of what proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite assignable reasons.” Thus, with the analysis of experiences of transcendence, it is not about acquiring scientific or falsifiable knowledge of the transcendent or proof of God’s existence; what pragmatism allows for is that the experience of both transcendence and the transcendent be regarded as full experience, which even people of our time may have, whether inside or outside of an institutional religious context.

Pragmatism suggests that the metaphysics of experience can only refer to subjective experience, which is based on belief, or, as I propose, faith, i.e. a personal attitude about trust in relation to the world, in other words, self-transcendence. For my project this again has consequences on the methodological level. Methodologically the metaphysics of experience requires a strategy of analysis that takes into account both the phenomenal, i.e. that which appears to consciousness, and the interpretation of the phenomenon. Such a strategy of analysis Jørgensen uses, employing hermeneutic phenomenology. By incorporating hermeneutic phenomenology into my model, I complement Fischer-Lichte’s performance analysis, as it underplays interpretation through its naturalisation of aesthetics, which tends to turn it into pure biology – by overestimating the significance of the body for the epistemological process of meaning-making. Taking my point of departure in a reconsidered re-enchantment of the world that includes experiences of the metaphysical, religious, and spiritual kind, the combining of the aesthetics of the performative and the metaphysics of experience allows for concepts such as transcendence and the transcendent to be used in analysis – while Fischer-Lichte herself would probably reject such concepts based on her rationalistic and materialistic point of view.

With regard to methodology and analytical techniques, experiences of transcendence require that the subjectivity of these experiences be taken into account, of course. In order to be able to study experiences, an insider perspective must be established that regards experience and meaning-making as something that begins with embodiment and therefore a situatedness in the event. As I said on pp. 207-209, I have found that an approach to perfor-


mance analysis based on an ethnographically inspired methodology meets this demand. The performative description of the participant’s experience with the event provides the material for a study of the experiential potential, which is often overlooked by the disciplinary aesthetics of theatre and performance studies, when only the performance as work is the object of analysis and not what the audience get out of being of the event. Thus, I have sought to engage with the criticism that Jørgensen raises against the theory of art: that it is unable to relate to anything other than the idiom of the work or artefact, or that it, at best, conducts a critical discourse analysis informed by sociology, cultural studies, and the like, and thereby often ignores the deeper existential experiences that art can give rise to.

Fig. 3: Model of experiences of transcendence

The key concepts

Turning to the key concepts of the model, these represent components of the proposed theory of experiences of transcendence. Together the concepts make up the analytical apparatus of the model, which aims at capturing the

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constituents, dynamics, and meaning-making processes of the staged event that potentially leads to an experience of transcendence. Here I will summarise the concepts one by one, beginning with the ones that refer to physical and material manifestations of the staging, and then proceed to those concepts related to somatic and reflexive processes of the participant. I will relate the concepts to examples of their use in the analyses. I contend that experiences of transcendence always originate in the encounter with the immanent or the sensorial world, as humans have no direct access to the absolute transcendent; in terms of hermeneutic phenomenology the transcendent can only be recognised as presentiment through traces, indications or symbolic occurrences. The epistemology of pragmatism establishes the transcendent as interpretation of experience that ought to be evaluated on the basis of its appropriateness in human terms, not as a claim to objective truth.

Staged Event

As I am interested in experience as aesthetic effect of events organised by humans and not natural events, I have chosen as the basic concept the staged event (p. 100ff) Staged event is a concept that I introduce to capture the complex relation between material staging and experience. Experience is generated through the reception process between the manifest structural organisation of the event and the participant’s individual meaning-making.

Fischer-Lichte problematizes this relationship with her aesthetics of the performative. In her understanding, staging is primarily associated with the preparatory artistic work that precedes the performance, typically interpretation of a dramatic text. Such work is more or less based on the intentions of the director, i.e. what the artist wants to communicate to his audience. As Fischer-Lichte rejects the idea of the performance as a work created by an artist and conveyed to the audience in favour of the performance as an event created in the interplay between the bodily co-present participants, she over-determines the significance of the performance’s materiality and processuality at the expense of intention and representation: she does not take into consideration that staging is an act that creates expectations with the spectators about certain intentions of the communication. Even though the performance as event is emergent and the outcome, in principle, unpredictable, the staging still has set a programme for what should happen and at the same time set an interpretational frame capable of activating certain contextualisations by the participant; it is therefore, from the artist’s or organiser’s side, by far left to
coincidence what the participant may take away from the event. Whether or not what was intended is actually realized in the encounter with the participant that is another matter. Here unpredictability enters into force. This relative unpredictability does not concern Fischer-Lichte, but she sees the aspect of emergence as the *raison d’être* of theatre and performance art. For her the performance event has come to mean an effort of re-enchanting the world by allowing the empirical event to appear as it is – that is, in what has been perceived as a secular act of revelation to bestow upon the participant a new realisation of what it means to be in the world. It is the project of the neo-avant-garde and especially performance art to connect art with life that Fischer-Lichte takes as her model for a generic aesthetics of the performative.

Fischer-Lichte rejects representation and interpretation as crucial dimensions of the actual performance event, claiming that reflection and interpretation are cognitive modes, which are incompatible with being in the process of attending the event. Contrary to Fischer-Lichte, I claim that the process and the event as experience-generating can not be decidedly delimited to the spatiotemporal extent of the material performance; the reception and interpretation process continues beyond the staged event itself (as it happens in the development of my experience in continuation of all performances analysed); this process may further be influenced by previous visits and participation (my repeated visits to *185 Empty Chairs* and *jesus_c_odd_size*); and it is even anticipated through the descriptions (of the performance, the ritual, media previews, reviews, others’ experiences, etc.) as well as preparations of a more personal nature that the participant herself had to do (e.g. my preparation of presenting myself and choice of waiata for the pōwhiri). By connecting Fischer-Lichte’s aesthetics of the performative with Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience, with its theoretical foundation in both philosophical aesthetics and hermeneutic phenomenology, I allow an understanding of representation as an effect, i.e. that meaning arises out of the individual’s encounter with a given materiality. The materiality of the staging initially affects the participant’s impressions in order to later develop into an experience. The analysis of experiences of transcendence must therefore begin with the material staging, whilst not overlooking that this materiality is the manifest result of a staging process that, by virtue of its context, influences the participant’s anticipation, perception and interpretation, across time and space, of what is about to happen, happens, and has happened in the event.

The formation of experience based on the participant’s reception process is dependent on a number of capacities of the participant, as Jørgensen de-
velops, which implies a receptivity to the influences to which the participant is exposed. In my understanding, this receptivity or openness is comparable to Jørgensen’s concept of the intermediate world as both a perceptive and cognitive state of the participant. This mental state of the intermediate world I propose to replace Fischer-Lichte’s use of Turner’s liminality to describe the transformative potential of performance, as the intermediate world as a transforming state is not dependent on a particular ritual invested with a socially sanctioned identity-forming effect. Thus reserving the liminality concept for decisive rites of passage such as the Māori pōwhiri brings greater clarity of conception and nuances the understanding of the aesthetic experience within the context of staged events.

As is established through my analyses, the concept of staged event allows for the inclusion of a wide range of events that extend beyond the categories ‘theatre’ and ‘ritual’, but it does so with an integrated dependency on the specificity of staging and its contextuality, which influences the representational effect. The ‘staging’ component of staged event emphasises the significance of the individual, local cultural typology and conceptual framing of the event. As it were, the staging comprises Māori marae-based pōwhiri, the Swedish churchplays of the Lund Cathedral (Jag är den jag är and Hittefågel), the environmental performance-installation in the contemporary art museum (Your Blind Passenger) and the memorial arts installation in the disaster zone of earthquake-stricken Christchurch (185 Empty Chairs), the biblical performance-exhibition in a former church now museum (jesus_c_odd_size). As I have shown, especially in the analyses of the pōwhiri, the churchplays, and jesus_c_odd_size, applying Milton Singer’s and John MacAlloon’s concepts of cultural performance, allows me to invest the concept of staged event with an efficacy of identity formation, in the sense that participation may both challenge and confirm one’s self-understanding within the cultural-institutional frame of the event. In this individual process of self-reflection, the environment of the staging becomes a formative factor, as the environment is invested with the meaning of actions and narratives that takes place in that setting; one may or may not identify oneself with them, and this affects one’s reactivity towards the on-goings of the event and ultimately the experience. In my experience, Hittefågel became an example of this when the strong political intention of the churchplay prevented me from interpreting it as a religious or spiritual experience.
Properties of Staging

Moving on from the overall concept of staged event, *properties of staging* is the designation of the specific material-based conditions of the staging as well as certain dramaturgical devises for engaging the participant. In applying these concepts, however, one has to bear in mind that the possible experience one develops is not by far the mere effect of the materiality – to be precise, the properties of staging merely *pre-condition* effects that emerge out of the individual participant’s encounter with the staged event. (In order to fully understand how these effects are brought about in the case of each individual participant, one has to take in consideration the complementary concept of capacities for experience.)

