

Performative Installation - Heat as a Relational Medium

Master Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.)
in Digital Media at University of the Arts Bremen, June 2026

Author

Boeun Kim

Supervisors

Prof. Dr. Andrea Sick

Prof. Ralf Baecker

Prof. Lea Letzel

University

University of Arts Bremen

Submitted on

June 2026, Bremen, Germany

Table of contents

Introduction

From digital media to *performative installation*

Chapter. 1

From Spectator to Actant: Theoretical Formulation of *Performative Installation*

Chapter 2-1 : A Chair for Co-responding

Chapter 2-2 : Mourning Heat

Chapter 2-3: Remaining Where Light Falls

Conclusion

To me, this thesis is a process of understanding the theoretical backgrounds that align with my artistic practice, as well as a form of documentation of my work and its ongoing process. Since these layered sensory namings and their mediations cannot be fully conveyed through the text alone, this thesis operates on the premise that the reader has already viewed my artistic works.

Introduction

“Wird nicht der Fels ein eigenthümliches Du, eben wenn ich ihn anrede”

[Does not the rock turn into a distinct 'thou' the moment I speak to it?]

(Novalis, 1799, p. 129)

“내가 그 이름을 불러 주었을 때 그는 나에게로 와서 꽃이 되었다.”

[When I called out the name, the one came to me and became a flower]

(Kim, 1952, lines 4-6)

Naming or calling is a way to begin a relationship with another being, whether it is human or a thing. The act of naming simultaneously functions as an act of mediation; without this process of naming, mediation itself is not easily achieved. As my artistic practice has transitioned - from drawing and painting to sculpture, from sculpture to installation, and from installation to digital media - my work has changed alongside this process of building relations, which is the act of naming. Because of these transitions, and since my practice is embodied through forms, sounds, sensations, and shared memories, the act of “naming” for me is not limited to linguistic or textual labels but functions as a form of mediation. Therefore, to me, this thesis is a process of understanding the theoretical backgrounds that align with my artistic practice, as well as a form of documentation of my work and its process. Since these layered sensory namings and their mediations cannot be fully conveyed through the text alone, this thesis operates on the premise that the reader has already viewed my artistic works. However, finding the appropriate “naming” is always an intricate task. Even when the object is as clear as a ‘chair,’ the individual experiences and memories associated with that chair differ. Therefore, the moment it is briefly called a ‘chair,’ the parts concerning those individual experiences remain suspended depending on the person. This becomes even more ambiguous when the thing itself is not physically clear. Consequently, continuous communication is required. Only when the endless intersections are narrowed down through this interaction can a shared proximity finally be achieved.

The same applies to art. Any fixed “naming” ultimately leaves behind unresolved misunderstanding, leaving the richer experiences related to the thing uncommunicated. This unresolved misunderstanding, left uncommunicated, stems from the very act of fixing it. Even if an artist places such a fixed object and holds back an audience member who is about to walk away, explaining the uncommunicated story behind it in tedious detail, it already remains a fixed object. At times, they may even give up on resolving that very misunderstanding, leaving it merely abandoned as an object. In either case, the moment the object becomes fixed, it inevitably degenerates into a misunderstanding that cannot be communicated. This might be an arrogance that it will not be understood anyway, or perhaps an evasion. Ultimately, to prevent a relationship that has entered cognition from solidifying into an uncommunicated misunderstanding, the interaction of narrowing down those intersections is essential.

Another personal motivation for this thesis stems from my experience as an artist who has consistently staged exhibitions and performances for about a decade. Throughout this journey, a persistent question has driven my practice: How can I prevent the audience from remaining mere passive spectators? This concern began with the reality of installation art, where visitors often spend less than three minutes in front of a work, or where capturing their attention seems to require an overwhelming physical scale or heavy financial investment. Seeking a way to encourage longer engagement without relying on visual grandiosity, I began incorporating elements of performance - a medium that inherently binds the audience to a specific duration and space. Admittedly, even in a performance, if the piece is monotonous, the audience disengages; as a viewer myself, I have fallen asleep when a performance grew tedious. In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), Jacques Rancière critically addresses this dynamic of traditional theater that forces the audience into a passive position, stating that “theatre is the place where ignoramuses are invited to see people suffering.”¹ By incorporating elements of performance into my work, my intention is by no means to confine the audience to such a passive role. Rather, my focus lies in addressing the contrasting limitations inherent in both mediums. On one hand, the “white cube” of a gallery grants viewers the freedom to walk away at any moment, which ironically often positions them as detached and comfortable spectators. On the other hand, the conventional performance space presupposes a passive audience and physically binds them to their seats, turning them into a different kind of restricted spectator.

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 3.

I aim to synthesize the advantageous conditions of both environments: the spatial freedom of the white cube - where viewers can linger wherever they choose - and the temporal engagement of performance, which encourages them to remain within the space for a sustained duration. By merging these two conditions, I aim to prompt the audience to move beyond mere observation toward a more profound, immersive experience. Through this approach, I attempt to position the audience not as passive onlookers, but as an essential, active component of the artwork itself. With this background, I refer to this format as a *performative installation*, as an attempt to narrow down these intersections. The comprehensive concept of this format, along with the theoretical framework surrounding the term, will be explored in detail in Chapter 1.

This conceptual exploration and my artistic practices as a *performative installation*, was researched and developed during the Master's program in Digital Media at the University of the Arts Bremen, which ultimately led to this thesis. The word 'digital' originates from the Latin *digitus*, meaning a finger or a toe.² This points to the fingers as the very first tools humanity used for counting, implying the act of quantifying something by pausing a continuous flow. In modern times, it commonly refers to processing information by converting it into binary code. In other words, whether it is sound or electrons, all continuous flows are converted into data of 0s and 1s, rendering them discretely countable. Meanwhile, 'media' stems from *medius*, signifying the middle, an intermediate, or a medium³ - originally denoting being situated in the centre to mediate between two parties. Viewed this way, digital media serves to mediate information that has converted analog elements existing in a state of flow into numbers of 0 and 1. To understand the etymological meaning of 'information' here, which is from 'inform', we must look into *informatio*, which combines *in-*(inside) and *formare*⁴ (to form or shape). Thus, it is interpreted as 'giving shape to the inside' or 'forming and embedding a shape within.' Ultimately, digital media means converting natural phenomena, such as a particular flow of energy, into an internal, countable 'in-form' for mediation. I pay close attention to this 'shaping of flow' and 'mediation' inherent in digital media. To me, this process felt akin to dancing under a single shared promise. Even when examining a small circuit, this holds true. Electrons flow inside these tiny components; based

² Douglas Harper, "digital (adj.)," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/digital>.

³ Douglas Harper, "media (n.)," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/media>.

⁴ Douglas Harper, "inform (v.)," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed May 28, 2026, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/inform>

on a promised choreography, they flow, pause, and flow again. Here the pause is not a complete cessation or disconnection of the flow. Rather, it is a preparation for the next flow, a fleeting moment where energy condenses, and something closer to *remaining*.

Here, I try to encompass an ensemble of situated actants⁵ - including lingering and rustling audiences, ephemeral manifestations of site and *in-stallation* - into this rhythm of precise flowing and remaining. This stemmed from the fact that, beginning with the handcrafting of physical matter, I have continued my artistic practices on the premise of the audience's existence while staging my work across exhibitions and performances. The relationship with the audience, whom I constantly encountered on-site, led me beyond creating works in a private space and prompted me to ask the following questions: If an audience always exists, in what manner do they remain within that flow? How does the artwork coexisting with them exist, and what kind of intervention can I contribute? What role does each -artwork, audience, and practitioner- perform? Furthermore, what kind of relationship do the artwork, audience, and artist form, and what kind of experience do they take away?

Accordingly, Chapter 1 elucidates the core concepts that resonate with the context of my work. First, based on the texts of Guy Debord, I begin with the concepts of 'spectacle' and the 'spectator' that render the audience fixed onlookers. From there, I review the 'Happening' as an attempt to break away from this passive spectatorship, focusing on how Happenings assign specific *performative* instructions to the audience. Building upon this discussion of the audience, I establish my own conceptual framework for *installation art*. Borrowing Claire Bishop's perspective, I examine three distinct forms of installation - including Ilya Kabakov's concept of the *total installation* - as methodologies that incorporate the audience as participants within the *installation* itself. With these cases, I focus on instances where the artwork does not remain a separate object, but approaches the audience as an integrated experience, allowing them to become part of the work.

Next, to clarify the concept of the *performative*, I briefly trace the development of the concept, starting from J. L. Austin's performative utterance. I then move through Erika Fischer-Lichte's performance theory to Judith Butler's expansion of the performative into *body*. Finally, to ensure the focus does not lean toward a human-centric view, I draw upon

⁵ The term 'actant' is borrowed from Bruno Latour's *Actor-Network Theory* (ANT), which grants semiotic and performative agency to both human and non-human elements alike. This concept will be further explained and examined in Chapter 1.

Bruno Latour's concept of the 'actant' through a brief overview of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). With this framework, I try to position both humans and non-humans within the *performative installation* on par with each other.

In Chapter 2, I will introduce three of my works. This approach does not aim to scientifically analyze; rather, it describes the situation in the *performative installation* exactly as it is, in order to return *to the things themselves*.⁶ Just as geography can never substitute for the vivid landscapes of forests and meadows we first encounter, I intend to trace the moments where actants meet, where the ephemeral circulation of heat, breath, and energy creates an ensemble.

