

Spirituality and Contemporary Art

By

Silvia Arca

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Master of Art by
Research

Department of Art History, Curating and Visual Studies
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
United Kingdom
1st May 2019

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

Abstract

This study examines the role of spirituality in contemporary art and traces the nature of this relationship within the context of Christian spirituality, the spirituality of 'immanence' (Spretnak, 2014), the idea of 'Eastern spirituality', and the sublime. It describes issues concerning the relationship between spirituality and contemporary art, highlighting how behind the idea of modern 'disenchantment' the search for transcendence never really disappeared from art but it uncovers under different forms. By analysing the work of artists who made the engagement with spirituality a central part of their research, this thesis argues that in spite of the reluctance towards this subject in the context of the secularised artistic panorama, the concern with the spiritual appears to be a lively area of interest in art in recent times. Although facing critical problems when it approaches official religions, different cultures, and philosophies, art that is spiritual demonstrates to be significant as it provides opportunities for new ideas and interpretation without necessarily depending on institutionalised beliefs, but rather aiming for a spirituality which is universal. Moreover, the nature of this topic can be extended towards further explorations such as a way of expanding awareness within society, oneself, and the other.

Dedication

To Francesco and to my family.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter I: Christian Spirituality.....	13
Introduction.....	13
Roger Wagner.....	22
Andres Serrano.....	29
Bill Viola.....	33
Mark Wallinger.....	36
Chapter II: The Spirituality of Immanence.....	43
Introduction.....	43
Joseph Beuys.....	50
Ana Mendieta.....	62
Marina Abramović.....	69
Chapter III: The Idea of ‘Eastern Spirituality’.....	78
Introduction.....	78
Anish Kapoor.....	81
Chapter IV: Sublimity and Transcendence.....	96
Introduction.....	96
Olafur Eliasson.....	106
James Turrell.....	116
Conclusion.....	128
Bibliography.....	133

Introduction

This thesis explores how contemporary and postmodern art engages with spiritual dynamics. It investigates the ways in which artists have sought to uphold a connection between art and spirituality, some of the forms that project has taken, and the issues that have been raised as a result. Based on a thematic analysis of the different kinds of spirituality in the art of the last 40 years, this study examines artists whose work embodies the varied facets of the spiritual. I will argue that a desire to explore spiritual emotions and ideas has been a consistent aspect of art in recent decades, in spite of the fact that modernism is often held to have transformed art into a mostly secular domain (Spretnak, 2014, 3). This thesis proposes that the so-called 'disenchantment' of art was never fully accomplished, a notion also motivated by the knowledge that in the last 30 years or so, many publications and exhibitions continue to explore and promote the spiritual in contemporary art. This has been done in various ways, both approaching official religions such as Christianity, as well as by seeking modes of secular transcendence and spiritual experience. Finally, this thesis is motivated by my personal intimate encounter with certain types of art and literature which made me question the notion of disenchantment in modern and contemporary art.

The concept of spirituality today can be particularly vague as its detachment from institutional religions allows it to take on a vast range of meanings. According to Sheldrake (2007, 1-2), the contemporary meaning of the term 'suggest[s] that the word

“spirituality” refers to the deepest values and meanings by which people seek to live. In other words, “spirituality” implies some kind of vision of the human spirit and of what will assist it to achieve full potential’. A sense of the spiritual is hence important for the creation of meanings in life, for providing a sense of belonging and gaining a wider engagement with the whole. It also provides opportunities to expand our awareness and empathy for others. The drive for spirituality has been manifested in the interests of non-Western religions or philosophies, pagan rituals, and beliefs, the cult of the Goddess and witchcraft, or the creation of new sets and movements, as happened with the New Age spiritualities since the end of the 1960s (Sutcliffe and Gilhus, 2013).

Applying these concepts to the secular Western society can certainly raise some questions, as the idea of ‘disenchantment’ is one of the main narratives of modernism (Elkins and Morgan, 2009). In fact, when thinking about the spiritual in art, it is easy to connect it with an idea of art which conveys religious truths, as happened in history during the Middle Ages or the Renaissance (Elkins, 2004, 5). Art used to serve religion and this unity slowly changed through the process of secularisation (Weber, 2001). As Weber (2001) described it in *The Protestant of Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in modern times, a new phase was reached during the Enlightenment and with the Industrial Revolution with the rise of technology and science. This provided new paradigms in the direction of society and economy, increasing a rational and disenchanted view of the world. Before Weber, as reported by Morgan (Elkins and Morgan, 2009, 8), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), lamented the ‘de-divination’ of nature pushed by the Christian’s desire of emancipation, and claimed that ‘the gods were

abandoned because they were no longer required'. At the end of the 19th century the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) declared that 'God is dead' (Williams, 2001). In his interpretation of the idea of disenchantment Kosky (2014, XI) stated, 'In the diagnosis of modern disenchantment is contained a decision about the nature, or the lack of thereof, of the world and what counts as real'. This decision had a great impact in shifting the view of the world, and consequentially, in the art panorama.

In *A Secular Age* (2007), philosopher and Roman Catholic Charles Taylor tracked the historical evolution of secularisation, analysing how society has transformed in the last five hundred years, from social structures where it was almost impossible not to believe in God, to the advent of Humanism and Enlightenment and the disengagement from religious bonds which brought with it a variety of alternative forms of beliefs. However, while recognising the importance and the achievement of secular societies, Taylor argued that belief in the spiritual, and the tension between the immanent and the transcendent will not end with the inescapable downfall of religion. Indeed, as events have proven, the need for higher meaning remains strong, and especially when the immanent is dominant, the spiritual is likely to emerge through multiple forms. This is exemplified by the proliferation of New Age spiritualism or New Religious Movements (NRM) encompassing a wide range of beliefs such as Animism, New Paganism, Scientology and Spiritualism, to cite some, which can either be a novelty or which can be found rooted in institutional faiths such as Christian or Hinduism (York, 1995).

This idea was first predicted in the theory of the postmodern put forward by several thinkers, most notably, Jean-François Lyotard who, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), described the fall of Modernism and the advent of Postmodernism, which brought the creation of a pluralistic and fragmented society. Lyotard did not directly refer to the renewed search for spirituality and the longing for transcendence, but these can be seen as expressions of the plurality he argued was definitive of the Postmodern era. This idea is taken into consideration in this thesis, which looks at the consequences of this wider situation for contemporary art.

In Western art history, from the second half of the 1800s and the advent of modernism, the process of secularisation brought about a liberation from the bond of the authority of the Church, allowing a new independence and experimentations (Elkins and Morgan, 2009, 40). Although in 1920s Europe the idea that art should be a vehicle for the expression of spiritual and symbolic values was challenged by avant-garde groups such as the Soviet Constructivists, 'the spiritual dynamic in modern art was common knowledge' (Spretnak, 2014, 5). According to Spretnak however, in the United States, it was not until the 1930s that a concern with the spiritual came to be seen as marginal for art. The author (2014, 5) cites the 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, curated by Alfred H. Barr Jr. In discussing the works of cubist and abstract artists in the exhibition catalogue, Barr (1936, 11) argued that, 'The more adventurous and original artists had grown bored with painting facts. By a common and powerful impulse they were driven to abandon the imitation of natural appearance'.

Even if artists whose spiritual intentions were fully expressed through their statements were part of the exhibition, Barr did not mention any works where metaphysical ideas were expressed in his essay, selectively erasing any relation to the spiritual.

Nevertheless, this understanding of modern art was widespread and highly influential: after its debut in New York, the exhibition went on to be presented in six other cities (Spretnak, 2014, 5).

With the 1950s and the advent of post-painterly abstraction, a central part of the self-understanding of art was that its aim was solely an exploration of its formal means rather than any narrative, symbolic or mystical features (Spretnak, 2014, 6). From then, modernism seemed freed from religion and spirituality and, during the second half of 20th century, the critic Clement Greenberg (1989) played an important role in developing the critical tool of formalist analysis as the modern, refined way to examine art, excluding other external references and meanings.

Even today the spiritual in art as a topic is still not particularly welcomed by critics, scholars and by the art establishment. In *Re-Enchantment* (2009), James Elkins and David Morgan tried to investigate the ‘unsolved problem’ of the relation between art and religion (as well as spirituality). When invited to take part in a debate on the issue, some critics declined as they couldn’t even contemplate the idea of discussing about art and religion simultaneously (Elkins and Morgan, 2009, 110). This attitude is certainly not new (Elkins and Morgan, 2009 and Spretnak, 2014, 8), and an example of this can be seen in the insidious attack on Joseph Beuys (1921 – 1986) coming from

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, which we can infer stems from Buchloh's aversion, as a Marxist critic, to Beuys's interest in the spiritual.

In his 1979 article 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol. Preliminary Notes for a Critique' published in *Artforum*, Buchloh called Beuys a 'crypto-fascist' and argued that his art was an apology for Nazism (Buchloh, 1979, 40 and Taylor, 2012, 33-34). For Buchloh, Beuys's work 'finds its new identity by pardoning and reconciling itself prematurely with its own reminiscences of a responsibility for one of the most cruel and devastating forms of collective political madness that history has known' and continued calling his art 'a grotesque coda acted out by a perfidious trickster'. As Taylor (2012, 33-34) rightly asserted, perhaps the real reason for delegitimising Beuys and his art was a broader critique of religion. Buchloh, like many other intellectuals, critics and theorists of his generation, saw religion and spirituality as something that belongs to the past and as politically backward looking. If the process of modernization is inseparable from secularization, and art is freeing itself from the ghost of religion, Beuys's effort to reintroduce the spiritual 'can only appear reactionary' (Taylor, 2012, 34).

Even if the experience of the spiritual in art often passed unconsidered in modernism, there is plenty of evidence that artists never really stopped engaging with it. One of the most notable examples is abstract art. For instance, Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) and Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) were deeply influenced by Madame Blavatsky's (1831-1891) principles of theosophy, which explored mystical aspects in nature and the soul. Golding, (2000, 15) finds that for these artists the translation of theosophy in art was a

way to create a religious experience, as well as to restore the spirit of the Western materialised society. In this regard, Kandinsky was also the author of *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911), a personal exploration on the connection between the form and the spiritual.

Moreover, in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* (1978), Robert Rosenblum argued that there is continuity between the search for the spiritual undertaken by the Northern Romantic painters and the modernist tradition, culminating in the Abstract Expressionists. Going against the tendency to view modernist tradition as determined primarily by the modernist art produced in Paris, Rosenblum stated that the sense of transcendence evoked in the landscape paintings of Romantic painters such as Caspar David Friedrich (1777-1840) and Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) never died out in modern art but was simply expressed through different symbols, especially in the modernist search for the sublime.

Many contemporary artists have engaged with both transcendence and religion. In *The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art* (2014) Spretnak offered an overview of the multiple forms of the spiritual since the 19th century to the present, ranging from Anselm Kiefer (born 1945) to Antony Gormley, (born 1950), from Chris Ofili (born 1968) to Shirin Neshat (born 1957) as well as the artists discussed in this thesis.

The desire to re-enchant art has seen renewed interest in numerous exhibitions over the last 30 years. As Spretnak reported (2014, 9) “the s word’ appeared quite frequently, and often admiringly, in reviews of the *New York Time* of art exhibition’ (the term ‘s word’ here denoting the spiritual). Before the new millennium, in 1986 the

Los Angeles County Museum held *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*; in 2003 the City Gallery at Waterfront Park's *Thresholds: Expression of Art and Spiritual in Art*, in Charleston, South Carolina; the Centre Pompidou in 2008 presented *Traces du Sacré*, tracing the spiritual in more than 450 works of modern art, and the 2013 *Beyond Belief* organised by the Contemporary Jewish Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which traced the connections between the spiritual and modern art (Spretnak, 2014, 9).

More recently, in 2013, at the Tate Britain in London, Linda Nochlin and Sarah O'Brien Twohig held the conference *Modernism and Spirituality*, which followed on from a research project on the sublime in art by Tate London that was launched in 2008. This involved research publications mapping the sublime since the 1700s to the contemporary, as well as a number of exhibitions and events dedicated to the concept (Tate, 2018).

In the same vein, in recent times many publications and articles acknowledge the presence of the spiritual in modern and contemporary art. To cite some: Suzi Gablik, one of the most forceful advocates in favour of a renewal of the spiritual in art with her book *The Re-enchantment of Art* (1991), Dawn Perlmutter and Debra Koppman's *Reclaiming the Spiritual in Art: Contemporary Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1999), Lynn Herbert's *The Arts and the Spiritual* (2001), Sally Promey's 'The Return of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art' (2003), *The Spiritual (Re) Turn*, a 2009 online symposium at the New York Guggenheim Museum, Dan Fox's 'Believe it or Not: Religion Versus Spiritual in Contemporary Art' (2010) and Simon Morley's *The Sublime (Documents of Contemporary Art)*.

The evidence of the flourishing of this subject cannot be disdained, particularly as its 'driving force' has been influencing artists 'for more than two centuries in the creation of thousands of acclaimed works of modern art' (Spretnak, 2014, 15).

For the purpose of this thesis, Elkins and Morgan's publication *Re-Enchantment* (2009) where the authors explored ideas such as disenchantment and re-enchantment in contemporary and postmodern art is particularly relevant as it provides a wider perspective on such issues.

James Elkins' *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (2004) and Jonathan Koestlé-Cate's *Art and the Church, a Fractious Embrace: Ecclesiastical encounters with Contemporary Art* (2016) are taken in consideration in regard to the relationship between contemporary art and religion. Elkins tried to find some of the reasons behind the mutual reluctance between Christianity and the art world, admitting that most of the time there is no space for Christian themes in the art of today. Koestlé-Cate investigated the role of religion in the secular culture, as well as the incursion of non-religious artists when chosen for church commissions, blurring the boundaries of established roles. By analysing works for the church made by non-believing artists in the light of Emile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade's writings, Koestlé-Cate emphasised the difficulty of determining the parameters of this field. He stressed how contemporary artists use ideas such as 'spiritual', 'sublime', 'transcendent' to evoke religious meanings, as in the case of the American Expressionists such as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, or more recently with Anish Kapoor and Anthony Gormley. The author (2016, 70) explained, 'the sacred is no longer required to be explicitly religious' as well as 'religious language itself is subject to re-evaluation in

terms opposite to the times. In either case, a non-religious non-traditional sacred is mooted'. Here Koestlé-Cate also argued that the separation between sacred and profane is impossible as they are subject to mutual influence. The above authors are significant for this research as they provide different points of analysis in relation to some of the artists I will focus on.

The spiritual is equally manifested in art from non-Western and ancient cultures. For this reason, the concept of 'Immanent spirituality' coined by Spretnak (2014), as well as the Orientalist issue (Said, 1978) will be taken into account as they provide a useful background to reflect not only on the different modes of the spiritual, but also to highlight possible controversies when approaching different cultures' philosophies and beliefs.

So far, I have presented evidence of the importance of acknowledging the spiritual in art, and having this as background, my thesis will be structured in four chapters.

In the first chapter, I examine the role of Christian Spirituality through the art of Mark Wallinger (born 1959), Roger Wagner (born 1957), Bill Viola (born 1951), and Andres Serrano (born 1950). I analyse some of the reasons of the distance between Christianity, contemporary and postmodern art, arguing that although the disaffection of the latter towards organised religion, there has been a remarkable resurgence of specifically Christian art. Under certain circumstance, this can prove Christian iconography to be a valid object of research in art practice.

The second chapter explores what Spretnak (2014) calls the ‘spirituality of immanence,’ which relates to a sense of the spiritual that refers to pagan, indigenous and primeval beliefs, as well as Asian, Aboriginal or South American cultures and philosophies (Spretnak, 2014, 151-152). Works of Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), Joseph Beuys, and Marina Abramović (born 1966) will be analysed as expression of this particular type of spirituality. The aim is to understand the socio-political and personal reasons behind the desire to connect to the past as well as to non-Western beliefs.

The third chapter is dedicated to art which finds inspiration in specifically ‘Eastern’ spirituality. I inquire into the very notion of ‘Eastern’ and subject it to critical interrogation, especially in regard to what happens when the idea is taken up in art, and the ways that the spiritual finds expression in it. Edward Said’s (1978) analysis of Orientalism is crucial here, and I investigate the notion in connection with the art of Anish Kapoor (born 1954). In particular, I examine the extent to which his use of Indian spirituality relies on those kinds of stereotypes common to the colonialist rhetoric as well as to some Western art from the past.

Finally, in the fourth chapter I investigate the notion of secular spirituality, which is related to our secular, postmodern society. For this I employ the concept of the sublime, widely used in art since the 1700s. Although presenting different layers of meanings, the sublime expresses a certain kind of spiritual that doesn’t offer references to any specific beliefs. The chapter focuses on the tradition of the concept coming from the Northern Romantics and Abstract Expressionism (Rosenblum, 1978)

as well as its postmodern interpretation (Lyotard, 1982, 1984) to explore the ways that artists Olafur Eliasson (born 1967) and James Turrell (born 1943) have perpetuated it and followed that particular reading of transcendence.

By outlining the variety of ways recent and contemporary artists have turned to the spiritual, I hope to shed some light on the importance and implication of this subject. As Arya (2016, 2) wrote, 'the process of creating art is often described in quasi-mystical terms' where the artist, concerned with 'the deeper questions of life, often reveals sights that are normally kept hidden' is able to carry 'the viewer to a different realm of the imaginary'. Under this light, it isn't surprising how the spiritual remains present in art (2016, 2) as well as the resurgent interest in it. By acknowledging the importance of the ways the spiritual manifests itself within contemporary art, I hope to underline the liveliness of this topic in visual art, as well as its significance. In my opinion, it offers insights beyond the sphere of art, such as possible implications and possibilities regarding a better awareness towards the self, others and our existence.

Christian Spirituality

Introduction

This chapter examines how contemporary artists have engaged with Christian themes and ideas. The artists in question are Roger Wagner, Mark Wallinger, Andres Serrano, and Bill Viola who, in very different ways, have regularly explored Christianity throughout their work.

I investigate why pious and sincere Christian art such as the one of Wagner, doesn't find much space in museums or through art critics and scholars' writings; and the opposite, examining why when an artist recognised by the art world employs Christian themes, it is usually treated with suspicion or even disdain by the Church, as is the case with Andres Serrano.

The aim is to provide an understanding of some of the ways artists engage with Christian spirituality, in the light of Arya's statement (2012, 18) that 'in the twentieth and twenty-first century we can still talk about religious art but the definition that applies to traditional religious art needs to be re-evaluated to fit a contemporary context'.

As David Morgan (Elkins and Morgan, 2009, 40) pointed out, Modernism distanced itself 'from institutional religions, most importantly Christianity, in order to secure the freedom of art as an autonomous cultural force that was sacralised in its own right (...), the manifestation of *Geist*, Spirit or Genius, of the essence of an age or nation (*Zeitgeist*)'. By rejecting conservative values and cultures, modernist artists claimed for an art that was innovative, subjective, progressive and experimental. If, in aesthetic terms, this tendency was expressed through an abandonment of the figurative form and an emphasis on the medium, it was also the mirror of a critical attitude both towards bourgeois society and the Church. 'Gradually, the most inventive and interesting art separated itself from religious themes', and if with modernism the distance seems definitive, 'Postmodern art has only made the break more decisive. Pop Art, minimalism, conceptual art, video and installation art seems miles away from religion', noted Elkins (2004, 12).

This doesn't mean that despite the force of secularisation religious art disappeared. Some artists even kept producing artworks to for the Church, such as the *Vence Chapel* (1948-1951) by Henri Matisse (1869-1954), Henry Moore's *Madonna and Child* (1943-1944) in St Mathew's, Northampton (Arya, 2012, 31-32) and Graham Sutherland (1903-1980) with the 1962 *Christ in Glory* for the Coventry Cathedral (1962), but, as Arya (2012, 30) explained, 'By the mid-nineteenth century it became clear that the preoccupations of art movements were formalistic, socially-oriented, and aesthetic. Religion (...) was no longer a central preoccupation'. During the twentieth century, in fact, religious feelings often took different forms, as in the case of abstract artists such as Kandinsky and Mondrian or with the Abstract Expressionists.

In the contemporary context, one of the problems with art that employs Christian themes concerns its aesthetics and content. According to Elkins (2004, 20) 'most religious art – I'm saying this bluntly here because it needs to be said – is just bad art. Virtually, all religious art made for homes and church is poor and out of touch' and this not because there are not good religious artists, but because they work on sets of ideas that happens not to be part anymore of the contemporary artistic panorama. To support his thesis, Elkins (2004, 16) uses as example Janet McKenzie's *Jesus of the People* (1999), winner of the competition 'Jesus 2000' which aim was to find 'the best image of Jesus for the millennium' (Elkins, 2004, 16). The work represents a black Christ modelled from a woman's body with three background symbols: a halo, a feather and a yin-yang. For Jesus, Janet took inspiration from a homeless man as well as inserting features of herself, her father and daughter (Elkins, 2004, 16).

Although it has to be argued that in this occasion Elkins picked an easy target — an amateur artist — *Jesus of the People* exemplifies the polarisation of contemporary art and Christian spirituality, in particular in the case of content and message. As contemporary society no longer shares a collective faith as it did in the past (de Duve, 2009, 154), most of the time genuine religious art — Christian in this case — deludes both in terms of its aesthetic and content. It can result in work that is too sentimental and unable to engage with the doubt, the complexity of faith and society, making art in which ideas can be perceived as distant from today's life.

Nevertheless, an attitude of disdain or indifference to religious art may negate the possibility of new explorations within contemporary art and culture. As Jeremy Biles (2009, 189) argued, 'to mechanically understand religious beliefs and expressions with sentimentally, schmaltziness, or kitsch is simply to ignore the most interesting and vital forms of contemporary religious thought'. Biles claimed that against the 'system of refusal' employed by scholars and critics, religious beliefs remain in art and appears in different forms as 'repetition with difference'. One is 'camouflage', with the 'unconscious importation of religious content in disguised form', a notion based on Eliade's thought (1991, 16) that religion 'haunts' art and its appearance happens on an unconscious level. In a similar way, Elkins (2004, 95) talked about 'unconscious religion' using as his example one of his students, whose art 'accidentally' created a new faith. For Elkins, this kind of faith is expressed by the sublime as it represents a way to transcend worldly experiences without employing religious thoughts. This happened with Romantic poets and artists such as Friedrich with his 'mountain ranges and bottomless abysses, his rainbows that seem to stretch forever from one end to the other, and his placid oceans that mirror scarlet sunsets' (Elkins, 2004, 96). Here the divine is indeed manifested in a non-religious way.

Another form of religious ideas in contemporary art is 'smuggling', a term Biles (2009, 190-191) employed in Michel de Certeau's sense (1984, quoted in Biles, 2009, 190) as 'a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus'. Contrary to camouflage, smuggling is a 'conscious tactic' used to resist the repression of religion by consciously employing religion with 'novel forms whose (...) meanings are not openly recognised' (Biles, 2009, 191). According to the author, smuggling — or 'recovery' — is used by contemporary artists through tropes, modified or inverted

ways, as in the case of Bill Viola and Andres Serrano, whose work is explored later in this chapter. Another example would be Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* (2006), the steel, reflective elliptical sculpture — known as The Bean — centrepiece of the Millennium Park, in Chicago. The artist refers to the work as an 'omphalos' which in ancient Greek means 'navel' and 'manifests a kind of sacred centripetal force' (Biles, 2009, 191). As Biles (2009, 191) explained 'the people who congregate within the chamber of the sculpture evoke something like a communal religious experience' which makes *Cloud Gate* 'an emblem of enchantment elicited through a recovery of religion'.

Taking such unexpected forms, religious tones and ideas can enable artists to produce non-traditional ways to engage with the sacred within a contemporary context, therefore 'erasing the barrier of repression that has estranged the critical discourse around those uncanny twins, art and religion', concluded Biles (2009, 192).

As David Morgan explained in the introduction of *Re-Enchantment* (2009, 12-18), despite the drive of secularisation, 'enchantment, no less than disenchantment, appears inherent to human consciousness [and] enchantment is a fundamental part of the disenchanting program of modernity'. Morgan rightly stated that in the contest of art, this serves as a way to project desires while allowing 'larger questions and insights', and often leading towards transcendence dimensions.

In her reply to the *Re-enchantment* (2009) seminar, Sally M. Promey (2009, 224-225), maintained the thesis that religion, far from disappearing, remains powerful within Western culture, and the effort made by the art establishment, certain critics and scholars to pretend it doesn't exist is the real anachronism. Promey criticised the

moralistic attitude towards religion in art and the 'presumption' that art 'does not have anything to do with religion, but that *it should not* do so'. In this respect, as her study on American art 'The Return of Religion' (2003) demonstrated, the necessity of reconsidering the 'secularization theory' has produced in the United States in the last thirty years different new approaches and interdisciplinary studies, giving a new emphasis to religion which has become 'a fundamental dimension of culture of the sort available to art historical investigation' (2003, 588). The author cited, as examples, books such as John Beardsley's *Garden of Revelation: Environments by Visionary Artists* (1995), John Davis's *The Landscape of Belief: Encouraging the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (1996) and David Morgan's *Icon of American Protestantism: The Art of Waller Sallman* (1996). The intention of such studies was to expand the dialogue between contemporary art and religion as well as to recover its historical and social content.

An issue to consider in art employing religious themes is its possible conservative agenda, which can reject art that doesn't conform to its own particular messages and spiritual standards, and can lead to the censure of some of the most crucial expressions in the panorama of contemporary art.