Rather than being defined by a fixed physical boundary, the property of *stage* comprises a playing area, which maintains a certain divide between agent and beholder and implies a hierarchy between them with one part having the initiative and the other following (Agent > Beholder). This divide plays itself out both on a physical and mental level. The playing area may be maintained throughout the event as in conventional theatre with a fixed, elevated stage; but it may also be momentary and migratory distributed throughout the space and time of the event, meaning that the proxemics or the distance between bodies may vary (cf. Hall). Thus, stage is an analytical concept that refers to Fischer-Lichte’s distinction between architectural-geometrical space (e.g. the proscenium stage or the apsis of the Last Supper tableau in *jesus_c_odd_size*) as well as performative space (e.g. the virtual space of the Eucharist in the churchplays or the pāe kauka, the space in-between the two seated parties of the pōwhiri, the manuhiri and the tengata whenua). In contrast to these understandings of stage, art installations such as *Your Blind Passenger* and *185 Empty Chairs* as well as the performance-exhibition environment of *jesus_c_odd_size* and the phase-structured rituals of pōwhiri and churchplays are stagings, which dissolve, expand, or destabilise the stage into an all-encompassing playing area: in the case of the first two events there is no stage in the sense of an implied division into positions of beholder and agent, rather one is one’s own beholder and agent at the same time (Agent = Agent ~ Beholder); in the performance-exhibition the positions have become dynamic, fluctuating, and interchangeable to such a degree it may be difficult for the participant to maintain the difference (Agent ~ Beholder); and in the pōwhiri and churchplay all the participants

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are beholders and agents as they alternate between these positions in accordance with the phase of the ritual (Agent → Beholder), e.g. in the pōwhiri observer, speaker, singer, greeter, whereas in the churchplay the shifts only take place during the Eucharist.

The occurrence of a feedback loop or a reciprocal relationship in the event requires at least two participants, an agent and a beholder, who are directing their actions and perceptions towards each other (cf. Böhnisch’s concept of directedness). In case there is no one performing before someone else, the staging may only rely on a material directedness of inanimate objects to engage the beholder, as the doors and colours of Your Blind Passenger and the chairs of 185 Empty Chairs are examples of. But the feedback loop and inanimate objects may also support and amplify each other as was the case in the pōwhiri, when I saw the gaze of the living doubled by the ancestors in the pāua shell eyes of the carved poupo figures, or when in Jag är den jag är I felt that the Lund Cathedral became a cosmic womb giving birth to all present. As I have argued in the analyses, the agency is transferred from the living to the dead, i.e. other representational material elements of the performance, in a ghosting effect, whereby the beholder recalls those who are absent, the transcendent, and perceive them as present in their mediatised or immanent forms. In principle, this is a process similar to the Eucharist’s symbolic transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ; to the one, who believes, the spirits of the ancestors are present in the poupo, or the whole cathedral building in Lund is filled with divine presence.

The concept of mobile audience refers to participants following either a prescribed or self-chosen itinerary throughout the space of the event, cf. Your Blind Passenger and jesus_c_odd_size, respectively. This concept builds upon Fischer-Lichte, and Ernst & Sauter, who discusses performances without conventional fixed audience positions in not-made-for-theatre venues, where the audience moves through an all-encompassing immersive environment such as an old abandoned hotel building or an urban landscape (guided by audio-guides or GPS-radio-receivers). Here an agency is bestowed on the environment as a performativity of materiality that may directly affect the participant’s actions as well as interpretation. In Your Blind Passenger the dense fog that I moved into “acted” against me, instigating an immediate feeling of loss of control, perceptually blinded and out of balance.

692 Carlson, 2008.
693 Sauter, 2012.
694 Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 112-113; Ernst and Sauter, 2015.
as I were, while in _jesus_c_odd_size_ I entered into a situation that offered a horizontal network of possibilities without any privileged overview. In both cases, the architectural-geometrical space sets parameters for my movement: the corridor of _Your Blind Passenger_ limited mobility to either forward movement or a turning around retracing my steps, while the vast multi-floor layout of _jesus_c_odd_size_ demanded that I negotiated my own route through the performance-exhibition, interchanging between consulting my map and following any impulse given to me by the surroundings – and this left me with a lot of freedom to move about. The audience mobility in these immersive events means that the performance space is co-created by the audience in a cognitive blend of the movement through real space and the imaginative or recollected scenarios introduced or prompted by the staging. I propose that in terms of transcendence, this process occurs as a convergence of mental and physical transcendence _vis-à-vis_ vertical and horizontal transcendence: one transcends the habitual distanced position of beholder to become a co-agent in the event, which is beyond one’s overview and prediction – in Schütz’ terms the equivalent of the little and intermediate transcendences; then the movement through scenarios and involvement in situations along the way bring forth associations, recollections, and imaginings that invoke that which is not empirically present, which presents a variation on Schütz’ grand transcendence, cf. the symbolic meanings that I assigned to the differently coloured zones of _Your Blind Passenger_ and the uncanny ghostly impression of engaging with authentic persons of our time who also presented themselves as biblical figures in _jesus_c_odd_size_.

*Interactive* is a concept I use to describe an encounter between participants that reciprocally affects or changes their actions in unplanned-ways. In particular, this applied to the meetings and conversations that I had with the performers in _jesus_c_odd_size_. Interactivity is not a concept as such that Fischer-Lichte uses; the closest she gets to this concept is what she describes as the shifting direction or attention of the feedback loop in terms of transforming the status of the spectator into a co-actor. This understanding does not, however, take into account the impact of imaginary reality or fiction on the beholder becoming an agent. To approach the complex layering of meaning in my interactions in _jesus_c_odd_size_, I introduced Gary Izzo’s concept of interactive theatre (p. 196f), as “theatre in which the audience actively and spontaneously co-creates with the actor the unfolding dra-

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This concept of interactivity applies with the important exception that
the performers did not create their biblical figures through psychological
acting, but their role was rather recognised through their iconographic re-
semblance with known biblical images or scenes, by their naming in the
programme, on the guide map, or when they present themselves to me by
their biblical name. Hence, I perceived of these real persons as biblical fig-
ures in my interactions, and in this process of communication and interpreta-
tion I had the momentary notion of transcending the real situation and enter-
ing into the fiction of having a conversation with e.g. Virgin Mary or Mary
Magdalene. It had a dramatic quality as it made me question who I was in
the situation: did I consider myself a Christian? Was there a place for me in
the Christian world drama, as in Shannon Craigo-Snell’s Baltazarian interac-
tive conception of the believer’s relation to God? (See my mentioning of this
p. 85.)

The concept of role-playing refers to the role, which is assigned to – and
perhaps taken or accepted by – the beholder in the context of ritual tradition
or perceived fiction of the event, effectively turning the beholder into a co-
agent and co-creator of a situation, and even, when accepted on the imagi-
nary level, a participant in a greater narrative, e.g. the before mentioned
Christian world drama. Role-playing on behalf of audience members or con-
gregants in the ritual events that I have analysed is not to be understood as
enacting a character, at least not in the psychological sense; the role-playing
is rather a symbolic participation in the meaning-production, much in the
same way as David V. Mason sees role-playing.