Lastly, heat functions for me as a medium for relationships, appearing as a methodological and material medium throughout my entire body of work. In this thesis, I intend to metaphorically address what has been dealt with thus far: from the faint body temperature that serves as evidence of life, to the cry generated by emitting high heat, and to the candle as the temporality of life.

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), viii.

Chapter 1.

In his book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967, a series of 221 short theses) - the French Marxist theorist, philosopher, filmmaker and writer - Guy Debord states, "In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation." He diagnoses that human history has transitioned from "*being* into *having*," and in the modern era, "from *having* to *appearing*." While what a person *was* mattered in the past, and what one *had* became important during early industrialization, he argues, how one *appears* to others has now become the crucial measure. Debord says that this life, which has "receded into representation," has allowed the spectacle (image) to possess stronger power than a life of direct experience. Furthermore, the spectacle is not merely a visual show, but it also influences the "social relationships between people mediated by images." Rather than direct communication, people confirm each other through communication via the spectacle. He states that this spectacle separates producers from products, separates individuals from individuals, and separates reality from images. Ironically, although the spectacle makes it seem as though it connects through a global network, he criticizes that this is merely a connection through the "passive acceptance" of a "one-way" image.⁷ The contemporary art scene in which Debord was active was a testing ground for experiments aimed at shattering this spectacle.

At the forefront stood the 'Happening,' which Allan Kaprow began naming in 1959. Although the origin of this concept lies with his teacher, John Cage, Allan Kaprow showcased the happening at the Reuben Gallery in New York in 1959 through an exhibition titled *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, creating events rather than images. Based on a detailedly structured score, he constructed an interactive environment that included the audience as part of the work. In his happening, the audience was given three stapled cards containing participation instructions along with a program guide:

"The performance is divided into six parts.... Each part contains three happenings which occur at once. The beginning and end of each will be signaled by a bell. At the end of the performance two strokes of the bell will be heard.... There will be no applause after each set, but you may applaud after the sixth set if you wish."

⁷ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967; London: Rebel Press, 1992), 7, 10-11, 13-15.

On these instructions, a score was written indicating what the audience must perform, such as when they should “change seats” and when they should “move to the next room” among the three rooms dividing the gallery.⁸ At the time, Kaprow did not just include phrases demanding this performance, but installed the entire environment to execute it, and composed it so that the audience operated as one within it. In this manner, by providing direct instructions, Kaprow prevented the audience from remaining mere passive ‘spectators’ of the spectacle. Instead, they were driven to engage in the happening as active ‘participants.’

Attempts to create environments to break the spectacle continued. Another representative example is the emergence of installation art. Installation art began when minimalist artists took artworks down from pedestals and created environments extensive enough to cross a public square. Placing something on a pedestal can be considered a declaration that it is a sacred object, elevated above the ground we currently stand on, and thus a noble artwork separated from daily life. This also objectifies the target on the pedestal. In other words, the target on the pedestal becomes separated from the ground the audience stands on. Traditional sculptures utilized this kind of platform to take on a monumental character or remained frozen in a fixed state. It was, in effect, an immovable dynamism. However, entering modern sculpture, this sculpture comes down from the pedestal. Artists of the time realized that sculpture interacts spatially beyond material boundaries. Accordingly, the barrier that distinguished the “object-viewer relationship” as nobility and symbol began to collapse. Consequently, “the observer and the object” were placed in an environment where they were granted equal status. Through this, “both objects and organisms” came to be accepted as things exactly as they are on the same floor, rather than as something represented.⁹ This shift toward an equal *being* placed in the same position caused the audience to no longer merely look, but to be placed within that environment; this created a situation where they see other audience members in the same environment and are simultaneously seen themselves. In this way, the era of installation art opened.

In her book, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005), Claire Bishop explains, “An Installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality.” She said it is “often described as theatrical, immersive, or experiential,” and it is distinguished “from traditional mediums (sculpture, painting,

⁸ Paul Schimmel, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 61.

⁹ Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century*, (New York: George Braziller, 1968), 20.

photography, video) in that it addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from distance, installation art presupposes an *embodied* viewer whose senses of touch, smell, and sound are all heightened as their sense of vision.” In other words, emphasizing the actual “sense of presence” of the viewer can be called the core characteristic of installation art. Regarding this audience participation and experience, Claire Bishop poses the following questions: “Who is the spectator of installation art? What kind of ‘participation’ do they have within the work? Why is installation at pains to emphasize first-hand ‘experience’, and what kind of ‘experience’ does it offer?” She also notes that installation art can immerse viewers into “a fictional world like a film or theatre set”, heighten “awareness of particular senses,” or demand certain actions as well.¹⁰ In Chapter 2, incorporating these characteristics and concerns of installation art, I seek to metaphorically address these questions through my specific artistic practices.

Encompassing diverse types of viewing experiences, installation art suggests the need for an approach that focuses on the viewer's experience rather than the subject or materials. As examples, I would like to cite three installations among the various cases presented by Claire Bishop. First, I would like to bring up Ilya Kabakov's total installation. In a total installation, the viewer functions as a sort of “actor”, performing a certain function within a “narrative scene” directed by the artist. Therefore, his work is often “described as theatrical.” This total installation “not only physically immerses the viewer in a three-dimensional physical space but which is also psychologically absorptive.” He explains “the effect of the ‘total installation’ as one of ‘engulfment’ : we are not just surrounded by physical scenario but are ‘submerged’ by the work; we ‘dive’ into it, and are ‘engrossed’ - as when reading a book, watching a film, or dreaming.” Kabakov describes that “the main motor of the total installation, what it lives by - [is] the cranking up the wheel of associations, cultural or everyday analogies, personal memories. In other words the installation prompts conscious and unconscious association in the beholder.”

The next example is the work of Paul Thek, inspired by Joseph Beuys's social sculpture. He combined the movement of viewers “in and through the installation with symbolic iconography.” In his installation *The Tomb (Death of a Hippie)*, the viewer was “encouraged to activate and interpret the scene by adopting the roles of mourner and archaeologist,” while passing through those structures. While the visitor's movement of

¹⁰ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, (Tate publishing, 2005), 6, 8.

walking implied a more ritualistic and social character, the work that was discovered while walking continuously changed.

The final example brought forward is the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn. According to Claire, He “rejected the term ‘installation.’” He instead considers his practice as sculpture and “explicitly references Joseph Beuys's concept of social sculpture.” He is famous for his claim, “I do not make political art, but I make art politically.” Regarding what he intends by making art politically, he states: “To make art politically means to choose materials that do not intimidate, a format that doesn’t dominate, a device that does not seduce. To make art politically is not to submit to an ideology or to denounce the system, in opposition to so-called ‘political art’.” He believed that the role required of the visitor was not literal participation, but rather becoming a visitor who thinks and reflects. He also stated: “This is something essential to art: reception is never its goal. What counts to me is that my work provides material to reflect upon. Reflection is an activity.”¹¹ In other words, he suggests that if his sculpture can serve as a catalyst for reflection, the viewers are inherently engaged in an act of participation.

In the last paragraphs, we looked at three aspects regarding installation art. One is Ilya Kabakov's total installation, which immerses the audience in a narrative space; another is the case of Paul Thek, which delegates a certain role to the audience and induces movement; the last is the case of Thomas Hirschhorn, where the audience performs an activity through thinking and reflection, even if it is not literal participation. Commonly, these aspects suggest that artworks form relationships based on the event of encountering the viewer, rather than being observed as fixed objects. The point to note here is the fact that this relationship-building goes beyond a state of simply remaining in a space, and operates as a *performance* where the presence and role of the viewer completes the work. The moment the viewer intervenes and responds to the flow of the work, the work transitions from a static state to a variable state. That is, within the installation, even if the visitor enters initially as ‘viewers,’ they no longer remain as such; instead, both the artwork and the audience take on a *performative* character. Moving forward, I will engage in conceptual examination of the term ‘performative,’ tracing its origins back to linguistics.

The term ‘performative’ in this context originates from *performative utterances* presented by the linguist John L. Austin. In his lecture entitled “How to Do Things with Words” in 1955 at Harvard University, he focused on performative sentences where the act of

¹¹ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, 14, 16, 28, 123, 124, 127.

speaking itself becomes an action, going beyond simply stating a certain condition or conveying facts. Like words such as "I promise," it started from creating a 'promise' rather than describing a state, or as in the poem cited earlier, calling out "you" like a rock and a flower, or naming a "name" - thereby generating reality through the language being performed. Speaking such sentences changes the world by speaking them, by performing them. According to Judith Butler, as cited by Erika Fischer-Lichte, the *performative* began to expand into a bodily dimension.

According to Fischer-Lichte, Butler brings forward the body as a "repertoire of infinite possibilities," drawing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body. For Butler, this implies that the body is "an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities." Elaborating on this phenomenological foundation, Fischer-Lichte notes that Butler extends these possibilities by likening "the conditions of embodiment to a theatrical performance" and that "the acts that generate and perform gender roles . . . constitute a 'shared experience' and 'collective action' because they have always already begun before 'one arrived on the scene.'"¹² That is to say, within this performative framework, the body inherently harbors an identity already shaped by the lived history and personal context of that very body, yet it is constantly re-performed as well.