An example of this comes from the art critic Peter Fuller who during the 1980s called for a return to grace in art, meaning with this the aim for a resurgence of the spiritual, as he widely expressed in *Images of God: The Consolation of Lost Illusion* (1985) and *Theoria: Art and the Absence of Grace* (1988). Considering contemporary art materialistic, inhuman, and with no social function (all 'qualities' expressed by Andy

Warhol, whose art is seen by many critics as an emblem of the mass culture's banality, commodity and consumerism), Fuller's opinion reflects an era of 'cultural crisis' with the 'triumphant but mendacious commercial media and liberal but vacuous fine art', as Stallabrass (1994, 88-89) noted. Convinced that what he regarded as the impoverishment of art was linked to its detachment from religion, Fuller believed that aesthetic experience must not be divorced from the spiritual. He makes this clear in his collection of short essays, *Images of God*, which share as their common theme the idea 'that aesthetic experience was greatly diminished if it became divorced from the idea of the spiritual' (Fuller, 1985, xiii). Even if proclaiming himself an atheist (Fuller, 1988, 27), Fuller asks how people can cope without the consolation of the 'the lost illusion' of religion and believes that only religious spirituality can produce an art able not only to satisfy spiritually but also to ensure that 'shared symbolic order on which its foundations could rest and from which sophisticated yet accessible superstructures could be built' as Stallabrass (1994, 87-89) explained. This means that through the lens of religion, art collaborates to guarantee those cultural bases from which society can benefit.

In his 1988 book *Theoria*, Fuller pursued these ideas further. His main reference here was John Ruskin, who became a sort of alter ego for the author: they both shared similar ideas such as an objection to capitalism and the idea of the necessity of a deep, spiritual engagement in the aesthetic experience. In particular, Fuller made use of Ruskin's distinction between 'aesthesis' and 'theoria': 'the former he [Ruskin] described as "mere sensual perception of the outward qualities and necessary effects of bodies" or "the mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness" to which such effects

can give rise; the latter as the response to beauty of one's whole moral being' (Ruskin, 1903-1912, 42 cited in Fuller, 1988, 45). The book represented Fuller's endeavour to elevate 'theoria' over 'aesthesis' in art, to re-establish its spiritual dimension from the fall which occurred during the 1900s. In doing so, the author looked towards those artists who preserved the spiritual in their art, which he finds in the British tradition: Frank Auerbach (born 1931), William Turner (1775-1851), Cecil Collins (1908-1989), Graham Sutherland (1903-1980), Stanley Spencer (1891-1959), John Piper (1903-1992) and Henry Moore (1898-1986), who, he argued, were able to convey a deep sense of the spiritual that comes from nature, elevating their art to a higher moral dimension. They were also representative of a traditional approach to painting made of 'colour harmony and the representation of space' (Stallabrass, 1994, 91), as well as a Romantic engagement with nature.

According to Fuller (Fuller, 1990, quoted in Fuller, 2017), the strength of such artists is that they 'were imperfectly modern' and that 'unlike true Modernists they did not deny the spiritual and aesthetic calamity by the ever-present weight of God's absence'.

Fuller harshly criticised those artists — British in particular — whose work didn't reach his moral and spiritual expectation. Francis Bacon (1909-1992), seen by Fuller as a skilled artist, was fundamentally one whose 'tendentious vision demands a moral response, and I believe, a refusal' (Fuller, 1985, 67); Richard Long (born 1945) is considered to be 'symptomatic of the loss of both the aesthetic and the spiritual dimensions of art (...). Seen in contrast to the greatest achievements of the British tradition in art, Long's relationship to the world of nature is simply regressive' (Fuller, 1993, xxxvi). Richard Hamilton (1922-2011) is one of his favourite targets: notable is the

correspondence between the two on *Art Monthly*, where Fuller shouts out his disgust at Hamilton's art who replies accusing the critic to be 'ignorant by disposition' and a liar (1981, 26) for the misinterpretation of his work and statements. Furthermore, Fuller shows retrograde ideas on art made by gay or feminist artists. For instance, he believed that David Hockney's (born 1937) homosexuality was a limitation on his work (Fuller, 1981, 35), and interviewed by Colin Symes for *Art Monthly* (1985, 9), when asked his opinion on Feminist Art, Fuller replied, without explaining on what basis, that 'The feminist art movement is nonsense. Complete nonsense. From start to finish'.

This conservative and dismissive attitude, often based not on argument but on mere prejudice, could have alienated many from the project of a new Christian art. Fuller's desire to place British artistic traditions against modernism, led him towards a Right-centred vision and bourgeois disposition which went as far as to insult the English middle-class for not having aesthetic taste because of their acceptance of mass-culture and commercial art (Fuller, 1988, 150). He put among his alliances members of the royalty and the aristocracy, considered the preservers of the British traditions. Indeed, both Prince Charles and Lord Gowrie's writings were published in the first edition *Modern Painters*, the art magazine Fuller founded in 1987. Within this context, it is not surprising if Fuller's call for grace in art is interpreted as an expression of the New Right, which also may explain why many artists were — and still are — reluctant to engage with Christian themes.

So far, I have presented some background arguments to cast some light on the relation — and division — between contemporary art and culture and Christianity. For the rest of the chapter, I am going to focus on the works of Roger Wagner, Andres Serrano, Bill Viola, and Mark Wallinger to understand how these contemporary artists fit in this discourse.

Roger Wagner

British artist and poet Roger Wagner has been working on Christian themes since the 1980s after studying at the Royal Academy of Arts. His range of work encompasses paintings, stained glass, ceramics, mosaics and illustrations for books (Miller, 1994). Wagner mostly works on figurative subjects that combine pastoral and biblical images with contemporary social events, in a style that echoes a sense of stillness and Christian hope. His work finds little space in the art world with exhibitions at the Ashmolean Museum Oxford, the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge, the NatWest Collection and the Takeover Panel London, but it is thoroughly acclaimed by ecclesiastic environments, having amongst his supporters Lord Richard Harries, honorary professor of theology at King's College, London and former Bishop of Oxford and Sister Wendy Beckett, nun and art historian noted for a series of art documentaries transmitted by the BBC in the 1990s (Sella, 1997).

Wagner was deeply influenced by Fra Angelico's paintings at the San Marco's church in Florence, and by the work of Giorgio De Chirico, whose works he saw as a schoolboy visiting Italy (Wagner, 2012, 5). Remembering De Chirico's *The Red Tower* (1913) at the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Venice he said: 'While the flattened planes and odd perspective suggested an uneasiness that clearly belonged in the 20th century, the painting also somehow seemed saturated in the past (...). Beyond that was something else, a kind of simple beauty that was absent elsewhere' (Wagner, 2012, 5). Another source of inspiration comes from the poet T.S. Eliot, and in particular his idea of living within the present without forgetting the past. The concept, 'time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future' (Eliot, 2001) became essential for Wagner, as well as the feeling of keeping alive the wisdom of the past and living with it in the present day. It is thanks to these two modernists, De Chirico and Eliot, that Wagner built his idea of creating an art in which he can freely combine what inspires him: 'What seemed to me appealing about (...) Eliot and De Chirico was their recognition that art does not go in straight lines. It loops and circles and winds in and out of itself', as he explains (Wagner, 2012, 5). The beauty of stillness and never-ending present Wagner finds in De Chirico — while many would remember him for his ability to convey a sense of inquietude — as well as Eliot's stress on the importance of the past, are seen through the lens of Christianity. At the conference *Marching to an Antique Drum?* (2012) Wagner explained:

It is an inherent characteristic of religions that they look back to the past. They constantly retell ancient stories and myths (...) and often they do so by remembering them and symbolically re-enacting them (...)

modernism by contrast (...) looks to the future. It embraces the new. It is highly interested in originality and consciously rejects tradition. Where religious art produces icons, modern art we might say is iconoclastic. (Wagner, 2012).

These ideas are evident in what is probably his best-known work, *Menorah* (1993), a large oil on canvas painting (157 x 195 cm), representing a crucifixion scene with the Didcot Power Station, Oxfordshire, as its background.

When Wagner saw Didcot Power Station for the first time he was deeply impressed by its scale, probably experiencing the feeling of the industrial sublime, a strong sense of awe provoked by the industrial and mechanical artefacts (Nye, 1996). The artist associated the image of the station both with Nazi crematoriums, and because of its shape, with the Jewish candlestick, deciding to link the two ideas and to use them as a background for the crucifixion: 'In no other religious event is the absence of God so closely linked with his presence, or the tragedy of human life so intimately linked with its redemption', he stated (Wagner, 2017).

Two thirds of the painting are dominated by the cooling towers of the power station with the chimney in the middle, while the remaining part represents a field where the drama of the crucifixion is depicted. The image of worshippers in the act of crying on the flooded foreground is borrowed from a newspaper, in order to accentuate the reality of the scene (Miller, 2009).

By incorporating in the painting one of the most tragic historical events in recent history, *Menorah* becomes a metaphor for the recurrent idea: why does God permit all this suffering? The crucifixion here reminds us of God's goodness, who sacrificed his own son to save humanity from evil and sin. Lord Richard Harries, saw the painting as 'an aesthetic whole which is visually fresh and morally challenging', with the use of light that is 'nothing less than the light of judgment' (2004, 135). The light, a metaphor of the presence of God since early theological aesthetics (Thiessen, 2004, 10) here represents God's judgment towards human behaviour, or, as Chris Miller put it (2009): the painting 'commemorate[s] the 'inhumanity' of human action, again and again the Christ must die to redeem us'. In *Menorah*, the presence of God is evoked by bringing together a fact of history and a biblical image as a 'challenge of representing divine action in the historical world', as Rowan Williams stated (2004).

If Wagner's aim is to appeal to Christians through the fusion of historical fact and theological ideas, the result, from a secular and contemporary aesthetics point of view, is rather poor for the same reason. The use of classic Christian iconography, the realism of the setting and the cruel symbolism of the representation makes *Menorah* a work that is difficult to fit in the art world. The style lacks refinement and the figurative exploration doesn't open towards new artistic possibilities; rather it relies on repetitions and metaphors of that kind of Christian art and themes which had inspired him.

More recently, Wagner experimented in stained glass with the creation of a window for Iffley church in Oxford. *The Flowering Tree* (2012) was the first church commission

for the artist, who decided the work 'should have a clear and explicit relationship with the past' (Wagner, 2012, 1). It represents simultaneously the crucifixion and the resurrection. Jesus is crucified in the shape of a flowering tree on the top of a hill, symbolising the 'divine forgiveness in which the whole story of human redemption comes into focus' (Wagner, 2017). He also introduced a river, the river of life, flowing from the tree to the bottom of the glass, and the sheep, representing Christ's flock. At first Wagner was worried this kind of representation could have been too surreal for its audience, but while making the window he visited Rome, and in the San Clement church, he came across the mosaic of the apse, dated between the 12th to the 13th century CE and representing motifs from the 4th to the 5th century CE. Since then, Wagner had no more hesitation in bringing together the biblical event he saw in the medieval mosaic, along with references to John Piper's nativity window which it faces in the 12th century church of Iffley.

According to Sister Wendy Beckett, who commented on the work on the BBC program The One Show (2012), the window is:

full of joy, it is not a suffering picture (...) it is a good thing (...) and the great river of life flowing very strongly from the tree (...) and the light is a symbol of God, it comes fluent, shows us as clearly the meaning and the beauty of creation and redemption. It all speaks so strongly, actually living a life (...) that wants to be close to Christ'.

Sister Wendy Beckett's appreciation testifies that the representation of the glorified Christ and the beauty of God are still important features in the theological aesthetics of the 21st Century (Thiessen, 2004, 208).

Aesthetically, the surreal elements in this oeuvre manifests similarity to the British figurative revival of the 1980s with works such as *Judas* (2002) by Peter Howson, especially in the exaggeration of certain features, a taste for symbolism and the evident literary elements. For his landscape, in *The Flowering Tree* and in other works such as *Menorah* and *Abraham and the Angels* (1986) Wagner took inspiration from Giorgione's pastoral landscape, by creating an ideal place where meaning is elevated by the use of metaphorical and biblical elements, such as the river and the sheep. This denotes the artist's willingness to remain loyal to a conservative approach, as Miller observed:

He liked Giorgione more than Picasso and wanted to paint like him (...)

The importance of Christian iconography in painting suggests an analogy between the collapse in the social authority of Christianity and the collapsing conventions of representation. Wagner's own beliefs are, in this perspective, old fashioned; they include the agency of God in this world (Miller, 1994).

What is significant about Miller's comment, is that it highlights some of the reasons why Wagner is neglected by the art world. Firstly, his repeated use of visual clichés in the revival of religious art of the past, mixed to the use of 'modern' perspective or

surreal elements, that can end up being anachronistic, derivative and old fashioned. The style relies too much on the art of the past, using stereotypes and a figurative language that doesn't seem to propose either visual explorations or finesse. Secondly, the problem of its message. With *The Flowering Tree* Wagner created pious art that serves the Church and brings the word of God in the world, as traditional Christian art used to do. As explained above in this chapter, this kind of art doesn't find space in today's art world, in fact even though Wagner's art is appreciated by the religious community, it is difficult to find it in museums and exhibitions, and there is no critical literature about it other than the one coming from member of the religious community, such as Lord Harries or Sister Wendy Beckett.

It might be possible to defend Wagner's painting as an example of postmodernism since under the broader spectrum of contemporary art (Danto, 1998), postmodern art involves the resurrection of religious beliefs. Yet his work highlights how distant it is from the kind of spiritual engagement typical of the art since Modernism, such as the work of Piet Mondrian or Mark Rothko, to cite some.

As Elkins (2004, 47) pointed out, a postmodern artist can't simply be 'religious': postmodern art needs to 'demonstrate second thoughts about religion (...) it has to appear that the artist is meditative and uncertain towards both art and religion: ambiguity and self-critique have to be integral to the work', which is exactly something that does not happen in Wagner. To gain acceptance in the art world, an artist needs to manifest some sense of self-critique and irony (Elkins, 2004, 31), running the risk of a sceptical response from the religious world. In this respect, in the last 30 years, there have been a number of artists who, engaging with religious themes,

provoke strong reactions from the Christian community. They stand in contrast to Wagner.

Andres Serrano

One of the most notorious examples of work which causes controversy is *Immersion (Piss Christ)* (1987), by the Catholic artist Andres Serrano. The over-saturated colour photograph, 150 x 100 cm, shows a small glass with, immersed in it, a crucifix in what the artist admits as being his own urine. Without the artist's confirmation about the nature of the fluid and the information coming from the title, the interpretation of *Piss Christ* would have been different (Williamson, 2004).

Controversies around this work have followed and still have not ceased: in 1989 two Republican senators accused, in the chamber of the Senate, the work of being blasphemous and vulgar (Casey, 2002). In 1997 the piece was exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, arousing extreme reactions because it was considered, once again, as blasphemous and offensive. Dr George, archbishop of Melbourne, unsuccessfully appealed for intervention from the Supreme Court, asking the work to be banished from the exhibition. Both the artist and the gallerists received threats (Casey, 2000).

In more recent times, *Piss Christ* was supposed to take part in the *Sacro e Profano* Biennial Exhibition at the Photolux Festival 2015 in Lucca. The photography Biennale's intention was to explore the dualism of the existence of the sacred and profane, the tension towards the divine and the places of the spirit (De Santis, 2015). As Marsala (2015) reported, surprisingly, this time most of the objections came not from the religious community, but from the extreme part of the conservative party, which argued that the work was not only humiliating towards the image of Christ and Christianity but that it was also a tribute to Islam. Despite the absurdity of these claims, the protesters won their cause and the festival director decided to exclude *Piss Christ* from the exhibition (Marsala, 2015). From the ecclesiastic world though, the piece received appreciation thanks to Sister Wendy Becket, who considered *Piss Christ* not as outrageous and blasphemous but as a strong way of saying 'what we have done to Christ' (2007).

Yet the piece can be read as blasphemous if only because of its title, or the extent to which it 'subverts the sacrificial interpretation of Christ's death' said Chasey (2000). According to Serrano (Morgan, 1989) though, the piece was not intended to be offensive to religion, on the contrary, it was meant to draw attention to how Christ has been perceived and treated as a commodity. As he stated: 'There's a billion-dollar Christ-for-profit industry out there (...) while these groups [U.S. Senators and the American Family Association] are busy weeding out what is to them morally objectionable on the airwaves and in our museums, who decided what is morally offensive in the religion industry?' (Morgan, 1989).

Art critic Lucy Lippard considered Serrano to be in 'the postmodernism mainstream' as his art destroys the 'the pleasure of a spiritually comforting image' (1990, 239); she admired the formal feature of the work as 'a darkly beautiful photographic image' (1990, 238-245), the Latin references (Goya, Buñuel), and the resistance in accepting every part of the human body, fluids included (Lippard, 2001, 20-21).

Regardless of being surrounded by controversies, Serrano certainly managed to gain acceptance in the art world in a way that Wagner hasn't. This is mainly because 'successful artists, and not 'just 'religious' artists', are the ones who can maintain a hierarchy in their practice, in which aesthetic development or innovation remain the primary concern of the work, and the use of personal narrative or identity politics is maintained on a secondary level', explained Worley (2009, 155-156). With Wagner this doesn't happen because the main purpose of his work is to provide a vehicle for his specific spiritual message, to the detriment of both his aesthetic research and religious dogma.

On the other hand, Thierry de Duve (2009, 156-157) claimed Serrano 'uses blasphemy as camouflage', meaning he was using blasphemy as a religious act to shake consciousness, and this was the reason why he hated the piece as soon he saw it, as he declared:

I recognized the Christian who wants to convert me [which] is despicable both on an aesthetic level and the ethical level. (...) He caters to the cynical art world that grins at the blasphemy in his *Piss Christ*, all

the while telling the people who are genuinely shocked that he has produced a contemporary, redeeming, and truthful representation of Christ's humiliation on the cross.

I think de Duve's critique is one of the most interesting, as it centres a key point on the ambivalence and complexity of the piece, showing which kind of issues Christian iconography can raise when used in contemporary art.

It also highlights the attitude put forward by some art critiques of banning art when they feel the spectre of indoctrination or religious propaganda.

Chris Parr (2009, 195) claimed that:

The High Art world's discourse has become a 'system of refusal' and restraints. It comes to sound like a closed-circuit system with strict rules of entry, a jargonistic discourse one must be proficient at to be heard, and a police state mentality to secure its borders and creeds.

Parr here is not only responding to de Duve but also to the seminar *Re-Enchantment* held by James Elkins and David Morgan at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007. The purpose of the seminar was to raise awareness of the almost absence of religion in contemporary art, one of the most crucial topics of postmodernism. Some art historians, critics and artists were invited to participate and though many accepted, others, such as Michael Fried and T.J. Clarke, declined, stating that 'it would simply be too 'painful' to sit at a table at which people would talk about religion and art at the same time' (quoted in Elkins and Morgan, 2009, 110).

Bill Viola

Despite the tensions between the contemporary art world and the Christian church, some artists are able to work within both the ecclesiastic and the mainstream art establishments, as in the case of the video artist Bill Viola. Viola adopts a rather peculiar position: indeed, it is possible to find his video installations in contemporary museums as well as in churches, and big part of his artistic research is focused on religions, and in particular from the 1990s, on Christian mysticism and saints, with explicit references to Christian religious art (Livingstone, 2000). The artist was particularly interested in the early Renaissance's old masters, 'young radicals' as he called them (Gayford and Viola, 2003, 22), such as Piero della Francesca and Giotto who he studied at the Getty Institute of Los Angeles, California (Walsh, 2003).

Viola's references to the art of the past are clearly identifiable in works such as *The Greeting* (1995) which alludes to the *Visitazione* (1528 ca.) by Pontormo (1494-1557) where, according to Settis, the formal and narrative similarities 'are that marked, that it is possible to describe the video as an exact transposition of the painting' (2008, 28); or again in *Catharine's Room* (2001), an installation of five screens representing the simple every day actions of women, a narrative format which belongs to the religious tradition of *predella*, usually placed at the bottom of the altarpiece (Settis, 2008, 20). In his discussion with Gayford (Gayford and Viola, 2003), the artist explained the reasons behind the choice to adopt Renaissance imaginary, with particular reference to the perspective revolution: 'I am fascinated with that historical period of intensive

innovation, a complete shift in the basis of image making'. Another reason is that in the creative use of Christian iconography made by the 'old masters', Viola (Gayford and Viola, 2003) perceives an effort to deal with social and political issues as well as re-visualising and reinterpreting some of the world's great spiritual texts and stories for contemporary viewers. This is a way to 'see through the material surface of the object to the symbolic layers underneath' (Belting and Viola, 2003), as if transcendence went beyond the Christian theme, exploring 'the deepest human issues: birth, death, compassion, cruelty, suffering – in short, life itself,' stated the artist (Gayford and Viola, 2003), which is also what Viola does with his video installations.

Viola's fascination with Christian iconography is present in many of his video works, and one of them is for St Paul's Cathedral in London: *Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)* (2014), with the recent addition of a new work, *Mary* (2016). As the artist claimed (Viola, 2017) 'the works have been gifted to Tate, and are on long-term loan to St Paul Cathedral, creating a collaboration between the two institutions.

Martyrs, a 7 minute video played in slow-motion, consists of four vertical coloured TV plasma screens, showing four figures overwhelmed by natural forces: earth, air, fire, and water. The first video shows a man that has been buried, the second a woman hanging with her wrists and ankles bound, the third a man sits on a chair surrounded by a circle of flames, and the fourth video displays a man with a rope tied around his ankles lying on the ground in the foetal position. The action is played backwards, showing the martyrs overcoming the natural forces as in a transformative ritual of death and ascension: the buried man rises while the earth is sucked upwards, the

woman fights against the wind spiral, the man sitting on the chair is surrounded by flames, and the man that was on the ground is crucified upside down while water is pouring over him from above. The martyrs proudly endure the elements until the end, and after seven minutes the video plays again in a never-ending circle of death and renewal. As Kira Perov (Tate, 2014), Viola's partner and collaborator, noted in a video interview:

The whole notion of martyrdom is that you've accepted your fate and that you are sacrificing yourself for some higher good or for some ideal that you have inside. And, we're meeting these four people on these screens at a time when they've already accepted it.

The idea of *Martyrs* has historical roots as martyrs are present in many religions, but the artist wanted to represent them in a universal way as they 'exemplify the human capacity to bear pain, hardship and even death in order to remain faithful to their values, beliefs and principles' (Tate, 2014). Accordingly, the message Viola wanted to convey by using Christian subject matter has little to do with Christianity itself. The protagonists are martyrs, and yet they can also be identified as common people, allowing the viewers a deep participation with the scene, which is also facilitated by the dimension of the screen as well as the impact of the sound. Even if employing Christian iconography for a work installed in St Paul's Cathedral, Viola's mysticism remains elusive, especially because, as Goldberg (1988, 24) said: 'What distinguished Viola's video installations is not necessarily beauty or formal invention but emotional

force', which aims for a transformative and transcendent experience. With *Martyrs*, ideas such as death, suffering, and rebirth are universal and not obviously religious, and the reason why Viola gains acceptance from the art world with pieces like that, is because of his capacity to engage with Christian themes as a metaphor of the human condition.

Mark Wallinger

In the context of investigating Christian ideas through a postmodern context, the work of the British Mark Wallinger, 'stands out', because of his tendency towards 'toying with the apparatus of the Christian faith' (Boys, 2009, 137). An eclectic artist, Wallinger broadens his work from painting to sculpture, installation, and photography. In his later works he has focused his attention on religious and spiritual themes, as well as identity and death.

Angel (1997), is part of the trilogy *Talking in Tongues*, which includes *Hymns* (1997) and *Prometheus* (1999). In each video Wallinger impersonated his alter ego, Blind Faith, who recites or sings extracts from the Bible, from Victorian children's hymns and from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The artist explored the meaning of language in relation to faith and the popular culture, and how its perception changes depending on the ways it is expressed, and on its environment. The character of Blind Faith is a blind man, holding a walking stick, wearing black sunglasses, a white shirt and tie, and

speaking with a distorted voice because of the use of helium or technical alterations.

In *Angel*, Blind Faith recites the first verses of St John's Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not (John, 1:1).

Having as its setting the Angel underground Station in London, the video plays in loop the character, who is the turning his back to the bottom of the escalator, recites the verses. On his left and right he is flanked by two other escalators, one going up and one going down, but the people are actually going the wrong way: we see the back of those going down and vice versa. The video is played backwards, requiring Wallinger to learn St John's Gospel in reverse in order to make the verses work when played. After seven and a half minutes, the loop stops and so does Blind Faith, who ascends the escalator with the sound of Handel's *Zadok the Priest* (1727), the anthem composed for the coronation of King George II.

With *Angel*, the spectator is confused for a number of reasons: the contrast between what is seen and what is heard, the non-stop litany of the verses which seem out of place, the visual strategy of the loop and the distortion of the voice. In addition, there is the awkward character impersonated by the artist. It gives the impression that something is going wrong, but simultaneously it has an irresistible force of attraction

given by the rhythm both of the moving escalator and by the narration of the Gospel. However, this ambiguity wouldn't be possible without the use of the religious language as a 'game', which seems to have blurred its intelligible connotations, as Berger (2014, 21) noted: 'It has become a foreign language in the pragmatic reality of everyday life'. The author also found connections between Wallinger and the philosophical concept of the language given by Ludwig Wittgenstein (2005, 396), who argued that language is 'an indefinite set of social activities, each serving a different kind of purpose. Each of these distinct ways of using language is called (...) a language game'. Following this concept, Berger (2014, 21) explained:

words and sentences are not to be confused with the actual objects or facts they refer to, [and so] religious language is a language game in its own right, relating to a specific form of life (...) it differs from other game languages in that it does not operate with empirical claims but with attitude.

According to this idea then, if religious language reflects systems of beliefs and not empirical truth, *Blind Faith's* performance, as a metaphor of religious life, would be a way to shake the obviousness of the real, putting in doubt what is already known and the very essence of what is right and wrong. In this respect, Berger (2014, 21), engaged with Wallinger's work as a way of conveying a positive Christian message: 'In the pragmatic reality of the everyday life, it is possible to perceive religious dimensions like confidence and hope', as Wallinger is able to suggest.