In the pōwhiri I was assigned the social role of manuhiri (guest), as this
traditional rite of encounter symbolically condenses and focuses the meaning
of integrating newcomers into Māori community as a transition full of signi-
ficance to the participants’ lives. Socially it had a lasting impact, as I had my
status of tapu (untouchable) transformed into noa (normal) granting me pe-

manent access to the marae. Furthermore, on the personal level it had a
strong affective impact on my self-understanding, since I had opened myself
to its spiritual dimension, i.e. the presence of the transcendent, my ancestors
and the ancestors of the tangata whenua (the hosts). The only example of
liminality, the pōwhiri, however, is exceptional: the participant’s outlooks do
not affect the efficacy of the ritual, or at least not in principle. Whether the
spiritual meaning of the ritual is recognised or not, the liminal transfor-

697 Mason, 2012.
formation of social status is still effectuated: everyone who does not disrupt the protocol and goes through with the ritual is formally welcomed.

While it is not possible to evade the social transformation of pōwhiri, there is not necessarily consensus about the importance of role-play in the other examples of role-playing that I have studied. The Eucharist of the churchplays and jesus_c_odd_size is role-playing in the sense the liturgy explicitly re-enacts, imitates the Last Supper in a symbolic form: the ritual assigns the role of Jesus’s follower to the participants. In principle, this means that participation is an acceptance of the religious meaning of the ritual, in other words, a confessional act. However, I have noted in the discussion of Hittefågel, this is only when viewed from the outside – if as a theatricalised event in the eye of the beholder; it may very well be perceived quite differently by the one who is actually participating. As Rappaport contended, it cannot be taken for granted that the participant actually believes in the theological significance attributed to the ritual. In my case, I took part because I see the Eucharist as just one of many established performative forms of transcending my own self, opening up to that which is greater than myself, an ultimate cosmic reality, yet one that escapes my comprehension and any human language; I did not take part because I believe in Jesus Christ as “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6 NIV). Thus, in terms of ritual role-playing, I did not accept the assigned role on Christian terms but reinterpreted my role to fit into my spiritual search for a faith independent from religious institution. This example of complex engagement stands to show that role-playing is probably the concept in my analytical apparatus, which most clearly points to the advantage of bringing an ethnographic-inspired approach to the analysis.

Finally, institution/environment-specific is a concept I have developed to replace the more commonly used ‘site-specific’, which I find is not precise enough to capture the complex meaning-producing relation between the event and its placement. None of my examples are site-specific events, that is, their meaning-productions are not strictly bound to a certain place. What determine the meaning of the events is a specific institution and/or environment. In the case of the pōwhiri and the churchplays, they could have been moved to another site without changing their meaning-production significantly; this is because they are forms of staging that carry with them their own frame of institution: the institution of ritual. Hence, it is quite common nowadays that the pōwhiri is performed outside of the marae. I witnessed one such instance, when the Governor General of New Zealand was wel-
comed at a local college and the pōwhiri was staged in the gymnasium.698 The churchplays could have been staged in any church or other venue as they are liturgies in their own right; they would only cease to function in the same way if one removed the play from its embedment inside the liturgical frame. Of course, if I had been to the pōwhiri or the churchplays at different sites, the environment would changed the overall impression, and in that sense, the events that I took part in are all more or less environmental-specific. As art installation and performance-exhibition Your Blind Passenger and jesus_c_odd_size can – or in the case of the latter has – travelled to different sites and environments699; yet, both of them seem to benefit from being placed inside the museum institution. They both have a certain institution-specificity understood in terms of what Kirsten Dehlholm sees as this institution’s freeing of the beholder to take an exploratory attitude to the subject of the staging (cf. my discussion p. 320f). The only event, which is not institutional-specific, is my visit to 185 Empty Chairs; instead it is completely dependent on the environment of the earthquake-stricken city centre of Christchurch. Before I visited the installation, it used to be at another site, but still in the central area of the city. One could not have moved 185 Empty Chairs to another city in New Zealand or abroad without changing its potential for meaning. In summary, the concept of institution/environment-specific points to the fact that the staged event is always in some way in a contextual interplay with its placement and surroundings, which affects its meaning-production.

Capacities for Experience

Having concluded the list of constituent concepts of properties of staging, I now move on to the concepts, which describe the capacities for experience that the participant bring to the staged event. Obviously, participants in the same event may end up having had different experiences. These variations in

698 Sacred Heart College, Lower Hutt, October 20, 2012. The general idea of the ritual institution as migratory may be conveyed to the reader by watching a video recording of the pōwhiri organised at the UN Assembly in New York to welcome New Zealand’s former PM Helen Clark as UN Development Programme Administrator, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qRRtuZZB-M (accessed 1 May, 2018).
699 jesus_c_odd_size had its worldpremiere in 2000 at Malmö Högskola in Malmö, Sweden. To my knowledge Your Blind Passenger has not to this date been shown anywhere else than at Arken – Museum for moderne kunst, Ishøj, Denmark.
experience can be attributed to the capacities, which are individual and determine one’s readiness for engagement in the event in the first place. One may either have these capacities or not; or one can develop them through encounters with the arts, nature, religion and spirituality. Only by considering the interplay between the material sensual properties of staging and the individual mental capacities can the analysis of experiences be completed. The capacities for experience comes together with the properties of staging in creating a certain affective and cognitive state during the process of reception, Jørgensen’s intermediate world, which makes the participant open to notions of immanent transcendence. This openness may eventually lead to the participant’s interpretative transformation of impressions into an experience and, in the longer run, the participant’s possible self-transcendence.

Building mainly on the philosophies of Alexander G. Baumgarten, Martin Heidegger, K. E. Løgstrup, and Gernot Böhme, Jørgensen develops what I have collectively termed reactivity. Reactivity is a crucial precondition of all aesthetic experiences as interpreted impressions. Reactivity as a concept consists of Baumgarten’s sensitive cognition, Heidegger’s and Løgstrup’s attunement, and Böhme’s atmosphere. According to Jørgensen, Baumgarten’s sensitive cognition is comprised of sensation, feeling, presentiment, and an ability to transcend. Sensitive cognition plays a part in perception, i.e. the organising of sensation into meaningful patterns. The importance of this kind of sensitive attitude became apparent to me during my pōwhiri when I perceived the doubling of the living tengata whenua in the carved poupo of the dead tīpuna (ancestors) and took it to be an indication of their presence. Not only are such impressions sensual – as the lively gleam that I saw in the eyes of both the people and the figurines – but also they are sensitive in the sense they combine sensation with a quick and delicate appreciation of the associations that are brought on by observing the phenomenon.

Jørgensen explains how denotative meaning is already established in perception referring to attunement in Heidegger’s and Løgstrup’s phenomenologies. In attunement Heidegger connects being-in-the-world and understanding, which means that one always already understands the world by one’s being in it, and at the same time the being-in-the-world is in a certain way attuned as a conditioning of the participant’s very existence, what Heidegger calls how-one-finds-oneness (Befindlichkeit). In this state of understanding one is already enveloped in a mood. In his take on the concept, Løgstrup points out that most of the time attunement goes unnoticed by the participant, and that it is only in hindsight that one may become aware of how this attunement is a disposition for moods and feelings, which is what is
poetically being created by art – or, as I might add, staged events. For example, the installation *185 Empty Chairs* amplified my feeling of existential fragility faced with the consequences of nature’s forces, and how I was particularly attuned to that feeling by how-I-found-myself-ness at that particular time, having had experienced a small earthquake myself.

Böhme’s concept of *atmosphere* I see as interconnected with Heidegger’s and Løgstrup’s concepts of attunement, for it is atmosphere that may activate the mood of a situation or event. The all-pervading atmosphere of *Your Blind Passenger* created an otherworldly mood that activated various associations and imaginings of transcending the limitation of my being, this planet and life itself. The weather on that grey and rainy spring day of my pōwhiri attuned me in front of the whare tipuna to the wailing intonations of the kairangā commemorating the dead, and I had shed tears. The sound-atmosphere of Carl Michael von Hausswolff’s subtle ambience in *jesus_c_odd_size* had created a sense of the mysterious, which suddenly erupted into a deep awe-inspiring rumble, which reverberated for a moment throughout the massive walls and floors of the St. Nikolaj church building just to subside as suddenly as it began – as if the Holy Ghost has passed right through it. And it was the atmosphere of womanhood created by the all-female cast in *Jag är den jag är*, which inspired my notion of the Lund Cathedral as a divine womb.