To further examine Butler's perspective, I focus more closely on the body as "materializing possibilities." As she argues in her text, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988), the body is "not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning." Which means that this harboring of meaning is achieved not through an interior essence but through "a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities." From her perspective, "one is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body." In other words, identity for Butler is a materialized identity constructed through this ongoing corporeal project, established precisely through a "stylized repetition of acts" over time.¹³

To summarize the concept of a *performative installation* up to this point, it can be understood as an environment that induces the transformation of the spectator - who has been conditioned by the spectacle - from a passive observer into an active viewer, and further, into

¹² Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1988), quoted in Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Jain (2004; London: Routledge, 2008), 27, 28.

¹³ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519, 521.

a performer. Within this context, the artwork and the audience are not fixed objects; instead, as distinct bodies and simultaneously, as a singular collective installation, they generate new meanings at every moment and forge relationships through “performative acts”¹⁴ in space.

I pay particular attention to the fact that both the artwork and the audience possess a performative perspective, and that the installation prompts such a situation. That is to say, the artwork does not function merely as a prop, but operates as an agent. Furthermore, I apply the aforementioned concept of the body and the body achieved through performance to non-human entities. For these non-human entities as well, their physical identities are established through a stylized repetition of acts, and they inherently bear an identity already shaped by the lived history and personal context of that very body. To support this perspective, I incorporate the concept of the *actant* by Bruno Latour in his “Actor-Network Theory (ANT)” into the framework of the *performative installation*.

ANT is a social theory and methodology proposed by Bruno Latour that explains society not through traditional structures or systems, but as a web (network). Despite misunderstandings arising from the common usage and implicit nuances of the word “network” itself, he nevertheless insists on using this term. One of the misunderstandings he clarifies is the technical meaning carried by the word “network” itself, and the second is the misunderstanding arising from its similar nuance to social networks. Regarding each misunderstanding, he explains that “a technical network in the engineer's sense is only one of the possible final and stabilized states of an actor-network,” and that “an actor-network may lack all the characteristics of a technical network.” For the second misunderstanding, he clarifies that “whereas social network adds information on the relations of humans in a social and natural world which is left untouched by the analysis,” ANT “aims at accounting for the very essence of societies and natures,” and that it does not wish “to add social networks to social theory, but to rebuild social theory out of networks.”

Furthermore, he states that despite the many potential misunderstandings, he insists on using the word “network” because the word actually originates from Diderot's concept of “réseau”(net) and serves as a metaphorical shift to describe essences, akin to Deleuze's rhizome. For him, modern societies “cannot be described without recognizing them as having a fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, capillary character,” and he asserts that “the only

¹⁴ Butler, “Performative Acts”, 519.

way to achieve this reinjection of things into our understanding of social fabrics is through a network-like ontology and social theory.”

Here, based on the characteristics of this network, Latour reformulates the concept of “Actor” in ANT. For him, “Actor” triggers misunderstanding because of “Anglo-Saxon tradition” that, combined with misunderstanding in social network context, means “an individual human - usually male - who wishes to grab power”. And he clarifies the actor in ANT as “a semiotic definition - an actant -, that is something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies *no* special motivation of *human individual* actors, nor of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be source of an action.”¹⁵

With this framework, the scope of the performer included in the aforementioned *performative installation* is close to the “actant” mentioned by Latour. Things are not mere tools; rather, they are interconnected with all other participants (performers), thereby producing performative acts through interaction within a network. What I emphasize here is that *performative installation* as an artistic practice specifically addresses the interactions occurring within the confines of a single installation.

With the concepts of Butler and Latour presented thus far as a framework, I extend Butler’s discourse on the performative body to non-human. Just as for Butler the body is not a fixed entity but rather a process achieved through “a stylized repetition of acts” and “a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities,”¹⁶ I argue that the non-human actant within the installation also constructs its own physical identity in precisely the same manner. That is to say, non-human elements such as objects and technological devices are not merely fixed matter or tools; rather, by repeating and sustaining specific acts within situations and conditions, they become subjective entities that simultaneously acquire an accumulated lived history and their own inherent agency.

Under this perspective, I seek to establish the *performative installation* not as a site where spectator and object are segregated, but as an *ensemble of situated actants* that continuously interact at every moment through “performative acts.”¹⁷ As previously

¹⁵ Bruno Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications,” *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369-370, 373.

¹⁶ Butler, “Performative Acts”, 519, 521.

¹⁷ Butler, “Performative Acts”, 519.

mentioned in the introduction, I endeavor to include *lingering and rustling audiences and ephemeral manifestations of site and in-stallation* within this *ensemble of situated actants*.

With this theoretical framework, what, then, is the state of the contemporary era? The dominant tendency of “spectacles,” in which direct experience is lost, and the prevailing current representation has now shifted into a more personal and private realm, remaining pervasive to this day. Byung-Chul Han addresses this current situation in his book *The Crisis of Narration* (2024). He states that, “In the age of Netflix, no one speaks of having shock experiences in connection with films. A Netflix series is nothing like a piece of art that corresponds to a pronounced danger to life and limb. Rather, it typically leads to *binge watching*. Viewers are fattened like consumer cattle. *Binge watching* is a paradigm for the general mode of perception in digital late modernity.” Furthermore, Han argues that “the screens on which movies played have been replaced by digital screens that we look at almost constantly... A screen bans reality, which becomes an image, thus screening us off from it.” Within this regime, “on a smartphone screen, reality is so attenuated that it can no longer create any shock experiences. *Shocks give way to likes*.” He extends this critique by arguing, “because it removes reality’s gaze, the smartphone is a most efficient tool for screening us off from reality.” According to Han, this gaze is “the gaze through which the other addresses us,” which completely disappears behind the touchscreen, depriving the other of its alterity and rendering it consumable. Citing Jacques Lacan, Han deepens this analysis of the image, reminding us that “a picture still possesses a gaze that looks at me, captures me, enchants and fascinates me.” In this Lacanian sense, Han notes that “the gaze is distinguished from the eyes,”¹⁸ wherein the eyes merely construct an imaginary mirror image that the genuine gaze ultimately crosses out. That is to say, the contemporary digital image, reduced to a swipe on a touchscreen, has lost this gaze.

Therefore, as a practice to cultivate an environment for the lost gaze - a gaze diminished by this increasingly insidious mode of the spectacle - and as a resistance against being domesticated as mere spectators, I propose a return to the site. As an extension of this artistic practice, Chapter 2 seeks to metaphorically address these issues through three specific works. To retrieve this lost gaze, the viewer becomes the audience, and moreover, a participant, engaging in attempts such as sitting on a chair parasitic on their own body heat to contemplate a plant, having their duration of stay tethered within a performance-based

¹⁸ Byung-Chul Han, *The Crisis of Narration*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), chap. 6, “From Shock to Likes,” EPUB.

installation, performing a piece utilizing heat as a medium, or remaining beside a dying, screaming candle.

Chapter 2-1. A Chair for Co-responding(2022)

How it started: questioning usefulness

The project *A Chair for Co-responding* began during the pandemic, following my relocation to Germany and a period of social and sensory isolation. In 2020, after moving from Seoul to Bochum with my two cats, I came to stay in a situation where I had no acquaintance, limited language skills, and almost no opportunities for personal interaction. Weeks, and sometimes months, passed without face-to-face conversation with others. Having few encounters with people meant being in a situation where the ways of communicating and stimuli from others were reduced. I was placed in a situation where the exchange of socialized language or emotions mostly disappeared. Of course, I did go grocery shopping. To feed myself to stay alive. Even when I went shopping, everyone was reluctant to be near each other. Perhaps they were even more reluctant to be near me. I, who did not know this while living in Korea, was an Asian woman here, during the pandemic. It was a daily routine to experience various expressions of hate, such as people being terrified of touching me or sometimes being aggressive and throwing waste at me. Including this reason, I avoided contact with people, who to me were foreigners, even more. In this state of social isolation, the things that were mainly repeated were for survival: eating, doing home workouts to avoid being swallowed by depression, watching screens or videos, observing plants, studying German, and playing with my cats and going for walks. Beyond social isolation, the environmental changes were also immense. The sun. It was the absence of the sun. I didn't know how much the sun can affect human beings. In Korea, the sun rises almost every day except during the summer monsoon season. Even in the middle of winter, the sun rises, and although it sets a bit early, it doesn't set at 4 PM like in Germany. Due to the lack of sunlight, the air felt even damper, and my fingers and toes became so numb from the cold that they even started to ache. I couldn't help but become sensitive to body heat and warmth, which I hadn't focused on when I was in a comfortable and stable state. I began to focus on the warmth generated to maintain homeostasis. The seeping coldness became even more intense if I skipped a meal. I could feel the lack of calories for maintaining body temperature through the coldness. During the long hours I spent alone in the room with not much I could do, I

even had the thought: all the effort I spend eating is simply for producing heat for my body maintenance? Again, tomorrow comes; I shop for groceries, cook and feed, exercise, and walk. I stare at the pavement with the damp air and the dew formed by that air. I feel the coldness and dampness creeping through my clothes. I sense the ground beneath my feet, slippery and wet from the dampness. I recognize the weeds on the ground. The weeds that are squeezing through the stones just to stay alive.

In this state, still feeling my evaporating body warmth, the traces of dissipating life residues, I came to the thought: what is the usefulness of this body?