Another way to see *Angel* could be through the idea that the ambiguity is not only in relation to the real dimension, but also, and especially, in relation to the spiritual dimension, in this case, Christianity. Through *Angel*, Wallinger expresses the contradiction between the real and the spiritual, bringing the spectator to question what they see and what they believe, two things that don't necessarily go together. In conversation with Marina Warner (2015), Wallinger emphasized one of the main issues he often investigates, which is the transfiguration of the banal, in this case a public place, the London Tube, where the transcendent makes its incursion into the everyday life, linking together the 'wonderful and banal', as he put it. According to Jonathan Koestlé-Cate (2016, 6), in *Angel*, 'the underground becomes the underworld, a scene of final judgment with the saved and the damned on either side of this hieratic servant of the word'.

The interest of the artist in shaking up the banal through the use of a public place is evident one more time in the statue of *Ecce Homo* (1999-2000), made for the Fourth Plinth Project in Trafalgar Square in London. The plinth was empty for about 150 years until in 1998, the Royal Society of Arts created the Fourth Plinth Project, where every year a different artist was called to create a work to fill the empty space (Burrows, 2000). *Ecce Homo*, a marble sculpture representing a man wearing a loincloth, recognisable as Christ because of the golden crown of thorns on his shaved head, which is inclined downward (Boys, 2009, 138). With his eyes closed, hands tied behind the back, this young man is not certainly the usual representation of Christ, but of common youth. As Koestlé-Cate (2016, 1) observed, the idea for the sculpture came from St John's Gospel, when Pontius Pilate presented Jesus as 'Ecce Homo' after being

arrested, and 'Wallinger believes this to be one of the most powerful episodes in the gospels, yet one underrepresented in sculpture'.

Hence Wallinger decided to inaugurate the new millennium and the 2000th anniversary of Christ's birth with this episode and to bring it to Trafalgar Square, a public square that commemorates the Battle of Trafalgar, which saw the British victory in the Napoleonic Wars. A sculpture representing Jesus in the middle of a place celebrating British glories could, as some claimed (Strong, 1999, 27), have been an issue for Wallinger, but he was surely aware of this, and instead, as Koestlé-Cate (2016, 2) rightly points out: 'It is a good subject *precisely because* of its location. What could have been more appropriate when set against the material hubris and imperial machinations of the State?'. With *Ecce Homo*, Wallinger demonstrates how to break empirical reality through the spiritual, both engaging with Christian iconography and the figure of the everyday man, which the sculpture symbolised. *Ecce Homo*, with its scale as normal size man, the humble and human attitude, the location of a public square, conveys a message of spirituality which is for everyone, believers and not. As the artist put it: 'I am playing with the possibilities of retrieving moments of spiritual unity in the generally uncompromising contemporary urban landscape' (Wallinger, quoted in Searle, 2000, 14). Always interested in exploring the notion of nationality, here Wallinger is not only communicating a message of spirituality, but he is also making use of Christian iconography in order to carry on his investigation. In this regard, Koestlé-Cate (2016, 3) argued that the impulse that motivates the artist 'draws upon a British nonconformist tradition of dissent', an idea that is confirmed by Wallinger who claims that the statue is 'a kind of heresy against secularism'

(Wallinger, quoted in May, 2001, 39-50). In this respect, the artist embraces the idea of Christ as a re-enchanter of the Western world, a human Christ who can connect with every sphere of society, especially with the oppressed, becoming a symbol for the fight for the democracy and human rights, exactly as he did during his lifetime (Koestlé-Cate, 2016, 4). At this point, in his study of the religious imagery in the work of Mark Wallinger, Koestlé-Cate asked why *Ecce Homo* has received almost no consideration from the religious community (Koestlé-Cate, 2016, 5). Maybe because Wallinger is not a declared believer and even if he investigates religion, in doing so he also questions it? Maybe because he comes from the 'official art world', and this is enough to be automatically discarded? Or could it be because of the non-sacred setting in which the sculpture is placed? One reason could be that *Ecce Homo* uses Christ as a metaphor and is not a profession of faith, which also happens with Bill Viola's *Martyrs*, with the difference that this last one is set in a church. Surely *Ecce Homo* doesn't fulfil the standard ecclesiastical criteria, but nevertheless, as Koestlé-Cate suggested (2016, 6), a theological message is present in this sculpture: 'Camouflaged within the safely secular notion of a representative of the persecuted everywhere, an image of Christ had taken root, at least for one time, in the heart of the capital'. I am not convinced Wallinger chose to camouflage a religious agenda within secularism, more likely it is the other way around, but even so, he definitely explores the relationship between the secular world and Christianity with impeccable intelligence and irony, passion and curiosity, becoming one of the rare examples in the Western society which transmits a sense of universal spirituality.

What comes from this discussion is that to gain acceptance from the art world, a critical questioning of religious belief, as well as a visual exploration, is required, as it happens with Wallinger, whose references to Christianity are not linked with religious propaganda, rather the Christ is humanised to explore and question society. Ironically, this questioning is what may prevent such art from being accepted by the religious community. On the other hand, Wagner takes that belief as an unquestioned starting point. This makes his art too obvious and not adherent with that kind of exploration and engagement that contemporary art that demands our attention should exhibit. Moreover, it neither offers figurative or aesthetic investigation and expertise, relying too much on masters from the past and religious metaphors.

Nevertheless, with this chapter, I hope I have demonstrated that even if the secular and the Christian worlds seem to be far from each other, the two still enjoy reciprocal influences. Christian themes and ideas can offer deep insight in regard to society today when used in a non-conventional, challenging and intelligent way to fit the contemporary context. This also means that in spite of the 'division' that has occurred in Western society, Modernity — and Postmodernity — are still very young compared to the thousands of years in which art and Christianity were entangled. Thierry de Duve (2009, 115) rightly observed: 'We – and then not all of us – have been learning to live without God, or gods, for a mere 250 years'.

The Spirituality of Immanence

Introduction

This chapter examines some of the ways in which what Charlene Spretnak (2014) has referred to as the 'spirituality of immanence' have been explored in art since the 1960s, and in particular in performance art. Accordingly, I consider the work of three artists: Joseph Beuys, Ana Mendieta, and Marina Abramović. My aim is to examine the character of their engagement with immanent spirituality, and their motivations for doing so.

The choice of these artists is based on the fact that, aside from the general recognition of their significance for art of the last 40 or so years, each one exemplifies some of the main characteristics of the 'spirituality of immanence,' whether inspired by ancient cultures and philosophies, or by the desire to reconnect with bodily perception and the earth through the use as their body as a medium. In some cases, acknowledging their role in society and the possibility of spreading spiritual, social and political messages towards their audience, the artist will play the role of teacher, or shaman, as Tucker likes to call them (Tucker, 1992). Along with the idea of creating art which is a vehicle of the spiritual in order to revitalize the society, another aspect these artists have in common is that they all deal with personal and social traumas, such as living in a time of war or being forced to leave one's homeland. Common to all is a

mobilisation of references to primitive and pagan cultures as a way of trying to overcome those struggles.

Before examining the artists' work itself, however, it is necessary to define what is meant by this term. According to Spretnak (2014, 151-152) the 'spirituality of immanence' is not necessarily linked to a specific religion, and during the years, contemporary artists who engage with it often refuse to proclaim their adherence to any official religion. Nevertheless, this idea of the spiritual is often inspired by philosophical and religious ideas that connect with immanence, such as primeval, indigenous, Asian and pagan cultures and philosophies, as the author explained:

Religious orientations that recognize all manifestations of nature, including the human, as expression of the sacred whole – and, thus, as sites of, or participants in, transcendence presence – proclaim a spirituality of immanence. In this orientation, the path to a perception of transcendence, whether involving a personified godhead or not, is through deep communion with the vast sacred field of interrelatedness we call nature, not by demanding, demonizing, or ignoring it in a quest to reach 'higher' realms (2014, 151).

Some of the works explored in this chapter will show the difficulty of tracking a definite line between the idea of immanent and transcendent spirituality. This is particularly evident in the case of Marina Abramović.

What is interesting about the idea of 'immanent spirituality' is the fact that when we usually approach concepts such as the 'sacred' and 'spiritual', these are mostly associated with notions such as 'immateriality' and 'incorporeal' whereas the idea of immanence is related to the physical and visible world as the vehicle through which the spiritual is manifested.

What drew artists towards an interest in ancient cultures and their mythology? The fascination with mythological themes and archaic cultures was not new to the artists of the 1960s and 1970s. Primitivism was a recurring feature of the history of modernism (Goldwater, 1967), yet there were some shifts in the 1960s. In *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, Lucy Lippard (1983, 5) argued that while modernist artists' use of mythological sources was a rebellion against 'social and regional realism', for late 1960s artists it was a way to 'rediscover social roots and communal meaning for their art'. Tired of the reductive ideas of 'true' art, formalism and 'reductive purism and art-for-art's-sake' they reacted with 'a gradual upsurge of mythical and ritual content related to nature and to the origins of social life' (Lippard, 1983, 5).

This last point is particularly significant when contextualised: the late 1960s and early 1970s was a moment of social change and conflicts with civil rights movements, the reaction against the Vietnam War and the rise of feminist issues. Inspired by anti-war and civil rights movements, the women's movement became much more widespread, questioning women's place in society and forming unions for issues such as access to

better jobs, equality of rights and salary and sexual discrimination (Phelan and Reckitt, 2012, 20).

If the disillusionment with the established society brought artists to search for a deeper meaning in the past, a relationship with nature, and a consequential spiritual awakening, it would be reductive to see the interest towards ancient cultures and spirituality *only* as a rebellion and a way to escape from late capitalism. Lippard (1983, 4) argued that the base of this fascination lies in the idea of making art which is a metaphor able to give sense to the world, as pagan people used to do, as she stated:

The simplest explanation for contemporary artists' current attraction to ancient images, artifacts, and sites is nostalgia – not only for those periods we now imagine offered a social life simpler and more meaningful, than our own, but also for any time when what people made (art) had a secure place in their daily life.

I believe Lippard is right when saying that the appropriation of ancient symbols and mythology by artists was done to guarantee a continuity of meaning in contemporary society, as well as a longing for their art to have more purpose, as in the past.

Nonetheless, this was also a historical moment of important archaeological discoveries and publications, which contributed to raise awareness to pagan cultures and in particular on the cult of the Goddess. Goddess spirituality emerged during the 1970s when a number of female artists were drawn to the sacred because of the theories put

forward by prehistoric archaeologists such as Marjia Gimbutas (1921-1994) who in 1974 published *The God and Goddess of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images* (Gimbutas 1974). Thanks to the interpretations of archaeological findings in 'Old Europe', Gimbutas argued that women were central to prehistorical European societies, which before the overwhelming patriarchal vision of religion, were based on the cult of female deity with its deep connection with the earth and the moon, was often associated with the idea of fertility, and its sacredness was highlighted by the power of regeneration.

During the 1970s and 1980s, other publications emerged, contributing to the fostering of feminist women and artists drawn to the cult of the Goddess. 'Modern Matriarchy Studies', defined by the German feminist Heide Göttner-Abendroth, stated that in prehistoric society the Goddess was the principal object of worship (1987), and the 1978 essay 'Why Women Need the Goddess' by Carol P. Christ also argued for the idea of the cult of the Goddess in pagan cultures. Other notable examples of this literature included works such as *When God Was a Woman* (1976) by Merlin Stone, who described the veneration of the female deity and the matriarchal domination before the rise of male-oriented religions, and *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979) by Miriam Starhawk which argued for a renewed exploration of the re-emergence of the culture and rituals of witchcraft, the Goddess and their relation to the feminist movement.

Later on, during the 1980s, Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor's *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of The Earth* (1987) and Elinor W. Gadon's *The Once and Future Goddess* (1989) added their name to the list of authors interested in the subject.

These books addressed matriarchal traditions in ancient cultures, the ways female shamans lived in harmony with nature, and in the case of Gadon, the expressions these ideas transmitted to female artists. A more recent instance of this orientation is Michael Tucker's *Dreaming with Open Eyes: The Shamanic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art and Culture* (1992), which explored the link between art and shamanism. Helped by theories of authors such as Nietzsche, Eliade, Castaneda, and Jung, Tucker recognised in the artist the reincarnation of the shaman who can help in the creation of a better society.

These ideas were adopted in art mainly by performance and land artists, notable in this regard Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977), who engaged with and shaped the natural landscape in the search, it has been argued, for spiritual connections (Morley, 2010). According to Lippard (1983, 212), who compared many works of land art with prehistorical sacred sites, what inspired many land artists during the 1960s and 1970s was the fascination with maps, travelling, navigations and geology, as a way to 'reconcile the mythic relationship between the daily round and the road to a spiritual achievement.'

In the case of feminist art, in addition to engaging critically with clear social and political issues, some performance artists also explored and redefined the spiritual as inspired by direct contact with nature, or by the exploration of ancient cultures and religions. Performance became one of the favourite mediums for such spiritual and social awakening (Butler, 2007, 348). In the 1960s and 1970s in particular, performance art was explored to this end by a number of artists such as Carolee Schneemann (1939-

2019), Yoko Ono (born 1933), Yayoi Kusama (born 1929), and Marina Abramović, to cite the best-known examples. Performance artists often reinterpret rituals in their performance which roots can be found in pagan dance and practices (Lippard, 1983, 160-195).

All these sets of ideas, the influence of paganism, the cult of the Goddess and the relation with nature, were not separated from their social context, which seemed to play a fundamental role in those years. As McEvelley (1983, 294) claimed: 'Performance works involving the appropriation of religious forms have fallen into two groups': the ones inspired by Neolithic rituals 'of fertility and blood sacrifice' and the ones inspired by Palaeolithic' shamanic practice, or sometimes a mix of the two. He explained: 'Both may be seen as an expression of the desire, so widespread in the '60s and early '70s, to reconcile within Modern civilization something like an ancient or primitive sensibility of oneness with nature'.

Lippard also noted that one of the aims of artists that engage with the primitive is to go against 'the false dichotomy thought in art schools: you can't make art if you want to be involved in the world', and vice versa. If looking back in time can be criticised as a symptom of regression or a way of creating meaning from idealised stereotypes, the use of cultures and myths taken by the past doesn't necessarily have to create 'false-consciousness' (Tucker 1992, 5-8). In this regard Tucker stated: 'it can open up far deeper and richer layers of consciousness than the purely historical mode of existence which has come to dominate so much of life today'.

Joseph Beuys

The art of the Joseph Beuys (1921 – 1986) is strictly related to the mythical narration he made of the vicissitudes of his life, as well as his social and political thinking. Beuys's interest in the spiritual and his fascination with mythology, occultism, shamanism, and anthroposophy permeates many aspects of his art and this is particularly evident in his performances, where he adopts the role of the artist-shaman (Moffitt, 1998). He was concerned with ideas of rebirth, transformation, and regeneration, and these relate to his own experience with death and the consequential creation of a mythological story about his survival (Taylor, 2012, 20).

In War World II Beuys was a pilot for the Luftwaffe, and during a snowstorm in 1943, his plane crashed. Surviving this accident, the artist promoted the story that he was rescued by the nomadic Tartars, who brought him back to life after several days in a coma by covering his body with fat and felt, (Tisdall, 1979, 16-17), materials Beuys will become so obsessed with at this point, that he turns them into sculptures.

How much of this really happened and how much comes from the artist's fantasy remains a mystery (Mesch and Michely, 2007, 175-176) and even if entirely made up, this self-mythologisation is artistically significant as it contributes to the creation of 'Beuys-persona' as artist, probably the reason why that moment was considered by the artist as his spiritual rebirth.

This mythical narration itself proves to be particularly problematic for the interpretation of Beuys's work, as it not only suggests the artist himself was trying to

shape how his work was to be read, but it also implies a shadow of falseness which some have found objectionable. Buchloh (1980, 7-11), for example, found Beuys's 'numerous attempts to construct a private mythology (...) really distasteful', in particular because of the artist's rejection in regard to historical thought and German history, as he explains: 'The history of post-Second-World-War Germany, which is Beuys's own historical situation; history of an emerging, economically powerful society; the histories of specific art forms — all of these are ignored, falsified, or mythified'. Rosalind Krauss (1980, 11) writes about a 'strategy of displacement' operated by Beuys where 'history is somehow displaced' by the fact, for instance, that his rebirth didn't happen in German soil. Krauss claimed that perhaps amongst the reasons why Beuys is so captivating to the Germans is that 'he presents a way of considering the past without having to consider it as one's own past, never in relationship to an immediate past or any specific present'. Moreover, this would go beyond the supposed falsification of his background permeating all his art where 'Reality is constantly recontextualised so that is not recognizable for what is it' (Krauss, 1980, 15).

On the other hand, the 'problem of reality' doesn't necessarily have to be the lens through which we see Beuys' art. Alain Borer (1996, 12-13) argued that Beuys's legend should be considered 'neither 'true' nor 'untrue' but at least 'truthful', a characteristic 'indispensable to any analysis of his work', and an approach I will adopt in my investigation. I think what Borer intends here is to take Beuys's story as he recounted it. Myth is part of Beuys's work and therefore we shouldn't worry about whether or not his story is related to a real-life event. Questioning it would bring with it the necessity

to reconsider his art because this self-mythologisation constitutes both the essence and the message of his work.

The war and the devastating events led by Germany marked Beuys so deeply that he started to see in art the way to reconcile with himself and the world (Moffitt 1998, 93-98). According to Stachelhaus (1987, 23), Beuys's decision to become an artist was a way of escaping from the trauma of the Second World War and the tragedy caused by German nationalism.

For the artist, it was essential that life and art should be related to a cosmic sense of wholeness and he believed that the function of art could be extended to improve the society, as he said in the 1974 speech in New York:

The whole problematic understanding of the function of art in the society is to change our understanding of ourselves and humankind – the problem is only to understand that man is a being who needs nourishment for his spiritual needs, and that if he could cultivate and train his primary nature, the spiritual nature, he could develop whole other energies (Beuys and Kuoni, 1990, 32).

By extending the meaning of art, Beuys believed that art could be the key to healing the 'wound of society', first of all in relation to German fascism (Tisdall, 1998, 30).

He was also critical of capitalist society, the commodification of goods and the media control (Tisdall, 1979, 6), and saw art as a tool in which power could be extended to help social change.

Beuys became fascinated in particular by shamanism. In the society of Central and North Asia, the shaman was a dominant figure of the tribe (Taylor, 2012; Eliade, 2004). Beuys saw shamans like doctors because of their therapeutic powers and the ability to transform substances (Tisdall, 1979, 23). As explained by Eliade (2004, 3-4), shamans are indeed also called 'medicine man' and 'magician' because of their 'magic-religious power' able 'to cure' and 'perform miracles'.

The interest in shamanic practice became for Beuys a way of being in contact with the past, nature, and the Cosmos, but it was also related to its healing powers. He adopted the persona of the artist-shaman: if the shaman can heal, the artist-shaman can do the same through his art. He started wearing felt for his own clothing and never performing without his felt hat (Tisdall, 1979; Taylor, 2012, 24): for some shamans, the hat was the most important part of their clothing. Beuys compared suffering and experience with death to the sickness endure by shamans to break the limits of consciousness to enter in contact with a profound 'visionary knowledge'.

The power of the shaman is also transmitted through animals, as they are in direct connection with the beyond, either representing the 'psychopompos' (spiritual guide) which helps the person to reach the beyond or the person who died (Eliade, 2004, 98-99). Animals are a recurrent theme for Beuys, evident in his drawings which practice

as he considered, 'a thinking form' (Tisdall, 1998, 35). Taking inspiration from Nordic imaginary he created lyrical images such as *Sheep Skeleton* (1949) or the stag series of the 1950s. Beuys's intention here is far from analytical reproduction, and natural features are transformed and spiritualised (Mesch and Michely, 2007, 231), with clear connections with shamanic rituals through ideas such as death, time, awakening, and evolution. In this regard, Beuys explained in *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland* (1974):

The stag appears in times of distress and danger. It brings a special element: the warm positive element of life. At the same time it is empowered with spiritual powers and insight, and is the accompanier of the soul (Tisdall, 1979, 34).

Beuys's interpretation of the spirituality of immanence maintains a deep connection both with the natural world and with ancient shamanic practice, which is particularly prominent in his performances.

In *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) Beuys placed himself in a gallery closed to the public but visible through a window. His face and head were covered with honey and gold leaves and on his feet were tied soles made from iron and a magnet on the right and felt on the left. Throughout the action, he remained mute carrying a dead hare amongst the pictures, with the intention of attracting those mystical energies of the earth, represented by the hare. The hare was also a symbol of

birth and incarnation as well as the 'vulnerability and finiteness of human kind', as Levi-Strauss notes (1999).

Base elements such as honey and gold are the most important refined material used by alchemists as a symbol of purity and goodness. Beuys related honey to the thinking mind that can produce ideas, transform thoughts and consciousness (Tisdall, 1979, 102).

He described the performance as a demonstration of the 'complex tableau about the problem of the language, and about the problem of thought, the human consciousness and the consciousness of animals', and this is brought to its extreme because the animal here is dead. 'The idea of explaining to an animal, conveys a sense of secrecy of the world and of existence that appeals to the imagination', which is also in contrast with men's 'stubborn rationality' (Tisdall, 1979, 101-105); he continues: 'The problem lies in the word 'understanding' and its many levels which cannot be restricted to rational analysis' (Tisdall, 1979, 101-105). The presence of the hare highlights again how the artist regarded nature as a source of spiritual knowledge as well its capacity of evoking supernatural powers. Feldman (Perlmutter, and Koppman, 1999, 109) noted how these beliefs are similar to American indigenous ones as they wear animal masks when hunting to acquire the power of the animal represented.

Beuys's healing vision is one of the main features of his art, an idea reinforced through his reading of the anthroposophical works of the philosopher and esotericist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) (Taylor, 2012). The Anthroposophical Society, founded by Steiner in 1921, embraced both the material and spiritual world, trying to provide answers to

different sectors of life: from agriculture to education, art to architecture (Moffitt, 1988, 114).

What Beuys took from Steiner was his anti-materialistic, ecological, evolutionary ideas, that allowed him to open his art towards 'a vision that integrates the spiritual, natural and human domains in a way that overcomes the opposition and conflicts rendering personal and social life' (Taylor, 2012, 28). The aim of Anthroposophy (Steiner, 1979, 256-257) is to awake the soul through a high state of consciousness, to gain a unity between bodily perception and the mind through the visualisation of symbolic images.

Reason, 'thinking', and intuition, are fundamental concepts to gain a vision of the whole, the essence of reality (Taylor, 2012, 30). Steiner's research touched various spheres of the spiritual such as mythology, shamanism and Christianity, believing the theory of evolution should go backwards, looking at the divine through the lens of ancient religion and cultures recalling the divine origins of man.

The similarity between Beuys and Steiner is particularly visible in relation to their ideas on materialism and the alienation of modern man. They believed in a vision that comprehend the world in its wholeness, both spiritual and material, which would allow independence from the merely sensorial experience, a development of the inner side, and the possibility of living life in its fullest (Moffitt, 1998; Taylor, 2012; Tisdall, 1998, 36). This kind of spirituality doesn't seek to transcend the physical world but to embrace the duality of it to create balance. This idea deeply influenced Beuys and is particularly notable in his *Aktionen* (Moffitt 1998). Here the spiritual is immanent for

different reasons: the use by the artist of his own body as an artistic tool, the introduction of objects taken from the human world, and in particular the necessity not to transcend the materiality of them, but instead to demonstrate the transformative power of art when matter and the spiritual are combined.

In *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art: The case of Joseph Beuys* (1998), Moffitt explained the connections between Steiner's symbolism and Beuys's art. These are evident in Beuys's fascination with bees in works such as *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. For both Steiner and Beuys, bees, in their microcosms and their labour as a colony, recall humans and symbolise socialism. Heat is an essential element for bees; it serves to enable the fluidity of honey and its crystallisation, which is similar to what happens with blood in the human body. Moreover, for some ancient cultures, bees were sacred animals able to produce 'spiritual substance' (Moffitt, 1998, 139-140).

Anthroposophical ideas are also present in *Show Your Wounds* (1976). It consists of an installation in a dark gallery space where paired objects are set: two mortuary tables, two zinc boxes containing fat, a thermometer and a test tube with a bird's skull inside. Moffitt (1998, 147) considered this symbolic arrangement to have been inspired by an Anthroposophical text where Steiner described a similar place and the sacrifice at Golgotha.

Acknowledging and showing man's spiritual and physical wounds as we see in *Show Your Wounds*, can be read as part of the healing process seen by the artist as the only way to progress and overcome a catastrophe (Moffitt, 1998, 148). This can again be read as a metaphor for the state of the German people after World War II.

If Beuys's major concern was to expand the possibility of art through the spiritual and to touch social and economic issues, the 1974 performance *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*, not only focuses on these concerns but probably encapsulates his work as a whole. The performance can be seen as Beuys's way to open up a dialogue with the U.S. as before that year he refused to go to America because of the invasion of Vietnam (Levi-Strauss, 1999).

Coyote took place in 1974 at the Rene Block Gallery, New York, where Beuys spent three days in a room with a coyote. He brought various objects: felt, a copy of *The Wall Street Journal* and a walking-stick and practiced rituals such as moving in circles around the coyote in a sort of primordial dance without taking off his eyes of him. The coyote, behaving like an animal, explored the objects and the person in the room: moving through the room, stretching out, staring at the barrier where spectators were present. As the days passed, the relationship between the artist and the coyote became more relaxed and closer until the end of the last day, when Beuys was taken away in the same way he entered in the room: wrapped in felt on a stretcher and then by ambulance.

Behind *Coyote* lies the ideas of transformation and freedom (Tisdall, 1979, 228-235): Beuys incorporated the shaman who, in contact with a wild and, for Native Americans, sacred animal and one of the most hunted by white Americans (Feldman in Perlmutter, and Koppman, 1999, 110-111), tries to create a point of contact not only between humans and animals, but also between Europe and North America, and to

heal the trauma between America and the Indian, 'the Red Man' (Munich: Schirmer, 1976, cited in Tisdall, 1979, 228). Levi-Strauss (1999) considered *Coyote* as therapy for the Western man, a way to open a dialogue in the 'schism between native intelligence and European mechanistic, materialistic and positivistic values (...) to move in the next evolutionary stage, from progress (...) to survival', meaning from the domain of the natural world towards a respectful and ecological vision.