In addition to the reactivity I have included *imagination* in my theoretical framework. Imagination may stand out as a decisive factor in the formation of an experience of transcendence. It is imagination in its Kantian meaning, more precisely the powers of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) that makes possible the cognitive leap from the perception of mere immanence, plain materiality, to its interpretation, the transcendence. This is precisely what happened in my encounter with the white chairs in *185 Empty Chairs*, when the ghosts of the departed occupied them.

Furthermore, the process of interpretation is facilitated by *aesthetic competence*, i.e. the previous experience that the participant may have had of the varieties of aesthetic formats, as well as *cultural competence*, i.e. any pre-acquired knowledge and experience with a given culture. Whereas the previous competences to a certain extend refer to relative objective patterns of recognition and assessments, *personal background* is a factor that condition a deep engagement with the on-goings of the event. Personal background comprises what the participant brings to the event in terms of personal history, ancestry, psychological makeup, preferences, ideologies, etc. My personal background became a particularly predominant factor in my spiritual experience of the pōwhiri. Yet the final prerequisites for metaphysical, spiritu-
al, or religious experiences are faith or belief. In accordance with my distinction between faith and belief (cf. Anita Hammer, Wildfred Cantwell Smith, and Tor Nørretranders, pp. 190-192), faith is an open attitude towards the transcendent, in that it rather observes the notion of or the trace of something beyond the known world than it proceeds to attribute a certain meaning to it. For example, faith may be characteristic of the very sentiency of a search for the spiritual or sacred. Or it may express itself in an experience of the metaphysical with reference to philosophy without attaining personal valuation, i.e. without the choice to implement such an interpretation as an outlook. Belief does the opposite; it adheres to an interpretation that has existential consequence. Typically, this interpretation would be provided by a belief system, in this context, a religion. It is worth notice, however, that both faith and belief may be convictions of the existence of the transcendent; but it does not follow that they are confessional or belonging to a certain denomination.

The process that may ultimately generate an experience of transcendence is the process of reception. I conceive of it as progression through a sequence of phases. Sensation initiates the sequence, followed by perception and interpretation, and possibly it leads to the notion of immanent transcendence with the subsequent transformation into an experience of transcendence. In accordance with the phenomenologist Alva Noë, I distinguish between sensation and perception as the first two phases of the reception process. Sensation is immediate stimulation of the nervous system through the participant’s senses. This process is by and large unconscious; except for sudden changes of light, sound or smell and changes that affect the body significantly, for instance, perceptual blindness, disorientation, and vertigo that I underwent in the foggy atmosphere of Your Blind Passenger. Perception is the ordering of sensation into meaningful patterns, in semiotic terms denotation, that may become conscious to the participant, making it accessible to further processing. Interpretation is the process of assigning connotative meaning to what is perceived. Some of the interpretation coincides with the perception, as the denotative recognition of objects for what they are known to be; and then reflection may set in as a deliberation on complex meaning. This latter kind of interpretation may occur during and after the event, depending on the situation. Obviously, the process of reception is intricately connected in time and space with the properties of staging and the capacities for experience, both of them influencing the reception in all its

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phases. For example, in *185 Empty Chairs* my interpretation of the chairs as being occupied by the departed happened during my first visit, but further affected the way I related to the installation and preconditioned my second visit, where I seated myself in one of the chairs and took on the perspective of the dead. Here I disagree with Fischer-Lichte, who in *Ästhetik des Performativen* rejects the idea of interpretation as something, which is part of the event. Fischer-Lichte sees the event as delimited by its materiality and spatiotemporal framing. I see it as very difficult to decide when the event ends as it is extended into a kind of “afterlife” through the process of interpretation. This process may extend across several visits to the same theatre production, exhibition, installation, or ritual, which then – as singular events – becomes intertwined and interlinked in a hermeneutical circle.

**Notion of Immanent Transcendence**

In her philosophical aesthetics Jørgensen is less concerned with explaining how the concepts of experiences are anchored in the bodily perception than with explaining them as philosophical concepts. This is typically how philosophy operates on a generalised abstract level. In theatre studies, however, understanding how meaning-making processes evolve as the audience’s bodily and sensorial processes is of much greater concern. Here I see it as the task of the theatre scholar to apply the philosopher’s conceptual work and convert it into a practicable analytical apparatus, and where it is needed recalibrate or supplement it. This is why I suggested combining Jørgensen’s metaphysics of experience with Alfred Schütz’s socio-phenomenological concept of immanent transcendence. Schütz’s bases his whole understanding of how the social world is experienced and thereby constructed through the immanent transcendence of the first person point of view, applying it to his three categories of transcendence: the *little transcendence* determined by the physically limited horizon of individually situated view point; the *intermediate transcendence* observing the inaccessibility of the other person’s or conscious being’s mind; and the *grand transcendences* taking on the forms of dream, religious ecstasy, or death. Jørgensen’s understanding of immanent transcendence is similar in so far as it refers to an experience, which is common to all humans; in concurrence with Schütz, she even suggests that this experience is not necessarily exceptional but can occur in everyday life.
and nature, that is, outside of artistic and ritual events. Yet, where Schütz’s approach identifies practical applications of his concepts, Jørgensen puts less attention to the phenomenological situation, which gives rise to the experience. This seems to divert her attention from the potential commonality of the experience and retain a more exclusive meaning of the concept. Jørgensen refers to the experience of immanent transcendence as an experience of being part of that which is greater than oneself, yet defies interpretation; it constitutes – as she puts it – “a surplus of meaning”. According to Jørgensen the experience of immanent transcendence is a failed interpretation, which is quite well known to today’s secularised Westeners, as they have lost the vocabulary previously provided by metaphysics or religion to describe and understand such phenomena. As such the impression of immanent transcendence remains uninterpreted, and a kind of uneasy acceptance of this undecidenedness is the outcome, the experience. There is also an overflow of meaning present in Schütz’s three concepts of transcendence, but in many social situations the participant would know based on prior lifeworld-experience how to interpret it and respond accordingly. This is for instance what I do in the familiarity of the chuchplays’ liturgy or when I navigate in the museum environment of jesus_c_odd_size; these situations are examples of little and intermediate transcendences that I am to a certain extent used to, relying on my cultural and aesthetic competence. In my encounters with the Disciples’ Grandmothers, Virgin Mary, the Lepers, or Judas in jesus_c_odd_size the social taken-for-grantedness of the situation is suddenly destabilised by the awareness that the other is not merely who that person objectively appears to be but at the same time concurrently ghosting a biblical figure of the past. Through this awareness a convergence between the middle transcendence and the great transcendence, or between the horizontal and the vertical, arises; but contrary to Jørgensen’s experience of immanent transcendence it is not the case that I do not know how to semiotically interpret the performer or the object in front of me. What this staged encounter prompts is a notion of the cognitive blend between the performer and the symbolic figure – in a very concrete sense an immanent transcendence that activates a cognitive spatiotemporal structure of the present, my bodily co-presence with the performer, with the past, the empirically absent biblical person, and points towards the future, the outcome of the encounter: What does it mean to me to be in this very real encounter with a living biblical figure? Who am I in this? Hence, for me the interactive encounter with the

702 Jørgensen, 2006, p. 58.
performer lead to the outcome that I reflected upon questions about my own possible religiosity or spirituality. In a situation like this where the religious or spiritual context of the event is explicit, immanent transcendence might rather present a challenge to the participant’s outlooks and convictions than an inability to interpret the situation.

On the overall level, I am interested in the kind of immanent transcendence that one knows how to handle as well as the kind that one does not. In terms of hermeneutic phenomenology, immanent transcendence occurs in all experience with staged events. But as my performative testing and rethinking of Jørgensen’s concept has lead me to believe, the experience of immanent transcendence may be seen as more than the inconclusive or frustrated end of an interpretation attempt. On the one hand, it may simply refer to the paradox of fiction, which Mason describes as cognitive and affective reactions to what is empirically absent on stage, the character or stage figure, as in the churchplays or jesus_c_odd_size, or the presence of the absent in the chairs of 185 Empty Chairs and the carved poupou figurines of the pōwhiri. On the other hand, if the process of reception is not completely halted but disturbed, I suggest that it conceptualises a phase of interpretational challenge, which preconditions an experience of transcendence.