The musty smell, the smell of earth, the smell of dead insects, the smell of rain, the smell of moss. Whether the scents are permeating into the nose or piercing through the clothes and into the skin. Whether that soaked-in air is mixing with the body heat being emitted and stealing away the calories barely filled. Whether they are just blending together. In that feeling of the body being completely sunk, in that situation of trying to survive and squeeze out. Whether I am that weed or the weed is me. What is the relationship between this and me?

Parasitic relationship

Upon entering the exhibition space, in a white space that is bleak to the point of desolation, there sits something that once again looks like a white chair. Along with the title "A Chair for Co-responding," there is an object that seems to propose that you sit down. The wires coming out of this chair are connected to an iron skewer-like object with a small lamp attached to it, as if foretelling another chain reaction. Unlike ordinary exhibition spaces, there is not a single light illuminating the artwork. After wandering around and looking through the space shrouded in darkness, I sit down on the solitary chair. Soon after, the small lamp turns on. A purple light, created by mixing red and blue lights, illuminates a small plant community beneath it. The chair is situated low - at a distance where one can look at the plant community illuminated under that light most intimately, and in a way that forces one to lean their body forward to look deeply into it. Leaning forward, I gaze. There, moss, lichen, and fragile sprouts squeezing through the gaps are entangled together. Just as the musty smell and damp air are felt, an unexpected parasitic plunder begins. From the moment of contact upon sitting on the chair, body heat was flowing into the chair. Between the body in contact and the cold, human-tailored cooling plate made of aluminum, the Peltier element creates an electrical flow

at that interface. The stinging chill rushing in from the contacted body makes the sitting body feel that it is giving energy, while simultaneously making it feel that its heat is being stolen.



Figure 1. *A Chair for Co-responding* at Ars Electronica, 2023.

Through this chair, the residual warmth of body heat left by human physical activity is intercepted and parasitized, and at the same time, the light turned on by this sucked-up energy accelerates the life activity of the plant community. When the oxygen produced by the plant shoots that received the light and the damp smell enter deep into the lungs once again, this strange cycle of a parasitic relationship is finally connected.

The interception and transfer of energy occurring among this installation, the audience, and the plants share the same line of thought on relationships unfolded in Michel Serres' book, *The Parasite*. Starting with the fable of the town mouse and the country mouse, he traces the chain of parasitism and defines the parasitic relationship as follows:

"[...] The rats are attracted to the table. One invites the other. [...] The guest, though a rat, is a parasite for anthropology, a guest at an interrupted banquet, [...] The host is not a parasite in this sense, but in order to live in the house of the tax farmer, within his walls, in his larder, he is a parasite in the biological sense, like

a common louse, a tapeworm, like mistletoe, an epiphyte. [...] If the "guest" is a tax-collector, in the broadest sense, I consider him to be a parasite in the political sense, in that a human group is organized with one-way relations, where one eats the other and where the second cannot benefit at all from the first. [...] the relation denoted by a single arrow is irreversible,[...] I call this semiconduction, this valve, this single arrow, this relation without a reversal of direction, "parasitic. [...] What does man give to the cow, to the tree, to the steer, who give him milk, warmth, shelter, work, and food? What does he give? Death."¹⁹

As can be seen in Serres' text, this work consists of this "irreversible, one-way arrow" that has no reverse direction, acting as a semiconductor. The audience's body heat is absorbed into the chair, and the Peltier, a semiconductor thermoelectric generation element, mediates this to produce electricity. This electricity once again illuminates the moss in the same space with light that aids photosynthesis, and the oxygen produced in this way mixes back into the air within the space.

However, the point here is the relationship between the finiteness possessed by the human body and the moss, which could virtually have a longer life if dried and hibernated. By sitting on the chair with a living body, the audience member might think of themselves as an omnipotent provider giving light to the moss. However, while humans are finite beings who must constantly consume calories to maintain body heat and life to survive, moss is a being that can survive for a long time by stopping its own metabolism even without water and heat. In other words, the trace of temporarily released warmth from a finite human conversely awakens the permanent moss to breathe, and through the mixing of that breath, a temporary relationship is formed.

This strange relationship expands beyond the audience member sitting on the chair to the relationship with the surrounding audience. Although invisible, other audience members in this shared space breathe in the oxygen produced by the sitting audience member's body heat together, forming a parasitic relationship once again.

Design log and an incident

There are a few incidents that occurred when first creating this chair. Initially, when I conceived the idea to generate electricity using body heat and use that electricity to turn on

¹⁹ Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 5.

the photosynthetic lighting for a parasitic relationship, I contemplated how to approach the audience in the most natural way possible. In an exhibition space - at least within a white cube - the audience usually walks, stands and gazes, or sits and gazes. Considering these behavioral patterns, I came to create a 'chair' as the method that could naturally contact the audience's body. However, making the chair recognized as a chair in the minds of the audience while simultaneously functioning as one was more difficult than expected. As the shape of the chair approached ergonomic comfort, the structure became more organic, making it difficult to attach the flat, rectangular Peltier elements that absorb the audience's body heat; conversely, the more suitable the chair's shape was to perform its function



Figure 2. First design of the chair, 2022.



Figure 3. Latest design of the chair, 2023.

(efficiently absorbing temperature and generating electricity), the more it gave the impression of a mechanical device rather than a chair. Setting the height of the chair was also a sensitive issue. If the height was even slightly too high, it looked like an exhibition platform or a tea table, and if it was even slightly too low, it was mistaken for a footstool. At the time of early

production, due to issues of time and budget, the shape had to be simplified entirely into rectangles. I wanted to order the Peltier elements themselves in a different shape, but it was difficult within the budget. Therefore, to match the standardized, rectangular tile-shaped Peltier elements, the top plate of the chair also became a rectangle. To ensure the durability of the chair, iron legs were manufactured and combined. However, the first problem occurred here. The audience perceived this angular, rectangular object not as a chair, but as an exhibition object that should not be touched. Furthermore, while chairs in exhibition spaces are usually placed against the walls, this installation was placed all by itself right in the middle of the space, making it look even less like a chair to the audience. In the end, to induce audience participation, the chair design had to be completely revised. The newly designed chair strictly maintained the technical functions of attaching the Peltier elements and arranging the cooling plates, but the top plate was changed to a circle, and a connecting support was added underneath the chair legs. This support was unnecessary in terms of function, but it was an element attached to realize the image of a familiar stool commonly seen in daily life. Once the design was changed, the audience finally recognized it as a chair and began to sit on it.



Figure 4. A visitor put their bag on *A Chair for Co-responding* at Ars Electronica, 2023.

However, the joy of the audience accepting the object as a chair was short-lived, as another bittersweet incident followed. The audience began to place their bags or belongings on top of this chair and view the exhibition. The familiarity as a chair had induced another function of the object (the act of placing items on top) beyond the originally intended 'body heat contact.' This incident served as an opportunity to further deepen my contemplation for future works regarding how the medium, shape, and signs used when a work is produced approach the audience with what kind of familiarity, and what kind of performativity they induce. Furthermore, it acted as a catalyst to awaken my interest in how the *performative* behavior resulting from this shape and medium, as well as the relationship between this *installation* and the audience, should be situated in subsequent works.

Chapter 2-2. Mourning Heat (열곡(熱哭))(2024)

Background and Motivation: Three fragments of stories

Fragment 1.

"So, we picked out a headstone, but honestly, no one in my family liked it. We even sent them some AI-generated designs to show exactly what we were looking for, right? But the design the stonemason sent back was just terrible. And get this—you won't believe how much they're charging. They sent over the invoice and it's 6.461,70 Euros with design, montage and taxes. Can you believe that? Six thousand! For that?"

- from a conversation with my friend

Fragment 2.

"There was nothing I could do but cry beside them. Without even making a sound. But then, I could hear my grandmother crying next to me. Intentionally louder, going 'Aigo, aigo.' Whether she was truly crying or just making noise, I couldn't really tell. But that wasn't what was important. Ringing out with sound was what was more important. So that everyone could hear."

- From what a friend said after returning from a funeral on a summer day.

Fragment 3.

What is being alive and what is a living thing were the questions that I have worked with, including in my last solo show *A flowing body does not decay*. It approached these questions through body temperature and the residual heat left on surfaces. A friend of mine, who is doing a PhD in astronomy, was inspired by my project through using heat as a medium and touching on life and death. He told me about stars and the death of stars. There are two things that defy entropy in natural science, one is life and the other is stars. A drop of ink dropped into water will become disordered over time as the pure ink molecules diffuse into the water. A fallen leaf will decompose over time and become compost, and things that are born will die again, but when a star is born or when life is born, it goes against this entropy, and both send energy back into the environment. A star dies with a supernova explosion; the universe is slightly different from the one before it existed. It is dead and gone, but the subtle changes caused by its scattered matter make the cosmic landscape more complex. And somewhere in the universe, life is born in abundance and returns as a circulation of matter.

The three fragmentary stories above were brought from conversations shared while creating the project *Mourning Heat*(열곡(熱哭)). They intactly contain the points of contemplation I faced while preparing for the work. What is today's ritual? What have we lost? Rather than overwhelming questions like life and death, I want to talk about us being alive right here, about the living process. If so, what should we do right here, right now? Heat produces a cry. That cry is so resonant that the body trembles. Who should activate this cry produced by heat? If we lose a certain object, even though we know this is a stage naturally faced by the living, does that object's fierce life energy truly disappear? At the same time, while doing sculpture and installation work and observing the audience, how can it become a performative installation where the audience becomes more a part of the work rather than a spectacle? At the end of overflowing worries, stemming from the nature of an audience that merely stays and passes by, what I began to focus on in order to approach the audience as an affective experience was precisely 'crying.'