The symbolic use of the animal is again a tool to create a spiritual connection with the natural world. As seen above, the presence of a 'spirit animal' (Eliade, 2004) helps the shaman to connect with the beyond allowing them to cure ailments. This is also an ancient idea coming from Indian American cultures who believed that, 'at the beginning of creation, animals and humans lived together as one race', said Harries (1968, cited in Perlmutter, and Koppman, 1999, 111).

The coyote is the emblem of the survivor during a time of evolutionary changes: its ancestors came from Eurasia and had to adapt to a new environment, carrying 'the paleo-Asiatic shamanic knowledge', which is another reason why Beuys was attracted to the animal (Levi-Strauss, 1999). In Native American mythology the coyote is a 'guide to the Underworld', symbolising the 'Transformer' spirit who brings 'order to chaos and chaos to order.' In other words, 'Coyote makes things happen' (Levi-Strauss, 1999).

The presence of the *Wall Street Journal* embodies the sickness of the society Beuys wanted to heal through the power of art: the obsession with money and economics,

'based on the unjust and unsound concepts of the present-day money economy – and one which can only prepare the ground for proliferating sources of infection in all the productive areas of the body politic, in culture, law and in society' (Tisdall, 1979, 234-235).

Against the misunderstanding which sees Beuys aiming for a return of the past because of the invocation of shamanism and ancient cultures, Levi-Strauss (1999) reported the conversation that took place between Beuys, the collector and author Heiner Bastian, and author Jeannot Simmen. Here the artist explained that his engagement with shamanism has to be read not as a wish to go backwards in history, but as a way to 'express (...) future possibilities' by putting shamanic wisdom, powers and forces into a contemporary context (Bastian and Simmen, 1980, 92).

Whether or not Beuys's art was actually able to change society left more than a few doubters, and this is noted by the art critic Donald Kuspit in *The Cult of the Avant-garde Artist* (1994). In his analysis of Beuys, Kuspit (1994, 90) argued that one of Beuys's preoccupations was to try to restore in the German people that sense of individuality that Nazism destroyed, as well as to 'restore creativity' which is expressed in his performance using elements coming both from the natural and the Nazi world. He used a primitive form of healing, the power of shamanism, 'in opposition to an order and reason that have historically proved more barbaric' (Kuspit 1994, 90). Yet the main question Kuspit (1994, 93) asked is 'whether Beuys offered a new form of utopian authoritarianism. Is the shaman mediator of the primordial, another pathological, authoritarian leader?' Kuspit claimed there is nothing authoritarian

about him, and this is exemplified in his healing mission and his desire to create a democratic society through a new art elite. In other words, in his shamanic performance, Beuys desired to heal and transform a disenchanted society, provoking and shaking its audience consciousness. For Kuspit (1994, 97), Beuys's wish was deluded not only because society is difficult to cure, but, he stated:

Rather, the artistic results of healing betray the suffering they sublimate because they inevitably become aesthetically ideal, however un-ideal they initially seem. Beuys tried to avoid art's seemingly built-in power of idealization by his materially gross and poignantly gauche performance, but his narcissism got in the way.

The accusation the author levelled at Beuys is that he took himself too seriously, it is about the fact he relies too much on the idea of his charismatic figure, his desire to be a guru, and his dependency on an audience. In other words, he *was* authoritarian — in a way — and these facts turn his shamanism against him. More than healing his audience, Beuys tried to heal himself, which is a normal attitude for an artist, as Kuspit continued: 'His performances invariably became a kind of self-idealization, indeed, a self-identification (...). Because the means of healing became contemplative ends in themselves, the performances lost their meaning as healing events'. Kuspit's idea of Beuys is crucial because it shows the failure to which his art succumbs, but this does not mean that his audience wasn't able to benefit or being emotionally involved from it.

Beuys's art demonstrates not only how ideas of the spirituality of immanence can be conciliated with the physical world, but it also shows its complexity in relation to personal trauma and the devastating events of War World II.

Even acknowledging that Beuys's charismatic persona plays an essential and sometimes problematic role on the reception of his art, and admitting that his narcissistic and self-referential behaviour also turned against him, his work was a notable milestone in the expansion of the possibilities of art in the last 40 or so years.

Ana Mendieta

Ana Mendieta was probably one of the most prominent feminist artists working in the early 1970s. Cuban-born, she was forced to leave her country at the age of thirteen to escape from Fidel Castro's regime. Mendieta spent more than two years moving from one camp to the other in the United States, before finding a place with a family in Iowa (Blocker, 1999). The experience of being uprooted led her to speak about the feeling of having been deprived of her relation to the mother earth, which became the focus of her creative energies, as she said:

My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe.

It is a return to the maternal source. Through my earth/body sculptures

I become one with the earth. I become an extension of nature, and nature becomes an extension of my body. This obsessive act of reasserting my ties with the earth is really the reactivation of primeval beliefs (...) [in] an omnipresent female force, the after-image of being encompassed within a womb, is a manifestation of my thirst of being (1987, 10, cited in Gadon, 1989).

Mendieta's work consists mostly of ritual performances in which she marked the landscape with her body in the search for a spiritual communion with nature (Blocker, 1999). These performances were often filmed or photographed. She privileged non-artistic materials in favour of specific natural sites and sculptures made with ephemeral materials such as vegetation or earth and having a constant reference to fertility, violence, and blood. Her works exemplify the expressions of the spirituality of immanence through the identification of her body with the earth, along with the religious references coming from her motherland.

Her performance works are deeply connected with the Caribbean religion of Santería, which combines elements of Catholicism with Orisha, a traditional spirituality brought to Cuba by enslaved Nigerian Yoruba people (Clark, 2007, 16-17). Mendieta's fascination with Santería depended on the idea that its rituals were seen as a way to create a balance and a connection between the natural and the spiritual world (Rauch and Suro, 1992, 44). She believed that a 'universal energy (...) reverberates through all organisms, and in the ritual evocation of *ashé* or divine power, magically animated her works with anger, pleasure, hunger and longing' (Blocker, 1999, 18). This is particularly

evident in the ritualistic use of blood made by the artist. In the 1972 *Untitled (Death of a Chicken)*, for instance, Mendieta held a decapitated chicken, leaving its blood to slash her body and the wall behind. The 1974 film *Untitled (Blood and Feathers #2)*, which documents the performance Mendieta undertook at Old's Man Creek in Iowa, shows the artist naked near a water bank. She first pours blood over her body and then rolls in the ground covering her body with feathers. At the end, she stands upright simulating a bird with her posture and gestures. In the performances held in those years, the artist was often the sacrificial victim, and blood served as metaphor and symbol: in Santería ritual animals were sacrificed during initiations, employed to empower the Gods. As Mary Jane Jacob (1991, 10) notes, these works recall the initiation rites performed by the Abakua, a secret male society of Santería, where the initiate had to walk holding a decapitated cock in his mouth, leaving the blood to drip all over the body.

A New York performance where Mendieta, covering her arms with a mix of blood and tempera, impressed her prints on the wall of a stage where Cuban music was played, is interpreted by Gadon (1989, 280) as a way to recreating a ritual gesture practiced by prehistoric women who imprinted their hands covered in red-ochre to the wall of the cave.

On the ritualistic use of the blood, the artist commented that she 'started immediately using blood, I guess, because I think it's a very powerful magic thing. I don't see it as a negative force' (quoted in Fisher, 2002, 86). She was indeed particularly interested in those spiritualities and religions that recognised their supernatural aspect (Mendieta et al., 2002).

Mendieta created two hundred works in a series called *Silueta* (1973-1980), in which she used her body to create a female silhouette in nature. The form was sometimes cut into the earth, others were made by flowers or even set on fire (Blocker, 1999). The creation of these works is a 'spiritual act' for the artist, from the choice of the place to the desire to fuse herself to the earth (Rauch and Suro, 1992, 48).

The first was titled *Imagen de Yagul*, part of a series of work performed in Mexico between 1973 and 1977, named after the pre-Columbian archaeological site of Oaxaca in central Mexico. Here Mendieta laid naked on the ground, covered and surrounded by the earth, rocks, and vegetation, her body totally integrated with the ground. In *Tree of Life* (1977), she covered her naked body with mud, standing attached to a tree, almost as an extension of it (Jacob, 1991).

Another significant Mexican performance is *Incarnation to Olokun-Yemayá* (1977) in which Mendieta impressed the shape of her body in the mud on the beach; the imprint of her body was then surrounded by the shape of a big hand. Its title refers to Olokun, the Cuban Goddess of the bottom of the sea and the ocean, as well as mother or grandmother of Yemayá, the Goddess of maternity and fertility, a deity invoked when the need for a place to call home is needed (Cabañas, cited in Gera, 2010). This work represents Mendieta's desire to reconnects with her land, her native culture, and origins.

In the 1976 Mexican performance in Oaxaca she set fire to her standing silhouette, drawn with the arms raised to accentuate the power of the flames; again, in *Untitled* (1977) in Old's Man Creek in Iowa she created the shape of her body into a volcano with gunpowder and set in on fire. The use of fire, a purifying element and metaphor of regeneration, was not only important in nature for the creation of a new, fertile ground, but in Santería's rituals was a way to gain the attention of the spirits to the site (Feldman, in Perlmutter, and Koppman, 1999, 111-112). With the *Siluetas Series*, the artist employed a sense of the spiritual which is immanent, earthly, deeply connected with the natural elements and at the same time with constant allusions to the rituals practiced in her country.

During the 1980s Mendieta returned to Cuba and created a series of earth sculptures — simply called *Rupestrian Sculptures* (1981) — that made clear reference to her homeland. They are indeed inspired by the pre-Columbian Goddess of the Taíno Indians, with the evocation of elements such as maternity and fecundity, as shown by the titles: *Our Menstruation, Old Mother Blood, Moon* (Gadon, 1989, 281-282).

This time the medium was not her body, but the works were carved into limestone, often representing the symbol of a woman, or images from other ancient myths. The sculptures she executed at Cueva de Aguila, in the limestone caves of Jaruco in Havana, bear the shape of her own body. The works were photographed by Bonnie Clearwater at the artist's request, who also worked on the photograph, but who died in 1985 without having the opportunity to see the work completed (Mendieta and Clearwater, 1993). The images refigure only the primal shape of a female body in an

almost abstract form but they convey strong and sexual elements from which strength is 'gained (...) from direct contact with her native earth and the myths of its ancient peoples', and they are 'both modern and primal in their ferociously female symbolism' as Lippard states (1983, 49). The site has relevance as it gave shelter to Cuban rebels and before that was sacred to the Goddess. As Blocker (1999, 47-48) has argued, the creation of these earth-body' sculptures represented the artist's wish to reconnect with her mother land in the form of the idea of the maternal earth, but in addition, the works illustrated her embrace of the wider idea to enter in contact with mother nature or 'the Great Goddess'.

Through her work, the artist engaged with religious ideas and cultures, using her body to create a spiritual connection with nature and the whole, as Gadon suggests:

She is neither re-creating nor reclaiming an ancient art; rather, through her very personal and unique creative process, she has given birth to a new iconography, and pluralistic art singularity appropriate to our time. Radical political, sacred, her work fuses mystery and history.

Lippard (1983, 49), rightly highlighted the theme of resurrection in Mendieta's art, considering it in a 'double sense – mythical/personal and historical/political'.

In the search for the spiritual through a deeper connection with art, Mendieta was trying to address her sense of alienation through being forced to leave Cuba, as well as the feeling of non-belonging as a foreigner in the US. She became involved in the

Feminist Movement, but nevertheless, couldn't fully identify with it, as most of those women came from the white middle-class society (Mendieta, cited in Brodsky, 1980, 118) and she also didn't want to be labelled as feminist (Blocker, 1998, 31-50).

As Phelan noted (2012, 23), 1980s America and Britain saw a conservative turn and 'the dominance of white women within feminism, especially within academic feminist theory, began to be denounced as its own form of conservatism'. Despite creating works against female violence such as *Rape Scene* (1978) and being part of the all-women A.I.R. Gallery (Blocker, 1998, 31-50), as well as being involved in several political and social issues regarding, for instance, colonialism and slavery (Blocker, 1999, 62) Mendieta's work refrains from categorisations. In particular, it is the 'double sense' (Lippard, 1983, 49) of her imagery and symbolism, with references to the social and political world but also to nature, to prehistorical cultures and Santería's rituals, which allows her work to express private and universal issues, and to set it above easy classifications.

Mendieta may have sought to reclaim the spiritual through her art, but in doing so she was also seeking to reclaim her origins, as she explained in relation to the *Siluetas Series* (quoted in Viso, 2004, 144):

The making of my silueta in nature keeps the transition between my homeland and my new home. It is a way of reclaiming my roots and becoming one with nature although the culture in which I live is part of me, my roots and cultural identity are a result of my Cuban heritage.

By using her body, opening towards nature, the Goddess and deity of her country, her ancient roots, as well as exploring social issues, Mendieta was trying to investigate a feeling of displacement and to reclaim her identity and sense of belonging.

Marina Abramović

Marina Abramović has been using her own body for more than 40 years as the object of her performances, subjecting it to an infinite form of physical and mental disciplines, blurring the limits between her personal life and art.

As Arthur Danto noted (Biesenbach, 2010, 34), Abramović's vocation has a strong religious component that, especially in her early performances, reveals strong elements related to the idea of immanent spirituality, manifested through the use of ancient knowledge and rituals as well as by interpreting the role of artist-shaman. Although this 'religious component' will show throughout the years a drive towards transcendence — particularly evident in her later performances, which often aim to overcome consciousness to reach a higher state of mind — for the purpose of this chapter, my investigation will focus on those works which maintain connection with the spirituality of immanence.

Spretnak (2014, 151-157) found that in Abramović, the spirituality of immanence is expressed through her desire to reconnect with bodily perception and the use of her

body as subject and material, by her capacity to perceive the sacred as a whole, and by the inspiration she draws from 'religious or philosophical traditions that evolved around a core awareness of immanence'.

The *Rhythm* series consists of a solo performance in which Abramović acted during the 1970s and had as its focus the idea of exploring the physical limits of her body, endurance, and control. Danto (Biesenbach, 2010, 31) pointed out that one of the reasons that Abramović created such radical performances, is the attraction she has always had towards exploring the boundaries between life and death. Especially during the 70s, she often found herself in the position where she might have actually died during her performances, as she admitted: 'I was always thinking that art was a kind of question between life and death, and some of my performances really included the possibility to dying, you know, during the piece; it could happen' (Abramović cited in Biesenbach, 2010, 31).

In *Rhythm 0* (1974), a six-hour performance held in Naples, the audience was invited to participate and was encouraged to use a choice of 72 objects on the artist's body. Some of them were objects of pleasure, others were potentially dangerous, such as a loaded gun. The audience started using the objects on the passive body of the artist, who after several hours had her clothes ripped off and her skin cut with a razor, reaching the point where a concerned member of the gallery staff decided to stop the action (Goldberg, 2001, 165 and Richards, 2010, 87-93).

Richards (2010, 14), drew an interesting parallel between the constant abuse the artist inflicts on herself and similar shamanistic ideas of yogic practice found in a Sanskrit text the *Pasupata Sutra* studied by McEvelley (2002, 225-226). Richards noted: 'The intention of this practice is that the practitioner should carry out inappropriate and potentially destructive behaviours that damage their self-image to such an extent that ego is all but affected'. It was believed that in this way the practitioner could free himself from social restraints and hence live happier (Richards, 2010, 14 and McEvelley, 2002, 226). In this way the shaman was able to help the whole community, 'becoming the legitimate focus of affliction, absorbing and removing social detritus' (Richards, 2010, 15). According to Arya (2009, 32), by turning herself into an object, Abramović 'could be regarded as the sacrificial victim who purges the wrongs of the community'. With *Rhythm 0*, Abramović, as many female body artists in those years, uses her body in ritualistic and spiritual acts to challenge the female objectification and socio-political construction related to sexuality, identity, and community (Arya, 2014, 5).

Renzi (2013, 120) expressed unease at the fact that Abramović allowed herself to be valued as an object when many a feminist theorist 'has worked to free from a condemnation to 'object' status'. To passively surrender and renounce to her subjective state was a conscious choice for the artist (Phelan, 2004, 572), nevertheless, since it was her own body the medium, this 'highlights (...) the performance's impossibility: that of being both an object without subject hood and a subject who experiences (...) pain and bodily harm' (Renzi, 2013, 133).

Considering the ‘moment of breach’ in which the performance was stopped because it could have ended in tragedy, it is obvious to think that the ‘object’ of the performance was at that point recognised as a person, hence the concern towards the artist’s life.

Contrasting this vision, Renzi (2013, 124) claimed that ‘the performance was halted, not because Abramović was seen as a life, but because she was (...) valued enough to save from destruction, as *art*’. This expands the possibility of the performance as the audience, not interested in Abramović as a human being, reacting to preserve the aesthetic value of the performance as well as against the ‘gender oppression, and female commodification’ (Renzi, 2013, 136).

In *Rhythm 0*, the desire to reconnect with bodily perceptions and to question social conventions were acted through a ritualistic ceremony in which rational patterns are challenged to ‘break with conventional understanding’, as the artist declared (cited in Morley, 2010, 212).

Abramović’s exploration of pain and bodily endurance continued when, in 1976, she met the West German artist Ulay (Uwe E. Laysiepen) with whom she established a twelve-year collaboration. The themes they worked on were focused on their cultural identity, their ego and their interest in exploring different philosophies and cultures to expand the possibilities of their body and mind.

In those years, they blended themselves one into each other completely, developing a deep relationship based on unconditional trust. (Westcott, 2014). They experimented for a period of time in the desert with Australian Aboriginals, exploring their ritual

practices, their ability to use different parts of their brain from Western people, their intimate connection with the land, their ancestors and their surroundings. Abramović was extremely fascinated by the ability of those people 'of being 'at one' with the world on a profound level' (Abramović cited in Richards, 2010, 46) during the rituals.

Nightsea Crossing is one of the major works Abramović and Ulay performed together. It was performed for 5 years (1981 – 1986) in several cities such as Amsterdam, Cologne, Helsinki, Lisbon, Sydney, Ushimado, San Paulo. It usually lasted 7/8 hours where the couple stayed motionless, in silence, sitting on a table, gazing at each other. They fasted for 24 hours. Once they reached a total of 90 hours spent immobile in front of the public, the project came to an end (Biesenbach and Iles and Abramović, 2008 and McEvelley, 2012). *Nightsea Crossing* is described by Abramović as a performance about 'presence and being present' to the point that 'material and immaterial (...) time and timeless' are one (Peyton-Jones, Obrist, and O'Brien, 2014, 28).

The performance required considerable endurance, and McEvelley (1998, 22) has argued that the way the artist was able to perform a work such *Night Sea Crossing* depends on the self-discipline she has gained during the years by studying Asian philosophies, rituals, mythology and travelling around the globe. She was influenced by Tibetan Buddhism and by shamanic practices from different cultures, which allowed her to develop an association between art and religion. As McEvelley observed: 'Abramović describes experiences of enfolding energy, energy fields surrounding her

and the audience' which, because of her desire to expand her energy towards the people around, makes the action 'like a shamanic performance'.

The performance gives insights into the perception of time. For Richards (2010, 97), considering the West, where life is ruled by a: 'rigid code of timetabling and specific duration-driven imperatives', time is just mainly seen under the lens of the capitalised society 'where 'time equals money'. By expanding and almost concealing time, *Nightsea Crossing* allows both performers and the audience to focus on the moment, and to reconsider the constraints of the Western notion of time.

Through the exploration of body and mind, *Nightsea Crossing* exemplifies the difficulty to define the limits of the spirituality of immanence. It makes clear the connections existing with transcendence, evoked by the artists in the way they disciplined their mind to reach a higher state of consciousness. Even so, this can still be seen as a consequence of the immanence, as the medium is still the body. The performance opens to a vision that considers mind and body as part of a whole, an idea which can be applied in regard to the spiritual, where immanence and transcendence meet.

In the 80s Abramović broke from her previous work and started experimenting with installations, shifting her attention towards the audience. She created spaces mostly occupied by mineral stones of various kinds, where the audience is allowed to become an active participant. Often instructions were provided. Materials such as copper, iron, wood, and minerals were used as Abramović (Marina Abramović) believes each

material naturally owns a particular energy which can be transmitted to people to reach a higher level of consciousness. They were intended to enable the audience to pass from a state of consciousness to another (Richards, 2010, 54), as well as to receive thoughts and energy from her, as by telepathy (Marina Abramović). She has called these 'Transitory Objects' because of their ephemeral status, since they were likely to be destroyed after use (Richards, 2010, 54). If compared to previous works, Abramović's attitude can be read as a transition from the role of the artist to the role of the teacher or guide who wants to help her audience to 'see through' and open their mind.

After a journey to Brazil in the 80s where she explored mines and came into contact with popular legends, Abramović started to believe in the magical power of crystals. Often distancing herself from the New Age's aura these materials can remind us of, she instead insisted on the importance of the individual participation and interaction with the objects. (Richards, 2010, 55). According to Richards, the 'Transitory Objects' allow people to reconnect with the natural world in a society where there is no time to stop and where 'contemporary existence (...) reads inactivity as boredom or laziness' whereas the artist 'embrace[s] 'boredom' as a necessary stage through which you must pass in order to become creative' (Richards, 2010, 56). The magic powers attributed to the minerals can be related to alchemy and its spiritual connotations. As Eliade noted (1964, 107), alchemy is a 'spiritual technique and soteriology' which aims to purify not only the material but also the person and their surroundings.

The 'Transitory Objects', working as a vehicle for the spiritual in relation to nature, are less compelling compared with the artist's performances. This is mainly because the rituality requested of the audience implies a certain mind set and trust only some would allow without a sense of inadequacy. As Lippard (1983, 160) pointed out 'when the ritual doesn't work, it becomes an empty, self-conscious act', which is the risk run with 'Transitory Objects'.

The desire to reconnect with bodily perceptions, to break with artistic and social conventions, led Abramović to experiment with the idea of an embodiment which, as Turner (1996, XIII) explained, means 'making and doing the work of bodies — of becoming a body in a social space'. The body in the social space interrogates not only cultural, social, and philosophical questions, but also its own status to understand what lies beneath. In the case of Abramović, the spiritual becomes necessary to this exploration to search for new ways to push social boundaries and conventions, to investigate human sensations and cultural identities.

The work of these three artists exhibits a specific concern with a spirituality of immanence in contemporary art, understood as a kind of bonding with nature. I hope I have demonstrated how the spiritual, often inspired by ancient cultures, philosophies, and religions, in order to find a voice in art, needs a particular social or personal background. The three artists examined here indeed share a deep sense of alienation or displacement both caused by traumatic events or by contemporary society. They also question their identity and sense of belonging, creating an art in which spirituality is manifested through the physical world, nature and their body.

By reconnecting with what has been forgotten or neglected about art from the past and reinterpreting ancient beliefs and different cultures through the spirituality of immanence, these artists are also trying to discover new functions for art. As Lippard (1983, 3-6) suggested, this happens especially when art wants to overcome 'decoration or status symbol' and have a social impact. This doesn't necessarily mean believing in pagan Goddess or esoteric rituals. It doesn't even mean that is always achievable or coherent, as some works here have demonstrated. It does mean seeing art in its wholeness, revitalise consciousness, and trying to make sense of the present by using ancient knowledge.

The idea of 'Eastern Spirituality'

Introduction

This chapter explores the art of the Indian-born artist Anish Kapoor and the ways it engages with ideas of 'Eastern spirituality'.

Since Kapoor was educated in Britain and established himself in the context of the British art world of the 1970s and 1980s and works mainly for a Western audience, his embracing his Indian heritage merits attention in terms of the wider Orientalising fascination of British audiences with Indian and 'Eastern' cultures. From an early stage of his career, Kapoor's work has been viewed under the lens of his Indian background, with many critics and intellectuals such as Thomas McEvilley, Homi Bhabha, Germano Celant and Partha Mitter. For this reason, I am going to examine the way his work explores notions of 'Eastern spirituality,' the extent to which this aspect of his work mirrors old Orientalist stereotypes or whether it diverges from them. And, if it is different, to consider *how* it differs.

The way that Europeans viewed Islamic and other Asian cultures has been transformed by Said (1978), who pointed out the extent to which their image was shaped by the impact of European colonialism and argued that the difference between

West and East is actually the expression of the power of the first over the latter. This has left a legacy up to the present and, arguably, Kapoor's work is not free of this legacy.

The term 'Orientalism' is used to describe the way Islamic and Asian cultures were categorised in the nineteenth centuries by intelligible and generalised ideas with the aim of making accessible to the British and French Empires the complexity of the many occupied territories, with their huge variety of cultures, histories and political constitutions. Equally importantly, it also refers to the way that such generalised ideas served to enhance the exercise of political power over those countries during the period of European colonialism (Said, 1978, 1-28; Turner, 1994, 21-23). The fascination with the supposedly 'spiritual' nature of 'oriental' cultures was intimately connected with this larger situation.

Considering this, concepts of 'Eastern spirituality' or mysticism have easily fallen into stereotypes or underestimated the various problems this topic may bring. In the light of the 21st century, where globalisation and multiculturalism are concepts of common knowledge, it is striking that orientalising can still be perceived in many aspects of the Western understanding of Asian cultures. In art, clichés in the presentation and representation of 'Eastern' cultures have a long history linked to European colonialism (MacKenzie, 1995). For instance, this is recognisable in the work of painters such as the British David Wilkie (1785-1841), or the French Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) with their representation of genre scenes embedded in an idealised and stereotyped imagination of the Orient (Nochlin, 1989).

Today, the art of the Iranian Shirazeh Houshiary (1955) and Shirin Neshat (1957) may work as example of art that have been concerned with this issue. Both emigrated from Iran and now live and work respectively in London and New York City. Their art is created for a Western public, and even if exploring different subject matters — spiritual for Houshiary and political for Neshat — it is based on a choice of ideas, as well as formal and pictorial solutions, deeply inspired by Iran. Although by exploiting the interest of Western audiences in the ‘exotic’ culture of their homeland, Houshiary and Neshat share similarities with Kapoor, in this chapter I am going to focus in just one artist.