I refer to it as a notion of immanent transcendence in the similar way notion appears in Baumgarten’s sensitive cognition, i.e. an impression of something, but vaguely grasped and not yet comprehended, a presentiment. Before one arrives at interpreting the impression, one goes through the notion – which, in the staged event, is initiated by sensation – of being part of that which is greater than oneself. This may be recognised as a letting go of or loosing oneself to occurrences, which are beyond one’s control. This may be associated with a feeling of confusion or discomfort as one enters into the event, cf. my entry of Your Blind Passenger or 185 Empty Chairs. However, the situation may not remain disconcerting as one regains one’s composure and finds a way to handle the situation. Often the encounter with immanent transcendence will pose both a challenge and a relief, or a mixed sentiment of fear and fascination as Rudolf Otto describes the encounter with the numinous. If one is able to overcome the urge to back out of the situation, it may turn into what Jørgensen calls an experience of beauty, which may implicate metaphysical, spiritual, or religious meaning-making. On the level of perception, this experience of beauty would be preceded by a kind of ecstasy or a state of being out of oneself (from Greek ek-stasis), or to be more precise, a momentary state of detachment from one’s reflecting intention-governed subject. This state allows one to sense objects and living beings in
their very appearance without evaluating their meaning or purposefulness; the beautiful, as Jørgensen has it, is that which does not serve any purpose beyond itself. While in this state, one may sense one’s own being in concert with what is observed – an impression that may bring pleasure, joy, or existential affirmation. This state comes very close to what Fischer-Lichte understands as re-enchantment of the world, which is a newfound realisation of ways of being in the world. Whereas Fischer-Lichte does not discuss the contextualisation of aesthetic experience but merely interest herself in it as a phenomenological realisation, Jørgensen’s conception of experience of beauty requires a hermeneutical process in order to become an experience at all; one’s perception of being part of that which is greater than oneself is not sufficient to leave a lasting impact, i.e. become an experience. It takes interpretation to transform the impression into an understanding of what one has undergone.

Transformation

The realisation of one’s being-in-the-world, what Fischer-Lichte calls re-enchantment, I suggest, may coincide with one having the notion of immanent transcendence. In my understanding, the notion of immanent transcendence has not yet become an experience; it is very much still part of the reception process. As I have explained above, its transformation is brought about by what Jørgensen terms the intermediate world, a certain state of consciousness, which is preconditioned by notion, but also attunement, atmosphere, and imagination. The mental state of the intermediate world is not an esoteric and exceptional occurrence, which involves a few people with visionary gifts, it is a common state in which the open-minded and reactive participant relates to the event. It is in the intermediate world that the spectator reacts cognitively and affectively to a theatrical character of the actor as if this character was a real person. In fact, this paradox of fiction is the very notion of immanent transcendence. However, the notion is only transformed into something more than the recognition of the theatrical character if it is subjected to interpretation. An experience is only generated if the notion or the instant of immanent transcendence is related through deliberation on a context, which appears meaningful to the participant and may contribute a perspective on the occurrence.

This is a very different kind of transformation than the one Fischer-Lichte proposes for the aesthetics of the performative. According to Fischer-Lichte
transformation is a liminal process, which is effective in the body as well as in social relations. As I see it transformation is somatically effective, but it only rarely involves liminality, cf. the pōwhiri. The concept of liminality relies on communal consensus for it to retain its distinctiveness and hence remain useful in analysis. The intermediate world as a cognitive and affective state, on the other hand, is not reliant on the social context; it is part of the individual reception process and evolves out of the encounter with the event. Entering the state of intermediate world allows one to engage with the event. Depending on the interpretation of the event, it may lead to self-transcendence, that is, lasting changes in the way one relates to life, to others, and to the world. The intermediate world does not change your being completely, but you are never entirely the same as the one you were before the event; your understanding, knowledge, or outlooks will have been affected to some extent.

Experiences of Transcendence: Metaphysical Experience, Spiritual Experience, Religious Experience

Experience – as I have shown – does not refer to the participant’s sensual process as the staged event unfolds; it designates what is the interpretative outcome of the process, that which the participant takes away and carries with her into life. In terms of event, experience is a performance, i.e. something that is completed (cf. the etymology of the word, from Old French parfurnir “accomplishment”). In effect, it is an interpretation. Thus, referring to Jørgensen I understand experience as a process that has been consummated and therefore constitute the end result of processing. This means that one can only be said to have had an experience, if it involves interpretation. It is this outcome that is decisive in assessing whether or not the event may have a lasting impact. In concurrence with Jørgensen, I hold it to be conclusive that the reception process has made a lasting (“prægende”) impression, that is, has made a transformative impact upon the participant. If this is not the case, one has not had an experience (“erfaring”), merely an impression (“oplevelse”). This is what is the ultimate (perhaps not always attainable) aim of the analysis: to determine what kind of impact the event had, if any.

From the very beginning I have emphasised that experiences of transcendence is merely a potential, i.e. possible outcomes of a participant’s engagement in a staged event. I have only described potentiality in generic terms: potentiality is a capacity for the realisation of something, in this case
the event as an experience of transcendence. Giorgio Agamben has discussed potentiality as a concept and proposed to narrow it down to capacity for realisation that the participant is aware of, but fails or chooses not to employ.\footnote{Giorgio Agamben, \textit{Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy}, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 182f.} Agamben’s understanding of potentiality is conceived for the political act. My understanding departs from Agamben’s concept. The difference between the political act and the undergoing of an experience of transcendence is that the first requires a conscious, deliberated instigation, the \textit{choice} to act, whereas the second is an effect of a doing, of participation, in the sense that a notion of immanent transcendence is something which takes hold of the participant and is beyond her/his control. Immanent transcendence comes upon one as a notion of that which is greater than oneself, that is to say, as something not yet interpreted and conceptualised; or as Jørgensen has it, it is \textit{excessive of meaning} calling for an interpretation, which the participant may or may not be able to conceive of. My analyses show that the notion of immanent transcendence is first sensually induced, and it does not necessarily take a thematic actualisation to bring it about. The most profound example of this is \textit{Your Blind Passenger}: I provided the meaning as I negotiated the unusual and challenging environment and associated the colours of the fog with cultural contexts that informed my interpretation of what I underwent, shifting through three regimes of meaning: the metaphysical, spiritual, and religious, but finally deciding on a spiritual-but-not-religious interpretation.

All the events, however different they may be, are examples of how the notion of immanent transcendence, of going beyond oneself and one’s normal everyday perception of the world, is established in the staging as a prerequisite for the sensation and the whole process of reception. Objectively, this is a potential of the staging, which can be identified in performance analysis as \textit{properties of staging}; they exist even if the potential of experience is not realised by the participant. These parameters are structural and contextual and are objective elements of the event. Yet, there is no direct causal relationship between experience and staging, which is a circumstance adding to the complexity of analysis. For example, one may as a spiritually inclined person attend a churchplay without it resulting in a religious experience, as was the case of my attending \textit{Hittefågel}. It might even be so that a potential for a certain experience is realised without the organisers of the event ever intended for it to happen, cf. my notion of the Lund Cathedral turning into a cosmic womb in \textit{Jag är den jag är}. Hence, one may conceptu-
alise what a metaphysical, spiritual or religious experience is and find the correlated properties of staging, but the conditions for having such experiences are clearly determined by individual outlooks, inclinations, feelings and moods. A methodological consequence of these experiential conditions is that the model cannot be applied artistically to a concerted effort in pre-constructing or staging experiences; its productive use is rather a retrospective appliance to individual experiences, which may backtrack their causes in the properties of staging.

In the staging, one may retrospectively discover preconditions for experiences of transcendence in their manifest structures and devises. In order to recognise or identify the potentiality for experiences of transcendence in the context of these properties of staging, I refer to them as correlated – if not corresponding – to concepts of metaphysical, spiritual, and religious experience. It follows that I consider the object or reference of experience, the transcendent, whether a god, spirits, or another dimension, as identifiable as traits that manifest themselves in the immanent, in this case, in the staging, e.g. the empty chairs or the realm of afterlife in the white light of Your Blind Passenger. By analysing metaphysical, spiritual and religious experiences of transcendence the model may help to understand and identify recurring staging and dramaturgical devises that potentially may produce such experiences.