Mourning as a ritual

“Today’s crisis of community is a crisis of resonance.”

(Byung-Chul Han, 2020, p.11)

Mourning (crying) is a condensed form of expression for complex emotions, released before they can be organized into language. It stands as the most fundamental ritual connecting the birth and death of life. When these unrefined emotions burst forth as corporal acts, crying transcends the realm of private sorrow to become a powerful resonance that invites the community into the individual’s grief. Historically, the figure of the ‘professional mourner’ has served as a ritualistic catalyst, bridging the gap between private bereavement and communal experience.

In his book *The Disappearance of Rituals*, Byung-Chul Han explains that "rituals bring forth a community in which resonances occur, one that is capable of accord, of a common rhythm [...] Resonance is not an echo of the self; the dimension of the other is inherent in it. It means accord." Ritual is not merely a conceptual procedure but a "processes of embodiment and bodily performances." From the ancient Greek *Moirologists*²⁰ to the Korean *gokbi* (哭婢), these mourners exhausted their physical bodies to generate sound and heat, filling the cold void of death with raw life energy. As Han points out, such acts are the realization of a “communal body [Körperschaft]” that creates physical bonds, through which the values and orders of the community are directly inscribed onto the members' bodies.

Within this ritualistic context, grief no longer stagnates within the internal psychological realm of the individual. According to Han, "In a ritual of mourning, the mourning is an objective feeling, a collective feeling. It is impersonal ... In a ritual of mourning, the community is the actual subject that mourns." In other words, the ritual of mourning is not about comforting the emotions of an isolated individual; rather, it is an act of binding atomized individuals back into a steadfast community through a shared affective experience (shared feeling).

However, as death in contemporary society has been transformed into a personalized service and a standardized medical procedure, these physical rituals have largely vanished.

²⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "moirologist," accessed June 1, 2026, <https://www.oed.com/>.

The increasing atomization of society also takes hold of its emotional world. The formation of collective feelings became less frequent. Instead, “fleeting affects and emotions,” the states of isolated individuals, predominate.²¹

With this background, as another project as *performative installation*, I practice the implementation of ritual through my project, *Mourning Heat*. In this work, borrowing the words of Han, I attempt to ensure that “forms of ritual, such as manners, make possible both beautiful behavior among humans and a beautiful, gentle treatment of things,” instead of “consume,” them. In the work, participants will have the chance to practice “treating not only other people but also things in beautiful ways, so that an affinity exists between us and other people as well as things.”²² In this context, *Mourning Heat* allows the participants to encounter a form of ritual and learn how to face the installation and other participants, how to hold the ceramic tube, and how to cry by activating the installation. This instrument, named ‘mourning instrument,’ utilizes thermoacoustic phenomena to give the experience of intangible energy of crying into physical sound and heat. The process in which the instrument reaches its thermal limit and emits a scream-like resonance attempts a ‘physical exhaustion’ once used to be performed by traditional hired mourners. By synchronizing the physical intensities of heat and vibration with the participants, *Mourning Heat* attempts to temporarily restore the community of resonance through artistic practice.

The Project / Main Body

Upon entering the hall, white dots fixed to thin metal wires appear in the twilight as if floating. As the audience gathers and sits down, the space sinks into a deeper darkness, and soon the faint light of the coil heats up. The small light radiated by the heated coil flickers within an extremely restricted domain. Composed of ceramic pedestals and vulnerable-looking coils, these apparatuses give the impression of an altar for a solemn ritual, or perhaps a cluster of low-lying candles or incense sticks on the floor. The individual hand-molded shapes reveal their presence by lighting up in subtly different forms. Around the time the low-illumination red light occupies the space, a performer emerges from among the audience as if they had been in that spot from the very beginning. The performer slowly circles around the cluster of lights. At the end of those steps, which seem to be exploring or contemplating something, the performer's touch reaches toward a pipe placed on the floor

²¹ Byung-Chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 11,12.

²² Byung-Chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals*, 11,12.

within the exhibition space where the light and heat of the coil waver. Carefully holding the off-white rod reminiscent of bone with both hands, the performer kneels in front of the apparatus and lifts the tube high. The moment the wavering coil is inserted into the interior of the ceramic tube, a sharp sound reminiscent of a wailing cry (perform *gok*) or some sort of weeping rings out.

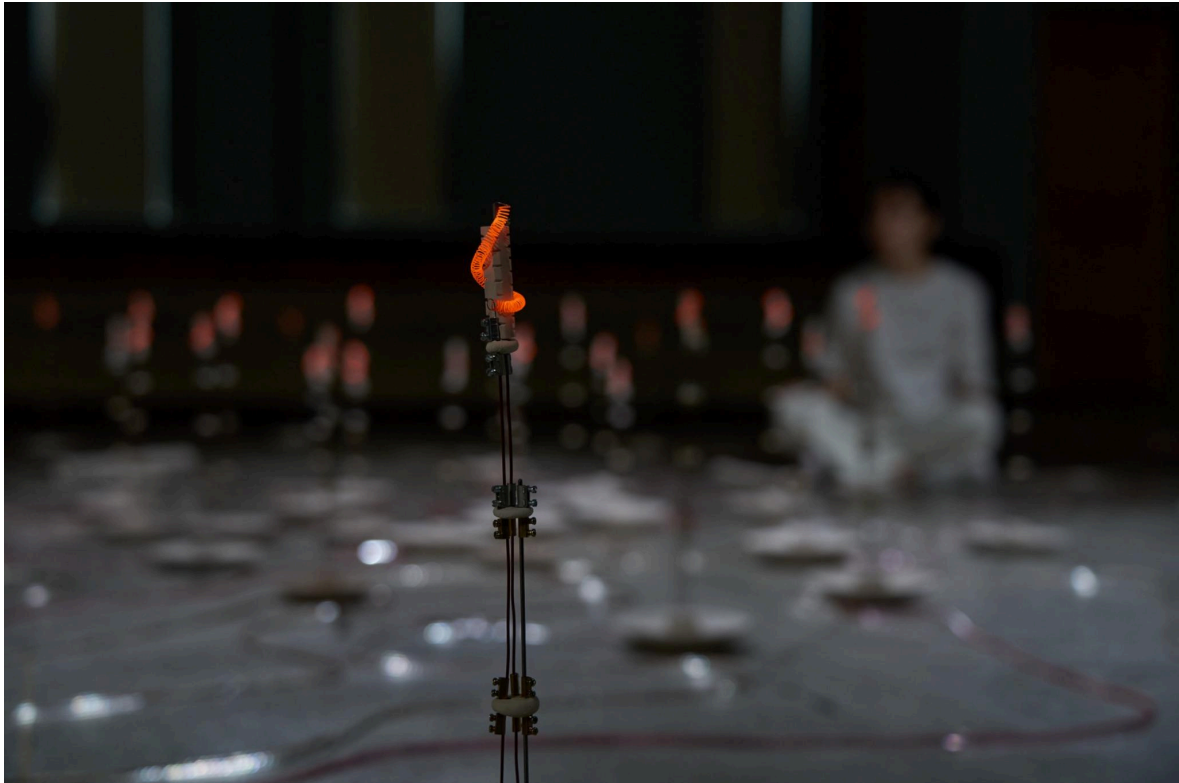


Figure 5. *Mourning Heat*(열곡(熱哭)) in Seoul, 2024, Photo by Chul Lim Choi

Inside the thick, transparent cable can be felt beneath one's feet, electricity flows from one pole to another. If the energy between these poles does not pass through a normal flow and instead abruptly collides and runs wild without passing through any resistance, a short circuit immediately occurs. On top of this tight threshold, thin copper wires, exposed with their insulation stripped, confront each other precariously with a single small ceramic piece between them. A nichrome coil is placed between these two poles. Nichrome is a medium possessed of high electrical resistance combining nickel and chromium. Unlike when electrons flow easily through a material like copper or silver, extreme friction and collisions occur when they pass through the rough atomic structure of nichrome. The vast energy poured in by electricity to break through this section of resistance causes a thermodynamic transition, radiating into the space while vibrating as intense heat.

The moment the ceramic embraces this bursting energy, the static air and the boiling heat meet, creating a rapid expansion. When the heated air surges up through the ceramic tube, cold air flows in from below as if rushing up to fill the empty spot. This repetition of dynamic expansion and contraction constantly circulates along the conduit of the pipe, releasing a cry that surges upward. The sound ringing out as it wraps around the hot coil produces an inhuman, bizarre cry located between a flute - as an extended tube of the vocal cords' vibration making a weeping sound - voice and breath. This sound - that is, a single vocalization with a direct centerpoint - simultaneously functions as an ownerless voice delivered from hand to hand as an instrument. The motion of the practitioner carefully holding the tube and interacting with the coil honestly fulfills a specific performance technique; yet, the sound that occasionally trembles so faintly in an extremely narrow domain that it reaches only the practitioner's own ears causes movements and events of a different



Figure 6. *Mourning Heat*(열곡(熱哭)) in Seoul, 2024, Photo by Chul Lim Choi

dimension from instrumental performance, reclaiming that sound as their own, just as someone who has lost the deceased murmurs so that only they can hear. At the end of the

slightly wavering, seemingly uniform sound and the sharp sound of the coil scraping the inner wall of the ceramic, the performer stops crying. They lift the tube high once more and lay it horizontally across their knees. Again, from somewhere, another performer begins to circle. Silence and anticipation intersect in the space while the three performers find their own sounds in turn. They link the ceramic tubes with the lights in calm movements as if executing a holy task, and the generated sounds fill the space, repeating a cycle of overlapping and scattering. Before long, when the dynamic movements and sounds stop all at once, the three performers sit in front of their respective apparatuses. As if by agreement, the three performers begin to resonate simultaneously. This sound of resonance causes interference and beating according to the minute movements of the performers, and furthermore expands by co-resonating with the bodies of the audience members present at the site.