Another example, this time coming from Asia, would be the Sri Lankan Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947). The art historian and philosopher was an important critic of colonialism, a pioneer in interpreting and divulging Indian art, history, philosophy, and spirituality to the West as a way of colonial resistance. Coomaraswamy formulated a complex and idealised theory of traditional Indian art, identity, and culture, based on the spirituality of its aesthetic tradition, which while emphasizing its exceptionality, embraced at the same time the universal in art (Coomaraswamy, 2011; Deshpande, 2015). In this regard he stated that his aim was ‘to serve not merely India but Humanity and to be as absolutely universal as possible’ (Moore and Coomaraswamy, 1988, 326). He also stressed the spiritual and anthropocentric Indian philosophy in contrast with the modern and empirical European vision of the world (Deshpande, 2015, 11). Ironically, however, his notion of India as being more spiritual than Europe itself encapsulated those kinds of clichés usually put forward by Europeans. The case of Coomaraswamy exemplifies how having a wide knowledge and

the best of intentions doesn't prevent you from falling into the same stereotypes and set of ideas.

It is against this background that I now explore some works of Anish Kapoor to see his possible engagement with Orientalist issues, for his art investigates the spiritual through the idea of the void and the sublime often with evident relation to his Indian identity, philosophy, and culture.

Anish Kapoor

Kapoor has been living in Britain since the early 1970s and since then he has represented the country's artistic scene, leading him, in 1990 to win the Turner prize at the Venice Biennale (Furlong, 1990). This shows a 'shift in exhibition politics' as Balaram (2016) notes, specifically demonstrated by the 1989 exhibition *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* curated by Rasheed Araeen, the first exhibition of British African, Caribbean and Asian modernist works. The exhibition catalogue criticised the fact that Black and Asian artists passed unnoticed throughout British modernism, as a result of British racial discrimination (Araeen, 1989; Brett, 1989, 111). As Fisher (Tate, 2009) noted, the exhibition contributed 'to the erosion of ethnic barriers in the art establishment and its role in opening up a cosmopolitan perspective on British diasporan art'. Ironically, Kapoor declined to participate to *The Other Story* exhibition, symptomatic as Ratnam suggested (1999, 153-160), of the

artist's desire to 'play down any connection between his cultural identity and the work he produced'.

As Balaram (2016) reports, the question of identity in Kapoor's art has been the object of several analyses as 'critics constantly negotiated the artist's position between East and West'. McEvilley (1990, 43-51) found connections with religions such as Judaism, Hinduism and Eastern philosophies, as well as metaphysics and psychoanalysis; again, with minimalism, modernism, and with Yves Klein because of the latter's interest in the notion of the void. However, the problem with this is that McEvilley puts Kapoor's art into such a large spectrum that it becomes almost impossible to contextualise or locate him (Balaram, 2016), an approach that allows a kind of disengagement from the political debate regarding both the artist's cultural identity and the Indian references in his work. Kapoor himself finds the question of nationality restrictive as he declares: 'I don't see myself as an Indian artist; neither do I see myself as a British artist. I am an artist who works in Britain. The work has to be looked at from as wide a base as possible' (Allthorpe-Guyton, 1990, 48). This attitude can be seen as a way of eluding the base of the issue, especially considering Kapoor's art very much relies on his Indian background.

If on the one hand it is understandable why he wishes to avoid being drawn into such issues, on the other, his own work actually invites it.

1000 Names, a series of pigment pieces Kapoor created between 1979 and 1985 exemplifies the artist's use of forms and colours. The installation, consisting of geometric forms made of wood, cement, polystyrene, and pigment placed on the

ground or on the wall, is sometimes presented as a single sculpture, at other times as a group (Celant, 1996).

Kapoor used raw pigment of the primary colours such as crimson, cobalt blue, yellow ochre and black and white. The pigments were expanded over the sculptures' edges, as he described them: 'the objects appear to be partially submerged, like icebergs. That seems to fit the idea of something being partially there' (Kapoor, 1989-90, quoted in Celant, 1996, xiii). This leads to an idea of objects that are uncertain, which is the main purpose of the artist: to create objects where 'what you see may be only part of something much larger' (Baume, 22, 2008). This aspect puts the objects into a dimension defined by Celant (1996, xiii) in between the 'here and there, the known and unknown' showing their physical as well as their spiritual nature.

These visually striking, dense forms put into doubt not only their physical nature but their very status as objects. Because of the use of the vivid pigments and the blurred edges, they are both powerful and fragile, as if they were randomly placed or autonomously appeared, as self-made, 'self-sufficient objects' (Celant, 1996, xii). The title *1000 Names*, was given by Kapoor when he realised that while he was making the pigment sculptures it was as if the pieces were making themselves 'out of each other' (Celant, 1996, xii), implying the idea of the multitude of objects in the world, the indefinable space they occupy, where *1000 Names* is only a fraction of these objects in a fraction of space, hence symbolising an infinite number, and the universe (Kapoor, quoted in Celant, 1996, xii). This not only obliterates the presence of the artist but in what Celant recognised as Kapoor's 'attempts (...) to decipher the mystery of *elsewhere*'

lies the mystical aspect of his work, which alludes to the idea of a spiritual which permeates everything.

In this 'constellation' of free objects spread on the ground and on the walls, Celant (1996, xiii) saw a work of art 'Full of conscious and unconscious vitality' which 'claims to be infinite', and where 'opposites and complementaries, light and dark, are reconciled, not only through colour-light but through the passage between upper and lower, outer and inner, surface and subterranean'. For Celant, the sculptures symbolised the space as part of the flux, of the whole cosmos. In the same way, Kapoor considered the pigment pieces in relation to the sky, like ancient astronomical sites such as Stonehenge 'that do one of the very fundamental things that sculpture can do outside, which is to express the relationship between things that are properly on the ground to something cosmic' (Hilty and Rose, 2010).

Even if *1000 Names* seems to allude to a spiritual domain which is universal, it contains strong references to the Hindu religion and Indian symbolic use of pure pigments. Kapoor, in fact, landed on the choice of the colours and the idea behind *1000 Names* in 1979 after he returned from India where he had seen raw pigments (Celant, 1996, XX). Here not only he found the earthly materiality of primary colours, but he also felt they helped him to regain contact with the spiritual and philosophical traditions that permeate many aspects of the culture of his homeland.

As Mitter (2008, 111) observed, in placing the sculpture throughout the space, Kapoor played with the idea of confusing the distinction between the works and the

architecture. In this he was profoundly impressed by the 18th-century Indian observatory Jantar Mantar, near New Delhi, a unique site built by the Maharaja Jal Singh II of Jaipur, and composed of different geometrical forms that were used as astronomical tools (Ellias, 2005, 6, cited in Baume et al., 2008, 111). This discovery allowed Kapoor to create physical objects from symbols, the meaning of which expands beyond pure formal representation. This symbology is evident in *1000 Names* in some triangular-like sculptures which also recall geometrical architectonic monuments such as the Buddhist stupa (Mitter, 2008, 111). Mitter found references to Diana of Ephesus, the multiple breasted deity related to the feminine. This is evident, for instance, in some of the forms the sculptures take, such as the groups of round-shaped 'mountains' ones. Again, the title of the work alludes to the Hindu deity of the thousand names Vishnu (Mitter, 2008, 112), implying the many forms the divine can take in the worldly appearance. An example of this symbology and the spiritual qualities of colours is provided by *To Reflect an Intimate Part of the Red* (1981), consisting of five geometrical sculptures placed on the ground, four red and a yellow in the centre.

Colours have for Kapoor an 'emotional place', and red plays a fundamental role in his art as it connects with 'creative energy', with the earth and blood (Cork, 1987, 7). On his relationship with the colour, Kapoor explained: 'Maybe red is a very Indian colour, maybe is one of those things that I grew up with and recognise at some other level' (Tusa, 2003). This statement underlines the artist's use of symbolic references when employing colours in his works. Red has a cultural importance in India, as Mitter (2008, 112) explained: 'Hindu shrines are often washed with red dye in celebration of

Devi, Kālī or Durga, manifestations of the Great Goddess who is associated with blood sacrifice and bodily fluids'. Kali is worshipped in India as the Divine Mother and Mother of Universe and is seen as a destructive force as well as a protector and liberator (Hawley and Wulff, 1996, 152). Livingstone (1983, 23) claimed that Kapoor sees [Kālī] as 'his' goddess. On Kali, the artist stated: 'My sense of her is that she is completely benign, yet full of destruction. She is the great mother, the creator, the place of all creations, yet potentially destroyer of everything' (Livingstone, 1983, 23). Kapoor's fascination with Kālī is expressed in 1982 *Red in the Centre* (Livingstone, 1983, 23) made of mixed media, earth and red pigment consisting of five sculptures: four on the ground and one installed on the wall. The ones on the ground, showing the bounded earth colour of which they are made, are a pair of horns, an agglomeration of breast-like pointed shapes, a formless hill which is covered with red pigment, and a drop shaped sculpture with a central opening which clearly alludes to female genitalia. The one on the wall represents a tongue, or a flame, in red pigment. This has a strong allusion to the iconography of Kālī, as she is often represented showing her tongue (Livingstone, 1983). Livingstone (1983, 25) considered the sculptures to be, 'aggressive and charged (...) fecund and destructive'. They also allude to destructive and creative forces, ideas such as death and birth, the archetype of the mother, and because of the material they are made for, with the earth. With *Red in the Centre* Kapoor fluctuates again from interlacing within specific myths an idea of the spiritual which expands towards the universal.

Kapoor explained the employment of myths saying that 'what is important is not looking at or reading myths (...) but living them, seeing connection with myths after

the fact, so that one enters into those psychological states and ways of being that have made those myths' (Livingstone, 1983, 25).

Reconnecting with India was for Kapoor the input he needed for his art, inaugurating a creative process that is still ongoing. As he noted: 'I wish to make sculpture about belief, or about passion, about experience that is outside of material concern' (1982, cited in Celant, 1996, xx). This statement demonstrates Kapoor's intent about his art, which regards connecting with the spiritual. Although not using the same stereotyped ideas common to Orientalist tropes of the past, as shown in *1000 Names*, Kapoor's adoption of the spiritual can be seen as relying on stereotypical ideas of Indian spirituality and symbolism.

These are manifested through the allusion to Indian deities and architectures, or in the very simple notion that 'red is an Indian colour'. Kapoor refuses to have his art labelled as Indian (Allthorpe-Guyton, 1990, cited in Balaram, 2016), yet he identifies the pigment pieces as 'Indian' (Tusa, 2003), and he does not talk about the spiritual tradition of India and the allusions to his homeland which are evident in his work. For Kapoor, the main problem in regard to his ethnicity and the Indian influence in his art, in particular the pigment pieces, is the fact that 'they were referred to as exotic. The exotic is a tag that seems akin to the touristic as if one was viewing the work from the outside. My job was to get a view from the inside', as the artist lamented in his conversation with John Tusa (2003). Undoubtedly, the very notion of the exotic often underlines negative connotations, and if Western religion and philosophies are understood seriously, the same validity and respect is not often applied in relation to India, or Asian cultures (Thirukode, 2008).

As this discussion suggests, Kapoor is critical when it comes to put labels on the Indian influences in his work. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, his art does not escape reliance on stereotypes, something that may be down to the fact that the context he works in and his audience are mainly European and American. In other words, it is a very selective Indianness that is being presented.

With the void pieces, Kapoor explored the concept of emptiness. In these works, he didn't need light or ephemeral substances; instead, he switched from the use of pigment to a heavy, solid material like stone. The installation *Void Field* (1990), was presented at the 1990 Biennale of Venice where the artist represented Britain. It consists of sixteen large square blocks of sandstone placed on the floor of a metre circa, each of them having a dark internal space made by black pigment symbolising a threshold, or the infinity. Celant (1996, XXXI) considered the work as an 'urban aggregate (...) a solid architecture through whose openings there shines a celestial light, luminous and mysterious', an image which propends from the earth to the sky and to the infinite, 'the earth containing the sky', as the artist commented (quoted in Celant, 1996, XXXI).

In many of Kapoor's works, darkness serves as a metaphor for the void. Deep colours possess the inherent virtue of inspiring spiritual feelings, conveying mysterious and uncanny properties. Baume (2008, 24) wrote that Kapoor's work alludes to 'what is not seen, what is implied, or what is seen as yet contradicted by our everyday knowledge of the world'.

Kapoor's notion of the void can be read through the Zen Buddhist idea of emptiness. It relates to the Buddhist understanding of the very nature of reality, suggesting what is usually perceived as physical, permanent and independent, that has no self, and that is empty (Suzuki, 1996). In Buddhism, emptiness, *shunyata*, deriving from the Sanskrit *shvi*, is an abstraction: Andrew Skilton (1997) describes it as what is 'ultimately true, and therefore which is ultimately knowable about things. It is not a 'thing' in itself, still less a 'thing' which is supposed to have (...) ultimate existence. It has no ontological status'. The void is not simply the empty part of the object, its negative space or the container; this is only related to its material state. It is also a force that releases energy, it opens access to a third dimension which is positive but still enigmatic. Expanding the potential space, the void negates the duality of emptiness and fullness, becoming a paradox and a portal where the aesthetic experience occurs (Danto, et al, 2004, 34-35).

This void, the third dimension or in-between space, in Kapoor's work has been seen in social and political context when the *Void Field* was presented at the 1990 Venice Biennale along with *Madonna* (1989-90), *The Healing of St Thomas* (1989) and *A Wing at the Heart of Things* (1990).

Niru Ratnam (2001, 90-96) for instance, suggested that *Void Field* is an allusion to the tragedy of British colonisation. To support this idea, he used Edward M. Forster's *Passage to India* (1924), which was also quoted in relation to *Void Field* by Tazzi (1992, 20) in the catalogue of Kapoor's San Diego exhibition. Tazzi reported a passage from

the novel that recounted the feeling of displacement and confusion perceived by the characters when entering the fictional Indian Marabar Caves (based on the Barabar Caves in Bihar, India):

An entrance was necessary, so mankind made one. But elsewhere, deeper in the granite, are there certain chambers that have no entrances? Chambers never unsealed since the arrival of the gods? Local report declares that these exceeded in number those that can be visited, as the dead exceeded the living — four hundred of them four thousand or million. Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil (Forster, 2005, 117).

In this encounter, the caves are the symbol of the ancient culture of India and, by extension, of the unknown and the void. This idea was also confirmed by Kapoor when pointing out ‘that E.M. Forster uses caves as a metaphor for that dark, mysterious interior of India’ (Hilty and Rose, 2010).

By comparing the experience inside the Marabar Caves and *Void Field*, Niru (2001, 95) wrote that Kapoor’s regular themes in relation to his homeland trace the same rhetoric of ‘English India, bringing a framework of reception that Kapoor might not have wanted, but found difficult to avoid’. An example of this is the artist’s statement about gender when talking about his work *Madonna* at the Venice Biennale in 1990. The

reception of the work created a comparison between the Mother of God and the goddess Kālī, the latter perceived mainly for her sexual and dangerous powers (McEvelley, 1990, 22-51). Kapoor talked of the 'implicit misogyny (...) in European thought (...) afraid of women, afraid of their power, while Indian thought not only acknowledges the feminine but even personifies the terrible feminine, as Kālī' (Meer, 1990, 93). With this claim clearly Kapoor didn't escape stereotypes.

The feminine is a recurrent theme employed by the artist shown in works such as *When I Am Pregnant* (1992), a white protrusion swelling from the wall. Again, on his idea of the feminine Kapoor said: 'I feel that creativity itself is feminine. I think this is also very Eastern. One can speak of Western tradition, certainly in modern art, being basically phallic. Western sculpture is a phallic art. My work seems to be the opposite' (Meer, 1980-1990, 42). This idea of inverting the Western-centred cultural vision of creativity encapsulates itself as an Orientalist stereotype which easily appeals to a Western audience.

In this respect, studies on Orientalism and gender such as Reina Lewis's *Gender Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (1996) offer interesting insights. Lewis inquired on the extent of European women artists' contribution to imperial culture, focusing on analysis of the work of the French Orientalist painter Henriette Browne (1829-1901) and on the Orientalised illustration of Jews in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. Contrasting with Said's claim (1978, 208) that 'Orientalism was an exclusively male province,' Lewis (1996, 2) argued that women worked as 'cultural agents' in the constitution of Orientalism, exploring in particular how they 'were positioned simultaneously within differences of imperialism, gender, class and (...) in relation to

discourses of creativity'. With her arguments, Lewis proved the inadequacy of fixed imagery and ideas about gender and Orientalism, highlighting instead the diverse possibilities this discourse can bring when questioning stereotypes such as East/West, men/women.

Probably one of Kapoor's works where the idea of being merged with the object, and therefore with the void, finds its best expression is *Marsyas* (2002). The enormous construction, 492 feet in length, 115 feet high and 75 feet in width, was made of red crimson PVC and was installed in the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London. Here Kapoor played with the illusion of an extended space, changing its shape based on the perspective, creating a place where the notion of the infinite is a protagonist, since the construction is not visible in its entirety from any point of the Turbine Hall: 'The overall idea that comes across is the dissolution of the work's material form', explained Mitter (2008, 116). Using complex mathematical models to adapt the idea to space, *Marsyas* consisted of a red PVC membrane stretched out to join three steel rings, each positioned in a different area of the Hall. This creates a 'trumpet-like form through which an aria may travel as fluently as the howl of a flayed satyr' (Adajania, 2011). In Greek mythology, Marsyas was the satyr who, challenging Apollo on playing the flute, lost his life, flayed alive by the god.

Myth is again a source of inspiration for Kapoor and now it takes the shape of an infinite structure implying connections with the universe as well as the cavities of the human body, allowing the audience a noumenal experience (Adajania, 2011). The skin-like sculpture is attractive and yet fearsome, both for its shape and dimension and for

the vibrant shiny red which metaphorically recalls human skin, and the blood. It is fluid yet structural. The cavities of the structure allude to the void and to the 'apertures of the human body, they also embody that velvet darkness at the deepest level of human consciousness' as Adajania (2011) asserted.

The huge scale of *Marsyas* was compared by Mitter (2008, 117) to Indian sacred buildings such as the Kailasa Temple to Shiva at Ellora. This not because of any real resemblance between the temple and the sculpture, but rather because they share an 'overwhelming monumentality' which is given by the way the structures function in the space rather than by the actual size.

Adajania (2011) offered a particular reading of *Marsyas*, interpreting the work as a triumph of Kapoor's postcolonial subjectivity, in which his success lies in the fact that he challenges 'the accumulated ascendancy of [the British] empire' and also 'in its transcendence of default assumptions about postcolonialism by shifting into a robustly transcultural register'. Adajania also argued that postcolonialism can be seen as a way to reclaim one's cultural identity from the coloniser in a way that can end up in the 'promotion of a defensive self-characterisation that can trap the postcolonial self in a narrow, supposedly authentic regionality'. This kind of restrictive vision wouldn't happen with Kapoor, she said, because his 'transcultural approach' allows him to confidently approach and combine elements coming from different cultures, creating 'narrative drawn from the global archive'.

This transcultural vision accepts a notion of an identity which is fluid and hybrid. Postcolonial texts such as 'The Other Question' (1983) by Bhabha for instance, challenged Said's Orientalism, considering its ambivalence in the consideration of the 'other' and creation of stereotypes. Bhabha (1998, 72) believes migrants like Kapoor (and himself) blur the boundaries of national identity, creating a 'doubleness of the self' and most importantly, cultural hybridity which opens up new spheres of meaning. Of Kapoor Bhabha (1999, 18) wrote:

Looking back on ten years of writing about his work, you find this all the time. If he uses blue pigment, first there is a reference to Yves Klein; a paragraph later there is somehow a Lord Krishna reference; another paragraph later and you're having an experience with the Elephant Kings of Bombay. The references continually move in that direction, as if the work does not signify as a sign itself. The work of diasporic artists must be authenticated through some sort of biographical/cultural reference.

By criticising those who identified such references in Kapoor's work, Bhabha wants to highlight how some of them might have been applied to Kapoor with imprudence, without fully considering his personal history. This also means his art should be seen in more universal terms, or with a different outlook rather than the one linked to his nationality. Undoubtedly Bhabha is right when saying that such connections need authentication, but even so, as this chapter has shown, it would be difficult to negate them, especially considering sometimes they come directly from the artist.

The same idea of fluidity is carried out by Salman Rushdie (2006), who claimed the artist's work is not bound to the limitation of his national identity. This means that it might be said for instance that Kapoor's art is neither British nor Indian, but embraces a message of universality, as the artist often says.

Mitter (2008, 30) wrote that 'the complexity' of Kapoor's work 'may well be an unintended effect of the colonial legacy of the last two centuries, which created a culture of multiple heritage,' giving him the privilege to access to a culture that hegemonic capitalist countries couldn't have.

I agree with these theories only partially. Even if we accept Kapoor's resistance to having a fixed national identity, the fluidity behind postmodern identity (Bauman, 2000) as well as the universal spirituality his art is able to communicate, his rhetoric can sometimes easily connected with a vague, stereotypical idea of Indian spirituality, and that certain works support an idea of India which is a distinctly Orientalising idea of it.

Sublimity and Transcendence

Introduction

In this chapter I trace the notion of the sublime as a form of secular spirituality in contemporary art.

Although the sublime has been relevant in much contemporary art, I focus on James Turrell and Olafur Eliasson, probably amongst the most prominent representatives of this genre, who have engaged with the sublime to explore the idea of a secular experience of transcendence. I examine how, by investigating the human relationship with nature, light and technology, Turrell and Eliasson express sublimity in different ways, respectively showing its modern and postmodern features.

Before examining their work in detail, I am first going to introduce the notion of the sublime and its revaluation and revival in culture and art.

The spiritual in art has historically been mediated by religion, and in contemporary art, the concept of secular spirituality can be applied to that kind of art that since modernism has been exploring spiritual concerns without addressing obvious religious themes. The sublime represents perhaps the 'most influential aesthetic ideal' (Morgan, 2009, 37) through which the spiritual has appeared in art, and because of its recurring non-religious interest in the transcendent, it has become an interesting object of

analysis to explore those kinds of feelings once belonged to religion. In particular, the experience of the sublime through art creates a moment of deep insight, serving as a point of spiritual awakening that can expand our comprehension in relation to both the self and society.

For the context of this chapter, the path followed by Robert Rosenblum who traced connections of the aesthetics of the sublime in the 'Northern Romantic Tradition' (1978) from the nineteenth century to the Abstract Expressionists, as well as the studies about postmodernism and the sublime in visual practice provided by French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1982; 1984) offer a relevant background. Through their ideas, it is possible to identify the different aspects the sublime takes in art, especially in regard to its modern and postmodern identity.

Regardless of its contemporary interpretations, the origin of the sublime can be tracked back to the Greek treatise *Peri hypsous* (*On the Sublime*), elaborated between the first and the third century B.C. and attributed to the author 'Pseudo-Longinus'. It literally means 'elevated' or 'lofty' and is described as a combination of wonder and astonishment as well as ecstasy caused by the ability of rhetoric used in poems and prose (Havell and Lang, 1980; Doran, 2015).

It is only in the eighteenth century with Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757-1759), that the concept started playing a major role in aesthetic theory (Doran, 2015, 141). In the *Enquiry*,

Burke (2014, II, I-II) wrote that some experiences, especially when in relation to the vastness and mystery of nature, are sources of extreme feelings such as fear and terror, but at the same time they strengthen and illuminate the self, mixing delight and horror, as the ultimate state of awareness to be alive. By highlighting the psychological aspect of the sublime on the mind, the sublime becomes a precious tool of self-preservation against the ordinary and the boredom of the soul (Costelloe, 2012). Yet despite the importance of Burke's theory, the central figure in the theorisation of the sublime has been Immanuel Kant, who, with the *Critique of the Judgment* (1790), explored the notion in relation to the limits of human imagination and how the reason reacts in front of those limits, as he explained:

The feeling of the sublime is (...) at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law (2007, 88).

Kant's analysis is therefore about the consequences of the sublime. Specifically, it denotes the limits of the human imagination, that moment when the ability to *visualise* reaches its limit when faced with something it can't comprehend in its totality, such as the vastness and complexity of nature and space (Costelloe, 2012, 103-104). It is a feeling that combines displeasure coming from our inability to imagine the infinity, as well as pleasure because of our ability to comprehend it in purely

theoretical terms. It is based on an awareness of a lack, and the realisation of our limits transforms the feeling of displeasure into pleasure, which is the reason why Kant calls this pleasure 'indirect' and 'negative' (2007, 76). Kant's idea of the sublime is an emotion he described as 'formless' and 'unbounded' which poses a high level of indeterminacy, impossible to fully comprehend or to determinate its limits (2007, 78, 104).

In art, the sublime was explored in the nineteenth century by the Romantic painters for whom nature becomes the primary source of the spiritual experience. *Monk by the Sea* (1808 – 10) by German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774 – 1840) represents a notable example. It shows a single figure standing on a dune assorted in the contemplation of a turbulent and dark sea and where the immensity of the natural elements are elevated in comparison with the human presence. In this way, Romantics translate sacred ideas through nature by expressing a sublime which tends towards the absolute or the divine (Rosenblum, 1978, 14).

In *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976), Thomas Weiskel argued that the reasons behind the Romantic sublime are related to the anxiety towards modernity and its development, which finds the individual separated from nature and to a state of inner emptiness as well passivity towards the reality.

The relation to nature, the search for transcendence, along with the investigation of the self and the creation of new symbols, is a heritage that during the decades was

taken up by many artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Edward Munch, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian. Robert Rosenblum went even further with this idea of continuity arguing that there is a common theme that links the Romantic Northern tradition with the American Abstract Expressionism.