Jørgensen’s typology of experience comprises two different kinds of experience, the metaphysical and the religious. I have added spiritual experience to create a more nuanced spectrum, including experience by those who affiliate themselves with non-confessional faith. All of these experiences of transcendence reflect upon what is aesthetically “a going beyond” transforming the initial impression of the event. The kind of transcendence realised is determined by contextualising the event within resources of interpretation, the knowledge of metaphysics, spirituality, or religion. Metaphysical experience is the interpretation of immanent transcendence that refers to philosophy for an explanation of the conditions of being. Religious experience relies for its interpretation of immanent transcendence on religious tradition (established through institutions and dogma). Spiritual experience interpret immanence transcendence in a search for the sacred, and therefore is more reliant on an open interpretative attitude – faith in Hammer’s sense – than a certain belief or conviction.

Rather than merely focusing on the manifest performance, as the discipline of performance analysis typically has done, the kind of analysis I have
developed shifts the object of research to the experience of the performative event.

How to Use the Model

The model approaches the staged event as an experience that has been lived; hence it can be applied to the analysis of first person accounts. The graphics of the model does not depict the participant, i.e. member of audience or congregant, as an entity within the event, although evidently she is situated within it. Rather it focuses on the components and process that altogether make up different experiences. The process of experience is a process, which is both embodied by the participant and embedded in the event, and the process thus implies the temporal simultaneity of exterior occurrences and the on-going reflexivity of the mind-body. The model shows what are the constituent components of experience and how they may work together in producing experience. Referring to Fig. 3 (p. 330), I shall describe the graphic model and explain how to read it. The components and process of experiences of transcendence is visualised in the model in the following way.

A staged event never occurs in isolation. It is always located within a context. Therefore the model’s circular field of staged event is squared by the word “context”. There is no outer line to mark off the area of context. Given the subject of inquiry, experiences of transcendence, marking off an outer limit to the model seems reductive. In practical and taxonomical terms, however, the context is understood as the life world of the participant, referring to Husserl’s phenomenological concept of Lebenswelt, and it includes components that are actualised in the participant’s encounter with the staged event, primarily those of culture, nature, environment; institutional frames such as religion or art, tradition and convention – all of which affect the participant’s expectations and the following reception of the event. Although the significance and influence of context on experience is considerable, it is not overriding, leaving space for potentially critical dynamics between staged event and context to play itself out in the reception process, e.g. my encounters with the churchplays. As part of the reception process the event’s relations to context are not easily delimited. It is often hard to tell in terms of time and space when and where the event begins and ends. Hence the visual demarcations of the reception process should not be taken too literal; the arrow shape indicates the general direction, not the scope of the process. One should bear in mind the possible extensions of the event beyond any obvious
spatiotemporal frame of staging, this being especially apparent in *jesus_c_odd_size* and *185 Empty Chairs*, as I returned to the performance several times. Yet, the scope of experience may by far extend the physical site. As I have pointed out, in Roy Rappaport’s regional terms the event’s time scope may range from the here and now of the organic region of the participant’s body in the event, past the region of social time, and into the indefinite region of cosmic time. Hence, the field of the staged event is marked with a dashed line to indicate its porous delimitation and complex interrelationship with the context.

The model is centred on the process of reception. As already mentioned, it is represented by an arrow to indicate progression through the different phases of impression (*oplevelse*): sensation, perception, and interpretation. The components related to the process of reception are placed on both sides of the arrow. The left side oval lists the *properties of staging*, i.e. the materiality and dramaturgical devises that make up the staging. These are the components identified throughout my analyses as central to the workings of an aesthetics of the performative that might condition and affect experiences of transcendence. The right side oval lists the *capacities for experience*, i.e. the components that I have singled out as factors, which eventually conditions the outcome of the reception and may result in an experience. Connecting the two ovals of properties and capacities and the main arrow of reception are four small double arrows. They are connected with the levels of the three phases of reception to approximately indicate parallel processes, which work both ways between the properties of staging and the capacities for experience, as they affect reception.

The last phase of the big arrow indicating the process of reception is the notion of immanent transcendence. As explained above, an attempt at interpreting a staged event could end up with this kind of notion, whether taken to be frustrated or open-ended; it might be that the interpretation does not proceed to the point where the participant starts to reflect upon or even question her own understanding of life and the world, but the notion does not originate in a reactivity and imagination strong enough to disrupt preconceptions and what is already known by the individual. In this case, the analysis would end at this phase of the notion of immanent transcendence.

Only the phase of having the notion of immanent transcendence may lead on to transformation. Orthographically, the word “transformation” has been shaped into the shape of a fan to suggest the varieties it may take on. Arrows point to the three different kinds of experience the model has been calibrated for: metaphysical, spiritual, and religious experience. The circles protrude
beyond the circle of the staged event into the surrounding context. This indicates that the meaning and, hence, the kind of experience depends on the analytically established context. Each of the experiences has been marked off as reflective out-come closely associated with the entire staged event. Furthermore, the circles overlap slightly as an experience, in hindsight, may evolve from one kind to the next, cf. my experience with *Your Blind Passenger*. The overlapping also suggests the interrelatedness of their kinds: there is a metaphysical dimension, in the philosophical sense, to both spirituality and religion, which could be appreciated from a philosophical or meta-reflexive point of view within both those contexts; and there exists a complex relation between spirituality and religion, in which either spirituality is considered a practice of religion or spirituality break away from and understand itself in opposition to institutionalised religion, and this experience may be termed spiritual-but-not-religious.

In practical use, the model is to be applied following the analytical approach that I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters: beginning with the staged event, its context is determined, the properties of staging described, and the participant reactions to these in terms of reception. Then the analysis continues to reflect upon the process of reception in relation to the capacities of experience, finally establishing the kind of experience that was the outcome of the event.

**Research Perspectives**

Based on the analyses, observations can be made that concern the theorising of experiences of transcendence on a general level. The observations give rise to some preliminary suggestions.

Taking into account the events analysed, one may make the following observations concerning the kind of staging that potentially could lead to an experience of transcendence:

1. Experiences of a metaphysical, spiritual, or religious nature are independent of any explicit metaphysical, spiritual or religious contexts for the staged event. This observation has been made on the basis of *Your Blind Passenger* and *185 Empty Chairs*, where these potentialities of experience do not immediately present themselves through representation.

2. An explicit religious context may lead to a nonreligious experience, whether this is of a metaphysical or spiritual (non-confessional) na-
ture. This observation is based on the churchplays, the pōwhiri, and Jesus_c_odd_size.

3. Experience is interpreted independently of the culture, tradition, or convention, which, as a starting point, forms the context of the staging. This observation relates especially to the pōwhiri, but could also be considered for the one with a foreign cultural background who attends a Western-styled staging.

4. For the secularised (Western) participant, it may be that it is presentational forms rather than representational forms that constitute a greater potentiality for having religious or spiritual experiences of transcendence. This observation is a synthetic consideration of the analyses, of which some relate to performance within an explicit spiritual or religious context (pōwhiri, churchplays, and Jesus_c_odd_size), while the rest of the events do not refer to such a context.

5. Liminality is not – as otherwise claimed by Fischer-Lichte – the central feature of all aesthetic experiences, including experiences of transcendence; it may be replaced by Jørgensen’s aesthetic intermediate word as a mental state that works independently of socially sanctioned rituals.

6. Experiences of transcendence actualise both physical and mental thresholds and borders on spaces that are often experienced as empathetic or challenging for the participant in the event. In this respect experiences of transcendence indicate the assumptions of experiential qualities found in, for example, William James’s and Rudolf Otto’s theories of religious and mysterious experiences.

Based on the analysed material, there is no evidence for generalising the observations and deciding on universal principles for the potential of experiences of transcendence. In this regard, the material is far too limited. It is primarily based on one participant’s experiences, my own, and among the selected staged events there is an overweight of forms that to a great extent involve the participant as an agent, compared to more conventional forms of theatre. The latter has had consequences for the development of the model, and it sets some limitations on what studies can be done with it in its present form.