Mourning Heat (2024) takes the form of a *performative installation* that cannot be completed without the intervention of the performers. This combination of performance and installation goes beyond a formal choice; here, the installation is not a simple object of appreciation but a potential state awaiting the performer's action, and the performer becomes a mediator who delivers by activating the apparatus at the same time. As an inevitable apparatus for the previously mentioned practice of ritual, this combination allows the apparatus, the body, and the physical energy flowing between them mediate one another, binding independent entities into a single sensory event.

Design log of Mourning Heat

“In reality, they insist, whenever we encounter matter ‘it is matter in movement, in flux, in variation’, with the consequence that ‘this matter-flow can only be *followed*’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 450-451). Artisans or practitioners who follow the flow are, in effect, itinerants, wayfarers, whose task is to enter the grain of the world’s becoming and bending it to an evolving purpose. Theirs is an ‘intuition in action’ (ibid.: 452)”²³

In my work, when including non-human actants, I tend to be deliberate in making decisions about the medium of the actant, because I consider their bodies are also

²³ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013), 25, quoting Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2004), 450–52.

“materializing possibilities.” Among these instances, the aspect to highlight in this work is the process of dealing with heat - especially intense heat, around 700-900 degree celsius, that stands in contrast to the subtle body temperature I handled in previous work - which can be described as an experience purely driven by the properties of heat and the necessity to have “followed” those very properties.

The mourning instrument came to be produced using ceramic as the main material. The most beautiful sound was the sound produced from a glass tube. Even with the same thermoacoustic phenomenon, the feeling of vibration given by the material itself was different. The clear sound possessed by glass and the somewhat heavier sound possessed by ceramic certainly gave different impressions. Even looking at other cases where thermoacoustic phenomena were experimented with, it was common to use glass or iron pipes. Heat does produce a sound. However, to the question of who must activate this sound, I was in a position where I had to answer: a human performer. Glass produced a clear sound, but it soon began to crack and then burst. Even though I used a quartz tube, it burst because the properties possessed by glass could not withstand the repeated expansion and contraction caused by heat. I also experimented with an iron pipe. It was far too hot to use as an instrument, requiring too much protective equipment. Visually, it was also very sadistic and threatening. Thus, I came to use ceramic - ceramic that becomes harder and crystallizes when it receives heat. This was also a familiar material. Because it did not heat up abruptly, the temperature of the high-heat coil was delivered as warmth even when a human touched it.

Borrowing the words of Tim Ingold, in his book *Making Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, the process of my material research can be described as a “transitory equilibration” within the “field of forces”²⁴ inherent in the medium. The process of producing ceramics was also a process of finding this very equilibration, given that ceramic is like water; it is like stone. It is like an ore - a water-like mass - formed when tiny mineral particles deposited over tens of thousands of years meet water and are kneaded by physical forces. In its natural state, it takes tens of thousands of years to change due to volcanic and geologic activity, but human intervention shortens this time. The flowing, stretching, thickening masses are hardened into metallic ores by heat and pressure. As a result of following the flow of the properties possessed by this clay, properties like water and like stone gave the mourning instrument a feeling of '...-like' such as a candle or incense, and it can be said that

²⁴ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, 25.

this effectively operated in endowing the instrument with the atmosphere and role of a ritual instead.

To synthesize the artistic projects explored thus far, my artistic practice as a *performative installation* stemmed from an unexpected incident during the observing and fabricating a chair to utilize the audience's body heat as a medium. To extend the audience's duration of stay, I incorporate the temporal engagement of performance and a shared ritualistic experience, which eventually led to *Mourning Heat* - an instrument that can cry with human intervention. Presenting this work 38 times over two years through various exhibitions and performances provoke few questions for my next project. While it was intriguing to observe how the intensity of sound and its affective resonance anchored the audience, I witnessed a tendency for the artwork to be consumed merely as a technological stimulus, akin to an interactive entertainment booth in a science museum. Strikingly, I confronted a limitation: without my verbal guidance to mediate and explain how to navigate this sudden instrument, the deeper essence of the work struggled to be conveyed.

However, touring through the diverse linguistic landscapes of French, Dutch, German and Korean - where language barriers often forced me to communicate and demonstrate participation solely through bodily gesture - sustained my inquiry. The questions may have returned from the point when I was trying to think of how to make contact with the audience to use their body heat. How can an artwork enable audience participation simply through their existence in the space - standing, walking or following a performer - without relying on too much verbal explanations? That is, what if the situation is composed to subtly invite the visitor's curiosity? Under such conditions, would merely entering the space already constitute a form of participation in the *performative installation*? The audience's curiosity-driven movements would be observed by others, transforming into yet another layer performance within the space. Ultimately, I began to imagine another *performative installation* where the audience, lingering and rustling, moves like a flock or wanders out of curiosity, until some elements that dramatically emerge from within this subtle movement rekindle the audience's curiosity again.

Chapter 2-3. Remaining Where Light Falls(2025)

Based on the preceding questions and reflections, another beginning emerged in the contemplation of heat shimmer and care. Looking at the pattern of my projects so far, it can be found that my work has attempted installations that induce performative acts in various ways. In terms of medium, it has generally shifted from a medium related to heat - from body heat to the mourning by heat. In conceptual terms, originating from the situations I experienced around me at the time, it transitioned from body heat as the residual warmth of life and the relationship formed through it, to the mourning faced through nearby funerals, and to those who weep on behalf of others. I think that the heat shimmer and care in this work were also encountered as a route to discovering my new work, just as before. That is, from the residual warmth of life, the intense heat has shifted to a heat shimmer; from the body heat experienced in isolation due to COVID-19, to mourning, and this time, to care.

One of the problems I encountered as I actually entered the project was the focus of care itself. Because the social, structural, medical, literary, and ethical dimensions of care were so vast, choosing which aspect of this immense care to emphasize was key. During the research process, I began with a method I personally preferred: examining the roots of the language. Both the Old Germanic *karō* and Old English *caru* imply grief, sorrow, and anxiety.²⁵ *Take* originates from Old Germanic *takana* and Old English *tacan*, meaning to touch, hold, or grasp something.²⁶ In other words, to "take care" means to grasp pain, sorrow, and anxiety with one's hands. Re-examining care through this etymology, the subject and object of care do not need to be fixed. Just as humans can care for humans, humans for animals, humans for objects, animals for humans, and objects for humans, the relationship between subject and object can be flexibly transformed. Furthermore, care acts as a process of finding the meaning of one's own existence through the act itself, blurring the boundary between subject and object. Care also forms a strong hierarchy. The object of care enters the realm of control under the name of care. In addition, for beings living through the time of life, if they are within a relationship at birth and at the final moment of life, they grow while receiving care and end their lives while receiving care. This could perhaps apply even to a single body, because living through the time of life is also a process of caring for oneself.

²⁵ Douglas Harper, "care (n.)," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed June 2, 2026, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/care>

²⁶ Douglas Harper, "take (v.)," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed June 2, 2026, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/take>

The care I thus began to focus on was a care that could be more personal, more private, and at the same time, intimate. I began to focus on a one-on-one relationship in care. Simultaneously, diverse dimensions of care had to be metonymized. To establish a one-on-one relationship, there first had to be a caregiver and a care receiver, which required a delicate setting of the relationship between the caregiver and the care receiver, and the relationship of the witnesses who will encounter this. Here, I began to think that it would be essential to have a somewhat cinematic feeling - as if you are in a movie and following the *protagonist*²⁷ within it. That protagonist must care for a thing, that is a symbolic being, which can be a metonymized being. That care is not entirely pleasant. While it is a situation that could be avoided if chosen, I wanted the witnesses and the protagonist both to remain and persist through it. Looking at the plot, it is simple: a protagonist who carries through to the end despite the hardship. Now, it required a process of specifically determining how this would happen, and what the physical position of the audience would be if they were to view this in a real space.

Leaving the aspect of care aside for a moment here, I would now like to talk about the heat shimmer. The beginning lies in the fact that there was a significant amount of time spent staring at the heat shimmer vacillating in the shadow of the *mourning instrument* that generated intense heat. Later, in the process of researching this, I learned the technical terms for the technology of visualizing heat. These were Schlieren imaging and shadowgraphy. Schlieren imaging is an optical technique used to visualize density gradients in transparent media, which are typically invisible to the naked eye. Shadowgraphy achieves a similar effect, though with less resolution, by displaying density fluctuations in the shadow of a light source. In a similar vein, shadowgraphy is a method that visualizes non-homogeneous boundaries within a fluid by projecting the shadows of light refracted by density variations on a flat surface. Both Schlieren imaging and shadowgraphy are phenomena that become visible due to light and the relatively altered air density caused by heat (also depending on fluid). Regarding this, Hans Jebsen-Marwedel, a chemist, glass scientist, and glassmaker, stated, “Schlieren, like clouds, are meaningful only in relation to their environment.”²⁸; that is, this phenomenon could be observed precisely because it is relative. Another attractive point of this phenomenon is that it is highly phantasmal. The phenomenon created by heat and light

²⁷The term 'protagonist' is used here with an emphasis on its etymological roots in ancient Greek theater, combining *prōtos*(first) and *agonistēs* (actor, combatant, or one who struggles). It highlights the character as the primary agent who actively bears and navigates the hardships of care.