In *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*. Rosenblum (1978, 7-8) argued that there is an 'alternative reading of the history of modern art which might well supplement the orthodox one that has as its almost exclusive locus Paris'. Accordingly, the tradition of the Northern landscape paintings of artists such as Friedrich never died but found other forms of expression in the American Abstract Expressionist painters: Mark Rothko, Clifford Still, Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman, all of whom were concerned with expressing glimpses of the divine, with the overwhelming feeling of transcendence and mystery in their works, evoking a deep sense of the sublime. Formal similarities between the Romantics and the Abstract Expressionists can be traced in works such as *Green on Blue* (1956) by Rothko which resembles the abstract representation of Friedrich's landscapes (Rosenblum, 1978, 10-12). The 'Romantic dilemma' of communicating 'a sense of the supernatural without recourse to inherited religious imaginary' (Rosenblum, 1978, 215-216) is especially significant in the Rothko Chapel (1971), a non-denominational chapel containing on its wall fourteen black-toned paintings. The idea behind the chapel is to convey a universally spiritual experience without addressing any specific religion, 'a dream originated with the Romantics', Rosenblum (1978, 216) explained. Through sublimity, Abstract Expressionists — like the Romantics — provided a modern and universal spiritual experience free from the tradition of religion.

Through his theory, Rosenblum didn't explain the possible reasons behind this interest and continuity in the sublime. According to Robert Hughes (1997, 446-447), the search for significance in the art of the Abstract Expressionists was a reaction to the emptiness of American values and a deep sense of disillusion towards the established society.

Nevertheless, the reasons for pursuing sublimity in art are addressed directly by Barnett Newman in the 1948 article 'The Sublime is Now'. He claimed that European artists are not able to achieve the sublime because of their dependence on the notion of beauty, when in contrast, New York painters, free from this heritage, can express 'men's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotion' (Newman, 1948). As for Newman, the sublime cannot be expressed by objects, hence why the destruction of the form in favour of abstraction. Although distancing himself from the Romantic religious-sublime, Philip Shaw (Tate, 2013) noted that: 'the painter was also keen to represent the quest for the 'impossible' in religious terms', and that since the mid 1940s many of his works were titled in reference to Jewish mystical thinking. It seems after all that the Romantic legacy is difficult to erase.

In more recent times, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924 - 1998) provided a rich theorisation of the aesthetics of the sublime in relation to visual art and postmodernity with the essays 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime' (1982), 'The Sublime and the Avant-garde' (1984) and later *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1994). He also proposed a socio-cultural analysis of the society with *The*

Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984) identifying postmodernism as ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Enlightenment, Idealism and Marxism), systems that establish the progress of society through universal truths such as ‘the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meanings, the emancipation of the rational or working subject or the creation of wealth’, leading to oppression and negating freedom, as he wrote (1984, xxiii).

In this context, Lyotard reevaluated Kant’s sublime through a postmodern interpretation and in relation to contemporary art. For the philosopher, as for Kant, the sublime is identified as a mixed feeling of pain and pleasure given by the failure of the imagination to represent a rational idea of the absolute, and the superiority of the reason to acknowledge those limits, a characterisation Lyotard summarised with the equation: *presentation of the unrepresentable* (Lyotard, 1982; Costelloe, 2012).

In relation to art, to unfold this oxymoron, Lyotard (1984, 41) used as model Newman’s work. The philosopher believes Newman was able to translate into painting that moment of ‘now’ when we ask ‘is it [the sublime] happening?’ With the use of the ‘zip’ in many of his works such as *Vir Heroico Sublimis* (1950-51) the artist tried to allude to the infinite, to represent the ‘inexpressible’ (Lyotard, 1984, 43).

Describing the paradox of presenting an absolute idea in art Lyotard stated (1982, 68):

‘Modern painters’ discovered they had to represent the existence of that which was not demonstrable. They (...) revolutionise the supposed visual

gives in order to reveal that the field of vision simultaneously conceals and needs the invisible, that it relates therefore not only to the eye, but to the spirit as well. They introduced painting into the field opened up by the aesthetics of the sublime – which is not governed by a consensus of taste.

Crowther (1989, 69) noted that with this statement Lyotard assumed that because modern artworks are ‘abstract’ or ‘formless’, they have the power to present the ‘unpresentable’ and the ‘invisible’ by avoiding any form of representation.

Lyotard is claiming therefore that some radical art, by negating any narrative or obvious meaning, obligates the viewers to confront their own conceptual limits, delivering that kind of mental shock typical of the sublime. Besides, Postmodern art, questioning the very essence of reality in art investigates its status philosophically by asking ‘what is painting?’ (1982, 65). The problem is that because much modernist art doesn’t pose this question, the unpresentable is recognised only as a ‘missing content’, makes the nature of the sublime ‘nostalgic’ (Lyotard, 1982, 69; Crowther, 1996, 5).

Lyotard identified in the Romantic artists this mode of the sublime as they strive for a deep communication with the absolute which nature suggests is the divine (Lyotard, 1984, 79-81; Crowther, 1989, 70). As Crowther (1989, 71) summarised, these “nostalgic’ works do not fulfil their sublime potential (...) achieved, rather, by those works of ‘novatio’ which make the nature of art explicitly problematic through *striving* to present it as a possibility of infinite (and thence unpresentable) experiment and development’.

Lyotard (1982, 69) asserted that some Avant-garde artists such as Cezanne, by engaging with a sublimity which is not nostalgic, incarnate this new aesthetic sensibility. They are part of the technical innovations, scientific development, experimentations and production, which tends 'towards the infinity of plastic experiment rather than towards the representation of any lost absolute. In this, their work belongs to the contemporary industrial, techno-scientific world', as he argued.

By claiming the postmodern sensibility of the sublime, Lyotard marked an important moment in the development and interpretation of the term, as the feeling is now recognised not only in relation to the 'beauty of phenomenal surfaces, but in the dematerialisation of these by techno-science', explained Crowther (1989, 75). This changes the nature of the sublime which is now not the divine, but the technological and its social complexity.

It appears now that the sublime, first by hiding and taking the place of religious concepts with the Romantics and then adapting its features to the secular world, has become a sort of container that represents everything that can be referred to the spiritual, the transcendent, the unrepresentable, the soul, the 'other' or the numinous and so on.

Simon Morley tried to bring some sort of clarity amongst the huge amount of writings related to the topic with *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art* (2010). In this anthology of writings and essays by several authors and artists, the sublime is explored through the categories of 'Nature' 'Technology' 'Altered States' and 'Terror'. The publication demonstrates the difficulty of confining the sublime in relation to art —

and culture — and how flexible this aesthetic category can be. Morley also questioned whether the shock provided by the experience of the sublime could lead to challenging the established rules towards society, putting forth eventual political and social changes (2010, 18). One can ask how much further one can go speculating on the subject.

In this regard, in the essay 'Against the Sublime' (2011), Elkins pointed out the complexity of the notion in the postmodern context, declaring that the concept is at this point overused. He also argued that it needs to be acknowledged that: 'the sublime cannot be fully excavated from its crypto-religious context' as well as that it is 'important not to assume that sublime, presence, or transcendence, are philosophic masks that can be removed, revealing a hidden religious discourse. They *are* the discourse' (2011, 12).

These words highlight the complexity of the sublime in the secular context as it can be used as a tool to address or cover religious ideas when it feels uncomfortable to use traditional ones. Elkins ended the essay observing that the sublime 'takes away from the real world', directing the focus on images that are otherwise incomprehensible, romantic clichés, used 'ineffectively' to cover religious beliefs, becoming difficult and weak, reasons why he proposed to abandon term for 'words that are fresh and exact' (2011, 19-21).

Although it is difficult to negate the abundance of usage of the term, Elkins didn't propose any 'fresh words' that could be used when addressing secular spirituality. In

fact, the sublime remains a powerful transformative tool which through art provides that 'mental shock' which extends one's awareness from the self to the society, either traditionally suggesting the presence of a higher spiritual realm, or showing the infinite possibility of the secular, postmodern society.

So far, I have provided some brief examples of how the sublime has been theorised. It is against this background that I am now going to address the two artists that are the focus of this chapter: American James Turrell and the Danish-Icelandic Olafur Eliasson.

Olafur Eliasson

Olafur Eliasson is an eclectic artist whose work mainly comprehends big installations, land art projects, photography and objects such as *The Weather Project*, *Green River* or the Icelandic photographic project *Volcano Series*.

Eliasson explores our relationship with nature through the use of technology, focusing in particular on light, fog, water and air (Gilbert and Eliasson, 2004, 22), natural elements whose immaterial components may give access to spiritual experience.

He uses the word 'ephemeral' in relation to his art, an idea inspired by Turner's paintings whose colour's effects allowed him to leave traditional representation in favour of an ephemeral atmosphere to explore concepts of transformation and

movement (Eliasson, 2014, 88). As for Turner, light is for Eliasson one of his favourite objects of investigation, and because of his capacity to evoke sublimity through it, he has often been considered the heir of the Northern Romantic tradition (Gayford, 2015, Eliasson and Gilbert, 2004, and Sandquist, 2000). Nevertheless, it is questionable if the sublime in Eliasson's work can be interpreted in modernist terms as a way of access to the divine. Nature is often mediated through the use of technology, an element that may shift the nature of the absolute towards its social and technological complexity. By analysing works such as *Your Black Horizon*, *Your Blind Passage* and *The Weather Project*, it is possible to discover that the qualities of Eliasson's sublime, although maintaining connections to the Romantics, are indeed more inclined towards its postmodern rather than its modern interpretation.

The northern light and atmosphere have always had a huge impact on the artist who admitted being 'obsessed with northern light' (Gayford, 2015, 48-49), as well as Northern Romantic painters (Eliasson, 2014, 88). He nonetheless distanced himself from those religious messages associated with the Romantic sublime, and even sharing the same sensibility towards nature and its atmospheric features, his ideas on the subject is careful, as he clarified:

There is a tendency to Romanticise this northern atmospheric quality – you know, as being to do with escape, melancholy, a way of disconnecting with the rest of the world, an excuse for irrationality... I identify with all these things, but there is also a danger. It introduces a

hierarchy in experiences: the closer you get to God the better you are as a person, the more existentially illuminated you are. I'm very afraid of that sort of essentialism (Gayford, 2015, 46).

In this regard, Eliasson (quoted in Fitzgerald, 2010, 405) also manifested his concern towards the role of the sublime, spiritual ideas in society and in art, as well as the role of the artist as a 'mystical figure', because of the 'often slightly totalitarian' vision these could incorporate. Even so, the artist didn't negate the relationship between his art the spiritual saying that 'this doesn't mean that I don't think the sublime is also a relevant discussion to have' (Eliasson, quoted in Fitzgerald, 2010, 405).

The Weather Project (2003), a gigantic artificial sun installed in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, encapsulates Eliasson's relation with the sublime and the Northern Romantics.

The installation was part of the Unilever Series where also other works such as Anish Kapoor's *Marsyas* (2002) and Miroslaw Balka's *How It Is* (2009) explored sublimity.

Eliasson's sun was made with the simple use of few elements: a suspended disc with yellow lamps behind it, mirrors on the ceiling and mist. When entering that massive space, visitors were dazzled by the luminous glowing disc, the yellow glow that invaded the hall, the misty and humid atmosphere, and simultaneously, a sense of disorientation and awe which came from their images reflected on the ceiling. Art critic James Mayer (2004, 220-222) recognised such emotions when, describing his visit saying: 'I look up: where am I? (...) I am remote, disembodied image. I am small

(...) We lie-down and lose ourselves, become part of, indeed become, the spectacle before us’.

Burkean sublime (Burke, 2014, II) — that astonishing feeling, a mix of fear and delight provoked by the vastness and mystery of nature — is not distant from what *The Weather Project* can give rise to. Moreover, this emotion can also be interpreted through the Kantian sublime, by considering what happens when reason reaches its limits. With *The Weather Project*, the mind is overcome by the effort of trying to understand the magnitude of what is presented and sublimity arises with the cognitive failure to imagine infinity; failure that also contains a high level of self-awareness and pleasure given by the power of the reason to comprehend this in theoretical terms (Kant, 2007, 114-115).

As Rosenblum (ARTnews, 2015) noted, the aesthetics of the sublime theorised by Burke and Kant ‘provided a flexible semantic container for the musky Romantic experience of awe, terror, boundless and *divinity*’, particularly expressed in landscape paintings, such as Turner’s *Sun Setting Over a Lake* (1840). In this regard, Gayford (2015, 46) described Eliasson’s work as ‘an updated equivalent of a quintessentially Romantic experience: darkness, mist, looming obscurity’, and *The Weather Project* as ‘A Romantic landscape’.

Both Eliasson and the Romantics capture those kinds of emotions that provoke the sublime experience, with the main difference being that Eliasson creates the circumstances for sublimity in the hall of the Tate Modern, substituting nature with technology. Although under this lens Eliasson’s installation can be read as ‘a summary

of Romantic philosophy's central idea' (Gilbert and Eliasson, 2004, 24), there are other elements to consider that may shift this perspective.

Eliasson is particularly concerned with self-perception — what he called as 'seeing yourself seeing' (Birnbaum et al., 2002, 10) which is the 'relationship between having an experience *and* simultaneously evaluating and being aware that you are having this experience' (Eliasson and Gilbert, 2004, 24). This attention towards self-awareness and perception when experiencing art, is what allows the subject to develop what the artist recognised as a 'critical position, or the ability to criticise one's own position in this perspective' (Birnbaum et al., 2002, 10). This aspect is emphasised by the use of technology whose apparatus is exposed if not celebrated (Friel, 2013, 15), as Eliasson (Birnbaum et al. 2005, quoted in Friel, 2013, 15) claimed:

I think the reason you want to show the machine is to remind people that they're looking (...) And I think the ability to go in and out of the work showing the machinery-is important today. My work is very much about positioning the subject.

By allowing the subject to become critical of perception, and intentionally showing the artificiality of the machines, Eliasson's art doesn't seem to seek universal truths or the divine in Romantic terms. As a matter of fact, in his conversation with Gilbert (Gilbert and Eliasson, 2004, 24) the artist said that his work has no aim to reveal any 'higher state of truth or truthfulness,' instead, he opens towards an experience of the sublime that encourages personal interpretations (Friel, 2013, 14). The possibility of having 'an experience and seeing yourself having the experience' is called by Gayford (2015, 50) a

‘double perspective,’ as, ‘You are capable of immersing yourself in a sublime situation, and – this is very important – at the same time you can evaluate, deconstruct, criticise the same experience’.

In *The Weather Project* sublimity arises not particularly because the object is overwhelming in its size or power, but, rather because our perception and imagination succumb in front of the ‘complexity of those processes and relations which make the surfaces of everyday reality possible, and which normally pass unnoticed or undiscovered’, terms used by Crowther (1996, 4) to describe the postmodern sublime. Eliasson’s deployment of the sublime then can be read under this lens as it relates to the infinite possibility of technology and its social complexity, not to the divine.

The 2005 installation *Your Black Horizon* also explored Eliasson’s fascination with the sun. Gayford (2015, 46) described it as ‘a minimalist update of the popular 19th century attraction, the panorama’.

The work is a pavilion made in collaboration with the architect David Adjaye on the island of San Lazzaro for the Venice Biennial. It was moved to the Croatian island of Lopud in 2007. It consists of a corridor where natural light passes through vertical wooden panels reflecting the light on a black wall. Past the corridor, there is a dark room where the only point of light is given by a thin horizontal line of light. At first sight, the light seems to be natural, but it is actually made of LEDs, controlled by a computer connected with a device which analyses Venice’s light condition. The light transmitted by the LED inside the room is a reflection of the natural light, but instead

of following the natural rhythm from dawn to sunset, it changes dramatically from slow to rapid and vice versa (Ebersberger and Zyman 2009).

With *Your Black Horizon*, Eliasson created an artificial horizon inside a dark room where, within fifteen minutes, it is possible to experience different variations of colours, from chill blues to warm reds (Birnbaum, 2005, 264). The sudden transformations of light, the darkness and the sense of the unknown, may provoke feelings of awe and confusion. The installation offers a tangible atmosphere which pervades the space, it suggests that actively interacting with the viewer can challenge the usual way we perceive our sense of the world. The title, including the word 'your' (as many other Eliasson's works), wanted to refer to 'something that begins somewhere inside you, behind your eyes rather than in front of them', explained Birnbaum (2005, 264). What happens in front of the eyes is, therefore, a trigger for a transformative experience, which may be recognised as sublime.

The same attraction to the horizon and its light, its atmosphere and changing colours, and constant dialogue between humans and nature is present in the art of many Northern Romantic artists and Friedrich in particular; notable in this regard works such as *Two Men by the Sea* (1817) and *Sea with Sunrise* (1826). Here the phenomenon of nature acquires a quasi-religious meaning given by the mysterious and transcendent atmosphere these works emanate, overcoming the boundaries between the natural and supernatural (Rosenblum, 1978, 20-24). The 'emotional dialogue' (Rosenblum, 1978, 106) between nature and its figure was also explored by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944) in works such as *The Voice* (1893) where

the strong verticality is emphasised by a liquid sun or moon. Considered by Rosenblum (1978, 102) the heir of Northern Romantic artists, sublimity in Munch is invaded by disquieting notes as his figures often seem 'isolated' rather than 'absorbed' by the landscape, which imprints a strong existentialist tone to his art.

Eliasson shares common elements with his Northern ancestors: a never-ending attraction to light, the exploration of sublimity in the relation of humans and nature, and the feeling of being overwhelmed by it in particular circumstances. The difference of *Your Black Horizon* is that it explores such themes where the natural element is recontextualised and artificialised by the use of technology. For this reason, Gayford (2015, 15) described the artist as 'a postmodern post-Romantic: an installation artist using light, architecture, and many other media to recreate the sensations of the sublime that were sought by artists two centuries ago'. Gayford's claim is right only in part, because even if the connections between Eliasson and the Romantic artists are evident, the nature of the sublime has changed. It does not seek for access to higher truth or presence, and most importantly, the Romantic 'nostalgic' element recognised by Lyotard (1982, 69) is missing here. Rather, it tends towards its postmodern interpretations. In *Your Black Horizon*, the machinery involved is straightforward, allowing the viewers to recognise the constructions behind their moment of transcendence, making the technological the object of the sublime. As Philip Shaw (Tate, 2013) noted, the artist 'reconfigure[s] the viewer's relationship with space and time, placing emphasis on the connections between the material conditions of perception and the intuition of an immaterial beyond'. Following this trajectory of thought, Eliasson's sublime shows a postmodern sensibility as explained by Crowther

(1996, 12-13) inasmuch as the use of technology defamiliarizes our reality, opening towards its infinite possibilities and consequentially showing and questioning the complexity of society. In this regard, in his discussion with Gilbert (2004, 25), Eliasson talked about the 'expanded context' of his work, especially in the context of ethics 'of what you do with your beliefs and the rules you choose to live by', in a way that 'people can reconsider or at least evaluate their way of experiencing the world'.

Experiencing art not as a 'viewer' but as a 'participant' (Gayford, 2015, 46) is central in Eliasson's installations, and the 2010 *Din Blinde Passager (Your Blind Passenger)* for the Arken Museum of Modern Art in Denmark is another example of this kind. The project was part of the Museum's UTOPIA series which is about the role of the concept of utopia in contemporary society and art (Chin, 2010). Utopia is interpreted by Eliasson as the 'now' a crucial moment where change can happen, as he declared:

'it constitutes a possibility that is actualized and converted into reality' and where 'our sense of orientation is challenged and the coordinates of our spaces, collective and personal, have to be renegotiated.

Changeability and mobility are at the core of utopia' (Eliasson, quoted in Chin, 2010).

The installation is a 90-metre-long wooden tunnel with artificially-generated yellowish fog where the visibility is just 1.5 metres. When entering the tunnel, participants were immersed in a disorientating space where it is easy to become lost in light and fog and where feelings such as awe, fear, and curiosity could be experienced.

According to the artist (Gayford, 2015, 49), the installation was a way to study the relationship between our sense and the surrounding architecture, as he said:

‘My idea is that for a while you feel lost, then new sensory systems click into place to rescue you. The length of the tunnel is roughly synchronised with the time it takes for you to lose yourself, hesitating, finding yourself again, and to adjust to that’ (Gayford, 2015, 49).

By using Romantic elements such as obscurity, light and fog, *Your Blind Passenger* offered an up-to-date experience of the sublime which can be interpreted through Lyotard’s definition of ‘presenting the unrepresentable’ (1982). In this formless space, sublimity arose from the shock of participants confronting the limits of their mind as they found themselves facing the infinity, infinity that cannot be represented but can be ‘demonstrated’ as Lyotard (1982, 67) explained ‘through ‘negative representation’ which Kant called ‘the abstract’. This machine-generated sublime can be seen in Lyotardian terms as a way to express the ‘unrepresentable’ complexity of contemporary society.

The physical experience provided by *Your Blind Passenger* can be also read under the lens of Merleau-Ponty’s (1993, 125-127) theory of perception, which claims that it is through our senses that the body articulates and create meanings from its surroundings. Accordingly, the sublime experience offered by the installation would allow to question and reconsider one’s vision of the world.

Eliasson is far from the 19th century transcendent idea of the sublime. Although his work starts from nature as a primary source, this is mediated by the use of technology. This allows the viewers/participants to experience a mechanical-induced sublimity: simultaneously to be aware of the experience, and to be able to question and reevaluate their surroundings and relationship with the world. Eliasson's work rejects transcendence since its purpose is not the access to the divine, rather, as he claimed: 'I think that having an art experience is stepping into the world, it is *having reality*' (Gilbert and Eliasson, 2004, 29).

James Turrell

Californian artist James Turrell (born 1943) is especially concerned with light and its perception. His experimentations have brought him to create a vast amount of work, such as *Skyspaces* and *Wedgeworks*, both inside museums and buildings and in nature. Through his work, Turrell conveys a strong sensorial experience which relates to a mode of the sublime that finds its roots in the modern tradition.

In Los Angeles in the 1960s Turrell became particularly interested in the interaction between the light and the physical components of the surface of his work (Adcock, 1990, 53-54). The same interest was shared by artists such as Robert Irwin (born 1928), Doug Wheeler (born 1939) and Maria Nordman (born 1943) who, along with Turrell, were part of the so-called 'Light and Space Movement' (Adcock, 1990, 53-54). By

creating installations made essentially by light and space, the intention was to create places where viewers can bodily participate instead of simply observing (Friel, 2013, 3).

As Adcock pointed out (1990, 36-38), Turrell's forms are minimalistic in their geometricity and simplicity, and his work, as most of Minimal artists', is *ready-made* - projected. Even admiring the straightforward and direct qualities of Minimalist sculpture (Herbert, 1998, 17), this wasn't Turrell's primal inspiration, since he wasn't preoccupied with the creation of simple form but rather with the perception (Adcock, 1990, 36). Minimalist artists were too concerned with the perception of their solid objects, but the solutions they devised were different, as Adcock explained (1990, 36):

Minimalist sculpture deals with obdurate mass and unyielding material whereas Turrell's light images create fluctuant perceptual volumes that are wholly immaterial – despite the fact they can be perceived as actual forms and often possess a greater sense of 'entity' than real things. More than being *about* perception (...) Turrell's light images are composed of perception.

While Minimal artists such as Donald Judd (1928-1994) and Robert Morris (1931) dealt with physical features and the mass of their objects, Turrell's volumes are immaterial (Herbert, 1998, 17), and this makes perception a fundamental and intrinsic part of his ethereal light works. Adcock (1990, 44-45) noted that although essential, the structural part of Turrell's art becomes secondary to the experience of light, and despite the similarity with Minimalism, what differs is that Turrell's work goes 'beyond

Minimalism by dealing with the complexity of seeing; they are not objects in space, but light in space’.

In this regard Turrell claimed (1985, quoted in Kosky, 2012, 94) ‘There is no object in my work (...) there never was. There is no image within it’.

In the 1967 article ‘Art and Objecthood’, Michael Fried argued that aesthetic experiences of ‘grace’ and ‘presentness’ offered by modernist art is denied by the literal relationship to the audience on which Minimalism is based (Fried, 1998). Minimalist artists, emphasising the physicality of their objects make them theatrical, distancing the beholder by raising one’s self-awareness (Fried, 1998, 167). This happens because of the ‘duration of the experience’ demanded by such works: in modernist art, states Fried, ‘at every moment the work itself is wholly manifested’ (Fried, 1998, 167). Fried’s view implies that ‘literal art’, creating an aesthetic experience based on its materialism, negates any possibility of transcendence. Controversies rightly developed against Fried’s criticism, considered to be reductionist and simplistic (Jones, 2000), subject of his personal taste and inconsistent in his judgments (Adcock, 1990, 45-55 and Carrier, 1985, 204). Nevertheless, Fried claim for ‘presentness’ ‘flushing out the metaphysical implications of the formalist method’, as Van Schepen (2009, 49) observed, can be applied to Turrell. His research is in fact inclined toward the search for the transcendence, undertaken before him by the American Transcendentalists, and more recently by the Abstract Expressionists (Hughes, 1997, 547, 570).

As Morley wrote (2010, 13), the ‘evocation of spatial immensity’ created by Turrell is similar to the one expressed by Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. With Turrell, the sublime experience is brought to another level by allowing the viewer to be fully

immersed in an abstract space of light where boundaries disappeared, and the mind is disoriented by the incapacity of rationalising the surrounding.

Part of the *Wedgeworks* series where light is projected in order to create the illusion of walls or divided space, are works like *Milk Run II* (1997) which exemplifies the connection between Turrell and the kind of search for the absolute formulated by Rothko (Herbert, 1997, 17-18). Here light was projected in a way that makes tangible its different qualities: opaque, translucent and transparent (Herbert, 1997, 18), in a red space where bright pink and acid yellow lines create illusionary barriers. As Herbert claimed (1997, 18), *Milk Run II* recalls Rothko's paintings, for 'the mystical colours and luminosity' evokes 'a feeling of tranquillity tinged with anxiety'.

The *Ganzfelds* series (a German word defining the 'whole field' of vision), is a body of work Turrell has been working on since the 1970s and consist of spaces made by an empty single room where images of geometric forms are projected onto the walls crossing through the chamber. The artist described the *Ganzfelds* phenomenon as 'the total loss of depth perception' (Turrell, 2018), which can also be read in Kantian (2007, 76) terms as a double negative pleasure: the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of our imagination and the indirect relief arising from the realisation that infinity is impossible to determine.