The selection of staged events that I have based my study on has been oriented towards forms that are placed in the intersection of theatre, installation, and ritual, and not more traditional, conventional forms of performance.
The selected forms are forms that actualise a relatively new interest in art or theatre history, which Jørgensen identifies as “the experience as experience”, i.e. the staging of the work or the performance is aimed at the participant’s process of having an experience not merely the decoding of a representation, “the object of experience”. This is basically the same performative turn as Fischer-Lichte actualises with her aesthetics of the performative, but whereas Fischer-Lichte is not reluctant to periodicise and generalise this aesthetics as a paradigm shift that first takes place in the theatre of the 1960s’s neo-avant-garde, Jørgensen seems more careful to perceive performative or experience-based forms as a gradual development that slowly begins to appear in the Renaissance and is still under way. Fischer-Lichte is determined on generalising the aesthetics of the performative as she sees it as applicable to all kinds of theatrical and cultural performances, namely that they all allow aesthetic experience as liminality, whether or not the performances take place within artistic or social institutions, or belong to a non-Western or Western tradition. Jørgensen, on the other hand, is interested in describing how transcendence and the transcendent are historical concepts that occur in different forms of expression at different times and in different cultural contexts, and that they may also change within the same culture or tradition, from one form to another, e.g. through that interest of contemporary Western European art which moves from representation to presentation. When it comes to investigating experiences of transcendence, i.e. the recognition of becoming part of that which is greater than one’s self, staged events characterised by an aesthetics of the performative are obvious choices because these forms have proved to show very favourable conditions for observing the participant’s agency and how such stagings may provide states of transgressing borders or hovering over thresholds.

However, if Fischer-Lichtes aesthetics is adopted uncritically and without modifications, it could easily result in a reductive understanding of what kinds of events a potential for experiences of transcendence can be found. All my analysis examples are characterised by a positional shift that Fischer-Lichte emphasises as crucial to the aesthetic experience, namely of the position between spectator and actor (or beholder and agent). Although Fischer-Lichte might not include the churchplays in the category of events belonging to her aesthetics of the performative, there are, as indicated by my analyses, more opportunities to act within this form of staging than might be anticipated, e.g. participating in the prayer responsories, extending the peace greeting

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705 See in particular Fischer-Lichte, 2010, pp. 60-65, 185.
to other congregants, and receiving the sacraments. As is evident from all my examples, there are quite extensive opportunities for influencing the participant’s entire sensory apparatus through the staging, precisely because they allow destabilisation of the ingrained conventional spectator position known from the theatre. This is done through the concrete immersive staging approach that the model captures as the properties of staging, especially the feedback loop, material directedness, mobile audience, interactivity and roleplaying. Even though, unlike Fischer-Lichte, I also relate the analysis to a context, a reception process and capacities for experience, the staging of the audience as agents still is thought to strongly influence the outcome of the event. There is nothing wrong with this assumption, as long as a study of experiences of transcendence does not exclude the possibility that such experiences may also arise in the context of the encounter with more conventional forms of representation. In my study, I have tried to keep the limitations of the analytical method in mind. It has been my assumption that a secularised Western audience who lacks a religiously based language to verbalise transcendence and the transcendent would stand a better chance of experiencing transcendence if access to these experiences was first created through the influence of the sensory apparatus, rather than an appeal to the intellect. If this condition, which concerns the fourth observation, is to be tested as a hypothesis, the study must involve more decidedly representational forms of representation with conventional stage-auditorium divide than my study has provided. Here, only the churchplays have upheld a relatively stable spectator position in a representational performance.

Therefore, the observations of my analyses above cannot yet be used to derive some general principles. What one can reasonably do, however, is to consider the observations as basis for hypotheses that can be tested in other studies of experiential material. Such studies could be based on more participants and forms of representation, both rituals and theatre, Western as non-Western.

From Children’s Theatre to Experiences of Transcendence of the Second Order

In addition to these perspectives on the study of experiences of transcendence, I will finally point out the eigenvalue of the concept of immanent transcendence within theatre and performance studies. If not made less mysterious, this concept has become more concrete by being inserted into a performative and theatrical context. The experiment seems to me to expand the
understanding of theatre in an existential dimension that can open theatre and performance studies to a dialogue with other relevant disciplines such as philosophical aesthetics, religious philosophy, theology, anthropology, and sociology. Aiming for these dialogues can prove crucial in trying to identify the ways in which theatre and other staged events can provide important resources of reflection that extend the sense of reality both ontologically and epistemologically in the twenty-first century.

In an initial phase, the concept of immanent transcendence refers to the fundamental characteristic of all theatre in that it, in a hermeneutic phenomenological sense, calls something “more” than what is actually empirically present on the stage into presence. In the introduction to this thesis, I described how this relationship had rendered indelible impression on me when, as a child, I was presented to the children’s touring theatre in the school’s uninspiring gymnasium and experienced how a performance through its fictional layer had created the perception of expanded reality. I was influenced by this impression to such an extent that I suddenly feared that the actor whose character was lost in the woods was also lost himself, and when he finally found his way home, I had felt a strong sense of relief.

Then and there the theatre had represented a moment of realisation that could bring about the experience of something bigger than the immediately detectable immanence. In the thesis, I have shown how moments of immanent transcendence have be reiterated in my experience, with a certain range of variations in the staged events: when I saw the earthquake victims occupy the white chairs in *185 Empty Chairs*; when I felt the eyes of the ancestors joined the living and together rested on me in the pōwhiri; when the female churchplayers in the Lund Cathedral accomplished the metamorphosis of the church building into a cosmic womb. And it was the same phenomenon that repeated when the actor in *jesus_c_odd_size* performed Judas’ monologue, and I then perceived him as *also* being Judas. Judas was real in that moment, the fiction worked.

A principle of the process can be observed: the form of representation belongs to the immanent, while its appearance and staging calls upon transcendence. In the beholder’s perception there occurs a cognitive blend or creative tension between components, present and absent, separated from each other in time or space. I admit that the most obvious choice would be to describe the phenomenon with the theatre studies term *theatricality*. However, I think there is more to it than just this semiotic decoding of a doubling of signs. With the power of imagination the impossible becomes possible: the absent becomes present as a factor that impacts on the beholder’s perception.
of reality. In this sense, the staging works as a machine of transcendence that triggers an in-depth and long-lasting effect. However, a mechanistic understanding of this phenomenon, as a result of the staging alone, is not sufficient either. It cannot fully explain what happens. As shown in my analyses, there is much more at stake than just the effects of the properties of staging, namely the capabilities for experience that the participant may possess.

In the scene with Judas, a feeling of amazement arose in me over that which is not otherwise possible, to stand and watch a person who empirically does not exist in my time apparently now and again appears as an indomitable and emotional highly charged reality. I met Judas as a human in a way that would not be possible anywhere else than in the theatre, namely as bodily co-presence. The encounter does not mean that I forget that Judas is a figment of my imagination. The sense of the immanent transcendence means that I experience the power that the theatre possesses to call forth the absent; it emerges from the interplay of the actor’s incarnation of the role and my imagination. The appearance of various faiths or life situations, which I am not familiar with or have never experienced, or may never end up in, suddenly become possible to follow, to engage in, and to reflect on. Unexpected realisations and experiences arise. Such significant moments can be experienced as magical because it is difficult to rationally explain how they occur or what they exactly mean. In the essay collection Gnostiske essay, Jon Fosse describes his own fascination with these moments, which he perceives both as characteristic of the ontology of the theatre and its epistemological function.

In Hungary, I’ve been told, they often say that when an evening in the theater was good, an angel passed through the stage, once, twice, several times. And for me that moment is the essence of theater: the theater is the moment when an angel passes the stage. What happens in those moments? Of course I don’t know, no one does, because it either happens or it doesn’t; one night it happens at one moment in the play, the next night at another moment.

For me these intense and clear moments, in spite their being unexplainable, are moments of understanding; they are moments when the people who are present, the actors, the audience, together experience something which makes them understand something they never before have understood, at least not as they now understand it. But this understanding is not mainly intellectual; it is a kind of emotional understanding which, as I have said, is mainly unexplain-
able, at least intellectually. It probably can’t be explained, it can just be shown, it’s an understanding through emotions.  

What Fosse describes is the theatre as an experiential form of immanent transcendence: only through the feeling, the other can be recognised – as experience. Here he approaches my understanding of Dorthe Jørgensen’s concept of immanent transcendence, which is experienced in the open-minded state of the intermediate world, which, on the threshold of excessive meaning, requires sensitivity, attunement, atmosphere and imagination; for only with these conditions fulfilled the angel can pass through the stage and the moment of recognition occur. As feeling.