²⁸ Gary S. Settles, *Schlieren and Shadowgraph Techniques: Visualizing Phenomena in Transparent Media* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2001), 28, quoting H. Jebsen-Marwedel, 117.

requires intense focus to see clearly, as if looking at an invisible entity, and it also induces an illusion akin to seeing a ghost or some spiritual energy.

This focus on care as personal, intimate and private, the relationship between the protagonist, the care-recipient, and the audience, and the dreamlike elements caused by heat were laid out as the materials for the project. Now, as a method to ensemble these, a narrative approach was adopted, and additionally, darkness was required. Regarding the element of narration, Byung-Chul Han invokes Walter Benjamin in *The Crisis of Narration*, to state “a narrative feeds off experience.” The method of transmitting through a narrative is a way of transmitting experience, which “in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.” Another characteristic mentioned by Han is that “a narrative creates community;” or a “community of *careful listeners*.” By forming such a community, a narrative creates “*listeners*.” This “*listener*” is “immersed *themselves* in what they hear.” Han again cites Walter Benjamin: “the more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory.” Furthermore, transmission through story is also a way of “suggest[ing] how *a story is to be continued*”²⁹ The narrative as a format was conceived as an attempt to connect with the memories of the audience - memories and domains an individual possesses regarding care, yet specifically those memories where they consciously or unconsciously overlooked a situation where someone was desperately struggling (*Agony*³⁰) with care - and simultaneously as a proposal for how this story should continue.

Regarding the aspect of darkness, Claire Bishop cites the French psychiatrist Eugène Minkowski, who described that “the dark night has something more ‘personal’ about it since it invades the body rather than keeping its distance.” Furthermore, he states, “The ego does not affirm itself in relation to darkness but becomes confused with it, becomes one with it.”³¹ Therefore, it was necessary for this narrative to proceed in darkness. In the darkness, the audience experiences a dampening of their other senses and remains in an environment where they can immerse themselves in the story - in a state of becoming one with the darkness. Another reason for insisting on darkness is to induce the audience, who enters as spectators, to *gaze* rather than to *see*. A brief, fleeting moment of light in the darkness cannot be

²⁹ Byung-Chul Han, *The Crisis of Narration*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), chap. 1, “From Narration to Information,” EPUB.

³⁰ Douglas Harper, “agony (n.),” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/agony>; the term “agony” in this context is derived from its relationship to the “protagonist.”

³¹ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 82, quoting Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies* (1933).

captured by merely *seeing*. This is because one must *gaze* into the darkness to chase the light and silhouettes that appear and vanish in an instant.³²

Consequently, the thing that has to be taken care of had to be a metonymic entity; it had to be a thing that could be *gazed* upon in the darkness, while simultaneously being effective in generating heat shimmers and being phantasmal; and finally, it had to be a presence intense enough to rival the performer throughout the entire performance. It had to signal both the beginning and the end of this care. Thus, an "hourglass that flows upward" - a candle flame - was brought in as the object receiving care. According to Bachelard, "he who keeps a vigil before the flame no longer reads. He thinks of life. He thinks of death." thereby implying that gazing at a flame ultimately leads the gazer to look into their own inner self. He also expresses: "The flame is precarious and courageous. This light is destroyed by a breath, relit with a spark, easy birth and easy death."³³ This fragile yet reviving flame metonymically aligned with the attributes of care that I wished to focus on. Therefore, the candle flame was entrusted with the role as the recipient of care.

In the first scene, which I term an *encounter*, through the actions of scratching sparks and lighting then extinguishing the candle in the darkness, the audience is gradually induced to become familiar with the method of *gazing*. Through this process, the audience, who were initially spectators, slowly transition into witnesses. Concurrently, a relationship begins to form in the darkness between the *protagonist* - who repeatedly and diligently scratches the flint, and the candle flame which illuminates everything as it catches but simultaneously shortens - and also the witnesses who observe this, sometimes from a distance and sometimes from right beside it. Furthermore, as the performance progresses, the performer moves from a position distant from the audience, into the midst of the audience, and finally from within them to the center. Now, I intend to describe the major scenes of the performance.

Scene 1.

It was already dusk, and it gradually grew dark. Amidst the exchange of small talk - featuring familiar faces and those not seen in a long time, which could be either pleasant or

³² Byung-Chul Han, *The Crisis of Narration*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024), chap. 6, "From Shock to Likes," EPUB; the distinction between "gaze" and "see" in this paragraph is inspired by Han's conceptualization on these chapter.

³³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Flame of a Candle*, trans. Joni Caldwell (Dallas: The Dallas Institute Publications, 1988), 16.

uncomfortable - the entrance door opens. The scattered people enter one by one in a line, and a space is provided to place bags or clothing. The interior is somewhat dark, yet maintained at a level that does not cause discomfort. In the large, open white cube space, a projection resembling blended colored lighting is cast upon an installation made of white curtains. Inside the curtains, a structure akin to laboratory machinery or a hospital ward is installed. In the dim space, people sit down one by one, facing the screen-like curtain. The degree of darkness and the blended colors create a dreamlike atmosphere.

Soon, the door closes and the projection screen darkens further. When everyone falls silent as if noticing the beginning, a harsh scratching sound accompanied by an intense flash begins - not from the screen they were watching, but from behind their backs. The scratching sound repeats. People turn around to sit one by one. As an even stronger light appears and vanishes, the figure of a person crouching in front of the white wall appears and then disappears into the darkness.



Figure 7. *Remaining Where Light Falls* in Bremen, 2026, Photo by Jennifer Yue Yuen Yu

The figure that appeared and disappeared before their eyes manifests as the shadow of a crouching person, along with them, a black shape resembling a small four-legged jar, and a single, small light. Soon, the person holding this small light walks slowly toward the

audience. Looking closer from a shorter distance, it becomes clear that this small light is a candle. As the performer suddenly moves quickly, the candle is extinguished. Afterward, everything is covered in darkness once again. In the darkness, everyone remains as a single silhouette along with the other audience members. With another scratching sound, a bright light flashes, and there, the crouching figure repeatedly appears and disappears. The fire does not easily catch. Due to the intense light before their eyes, shadows and the structures of the building are temporarily revealed and then vanish. After several scratching sounds and flashes, the fire catches again. The performer walks back into the crowd of the audience with the candle. Following the performer's movement and walking speed, the candle flickers precariously, as if on the verge of going out. The performer places the candle back on the floor and approaches it, keeping the body close to the ground as if crawling. As the performer draws near the candle, their face is revealed. The performer whispers to the candle, and at the whisper, the flame wavers faintly again before going out. After the third blackout, the scratching sound repeats and sparks flash. With the candle placed in front, the performer rocks the crouching body back and forth, then crushes the sparks with their hand to extinguish them.



Figure 8. *Remaining Where Light Falls* in Bremen, 2026, Photo by Daniel Vadasz

Scene 2, 3

The image of the performer who has entered inside the curtains is faintly cast beyond them. Soon after, a large hand and face are projected onto the mysterious circular light. In

that image, which resembles a splendid shadow, the performer's faint breath creates a minute haze for a brief moment before the performer begins to kindle the fire again. Meanwhile, the flashing light source generates an intense heat shimmer and then disperses. In this manner, the sparks and light ripples behind the veil blend with the heat shimmer projected onto the curtains until the fire catches. The candle flame witnessed thus far, amidst the intense heat shimmer, flows upward toward the sky like 'burning liquid' and like 'a vertical brook,' generating a dreamlike current. As the flow is calming down, the performer's whisper once again creates a variation of an intense current.

Exiting the curtains with the lighted candle, the performer begins to walk along the white wall with extremely slow steps. A minute sound, of which the origin in time is uncertain, begins to be heard; this noise repeats a cycle of dispersing and flowing calmly according to the candle flame that sways left and right with the performer's steps, starting to form a single rhythm. The sound gradually grows louder along the wall, repeatedly gathering into a rhythm and dispersing into a nervous noise. Around the time the performer reaches the end of the wall, the movement of the candle - which had been subtle - becomes a roaring sound, overwhelming the space. This mass of oscillating noise narrows the distance to the audience along with the performer, rushing between them. The audience repeatedly follows the performer and stops, gradually beginning to gather toward the center of the space.

Scene. 5

After a sound that oscillates as if touching a detonator, repeatedly fading to the point of extinction and then reviving, the candle is left in a corner of the space, and the performer departs. As the flame, having ceased its swaying, begins to flow straight toward the sky, the intense noise converges into a single sound. The noises, gathered into a straight line, reflect off the wall and resound throughout the space like a siren. Soon, turning their back on a strange and ambivalent shadow situated between protecting the candle and strangling it (choking its breath), the performer sits on their knees in front of the candle spreading like a siren and cradles the candle with both hands.