The early *City of Arhirit* (1976) was a four-room installation which opened into a hallway. Each room had a different tone coming from the outside building's natural light reflected on coloured surfaces (Beveridge, 2000, 307). The viewer, walking

through a bright ‘mist’ of colours such as red and blue, became disoriented getting lost into the ganzfeld (Beveridge, 2000, 308). Kosky (2012, 101) described Turrell’s chambers as places where ‘we take a ‘step back’ into this other light — one that shines without prior illumination and that is itself a reality to see’. In these abstract places, the limits, the partitions of the walls and the sense of the space and are lost, while disorientation and awe evoke a sense of sublime. For Turrell, the connection between light and the sublime derives also from his upbringing, as his parents were Quakers (Herbert, 1997, 15). In Quaker practice revelation is sought through meditation and awaiting the coming of ‘inner light’ (Turrell, 1997, quoted in Herbert, 1997, 15 and Govan, 2013, 15). This aspect recalls the spiritual influence in Turrell’s art, and in particular, the Quakers’ ‘straightforward, strict presentation of the sublime’, as the artist defined it (1993, quoted in Morley, 2010, 98).

More recently, the 2010 *Dhatu* (a Buddhist term for ‘realm’) represents the evolution of the *Ganzfelds* spaces and Turrell’s interpretation of sublimity.

The chamber, which seems to be made by light itself, encapsulates Turrell’s ideas of his work: ‘What is really important for me is to create an experience of wordless thought, to make the quality and sensation of light itself something really quite tactile. It has a quality seemingly intangible, yet it is physically felt’ (Turrell, 1996, 574). The installation is a formless colour-changing space with a rectangular coloured light at its ‘end’. The light obfuscates the real shape of the room as well as its sense of scale, allowing the participant to experience infinity. According to Friel (2013, 10), sublimity here occurs through the ‘radical reductionism’ of *Dhatu* which presents a void where is possible to discover one’s relation to perception through the medium of light. Friel

brought into the equation Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1993, 125-127) idea on perception who argued this is not only thought but also a bodily experience. Bodily perception, in relation to art, 'gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible' (Merleau-Ponty's 1993, 127). This is what happens in *Dhatu* where light is perceived in its physical presence instead of its abstract form. In *Dhatu*, Kant's sublimity is expressed by the sense of unease rising from the overwhelming sensation of being immersed in a shapeless, infinite space, as well as pleasure coming from the ability to admire such space (Friel 2013, 8-9).

Another element which contributes to experiencing the sublime in *Dhatu* is technology: here light doesn't come from nature, but is artificial (Friel, 2013, 11). This marks the evolution from the Kantian sublime to the modern experience of it: if, for Kant, the sublime is related to our experience of nature, in *Dhatu* the sublime is 'electrical' as David Nye (1994) calls it, allowing Turrell to create 'a synthetic environment infused with mystery (1994, 225). According to Friel (2013, 11), the art of Light and Space, and consequentially that of Turrell, while fitting into the 'realm of the technological sublime', often incorporates the artificial in their work in order to 'intensify a natural experience that can become lost in the complexity of modernity'. This means that *Dathu* can be read in Romantic terms as a way reconnect with nature in order to gain access to a higher spiritual realm.

As curator Herbert (1998, 12) explained, the sublime experience is for Turrell strictly linked with subjectivity, especially with seeing. By eliminating objects, perception 'becomes his object' as well as his medium. Herbert wrote (1998, 12): by 'avoiding 'associative, symbolic thought', he [Turrell] wants us to look at looking (...) you are

seeing light as you've never seen it before through your body's only windows onto the brain, your eyes'. This kind of subjectivity can not only be connected to the Kantian notion of self-awareness as one of the principal moments of sublimity but it is particularly rooted in the thinking of American Transcendentalists (Hughes, 1997, 574).

The philosophical and literary movement of the 1820s and 1830s arose in New England and was centred around authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) (Wayne, 2006). It emerged as a reaction against Unitarianism, a branch of liberal Christianity focused on rational thought and progressive morality (Finseth, 1995, 17). Transcendentalists, reconnecting with the English and German Romantics, emphasised subjectivity in spite of empiricism, assuming that the real essence of reality has nothing to do with its appearance (Finseth, 1995 and Gura, 2007). It promoted the importance of individuality, spiritual and mental self-development and the relation to nature as a way to perceive glimpses of the divine without using codified religious beliefs (Wayne, 2006, viii).

One of the most noted publications coming from the movement is the 1854 *Walden; or Life in the Woods* by Thoreau. The text, inspired by the years Thoreau spent in a cabin near Walden Pond, Massachusetts, is a meditation on living a simple and independent life in natural surroundings. In particular, the book signified a way for the author to undertake a journey towards spiritual awakening, away from the corruption of the state and in deep connection with nature (Thoreau, 2016).

In art, the style most commonly associated with Transcendentalism is the nineteenth century American Luminism (Novak, 1989, 23-9). Luminist painters focused especially on the landscape and pastoral scenes, and in the same way as Transcendentalists, believed that spiritual awareness could be enhanced in the presence of nature, in particular when the landscape is immersed in natural light (Novak, 1989, 23-9 and Herbert, 1998, 18). As Novak (1998, 23-9) noted, in painting this idea was translated into horizontal solutions in order to enhance a kind of light where the quality was not soft and diffuse but cool and crisp. This is evident in the work of John Frederick Kensett (1816–1862) and Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904). In *Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay* (1868) Heade represents a marine scene where ‘the primitive flatness of the reflected sails in the water (...) neither glam nor radiate’, as Novak described it (1998, 82-83), and light becomes palpable through a series of parallel lines in which ‘each part (...) arrests the moment in Emerson’s ‘concentrated eternity’ (1958, quoted in Novak, 1998, 83). This ‘concentrated eternity’ encapsulates Luminists ideas on the sublime which arise from the deep connection of men and women in front of the vastness of nature.

If light is the medium used by Luminists to convey the sublime, Danto (2003, 149-157) claimed that the sublime here is only represented (thanks to the scale of the works), but that the paintings themselves cannot be identified as sublime objects. Herbert (1998, 18) is of a similar opinion, when he said that the experience of light in the American Luminists remains ‘vicariously’ whether Rothko ‘bring[s] the view closer, but Turrell places viewers right in direct contact with the light’.

Turrell continues this tradition where light, nature and landscape are primary sources of inspiration with his *Skyspaces*, a series of works started in 1970s. As the name suggests, these are spaces where one can look at the sky, usually consisting of a chamber or an aperture in the ceiling to the sky.

Skyspaces can be single structures or part of an existing building and the aperture can be square, round or oval (Turrell, 2018). The aperture allows the viewer to see the sky's variations of light and colours, to reconsider it in a different, deeper way. As Govan (2013, 14) observed: '*Skyspaces* (...) magically bring the sky we take for granted as being *far away* into our intimate physical space'. By reducing the distance between the viewer and the sky, what remains is ethereal, is perception and the simple act of seeing. In this regard the artist explained:

This is an art that people try to touch – but there is nothing to touch.

There is, first of all, no object; there is no image (...) What then are you looking for? Well, I am hoping that you then have the self-reflective act of looking, so you're actually seeing your-self see to some degree, so that it actually does reveal something about *your* seeing as opposed to being a journal of *my* seeing (quoted in Hughes, 1997, 573).

With *Skyspaces* Turrell doesn't really 'create' anything, as the sky has always been there, he just offers 'a frame, a limit or edge that can contain its immensity and thereby let the uncontainable sky appear', as Kosky (2012, 113) commented on them.

Cat Cairn (2003) is a rocky structure situated at the top of the Cat Cairn hill overlooking Kielder Water and Forest Park in Northumberland, England. Kosky (2012, 121) defines the observatory as a 'tool' that 'help[s] you to see the sky'. From the entrance, a corridor brings to a circular room with a bench protruding from the wall and a circular aperture in the ceiling.

Describing his feelings when entering the space, Kosky (2012, 121) wrote about the act of seeing and abandoning himself to perception as the extracorporeal experience of 'losing yourself in what you see', as well as a sense of dizziness. This resembles a sublime experience happening when the author confronts himself with the immensity of the sky, as well the immensity within himself, like something impossible to measure. As he continued: 'My position thus become one in relation to a mystery which leaves me (...) ever uncertain of where I am' (Kosky, 2012, 129).

By isolating the sky and the light effects that are 'normally encrypted in the perceptual noise of the day-to-day and lost in the general disregard', as Adcock (1990, 206) points out, Turrell makes 'visible light visible'.

Turrell's relation to nature and the Cosmos is particularly evident in *Roden Crater*, a life-long project the artist has been working on since 1979 located in the Arizona desert.

Roden Crater is an extinct volcano and Turrell's mission is it to transform it into an observatory where technological instruments are not necessary. In some ways *Roden Crater* works as a camera obscura (Govan, 2013, 17), composed by a series of chambers and tunnels that work to intensify the light of the sun, the moon and the stars, to enable the viewer to connect with the self and with the cosmos (Calvin, 2013, and

Turrell, 2017). The various chambers of the *Roden Crater* are projected to deliver a different kind of sensorial experience based on the time of the day or the year; allowing the outside to come inside, similar to archaeological sites around the world (Bright, 1999, 20). According to Bright, for Turrell some of them not only serve a civic or religious purpose but ‘They have energy and a sense of presence’. The author also recognised that *Roden Crater* places ‘the viewer in what Bachelard poetically calls an experience of ‘*intimate immensity*,’ where the space of the personal and the universe blend’ (Bright, 1999, 21). With this project sublimity arises through the idea of embracing the mystery of the Cosmos and being part of the whole. Through *Skyspaces*, Turrell ‘put viewers in direct relation with the immensity of the heaven above’ (Gayford, 2015, 50), allowing an experience that seems to correspond with the Romantic tradition which seeks sublimity in the vastness of nature to reach a higher spiritual realm.

The sublime, though used — and perhaps sometimes overused — throughout the centuries, is, according to the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (1993, 25) a:

‘fashion (...) that has persisted uninterruptedly into our own time from the beginning of Modernity (...) It has always been in fashion because it has always concerned a break within or from aesthetics (...) it is has been a kind of defiance with which aesthetics provokes itself — ‘enough beauty already, we must be sublime!’ But at the same time, it has not been a matter of mere fashion (...) but necessity itself.

Therefore, through the sublime art is shaken, provoked, interrogated (27). Adapting itself to the era and context, it still creates new opportunities of artistic expressions. These, in the case of Eliasson and Turrell, allow the artist to create artworks that can convey an involvement that is out of the ordinary both in relation to our society, nature and the self.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to understand how the spiritual manifests in contemporary art, which dynamics are involved, and its importance in the artistic panorama, despite the modern idea of disenchantment as one of the prime traits of the secularised society. In order to do so, I have analysed the work of a selected group of artists whose engagement with the spiritual shows the diversity of meanings of the concept. I have limited the field in exploring how spirituality is expressed in contemporary art when it refers to Christianity, the idea of immanence, the notion of 'Eastern spirituality' and the secular transcendence or sublime.

Art that employs Christian themes can be controversial because it relies on specific messages and symbolisms which have been expunged from the mainstream artworld since Modernism. By exploring Christianity in very different ways, the artists under discussion have shown the boundaries between art and religion, but also how they still continue to influence each other. Specifically, the capacity of certain artists to reshape this discourse by creating fresh, novel forms of art by challenging established ideas, questioning and rethinking the limitations involved.

The spirituality of immanence emphasises the embodiment of the spiritual which finds manifestation through an art which borrows symbols and ideas from pagan or ancient cultures. The works analysed prove that this is an art which often has to do

with concrete issues, as the artists in question dealt with social, political or personal trauma. Within the spirituality of immanence, reconnecting with the past becomes for these artists a tool to heal suffering and to make sense of the present world. It also allows for the creation of artworks where the appropriation of ancient symbols finds different ways of meaning, shaking and nourishing consciousness.

The idea of 'Eastern spirituality' shows the complex relationship between Anish Kapoor and the incorporation of Indian influences in his art. Even when considering an openness beyond the boundaries of nations for art that integrates the tradition and identity of a culture while aiming to convey a universal spiritual message, the debate shows how colonial rhetoric and stereotypes are difficult to escape. In Kapoor in fact, certain works are imbedded in a vague mysticism based on specific ideas of Indian spirituality that can easily suit the taste of the Western audience. Even representing only one example of the possible implications involved in adopting symbolisms and ideas belonging to a specific spirituality, Kapoor's case can be seen in a wider perspective; considering how easy it is, in a globalised society, to inaccurately appropriate other cultures.

Sublimity and transcendence enclose the most relevant way to address the spiritual in art. The artists examined in this section reveal how malleable the subject is and yet how compelling it can be in conveying a sense of the divine which tends to the universal. The sublime offers an aesthetic sensibility which seeks meaning by questioning, in the case of Turrell and Eliasson, our relation to nature and to

technology. Acknowledging the shock provoked by the sublime experience, this may lead to an inquiry of the bases of one's perception of reality or established ideas.

By embodying their own sense of the spiritual, the artists explored in thesis, should have given examples about the problems, as well as the possible potential of spiritual meanings in contemporary and postmodern art.

Although for many (Elkins, 2004, 21-22; Spretnak, 2014, 1-9) the presence of the spiritual in art may remain a taboo, this thesis should demonstrate that acknowledging such subjects doesn't necessarily mean going historically backwards or erasing what has been accomplished by art since it freed itself from service to religion. Issues can arise, and in some cases there are clearly problems, especially when approaching institutionalised beliefs and different cultures' philosophies and religions. Even though, and paraps particularly for this reason, I hope I have shown that the value of the spiritual in art should not be disregarded.

In 'A Godless World Will Do', scholar Cordula Grewe (2009, 264-265) noted that 'The prison bars (...) erected' in denying transcendence 'are self-imposed rather than genuine to the secular itself' and that the 'rhetoric of refusal (...) denies the secular the chance of its own opening towards transcendence'. Grewe rightly suggested to stop labelling ideas such as 'meditative' and 'spiritual' as 'crypto-religion' to allow art 'to become a vehicle for a form of self-realization that does not deny the non-rational and the irrational and yet the secular'.

The challenge is embracing the spiritual for art free from strict religious structures to support different forms of enchantment (Grewe, 2009, 265). After all, as professor Robert C. Fuller (2001, 8) claimed, 'Spirituality exists wherever we struggle with the issue of how our lives fit into the greater cosmic scheme of things', which is something can be applied to any era or society, secular or not, and art can certainly convey this.

Considering the relationship between art and religion, Siedell (2009, 234-235) wrote: 'against the protests of both modernist art critics and religious fundamentalists, contemporary artistic practice could very well play an important role in enriching both artistic and religious practice which the current cultural context desperately needs'. Siedell's words can easily apply to different spiritualities, such as secular transcendence. As the spiritual exists in a lively content in today's art (Spretnak, 2014; Fanning, 2018), dismissing it would mean underestimating its potential contribution to art, as well as society and personal development. For this reason, despite my critical commentary in relation to specific issues, I would like to consider the positive values of this study. Art that is spiritual may be indeed seen as a tool for expanding experiences beyond the ideas of self-awareness and self-enquiry, as I hope this thesis has demonstrated.

This discussion does not end here, as questions and observations will always rise to bring this enquiry further. For me, my aim was to acknowledge the significance of the spiritual in art, to question this powerful area of influence, to shed some light on its problematics, and to broaden its potential. Perhaps it is worthwhile, especially considering the complexity of its manifestations, to contemplate the spiritual in art as

a way to resist passiveness and nihilism and instead to promote social and anthropological inquiry and to stimulate compassion and understanding.

Bibliography

'Flowering Tree' (no date). Available at:

<http://www.rogerwagner.co.uk/work/item/9/the-flowering-tree-1> (Accessed: 3 November 2016).

'Menorah 1993' (no date). Available at:

<http://www.rogerwagner.co.uk/work/item/17/menorah-1993> (Accessed: 3 November 2016).

'Xmas Stained Glass Art Lesson' (2012) *The One Show*, BBC, 21st December. Available

at: <https://iffleychurch.org.uk/the-original-plan-of-the-church/05-the-windows/> (Accessed: 3 November 2017).

Abramović, M., *Transitory Objects*. Available at:

<http://www.marinaabramovic.com/transitory.html> (Accessed: 17 September 2017).

Adajania, N. (2011) 'The Mind Viewing Itself by Nancy Adajania', in Hilty, G., Rose, A.,

Anish Kapoor. London: The British Council Visual Art Publications and Lisson Gallery. Available at: <http://anishkapoor.com/459/the-mind-viewing-itself-by-nancy-adajania> (Accessed: 20 February 2017).

Adcock, C. (1990) *The Art of Light and Space*. Oxford: University of California Press.

Allthorpe-Guyton, M. (1990) 'Mostly Hidden', in McEvelley, T., Allthorpe-Guyton, M.,

Kapoor, A., *Anish Kapoor*. London: The British Council Visual Art Publications.

Anfam, D., Burton, J., De Salvo, D. (2009) *Anish Kapoor (20th Century Living Masters)*.

London: Phaidon Press.

Archangeli, M., Bazin, D., Cavalli, G. C., Gnudi, C. Kitson, M., Mahon, D., Mazzetti, A.

(2006) *L'ideale classico del Seicento in Italia e la Pittura di Paesaggio*. Bologna:

Alfa.

ARTnews (2015) 'Beyond the Infinite: Robert Rosenblum on the Sublime in

Contemporary Art in 1961'. Available at:

<http://www.artnews.com/2015/03/27/beyond-the-infinite-robert-rosenblum-on-sublime-contemporary-art-in-1961/> (Accessed: 12 September 2016).

Arya, R. (2009), 'Ecstasy and Pain: The ritualistic dimension of performance practice',

Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts, 13 (3), pp. 31-40.

Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13528160902819307>

(Accessed: 11 June 2017).

Arya, R. (2012) 'The Neglected Place of Religion in Contemporary Western Art',

Fieldwork in Religion, 6 (1), DOI: 10.1558/firn.v6i1.27.

Arya, R. (2016) 'Spirituality and Contemporary Art', *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of*

Religion (August). Available at: <http://religion.oxfordre.com> (Downloaded: 23

April 2017).

Arya, R. (2014), 'Taking Apart the Body: Abjection and the Body Art', *Performance*

Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts, 19 (1), pp. 5-14. Available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13528165.2014.908079>

(Accessed: 11 June 2017).

August K. Wiedmann. A. K. (1979) *Romantic Roots in Modern Art*. Newport: Gresham

Books Ltd.

Balaram, R. (2016) 'With the Void, Full Powers: Anish Kapoor and the Venice Biennale

of 1990', in *British Art Studies*. Available at:

<http://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-3/kapoor-venice-1990> (Accessed: 15 February 2017).

Bancroft, A. (1987) *The Origin of the Sacred*. Pyrmont: Law Book Co of Australasia.

Barnett, N. 'The Sublime is Now' (1948) in Harrison, C., Wood, P. (Eds) (1999) *Art in Theory, 1900 – 1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

Barr, H. A. (1936) 'Cubism and Abstract Art' in Museum of Modern Art *Cubism and Abstract Art*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. Available at:

https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2748_300086869.pdf

(Accessed: 4 December 2017).

Barres Del Rio, P., Perreault, J. (1987) *Ana Mendieta: A Retrospective*. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art.

Bastian, C. and H., Simmen, J. (1980) *Joseph Beuys Drawings*. Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag.

Baume, N. (2008) 'Floating in the Most Peculiar Way' in Baume, N. (Ed.), Jacob, M., Mitter, P., Kapoor, A., Medvedow, J. *Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future*.

Boston: The MIT Press. Pp. 13-27.

Baume, N. (Ed.), Jacob, M., Mitter, P., Kapoor, A., Medvedow, J. (2008) *Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future*. Boston: The MIT Press.

Baca, J. F. (Ed) Mendieta, A. (1980) *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*. New York: A.I.R. Gallery.

Bell, J. (2013) 'Contemporary Art and the Sublime', in Llewellyn, N., Riding, C., in *The Art of The Sublime*, London: Tate Research Publication. Available at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/julian-bell-contemporary-art-and-the-sublime-r1108499> (Accessed: 19 May 2017).

Bellah, R., N. (1976) *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-traditional World*. New York and London: Harper and Row.

Belting, H., Viola, B. (2003) 'A conversation' in J. Walsh (Ed.), *Bill Viola: The Passions*. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum. Pp. 158–185.

Berger, M. (2014) 'Of Thresholds and Inverted Orders: The Religious Dimension and the Public Sphere on the Video Art of Mark Wallinger', *Imaginario et Ratio: A Journal of Theology and the Arts*, 3. Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publisher. P.21.

Beuys, J., (1974) *Joseph Beuys: The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*. Oxford: Museum of Modern Art.

Beuys, J., Harlan, V. (2007) *What is Art?: Conversation with Joseph Beuys*. West Hoathly: Clairview Books.

Beuys, J., Kuoni, C. (1993) *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.

Beveridge, P. (2000) 'Color Perception and the Art of James Turrell', *Leonardo* 33 (4), pp.305-313. Available at:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/1576905?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

(Accessed: 14 September 2018).

Bhabah, H. K., Kapoor, A., Tazzi, P. L. (1998) *Anish Kapoor*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

Bhabha, H. K. (1998) 'Chillava Klatch: Shahzia Sikander Interviewed by Homi Bhabha', in *Shahzia Sikander*, Exhibition Catalogue. Chicago: Renaissance Society, University of Chicago. Available at:

- <http://renaissancesociety.org/publishing/419/shahzia-sikander-pdf/> (Accessed: 15 February 2019).
- Bhabha, H. K. (1983) 'The Other Question' in *Screen* 24, 6 (November), pp. 18-36.
(Downloaded: 18 July 2018).
- Bhabha, H. K. (1998) 'Anish Kapoor: Making Emptiness', in *Anish Kapoor*. Available at: <http://anishkapoor.com/185/making-emptiness-by-homi-k-bhabha> (Accessed: 8 February 2017).
- Bhabha, H. K. (1999) *Shahzia Sikander*. Chicago: Renaissance Society, University of Chicago.
- Bhabha, H. K., de Loisy, J., Rosenthal, N. (2009) *Anish Kapoor*. London: Royal Academy of Arts Publications.
- Bhabha, H. K., Kapoor, A. (1993) 'Homi Bhabha and Anish Kapoor: A Conversation' in *Anish Kapoor*. Available at: <http://anishkapoor.com/976/homi-bhaba-and-anish-kapoor-a-conversation> (Accessed: 8 February 2017).
- Biesenbach, K. (2010) *Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.
- Biesenbach, K., Isles, C., Abramović, M. (2008) *Marina Abramović (Contemporary Artists Series)*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Biles, J. (2009) 'Re-Imagining Religion: A Ghost Story', in Elkins, J., Morgan, D., (Eds) *Re-enchantment*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp. 187-194.
- Birnbaum, D. (2005) 'Dawn 'till Dusk', *Artforum International*, 44 (1), p.264.
- Birnbaum, D., Eliasson, O., Grynsztein, M. (2002) *Olafur Eliasson*. London: Phaidon Press.

- Blocker, J. (1998) 'Ana Mendieta and the Politics of the Venus Negra', *Cultural Studies*, 12 (1), pp. 31-50. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcus20> (Downloaded: 24 November 2016).
- Blocker, J. (1999), *Where is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bois, Y. A. (2009) 'To Sing beside', *October* 129, p.137. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40368567> (Downloaded: 6 November 2016).
- Borer, A., Schirmer, L. (1996) *The Essential Joseph Beuys*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Bracewell, M., Renton, A. (2011) *Anish Kapoor: Flashback*. Manchester: Cornerhouse.
- Brett, G. (1989) 'Internationalism Among Artists in the 60s and 70s', in Araeen, R. (1989) *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, Exhibition Catalogue. London: South Bank Centre. P.111.
- Bright, R. (1999) *James Turrell: Eclipse*. London: Michael Hue-Williams Fine Art Ltd.
- Brockes, E. (2014) 'Performance Artist Marina Abramović: 'I was ready to die'', *The Guardian*, 12 May.
- Brown, J. (1985) *James Turrell: Occluded Front*. Los Angeles: Lapis Front.
- Buchloh, H. D. B. (1980) 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique', *Artforum*, (January).
- Buchloh, H. D. B., Krauss, R., Michelson, A. (1980) 'Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim', *October*, 12, pp. 3-21. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778572> (Accessed: 28 May 2018).

- Burke, E. (2014) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms> (Downloaded: 19 May 2016).
- Burrows, D. (2000) 'Beyond Belief: Mark Wallinger's *Ecce Homo*' in Burrows, D., Hunt, I., de Salvo, D., *Mark Wallinger: Credo*. London: Tate Gallery Publishing Limited.
- Butler, C., Mark, L. G. (2007) *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Campbell, J. (1989) *The Power of Myth*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.
- Carrier, D. (1985) 'Art and its Market' in Hertz, R. (Ed.) *Theories of Contemporary Art*. Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall. Pp. 193-205.
- Carrier, D. (1993) *Poussin's Paintings: A Study in Art-historical Methodology*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Celant, G. (1978) *Beuys, Tracce in Italia*. Naples: Amelio (cited in Mesch and Michely, 2007).
- Celant, G. (2008) *Tornado Americano. Arte al Potere 1949-2008*. Milano: Skira.
- Celant, G. (1996) *Anish Kapoor*. Milan: Charta.
- Chasey, D. (2000) 'Sacrifice, Piss Christ and liberal excess', *Law, Text, Culture* 5 (1).
- Chin, A. (2010) 'Olafur Eliasson: Your Blind Passenger', *Designboom*. Available at: <https://www.designboom.com/art/olafur-eliasson-your-blind-passenger/> (Accessed 12 November 2018).
- Christ, C. P. (1978) 'Why Women Need Goddess'. University of Santa Cruz, Spring. Available at: <https://www.goddessariadne.org/why-women-need-the-goddess->

[part-1](#) (Accessed: 27 November 2016).