However, this is not the achievement of the full potential of the immanent transcendence: the potential is only fulfilled if the immanent transcendence finds an interpretation. The notion of immanent transcendence, of difficult interpretable meaning, is both marvellous and disturbing – to face Judas, the victims of an earthquake, the ancestors of the Māori, the Divine; this destabilisation or disturbance of the secular worldview calls for an interpretational frame to which the unruly feeling can be matched. This is the second phase in which the immanent transcendence can be lifted up into another potency – by being given an explanation, to be inserted into a second order. This is where a metaphysical, spiritual or religious explanation of the phenomenon applies to those who are so inclined or keep an open mind.

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Transcendenserfaringer på baggrund af iscenesatte begivenheder


Resultatet er en praktisk model, der gør det muligt at analysere transcendenserfaringer, som er opstået på baggrund af iscenesatte begivenheder genem det komplekse samspil mellem iscenesættelsens materielle egenskaber og tilskuerens/ritualdeltagerens kognitive kapacitet for at gøre sig erfaringer i receptionsprocessen – elementer som alle er betinget af begivenhedens kontekster.

Samlet set er afhandlingsen kapitler arrangeret således, at teori og metodik udgør en ramme for analyser. De diskuterede teorier og metoden danner baggrund for analyserne, og sammen udgør analyserne variationer af det udforskeede fænomen, transcendenserfaringerne, der igen belyser udviklingen af den praktiske model for forestillingsanalyse. Det relativt brede spektrum af begivenheder, der spænder fra installationskunst over ritual til teater, har til formål at demonstrere anvendeligheden af modellen. I stedet for at presentere analyserne i deres kronologiske rækkefølge er de analytiske kapitler forholdsvis fritstående. Rækkefølgen er dog ikke helt tilfældig: den iagttager en bevægelse fra fremmede til velkendte begivenheder, dvs. begivenheder tilhørende miljøer, kulturer eller traditioner, som jeg enten var vant til eller ubekendt med, da jeg deltog. Dette er et bevidst metodologisk valg. Begyndende med de fremmede begivenheder lader jeg mig bevidst udfordre somatiske og semantisk ved at gå ind i sammenhænge og iscenesættelsesformer,
som jeg ikke sædvanligvis har adgang til (gennem tidligere erfaringer og erhvervede kompetencer, f.eks. sproglige, kulturelle), eller for hvilke der ikke er nogen udtrykkelig metafysisk, religiøs eller spirituel referenceramme. Disse “forflyttelser” tvinger mig til at være opmærksom på at begivenhederne nonverbale, kropslige aspekter, som ellers let “kortsluttes” af semiotisk analyse. Derefter anvender jeg den samme fænomenologiske tilgang til at analysere begivenheder, der er velkendte eller indfødte for mig, for der ved at udvide analyseregistreret til deres performative processer. Derudover er der en vis progression i udforskningen af begreberne i det analytiske apparat, men uden at opgive kompleksiteten i analyserne.

I introduktionen bestemmes hvad der menes med transcenderende erfaringer i teatrale, rituelle og andre former for iscenesatte begivenheder. Der er tale om erfaringer med at få mentalt og fysisk adgang til det, der ikke empirisk er tilstede i rummet, hvad enten dette rum er teaterscenen, museet eller helligstedet. Disse erfaringer kaldes frem gennem de handlinger, der udføres af deltagende aktører, både de levende, de døde, og de imaginære. Disse er erfaringer, som kan bidrage til at tilfælde deltagende deltagere, teatertilskuer, museumsgæst eller ritualdeltager, at blive del af det, der er større end dennes selv, det som ligger udenfor den enkeltes kontrol eller fatteevne, og som på længere sigt kan lede til forandring med forandringer af deltagers anskuelser og verdensbillede. Det påstås at dette erfaringspotentiale findes i alt teater, ja, alle iscenesatte begivenheder. Hvordan disse erfaringer opstår i deltagers møde med begivenheden belyses med nogle indledende konkrete eksempler fra børneteater, deltagerinvolverende teater, ritualer og kunstbegivenheder. Primært Olafur Eliassons performance-installation *Your Blind Passenger* giver en indføring i det komplekse sammenspil mellem iscenesættelsens materielle egenskaber og tilskuerens/ritualdeltagerens kognitive kapacitet for at gøre sig erfaringer i receptionsprocessen. Det begrundes hvorfor det er vigtigt at beskæftige sig med transcenderende erfaringer, idet de ses som en grundlæggende fysisk og mental måde at engagere sig i verden og samfundet. I nutiden synes erfaringen at blive del af sammenhænge, der er større end selvet særlig relevant: verdenssamfundet befinder sig i en række alvorlige kriser, der kræver handling på flere niveauer, individplan, samfundsplan og globalt plan. Iscenesatte begivenheder kan bidrage til øget bevidsthed og engagement, bl.a. ved at de fungerer som erindringsmaskiner, der minder deltageren om disse store sammenhænge, og det giver adgang til det performative og symboliske beredskab, som teater og ritualer stille der rådighed. Samtidig rummer transcenderende erfaringer potentialet for at fortolkes religiøst og spirituelt, og der argumenteres for relevansen af at forstå disse erfaringspotentiale ved iscenesatte begivenheder på baggrund af religionens tilbagevegenden til samfundslivet og nyere sekulariseringsteorier, der ikke ser sekularisering som religionens og troens forsvinden men som dens individualisering og afdogmatisering. I forståelse af hvordan disse processer afspelers sig i scenekunst og kulturelle begivenheder har teatervidenskab og perfor-


Det andet kapitel undersøger fremkomsten af transcendererfaringer på baggrund af to meget forskellige iscenesatte begivenheder i Aotearoa New Zealand, nemlig mindespærkeinstallationen 185 Empty Chairs og det maoriske pōwhiri-ritual. Analyserne foregår i tre trin: for det første udfoldes ret så detaljerede deltagcereretninger om begivenhederne: hvilke omstændigheder der udelelser deres transcenderende virkning fastlægges, og hvordan det var at gennemgå oplevelserne beskrives; for det andet analyseres iscenesættelens materielle egenskaber, dvs. den performative generering af materialitet inden for begivenheden; og for det tredje lægges der særlig vægt på begivenhedernes markante momenter, hvilke er afgørende for dannelsen af erfaringer med transcends. Samspillet mellem materielle egenskaber og kapaciteter for erfaring og deltagérens personlige baggrund diskuteres og relatieres til fortolkningen, der trækker på erfaringsmetafysikken. I begge begivenheder er jeg interesseret i det fænomenologiske paradoks i fremspringelse af de fraværende, jordskælvofrenes og forfædrenes, tilstedevar gennem den potentielle virkning af iscenesættelens på deltageren. I 185 Empty
Chairs er denne forestilling om immanent transcendens især observeret i samspillet mellem installationens materielle henvendethed og deltagerens imagination, mens den i pōwhirī-ritualet er skabt af vekselvirkning mellem progressionen gennem forskellige rituelle scener i en gradvis nærmere sig værthsfolket, deltagerens responsivitet og erhvervede kulturelle kompetencer i forberedelsen til ritualet. Begge begivenheder betragtes som potentielt transculturelle, da begge iscenesættelser inviterer den udefrakommende deltager til at engagere sig sensitivt på et personligt plan og dermed genkende sig selv i mødet med den anden.

Jag är den jag är, fulgte ritualet straks efter det teatrale spil i Hittefågel, hvilket i princippet tillod påtagelse af rollen som nadvergæst i ritualet at ses som en forpligtelse på kirkespillets formaning om at beskytte flygtningebørn og dermed identifikation med kristen tro og moral. For mig er Hittefågel en politisk erfaring inden for en religiøs kontekst, ikke en religiøs eller spirituel erfaring. Samtidig hævder jeg, at den fungerer som en kulturel performance, idet den afspejler den kristne kultur på en sådan måde, at det er muligt for både kristne og andre enten at genkende sig som tilhørende denne kultur eller at stå udenfor. Derfor er det muligt, som jeg foretrækker, kun at identificere sig med humanismen i forestillingen.

sine forbehold, således som den kan aktualiseres i mødet med den bibelske performer.