Figure 9. *Remaining Where Light Falls* in Bremen, 2026, Photo by Daniel Vadasz

Last scene

As if stretching the flow of a fleeting moment, the performer gradually sinks toward the ground. Accordingly, the noise reflecting up from the floor is amplified further, but soon the performer encloses it with their body. Before long, the candle has burned through its own body, barely leaving its head, and only a precarious length remains, on the verge of being extinguished by even a fleeting breath. The silhouettes of the audience, who were in the darkness, move silently, sitting down together around the performer and the candle as if by prior agreement. Amidst the roaring sound filling the space, like a ritual, they guard the critical threshold of the flame that is about to go out, remaining with its final moment.

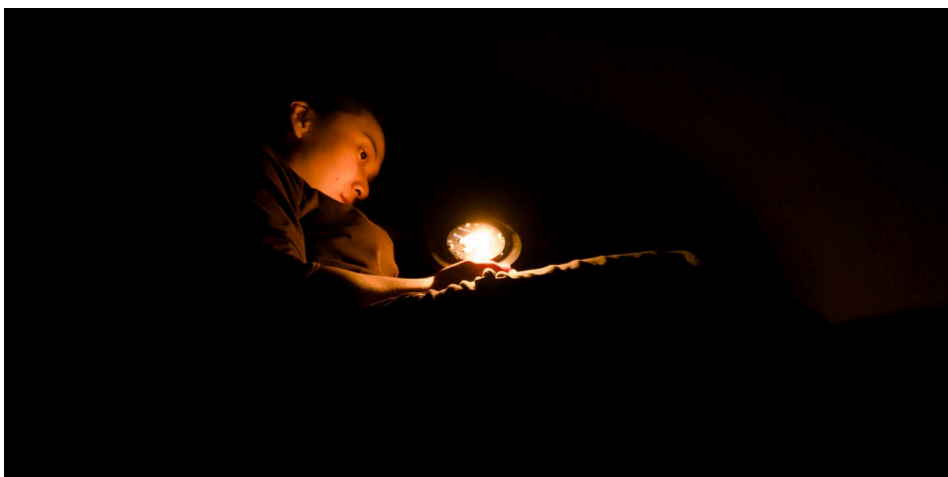


Figure 10. *Remaining Where Light Falls* in Bremen, 2026, Photo by Daniel Vadasz

The title *Remaining Where light falls* is adapted and modified from Annie Ernaux's diary title, *I remain in the darkness* ³⁴ is a diary written by Annie Ernaux, a contemporary French novelist and essayist, as her mother, who had been her caregiver entire life, gradually lost her memory and intellect and physically deteriorated after being diagnosed with dementia. The original title of this book was taken from the last sentence of a letter sent to the author by her mother one day when her dementia symptoms were worsening. By modifying the title of this book, the phrase "Where Light Falls" in the title of this work was intended to encompass an ambivalent meaning: a place where light falls like sunlight sitting on the floor, and at the same time, a place where light diminishes and fades. As previously mentioned at the beginning of Chapters 2-3, I tend to derive the conceptual aspects of my work from my surroundings; thus, this work also began from the experience of caring for someone and having to witness that care. Mirroring the words of director Bong Joon-ho during his 2020 Academy Award acceptance speech, where he famously quoted Martin Scorsese's maxim, "The most personal is the most creative," ³⁵ I sought to embody a narrative in this work that stems from a deeply private experience. Hoping that the narrative thus embodied will be communicated in a way that "suggest[ing] how a story is to be continued," I conclude this chapter.

Conclusion

This thesis has conducted research on performative installation as an artistic alternative to narrow down the misunderstanding between the practitioner, the artwork, and the visitor. Specifically, Chapter 1 examined Happenings and installation art as attempts to emancipate the viewers from spectators, starting from the etymological roots of the *performative* and exploring its conceptual expansion into the body. Furthermore, to encompass non-human bodies within this bodily sphere, this study utilized the concept of the 'actant' from Actor-Network Theory to narrow down the *performative installation* pursued in my practice. Grounded in this theoretical framework, Chapter 2 presented three works conducted as attempts to synthesize the spatial autonomy of the white cube, the temporal duration of performance, and performative acts, analyzing them by describing the empirical aspects of each work. These theoretical investigations and artistic practices serve as both my

³⁴ Annie Ernaux, *I Remain in Darkness*, trans. Tanya Leslie (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999).

³⁵ Bong Joon-ho, "Best Director Acceptance Speech" (speech, 92nd Academy Awards, Los Angeles, CA, February 9, 2020), quoting Martin Scorsese.

understanding and practical embodiment in digital media - which I interpreted in the introduction as ‘flowing and remaining’ upon completing my Master's degree. Furthermore, by treating the properties of heat as a material and methodological medium throughout my entire body of work, I made an attempt to translate the relational character of heat into my artistic practices. It is true that, as mentioned in the introduction, defining the core methodology of this study as *performative installation* may also be another form of naming, and perhaps another misunderstanding. Nevertheless, this thesis finds its significance in being a practice to narrow down the gap of misunderstandings.

Reflecting this prospective pursuit, in the process of developing my most recent work, *Remaining Where Light Falls* (2025), I was deeply struck by watching a 60-minute loop performance with absolutely no people in Heiner Goebbels’ performance work, *Genko An - 03061 Seoul* (2025). *Genko An*, a 60-minute loop performance where human actors are absent except for the audience, was an empty black box, yet all audiovisual elements were extremely delicately composed, and within that meticulousness, I felt a sublime beauty that is difficult to explain in words.³⁶ I encountered this work when a sense of skepticism about what I was doing came upon me, amidst the long institutional system of art education, from starting to paint at the age of 12, going through an art high school and an art university, and reaching graduate school. I ended up taking my parents, who have absolutely no educational background in art, to this space of *Genko-An*. Born and raised in Korea, where overwhelming budgets and attention flow toward entertainment, I think I took my parents there out of a long-standing question of whether intellectual training must precede the enjoyment of art, and a curiosity about whether the general public, distant from institutional art education, could share this overwhelming delicacy and emotion that I felt. They were deeply assimilated into the delicate rhythm emitted by the space and completely remained there for an hour or two. I conclude this thesis with the thought that this experience - that a delicately tuned work can reach the audience and give a wholesome resonance without professional background knowledge and make them remain in the space - became a refreshing milestone regarding what kind of art I, as a practitioner, want to pursue.

³⁶ Heiner Goebbels, *Genko An - 03061 Seoul*, 60mins loop performance, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea, July 12, 2025.

AI Disclaimer: The author used Gemini solely for language editing, proofreading, and vocabulary refinement to improve the readability of the text. The core ideas and academic arguments remain entirely the work of the author.

Reference

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Flame of a Candle*. Translated by Joni Caldwell. Dallas: The Dallas Institute Publications, 1988.

Bishop, Claire. *Installation Art: A Critical History*. London: Tate Publishing, 2005.

Bong, Joon-ho. "Best Director Acceptance Speech." Speech at the 92nd Academy Awards, Los Angeles, CA, February 9, 2020.

Burnham, Jack. *Beyond Modern Sculpture: The Effects of Science and Technology on the Sculpture of This Century*. New York: George Braziller, 1968.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31.

Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. 1967. Reprint, London: Rebel Press, 1992.

Ernaux, Annie. *I Remain in Darkness*. Translated by Tanya Leslie. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Translated by Saskya Jain. London: Routledge, 2008.

Goebbels, Heiner. *Genko An - 03061 Seoul*. 60 mins Loop performance. MMCA, Seoul, Korea, 2025.

Han, Byung-Chul. *The Crisis of Narration*. Translated by Daniel Steuer. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2024. EPUB.

Han, Byung-Chul. *The Disappearance of Rituals*. Translated by Daniel Steuer. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020.

Harper, Douglas. "agony (n.)." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. accessed June 4, 2026. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/agony>.

Harper, Douglas. "care (n.)." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Accessed June 2, 2026. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/care>.

Harper, Douglas. "digital (adj.)." Online Etymology Dictionary. Accessed May 28, 2026. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/digital>.

Harper, Douglas. "inform (v.)." Online Etymology Dictionary. Accessed May 28, 2026. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/inform>.

Harper, Douglas. "media (n.)." Online Etymology Dictionary. Accessed May 28, 2026. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/media>.

Harper, Douglas. "take (v.)." Online Etymology Dictionary. Accessed June 2, 2026. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/take>.

Ingold, Tim. *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Kim, Chun-su. "꽃" [Flower]. 시와 시론 [Poetry and Poetics], 1952. Accessed May 28, 2026. <https://www.nl.go.kr/NL/contents/N20103000000.do?page=1&schM=contView&schOpt1=CA0000000022&schOpt2=CA0000000703&schOpt3=01&schIdSub=CO20221104151546996100>.

Latour, Bruno. "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications." *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369–81.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. London: Routledge, 2012.

Novalis [Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg]. *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* [The Disciples at Saïs]. 1799. Accessed May 28, 2026. <https://sedab31a93ea64a56.jimcontent.com>.

Oxford English Dictionary. s.v. "moirologist." Accessed June 1, 2026. <https://www.oed.com/>.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2009.

Schimmel, Paul. *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998.

Serres, Michel. *The Parasite*. Translated by Lawrence R. Schehr. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

Settles, G. S. *Schlieren and Shadowgraph Techniques: Visualizing Phenomena in Transparent Media*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2001.