- Clark, M. A. (2007) *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion*. Westport CT and London: Praeger.
- Collectif, Kapoor, A. (1990) *Anish Kapoor. British Pavilion. XLIV Venice Biennale*. London: The British Council.
- Coomaraswamy, A. K. (2011) *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Cork, R. (1987) 'Interviewing Anish Kapoor', in *Anish Kapoor on Paper 1975-1987*. Brisbane: Ray Hughes Gallery.
- Costelloe, T. M. (2012) *The Sublime: from Antiquity to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cross, S. (1996) *The Elements of Hinduism*. Shaftesbury: Element Books Ltd.
- Crowther, P. (1989) 'The Kantian Sublime, the Avant-garde, and the Postmodern', *New Formations*, 7, (Spring).
- Crowther, P. (1996) *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism*. Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online. Available at: www.oxfordscholarship.com (Downloaded: 26 April 2016).
- Daneri, A., Di Pierantonio, G., Hegyi, L., Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Vattese, A. (2002) *Marina Abramović*. Milan: Charta.
- Danto, A. (2003) *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Danto, A. C. (1998) *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Danto, C. A., Rosh, E., Epstein, M., Batchelor, S., Bamber, L., Lee, C. J., Larson, K.,

- Tucker, M., Lacy, S., Pitman, B., Anderson, L., Becker, C., Baas, J., Jacob, M. J. (2004) *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- de Duve, T. (2009) 'The Art Seminar', in Elkins, J., Morgan, D. (Eds) (2009) *Re-enchantment*. London and New York: Routledge.
- De Santis, S. (2015) 'Photolux Festival "Sacro e Profano", a Lucca la Biennale di fotografia tra luoghi spirituali e riletture blasfeme. In mostra anche Andres Serrano e Stanley Greene'. Available at:
https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2015/11/03/photolux-festival-lucca-sacro-e-profano_n_8461170.html. (Accessed: 28 October 2016).
- Deshpande, S. (2015) 'Ananda Coomaraswamy and Spiritualist Reading of Indian Art' in Kulkarni, S. G., Chauhan, K., *Art, Aesthetics and Philosophy: Reflection on Coomaraswamy*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd. Available at:
https://www.academia.edu/29275660/Ananda_Coomaraswamy_and_the_Spiritualist_Reading_of_Indian_Art (Downloaded: 28 May 2018).
- Devonshire-Jones, T. (2004) *Presence: Images of Christ for the Third Millennium*. London: BibleLands.
- Doran, R. (2015) *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Egbert, D. (1967) 'The idea of 'Avant-Garde' in Art and Politics', *The American Historical Review*, 73 (2), pp.339-366. Available at:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1866164.pdf> (Accessed: 02 November 2017).
- Eliade, M. (1991) *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*. Translated by P. Mairet. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eliade, M., Doniger, W., Trask, W., L. (2004) *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of*

- Ecstasy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eliasson, O. (2014) 'Reality is Ephemeral', *Tate Etc.*, 32 (Autumn), pp. 88-89.
(Downloaded: 23 May 2016).
- Eliot, T. S. (2001) *Four Quarters*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Elkins, J. (2004) *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Elkins, J., Morgan, D. (Eds) (2009) *Re-enchantment*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Finseth, I. F. (1995) 'American Transcendentalism', *Liquid Fire with Me*, M.A Thesis, University of Virginia (Accessed: 10 June 2017).
- Fisher, J. (2009) 'The Other Story and the Past Imperfect', *Tate Papers*. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/no-12/the-other-story-and-the-past-imperfect> (Accessed 12 October 2018).
- Fischer, P., Dondelinger, P., Roulet, L. (2002) *Ana Mendieta: Body Tracks*. Luzern: Kunstmuseum.
- Fitzgerald, M. (2010) 'Nature as Culture: Olafur Eliasson and the idea of a Contemporary Sublime', *Art & Australia* (47), pp.404-405.
- Forster, E. M. (2005) *A Passage to India*. London: Penguin.
- Foster, H. (1985) 'The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art', *October*, 34, pp. 45-70. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778488> (Downloaded: 26 November 2016).

- Foster, P. (Ed.) (1997) *Feibusch Murals: Chichester and Beyond*. Chichester: Cheichester University Press.
- Freeland, A. C. (2001) *But Is This Art?: An Introduction to Art Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fried, M. (1998) *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.
- Friel, M. (2013) 'Sublimity in the Art of Light and Space Movement', *The Undergraduate Research Journal*, 15. (Accessed: 3 April 2017).
- Fuller, C. R. (2001) *Spiritual, but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online. Available at: <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0195146808.001.0001/acprof-9780195146806> (Accessed: 8 April 2019).
- Fuller, L. (2017) 'The Journey', *Laurence Fuller*. Available at: <http://laurencefuller.squarespace.com> (Accessed: 8 April 2018).
- Fuller, P. (1980) *Beyond the Crisis in Art*. London: Art Series.
- Fuller, P. (1981) 'David Honkney', *Art monthly*. 49 (September), p.35.
- Fuller, P., O'Hear, A. (Ed.) (1993) *Henry Moore. An Interpretation*. Methuen: London.
- Fuller, P. (1985) *Images of God: The Consolations of Lost Illusions*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Fuller, P. (1988) *Seeing Through Berger*. London: Claridge Press.
- Fuller, P. (1988) *Theoria: Art and the Absence of Grace*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Fuller, P. (1993) *Peter Fuller's Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art*. York: Methuen Publishing Ltd.

- Gablik, S. (1995) *Conversation Before the End of Time*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Gablik, S. (1994) *The Reenchantment of Art*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Gadon, E. (1989) *The Once and Future Goddess: A Sweeping Visual Chronicle of the Sacred Female and Her Reemergence in the Cult*. San Francisco: HarperOne.
- Gayford, M. (2003) 'The Ultimate Invisible World', *Modern Painters*, 16 (3), pp.22–25.
- Gayford, M. (2015) 'A New Romantic', *Apollo* (January), pp. 46-50. (Downloaded: 24 May 2016).
- Gera, J. (2010) 'The Search for Identity in the Art of Ana Mendieta and Arnaldo Roche-Rabell', *Americana E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*, VI (1). Available at: <http://americanajournal.hu/vol6no1/gera> (Accessed 27 November 2017).
- Gilbert, C., Eliasson, O. (2004) *BOMB*, 88, (Summer). Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40427639> (Downloaded: 9 May 2016).
- Gimbutas, M. (1974) *The God and Goddess of Old Europe, 7000 to 3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Goldberg, R. (2001) *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Göttner-Abendroth, H. (1987) *Matriarchal Mythology in Former Times and Today*. Berkeley: Crossing Press.
- Govan, M., Kim, C. Y. (2013) *A Retrospective: James Turrell*. London: Pastel Publishing Ltd.
- Greenberg, C. (1960) 'Modernist Painting', in Harrison, C., Wood, P., *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Greenberg, C. (1989) *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Grewe, C. (1999) 'A Godless World Will Do' Art' in Elkins, J., Morgan, D. (Eds) *Re-Enchantment* New York and London: Routledge, pp. 261-266.
- Guénon, R. (2009) *The Essential René Guénon: Metaphysics, Traditions, and the Crisis of Modernity*. Bloomington: World Wisdom.
- Gura, F. G. (2008) *American Transcendentalism: A History*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Hamilton, R. (1981) 'When the Fan Hits the ****', *Art monthly*, 51 (November), p.26.
- Harries, R. (2004) *The Passion in Art*. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Harvey, P. (1990) *An introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, Histories and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hasegawa, Y. (1997) *Where does the Light in our Dreams Come From?*. Setagaya, Tokyo: Setagaya Art Museum; Museum of Modern Art Seitama and Nagoya.
- Hauser, K. (2001) *Stanley Spencer*. London: Tate Publishing.
- Havell, B. A., Lang., A. (1980) *Longinus, On the Sublime*. London and New York: MacMillan and Co. Available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17957/17957-h/17957-h.htm> (Accessed: 12 May 2017).
- Hawley, J. S., Wulff, D. M. (1996) *Devi: Goddess of India (Comparative Studies in Religion and Society)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Herbert, M. L. (1998) 'Spirit and Light and the Immensity Within' in Herbert, M. L., Lienhard, H. J., Pittman McGehee, J., Riley, T. (1998) *James Turrell: Spirit and Light*. Huston: Contemporary Arts Museum.
- Herbert, M. L., Lienhard, H. J., Pittman McGehee, J., Riley, T. (1998) *James Turrell: Spirit and Light*. Huston: Contemporary Arts Museum.
- Hilty, R., Rose, A. (2010) *Anish Kapoor*. London: British Council and Lisson Gallery. Available through: <http://anishkapoor.com/191/in-conversation-with-greg->

[hilty-and-andrea-rose](#) (Accessed: 20 February 2017).

Holland, C. (2010) '700-Hours Silent Opera Reaches Finale at MoMA', *The New York Times*, 31 May.

Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/31/arts/design/31diva.html>

(Accessed: 26 November 2016).

Hughes, R. (1997) *American Vision: The Epic History of American Art*. London: Harvill Press.

Hughes, R. (1981) *The Shock of the New*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Jacob, M. J. (1991) *Ana Mendieta: The "Silueta" Series, 1973-1980*. New York: Galerie Lelong.

John, 1:1, Holy Bible: King James Version

Jonas, A. C. (2000) 'The Modernist Paradigm: The Artworld and Thomas Khun', *Critical Enquiry*, 26 (3), pp. 488-528.

Kandinsky, W. (2000) *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc.

Kant, I. (2007) *The Critique of the Judgment*. Edn. translated by J. J. Meredith. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Kant, I. (1981) *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Edn. translated by J. T. Goldthwait. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kapoor, A. (2011) *Turing the World Upside Down in Kensington Gardens*. London: Koenig Books.

Kapoor, A. (2016) 'In Conversation with Marcello Dantas', in *Anish Kapoor*. Available at: <http://anishkapoor.com/178/in-conversation-with-marcello-dantas>

(Accessed: 20 February 2017).

- Kapoor, A. Bhabha, H. K., Tazzi, P. L. (1998) *Anish Kapoor*. London: California University Press.
- Kazin, A., Aaron, D. (1958) *Emerson: A Modern Anthology*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- King, M. (2005) 'Art and the Postsecular', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 4 (1), pp.3-17. Available through: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jvap.4.1.3/1> (Accessed: 16 December 2016).
- Koestlé-Cate, J. (2014) 'Grids: A Kraussian Perspective on New Window for the Church', *Religion and the Arts*, 18, pp.672-699. (Downloaded: 16 October 2016).
- Koestlé-Cate, J. (2016) 'Blind Faith and the City: Mark Wallinger and the Religious Imaginary' in Quash, B., Rosen A., Chlöe Reddaway, C., *Visualising a Sacred City: London, Art and Religion*. London: I.B. Tauris. (Downloaded: 06 November 2016).
- Koestlé-Cate, J. (2016) *Art and the Church, a Fractious Embrace: Ecclesiastical encounters with Contemporary Art*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kosky, L. J. (2012), *Arts of Wonder: Enchanting Secularity: Walter de Maria, Diller + Scifidio, James Turrell and Andy Goldsworthy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Krauss, R. (1979) 'Grids', *October*, 9, pp. 50-64.
- Kuspit, D. (1994) *The Cult of the Avant-garde Artist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core> (Downloaded: 26 November 2016).
- Kuspit, D. (2005) 'A Critical History of the 20th Century Art', *Artnet Magazine*. Available at: <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/authors/kuspit1.asp> (Accessed: 27 November 2016).

Levi-Strauss, D. (1999) 'American Beuys: "I Like America and America Likes Me"', in

Levi-Strauss, D. (1999) *Between Dog & Wolf: Essays on Art and Politics*.

Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.

Available at: <https://nbrokaw.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/american-beuys.pdf>

(Downloaded: 4 June 2018).

Lippard, L. R. (1990) 'Andres Serrano: the Spirit and the Letter', *Art in America*, (April).

Lippard, L. R. (1983) *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of the Prehistory*. New

York: The New Press.

Livingstone, M. (1983) *Feeling Into Form*, Exhibition Catalogue. Liverpool: Walker Art

Gallery.

Livingstone, M. (2000) 'Bill Viola', in Morphet, R., Rosenblum, R., Bumpus, J., (Eds.)

Encounters: New Art from Old. London: National Gallery Company. Pp. 308-23.

Lyotard, J. F. (1982) 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime'. Translated by L.

Liebmann, *Artforum*, pp.64-69.

Lyotard, J. F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis:

University of Minnesota Press.

Lyotard, J. F. (1991) *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Translated by G. Bennington

and L. Bowlby, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lyotard, J. F. (1994) *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Edn. translated by G.

Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

MAI, (2017), Available at: <https://mai.art> (Accessed: 25 November 2016).

MacKenzie, J., M. (1995) *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*. Manchester:

Manchester University Press.

- Marsala, H. (2015) 'Piss Christ di Andres Serrano non sarà al Photolux Festival 2015. Vince la censura. Il direttore cede dinanzi alle polemiche di cattolici e leghisti'. Available at: <http://www.tribune.com/2015/11/piss-christ-di-andres-serrano-non-sara-al-photolux-festival-2015-vince-la-censura-il-direttore-cede-dinanzi-alle-polemiche-di-cattolici-e-leghisti/>. (Accessed: 28 October 2016).
- Marshall, S. (1997) 'You Have a Cold Heart, Degas!', *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/26/magazine/you-have-a-cold-heart-degas.html> (Accessed: 4 November 2016).
- McEvelley, T. (1998) 'Stages of Energy: Performance Art Ground Zero?', in *Marina Abramović: Artist/Body: Performances 1968 – 98*. Milan: Charta.
- McEvelley, T. (2002) *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies*. New York: McPherson & Company.
- McEvelley, Y. (2012) *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism*. New York: McPherson & Co.
- Meer, A. (1990) 'Anish Kapoor', *Bomb*, No.30. Available at: <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/anish-kapoor/>
- Meer, A. (1990) 'Anish Kapoor', *Interview*, (June), p.93.
- Mendieta, A., Clearwater, B. (1993) *Ana Mendieta: A Book of Works*. Miami, Grassfield Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1993) 'Eye and Mind' in Johnson, G., (Ed) *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. Pp. 125-127.
- Mesch, C., Michely, V. (2007) *The Reader: Joseph Beuys*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- Meyer, J. (2004) 'No More Scale: The Experience of Size in Contemporary Sculpture'.
Artforum, 42 (10), pp.220-228. (Downloaded: 7 November 2018).
- Michaelson, J. (2013) 'Yes, Marina Abramović is Selling Out—and That's OK', *The Atlantic*, (18 December 2013).
- Miller, C. (1994) 'The Orient Corn' in Miller, C., *The Ashmolean Catalogue Roger Wagner Painting 1982- 1994*. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum.
- Miller, C. (2009) *Forms of Transcendence: The Art of Roger Wanger*. Carlisle: Piquant Editions LTD.
- Mitter, P. (1995) *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*. Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitter, P. (2008) 'History, Memory and Anish Kapoor' in Baume, N. (Ed) et al. *Anish Kapoor: Past, Present, Future*. Boston: The MIT Press. Pp. 104-118.
- Moffitt, J. F. (1988) *Occultism in Avant-garde Art: Case of Joseph Beuys (Studies in the Fine Arts Avant-Garde)*. Ann Arbor MI: UMI Research Press.
- Moore, A. (Ed.) Coomaraswamy, R., P. (1988) *Selected Letters of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morgan, S. (1989) 'Interview with A. Serrano', *Artpaper* (September).
- Morley, S. (2010) *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Nancy, J. L. (1993) 'The Sublime Offering' in Courtine J., F., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Questions*, translated by J. S. Librett. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Nepsis101 (2007) *Sister Wendy on Piss Christ*. Available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9pAKdkJh-Y> (Accessed: 6 November 2016).

- Newman, M. (1982) *Objects and Figures: New Sculptures in Britain*. Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery.
- Nietzsche, F. (2001) *The Gay Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nochlin, L. (1989) 'The imaginary Orient', in Nochlin, L., *The Politics of Vision: Essay on Nineteenth-century Art and Society*. New York: Harper & Row. (Downloaded: 27 February 2017).
- Novak B. (1989) 'On Defining Luminism' in Wilmerding, J. (Ed.) *American Light: the Luminist Movement 1850–1875*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nye, E. D. (1996) *American Technological Sublime*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Obrist, H. U. (2010) *Marina Abramović/Hans Ulrich Obrist (Conversation Series)*. London: Konig Books.
- Parr, C. (2009) 'Where's Ganesha When We Need Him? Removing Obstacles to Re-Enchantment in the Borderlands of Religion and Art', in Elkins, J., Morgan, D., (Eds) *Re-Enchantment*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Pejić, B. (1993) 'Being the Body: On the Spiritual in Marina Abramović's Art', in Meschede, F., *Marina Abramović: Artist Body*, Milan: Edition Cantz.
- Perlmutter, D., Koppman, D. (1999) *Reclaiming the Spiritual in Art: Contemporary Cross Cultural Perspective*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press.
- Perov, K. (Ed.) (2008) *Bill Viola. Visioni interiori. Catalogo della Mostra*. Firenze: Giunti GAMM.
- Phelan, P., Reckitt, H. (2012) *Art and Feminism (Themes and Movements)*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Peyton-Jones J. and Obrist, H. U. and O'Brien, S. (2014) *Marina Abramović: 512 Hours*. London: Konig Books.

- Promey, S., M. (2009) 'Expanding Conversations: Theories, Histories, and the Study of Contemporary Practices', in Elkins, J., Morgan, D. (Eds) *Re-enchantment*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp. 222-225.
- Ratman, N. (1999) 'Chris Ofili and the Limits of Hybridity' in *New Left Review*, 1 (235) (May-June). Available at: <https://newleftreview-org.ezproxye.bham.ac.uk/issues/1235/articles/niru-ratnam-chris-ofili-and-the-limits-of-hybridity> (Accessed: 9 July 2018).
- Ratnam, N. (2001) 'I Am That Other That You Want Me to Be: the Work of Anish Kapoor in 1980s Britain', *Sculpture Journal*, 5, pp.90-96.
- Rauch, H., Suro, F. (1992) 'Ana Mendieta's Primal Scream', *Américans*, 44, pp. 44-48.
- Ray, G. (2001) *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*. New York: D.A.P. Inc.
- Rée, J. (Ed.), Urmons, J. O. (2004) *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Western Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Reitmaier, H. (2007) 'In conversation with Anish Kapoor', *Tate Magazine*. Available at: <http://anishkapoor.com/177/in-conversation-with-heidi-reitmaier> (Accessed: 8 February 2017).
- Renzi, K. (2013) 'Safety in Objects: Discourses of Violence and Value – The *Rokeby Venus* and *Rhythm o'*', *SubStance*, 130 (42, 1), pp.120-145. Available at: <http://sub.uwpress.org/cgi/doi/10.1353/sub.2013.0007> (Downloaded: 11 June 2017).
- Richards, M. (2010), *Marina Abramovič*. New York: Routledge.
- Rhomberg, K. (2001) 'Situations: Mark Wallinger in conversation with Krinstin Rhomberg', in May, K., *Sculpsit: Contemporary Artists on Sculpture and Beyond*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. Pp.39-50. Quoted in

- Jonathan Koestlé-Cate, J. (2016) 'Blind Faith and the City: Mark Wallinger and the Religious Imaginary' in Quash, B., Rosen A., Chlöe Reddaway, C. *Visualising a Sacred City: London, Art and Religion*. London: I.B. Tauris. (Downloaded: 06 November 2016).
- Rosenblum, R. (1978) *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*, London: Thames and Hudson.
- Rothenstein, J. (1954) *Modern English Painters: Volume Two, Nash to Bawden*. London & Sydney: Macdonald & Co.
- Rushdie, S. (2006) *Francesco Clemente: Self Portraits*. London: Gagorian Gallery.
- Ruskin, J., Cook, E. T., Wedderburn, A. (Eds) (2010) *The Works of John Ruskin: Volume IV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sandquist, G. (2000) 'Olafur Eliasson', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Inquiry*, 2, pp. 106-110. (Accessed: 09 May 2016).
- Salter, G. (2018) 'Looking at Masculinity: Bacon, Souza, Freud' in *All too Human: Bacon, Freud and the Century of Painting Life*. Ex. Catalogue, London: Tate.
- Schwartz, B., Alexandra, C. (2010) *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.
- Searle, A. (2000) 'A Figure Apart', in Searle, A., *Mark Wallinger: Ecce Homo*. Vienne: Wiener Secession. P.14.
- Shaub, M. (2009) 'Your Black Horizon', in Ebersberger, E., Zyman, D., *The Collection Book: Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary*. Cologne: Walther König.
- Shaw, P. (2013) 'Modernism and the Sublime', in Llewellyn, N., Riding, C., *The Art of The Sublime*, London: Tate Research Publication. Available at:

http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-modernism-and-the-sublime-r1109219#f_1_59 (Accessed: 19 May 2017).

Siedell, A. D. (2009) 'Beyond 'Religion' and 'Spirituality': Liturgical and Sacramental Presence in Contemporary Art' in Elkins, J., Morgan, D. (Eds) *Re-Enchantment*. New York and London: Routledge. Pp. 232-235.

Sjöö, M., Mor, B. (1987) *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of The Earth*. San Francisco and London: Harper & Row.

Spretnak, C. (2014) *The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art: Art History Reconsidered, 1800 to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Staff, C. (2011) *Holy Bible: King James Version*. London: Collins.

Stachelhaus, H. (1987) *Joseph Beuys*. New York: Abeville.

Stallabrass, J. (1994) 'Success and Failure of Peter Fuller', *New Left Review*, 1(207).

Available at: <https://newleftreview.org/l/207> (Downloaded: 7 February 2018).

Starhawk, M. (1999) *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.

Steiner, R. (1968) *A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception*. Spring Valley: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (1979) *An Outline of Occult Science*, Spring Valley: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (1978) *Rosicrucian Esotericism*. Spring Valley: Anthroposophic Press.

Steinerhauer, J. (2012) 'Is Marina Abramović Trying to Create a Performance Art Utopia?' *Hyperallergic*, 7 (May).

Available at: <https://hyperallergic.com/51149/is-marina-abramovic-trying-to-create-a-performance-art-utopia/> (Accessed: 13 September 2017).

Strong, R. (1999) 'Is this a Sitting Site for a statue of Jesus Christ?', *Daily Mail*, 22 (July), p.27.

Symes, C. (1985) 'Art and Politics', *Art Monthly*, 89, (September), p.9.

Tate (2014) 'Bill Viola: Martyrs (Earth, Air, Fire, Water)' *TateShots*. Available at:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/bill-viola-2333/bill-viola-martyrs-earth-air-fire-water>. (Accessed: 8 March 2017).

Taylor, C. (2007) *A Secular Age*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Taylor, M. (2012) *Refiguring the Spiritual (Religion, Culture and Public Life)*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Tazzi, P. L. (1992), 'Breath of Air, Breath of Stone' in *Anish Kapoor*. San Diego: San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art.

This is Tomorrow (2015) *Mark Wallinger and Marina Warner in Conversation*.

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hk3buXon5ok> (Accessed: 06 November 2016).

Thoreau, H. D. (2016) *Walden; or Live in the Woods*. London: Penguin Classic.

Tisdall, C. (1976) *Joseph Beuys Coyote*. Munich: Schirmer/Mosel.

Tisdall, C. (1979) *Joseph Beuys*. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum/Thames and Hudson.

Tisdall, C. (1998) *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way*. London: Violette Edition.

Tillich, P. (2004) 'Writings in the Philosophy of Culture', in Thiessen, G. E., *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*. London: SCM Press.

Turner, B. (1994) *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*. London: Routledge.

Turner, B. S. (1996) *The Body and Society, Exploration in Social Theory*. London: Sage.

- Tucker, M. (1992) *Dreaming with Open Eyes: The Shamanic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art and Culture*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Turrell, J. (1996) 'Mapping Space', in Stiles, K., Selz, P. (Ed.) *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Turrell, J. (2018) *James Turrell: Ganzfelds*. Available at: <http://jamesturrell.com/work/type/ganzfeld/> (Accessed: 1 October 2018).
- Turrell, J. (2018) *James Turrell: Skyspace*. Available at: <http://jamesturrell.com/work/type/skyspace/> (Accessed: 6 October 2018).
- Turrell, J. (2018) *Roden Crater*. Available at: <http://rodencrater.com/celestial-events/> (Accessed: 1 October 2018).
- Tusa, J. (2003) 'Transcript of the Interview with Anish Kapoor', BBC Radio. Available at: <http://anishkapoor.com/180/in-conversation-with-john-tusa-2> (Accessed: 16 January 2017).
- Urmson, J. O. (2005) 'Wittgenstein, Ludwig Josef Johann (1889-1951)' in Rée, J. (Ed.), Urmson, J., O., *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Western Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge. P.396.
- Van Schepen, K. R. (2009) 'From the Form Spirit to the Sprit Form' in Elkins, J., Morgan D. (Eds.) *Re-Enchantment*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Belting, H., Sellars, P., Viola, B., Walsh, J. (2003) *Bill Viola: The passions*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum in association with the National Gallery, London.
- Wagner, R. (2012) 'Marching to an Antique Drum?' *Christian Faith and Modern Art Lecture*. Gresham College. Available at: <http://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/part-four-marching-to-an-antique-drum> (Downloaded: 3 November 2016).

- Weber, M. (2001) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Edn. translated by T. Parsons. London: Routledge.
- Weiskel, T. (1976) *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Wilenski, R. H. (1951) *Stanley Spencer Resurrection Pictures (1945–1950)*. London: Faber And Faber.
- Williams, B. (2001) *Nietzsche: The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williamson, B. (2004) *Christian Art: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Worley, T. (2009) 'The Art Seminar', in Elkins, J., Morgan, D., (Eds) *Re-enchantment*. London and New York: Routledge